

A black and white photograph of a wedding ring and a ribbon on a white fabric background. The ring is a simple band with a row of small stones on the bottom half. A light-colored ribbon is draped across the ring. In the background, a dark ribbon is tied in a bow, and a small, light-colored rose is visible. The entire scene is set against a white, textured fabric background.

A Marriage Made in Heaven

Personal Transformation in Marriage through the Fruit of the Spirit

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Table of Contents

Lesson 1:	Introduction	3
Lesson 2:	Betrothal	7
Lesson 3:	Love	11
Lesson 4:	Joy	17
Lesson 5:	Peace	22
Lesson 6:	Patience.....	28
Lesson 7:	Kindness.....	34
Lesson 8:	Faithfulness.....	40
Lesson 9:	Meekness.....	46
Lesson 10:	Self-Control.....	53
Lesson 11:	Family Mission Statement	61
Appendix I:	Love Dares	68
Appendix II:	Group Work.....	74
Appendix II:	Self Evaluation	77
Appendix IV:	Review and Discussion of the Movie <i>Fireproof</i>	80

Lesson 1 - Introduction

“Expectations are premeditated resentments.”

A divorced woman told me that in a Bible study. She had been through a bitter divorce. In hindsight she could see that her marriage was doomed to failure from the outset because, as she said, she expected too much from it.

While we are not so pessimistic about marriage, we must admit there is some truth to this statement. Placing high expectations on marriage (or anything else) in a fallen world will only lead to disappointment.

Many come to marriage with expectations that are wildly out of sync with what can be realistically expected. We buy into the “happily ever after” stories and expect the frog we’re dating will be transformed into Prince Charming the moment we say, “I do.”

That would be a premeditated resentment.

The First Family

What do you suppose might have been the expectations in the first marriage? Did Adam have unrealistic hopes? Did he expect too much from his new bride?

Perhaps he did. You see at least a little disillusionment from the start in the first family. After Adam eats the forbidden fruit he is called to give an account for himself.

“Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” God asked.

Adam is feeling the heat. He has sinned. He’s done something new. Something he has never done before. For the first time in his existence he is feeling the pressure from something with which we have become all too familiar. We can’t imagine a world without sin, but that was all Adam knew till this point. Remember, he was naked and not ashamed (Genesis 2:25).

But he’s not naked anymore. He’s ashamed. He’s hiding. He doesn’t want to look God in the face. And when God asks him to explain his actions he turns and blames his wife.

But notice that he does more than just blame her. It seems that he places even more blame on God.

“The woman whom you gave to be with me,” he said, “she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.” Genesis 3:12

“Hey God,” you can hear him say in that, “I didn’t ask for this! Why did you give me this woman?”

Good question. Why did God give Adam a wife?

Problems in Paradise

In Genesis 2:18, God said, “It is not good for man to be alone.” This is perhaps one of the most fundamental statements ever made about the nature of man. Man was not created to be alone. Man was created in God’s image (Genesis 1:26-27), which means that he is a relational being, with a desire to love and to be loved. Man was made for relationship.

So God creates for Adam a suitable companion. A help-meet. “I will make him a helper fit for him,” God said (Genesis 2:18).

Eve was “fit” (or we could say “fitted”) for Adam, which is to say she complemented him. She was from him (“bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh”), but not identical to him. Woman was designed physically, emotionally, and in every other way to be the perfect match for man.

That’s not to say she was perfect. Nor was their marriage perfect. Like every other couple in the history of mankind, theirs was a relationship with problems and disappointments. Adam was certainly not happy with Eve after the Fall (and we are sure the feeling was mutual).

But, in spite of this frustration, God expected them to stay together. “Male and female,” is what the creation account tells us (Genesis 1:27), which is to say one male and one female. That’s one man for one woman. There was no contingency plan to fall back on; that is there was no wife #2 in case wife #1 didn’t work out (see Matthew 19:3-6).

All of this leads us to the first conclusion we’ll make concerning the purpose of marriage. While it is clear that God wants husbands and wives to find pleasure and happiness in each other, happiness does not appear to be the primary thing. If happiness were the primary objective, why not put an escape hatch in that vessel? If happiness were the only objective, why

not create multiple women for Adam to choose from (or to fall back to in case things didn't work out)?

Like the Angels

But let's think about this on another level. Why didn't God's solution work? Why was it that the problem (man was alone) did not completely resolve itself by God's solution (the woman)?

Adam must have felt lonely after sin entered the picture. Their relationship changed. He probably had to find somewhere else to sleep that night. At the very least he was feeling some coldness after that episode.

But on an even greater level, Adam and Eve both started to die on that day. They were taken from the tree of life. They were now going to be separated by death, and one of them was going to be left alone.

This kind of loneliness and frustration in marriage is a critical issue to ponder. Part of the reason why marriages fail is because people are disillusioned. They enter into marriage with unrealistic expectations and divorce their mates feeling they have been sold a bill of goods (even by God).

So what is the purpose of marriage? Is it really able to satisfy our deepest longings and needs? Can marriage fill the void of loneliness which God identified in man from the beginning? If not, what is it for?

Before we answer that question, it should be noted that marriage was never intended to be a permanent relationship. It is a temporary thing like everything else in this world.

Jesus said as much when answering the Sadducees concerning a question about marriage. The Sadducees didn't believe in the resurrection and so they posed a scenario where a woman would be married, as a result of the Levirate marriage laws (Deuteronomy 25), to seven husbands in her life time. And then they asked Jesus whose wife she would be in the resurrection. They thought this would be an impossible question for Jesus to answer, but his reply was simple,

You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. Matthew 22:29-30

Jesus affirmed the temporary nature of marriage. It simply does not extend beyond this life. We call it a "permanent" relationship, but when we say that what we mean is that, from the perspective of this life, marriage is to last forever. "Till death do we part," is how we put it, but this vow we make betrays the truth behind what Jesus said: the vow ends at death.

Our conclusion from this is that marriage cannot meet our deepest need, nor was it designed to do that. It is a temporary relationship, and we were made for more than this.

Being created in God's image not only makes us relational beings, it also makes us eternal beings. We have a soul that will never die. It will live on after our mortal bodies are buried in the grave. God gave us this soul so that we would be capable of sustaining an eternal relationship.

An Analogy

This eternal relationship is the reason for everything. Everything God created, everything he planned, everything he has caused to happen down through the centuries has been designed to accomplish this one purpose.

Even marriage.

Listen to the words of Paul,

For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. Ephesians 5:29-32

Paul is saying here that marriage is an analogy. It represents, we believe, God's best effort at describing the kind of relationship he wants to have with us. God wants intimacy with us. He wants to love us and wants us to love him back. That's God's plan. That's God's eternal purpose for each one of us. And one of the ways God has illustrated his Divine plan for us is through marriage.

Right now, in your marriage, you are in a union that can teach you what few other earthly relationships can. It can help you to know what it means to relate to God in an intimate way. While other relationships can help us discover different aspects of what our relationship to God is like (slave/master, citizen/king, child/parent), it is marriage that brings us the closest to knowing how deep and how profound this relationship is designed to be.

Marriage then is not merely about our earthly happiness, but about our spiritual education.

A Gymnasium for the Soul

We contend that marriage is all about spiritual growth. In every circumstance, God is much more concerned about our holiness than our happiness. Why should marriage be any different? Why should marriage be

left out of God's overall plan to sanctify us for himself?

Marriage does that. It almost compels you to grow spiritually. At least it forces you to see your weaknesses more clearly. To find any happiness or contentment in marriage at all, you've got to identify your own faults and try to improve.

Marriage demands a change in your basic orientation. You can't think according to the flesh (a "me" centered orientation) and expect your relationship with your mate to do very well. Husbands and wives who only think about themselves will find marriage to be a miserable experience.

Successful marriages are those where at least one partner has surrendered his or her rights to personal happiness and self-gratification. They have given up on the works of the flesh and have instead sown the fruit of the Spirit into their character.

When the stress of bills and kids and illnesses and uncertainties begins to rob them of all their energy, they rely on **love** and **joy** and **peace**.

When their mates are about as sharp as a bowling pin when it comes to their sensitivities, they rely on **patience** and **kindness**.

When contentious discussions about finances and in-laws and kids come up, they rely on **goodness** and **gentleness**.

When the tiresome familiarity that comes from dealing with the same annoying quirks and character flaws over the years tempts them to seek greener grass, they rely on **faithfulness** and **self-control**.

And as they rely on the fruit of the Spirit to endure these trials in marriage, it makes marriage a kind of training ground; a gymnasium for the soul. They exercise godliness in marriage because they're forced every day to put the fruit of the Spirit into practical use.

So what are your expectations in marriage? Are you waiting for him to get a clue or for her to see the light? Are you waiting for God to transform your mate into something he or she is not right now? Or are you looking for personal transformation? Do you see your

marriage as an opportunity to grow up in Christ Jesus? That little change in perspective makes all the difference in the world!

And here's a little secret—If your only goal is personal happiness, you won't grow and you won't be happy. Change your focus to personal growth and you will not only produce the fruit of the Spirit inwardly, you'll find marriage to be an exceedingly satisfying relationship that only gets better and better!

Concepts and Application

1. Do you agree with the statement that “expectations are premeditated resentments”? Why or why not?
2. List some of the reasons people get married.
3. Is it true that many of our frustrations in marriage are due to unrealistic expectations?
4. How did sin present new challenges to Adam and Eve? What were those challenges?
5. What do you think the statement, “They were naked and not ashamed” (Genesis 2:25) meant?
6. What does Genesis 2:18 (“It is not good for man to be alone”) say about our basic nature and makeup?
7. What does it mean to be made in God’s image (Genesis 1:26-27)?
8. In what way was Eve a suitable companion or help-meet for Adam (Genesis 2:18)? According to the lesson, what did it not mean?
9. What logical conclusion did Jesus make out of God creating them “male and female” (Genesis 1:27; Matthew 19:3-6)?
10. How did sin bring loneliness into Adam’s life?
11. In what way is marriage a temporary relationship? In what way is it a permanent one?
12. In what way is marriage an analogy (Ephesians 5:29-32)?
13. Is it true that marriage forces you to grow? What happens if you don’t grow in marriage?
14. In the lesson we state that it takes at least one partner to surrender their rights to personal happiness for a marriage to be successful. How is this so?
15. Why are husbands told to dwell with their wives “with understanding”?
16. List one way each of the Fruit of the Spirit is developed in marriage:
 - a. Love
 - b. Joy
 - c. Peace
 - d. Longsuffering
 - e. Kindness
 - f. Goodness
 - g. Faithfulness
 - h. Gentleness
 - i. Self-Control
17. How can marriage be described as a marriage for the soul?

Lesson 2 - Betrothal

So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her.
Genesis 29:30

His son needed a bride.

The problem was there was no suitable wife among the locals for his son to marry. So Abraham charged his most trusted servant to make a long arduous journey, hundreds of miles to where they came from, and find a wife for Isaac among his relatives.

The story of Isaac and Rebekah's betrothal was not unusual (Genesis 24). They observed the same customs most Eastern families have followed for centuries.

In Jewish families a *shadchan*, or matchmaker, would be selected by the father to find an appropriate wife for his son. Once an acceptable bride was found by the matchmaker, she would be presented with a *ketubah*, or marriage contract, which would outline the rights and responsibilities of the groom (Exodus 21:10). She could either refuse or accept this offer of marriage (Genesis 24:58).

The contract would include a *mohar*, or bride price. The Scripture placed a minimum price to be paid of fifty shekels of silver (Exodus 22:16-17; Deuteronomy 22:28-29), but the price would vary greatly according to the groom's ability and/or desire for the young lady he wanted as his bride.

The bride price could be paid for in a variety of ways. Isaac offered Rebekah gold, silver, or clothing (Genesis 24:53). David killed one hundred Philistines for Saul's daughter Michael (1 Samuel 18:25). Jacob agreed to work seven years for Laban, Rachel's father, for the hand of his daughter (Genesis 29:15-20).

If all the parties agreed upon the marriage contract and the bride price, the groom would offer a glass of wine called the "Cup of Acceptance." If she drank from the cup, the marriage was sealed and they were legally married at that point. She would take his name and would be called his wife. This marked the first stage of marriage called the *kiddushin*, or betrothal.

This betrothal period was a time of preparation. The bride would go through purifications consisting of perfume baths and treatments, or *mikveh* (Esther 2:12). The groom would return to his father's house and prepare a home for the couple to dwell in. This period of separation could last anywhere from a month

to a year. For both the bride and the groom it was a time of preparation as well as great anticipation.

The betrothed bride would veil herself during this time (Genesis 24:65; 29:22-25). She would wear the veil in public indicating to others that she had been pledged in marriage. She was to be saved and preserved for her husband.

The father of the groom determined when the betrothal period should end. He was the "home inspector" judging whether the house was ready for the new couple to live in. As soon as he said the house was suitable, the groom would go with his friends to "abduct" his bride. This abduction would take place at the midnight hour with a shout from the procession and the blowing of the *shofar*, or horn (Matthew 25:6).

Naturally, the bride would not know when her husband would come, so she would have to be ready at all times. Her lamp, her veil, and her wedding garment would all be beside her bed so she could leave as soon as the voice of her husband was heard. Her bridesmaids would also be ready and waiting eagerly with oil in their lamps (Matthew 25:1-13).

At the *nissuin*, or wedding ceremony, a canopy was set up for the couple to stand under to say their public vows to each other. This canopy, or *chuppah*, was a sheet stretched out over four poles which symbolized the couple's new home (Joel 2:16; Psalm 19:5).

After the ceremony the bride and groom would go into the bridal chamber (*chuppah*) for a few minutes to be alone. It was forbidden in Jewish culture for an unmarried man and woman to be in a room by themselves, so this period of seclusion symbolized their new status as husband and wife. This was a special time for the bride and groom, in that what they had worked for and dreamed about during their period of betrothal was now a reality. When they emerged from the canopy, they would join with their guests for seven days of joyous feasting and celebration.

A Bride for Christ

Marital imagery is common in the Bible. In the Old Testament we can read of how God had married Israel (Jeremiah 2:2; and see Exodus 19:3-8). When they forsook God for idols it is described as marital unfaithfulness (Jeremiah 3:1-2), and because of their whoredom God divorced Israel (Jeremiah 3:8).

In the New Testament we can see that the Jewish betrothal customs are typical of our betrothal to

Christ. We noted Ephesians 5 in the last lesson, where Paul, in the middle of a discussion about the roles of the husband and wife in marriage, has this to say:

“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. Ephesians 5:31-32

All that God said about the man and his wife in marriage (*the two become one flesh*), is typical of our relationship with Christ.

Just as Abraham sought a bride for his son Isaac, God also wanted a wife for his Son. That’s why God created us. This is the very purpose of our existence. God made us in his image so that we might be relational beings like him, having an intense desire to love and to be loved. God designed us with the capacity to love our husband, Christ, and with the desire to be loved by him.

Just think for a moment about what this means to you and me. This puts the story of the Bible in a whole new light. The Bible is the story of how God sought a bride for his son. The story is about how God went to great trouble and effort and cost to find and prepare a bride.

Think about the cost. You remember the *mohar*, or bride price. We read about Rebekah’s bride price in Genesis:

And the servant brought out jewelry of silver and of gold, and garments, and gave them to Rebekah. He also gave to her brother and to her mother costly ornaments. 24:53

How do you suppose Rebekah felt when she saw all of those riches: the gold, the garments, the costly ornaments? “Is that for me?”, she might have thought to herself, “Am I worth all of this?”

Now think about us? What was the price God paid for his Son’s bride? And what does that say about our value?

knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. 1 Peter 1:18-19

Rebekah was worth silver, gold, garments, and costly ornaments. We are worth much more! Peter says we were not bought with “silver and gold.” No, we are worth much more than that. In fact, God gave the most valuable thing in his possession. He gave the precious blood of his Son! Are we worth that much to God? “Surely not,” you say. But that’s what it says.

A Love Story

The Bible is a love story. If you reduce the whole Bible to its simplest form, you’ll find that it is just that. And this is not just another love story either; it is the greatest ever told!

Consider how the story begins. We begin by reading of a perfect marriage in a garden paradise. God creates Adam and prepares a wife for him from his side. He is thrilled by his new bride. “Bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh,” he says. Joined together by God, the record tells us there is nakedness and yet without shame.

Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. Genesis 2:24-25

A perfect world. No death, no sorrow, no curse, and no shame. There was only joy, and peace, and righteousness. There was no division or strife. There was only love. Sin had not yet entered the world. Before the Fall, the first couple shared an idyllic life with each other and with God. That is how our story begins.

The middle of the story reveals the effects of sin and the Fall. It is not a happy story. But all along God is working out a plan to make things right again. He makes things right with the cross. The cross solves the problem of sin.

Now consider how the story ends:

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. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. Revelation 21:1-2

All the effects of the Fall are reversed. Instead of hate there is love. Instead of enmity there is peace. Instead of sorrow there is joy. Instead of shame there is glory. Everything evil is gone. Everything that forced us away from God has been removed. There is nothing to hinder the bride from a blissful and eternal relationship with her Husband. The idyllic life the first couple knew is restored.

We are naked. And because there is nothing to hide anymore because of sin, we are not ashamed.

The Betrothal

But we understand that we are not to that glorious end yet. That’s not to say we are not the bride of Christ now. We wear his name; we enjoy many of the benefits of marriage, but only as his betrothed.

For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. 2 Corinthians 11:2

The meaning of the word betrothal, or *kiddushin*, is sanctification. A Jewish virgin was sanctified, or set apart, for her husband during this period. She also prepared (or sanctified) herself during these months. In the same way, the bride of Christ is sanctified, or set apart, for him now. The bride is also preparing (or sanctifying) herself for her Husband, or Christ.

This is a time of anticipation. As the Jewish bride would dream of the new home and life she would share with her husband, so does the bride of Christ:

Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms... I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. John 14:1-3

Have you ever read that passage that way? Read it again. Think about the time you waited for your wedding day. Did you count down the days? Did you dream of wedded bliss? Jesus has prepared a place for us. He wants to be near to us. He's coming back to take us home!

Sanctification

As most brides do, my wife Adrienne wore a traditional, long, white wedding dress. She wouldn't want to present herself in something covered with filth. She wouldn't have worn that dress to work or to garden or to change the oil in the car. The dress was to be flawless.

Jesus gave his life to transform our filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6) into something glorious:

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. Ephesians 5:25-27

We are given a beauty not our own. Though our sins were as scarlet, now we are white as snow (Isaiah 1:18). We are sanctified by the Spirit of our God (1 Corinthians 6:11). We are washed in the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 7:14). We possess the glory of God (Revelation 21:11). And this glory is not ours because of anything we did, but because of Christ's body that was sacrificed for us (Colossians 1:22).

But we have a responsibility to keep ourselves pure. The great multitude in Revelation exclaims,

*Let us rejoice and exult
and give him the glory,
For the marriage of the Lamb has come,
and his Bride has made herself ready;
It was granted her to clothe herself
with fine linen, bright and pure—
For the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the
saints. 19:7-8*

We want to wear fine linen. We don't want any wrinkle in our character; any blemish or spot. We do not want to be clothed with anything less than the very best.

During our betrothal period we prepare ourselves to be presented in marriage to Christ. We prepare ourselves by putting on righteousness.

The Wedding Day

Adrienne's favorite picture from our wedding day is of me standing up front looking at her as she was walking down the aisle. The woman of my dreams was walking toward me. It was the most beautiful sight I had ever seen. I had waited, for what seemed to be a very long time, and now our day had finally come. We would finally be husband and wife!

Do you understand that this is a picture of Christ? We are his bride! He is longing for us! Is that hard for you to believe? Listen to what the Scripture says:

*as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride,
so shall your God rejoice over you. Isaiah 62:5*

Worth is not determined by words. I tell unmarried ladies not to be deceived by smooth talk. I suggest they pay more attention to what a suitor does rather than what he says. Words don't prove as much as deeds. Words are cheap. Deeds are more costly.

Isaac came to Rebekah with silver and gold. He proved his love with a financial sacrifice.

Jacob came to Rachel with work. He proved his love by a sacrifice of time and energy.

David came to Michael with slain Philistines. He proved his love with a sacrifice of courage.

Jesus came with blood; not the blood of bulls and goats, not with the blood of his enemies, but with his own blood. Jesus demonstrated his love with the ultimate sacrifice.

*I am my beloved's,
And his desire is for me.
Song of Solomon 7:10*

Concepts and Application

1. Define the following parts of traditional Jewish marriages:
 - a. Shadchan
 - b. Ketubah
 - c. Mohar
 - d. Kiddushin
 - e. Mikveh
 - f. Shofar
 - g. Nissuin
 - h. Chuppah
2. What was the bride price for Rebekah (Genesis 24:53)? What did this communicate to Rebekah about her worth?
3. What was the bride price for us (1 Peter 1:18-19)? What does that say to you about your worth to God?
4. In the lesson the story of the Bible is described as a love story. How so?
5. How is our betrothal similar to Jewish betrothals? What is another word for betrothal? What did the bride do during this time? What did the husband do? What are the spiritual parallels?
6. What is our righteousness called in Isaiah 64:6? How are we described in Ephesians 5:25-27? How did this transformation happen (Isaiah 1:16; 1 Corinthians 6:11; Revelation 7:14; Colossians 1:22)? Whose glory do we have (Revelation 21:11)? What does this mean to you? How should it change the way we look at ourselves?
7. What is the “fine linen” in Revelation 19:8? How should this change the way we look at our life?
8. Jesus is longing to be united with his bride (Isaiah 62:5). Paul prayed that we might know the glory of God’s inheritance in us (Ephesians 1:18). How does this thought change the way you look at your life?
9. What is the “marriage made in heaven”?

Lesson 3 - Love

*Love never ends.
1 Corinthians 13:8*

Nothing in the house has changed.

At least nothing has changed since she left it. “Every picture on the walls are the ones Nellie chose, the ones she wanted up,” he says, “I’ve changed nothing, except add pictures of the great-grandchildren she never had a chance to see.”

He continues to sleep on his side of the bed, the left side, just as he did in their 53 years of marriage. And every month, on the 21st day of that month, he writes a letter to his wife who passed away in 1985.

In his letters, he’ll tell her how the kids, grandchildren and great-grandchildren are doing. Every letter ends with a message to his wife about how much he misses her. He’ll say things like, “It’s been 16 years, 9 months, and 10 days since you were released from your pain and taken to heaven. But you are with me always.”

When he finishes a letter to “his best girl,” he’ll fold it once, slide it in a little envelope and walk into his bedroom. He’ll go to the stack of letters sitting on her pillow, untie the yellow ribbon, place the new one on top and tie the ribbon again. After almost 25 years, there are close to 300 letters now sitting on her pillow.

He has a long list of achievements in college basketball. He won 10 national titles including 88 consecutive wins at UCLA as a coach. He was All-American at Purdue as a player, and holds a double-induction, as player and coach, into the Basketball Hall of Fame. Because of those achievements, it would be easy to overlook what could be John Wooden’s greatest accomplishment.

He loved his wife.

He still loves her, even after being separated by death almost 25 years ago.

We need to hear more stories like that. All we hear about these days are the high-profile marriages that seem to inevitably end in divorce. We hear a lot of complaining from disgruntled couples who are no longer happy in marriage.

“She’s changed,” he will say. “She’s not the woman I married. The love is gone.”

“He doesn’t love me anymore,” she will say. “I don’t see any reason to try anymore. It won’t do any good.”

Could you hear John Wooden saying that? Or was he just lucky? Did he have one of those problem free marriages that just worked effortlessly for 53 years?

Please.

Love & Marriage

Love is not something that just happens. Love is not some mysterious connection two fortunate souls find when they “wish upon a star,” or when they pray to God for that one special person who will help “complete” them. Is that love? That is the way Hollywood makes it look on the big screen. But it’s not real life. It certainly is not real love.

Love is not something you “fall into”; something you catch like a cold. Love is not some unpredictable force that pierces the heart like Cupid’s arrow. Love is a choice, a conscious decision. Love is an act of the will. It is a manifestation of the character of Christ, or the Fruit of the Spirit, being lived out in our lives.

The characteristics listed in Galatians 5:22 are called “fruit” of the Spirit, but they could just as easily be called “evidences” of the Spirit or “manifestations” of the Spirit. We know we are living by the Spirit when Christ’s character is manifested in our life in a practical way.

Conversely, the works of the flesh are outward signs of a worldly disposition. When all we see is enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, and envy in our life, that is a sign that we are being controlled by our fleshly (or worldly) passions (Galatians 5:20-21).

The flesh is fundamentally selfish in nature. It is focused on pleasing self. The flesh rejects God and makes self the center of the universe. All that matters is happiness for self, pleasure for self, fulfillment for self.

When the statement is made, “I don’t love her/him anymore,” that is a clear sign that the love of Christ is missing. The flesh is speaking there, not the Spirit. The flesh is saying, “I’m not happy because she doesn’t *please* me anymore, and so I don’t *love* her anymore.”

The flesh ties love to performance. “Love” is what you feel toward those who make you happy; toward those that are devoted and faithful to you; toward those who do nice things for you. As long as your mate does

those things for you then you will love them. If they stop doing those things, you don't love them anymore. Therefore, love (according to the flesh) is something you earn.

The Spirit of Christ defines love in a different way. Christ's love is unconditional. It is not tied to performance. It is a gift, not something that must be earned. Christ's sacrifice for us was not based on our worthiness but on his undying love. He didn't give his life because we were good. We were wicked and sinful. We were not friends, but rather enemies of God when he loved us (see Romans 5:6-8 & Ephesians 2:1-10).

It is this kind of love that is held up to us as a pattern to follow in marriage (Ephesians 5:22-33). We are to love unconditionally. We are to love with no strings attached. We are to give to our mates as Christ gave to us; to forgive as he forgave us; to love as he loved us.

Love Your Enemies

This is what marriage is all about. God is teaching us how to love in marriage. Marriage is not primarily about happiness. That's not to say marriage is intended to be a dreary thing, but personal happiness is not the main objective. From God's perspective the goal of marriage is holiness, not happiness. Marriage is a gymnasium for the soul. It is where we build our spiritual muscles. It is in marriage that we learn how to love with Christ's love.

There is no other relationship, in fact, that tests our love more. Consider these commands of Jesus:

- *Do good to those who hate you.*
- *Bless those who curse you.*
- *Pray for those who abuse you.*
- *To the one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also.*
- *As you wish that others would do to you, do so to them (Matthew 5:38-48 & Luke 6:27-36).*

"But," you say, "this is talking about enemies, not our mates."

But who is our enemy? Most of us think about bullies at school, adversaries at work, or political enemies when we read these statements, but you can't leave the home out of it. Jesus said that as a result of his teaching that "a person's enemies will be those of his own household" (Matthew 10:36). Some of our worst enemies might live under our own roof.

The closer someone is to you, the more they can hurt you. Strangers can hurt you, but the emotional scars will not be nearly as severe. Take someone who cuts you off in traffic. That makes you mad, right? But

would you then call them your enemy? You don't even know them. It's frustrating, but you won't even remember what was done 15 minutes later.

What about someone who is one flesh with you? Injuries incurred by your husband or wife can leave scars that last a lifetime. Think about what happens...

- When sharp disagreements arise over finances or children?
- When feelings have been blatantly trampled on or your mate has judged motives unfairly?
- When in-laws have made unwanted intrusions and your mate won't do anything about it (and doesn't even seem to care)?
- When intimate secrets have been revealed or a serious breach of trust is made?
- When there is constant teasing, belittling, or harsh criticism (even in public)?
- When there is infidelity?

If Jesus is not talking about marriage when he says, "Love your enemies," then whom in the world is he talking about? Though we hate to say it, the fact remains that sometimes your greatest enemy will be your mate.

The Heavy Lifting

So, if marriage is a gymnasium for the soul, that would make the command to "love your enemies" in marriage the heavy weights. And while we would not wish problems on any marriage, it is when the severe trials come that we have the greatest opportunity to grow. You will never learn the love of Christ more than when you try to love your enemy.

Severe trials help expose worldly motives and wisdom in our thinking. It brings into sharp relief the works of the flesh that are still a part of our character. Paul writes,

the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. Galatians 5:17

As we have said already, the flesh is motivated primarily by a desire to please self. When dealing with an enemy, this self-centeredness will cause you to seek either security or revenge. A desire for security causes one to retreat in fear ("I don't want you to hurt me again"). A desire for revenge causes one to lash out in anger ("You will pay for that"). Either way, the flesh is behind it.

Standing opposed to this fleshly thinking is the Spirit. The Spirit drives us toward reconciliation (as opposed

to security) and forgiveness (the opposite of revenge). Instead of pushing away, the Spirit of Christ seeks peace trying to draw an enemy back to himself. Instead of retaliation, the Spirit desires to bless and to do good for its enemy.

When a serious conflict arises in your marriage, which of the two tends to direct your behavior? The flesh or the Spirit? Are you driven by a desire...

- To reconcile or to retreat?
- To forgive or to get revenge?

Read very slowly this great description of love, and as you read think about yourself and if this describes your character.

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. 1 Corinthians 13:4-8

The love of Christ thinks nothing of self but is motivated by a selfless concern for the other. The love of Christ is opposed to fleshly desires. It is a love that takes risks. It is a love that sacrifices. It is a love that gives away.

- It shows kindness, gentleness, and consideration in the midst of a storm of hatred (Acts 7:54-60).
- It returns not evil for evil (Romans 12:17).
- It yields to unreasonable demands (Philippians 4:5).
- It initiates reconciliation (Matthew 5:23-24; 18:15).
- It swallows pride and humbly confesses wrong (James 5:16).
- It offers forgiveness (Matthew 18:21-22).
- It seeks to overcome evil with good (Romans 12:20-21).
- It patiently suffers abuse again and again (Luke 17:3-4).
- And even when a victim of cruel injustice, it continues to show affection and sympathy (Luke 23:18-47).

Why Love?

But you probably knew that already. I realize that most of you have heard many lessons about the love of Christ before. For most of us, our problem is not a *knowing* problem, but a *doing* problem. We are deficient, not in information, but in motivation.

And this is one of the main goals of this book. I had no desire to add to the plethora of self-help type lessons on marriage already out there. This is not a “five easy steps to a happier marriage” kind of book. My aim is not simply to change behavior, but to change the way you think about marriage.

We all need a paradigm shift. Most marriages are “me” centered. Most authors out there would suggest you try a “we” centered marriage. But that’s not enough. We need “Christ” centered marriages. It is not about self, nor is it about “us”. It’s about Christ.

This is what Jesus tried to teach the Pharisees. They were basically self-centered. Even their religion was selfish. They thought they had figured out a way to love God without having to love their fellow man. They paid their dues (tithing), they went to church (synagogue), and studied their Bibles (the Torah). But they had forgotten the “weightier matters of the law; justice and mercy and faithfulness” (Matthew 23:23).

Why would the Pharisees try this? Because loving God (in one sense) is not difficult. It’s easy to love God because he doesn’t smell or have bad breath. God doesn’t break his promises to you or stab you in the back. You don’t have to worry about God gossiping about you.

But Jesus made it clear that you can’t separate the love of God and the love of your neighbor. When asked what the great commandment of the law was, Jesus responded that we should love God with all our heart, soul, and mind (Matthew 22:37). Nothing new there. That was the standard answer. That was what they expected him to say. However, Jesus didn’t stop there. He said,

This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets. Matthew 23:38-39

“A second is like it.” The second commandment (love your neighbor) is like the first (love God). They go together. You can’t have one without the other. You can’t love God without loving your neighbor. As John said, “he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen” (1 John 4:20).

So say what you want about your love for God, but if you don’t love your neighbor (and that would include your wife or husband) then it’s all a bunch of talk! It’s hypocrisy! It’s Pharisaical! It’s a lie! (1 John 4:20)

Many of us live this lie. We go to church and sing praise to God and tell anyone who would care to listen that we’re Christian, but we also treat our mates like dirt. We say we love God but our deeds tell the real story.

Hindered Prayers

A paradigm shift is needed. We need to make a fundamental change, not merely in our behavior, but in our thinking. Many of us need to look at marriage and our mates in a completely different way, because like it or not, God measures our love for him by the way we love our mates.

Look at this from a different angle. We are “one flesh” with Christ, right? That’s what Ephesians 5:31-32 says. We are the bride of Christ. So what that means is that Jesus feels a strong connection with us as his bride. That’s why, when Saul of Tarsus was persecuting Christians, Jesus asked him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” (Acts 9:4) Every Christian taken to trial, every saint thrown in prison, every brother put to death, Jesus interpreted that as a wrong done to him personally. Jesus identifies with us.

If our mates are Christians, then Jesus shares a one-flesh relationship with them, being one spirit with them (1 Corinthians 6:17). When we verbally abuse our mate (or, God forbid, physically abuse them), Jesus feels their pain. If he were to miraculously appear to us, he would ask, “Why are you persecuting me?”

It’s this understanding that helps explain Peter’s instructions to husbands,

Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered. 1 Peter 3:7

“So that your prayers may not be hindered.” Why would they be hindered?

Let me give a personal example. I have wonderful in-laws who would do anything for me, but imagine if they were to visit Adrienne and me some weekend and the whole time they were with us I treated their daughter in a disrespectful way. All they heard from me was constant criticism, biting sarcasm, and a harsh tone toward their only daughter. Now, what do you think they would say if after hearing me verbally abuse their daughter all weekend, I came and asked them for money?

Peter is reminding us as husbands that when we go to God in prayer that we are talking, not just to our Father, but to our Father-in-law. Our wives are fellow heirs of the grace of life with us. That means they are just as important to God as we are. You are married to God’s daughter and should treat her with honor and respect at all times.

See the paradigm shift now? When you honor your wife, you honor God. When you bless your husband, you bless God. When you show kindness to your wife,

you do show kindness to God. When you love your husband, you love God.

A Paradigm Shift

We need to see love in marriage in a different way. Will it help our home be a happier place? Yes. Will it make your relationship with your husband or wife stronger? Sure. Will it help your mate so that they will want to love you more? Maybe so (1 Peter 3:1-2).

But we need a greater motive. What do you do when there is little hope of your marriage improving? What if you’re married to an absolute loser? What if you realize you made a big mistake in marrying your husband or wife? What if you realize they might not ever change? What do the self-help books have to offer then? What do the self-help books promise once marital bliss seems to be impossible?

The answer is nothing. But the Bible offers something. It offers much more than mere happiness.

Rick Hoyt is disabled. Strangled by his own umbilical cord at birth, it rendered him brain damaged and unable to control his limbs.

The doctors told his parents he would be a vegetable the rest of his life. At nine months old, they were encouraged to put him into an institution. But they wouldn’t go for that. They believed he had a mind.

At age 11, they took their son to the engineering department at Tufts University and asked if there was a way to help him communicate. They rigged him to a computer where he could control a cursor by touching a switch with the side of his head. He was able to communicate. A big hockey fan living in the New England area, his first words were “Go Bruins!”

When a high school classmate of his was paralyzed in an accident, the school organized a charity run.

“Dad, I want to do that,” Rick pecked out on the computer.

His father was a self-described porker who had never run more than a mile. How would he push his son five miles? But he did, and that charity run changed his life.

Rick typed, “Dad, when we were running, it felt like I wasn’t disabled anymore!”

Obsessed with giving Rick that feeling as often as he could, he started training hard with his son. They ran races constantly together, eventually marathons. He even qualified for the Boston marathon.

His friends encouraged him to try a triathlon with Rick. He had never learned to swim and hadn’t ridden a bike since he was six. How would he haul his 110-pound kid through such a demanding race? He did.

In all, Rick and his father have completed over 1000 races, including six Ironman competitions (that means pushing 26.2 miles in a wheelchair, towing 2.4 miles in a dinghy while swimming, and then pedaling 112 miles on the handlebars). In 1992 they biked and ran across the U.S., completing the full 3737 miles in 45 days.

Why would a father do this for his son? He says it's all so he can see that big smile on Rick's face.

Can you see yourself in this picture? We have a lot in common with Rick. We are the helpless sons. We are handicapped because of sin. We cannot do anything by ourselves. Jesus has carried us. He has "borne our griefs and carried our sorrows" (Isaiah 53:4). He not only bore our sins in his body (1 Peter 2:24), he took on our sins and became sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21).

And why did Jesus do this for us? Why would he pick us up and carry us in his arms when we couldn't do anything for him in return? He did it to put a smile on our face!



Rick lives in his own apartment, works in Boston, and loves to spend time with his dad. They make motivational speeches together around the country, and still compete in races together.

Rick is able to take his father out to dinner and buy his father things to show his appreciation for him, but the one thing he would like to give his father, money could never buy.

"The thing I'd most like is that my Dad sit in the chair and I push him once."

We can do for Jesus what Rick can't do for his dad.

Jesus said, "as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me."



Concepts and Application

1. "I just don't love him/her anymore." What do we mean when we say that? What is our understanding of love?
2. What would you say is the fundamental difference between the world's definition of love and the love of Christ?
3. The lesson argues that the flesh ties love to performance. What does that mean? How is that different than the love of Christ?
4. Read Ephesians 5:22-33 and look for phrases that would give us clues as to which kind of love is expected of us in marriage.
5. Does the command to "love your enemies" apply to marriage?
6. The lesson states that the closer someone is to you, the more they can hurt you. Is this true? How so?
7. How does loving your enemy test and refine your love? How does it help to develop the love of Christ in you?
8. According to the lesson, what does a self-centered kind of love motivate you to do when faced with an enemy (two responses)? What does the love of Christ motivate you to do instead?
9. Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-8. According to this passage, how does true love respond to an enemy?
10. What is the paradigm shift in marriage suggested in the lesson? What kind of marriage do we need?
11. How were the Pharisees "loving God" without loving their neighbor? Why did they want to just love God? Why is it not possible to love God without loving your neighbor?
12. Why is it not possible to love God without loving your wife or husband?
13. According to 1 Peter 3:7, what is one reason for ineffective prayers? Why would that hinder our prayers?
14. If the motive for working at being the best husband or wife is not marital happiness, what is our motivation?

*the joy of the LORD is your strength.
Nehemiah 8:10*

He's locked up many prisoners before, but something is different about these two.

"They must have made someone really mad," he thinks to himself as he walks them down to the inner prison.

Their garments are torn.

Their backs are a bloody mess.

But he's seen worse. Prisoners are usually beaten before he gets them. That's not what is different. The difference is these men seem so peaceful.

He tells them to sit on the ground as he attaches their feet to a block of wood on the floor. They offer no resistance.

Their feet are spread apart and fastened in such a way that they will sleep tonight (if they sleep at all) flat on their backs on the cold wet floor. This will be uncomfortable to say the least given the fact that they have just been beaten.

But they do not protest at any point. He has not been particularly gentle with them. He has not washed away the dirt from their wounds. They are in obvious pain as they are fastened in the stocks, yet there seems to be a calm, quiet acceptance of everything done to them.

When the jailer lies back down on his bed that evening he wonders how they could not be more upset. He even thinks he hears singing coming from their cell (Acts 16:23-25).

But we really don't know what was going through the mind of the Philippian jailer before the earthquake later that same night. Had he heard Paul and Silas preach the gospel? Had he inquired about this man Jesus whom they were preaching?

We do know that after the earthquake he was about to take his life. We know that after Paul and Silas assured him that they were all still there the jailer fell down with fear at their feet asking, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" This would seem to suggest he knew something about the gospel.

But his desire to be saved may have also been influenced by the behavior of Paul and Silas that night. After all that had happened to them, they were singing at midnight. No doubt, the jailer must have been impressed by their demeanor that night.

It probably didn't surprise the jailer to hear this letter read from Paul as he wrote from a Roman prison:

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy... because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. Philipians 1:3-4, 7

It was not strange for him to hear Paul talk like that. Joy in prison? It is what he would expect to hear from Paul. That's the man he knew.

You see the jailer understood something about the way Paul looked at things. He knew what brought Paul joy. He knew what made Paul sing and rejoice. He knew the way Paul thought about things.

He knew Paul had the mind of Christ.

Precept and Principle

Most people have the wrong idea about Christian marriage. They think it is a simple process of learning a few rules in scripture.

The New Testament has relatively little to say about marriage. We're told something about the permanence of marriage (Matthew 5:31-32; 19:3-9; Mark 10:1-12; Luke 16:18). We're told what the roles in marriage are (Ephesians 5:22-33; Colossians 3:18-19). And we're told about what our attitudes in these respective roles ought to be (1 Peter 3:1-7).

Now, we understand that these passages are packed with information about marriage, but we do not think it is an oversimplification to say that all the New Testament says directly about marriage is:

- It is between a male and a female.
- It is for life.
- The wife is to submit to her husband.
- The husband is to love his wife.

And if we are not careful, we can walk away from those passages thinking marriage is a relatively simple formula: follow your roles, stick together, and God will be happy.

But it is not that simple. God wants more. He is just as concerned about who we are as he is about what we do. Take the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus said,

You have heard that it was said to those of old, "You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be liable to judgment." But I say to you that

everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, "You fool!" will be liable to the hell of fire.
Matthew 5:21-22

The Pharisees had made morality too simple. They had reduced it to the lowest level; to the bare minimum. They reasoned that as long as they didn't kill their brother they were okay. Anger? That's nothing to worry about too much.

Jesus said we should worry. He said that anger will send us to hell.

God wants more than outward obedience. He wants the heart.

What that means for us in our marriage is that we need to think outside the box a little bit when we're thinking about what God expects from us. We need to move past the scriptures that speak directly to marriage, and see what else is there. We need to move beyond commands that tell us what we must do, and investigate principles that tell us who we ought to be.

One such book that is full of principles for marriage is the Philippian letter.

Philippians on Marriage

On the surface, it would appear that Paul's letter to the Philippians says nothing about marriage. But you'll find that it has a wealth of information about what our perspective should be in marriage.

More than perhaps any other book in the Bible, this letter talks about joy. Paul uses the word "joy" or "rejoice" 12 times. One of the most well known passages from this letter says, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice." (Philippians 4:4)

This command applies to marriage. Paul says to rejoice "always" which means at all times and in every circumstance. So if we are not rejoicing in our marriages, we are disobeying a command of God.

But some of us find little cause for rejoicing. Some of us are going through financial stress right now. Others are dealing with physical ailments or handicaps (which can add to the financial stress). Problems can come from almost any direction in marriage: in-laws, kids, past sins, uncertainty about the future.

Though some of those things are out of our control, often times we create our own problems. You may be dealing with a mate who refuses to budge on anything. So stubborn is your mate, in fact, that it appears things will never get any better.

Does this describe your marriage?

How can you find any joy in all of this?

We need to consider what Philippians has to say about joy, and how these principles apply in marriage.

Joy in Prayer

always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy (1:4)

The Greek word translated "prayer" here is the idea of intercession, or praying to God for someone other than self. Intercession is one of the most private, selfless acts we will ever do as a Christian.

Why else would you do this? You're not doing this for yourself, but for someone else. No one knows you're doing it, either, so it is not done for prideful reasons.

But how does this kind of prayer produce joy? It does so by recalibrating us. Our thinking is usually skewed by selfishness. The reason we are depressed about our circumstances is often because we're feeling sorry for ourselves. Praying for others requires that we think more about others than ourselves, and just doing that can make a world of difference.

The next time you're feeling sorry for yourself, pray for someone else. Don't just pray for yourself. Praying only for yourself can actually make the problem worse because you can become completely self-absorbed. So while you pray for yourself, also pray earnestly for others. It will bring joy back to your life.

Pray for your mate. When they are being unreasonable, annoying, critical, judgmental, cruel, or unloving toward you; just get down on your knees and pray for them. Jesus told us to pray for our enemies (Matthew 5:44). Give this a try and see how your perspective about things changes.

What should you pray for? Thank God for their good qualities. Tell God what is bothering you. Ask God to help you respond the right way. Thank God for the peace he will bring to your heart.

The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:5-7

It will surprise you how much joy can be found in going through the process of intercession for your mate, especially when things are not going well. You won't be thinking selfishly for very long if you do this correctly. Your thinking will be recalibrated. Your thoughts will no longer be about self but about God's larger purpose for your life.

Evelyn Underhill said, "This is the secret of joy. We shall no longer strive for our own way, but commit ourselves, easily and simply, to God's way, acquiesce in his will, and in so doing find peace."

Because Paul was a man of prayer, he could find cause to rejoice in any circumstance. He even rejoiced in prison. He knew that his imprisonment was making the saints in Rome more bold in their faith.

I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. Philippians 1:12-14

It may be that there is a Divine purpose to your suffering in marriage. Could you be teaching something to your children through your patience or meekness? Could your godly response to problems be helping your unbelieving spouse come to the truth (1 Peter 3:1-2)? Could your example cause unbelieving coworkers or friends to glorify God (1 Peter 2:11-12)?

We don't often know until years later when this kind of thing happens. Sometimes we never find out. But intercession forces us to think in this direction. When we pray only for self we can forget about the larger purposes of God and become wrapped up in ourselves.

Intercessory prayer gets us thinking as we ought. We start to think like Paul did, about the big picture, about God's eternal purpose being worked out in our life, even in our marriage.

Joy in Service

Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Philippians 2:4

When you get up off your knees in intercession for your mate, what do you do next?

You serve them.

You fix them a cup of coffee. You fix that leaky faucet you've been promising to fix for weeks. You go iron his shirt. You pick up the dry cleaning on your way home from work. You offer to keep the kids Friday night so she can go out with her friends.

But be careful. Your acts of service will not produce the good God desires in your life if you do this for the wrong reason. If you've bought in to the promises self-help books make, that this will make your marriage happier, you've missed the point. While it is true that this might happen, it is not a promise the Bible makes.

It's not the point anyway!

The point is that when you serve your mate, and especially when that service is undeserved, you will become more like Christ.

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of

God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Philippians 2:5-8

That Greek word translated servant, is *doulos*, or slave. Being a slave in the first century was a dreadful thing. They were bought and sold in the market. They had no rights. No freedom. They received no wages; did not own anything; could not serve in the military; could not testify in a court of law; had no legal recourse. Slaves were the lowest class. This is what Christ Jesus became for us.

But to appreciate what he did, we also need to consider what Jesus left behind. Paul said that Jesus didn't hold onto "equality with God." Before his birth, he was in the midst of heavenly beings who were singing his praises. Seraphim were crying out, "Holy, Holy, Holy," before his throne. Angels and archangels were bowing before his radiant glory. Even the devil or demons that came before him would tremble in his presence. He left heaven, where he was praised and honored, to come to earth, where he was rejected and despised (Isaiah 53:3).

But the most important thing he left was his Father. Before he came to earth, all he knew was love, and peace, and joy in his Father. He left his Father, who is love (1 John 4:8), to come to this earth where it is hard to find true love. He left the glory of a perfect world to come wade into the sewage of our fallen world. In heaven he was surrounded by light and righteousness and life. On earth he immersed himself in the putrid sewage of sin and hatred and injustice.

But that's not all. He didn't just expose himself to sin when he came to this earth. He became sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21). He became a curse (Galatians 3:13). He went to the cross, carrying our sins, as it were, on his bloody back (1 Peter 2:24).

And why did he do this?

He did it for us; an unholy, unthankful, undeserving bunch of rebels.

Washing Feet

Jesus says that if we want to be like him, if we want to be great, if we want to receive glory, then we must do as he has done.

On the night before he was crucified, while his disciples were arguing over who was the greatest (Luke 22:24-27), Jesus got up from the table, took off his outer garment, tied a towel to his waist, poured water into a basin and washed the disciples' feet (John 13:1-5).

Washing feet was a common thing in the first century. They wore sandals and the roads were not paved. They walked everywhere back then, and so their sweaty feet would naturally be very dirty by the end of the day. So it was customary for the host to have all the dinner guests' feet washed. But this was not a pleasant task, as you would imagine, and so it was not the host himself, or just any servant who would do this. They would select the lowest slave in the house to wash everyone's feet.

As Jesus came to Peter's feet, Peter declared, "You shall never wash my feet" (John 13:8). Peter thought that Jesus needed to be corrected for his breach of etiquette. Jesus had it all backward. Jesus is the greatest in that room. Peter wanted to be great, and great people do not wash feet. That is for the lowest.

But Jesus knows what he is doing. He is intentionally turning things upside down. He asks them,

Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. John 13:12-15

Jesus is trying to overhaul our thinking. What we think is down is actually up, and what we think is small is really great.

Apply this to marriage. We look at someone who allows their mate to walk all over them as a weak individual. "Why do you let him/her treat you like that?" we say. "Why don't you stand up for yourself? You're not their slave."

Isn't that what Peter was saying to Jesus? "Have a little self-respect, man. Don't you understand how great you are? Great people don't do this kind of thing. You're not our slave."

But that's exactly what Jesus made himself. That's what he came to be. And that's what he is calling us to become. Jesus said in another place, "whoever would be first among you must be slave of all" (Mark 10:44).

A Drink Offering

Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. Philippians 2:17

"How long do I have to do this?" was his question.

His wife was seeking a divorce, and I was trying to encourage this brother to do little acts of kindness for her. He had tried to do extra chores around the house to let her know he loved her, but nothing seemed to be working. She didn't seem to notice or even care. In

fact, when she did notice she would simply judge his motives.

He was ready to quit. He just didn't have any motivation left to try. It wasn't working.

The problem he had is the problem most of us have (and I include myself). We don't have the attitude of a slave. We want our wages. It's only fair. It's the American way. We want to be paid and rewarded in some way for the good we do.

But Paul found joy in getting nothing, that is, nothing in this life. He would go around recklessly giving his heart away to people he barely knew. He would expose his heart to people who would judge him and treat him unjustly. He would be mocked and beaten and thrown into prison. And now he sees a future destiny with death.

And he can't wait. He is ready to be poured out as a drink offering. He is ready to sacrifice everything. He is rejoicing at the thought of it.

Why would someone be so careless with his heart? Why love people who won't love you back? Isn't this behavior foolish, even a little crazy? Is this the result of some kind of disorder? Masochism?

We echo the words of Festus, "Paul, you are out of your mind!" (Acts 26:24)

And, truth be told, Paul was out of his mind. He was crazy. He was a fool. He was crazy for Jesus. He was a fool for Christ (1 Corinthians 4:10).

Paul was not insane. He had found the source of true joy. Joy is not found in selfishly living for oneself. It is found in selflessly giving yourself to others for Christ's sake.

And the more sacrificial and reckless and wasteful your giving is, the more joy you experience. It's a paradox. You go up by going down. You gain by losing. You are exalted by being humbled.

Try this in your marriage. Don't do the dishes because you think you'll get something in return. Do it for Christ's sake. Don't forgive in hopes they will do the same. Don't listen with a secret desire that you might be heard. Don't show consideration or kindness or patience or humility or anything else with a selfish motive.

Just give yourself away to your mate. Pour out your life as a sacrifice for them. Take the regulator off of your heart. Don't be careful or cautious anymore. Be wasteful. Do something bold and daring and reckless. Wash their feet. Slave for them.

Try to learn what the mind of Christ is through service to your mate.

And discover joy you never thought possible.

Concepts and Application

1. Why do you think Paul and Silas were singing after having been beaten and thrown in prison in Philippi (Acts 16:23-25)? What caused Paul to rejoice in a Roman prison (Philippians 1:3-4, 7)? What kind of mind did Paul possess (Philippians 2:5)? How did that help him to find joy in difficult circumstances?
2. What does the New Testament say specifically about marriage (Matthew 19:3-9; Ephesians 5:22-33; 1 Peter 3:1-7)? Is this all the New Testament has to say about marriage?
3. What are some principles from the Sermon on the Mount that would apply to marriage (Matthew 5-7)?
4. Is it true that God is just as concerned about who we are as he is about what we do? Why is it not enough to control our behavior? Why must we also control our thoughts?
5. What kind of prayer is Paul speaking of in Philippians 1:4? How did he offer this prayer? What makes this kind of prayer a selfless thing? How does it produce joy?
6. What do you think of Evelyn Underhill's quote in the lesson? Is that true? Is that a biblical idea? How does intercessory prayer help you to think in this way?
7. What do we do once we've interceded for our mate? Give some examples of things you can do.
8. What was the condition of slaves in the first century? Why do you think it says that Jesus took on the form of a slave in Philippians 2:7?
9. What is most impressive to you as you think about what Jesus gave up to come to earth?
10. What did Jesus do to the disciples the night before he was crucified (John 13:1-5)? What were the disciples doing the same night (Luke 22:24-27)?
11. Who was usually assigned the task of washing guests' feet? Why?
12. Who didn't want Jesus to wash his feet? Why do you suppose he didn't want Jesus to do this?
13. What was Jesus teaching us about marriage as he washed the disciples' feet?
14. According to the lesson, what is the source of true joy? Do you agree with this? How would adopting this philosophy in life change your marriage?

*“Marriage is an adventure, like going to war.”
G. K. Chesterton*

He lived 930 years.

But if he were alive today he would probably discourage us from envying his many years on this earth. Adam had a difficult life.

He lost two sons. And he lost them both, you might say, in the same day.

His eldest son, Cain, murdered his younger brother in a jealous rage. As a result of this, Cain “went out from the presence of the Lord” and lived the life of a fugitive the rest of his life (Genesis 4:1-16).

There were two empty places at the dinner table that night, and Adam had to stare at those empty seats the rest of his life.

And when it is said “for the rest of his life” it normally means, at most, decades. But not Adam; he didn’t have the luxury of being released from his pain after a few short years. Year after year, decade after decade, century after century, Adam lived his life, had other sons and daughters, but could never replace the two sons he lost. Neither son would come back home. Abel was lost to the grave, and, worse still, Cain was lost to the devil.

And who could Adam blame for this? Not society or the media or anyone else for leading his wayward son astray. He could only look at himself.

“If only I hadn’t eaten of that fruit.”

Talk about regret.

Things deteriorated throughout the days of Adam’s long life. Violence became the norm. It seems likely that Adam was still alive when Lamech became a murderer (Genesis 4:23). By the time of the flood, mankind was filled with violence; so thoroughly depraved and wicked that God was sorry that he had made man (Genesis 6:1-13). Though Adam was not alive when the flood came, he likely saw where things were headed before he died.

Adam’s decision to eat that fruit remained vivid in his memory till the day of his death. Every sin he witnessed only served as a painful reminder; a reminder of what he started; a reminder of what was lost.

The unique aspect of Adam’s experience in this world is that he lived in the world before sin. He knew what

the world was like originally: a world without pain or sorrow; a world without jealousy or strife or hatred or murder; a world of peace; a world without sin.

As Adam saw his family fall apart, he could only think back with deep regret to what life used to be like before the Fall.

A Sad Story

The fall. That’s a curious name we’ve given to that event, isn’t it? It is an appropriate title because that’s what happened. Everything went down hill the moment man sinned.

It seems that the story of Genesis is the story, in part, of how things went wrong. Terribly wrong! To be sure, Genesis is full of great examples of faith and obedience. But it is just as full of negative examples of sin. After the flood, consider some of the sins that are chronicled for us in the book of Genesis:

- Noah’s son, Ham, looked on his father’s nakedness after his father had gotten drunk (9:21-22).
- Abraham lied about his wife’s identity, not once but twice (12:10-20; 20:1-7).
- Like his father Abraham, Isaac also lied about his wife’s identity (26:6-11).
- Isaac’s son, Jacob, carried on the family tradition of lying when he deceived his father by making him think he was his brother, Esau, in order to steal his brother’s blessing (27:1-29).
- Esau, in turn, because he was deceived by his brother plotted to take his brother Jacob’s life (27:41).
- The wives of Jacob, Rachel and Leah, got involved in a sort of competition to see who could bear the most sons (29:31-30:24).
- As a result of the rape of their sister, Dinah, Simeon and Levi went out and killed the inhabitants of an entire city (34:25-31).
- Jacob showed favoritism to his son Joseph (37:3), and as a result his other sons wanted to kill Joseph (37:18). Instead, they sold their brother to Ishmaelite traders as a slave (37:28).
- One of Jacob’s sons, Judah, committed incest unknowingly with one of his daughters-in-law

who had disguised herself as a prostitute (38:1-30).

When you read this list, you can't help but think of the works of the flesh: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, and revelries (Galatians 5:19-21).

Another fact we should note is that the list is not a description of the moral condition of the world. It is a history of God's people. These are the descendants of Abraham. These are the good guys!

How could this be? Sons lying to their fathers, brother plotting against brother, sisters competing, fathers playing favorites, and all of this in the special family through whom God brought the Savior of the world!

In the family we see pride, competition, hatred, envy, lying, manipulation, envy, fornication, and even murder!

The story of Genesis is the story of a world quickly given over to sin. It is the story of how sin devastated and corrupted the home.

The Fall and Marriage

No relationship has been affected by sin more than marriage. Deep scars have been left on marriage from the fall.

After the man and the woman ate the forbidden fruit, God cursed the serpent, the man, and the woman. The serpent was told that he would crawl on his belly and that the seed of woman would destroy him. The man was told that the ground would be cursed and he would produce fruit only by hard labor.

The curse on woman revealed the most negative consequences on marriage. The woman is told,

I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you. Genesis 3:16

There are two parts to this curse. The first deals with the punishment for sin, the second with the consequence of sin on marriage. The punishment will be that the birth process will be a painful one for women now.

But it is the second part of this, or the consequence, that we want to focus our attention upon. The consequence of sin is that there will be conflict between the husband and wife in marriage.

Some have misunderstood the second part of this verse. It is said that woman's submissive role in marriage is a consequence of the curse on Eve. That is factually not true.

The Bible makes it clear that headship was established by God, not because of sin, but because of the order in which he created the man and the woman.

When Paul prohibits women from teaching or usurping authority over men in 1 Timothy 2, the reason he gives is the order of creation: *For Adam was formed first, then Eve* (v 13).

In 1 Corinthians 11:3, Paul affirms that *"the head of woman is man"* (NKJV), and gives the reason for this statement later writing,

For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. 1 Corinthians 11:8-9

Adam was Eve's head the day she was created. In God's original marriage, Adam provided loving leadership in the marriage, and Eve respectfully submitted to his authority.

But all of that changed in Genesis 3 when they ate of the forbidden fruit. Clearly Adam abdicated his God-given responsibility of headship when he ate of the fruit. God said to him,

Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, "You shall not eat of it..." Genesis 3:17

Adam had not only failed in his eating of the forbidden fruit, he had failed as a spiritual leader. He needed to warn his wife, not tacitly endorse her foolish decision by joining her in this sin. He was right there when she was being tempted by the devil, and said nothing to stop her (read closely Genesis 3:6 *"she also gave to her husband who was with her, and he ate."*).

So this verse is not describing the way things should be. This is a description of the cursed way things are going to be while sin reigns. This is not the way marriage was designed. This is a distortion of the original. This is the ugliness of sin.

But what is being said in this verse? What is this desire the woman will have for her husband? Some have understood this to mean an emotional need for the man's affection or, more directly, to the sexual drive in the woman. The same word for desire is used in Song of Solomon 7:10 *"I am my beloved's, and his desire is for me."*

However, the word for desire is also used in the next chapter in Genesis. In fact the structure of the end of 4:7 is almost identical to 3:16. In Genesis 4:7, God is warning Cain about his anger toward his brother Abel. He says,

sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it.

Not only is the English here parallel, so is the Hebrew. The words for desire and rule are the same in both passages.

What does this tell us about the word “desire?” When God tells Cain that sin is crouching (like a lion) at the door of his heart, he means that sin wants to control him, to defeat and overpower and enslave him.

Thus, God is saying that a woman’s desire will be to control and to be master over her husband. His desire will likewise (and perhaps in response to her attempt at control) be to rule over her.

What is described here is the history of marriage. Down through the ages marriage has been a battleground where both sexes have sought to gain the upper hand, to dominate and defeat the other.

As a rule it can be argued that men have historically come out on top in this struggle. We have more brute strength and so we can rape and abuse and intimidate and snap our fingers to get our way.

But that’s not to say women have just meekly accepted this as the way things are. Women are sinners just as much as men are. There have been more than a few Delilahs and Jezebels who were proficient in controlling the men in their lives down through the years.

The woman can certainly hold her own in the battle of the sexes. What she lacks in brute strength she makes up for in guile and cunning. She knows ways to subdue her husband. Either through manipulation, or by constant nagging, or by exploiting the man’s weakness to lust, she is able to get her way.

So, one of the primary consequences of sin in marriage is this struggle for control, dominating men and devious women. This is not what God had in mind when he joined the first man and first woman together. This is not what he wants for us either, far from it!

Restoring the Original

Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.

Genesis 3:16 is not describing the ideal, but rather the corruption. When sin entered the world, it destroyed peace not because headship and submission were thrust upon us as a curse but because it twisted the divinely appointed roles. Sin didn’t create headship and submission, but rather it ruined and distorted them.

The roles as they were originally intended are given to us in Ephesians 5:

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body,

and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. Ephesians 5:22-33

Once again we should point out that marriage is a metaphor that stands for something much more than a man and a woman coming together to be one flesh. It is a portrait of the relationship between Christ and his bride, the church.

This is important to note here because it tells us that these roles in marriage were not arbitrarily assigned by God. The roles of the husband and wife are rooted in the distinctive roles of Christ and his church.

So, we are to live this out in our marriages. What a responsibility this is! If it was important for Moses to make “all things according to the pattern” when he was building the tabernacle, which was a copy or shadow of the true tabernacle made without hands in heaven (Hebrews 8-9), then it is just as important that we move with reverent awe and submission in our marriages. We represent Christ and the church in our marriages!

Husbands, we are to mirror Christ’s love for the church! Headship is not a privilege to be used for our own selfish purposes. It is not a right to command and control. It is a responsibility to love like Christ did, laying down our lives for our wives as servant leaders.

Wives, submission is not to be slavish or coerced or cowering. It is lovingly and respectfully given to your husbands just as the church gives herself in submission to Christ. Christ does not want our obedience to him to be offered grudgingly. He wants it to be freely and willingly and joyfully given. Your submission is to be a picture of that.

But this portrait of loving leadership and willing submission is foreign to many of us. The biblical

picture has been marred by sin. Many of us have grown up in an environment where all we witnessed was cold indifference and selfish competition. We need a clear picture of what God wants from us.

Loving Leadership

What does it mean to be a man? What does a Christian husband look like?

1. He does not demand to be served, but instead sacrifices himself for his wife.

After Paul tells husbands that they are the head of the wife as Christ is head of the church, he explains what that means. He said, "Husbands love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25). Our leadership in the home is to resemble the sacrificial servant leadership of Christ.

Jesus said that our leadership was not to resemble the Gentile model where authority is exerted through force and intimidation, but to be one of influence through loving service.

You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.
Mark 10:42-45

2. He exerts leadership in marriage to achieve God's purposes, not his own.

After pointing out Christ's love expressed toward his bride, the church, in his sacrifice for her on the cross, Paul says that this sacrifice was made,

that he might sanctify her... so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. Ephesians 5:26-27

This is the Christian husband's chief aim as well. He is not preparing his bride for himself, but for another. His goal in leading his wife in a godly path is the same as that expressed by the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 11:2:

For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ.

3. He makes decisions with his wife's best interests at heart.

The two are made one flesh, and thus Paul says,

In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. Ephesians 5:28

He does not see his wife as a competitive rival, but as a complementary part of himself. Anything he does for her he is doing for himself.

He has the final say in making decisions because he is the head, but those decisions are rarely unilateral. He gladly seeks input from his wife because he values her wisdom and her preferences above all others. They are "one flesh" and so he naturally seeks her input in everything.

In the rare occasion when he does make a decision against his wife's wishes, it will always be because he sees this is for the greater (and sometimes spiritual) good of the family, never because it serves his own selfish desires. But even then he will enter into such decisions cautiously because he values his wife's opinion so highly.

Willing Submission

What does biblical womanhood look like in marriage? How does a Christian wife conduct herself?

1. Her general disposition is to yield and to submit to her husband.

Paul makes it quite clear, "so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands." (Ephesians 5:24) She submits in the little things, the big things, and everything in between. She looks to her husband for guidance and leadership. Her desire is to follow, not lead in the marriage. This is what she would prefer to do. She does not desire to be head.

But this begs the question, what about ungodly husbands? It is one thing to submit to a man who is providing self-sacrificial, loving, godly leadership. What about a woman married to a man who not only fails to deliver that kind of leadership, but has no concept of what that even means?

2. Her submission comes from a respect for the Lord.

Her submission is ultimately about the Lord, not her husband. She submits to him, as she would to Christ, not that he is Christ or that he necessarily has the spirit of Christ in him. The role is simply not contingent on the man getting it right (anymore than the man's obligation to love is contingent on her submission).

The husband does not replace Christ as the supreme authority in her life. Rather she submits to him because Christ is her supreme authority.

Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church... Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Ephesians 5:22-24

This submission to the husband's headship, therefore, does not depend on him being everything he ought to be. She's not submitting because he's providing the self-sacrificial leadership of Christ. If that were the condition, then no wife would have to submit. No husband perfectly exemplifies the love of Christ.

Her submission is there even if her husband is not a Christian. Peter said,

Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct. 1 Peter 3:1-2

Peter has in mind a woman married to an unbeliever. He sees the scenario where the unbelieving husband is converted by his wife's conduct, especially, it seems, her respectful and submissive attitude toward him.

However, we must point out that since this submission is rooted in the authority of Christ, it is not absolute. If the husband leads his wife in a path that is contrary to Christ, she will not follow him. She will not steal with him, or lie for him, or get drunk with him, or do anything that would be a sin. Her first obligation in everything is to obey the Lord (Acts 5:29).

But even when she makes a stand for Christ, she still respects the position her husband holds. She still clings to that "gentle and quiet spirit" (1 Peter 3:4) even when forced to defy her husband's demands. She communicates to him that she does not enjoy going against his authority. She also makes it clear that she wants desperately for him to change so that she might willingly and joyfully follow him in the paths of righteousness.

Return to Eden

What do you have when husbands offer their wives strong, tender, loving, self-sacrificing, leadership?

What do you have when wives offer loving, joyful, and willing support to their husbands?

You have a taste of Eden.

This is life before the fall. This is life before sin. This is marriage as God designed it to be.

Marriage does not have to be a battleground where we fight and claw and manipulate and deceive and hurt and destroy each other. God has shown us a better way. By the power of God's Spirit, through faith in his promises, and by obedience to his Word, we can create a restful and peaceful life for each other.

And not only does this lead to great blessings for ourselves, it brings God glory. In a home where a husband leads like Christ, and a wife responds like the bride of Christ, the world is given a glimpse of heaven on earth. The harmony and mutuality and respect of a godly home like this is a captivating and attractive thing to people in the world. They cannot help but see the beauty and the majesty of God's design.

But what is the consequence of not following God's plan? A horrible tragedy indeed! Not only do two people hurt themselves (as Abraham's family did to themselves over and over again), they cause the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme. The beautiful picture of loving leadership and willing submission is destroyed.

So whether your mate will cooperate with you or not, resolve in your heart that you will sacrifice all to follow your appointed role in marriage. Too much is at stake. You represent on one side or the other, whether you are husband or wife, our marriage to Christ. You demonstrate this to your husband or wife, to your children, to your coworkers, to your community, to the world!

No matter what you must give up, no matter how hard your mate makes this for you, don't let anything stop you from loving your wife or submitting to your husband.

Because in the end this is not about you.

It's about Christ.

Concepts and Application

1. List some of the upsetting things Adam witnessed in his long life. What made these things especially painful for him?

2. The lesson states that Genesis is the story of how things went wrong. How is that so? What do we learn about the family of Abraham that is less than flattering? What makes this so shocking?

3. How was marriage affected by the fall? What is the curse in Genesis 3:16? Was submission and headship a consequence of the fall or creation (see 1 Timothy 2:13; 1 Corinthians 11:3, 8-9)? Explain the last half of Genesis 3:16 in light of that. How does Genesis 4:7 help us to understand this verse in 3:16? How has 3:16 been demonstrated down through the years in marriage?

4. How do the roles given in Ephesians 5:22-33 help reverse the effects of the fall on marriage?

5. According to the lesson, what does a Christian husband look like? Is there anything you would add to this list?
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.

6. According to the lesson, what does a Christian wife look like? Is there anything you would add to this?
 - a.
 - b.

7. According to the lesson, what should be one of our main motivations in seeking to follow these roles in marriage?

Lesson 6 - Patience

When I was a young man I vowed never to marry until I found the ideal woman. Well, I found her but, alas, she was waiting for the ideal man."

Henri Alain-Fournier

Ever had a day where you wished you never got up?

Job had one of those days.

Now there was a day when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, and there came a messenger to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them, and the Sabeans fell upon them and took them and struck down the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you." While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, "The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them, and I alone have escaped to tell you." While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, "The Chaldeans formed three groups and made a raid on the camels and took them and struck down the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you." While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, "Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, and behold, a great wind came across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young people, and they are dead, and I alone have escaped to tell you." Job 1:13-19

Talk about a bad day! Everything lost, his oxen, his sheep, his camels, his servants, and all of his children, all in a single day!

But Job's suffering was not over.

So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord and struck Job with loathsome sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. And he took a piece of broken pottery with which to scrape himself while he sat in the ashes. Job 2:7-8

Isn't it funny how you always seem to get sick when things are falling apart?

Job's having a hard time. He can't seem to get any relief. It's at his lowest point that the hardest blow hits him.

Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die." Job 2:9

We need to be careful how we judge Job's wife. Don't forget that she lost her children, too. But her reaction to this trial was no help to Job. When he needed her the most, she failed him. When he went through the darkest valley of his life, she abandoned him. When his faith and integrity was being tested like never before, she told him to give up.

How the Story Ends

The story of Job's life has a happy ending.

And the Lord restored the fortunes of Job, when he had prayed for his friends. And the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before. Then came to him all his brothers and sisters and all who had known him before, and ate bread with him in his house. And they showed him sympathy and comforted him for all the evil that the Lord had brought upon him. And each of them gave him a piece of money and a ring of gold.

And the Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning. And he had 14,000 sheep, 6,000 camels, 1,000 yoke of oxen, and 1,000 female donkeys. He had also seven sons and three daughters. And he called the name of the first daughter Jemimah, and the name of the second Keziah, and the name of the third Keren-happuch. And in all the land there were no women so beautiful as Job's daughters. And their father gave them an inheritance among their brothers. And after this Job lived 140 years, and saw his sons, and his sons' sons, four generations. And Job died, an old man, and full of days. Job 42:10-17

"What a great ending," you say, "the Lord really blessed him!" He was comforted by his brothers and sisters. He got twice as many flocks and herds. His health was restored, dying at a ripe old age. He even had more children.

Job was able to start over again in a lot of ways. God was merciful to Job replacing a lot of things he had lost. New health, new sheep, new camels, new oxen, new donkeys, new sons, new daughters...

But he still had the same old wife. Remember her? The woman who had counseled Job to "curse God and die?" God didn't give Job a new wife.

Learning Patience

Was Job able to enjoy the rest of his days with his wife? She had abandoned him when he needed her the most. Surely there were scars and hurt feelings. After

all, if he felt abandoned by God in his suffering, how did he feel about his wife?

The more important question though is what did Job learn in his marriage through this awful experience? What did he learn about his wife and their marriage? What did he learn about himself and his character? Did he, in all of this, learn patience?

The Greek word translated “patience” in the Fruit of the Spirit is *makrothumi*, which is a combination of two words, *makro*, which means slow, and *thumos*, which means anger. So rendered literally it means “slow to anger.”

The proverbs say:

A patient man has great understanding, but a quick-tempered man displays folly. Proverbs 14:29

A hot-tempered man stirs up dissent, but a patient man calms a quarrel. Proverbs 15:18

Patience is the ability to hold the tongue when provoked, to turn the other cheek. It is a quiet, steady, even-keeled, even-tempered disposition that simply refuses to quit. It is composure under pressure, stability under fire.

Patience is diligence when nothing seems to be going right. It is fortitude when an enemy presses hard. It is staying power under attack.

Patience is that steadfast endurance that causes the soldier to keep fighting when weary. It is that never-say-die courage that motivates a boxer to get back up when he’s been knocked down for the hundredth time. It is that steely determination that compels the marathoner to keep his legs moving when all his strength is gone.

Marriage tests patience because it brings two flawed people together into close proximity. Hurtful things are said, mistakes are made, offenses happen. It’s all part of the package.

But this is hard to accept. Many can deal with the “in sickness and health, for richer or poorer” part of marriage. But sin is something we cannot tolerate. Suffering from an illness is something we can’t help. Losing a job is often out of our control. But when our mate intentionally hurts us, that is different.

This makes marriage a training ground for patience. In fact, no other relationship disciplines us in this virtue quite like marriage. No other relationship demands as much from us.

Think about it, what other relationship requires the same level of commitment? If you get frustrated with your boss, you can change jobs. If you don’t like your home, you can buy a new one. If you get tired of the

cold winters up north or the hot summers down south, you can move to another part of the country.

The freedom and prosperity of our society have made long-term commitments a rare thing. In 1955 the average person stayed in a job for twenty-seven years. Today the number is closer to four. Americans move about every five years.

We can change banks, grocery stores, dry cleaners, hairdressers, doctors, cell phone providers (unless, of course, you’re in a contract and you have to wait a couple of years). We have so many choices and options. If you don’t like the service you’re receiving, you’re free to leave just about whenever you want.

We change churches, change careers. We even change our president every four years. By law, he’s got to be gone in eight.

So, if we don’t like something, we change it. That’s not exactly the best environment in which to learn patience.

But God has made a relationship that you are not to change. Jesus said, “*What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate*” (Matthew 19:6).

It doesn’t matter whether you are in a good marriage or a bad one; whether you are married to a believer or an unbeliever (1 Corinthians 7:12); God takes the vows we have made seriously. He will not let us wiggle out of the promise we make. There are no loopholes or escape clauses. This is not a cell phone company we’re dealing with. This is no two-year renewable contract.

Marriage is battle where retreat is not allowed. It is a boxing match where throwing in the white towel is not an option. It is a long distance race where stopping renders you disqualified (1 Corinthians 9:27).

Come to Terms Quickly

So if you have to go the distance, what do you do when conflicts arise? Listen to this counsel from Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount:

Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny. Matthew 5:25-26

Now, Jesus is not talking about marriage, but what he says here certainly applies. Quite literally, your mate can take you to the judge (and you will not get out until you have paid the last penny in divorce court), but Jesus is speaking metaphorically here. Neglected grievances have dire consequences. You pay for it in the long run, and you may not have a lot of time. You must act with haste. Come to terms quickly is what Jesus said.

But we seldom do. We fear we might lose our cool (or they will lose theirs), and so we retreat. We throw in the towel. We give up.

The devil loves it when we do that. Ephesians 4:26-27 warns us,

Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil.

When we have allowed the sun to set several times on hurt feelings, the accumulated effects over time are devastating. We have given the devil a foothold in our marriage, and all he needs is a narrow opening, a slender crack, to fit the tiny tip of a ten-ton wedge he will hammer between us.

But we are too prideful to roll over in the bed and say, "I'm sorry." We fear our words will be rejected. We don't want to face an icy cold wall. We are afraid of the storm of emotions that might be waiting on the other side.

And so the sun sets.

And the devil wins.

Tear Down This Wall

But patience doesn't run from conflict. Patience has the courage to meet it head on.

On June 12, 1987, President Ronald Reagan spoke to the citizens of Berlin at the base of the Brandenburg Gate, near the Berlin wall. Of all the speeches delivered by the "Great Communicator," this one is perhaps the best remembered.

General Secretary Gorbachev, if you seek peace, if you seek prosperity for the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, if you seek liberalization: Come here to this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!

How can you tear down the wall between you and your mate? It is not easy, it will test your patience to the limit, but if you are willing to try, here are some ways to make peace in your marriage.

1. Don't sweat the small stuff!

Starting a quarrel is like breaching a dam; so drop the matter before a dispute breaks out.
Proverbs 17:14

The story is told about a couple that was trying to make their marriage work. They agreed to drop a slip in the "Fault" box for a month. This box would keep a record of daily irritations such as, "leaving the top off the jar," "wet towels left on floor," "dirty socks not in hamper," and on and on. At the end of the month, they exchanged boxes. The husband read and reflected on all he had done wrong. Then the wife opened her box and began reading as well. They were

all the same, the message on each slip of paper was: "I love you!"

"Love is patient..." Those are the first words in the great chapter of love (1 Corinthians 13:4). Love is willing to patiently overlook the little things.

2. Listen, listen, listen!

He who answers before listening— that is his folly and shame.
Proverbs 18:13

Here is where patience is really tested. Everything about our selfish nature wants to debate and argue and get our point across. When we speak without listening we accomplish nothing.

It takes a truly wise person to stop arguing and listen. It takes tremendous discipline and patience, but that's what it takes to resolve differences. Nothing will be resolved until someone finally swallows his or her pride and quietly and patiently listens to the other side.

Don't just wait until your time to speak. That's not listening. That is nothing but a pause where we think of what to say next.

Listening involves trying to understand, and not just what is being said, but why it is said. It is a sincere desire to understand the other point of view.

Listening happens when we lower the defenses. It happens when we are willing to be vulnerable. With no desire to save face. Showing respect becomes more important than being respected. Understanding becomes more important than being understood.

Listening is an outgrowth of true, unconditional love. When a heart has put others (with all of their feelings and desires) ahead of self, only then is there a willingness to listen.

3. If you must speak, be careful what you say!

Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.
Proverbs 29:22

Solomon praises the wisdom of a man who carefully chooses his words. He knew of the immense power of words. They can pierce like a sword.

Words are especially powerful in this relationship. It's one thing to hear abusive and hurtful words from a stranger, from your boss, or even from a friend. When you hear it from your wife or husband (someone who is "one flesh" with you), that's really painful!

Choose words carefully. Stay away from absolutes. Don't say, "You *always* ignore my feelings," or "You *never* listen to me." Not only is that false, it is not productive. Your mate will feel persecuted and

unjustly criticized. Defenses are put up when you start talking like that.

While you don't gloss over the problem, you also don't make it bigger than it is. Honestly convey your feelings with constructive, non-confrontational language.

Don't throw out ultimatums: "Change or else!" That only causes resentment. Give them the opportunity to suggest changes. Make this a joint effort.

4. If you must speak, be careful how you say it!

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

Tone of voice is critical. A significant portion of our understanding depends on how the message is delivered. The content is important, but just as important (and perhaps more important) is the way it is said. What you are *saying* may be true, but what you are *saying* may not be the issue at all. It's *how* you're saying it.

It is important to consider first what the objective is. If the objective is to win the argument, then you've already lost. Your mate will be won over by sincerity, not arguments. Be gentle. Give your spouse the confidence that your only goal is to restore and preserve peace in the relationship.

Handling disagreements in a respectful tone of voice pays long-term benefits. It breeds confidence. Honest communication is encouraged. Thoughts can be shared without fear of rejection or misunderstanding. The devil is prevented from getting a foothold in the relationship because of lingering bitterness (Ephesians 4:26-27).

5. Watch your emotions!

*A hot-tempered man stirs up dissension,
but a patient man calms a quarrel.
Proverbs 15:18*

When one partner is upset, it is easy for the other to take it personally. The words sound condemning, but it might only be frustration from work or a bad day at home. It may only be the result of fatigue or hunger or the effects of an illness or hormones.

This is where humility is needed. A truly humble person is willing to accept abuse and persistently ask questions to find out what is really going on.

Love is needed. "Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." (1 Corinthians 13:7) Love gives the benefit of the doubt, not judging the outburst but seeking to understand the context.

In the heat of battle, it is so easy to lose your temper. Some advise counting to ten, but there is a better way to control your emotions.

Pray.

Go to a private place and get on your knees. Express your hurt and your anger to God. Don't worry; he can handle the honesty. Put yourself before his throne and lay your burdens at God's feet. Tell him all about it.

You'll likely get up after that and go apologize.

6. Wait!

*Do not say, "I will repay evil";
Wait for the Lord, and he will deliver you.
Proverbs 20:22*

I read somewhere that the average yearly cost of running red lights is over 7 billion dollars and that the average time saved by running red lights is only 50 seconds!

We don't like to wait! We have grown accustomed to getting everything we want instantly. We have instant coffee, instant oatmeal, instant messaging, instant credit...

In many ways we've been conditioned from childhood to want instant gratification. As babies our mothers came running whenever we cried. As toddlers we would pitch a fit in Wal-Mart to get what we wanted. As teens we learned how to sweet talk to get our way.

Then we get married... And while there's nothing wrong with a baby crying for his milk, when a grown adult pitches a fit because "*SOMEONE FORGOT TO GET MILK YESTERDAY*" you've got a problem.

We need to grow up. There is no instant gratification in marriage. It takes patience.

If issues are not resolved immediately, patience doesn't stomp off in a huff to go pout. It allows a reasonable amount of time to pass to readdress the issues. It does not ignore the problems forever, but it does not insist on its own timetable either. It can personally accept the other when problems are not immediately resolved.

Patience also accepts that there are things that simply can not change. It is willing to live within the constraints of what is possible. Patience never demands the impossible.

Patience is optimistic. If 99% of a situation looks negative, patience emphasizes the 1% that looks positive. It decides to overlook irritating things and minor offenses.

Patience listens, waits, and never gives up, even when things look bleak. Patience remains steadfast when it appears that things might never change. Divorce never

enters the mind because patience does not even consider quitting.

Waiting for Glory

The reason patience is able to persevere this way is because it is rooted in an eternal perspective. 2 Corinthians 4 says,

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. Vs 16-18

This perspective is the firm foundation on which patience stands. Patience focuses on the invisible, not the visible; the inner nature, not the outer nature, the eternal, not the transient.

Our marriage is the transient. It is a temporary relationship. It is not eternal. When we die we are released from our vows. It is limited to this life.

Our relationship to Christ is the eternal. When we die we will be joined forever to him. That is the marriage we desire.

When compared to the eternal glory of this relationship, the struggles of our temporal

relationships on this earth don't seem so bad. Our marriages might be pretty tough at times, but as long as we can see our patience growing, then the struggle serves some positive purpose. It is helping to prepare us for heaven.

As Jacob labored and toiled those seven years for Rachel and it only "seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her" (Genesis 29:20), so the struggle in marriage seems only a few days because patience keeps its eyes fixed on the eternal weight of glory that will come when Christ returns.

In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls. 1 Peter 1:6-9

Get a vision of what awaits. Keep your eyes on the prize. He is coming to receive you as his bride.

Be patient. The struggle is only helping you to get ready for that day.

Concepts and Application

1. Why was the reaction of Job's wife so difficult for him to take (Job 2:9)? Do you think Job forgot all about this when the Lord restored his fortunes and health to him?
2. What does the word patience mean literally in the Greek? What do the Proverbs say about patience (Proverbs 14:29; 15:18)? Describe patience in your own words.
3. Why does marriage test our patience? How does it train patience?
4. How has our society helped to encourage impatience? What happens when we allow the sun to go down on our wrath (Ephesians 5:26-27)?
5. Don't sweat the small stuff (Proverbs 17:14). What are some of the "small things" in your marriage that tend to irritate you? What can you do to change that?
6. Listen, listen, listen (Proverbs 18:13). What does it mean to listen? Why does this require patience?
7. If you must speak, be careful what you say (Proverbs 29:22). What are some words we should not use and why?
8. If you must speak, be careful how you say it (Proverbs 15:1). How important is our tone? What does a harsh tone communicate? What about a soft tone?
9. Watch your emotions (Proverbs 15:18). Are we always the reason our mates are upset? Why do we tend to take everything so personally then? How do humility and love help keep our emotions under control? How does prayer help us to be more patient?
10. Wait (Proverbs 20:22). Why are we so childish in marriage, so impatient? When resolution to a problem does not come immediately, how should we respond? Are there things that will never be changed?
11. What does 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 say about what our attitude ought to be in marriage? If we had that perspective in our marriages, how would they be different? How would we personally be different?

Lesson 7 - Kindness

Kindness is the language which the deaf can hear and the blind can see.
Mark Twain

He stood me up.

We were supposed to cut the grass at the church building and he didn't show up.

I wasn't mad at him, but I called him just to check and see if he was coming. He was very apologetic. He had overslept.

He showed up at the church building later. We talked a little and I found out the reason he had overslept was he had stayed up till the wee hours of the morning helping his wife grade papers. She is a schoolteacher and has had health problems. It makes her lethargic, draining her of whatever energy she has. He sacrificed his sleep to help her.

Success in marriage is not about the big things. It is not about how we handle the big events when they come along. Those things will test us, but those are not the things that define our marriages.

It is the little things. It is the seemingly small and insignificant things we do every day, usually without even thinking about them.

What we do without thinking is what we really are. It is our default. In computer lingo, the default is all of the settings assigned to a software application or device out of the box.

For some of us, we default to selfishness. When we aren't forced to do otherwise, we are naturally critical, insensitive, uncaring, and basically absorbed in our own world. Our default is set on "self."

But others have trained themselves to be kind. That is their default. They will occasionally be selfish, but tend to be generous, sensitive, caring, and concerned about the welfare of others. Their default is set on "others."

The way we set our default is through consistent practice over a long period of time. Kindness becomes our default only after practicing kindness every day over a long period of time.

No Small Virtue

When Adrienne and I were dating, I would send her a card in the mail every week. She was in Birmingham and I was two hours away in Auburn and so we would write notes to each other. My letter would go in the mail on Monday and she would get it on Wednesday, and I would receive her letter on Wednesday.

There is nothing unusual about this. That is what young couples do when they are courting. We like to show kindness and affection. It is not forced. It is perfectly natural.

It is also natural to stop doing that once you are married. We have accomplished our objective. Now we can move on to other things. We heard of one man who said, "I told her I loved her the day we got married and if I change my mind I'll let her know."

Kindness is an added bonus, not a requirement, to many. Many would look at the Fruit of the Spirit and lock in on "faithfulness" and "self-control" and maybe even "patience." Those are the big virtues. Those are the things we promised in our vows.

But what about kindness? Is it not important?

Kindness is no small virtue in the Bible. It is prominent in some of the lists of virtues found in the New Testament.

- It is the second one listed in the great chapter of love, 1 Corinthians 13:4-8.
- It is the second virtue among those characteristics of Christ that we are to put on listed in Colossians 3:12-14.
- It is part of the Fruit of the Spirit, Galatians 5:22-23.
- Ephesians 4:32 simply tells us, "*Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*"

Furthermore, God is described to us in the Bible as a God of kindness. It is a part of his character.

- *Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? Romans 2:4*
- *so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. Ephesians 2:7*

- *But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us... Titus 3:4-5*
- *But love your enemies and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Luke 6:35*

Do not overlook this virtue. Kindness is a big deal; a very big deal. It is a command. It is a part of God's character. If you fail to show kindness you are not following God's word.

Kindness in the Bible

So don't go to sleep on me in this lesson. This is important, so pay attention. This is especially important if this is not your natural default. You are going to have to discipline yourself to act and to think in new ways.

We need a good working definition of kindness. Let us begin by thinking about how the Bible describes kindness for us.

1. Kindness is thoughtful.

Yet it was kind of you to share in my trouble. Philippians 4:14

Paul is thanking the saints in Philippi for taking care of his physical needs while he is in prison. You get the impression that Paul did not ask for anything, they simply saw a need and took care of it.

It is the nature of kindness to act that way. Kindness takes initiative. It does not sit and wait to be asked. Kindness is lively and active. It looks for opportunities to bless.

Kindness is proactive. It initiates by being the first to greet, the first to smile, the first to serve, the first to forgive. It finds pleasure in doing this.

We like the English Standard Version's translation of Romans 12:10:

Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.

Paul is saying we should compete with each other in seeing who can show honor the most. That is a good competition. Most competition is bad, but if you are trying to outdo your mate in seeing who can do the most for the other, then that is a healthy competition in marriage.

Do you think you could outdo your wife or husband? What could you do today to score more points (not points to get something in return)? It is all about them, not you. How can you outdo them in showing honor?

2. Kindness is opposed to anger.

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another... Ephesians 4:31-32

We normally think of patience as the opposite of anger. Jesus said that when our enemy strikes us on the one cheek that we should turn the other (Matthew 5:38-39), but he doesn't stop there.

And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you. Matthew 5:40-42

Jesus demands more than patience. We think we have done our job when our mates hurt or abuse us and we bite our tongue. And while we do not want to diminish the importance of doing that, it is not enough to merely turn the other cheek.

Jesus challenges us to do more. Instead of thinking of ways to punish your mate, think of ways to bless them instead. Instead of responding to evil with anger, let kindness be your response.

Anger is a sign of selfishness. We feel justified in our anger because we are thinking selfishly.

Kindness in the face of evil is a sign of selflessness. It demonstrates beyond any doubt that we are motivated by God's purposes and not our own. Our desire is to bring them back to God through love.

if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink, for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Romans 12:20-21

You can overcome evil in your spouse. Be patient with them, but also seek to actively love them by showing them kindness.

3. Kindness gives with no strings attached.

love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Luke 6:35

"Why should I do anything for her? She never thanks me!"

"Why should I do that for him? He won't notice!"

Kindness does not speak this way. It is not based on performance. It is given away freely as a gift.

God's kindness for us is based on his love, not on our worthiness. God is kind to us even though we are "ungrateful" as Luke 6:35 says. We do not adequately thank God even on our best days. On the whole we are basically an unthankful world, yet he continues to show kindness to us anyway.

God is kind to us even though we are "evil." Far from deserving our gifts from God, he continues to shower us with abundant blessings. To love like God, we must show kindness at all times, especially when our mates do not notice it or deserve it.

And this is where the rubber meets the road. It is one thing to know what kindness is. It is quite another to be kind. It is one thing to understand the nature of God's kindness toward us. It is another to reflect this kindness in our marriage. As we have said before, ours is not a knowing problem, but a doing problem. We need a greater motive.

Why should we show kindness when our mates don't deserve it?

The Highest Motives

Consider a passage that has nothing to do with marriage. In this passage Paul called on the saints in Corinth to separate from anything associated with idolatry. This was a hard thing. It meant being cut off from virtually all social life in their community.

Why would someone consider doing this? Look for the motives Paul gives as you read this passage.

What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty. Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God. 2 Corinthians 6:16-7:1

Did you hear what Paul said?

More important, did you hear what he didn't say? There were no temporal blessings promised. He didn't say, "Cut out idolatry and you'll have a better life." Though there might be some truth to that statement, it was not the reason given for this appeal.

There are basically two motives Paul gives here: LOVE and FEAR. We need both of these.

First of all, fear. He said we should bring holiness to completion in the fear of God. God wants us to respect

his authority. God wants us to obey him because he is God. He wants us to submit to his way whether we understand why his way is better or not.

The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 1:7). The fear of God is the whole duty of man (Ecclesiastes 12:13). Reverential fear is what God wants to see in us (Exodus 20:20; Hebrews 12:28).

But along side of fear is love. God is appealing to us to love him more than idols. He wants to be the center of our lives, and so he gently invites us through these promises:

- *I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them*
- *I will be their God and they shall be my people*
- *I will welcome you*
- *I will be a father to you*
- *You shall be sons and daughters to me*

"Now," you say, "what in the world does this passage have to do with marriage?"

The answer is nothing, except that the same two motives (love and fear) are given as reasons for us to follow our roles in marriage. Read about those roles again (Ephesians 5:22-33), and as you read look for those two motives.

Did you see what was missing? Where did Paul say, "Follow these roles and your marriage will be happier"? He didn't say that, did he? He didn't say, "Submit and everything will be swell." He didn't say, "Love your wife and you'll have the marriage of your dreams." No, it's the same two motives: fear and love.

First, fear. The text is preceded by this statement in verse 21, "*submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.*" Then, throughout the text, the emphasis is placed on us submitting to each other in our respective roles because of our reverence for Christ:

- *Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord*
- *As the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands*
- *Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church*
- *No one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church*

The emphasis on Christ is hard to miss, isn't it? Read also the admonition Paul makes to masters and slaves

and see the same emphasis on obedience to Christ (Ephesians 6:5-9).

But this is not the only motivation. We have already pointed out the emphasis Paul places on our relationship with Christ as his bride. We are one flesh with him. We have an intimate relationship with Christ, and we want to go deeper. It is this desire that energizes us to do what we would not otherwise do. Our love for the Lord is what fuels the desire to show kindness to our mates.

We need to know “why to” as much as we need to know “how to”. We do this for Christ. It is all about him.

Kindness in Marriage

But knowing “how to” is also important. So for those of us who have forgotten what kindness looks like in marriage, here is a refresher course.

1. Kindness greets.

A glad heart makes a cheerful face, but by sorrow of heart the spirit is crushed. Proverbs 15:13

The first words out of your mouth when you come home from work, or when your mate comes home, set the tone for the rest of the evening. Make them positive words!

Make the home a place where he wants to be at the end of the day. It's true that you have had a stressful day, but so has he. Make the home a cheerful and happy place by welcoming him with a warm greeting.

When you come home from work, make sure you leave work at the office. Get yourself in a good frame of mind so that when you walk through that door you can cheerfully greet your wife.

Just a cheerful “Hello, how are you doing? How was your day?” is significant. You will be amazed at the difference it will make. This little act of kindness will go a long way.

2. Kindness praises.

Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her, “Many daughters have done excellently, but you surpass them all.” Proverbs 31:28-29

I do not think I ever had a meal at my grandparents' table where I didn't hear my grandfather complement my grandmother on the wonderful meal she prepared. He truly was thankful. And she really needed to hear that.

Praise is such a simple thing, but it is powerful. Wives are commanded to “respect” their husbands (Ephesians 5:33). Respect is like air to a man. He cannot survive long without it. If he does not get it from you, that secretary at the office who praises him

all the time will seem more and more attractive to him. Make sure that you are your husband's biggest fan.

Husbands are to give “honor” to their wives (1 Peter 3:7). She needs to feel like she is special in your eyes. She needs to hear constant praise from your lips (Proverbs 31:28). She needs to receive heartfelt acknowledgement for all the good things she does. She needs to be reaffirmed in this way every single day. She should never feel you take her for granted.

3. Kindness dresses up.

She makes bed coverings for herself; her clothing is fine linen and purple. Proverbs 31:22

The virtuous wife of Proverbs 31 was a busy lady, but not too busy to try to look good for her husband. You might picture her wearing homely looking clothes, with rollers in her hair running around trying to get everything done. But that is not the picture at all. She has style and class. She wears fine linen and purple.

Of course, the inner beauty is the most important thing (1 Peter 3:1-5), but that doesn't mean the godly woman is a slob who cares nothing about her appearance. The godly woman dresses modestly. She does not want undue attention on her physical beauty, but at the same time she is very concerned about pleasing her husband. She dresses to impress him. Her dress is about his pleasure, not her vanity. It is another way she shows kindness to him.

4. Kindness listens.

The hearing ear and the seeing eye, the Lord has made them both. Proverbs 20:12

Men, you want to show kindness to your wife? Listen to her. And I mean really listen! Turn everything off. Turn off the T.V., the computer, the iPod, the phone... Focus all your attention on her.

Listen to her when she is frustrated. You are not the only one with a lot of stress and responsibilities. In many ways, her life is more difficult than yours, especially if you have children. Pay attention to what she is telling you and let her know you care about her problems.

Listen to her when she is sad. You are her rock. You are the wind beneath her wings. You are there to lift her up and keep her going when she is down. When you see her slipping into a depression, do what you can to help pull her back. That doesn't mean you have to fix everything (in fact, don't try to do that). Just sit there and listen.

She will likely still be frustrated and sad after you have listened to her, but she will appreciate the kindness you have shown.

5. *Kindness meets sexual needs.*

Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well. Proverbs 5:15

This is advice for a husband, but wives should pay attention to this. The wise man calls sex water. What does that tell you about how important it is to a man?

You are not to neglect your husband's needs in this area (1 Corinthians 7:3-5). You do not have a scriptural right to do that.

But don't just do this because it is commanded. Do this as an act of kindness. Be a willing partner in this. Show an interest in your husband.

This act of kindness will mean more to him than you can know.

6. *Kindness serves.*

I passed by the field of a sluggard, by the vineyard of a man lacking sense, and behold, it was all overgrown with thorns; the ground was covered with nettles, and its stone wall was broken down. Proverbs 24:30-31

How do you think this man's wife felt about the state of things in their home? She was ashamed! Worse still, she did not feel her desires were valued. He had more important things to do.

We joke about that "honey do" list our wives give us, but this is no laughing matter to them. To them this is important. To us it is just a leaky faucet, but to them this is a test of how much we care about them.

When we take seriously our lists of things to do around the house, we communicate love and concern. When we cancel our golf outing or miss the big game on Saturday to fix that leaky faucet, we demonstrate with our actions how important our wives are to us.

Is there an act of kindness you can do this weekend for her?

Making Deposits

Stephen Covey says that we all have a personal emotional bank account with our mates. It begins on a neutral balance, but over time we make deposits and/or withdrawals. However, instead of dealing with monetary units, we deal with emotional units.

The emotional units are units of trust. As we make deposits our mates' trust and confidence in us grows. We build up a positive reserve in their account. The greater our account balance, the greater tolerance there will be for mistakes.

Withdrawals are made when we do negative things in the relationship. These withdrawals deplete confidence. When we have completely emptied the

account then minor things become major things. There is no trust at all.

It says of the virtuous wife, "The heart of her husband trusts her" (Proverbs 31:11). Why? Just read the rest of the chapter. She has made a lot of deposits in his account. Her credit score is through the roof!

What is your emotional credit score with your mate? How much do you have invested in your mate's account?

Is it not good? Do you want to know how to raise your balance back into positive territory?

Showing little acts of kindness can be a start. It doesn't have to be anything big or dramatic. It just has to be frequent and consistent.

Smile at your husband when he comes into the room. When you come home at the end of the day, show your wife the same energy and enthusiasm you show your most important client.

Respect your husband and thank him for the long hours he spends at work to provide for you. Open the door for her. Treat her like a queen. Praise her. Make her feel special.

Dress up for your husband and try to look attractive for him. Take your wife out on a surprise date.

Don't nag him. Bite your tongue when your husband has forgotten to fix that leaky faucet for the fourth consecutive weekend.

Listen to her. Be concerned about her needs. Be responsive to her requests. Fix the faucet.

Pretend you are dating all over again. We should never stop courting. Try to win her heart all over again. Make that your goal. Write little notes to him. Sprinkle a little perfume on them and put them in the mail. This kind of mindset will keep the bank account in positive territory.

And make sure you remember that any kindness done to your mate is really kindness done to the Lord. As you do those things for your mate, keep the vision of your Lord dying on the cross before your eyes. Do this, first and foremost, because of a fear and a love for God.

As you perform these little acts of kindness for your mate, say to him, "Lord, I present this to you. Accept this sacrifice of praise. Amen."

Concepts and Application

1. In computer lingo, what is the default setting? How do we set our default in relationships?
2. What lists of virtues has patience in it? In what passages is God described as a God of kindness?
3. Kindness is thoughtful. What is meant in the lesson by the statement “kindness is proactive”?
4. Kindness is opposed to anger. Is turning the other cheek all that Jesus required of us in the Sermon on the Mount? Is it enough to simply be patient? What does kindness do?
5. Kindness gives with no strings attached. Who is God kind toward (Luke 6:35)? Why do we often fail to show kindness in our marriage? What do we mean when we say our mate doesn’t “deserve” our kindness to them? How is that concept contrary to God’s kindness?
6. The Highest Motives. What does the lesson give as the basic motives in marriage (Ephesians 5:21-33)? How does this relate to our being kind to each other?
7. Kindness greets. Why is it difficult to be cheerful and happy when we reunite at the end of the day? What makes our greeting so important?
8. Kindness praises. Why is praise important to a man (Ephesians 5:33)? Why is praise important to a woman (Proverbs 31:28-29)?
9. Kindness dresses up. Which is more important, inner beauty or outward beauty (1 Peter 3:1-5)? How does a godly woman dress (1 Timothy 2:9-10)? Does this mean a godly woman is totally unconcerned with her appearance (Proverbs 31:22)? Explain.
10. Kindness listens. Why is listening so difficult for us as men? Why is it important for us to listen to our wives? How does this simple act help to nourish and cherish our wives (Ephesians 5:29)?
11. Kindness meets sexual needs. How important is sex to a man (Proverbs 5:15)? Does a wife have the right to neglect this need (1 Corinthians 7:3-5)? How is this an act of kindness?
12. Kindness serves. How do most husbands look at their “honey do” lists? How should we look at them?
13. Our Emotional Bank Account. What is this? What is the unit of deposit? How are deposits made? How are withdrawals made? How does kindness build up the account? Is it easier to withdraw or deposit? What does this mean to you?
14. After reading this lesson, what do feel you need to work on the most?

Lesson 8 - Faithfulness

*The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases;
his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.
“The Lord is my portion,” says my soul,
“therefore I will hope in him.”
Lamentations 3:22-24*

What is the state of marriage in America?

If marriage were a stock, we'd all be selling. Since 1970 the number of married couples has increased 19%, the number of singles has increased 85%, and the number of unmarried couples has increased 400%.

Far from being ashamed of divorce, our culture glorifies it. Debbie Ford, in her book *Spiritual Divorce*, calls divorce “a catalyst for an extraordinary life.” *Spiritual divorce* is defined as one in which “we use our divorce to improve our lives, and our experience becomes one of gain rather than loss.”

The CBS *Early Show* had a segment on “divorce ceremonies.” Phil and Barbara Pennigroth wrote *A Healing Divorce*, in which they claim that a divorce ritual can end the acrimony between ex-spouses. They suggest exchanging *non-wedding rings* as a symbol of the reversal of their commitment and in the divorce ceremony actually say the words: “I release you as my husband/wife.”

Commitment has become so rare that one Los Angeles jewelry store posted a sign: “We Rent Wedding Rings.”

Things are bad and could get worse. It makes you wonder if there is hope for marriage at all!

What about your marriage? Do you fear divorce? Perhaps your parents divorced. Maybe your spouse's parents are divorced. Some of your friends may have divorced. Does all of this raise concern over your own marriage?

A Reason to Fear

It is understandable if you are a little fearful. Have you heard the statistics about Christian marriages? A Gallup survey found that among “born again” believers the divorce rate was slightly higher than among those who did not claim to be Christians. Is that not scary?

Being a Christian does not guarantee success in marriage. Marrying a Christian does not make a marriage divorce proof.

Not wanting a divorce is no guarantee either. Who wants a divorce anyway? No one gets married planning to get divorced later. Divorce is a horrible thing that most people dread.

The negative effects of divorce are well documented. It is financially devastating. With few exceptions, divorce will cost you dearly in the pocketbook (especially after the lawyers get paid).

Life expectancies are markedly lower for divorcees. A Yale researcher concluded that “being divorced and a nonsmoker is [only] slightly less dangerous than smoking a pack a day and staying married.”

The emotional scars run deep. Divorced men and women both suffer a decline in mental health, but researchers have found that the effects on women are especially profound. Some of the mental health indicators affected by divorce include depression and hostility. There is lack of self-acceptance, personal growth, and positive relations with others.

And no one suffers in divorce more than children. When the divorce rate began to rise in the 1970s, it was thought that the absence of parental contact was a critical factor in the poor adaptation of children to divorce. Several studies were conducted, including one cited in the *American Sociological Review* by the National Survey of Children. It showed that paternal participation has a negligible effect, if any, on the well being of children. They found that when measuring factors like academic achievement, behavioral problems, distress, and delinquency, all children of divorce suffered.

So who really wants a divorce? No one does. Yet the divorce rate remains high in this country, even among those who profess faith in Christ.

Do our marriages stand a chance?

A Reason to Hope

That same Gallup survey that uncovered the truth about divorce among born again believers also revealed another amazing statistic. One of the questions asked to couples was how many times they prayed together each week, and among those who prayed at least five times a week the divorce rate for those couples was **less than a half percent!**

“The family that prays together stays together.” There is a lot of truth to that old saying. The statistics back it up.

It is a biblical truth as well. Paul said, *“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”* (Philippians 4:13). Jesus gives us the power to overcome any circumstance.

If we live by the flesh we will have dissensions and divisions (Galatians 5:20), but we do not have to live by the flesh. By the power of Christ’s Spirit we can crucify the flesh with its passions and desires and put on love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, and faithfulness (Galatians 5:22).

Divorce is not inevitable. Any marriage can go the distance! Any marriage can be saved!

What God Has Joined Together

Up to this point, we have stressed the temporary nature of marriage. Marriage is not an eternal relationship (Matthew 22:23-33). Our eternal relationship is our relationship with Christ as his bride (Ephesians 5:22-33). That is the marriage made in heaven. The purpose of the marital relationship is to prepare us for that.

In this lesson, however, we are stressing the permanence of marriage. Marriage is a lifetime commitment. So far we have thought about how marriage teaches us love, joy, peace, patience, and kindness. This permanent, lifelong commitment also teaches us faithfulness.

Jesus taught that we must be faithful in marriage. When asked about divorce, Jesus made it clear that we must always keep our vows:

And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause?” He answered, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” Matthew 19:3-6

This question was a trap. Divorce was a controversial issue back then. There were two competing rabbinical schools. Rabbi Hillel and Rabbi Shammai both taught that a man could divorce his wife on the grounds of Deuteronomy 24:1-4, but they differed in their interpretation of that passage.

Deuteronomy 24 considers a scenario where a man gives his wife a writing of divorcement because of some indecency in her. Hillel and Shammai disagreed over what that word “indecency” meant. Shammai taught this was some gross indecency (though not limited to adultery). Hillel was more liberal. He extended the meaning beyond sin to just about

anything that could be defined as offensive to a husband, including an improperly cooked meal.

Which side is Jesus going to take? Hillel’s or Shammai’s. But Jesus does not choose sides. He is not concerned with religious politics. His only concern is truth.

Jesus quotes from Genesis 1:17 to affirm that God made them “male and female”, implying that they should be joined together. He then quotes from Genesis 2:24 to remind them that the two (male and female) were made one. His conclusion is that this joining together is of God and man must not alter it.

Jesus does concede that Moses permitted divorce because of the hardness of their heart, but he also makes it clear that this was a temporary departure from the original plan. He said, “From the beginning it was not so” (Matthew 19:8). Divorce is not and never has been God’s will. Jesus made that plain. Anyone can read what Jesus said and see that this is true.

Are there difficult questions regarding divorce? Of course, but let us be careful that we do not become like the Pharisees. We must not search the Scriptures looking for loopholes and justifications for divorce.

In this text, Jesus cuts through all the legalistic hairsplitting, both then and now, and affirms in no uncertain terms the will of God. Divorce is wrong! It is a sin! It is a violation of God’s original plan! The two, Jesus said, became one flesh. Man does not make them one. God does. And what God has joined together, let not man separate.

The Faithfulness of God

And think about this, could marriage be anything less than this? If marriage is supposed to be a living analogy of our relationship with God, then it must be a portrait of faithfulness.

The Scriptures provide for us numerous descriptions of the faithfulness of God. It is one of the ways God described himself to Moses.

The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.” Exodus 34:6

Moses described God to the Israelites as a faithful God.

Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations. Deuteronomy 7:9

God kept the promises he made to Abraham to give his people the land where Abraham lived as a sojourner. Once God had given the land to the Israelites under the leadership of Joshua, we read,

And the LORD gave to Israel all the land that he swore to give to their fathers... Not one word of all the good promises that the LORD had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass. Joshua 21:43, 45

The Psalmists often praise God for his faithful love.

Praise the LORD, all nations! Extol him, all peoples! For great is his steadfast love toward us, and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever. Praise the LORD! Psalm 117

When Jeremiah was in a deep depression after the fall of Jerusalem, what kept him from complete despair was God's faithfulness.

The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. Jeremiah 3:22-23

Hosea: A Portrait of Faithfulness

During the days of Hosea, Israel had become an idolatrous nation. Hosea was sent to warn them of God's judgment. God especially wanted Hosea to explain how hurtful their rebellion against him was.

But how could Hosea help the people understand how God feels, when he did not understand? God wanted Hosea to understand, and so he called on him to do an astounding thing:

When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, "Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD." Hosea 1:2

God tells Hosea to marry a prostitute! He wants him to bear children with that prostitute. So Hosea does just that. He marries a harlot named Gomer. They have a son, named Jezreel, and then a daughter, Lo-ruhamah (meaning No Mercy), and then another son, Lo-ammi (meaning Not My People).

After Hosea and Gomer have these three children together, she left him. No surprise, right? You could have seen that one coming.

Can you imagine how Hosea must have felt? Hosea was humiliated. He was made to look like a fool. You can almost hear the comments. And we must not think he went through all of this in some kind of mechanical way. He had feelings for Gomer. They were "one flesh" in marriage, and she walked out on him. He was left a heartbroken man.

But the story is not over. It gets even more perplexing. Gomer leaves Hosea and becomes a slave (presumably to the man she left Hosea for). God then tells Hosea to go buy her back.

And the LORD said to me, "Go again, love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress, even as the LORD loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love cakes of raisins." So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a lethech of barley. And I said to her, "You must dwell as mine for many days. You shall not play the whore, or belong to another man; so will I also be to you." For the children of Israel shall dwell many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or household gods. Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God, and David their king, and they shall come in fear to the LORD and to his goodness in latter days. Hosea 3:1-5

Now if we knew Hosea, if we were his friends, what would we say to him?

"What are you thinking, Hosea? Can't you see what you are getting into? She is not good for you! She will only cause you grief! She is going to break your heart! Don't do it, Hosea!"

And then after she leaves him (which is what we expected), Hosea is heartbroken. She has cheated on him, leaving him for another man. She has crushed him. And while we feel sorry for him, part of us is relieved because at least the nightmare is over. It is a good thing she is gone. Now our friend can try to rebuild his life without her.

But then Hosea goes and takes her back. After all that, he actually goes and redeems her and takes her back as his wife.

At this point we are at our wits' end with him.

"Hosea, what are you doing? Are you out of your mind? It was bad enough that you took her to begin with. We warned you of what would happen, but now you take her back! You have been through enough already! She does not deserve this!"

Hosea then says to us, "You all are condemning this woman, saying I should not take her back... when this woman represents all of you! You are the harlot! And God is going to take you back even though you do not deserve it! God remains faithful to the covenant in spite of your unfaithfulness."

"Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her.

"And I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the LORD."

What is God teaching us here?

Faithfulness in Marriage

Faithfulness is not based on feelings. Young couples come to me when they are having problems and say, “I feel nothing.” Of course, this is not true. They feel a lot. It is just all the positive feelings they felt before marriage have been replaced by negative ones. But does the fact that “I feel nothing” toward my spouse give me the right to walk away?

The fact is that we are the ones who have walked out on God. “*All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way*” (Isaiah 53:6).

We have turned God down to go after other lovers.

You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, “He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us”? James 4:4-5

Our friendliness with this world is called **adultery!** Like a jealous husband, God’s heart is both angered by our treachery and broken by our betrayal. That is why James calls us enemies of God. Can we not relate to how God must feel at some level in our own marriage?

This is one reason we have marriage. Though we may not ever suffer the pain of betrayal Hosea felt, sin is a part of every marriage. More than any other relationship, marriage allows us to experience what God feels like every time we sin against him.

Marriage provides a small window for us into God’s heart. It affords us the opportunity to see God’s faithfulness, faithfulness that is not natural to us, faithfulness that is not based on feelings or emotions, faithfulness that is costly, sacrificial, and even painful.

Sin committed against us in marriage helps exercise faithfulness. When our mates are being selfish or inconsiderate toward our feelings; when they have let us down or been indifferent toward our needs; when they have betrayed us or even intentionally hurt us; then that is when our character is truly tested. We said, “For better or for worse,” and our dedication to that vow is tested and strengthened in the “worse” not in the “better.”

So are you up to the challenge? Are you ready to try to scale this mountain and learn the faithfulness of God?

Don’t worry; God has not called on you to marry a harlot. What he has required of you, however, is that you remain faithful to the mate you have, with all of their annoying imperfections and frustrating weaknesses.

Marriage offers us a key to unlock the door of God’s heart. In it we can learn the faithfulness of God!

A few things we want to emphasize as we conclude this lesson:

1. Be faithful in the “little things.”

Woe to you, blind guides, who say, “If anyone swears by the temple, it is nothing, but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath. Matthew 23:16

Jesus rebukes those who would categorize promises into “big” and “small” ones. Jesus said, “Let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No.’” (Matthew 5:37)

Do we not often think this way? “You’ve got to keep your vows,” we say, “Divorce is a sin.” But we don’t worry too much about the other promises we routinely break (like that promise to go shopping with her this weekend or that we would pick up something for him).

If you’re not faithful in the little things, you won’t be faithful in the big things. Jesus said, “one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much” (Luke 16:10). Those little commitments we break all count and leave a mark on our character. Lying is a habitual thing.

Besides, thinking in terms of “big” and “small” commitments to begin with is a sign that we’ve conditioned ourselves to be dishonest. Do not try to figure out which promises you must keep and which ones you can break. Keep your word!

2. Be faithful in the “big things.”

However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. Ephesians 5:33

What are the “big things” in marriage? Just what were you vowing when you said, “I do”?

Wives, you promised submission to your husbands. You are to submit to him as to Christ (Ephesians 5:22-24). To show your husband anything less than your full respect and submission is to break your vow.

Husbands, you promised to love your wife. You are to love your wife as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her (Ephesians 5:25-29). If you don’t love your wife unconditionally you are breaking your vow.

Marriage is not just something to be endured. It is something we must work on every day. We cannot be satisfied when we constantly fight and argue; when there is no communication but only cool indifference toward each other; when there is no consideration for each other’s needs; when there is no respect or honor.

We’ve got to view the fulfillment of these roles as a test of our honor. We’ve made promises and if we don’t keep them we are liars. We are vow breakers as

much as the Hollywood types who go from one partner to another.

3. Be faithful even when your mate isn't.

The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. Lamentations 3:22-23

The promises you made at the altar were unilateral. The vow was not, "I'll keep mine if they will keep theirs." You must keep your vow regardless.

How often were the Israelites faithful to the covenant? You know the answer to that question. Rarely were they ever faithful. Not more than forty days after they had vowed, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do" (Exodus 19:8), they were worshiping the golden calf (Exodus 32). And what was God's response? It was anger, but in the end he was merciful (Exodus 32:10, 34). Why did God show them mercy?

But Moses implored the LORD his God and said, "O LORD, why does your wrath burn hot against your people... Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, to whom you swore by your own self, and said to them, 'I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your offspring, and they shall inherit it forever.'" And the LORD relented from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people. Exodus 32:11, 13-14

Are we reflecting the faithfulness of God in our marriages?

I Love Him Anyway

Gary Thomas writes about a woman who has done this in her marriage:

Meg and Peter have been married for more than twenty years. On Valentine's Day, Meg went all out, giving Peter his favorite candy, tickets to an upcoming hockey game, and later at night, she wrapped herself in a special outfit purchased for just that occasion.

Peter got her a card.

At the grocery store.

That he purchased on the way home from work.

He didn't add anything to it either. He just signed it: "Peter." He even forgot to write the word "Love."

A couple of days later, Meg tried to explain that she felt a little taken for granted. Apparently, Peter misunderstood her intent because when, two months later, they celebrated their twenty-

second anniversary, Peter didn't get Meg anything.

Meg waited throughout the day, wondering when Peter would bring out the present—but the present never came. Since she had given Peter her present—some rather expensive fishing lures—she knew Peter had to know it was their anniversary. So as they got ready for bed, Meg waited in anticipation, but Peter slipped in beside her and promptly went to sleep.

The next morning, Meg was beside herself. She fretted all day until Peter came home from work, and then she asked, "How could you not get me anything for our anniversary—especially after our conversation about Valentine's Day?"

"Well, I thought about getting you something, but it didn't work out," he replied. "And I knew not to get you a card because you said you didn't like it last time."

"It's not that I didn't like the card. It's just that the card alone seemed a little sparse. But even that's better than nothing."

Several months later, Meg had a birthday. This time, Peter got her a present—a kitchen tool set. Several weeks before, Meg had asked to borrow Peter's tape measure and screwdriver. Peter figured Meg should have her own small set of kitchen tools so she didn't have to borrow his.

Meg recounted all this, then explained how she had tried to get her husband to read several how-to books on loving your spouse, but it just didn't interest him. He'd read the first few pages, lose interest, and never pick up the book again.

"I've realized it's never going to change," she confessed. "But I love him anyway." (taken from Devotions for a Sacred Marriage, pg 98-99)

I love him anyway.

Is that the kind of love you have for your spouse?

When you first met your spouse, your love was based on "because," not on "anyway." You loved him because he was kind to you. You loved her because she showed you respect. You loved him because he swept you off your feet. You loved her because she dazzled you with her charm.

But what if all of those reasons are taken away? What if there is no more *because*? Can you love *anyway*?

Faithfulness is not necessary when you love your mate because.

Faithfulness is what you need when you have to love anyway.

Concepts and Application

1. **A Reason to Fear.** What is the divorce rate among “born again” Christians when compared to the rest of the population in America? What are some of the consequences of divorce?
2. **A Reason to Hope.** What did the same Gallop survey reveal about the divorce rate among those who prayed together at least five times a week? How do you explain the discrepancy between these people and the regular population of those who call themselves “Christians”? How does this give us hope?
3. **What God Has Joined Together.** How was the question the Pharisees asked Jesus about divorce a trap (Matthew 19:1-3)? Was Jesus concerned about their religious politics? What was his concern? What conclusion did Jesus draw from the institution of marriage in the beginning?
4. **The Faithfulness of God.** What do these scriptures say about God’s faithfulness?
 - a. Exodus 34:6
 - b. Deuteronomy 7:9
 - c. Joshua 21:43, 45
 - d. Psalm 117
 - e. Jeremiah 3:22-23
5. **Hosea: A Portrait of Faithfulness.** What astonishing thing did God tell Gomer to do? Why did he tell him to do this? How do you think Hosea felt when Gomer left him? How difficult must it have been to take her back? What did all of this represent?
6. **Faithfulness in Marriage.** What have we done to God according to Isaiah 63:6? How are we described in James 4:4-5? How does marriage provide a window into God’s heart?
7. **Be faithful in the “little things.”** What did Jesus say about those who tried to separate big and little commitments (Matthew 5:37)? What truism does Jesus state in Luke 16:10? How does that relate to marriage? How is our faithfulness tested?
8. **Be faithful in the “big things.”** According to the lesson, what are the “big” vows we made when we said, “I do?” How do we deceive ourselves into thinking we are keeping their vows when our marriage is a disaster?
9. **Be faithful even when your mate isn’t.** What do we mean when we say that our vows are unilateral? What was God’s reaction to Israel after they sinned by worshiping the golden calf? Why did he react this way?
10. **I Love Him Anyway.** What does it mean to love someone “because”? What does it mean to love someone “anyway”?

Lesson 9 - Meekness

The meek man will attain a place of soul rest. As he walks on in meekness he will be happy to let God defend him. The old struggle to defend himself is over. He has found the peace which meekness brings.
A. W. Tozer

Abraham Lincoln is held up as an example of perseverance. He was born on a farm in a one room log cabin, the son of a farmer.

Lincoln faced defeat throughout his life. Perhaps you have seen a list of all of his personal and public failures before he reached the White House. He lost eight elections, twice failed in business, and suffered a nervous breakdown.

What is not mentioned in those lists was the perseverance he displayed in his marriage. Unlike Lincoln, who was poor, Mary Todd came from an aristocratic family, and she was high maintenance to say the least.

Shortly after their wedding she told Lincoln that everybody who was quality lived in a two story house. Lincoln never agreed to build this for her, and so she waited until he was away for several weeks and contracted with a carpenter to build this for her.

Her temper tantrums made retaining hired help extremely difficult. Lincoln is reported to have given the girls an extra dollar each week as a way of compensating them for their trouble with the first lady. After one eruption between Mary and a maid, Lincoln quietly patted the girl on the shoulder and said, "Stay with her, Maria. Stay with her."

When a salesman called on the White House and was verbally assaulted by Mary, he marched right up to the Oval Office to complain (a different time back then). Lincoln listened calmly, then replied, "You can endure for fifteen minutes what I have endured for fifteen years."

Her spending sprees were infamous. On one such event she bought hundreds of pairs of gloves. She went way over the budget Congress gave her for redecorating the White House (and this was in a time of war). Her lack of financial discipline caused Lincoln a lot of problems. Presidents were not as well off as they are today.

Lincoln endured numerous indignities at the hands of his wife. On one occasion she even threw coffee in his face (and this was in public). Lincoln's inability to

control his wife was often a public relations nightmare.

Things really started to fall apart after they lost Willie, Mary's favorite son. Many believe that Mary Todd was emotionally unstable to begin with, and the ensuing grief after his passing began to crack her fragile psyche. It became more and more difficult for her to control her hysterics.

It was in the middle of this personal and marital upheaval that Lincoln faced the most difficult period of his political career. Gary Thomas writes about this:

It was in the aftermath of this tremendous grief (losing his son) and distraction (watching his wife fall apart) that Lincoln was called on to give the speech that would mark him for posterity. Lincoln's political life was as precarious at this point as was his home life. As the Civil War dragged on, Abe's political favor crashed. When told that the president would address the crowd at Gettysburg—gathering to commemorate the fallen soldiers—a fellow politician scoffed, "Let the dead bury the dead."

Shortly before Lincoln left for Gettysburg, his son Tad became ill, and this once again intensified Mary's hysterics, as she was newly reminded of the son she had lost less than two years earlier. With all the distractions at home, Lincoln was able merely to scribble out a few notes as he left for Pennsylvania.

In this highly emotional moment, Lincoln could be forgiven for delivering his words with less-than-powerful rhetoric. One reporter described Lincoln's delivery as "a sharp, unmusical treble voice." The applause was scattered and restrained, so much so that Lincoln believed he had failed miserably. He leaned over and told a friend, "It is a flat failure and the people are disappointed."

But the words were true and genuine, and they were moving and powerful—and as the newspapers recorded them without Lincoln's understandable gloom coloring them, the nation was inspired as never before. The Gettysburg Address is one of the most famous speeches ever delivered on American soil, and those words would eventually be carved in stone, accompanying Lincoln into posterity. It may be a cliché to say this, but it's

still true: He shone brightest when his personal life was darkest. (Sacred Marriage, pg 136)

The Blessing of a Bad Marriage

It is said that, "Behind every great man is a great woman." That is not always true. In the lists of the greatest American presidents, Lincoln's name is always near the top. In one such list for first ladies, Mary Todd Lincoln is credited with being the worst.

Gary Thomas argues in his book, Sacred Marriage, that a bad marriage made Lincoln a better man.

The connection one can make between Lincoln's marriage and his mission is not difficult. It is easy to see how a man who might quit on a difficult marriage would not have the character to hold together a crumbling nation. Lincoln was virtually obsessed with saving the Union; what better training ground than the difficult marriage that required such tenacity from him? (pg 136-137)

What we have tried to emphasize in these lessons is that marriage is a training ground, a spiritual gymnasium. Marriage disciplines us in our character and helps us to develop the Fruit of the Spirit in our life.

Just as physical exercise is not easy, neither is spiritual exercise. It is hard work to develop the character of Christ. And the more difficult the characteristic, the more challenging will the training be to help us develop it.

What we have come to now near the end of our study is perhaps the most difficult of all the characteristics in the Fruit of the Spirit to put on. We have come to meekness.

Meekness in the Bible

The word in the Greek which is translated "meekness" for us in English is the word *prautes*. This is one of those words in the Greek that is difficult to translate into English. William Barclay said it is "the most untranslatable of words in the New Testament.

Scholars wrestle over how to translate this word, *prautes*. It is sometimes translated "gentleness", sometimes "humility", but most often translated "meekness". There are problems with all of those words in defining this idea.

The problem with the word "meekness" is that it carries with it a negative idea in the mind of most people. The Reader's Digest Oxford Complete Word Finder offers these synonyms for meekness:

tame, timid, mild, bland, unambitious, retiring, docile, acquiescent, repressed, suppressed, spiritless, broken, and wimpish.

Not exactly an impressive list, is it?

"Humility" is not a bad translation of the word. *Prautes* is rooted in a proper understanding of self. Also, the idea of "gentleness" is part of the idea because *prautes* responds to others in a gentle way. But there is another important element missing in all of these words.

The key idea in the word *prautes* as it is defined in the Bible is this concept of strength under control.

Aristotle said about this word that it is

the ability to bear reproaches and slights with moderation, and not to embark on revenge quickly, and not to be easily provoked to anger, but to be free from bitterness and contentiousness, having tranquility and stability in the spirit.

Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5). What he meant by meek is defined later in the chapter:

You have heard that it was said to those of old, "You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment." But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, "You fool!" will be liable to the hell of fire. So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny. Matthew 5:21-26

So, instead of a verbal attack on his enemy, the meek man controls his tongue and his anger. He seeks reconciliation and peace with his brother.

Jesus defines this idea further:

You have heard that it was said, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. Matthew 5:38-39

A meek man does not seek revenge. He has such power over his passions that even if someone slaps him on the cheek he refrains from retaliating in kind.

But this raises the question, "Does a meek person ever get angry?" It does not eliminate anger, but rather controls anger. Aristotle spoke further about *prautes* saying that it can get angry, but

on the right grounds, and against the right persons, and in the right manner, and at the right moment, and for the right length of time.

A meek individual stands in the middle between two extremes: getting angry without a cause and not getting angry at all. It is anger controlled by principle, not passion.

Meekness, as we have said already, is gentle but not because it is driven by fear. A meek man is no wimp. A meek man is not necessarily powerless to defend himself or just lacking sufficient courage to do so. He is not a spineless, gutless wimp. He is gentle by choice. His actions and reactions are controlled by an humble disposition that cares nothing about self. His actions are controlled and motivated by a desire to please and honor God in everything.

Examples of Meekness

Moses is described in Numbers 12:3 as the meekest man on the earth. In this passage his authority as the leader of God's people was challenged by his brother and sister, Aaron and Miriam. While they harassed him unjustly, Moses offered no defense of himself. In fact, when God punished Miriam with leprosy, Moses interceded for his sister (Numbers 12:1-10).

But Moses was not a wimp. He was not a pushover. When the children of Israel rebelled against God and worshiped the golden calf, Moses came down the mountain and, in a storm of anger, threw the tablets down the mountain. He crushed up the stone into powder and made the people drink it in water. He then asked who was on the Lord's side. When the Levites came to Moses' side he told them to go kill their brethren. Three thousand fell that day (Exodus 32).

What was the difference between these two scenes? The difference is that in one Moses' honor was at stake and in the other God's honor was the issue. When it came to God's honor Moses would not budge an inch. He would fight tooth and nail when it came to God. When it came to his own pride Moses would not even put up a fight. He let people walk all over him.

The apostle Paul was not a mild, weak person either. After he was stoned and left for dead in Lystra we read that he got up the next day to go preach again in the city of Derbe (Acts 14:19-20). When he incited a riot by his preaching in the city of Ephesus Paul had to be restrained by the brothers from going in to address the angry mob (Acts 19:30-31).

Paul was not afraid of a fight. When false teachers were troubling the saints in Galatia with a different gospel, he did not mince words with them:

But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. Galatians 1:8-9

Paul was a fighter. He told Timothy to fight the good fight of the faith, to preach the word in season and out of season, that God had not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and love and self-control (1 Timothy 1:12; 2 Timothy 1:7; 4:2).

But this same fearless warrior for the faith also told Timothy:

And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. 2 Timothy 2:24-25

When Paul tells Timothy that he should patiently endure evil, he is not speaking of evil against God or false teaching in any way. He is not to ever compromise the truth of God's Word. The evil he is referring to is evil against oneself. If an opponent should attack the truth, you fight him and do not give an inch. If an opponent should attack you, then you be patient and gentle with him. (The word translated "gentleness" in this passage is our word *prautes*.)

Where did Paul get this idea? When he was under personal attack by false teachers in Corinth, he responded by saying,

I, Paul, myself entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ... 2 Corinthians 10:1

The key phrase there is "of Christ." Paul was only teaching what Jesus Christ had already demonstrated for us.

So what is the meekness of Christ?

Meek and Lowly in Heart

Jesus described himself as "meek and lowly in heart" (Matthew 11:29). It was prophesied of Jesus:

He will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets; a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench... Matthew 12:19-20

Jesus was gentle and humble. He did not possess even an ounce of pride or selfishness. He cared nothing about self.

Jesus was the ultimate in meekness. No one before or after him exhibited the qualities of humility and gentleness Jesus had. The reason Jesus excelled beyond all others is because no one was subjected to the same level of injustice as he was. What separates Jesus from all others is the cross.

Isaiah prophesied of him,

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. Isaiah 53:7

The afflictions Jesus endured were completely undeserved and everything about how he was treated

was unjust. In Luke 23 we hear someone declare Jesus' innocence no less than five times! Pilate declares his innocence three times. He said to the chief priests "*I find no guilt in this man*" (v 5). Later Pilate said to them:

You brought this man as one who was misleading the people. And after examining him before you, behold, I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him. (vs 14-15).

And then a third time he asked, "*Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no guilt deserving death.*" (v 22) Matthew tells us that even Pilate's wife called him a "*righteous man*" (Mt 27:19)

One of the thieves being crucified next to him defended him as innocent. He rebuked the other thief who railed at Jesus and said,

Do you not fear God, since you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong. (v 40-41)

Finally, the centurion brings the crucifixion scene to a close with these words, "*Certainly this man was innocent.*" (v 47)

You could argue there is one more witness, a silent witness, to Jesus' innocence at the cross. Luke records that for three hours there was darkness over the land (vs 44-46). God declared his innocence!

Now think about this for a moment. What happens to us when everyone around us is telling us we are innocent?

"He is so mean to you! That's so wrong! How can he treat you that way?"

"How can she get away with that? You certainly deserve better than that!"

When our friends start consoling us by defending our innocence, the end result is usually not good. It does not take much convincing to make us feel we are the victim in a situation. The temptation to exact revenge is very strong.

What was Jesus' reaction?

While Luke tells us of the five times that Jesus' innocence was defended (six if you include God's silent witness), Matthew tells us three times that Jesus would not defend himself.

- 26:63 "*Jesus remained silent*"
- 27:12 "*he gave no answer*"
- 27:14 "*but he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed.*"

Jesus was defended by Pilate, by Pilate's wife, by Herod, by the thief, by the centurion, by God... The only one who didn't say anything was Jesus himself!

While being viciously and unjustly attacked, Jesus did not defend himself at all!

To This You Have Been Called

The cross defines for us what true meekness is. It is the ultimate in humility, in gentleness. It is strength under control. It is power and control over passions to accomplish God's will.

Peter uses the example of Jesus on the cross as a pattern for us to follow in our lives.

Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. 1 Peter 2:18-23

Slaves were often beaten by their masters. Sometimes they were beaten when they had done nothing wrong. Peter says it is a "gracious thing" when "mindful of God" for a Christian slave to endure this kind of treatment meekly and patiently.

If that seems extreme, wait till you hear what Peter has to say to wives in the next chapter:

Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives—when they see your respectful and pure conduct. Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair, the wearing of gold, or the putting on of clothing—but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. 1 Peter 3:1-4

It is hard for us to imagine how difficult life was for wives married to unbelieving husbands in the first century world. In the ancient world, women did not have rights. They could not choose their own gods. That was decided by the master of the house. To choose otherwise would often be interpreted as an act of defiance against his authority, whether you were the master's slave, his child, or even his wife!

Peter's instruction to wives in this situation is that they submit to their husbands. He calls on them to submit to their husbands as Sarah did to Abraham (who was a righteous man), calling him Lord (1 Peter 3:6).

Why would a woman do this? Two motivations are given. The first is that the husband might be won over to the gospel by her submissive conduct. This is not a guarantee Peter gives. It is merely possible. For this reason, this is the weaker of the two motivations. The wife submits to her husband, hoping that he will be saved, but this is not the primary motivation.

The primary reason is given in verse four:

let your adorning by the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious.

The word "gentle" here is our word, *prautes*. Peter says that the husband might be impressed by this, but he might not even notice. It might only make him more angry and abusive toward her. On the other hand, this characteristic is precious in God's sight. *Very precious.*

This is all that matters to a godly wife. She does not submit to her husband because he deserves it. She does it out of reverence for Christ (Ephesians 5:21). She does it because she is mindful of God (1 Peter 2:19).

She submits even when it is not appreciated by her husband; even when her husband is unjust in his treatment of her. She does this because she has been called to this.

For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example. So that you might follow in his steps. 1 Peter 2:21

This is our calling. We are not called to be happy. Happiness is not even promised to us in marriage. According to Peter, Christ may make your marriage a miserable one (especially if married to an unbeliever).

We are called to holiness. We are called to imitate the character of Christ. We are called to be meek in marriage.

But we have only spoken in principle form so far. What does meekness look like in marriage?

Money, Money, Money

It is said that money is the primary cause of arguments in marriage. Why do we fight over money so much?

A majority of the time, the argument has little to do with money. The real issue is control. He gives her an allowance and requires that she account for every penny she spends.

She leaves the kids in daycare to work a fulltime job (which is what he demanded), but is able to rebel against his dictatorial authority over her by going on spending binges.

When they argue over money, the disagreement sounds something like this, "It's not the money, it's the principle of the thing." Which is true. Both sides

are demanding respect from the other. Neither feels respected by his or her spouse.

In the divorce proceedings the two will fight tooth and nail over every last dime. Of course, they are both losing their shirts in lawyers' fees while they do this, but it does not matter. It isn't really about money. It's about respect. It's about control.

What is the answer to this? In a word, meekness.

Brother was going to law against brother in Corinth. Paul advises a radical solution to the problem:

To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? 1 Corinthians 6:7

Meekness is the ability to see beyond our own selfish pride and see the larger issue. A meek person is not concerned with money or respect. A meek person's focus is on God. God's reward is worth more than all the money in the world. A sense of value in God's sight makes up for any amount of disrespect we feel from our mates.

Abraham had this kind of perspective. When his herdsmen and Lot's herdsmen argued over land, Abraham's solution was simple: you go to the right, I'll go to the left; you go to the left, I'll go to the right. Let's not argue. We are brothers (Genesis 13).

He could only have this kind of perspective by having a pilgrim mentality. He did not seek wealth here, but sought a "city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God" (Hebrews 11:10). It really did not matter to Abraham which way Lot went, whether Lot was taking advantage of his kindness, he really did not care about the land that much.

This is the way we are called to think about money in marriage. Now, money issues can sometimes get complicated. Decisions about finances can be harmful to the family, but often times it is hard to separate what may be legitimate concerns from our own selfish feelings. What we see as a fight "for the good of the family" may really be more about our personal good. It is hard to look at the situation objectively.

Pray to God about it. Ask him, "Am I obsessing over this because of the financial good of the family or my own selfish pride?" Prayer will help to uncover our real motives.

Forgiveness

Jesus told a parable about a man who had two sons. The younger demanded that his father give him his inheritance. He left his home and spent all his inheritance in prodigal (or wasteful) living.

A severe famine came and he was in need. He had to feed pigs to survive. It was while he was in the pig pen that he came to himself. He went home and his father freely forgave him.

The older brother would not join the celebration. He stood outside by himself. He was angry. He refused to go in.

Why? He felt his brother did not deserve to be forgiven. You don't throw a party for someone who wastes his inheritance on prostitutes!

The eldest son was as mad at his father as he was at his brother. His father had killed the fattened calf for his rebellious sibling. "How dare you do that for him when I've been serving you all these years and you've never even given me a goat to celebrate with my friends!"

In his mind there was no justice! Fellowship and forgiveness is something you earn. His brother had not earned it (Luke 15).

Buddhists tell a story similar to this. A son leaves home but the father in this story is poor. He comes back years later and walks in front of the home of a very wealthy man (and he does not realize that this wealthy man is his father).

The father recognizes him, however, and he hires his son as a servant and allows him to work for and serve him. The son faithfully works for his father for over twenty years working as a lowly scavenger.

Then, near the end of the father's life, he wants to honor his son. He elevates his son to the chief steward over all. At the end of the story the father gathers all his relatives and friends for a great celebration where he finally declares that the servant is actually his son and the heir of all he possesses.

This story reflects human wisdom. This is the philosophy of the older brother. Forgiveness is something you earn. To get a second chance, you must first prove yourself worthy of it.

This is our philosophy in marriage. Crimes must be sufficiently punished before we will consider opening up our heart again. The problem is that we will never be satisfied. The punishment is never enough.

When Jesus was reviled he did not revile in return, when he suffered he did not threaten, but he was not completely silent while on the cross. The ultimate expression of meekness on the cross was not in Jesus'

silence. The amazing thing is in what Jesus said about those who were crucifying him: "*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do*" (Luke 23:34).

The Meek Shall Inherit the Earth

In one of Gary Henry's "Diligently Seeking God" articles, he talks about serendipity. Serendipity is where you find something you were not looking for.

Jesus told his disciples, "For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. Matthew 16:25

That's serendipity. The disciple of Jesus is not looking for anything for himself. In fact, he gives everything away. But in so doing, he finds everything he ever wanted.

I think this is the meaning behind the promise Jesus makes about the third beatitude: "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5). The meek give up their rights. They demand nothing. Expect nothing. But in the end, they are the ones possessing all things.

Obviously, this is a promise reaching forward to heaven, but it has application in the here and now as well. Just look at couples who are selfish. They are not happy. It is the people who freely give away everything that find true joy and satisfaction in marriage.

You win by losing.

You go up by going down.

The last shall be first.

Those who weep shall laugh.

The poor will be rich.

The meek inherit the earth.

Those promises seem impossible, but by faith we know it is true. The cross did not make much sense either, but somehow it worked out okay.

Besides, fighting doesn't seem to be working for you now, does it?

Why not try meekness?

Concepts and Application

11. How is Abraham Lincoln an example of perseverance? What was going on in Lincoln's personal life when he gave the Gettysburg Address? How does that change the way you look at that address to the nation? What does that say about his character?
12. **The Blessing of a Bad Marriage.** According to the lesson, how did Lincoln's bad marriage make him a better man?
13. **Meekness in the Bible.**
 - a. The Greek word *prautes* is translated in the Bible as "meekness", "humility", and gentleness." How do the words "humility" and "gentleness" help describe this characteristic?
 - b. What are some of the synonyms for the word meekness found in the Reader's Digest Oxford Complete Word Finder?
 - c. How did Aristotle define and describe this word, *prautes*?
 - d. What does meekness do, according to Matthew 5:21-26, 38-39? Does a meek man ever get angry?
14. **Examples of Meekness.**
 - a. Would you describe Paul or Moses as wimps? What examples of courage are cited in the lesson? Can you think of other examples of their strength?
 - b. What was Moses reaction to Miriam and Aaron when they rebelled against his authority (Numbers 12)? How do you explain the difference in his reaction here and his response to the golden calf (Exodus 32)?
 - c. What did Paul tell Timothy to do in 2 Timothy 2:24-25? What kind of "evil" are we to endure? Is this evil directed toward God or his Word?
15. **Meek and Lowly in Heart.**
 - a. How is Jesus described in Matthew 11:29 and 12:19-20?
 - b. What was prophesied of Jesus in Isaiah 53:7? How many times is Jesus' innocence defended in Luke's narrative of the crucifixion (Luke 23)? Who defends Jesus? How do we normally respond when people tell us how innocent we are and how wrong our mates are for mistreating us?
 - c. What was Jesus' response when under attack (Matthew 26:63; 27:12, 14)?
16. **To This You Have Been Called.**
 - a. 1 Peter 2:18-23. How were slaves to respond to unjust beatings from their masters? Why were they to respond this way?
 - b. 1 Peter 3:1-4. How were wives to respond to their unbelieving husbands? Why were they to respond this way?
17. **Money, Money, Money.** Why do we fight so much about money? What was Paul's solution to a similar problem in Corinth (1 Corinthians 6:7)? What was Abraham's solution to a problem with his nephew Lot (Genesis 13)? What mindset drove Paul and Abraham to reach such strange solutions (Hebrews 11:10)?
18. **Forgiveness.** In the parable of the Prodigal Son, why would the older brother not join the celebration? What was his concept of forgiveness? Contrast this parable with the Buddhists' story of the Prodigal Son. What was the basis for forgiveness in the Buddhists' version?
19. **The Meek Shall Inherit the Earth.** In what way is the promise Jesus made to the meek (that they shall inherit the earth) true? Is it only true in an eternal sense?

Lesson 10 - Self Control

Do you not know that the runners in a stadium all race, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. Now everyone who competes exercises self-control in everything. However, they do it to receive a perishable crown, but we an imperishable one. Therefore I do not run like one who runs aimlessly, or box like one who beats the air. Instead, I discipline my body and bring it under strict control, so that after preaching to others, I myself will not be disqualified.
1 Corinthians 9:24-27

I have a long-term love affair that I am prepared to confess ...

I love food!

It doesn't matter what kind of food it is. I love it. Adrienne will tell you that I will eat just about anything: Mexican, Italian, Chinese, Indian, you name it; I will most likely eat it.

I love southern cooking. Soul food. The vegetables just taste better when they are fried or had hours to cook in fat. I love casseroles, creamed corn, fried chicken, watermelon, banana pudding. My mouth is watering just writing about all of this!

My greatest love though would have to be ice cream. In my opinion, just about any dessert tastes better with a scoop of ice cream on it. Ice cream works with lots of different things. I like to dress it up by slicing bananas or strawberries to put on it and pouring hot fudge sauce all over it. MMM-MMM! That's good!

I have been known to eat large quantities of ice cream at a time. I will pile large scoops in a bowl and then go get some more later. (It frustrates the kids when I eat up all their ice cream.)

But I am aware of the fact that this love affair with food and ice cream can have a serious (even deadly) cost. It will create numerous health problems for me down the road if I do not bring it under control. I am not what you would call a serious dieter, but for the last couple of years I have become more conscious of what I eat and the quantity of what I eat. And yes, I have even tried to cut back on ice cream.

Warnings from God's Word

The Bible has a lot to say about self-control. The Proverbs in particular share with us the consequences of not controlling the desires of the flesh.

1. Overeating. Long before the Surgeon General ever issued warnings about obesity, the wise man said *"the glutton will come to poverty"* (Proverbs 23:21).

2. Lust. Over and over in the Proverbs this wise father warns his son about the immoral woman. He says, *"Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well"* (Proverbs 5:15).

3. Money. Wonder what the Proverbs say about our financial problems today? This warning sounds almost prophetic: *"The borrower is slave to the lender"* (Proverbs 22:7).

4. Alcoholism. The wise man had a lot to say about this, *"Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise"* (Proverbs 20:1).

5. Workaholism. To the man who is obsessed with his job and career, the Proverbs say, *"Do not toil to acquire wealth, be discerning enough to desist"* (Proverbs 23:4).

6. Anger. To those of us who tend to speak before we think, the Proverbs say, *"A fool gives full vent to his spirit, but a wise man quietly holds it back"* (Proverbs 29:11).

Solomon most likely wrote many of these warnings. He spoke from experience. He was the wealthiest man of his age. There was not much he could not have, and this almost limitless ability to enjoy whatever he desired was a major test for him spiritually (Ecclesiastes 2:3-9). Living in a world without limits presents unique challenges to self-control.

When you think about it, our world is not much different than Solomon's. We may not be as rich relative to others as he was, but if you were to compare our creature comforts to his we live a pretty good life. And like Solomon, we live in a world with very few boundaries.

For example, Solomon could sample many different types of food that most people in Israel would never get to eat. We have restaurants that serve Chinese, Japanese, Thai, Indian, Mexican, Italian, French, German, etc. We have more selection than Solomon could ever dream of.

Solomon is famous for having seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. He would seem to be way ahead of us in this comparison, but we have ways to connect with people that Solomon would have never thought possible. Consider how the Internet has

changed our world. While Solomon could snap his fingers and women would be brought before him, all we have to do is click a mouse.

Solomon had seemingly unlimited wealth. He lived in a world without price tags. If he wanted something, he could have it. Again, he would seem to have us beat. However, until recently, instant credit has been the name of the game in our world. You want furniture? Take it home today and pay nothing for two years! Want new clothes? Charge it! Want a new car? Sign and drive! Want a new home? Well, before the credit crunch you could even purchase a house with no money down. Good times, right?

Paying the Piper

Not exactly.

Solomon learned through hard experience that living a life without limits has serious consequences. Because of his many wives his kingdom was divided and ultimately destroyed. He ignored God's warnings against marrying foreign wives. His wives led his heart away from God and God brought the nation down (1 Kings 11:1-8).

In our present financial crisis, we are learning some hard lessons as well. Will our nation go into a downward spiral like Israel? God only knows. One thing is certain, whether you are talking about finances or sex or improper relationships or the Internet or alcohol or drugs, a lack of self-control will destroy a marriage.

*Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.
Galatians 6:7*

Is your marriage in trouble? Has a lack of self-control driven you into dangerous territory? Are debts starting to spiral out of control? Is Internet porn a problem for you? What about alcohol or narcotics? Are you involved in a secret relationship?

You may think that you are okay right now because you are managing your vices pretty well. Beware, my friend! As they say, sin will take you farther than you want to go, and cost you far more than you are willing to pay. Or as the Bible says, "You reap what you sow!" You may avoid the consequences of sin for a while, but eventually you have to pay the piper.

Maybe you are paying already. The arguments over finances have become shouting matches. You are tired of dealing with their addiction. You have been unfaithful and made the painful confession, or worse than that, your spouse has discovered your little secret. You have completely wiped out your emotional bank account because of broken promises. There is no communication. There is only bitterness and loneliness. Divorce seems inevitable.

Moving Forward

Wherever you are right now, the most important thing to do is to not give up hope. Learn from the past, but don't dwell on it. Focus on the future. Make tomorrow better than today. It does no good to live in the past. Reach forward!

But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Philippians 3:13-14

That is what this lesson is about. This lesson is about moving forward. It is my prayer that this lesson will give you some hope for the future.

In fact, the next two lessons will hopefully do this as both will focus on how we can learn self-control. In this lesson we will look at four biblical strategies that can be put into practice right now. These are strategies that will help to stop the negative momentum.

The next lesson will look at the key to moving forward: **the power of vision**. We need to see the big picture. We need to think about what our purpose in life is. These issues with self-control are merely symptoms of a problem much more profound. Overspending, binge drinking, drug abuse, porn, and extramarital affairs are signs of a weakness in our relationship with God, not just a lack of will power. Will power can only last so long. Will power without purpose will ultimately fail. Techniques without purpose will not work. Vision gives us motivation like nothing else. And God gives us a vision that stretches far beyond anything the world has to offer.

Equipped with these four techniques and the power of vision, there is no temptation that can overcome us.

*For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ... 2
Corinthians 10:4-5*

So what weapons do we have in this battle? We will begin by looking at the four strategies:

Strategy #1: Bible Study

*Through your precepts I get understanding;
therefore I hate every false way. Psalm 119:104*

You know what our problem is? **WE LIKE TO SIN!**

The reason we sin is because it is enjoyable. Any preacher who tells you sin is not fun is lying to you. We would not sin if there was no pleasure in it.

So how do we keep ourselves from doing something that is enjoyable? First of all, we have to understand that the pleasures of sin are temporary (Hebrews 11:25). Life is short. Eternity is long. It is foolish to

sacrifice eternity for a few passing moments of pleasure. The Word of God equips us with an eternal perspective.

Second, we must develop a natural distaste for sin. This is possible with the Word of God. It helps us to not only find sin distasteful, but to hate it (Psalm 119:104). "Through your precepts I get understanding..." God's precepts help us to see sin for what it is. It strips off the veneer the devil puts on it so we can see the grotesque and ugly reality of sin.

For example, while the commercials glorify drinking, showing people having fun with a beer in their hand, God's Word pictures a man staggering in his own vomit (Isaiah 19:14); a man seeing strange things, and saying perverse things under its influence (Proverbs 23:33); of being so numb that a man does not even know when he is beaten (Proverbs 23:35); of being stung by alcohol like an adder (Proverbs 23:32); and after going through all of that, still wanting another drink the next morning (Proverbs 23:35). Not a pretty picture, is it?

But the Bible not only gives a clear picture of sin, it also allows us to see ourselves more clearly. The Bible is called a mirror (1 Corinthians 13:12; James 1:23-25). It is compared to a sword that cuts deep to reveal our true character:

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Hebrews 4:12

The Word of God is like a surgeon's scalpel. It exposes us for who we are, for what we have become. We can fool others into thinking we are spiritual and godly. We can even deceive our own heart (James 1:22, 26), but we cannot fool God. God sees much more than just the outward actions that others see; he understands what is going on in our minds, our motives and our intentions. The next verse in Hebrews says,

And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account. 4:13

That is one of the reasons we avoid Bible study. We do not like to be exposed. We do not like what we see in the mirror. The sword is two-edged and it cuts deep. And there are no anesthetics for this surgery. It is painful and so we run from it.

However, when we go under the knife of the Great Physician and allow him to cut out the impurities in our character and motives, we are made better. After this surgery, we are transformed from the inside out. Our minds are renewed so that instead of loving and desiring sin we loathe and are repelled by it (Romans 12:2, 9).

This is where your battle with sin must begin. It is hard to refrain from doing something that you love. You can resist for a while with sheer will power, but that will eventually fail. Try as hard as you might, you will keep going back to your old sins.

On the other hand, it is equally as hard to do something that you hate and despise. We must allow God to retrain our minds and hearts to hate sin. God's precepts will give you understanding, not only of sin but of yourself. You can learn to hate every false way!

Strategy #2: Prayer

The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:5-7

So for us to overcome temptation, we must first see it for what it is. The devil has lied to us. He has sold us a bill of goods. He has made us willing captives through his deception. Only the truth can set us free (John 8:32).

One of the devil's most clever deceptions is this idea that sin will satisfy our deepest needs. Eve wanted to be wise (a good desire), but the devil lied to her, making her believe that the forbidden fruit would give her this wisdom (Genesis 3:1-6).

I love ice cream. I used to have a routine every evening of getting a big bowl of ice cream to eat before I went to bed. When I was trying to lose some weight recently, I read somewhere that eating late is not the best thing to do, so I resolved to give up ice cream after dark. This became a much more difficult challenge than I anticipated. In fact, nothing in my diet was harder to do than giving up that late night bowl of ice cream.

I came to realize that I had developed something like a psychological dependence on ice cream. I ate it, not just because I was hungry or because it tasted good. It was my way of coping with the stress of a hard day. If I had a good day the urge for ice cream was not so strong, but if I had a difficult day, I could barely resist going to the freezer.

We all deal with the stress of life in different ways. Some of us like chocolate, some of us like comfort food, some of us go on shopping binges, some of us find relief in a bottle, some of us surf the Web for porn, and some find relief in the arms of a prostitute.

Am I equating a chocolate bar with a prostitute? Certainly not! That's not the point. The question we are trying to get you to consider is this: **Where should we go to find comfort?** Who has promised us peace?

Who has promised to ease our anxieties, to guard our hearts and minds?

A lack of self-control is a sign of idolatry. Idolatry comes in many different forms. You do not have to bow down to a block of wood to have an idol. An idol is anything you place before God (i.e. covetousness, Colossians 3:5). Instead of raising our hands to God, we go to the convenient idols we have made for ourselves.

We call these idols “convenient” because they do not tell us what to do. That is the nature of idolatry. Idols are manmade. They have no personality or will. For that reason they would appear to be under our control. We feel like we are in charge. These things are serving us, giving us what we need, and without the guilt. We think these things are our slaves, when in fact we are the ones who are enslaved.

Let not sin reign in your mortal body to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. Romans 6:12-13

Give up your idols! Turn to the living God. The idols offer only empty promises. They cannot give you what you need. They provide only temporary relief.

But make sure that when you turn from the idol (giving up porn, alcohol, covetousness, etc.), that you are at the same time turning to God. Our lives do not like vacuums. Merely eliminating the bad does not work. You must fill the void with good.

When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and finding none it says, “I will return to my house from which I came.” And when it comes, it finds the house swept and put in order. Then it goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there. And the last state of that person is worse than the first. Luke 11:24-26

So what about you? Are you struggling to keep the demons out of your house? Are you trying by mere will power to force yourself to stay away from those idols?

Are you praying?

Strategy #3: Flight

Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape; that you may be able to bear it. 1 Corinthians 10:12-13

The story is told about a man caught in a flood. It had rained for days and the floodwaters were forcing emergency vehicles to go out and help evacuate the area.

They came to this man’s house and told him to hop in the van so they could drive him to safety.

He replied, “Don’t worry about me. I’m praying to God. He will protect me. Go save someone else.”

It kept raining. Later that day the floodwaters had risen to the point that they sent out boats to save people. This man was on his front porch now, water about to come into his house. He was still on his knees praying.

They said, “Hey, get in the boat.”

But he insisted that God would be with him and would deliver him from this flood.

It kept raining. It rained so hard and so long that by the next day the river overflowed its banks and now this man was on top of his roof, still on his knees. The rescuers came in a helicopter. They let down a rope and shouted to him to grab hold of it, to which he shouted back,

“God is my Savior! He will save me from this flood!”

He drowned in the flood, and the story goes that when he met God he was mad at God. The man asked him why he did not listen to his cries for help.

God looked down at him and said, “I sent you a van, a boat, and a helicopter, what more did you want?”

The point is God always gives us a way of escape. That is what he promised.

But we have to take it.

Prayer is important, but sometimes prayer is not enough. Sometimes we need to get up off our knees and start running!

Joseph was a handsome young man, miles from home, living in a strange land, and placed in a difficult position as a slave in the house of a man named Potiphar (Genesis 39:1-6). We are told that God was with him. God blessed everything Joseph did, so that he was made steward over Potiphar’s entire house. It would be safe to assume Joseph was a prayerful man. He trusted in God.

But Joseph’s faith was then put to the test. Potiphar’s wife started to make advances on him. She was persistent in this, coming at him daily. No doubt Joseph prayed hard during this time. We can witness the strong, godly perspective he had in the way he refused Potiphar’s wife. He said to her,

Behold, because of me my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put

everything that he has in my charge. He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except yourself, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God? Genesis 39:8-9

That is pretty strong, is it not? Would you say that to a coworker? Would you say that to someone who was making advances on you? Joseph had an extraordinary awareness of God that very few possess. Prayer had helped develop this perspective in him.

But there came a day when prayer was not enough.

But one day, when he went into the house to do his work and none of the men of the house was there in the house, she caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me." But he left his garment in her hand and fled and got out of the house. Genesis 39:11-12

Joseph was strong but he knew his limitations. This temptation frightened him. Perhaps he felt his pulse rate start to rise. Perhaps he felt a desire for her he had not felt before. Whatever the reason, he ran.

Husbands, when you feel your blood pressure is rising, **run!**

Wives, when you feel your heart start to flutter, **run!**

Do not lie to yourself. Do not think that you are strong enough to handle this. "Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12). No one is above the sin of adultery. No one.

How many of us would claim to be as strong as David? He was a man after God's heart (Acts 13:22). He was a man of prayer, expressing some of the most beautiful sentiments to God ever written in the Psalms. Yet David was not above this sin. He took another man's wife (2 Samuel 11).

Be smart enough to run from temptation.

Let's consider two different fronts to this battle: the eyes and the heart.

Strategy #3a: Protect Your Eyes

I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I gaze at a virgin? Job 31:1

In the popular book *Every Man's Battle*, Stephen Arterburn and Fred Stoeker recommend we learn to "bounce the eyes." This means looking the other way when we see something that is tempting to our eyes; whether it be a lewd billboard or an immodest woman at the store or a cheerleader during the game on TV. This is one way to flee temptation.

However, there are some places where bouncing the eyes does not work. There are some places where your eyes have nowhere to bounce. It should go without saying that a nightclub, a crowded beach, the pool,

and many modern movies that are filled with lasciviousness offer almost no places for your eyes to safely look. Unless you are blind, you should avoid these places entirely.

There is software out there to help with Internet porn. Some have used web services. CovenantEyes.com is a site we can recommend. It works by giving accountability partners (that you select) a record of all the places you have been on the web every three days with a score for sites that could be dangerous (i.e. YouTube or MySpace or Playboy).

Men, do whatever you have to do to protect your eyes!

Strategy #3b: Protect Your Heart

Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life. Proverbs 4:23

However, the most dangerous threats are not those that assault our eyes, they are the ones that threaten our hearts.

Our hearts are more easily deceived than our eyes. Pornography is not hard at all to identify. On the other hand, workplace romances or affairs with close friends usually begin innocently. These relationships do not normally begin with evil intent. There may be no physical attraction at all at first. We fail to see the danger. We lower defenses and loosen boundaries because we think that affairs are primarily about the eyes and not about the heart. The devil tells our eyes it is okay to get close; that there is no danger, and our hearts are led into a trap.

One-night stands happen, but this is not the most common problem godly people face. Most affairs are gradual in their development. We are naïve to what is going on usually. These relationships progress slowly over time.

It begins as a friendship, though nothing exclusive. Kind gestures are offered with no intent. Words of praise are offered innocently and sincerely. There is nothing secretive in the beginning about the relationship. No one feels like a boundary has been crossed. There is no shame.

Over time though, conversations become more intimate. There is nothing romantic yet; the relationship just moves to another level. Emotional support and encouragement is freely offered. A casual friendship becomes a close friendship. An emotional connection grows over time.

Though this stage of the relationship is early, even now you feel a desire to keep this friendship private. You know you have crossed a line. You know your mate would not approve. You start deleting any emails, texts, or other correspondence. When this person comes up in conversation (and yes, it is not uncommon

for the mate to know this person as well), we get silent.

In the next stage we start to push the boundaries a little more. The relationship deepens. Flirting begins, short notes are left for each other, private lunches and meetings happen more and more often. You mutually decide, without even saying it out loud, that you will both keep this relationship private. You do not want even other friends to know about this, let alone your spouse. At this point you may even open a new, private email account and get another phone.

Once you have reached this level in the relationship, the final stage happens naturally. If your marriage is weak already it can happen very quickly. You have compromised your position, and all the devil needs is for you to surrender your foothold, even just a little bit. He can easily pull you the rest of the way from here.

You start to have fantasies about the other person. Secret relationships like this are arousing and exciting. You are infatuated. They can do no wrong. Your mate, by comparison, does not seem as appealing. If your marriage has been struggling, there is no way your spouse can compete. The flaws in your spouse grate on your nerves more and more. Your secret “friend” starts to look more and more attractive (even physically, though it did not start out that way). Over time, you find it difficult to think about anyone else.

However, you have not given in completely yet. You still believe deep down in your heart that you have done nothing wrong. You rationalize that you are still “technically” faithful. You tell yourself that this is just a friendship. But, at the same time, you make more and more justifications for your behavior. You also become more and more worried about friends who have become suspicious.

Though you feel guilty about this, you even start to have sexual feelings toward this person. They have become physically attractive to you (the heart trains the eyes). You wonder if the feelings are mutual. It is a complete thrill when one of you “accidentally” rubs up against the other. A backrub is asked for and given at the end of a hard day. A hug of sympathy becomes something else. A look is given. There is no turning back now.

It might be a “late night at the office.” It might be a business trip. It might even be when the two families go on vacation with each other. But whatever the circumstances, too many barriers have been crossed. The sexual affair is inevitable. The devil wins.

Does this frighten you?

It should.

Flee!

Strategy #4: Godly Friends

So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. 2 Timothy 2:22

So once you have made that covenant with your eyes, and built boundaries around your heart, what do you do next?

Timothy was told to both flee and pursue. Paul told him to not only run away from those things that might arouse youthful lusts, but to run toward the right kind of influences.

One of the reasons you may be struggling with self control right now is you are surrounded by the wrong kind of people. You have tried to give up drinking but still go out with your drinking buddies. You are trying to control your spending, but all your closest friends are materialistic. You are trying to remain pure sexually, but your friends have very low standards of purity.

And what do these friends do when you start having problems in your marriage? Those who are full of worldly wisdom will tell you to stick up for yourself, to fight for your rights, to find somebody else who will treat you with respect. It is easy to justify fleshly desires when surrounded by friends like that.

Be very selective when choosing friends. Especially when choosing a close friend; the friend you confide in; the friend you go to when you are dealing with sin. The friend we recommend you choose is hard to find. We recommend you find someone who will:

- Always be there. *A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. Proverbs 18:24*
- Patiently listen without judgment. *Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses. Proverbs 10:12*
- Keep confidences. *Whoever covers an offense seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates close friends. Proverbs 17:9*
- Give wise counsel. *Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm. Proverbs 13:20*
- Tell you what you need to hear. *Faithful are the wounds of a friend, profuse are the kisses of an enemy. Proverbs 27:6*
- Pick you up. *Two are better than one... For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. Ecclesiastes 4:9-10*

- Make you want to do better. *Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another. Proverbs 27:17*
- Stick with you through the hard times. *A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity. Proverbs 17:17*
- Pray for you. *Finally, brothers, pray for us... 2 Thessalonians 3:1*
- Confess our sins to each other (James 5:16).
- Be hospitable to one another (1 Peter 4:9).

Could you use a support group like this?

We all need this. We all need support. We all need friends. There are no lone rangers in the kingdom. If you are trying to fight the devil by yourself, you will lose. You need the Lord. You need God's people to help you. You need a good friend.

The Next Step

So far we have looked at four powerful strategies: Bible study, prayer, fleeing, and godly friends. All of these strategies are necessary, but we have still one more step. This one is so important we have devoted an entire lesson to it.

What we need most of all is **vision!** None of these strategies will mean a thing without it. Compelled by a strong purpose and vision of what is to come, we can overcome any temptation the devil puts in our path. No matter how long you have been held captive, no matter how far you have gone down the path of darkness, a strong vision can help you break free from those shackles and bring you back to the light.

For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. Romans 6:14

If you are having a problem with self-control, you need someone like this right away. Do not wait, things will only get worse.

Be honest with them about your problem. Tell them the whole story. A godly friend will listen. A godly friend will keep it confidential. No matter how embarrassing your problem is, you do not have to worry about coming clean with them.

Too often, we suffer in silence. We are too ashamed to admit our weakness. We try to work on our weakness by ourselves.

You will be amazed at how liberating it will be to finally confess to someone your problem. The weight will no longer be on your back alone. They will share your burden with you. They will listen to you, cry with you, pray for you, and counsel you. Confiding your problem with a good friend like this can be the turning point in your marriage and your spiritual life.

Where do you find a friend like this?

In the church. God has given us the church as a kind of support group. He knows it is not easy to live in this world. He made us. He knows us better than we know ourselves. That is why he has given us each other in the church. I counted up one time 55 "one another" passages in the New Testament. Among other things, we are to:

- Love one another (John 13:34).
- Be devoted to and honor one another (Romans 12:10).
- Not judge one another (Romans 14:13).
- Accept one another (Romans 15:7).
- Admonish one another (Romans 15:14).
- Serve one another (Galatians 5:13).
- Bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2).
- Forgive each other (Ephesians 4:32).
- Regard each other more important than self (Philippians 2:3).
- Be honest with each other (Colossians 3:9).
- Encourage one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11).
- Exhort one another (Hebrews 10:25).

Concepts and Application

1. **Warnings from God's Word.** Why does having an abundance make self control so much more difficult? What did you think of the comparison between Solomon and us? Do you feel like self-control is just as difficult for us as it was for him? How so?
2. **Paying the Piper.** What is the problem with thinking you can manage your vices (alcohol, pornography, uncontrolled spending, improper relationships, etc.)?
3. **Moving Forward.** How should we view past sins according to Philippians 3:12-14?
4. **Strategy #1: Bible Study.**
 - a. Why do we sin?
 - b. What does the Bible reveal to us about sin (Hebrews 11:25; Isaiah 19:14; Proverbs 23:29-35)? How does this take away the motive to sin?
 - c. What does the Word reveal about ourselves (1 Corinthians 13:13; James 1:23-25; Hebrews 4:12-13)? How does this help encourage self-control?
5. **Strategy #2: Prayer.**
 - a. How is a lack of self-control a form of idolatry (Colossians 3:5)?
 - b. Why does the lesson describe our idols (food, money, sex, etc.) as "convenient"? What is the lie behind that sense of security (Romans 6:12-13)?
 - c. Why is will power not enough to conquer these vices? Why is prayer also necessary (Luke 11:24-26)?
6. **Strategy #3: Flight.**
 - a. According to 1 Corinthians 10:12-13, how does God give us the ability to bear temptation?
 - b. Why did Joseph run from Potiphar's wife (Genesis 39:1-9)? Why do we not run from temptation? What are we thinking? Do we think we are as strong spiritually as Joseph was (1 Corinthians 10:12)?
7. **Strategy #3a: Protect Your Eyes.** Why is it important to make a covenant with your eyes (Job 31:1)? What does it mean to bounce the eyes? Are there places where you cannot bounce the eyes?
8. **Strategy #3b: Protect Your Heart.** The lesson says that the most dangerous threats are not those that assault the eyes, but those that threaten the heart. Do you agree with that statement? Is it true that our hearts are more easily deceived?
9. **Strategy #4: Godly Friends.**
 - a. What two things does Paul charge Timothy to do in 2 Timothy 2:22? Why are both of those things necessary to maintain purity?
 - b. Of the list of qualities you should look for in a friend in the lesson, list a few that you felt were most important and explain why you feel they are important.
 - c. Why should we be honest with our friends about our struggles with self-control? Why are we not honest? Why do we tend to hide things from people who care about us?
 - d. Where is the best place to find a true friend? Of all the "one another" commands listed in the lesson, which ones do you feel are the most important? Which ones do we need to do more as individual members of the church?

Lesson 11 - Family Mission Statement

People do not drift toward Holiness. Apart from grace-driven effort, people do not gravitate toward godliness, prayer, obedience to Scripture, faith, and delight in the Lord. We drift toward compromise and call it tolerance; we drift toward disobedience and call it freedom; we drift toward superstition and call it faith. We cherish the indiscipline of lost self-control and call it relaxation; we slouch toward prayerlessness and delude ourselves into thinking we have escaped legalism; we slide toward godlessness and convince ourselves we have been liberated.

D.A. Carson

Swimming sensation Michael Phelps has won sixteen Olympic medals (14 of them gold). In the 2008 Olympics, the world was mesmerized as in eight days he won gold in eight consecutive events, breaking seven world records. He already holds the most gold medals of all time, and at 23 years of age he could easily win more in 2012.

Michael Phelps has an extraordinary diet. He eats more calories for breakfast than most eat all day. He has a three egg sandwich loaded with cheese, fried onions, tomatoes, and mayonnaise. He has three chocolate chip pancakes, a five egg omelet, three sugar-coated slices of French toast, a bowl of grits, and two cups of coffee.

For lunch he eats a pound of enriched pasta, two large ham and cheese sandwiches with mayo on white (not wheat) bread, and energy drinks (loaded with calories).

For dinner he eats a half pound of pasta with carbonara sauce, a large pizza, and more energy drinks.

In all, he consumes about 10 to 12 thousand calories a day. To put that into perspective, an average male takes in about 2000-2500 a day. If an ordinary desk guy were to eat 12 thousand calories in a day, he would gain about two pounds of body fat. Michael Phelps has less than 8% body fat. How does he stay so slim eating all those calories?

The answer is he swims. He swims a lot! His training regimen is intense to say the least. Aside from other training out of the water, Phelps swims about fifty miles a week! He has no rest days. He swims five hours every day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. He even swims on Christmas and birthdays.

Consider the sacrifices Phelps has made in his life to do this. Like most elite Olympic athletes, he has been doing this since he was very young. He was only eleven years old when he started under the swimming coach he is under now. That means that for over half of his life he has been in intense training: every day feeling very much like the day before; every day giving up a carefree childhood; every day giving up time to spend with his friends; every day stretching his body to the limit; every day another sacrifice.

Why has Michael Phelps done this?

In his own words: "You can't put a limit on anything. The more you dream, the further you get."

Think about what Phelps said because this statement is important. The secret to learning self control is one simple thing: VISION!

Paul: A Life of Sacrifice

Do you not know that in a race all the runner compete, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified. 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

Like Michael Phelps, the apostle Paul was a highly motivated individual. With a laser like focus, he spent his whole life straining forward toward a single goal: **going to heaven and taking as many with him as he could!**

Paul gave up a lot of things to achieve this goal. Like Michael Phelps, he had an unusual diet. He gave up a lot of foods he enjoyed and had the right to eat. He willingly limited his diet to only those foods that others could eat in good conscience (1 Corinthians 8:13).

He also restricted his social life to achieve his goal. He gave up his right to marry (1 Corinthians 9:5).

He made financial sacrifices. Though he had a right to request support from churches, there were multiple occasions when he even refused to accept monetary support (1 Corinthians 9:6).

Paul gave up a promising career. He was on the fast track in Jewish society. In Philippians 3 he gives us a list of his credentials:

circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness, under the law blameless. vs 5-6

An impressive resume, and yet Paul freely gave it all up. Paul had begun working on this from the time he was a young child, and yet he gave up all that he had worked so hard to achieve (v 7). Why would he do this?

But that is not all. In addition to the dietary, social, and career sacrifices, Paul also made many physical sacrifices as well. He suffered numerous hardships as a preacher of the gospel. The list in 2 Corinthians 11 is impressive:

Five times I received at the hands of the Jews forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. vs 25-27

Paul sacrificed comfort and convenience. If he had much wealth (and he probably came from a well to do family), he gave it all up for a life of poverty, going cold, naked, and hungry on many occasions.

Paul forfeited the rights he had to safety and security. He was a Roman citizen and he used his citizenship as far as it would go, but his behavior (which most reasonable people would describe as reckless) would usually land him in jail in spite of his citizenship.

Above all of this, Paul sacrificed his health. With each beating, with every stoning, with every whipping he would take away another year or two from his worn out body. And though his body would eventually heal from the broken bones and the wounds he received, some scars never went away (Galatians 6:17).

The worst scars for Paul were the emotional ones. He loved others with the kind of reckless love we have talked about in these lessons, and he paid the price for that. He was hurt again and again by churches and individuals that did not return his love.

And I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls, though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved. 2 Corinthians 12:15 (NKJV)

Calculated Risks

But Paul would argue there was nothing reckless or irrational about his life. He was an extremely intelligent and sane individual. He was not crazy. Everything he did made perfect sense in his mind.

I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. 1 Corinthians 9:26

We might question the sanity of parents who groom their children to become Olympic athletes, given the fact that there is a miniscule chance that any child will even make it to the Olympics, much less win a medal. With everything a child and a family has to sacrifice for this dream, why do it?

But these parents are not crazy. We might argue they are misguided in their ambition, but they are not crazy (at least not the kind of people you would have to institutionalize). They are perfectly sane and rational people. And they understand the chances of success are small. But it does not matter to them. To them, the dream is worth the risk and the cost involved.

Paul was the same way. He was not naïve. He understood the risks involved in his work. He knew what the financial, social, physical, and personal costs all were. He felt these costs every day. But to him the dream was worth the cost. In Romans 12:1, he called these sacrifices our “reasonable service” (NKJV). To Paul, these sacrifices seemed very logical and reasonable.

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

Eternal glory! That is the vision! That is the dream! That is the reason why all of these sacrifices (which Paul calls “slight” and “momentary”) seemed reasonable to Paul. The reward was well worth the cost. From this perspective, what Paul did was not risky at all.

That is the power of vision. Vision helps you to do extraordinary things. A powerful dream motivates you to do things you would not normally do.

Dreams crowd out thoughts of costs. The athlete in training does not feel the aching muscles when he keeps the dream alive in his mind. When he can see himself standing on the podium receiving his medal; when he thinks about the national anthem being played; when he thinks of the respect and admiration of fellow athletes and coaches; when he imagines the articles written about him, the cheering crowds, the

proud look on his parents' faces... With that in mind the long, dull, monotonous hours in the gym do not seem so difficult at all.

Aspiring Olympic athletes dream of eternal glory. That's what it is all about. The dream is to achieve something so great that your place in history will be secure. The ambition is to accomplish something so extraordinary that your name will never be forgotten.

But is this really possible? As great as Michael Phelps is right now, people spoke of Mark Spitz in the same way just thirty years ago. It may not even take another thirty years for all of Phelps' records to be broken. Even the greatest of athletes are soon forgotten (Ecclesiastes 1:11).

They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. 1 Corinthians 9:25

No, Christians are the only ones who can boast of eternal glory. We are the only ones who have a legitimate right to use that kind of language. We are the only ones who can envision a future hope that promises this kind of glory.

This is what makes what we have talked about in these lessons doable. We have talked about what it means to show reckless love, which we have defined as:

- Freely giving yourself away; taking the restrictor plate off of your heart; no longer being cautious or calculated in your love; loving the unlovable; hoping, believing, and enduring all things (1 Corinthians 13:4-8).
- Practicing proactive love; initiating kindness; showing sincere and genuine acts of kindness to the unthankful and evil (Luke 6:46).
- Being faithful even when your partner is not; not looking at marriage as a contract where you expect something in return, but as a covenant where you give regardless; no longer loving "because" but loving "anyway" (Hosea)
- Responding with meekness in the face of an enemy; giving in to unreasonable demands; forfeiting all rights for the good of the relationship; offering undeserved forgiveness (1 Peter 3:1-6).
- Controlling and subduing all your passions; giving up what your flesh craves for Christ's sake (1 Corinthians 9:24-27).

Reckless love does not offer immediate gratification. In fact it is just the opposite. Reckless love gives without getting. It gives even when it is guaranteed that there will not be any immediate pay off.

Reckless love does not come naturally. It requires discipline. We must struggle against our flesh to do this. The flesh is primarily selfish. It wants immediate reward. It wants certainty. It is risk averse.

Like swimming upstream, reckless love requires deliberate and determined effort. If we allow ourselves to follow the flesh, to do what comes naturally, we will go in the opposite direction. We will quickly drift downstream in the direction of selfishness.

And this is where vision comes in. Only a strong vision will offer the motivation to go against the powerful desires of the flesh. Vision gives us the ability to see beyond the immediate to the long term.

How can we develop a vision like this? How can we as a family create an environment in our home where all of our efforts are directed toward a common, shared purpose?

Family Mission Statement

Stephen Covey, who wrote the best seller, "Seven Habits of Highly Effective People," also wrote a book on the family, "Seven Habits of Highly Effective Families." In both of these books he emphasizes the importance of vision. He calls it "beginning with the end in mind." He says this is the key to success in life and in marriage. He says it is critical to overcoming obstacles in your personal or family life.

Covey suggests that you put your vision into writing in the form of a mission statement. Mission statements have been used for a long time in the business world. It is a brief statement which sums up the purpose of a company or organization.

A mission statement helps to clarify what the goal is. Most people have no idea where they are going in life. They just go through the motions. They just do what they do without any thought to purpose or direction. They are sailing through life without a rudder. They have no compass. They have no map. They have not a clue as to where they want to go or how to get there.

Without a sense of direction we are no longer in control of our lives. We just kind of go with the flow. We do what others around us do. We do whatever feels natural to us, and nine times out of ten, this is the wrong thing to do. If you are following the crowd, you are probably wrong. If you are simply doing what feels right, you are most likely doing the wrong thing.

A personal or a family mission statement gives you a map, a compass, and a rudder. Like a map, it lets you know where you want to go. Like a compass, it gives you a sense of where due north is. Like a rudder, it gives you a sense of control over where your life is heading.

For the last five years, our family has been directed by a mission statement the children helped us develop. Anna and Joshua were only five or six at the time, and Katie was two or three, and so our mission statement certainly reflects the responses of a young child. But

perhaps it is the fact that this was made “out of the mouth of babes” that it has been so meaningful for us.

We call our mission statement, “The Maxson Family Motto”:

We are the Maxsons!

We love God, we praise God, we obey God.

We like our friends. We like our toys.

We like to sleep at night.

Sometimes we are nice. Sometimes we are mean.

But we love each other, and we forgive each other.

We are the Maxsons!

We are goofy, we are nice, and we really like our food!

What is the direction of your family?

Do you have a common goal, a shared mission in life?

When was the last time you sat down as a couple to talk about this? When was the last time you seriously thought about what your purpose in marriage was?

Could you describe the mission of your marriage and family in a brief and simple statement? Would your mate say the same thing you did?

The Power of Intention

Intention is a mental discipline. It is a process of the mind where we set the course of our actions. It is an aim that helps guide our behavior.

Intention has gotten a bad rap. It has been given a bad name because of that saying, “The road to hell is paved with good intentions.” “Good intentions” has become synonymous with “weak, ill-defined goals.” “Good intentions” has come to mean, “He meant well but didn’t follow through with his commitment.”

But we believe this argues in the other direction. If we don’t follow through with our commitments, that is a pretty good indication that we did not really purpose in our hearts to do something. Our goals were ill-defined and were not well thought out.

The fact is that we do not do “good” without intending to do it. It is when we let go of the rudder or stop paddling that we flow downstream toward selfishness. It is when we fail to look at the compass or map that we get lost in life.

A mission statement is a statement of intention. It does not mean we will always follow through with what we intend to do, but it does serve as a constant reminder of what our goal is.

Stephen Covey quotes a father who talked about how his mission statement helps him to keep his head in the middle of conflict.

I used to find myself being quite loud, abrupt, stark, and a little bit gruff. But when I wrote my mission statement, I realized that I needed to create more of a calming, reassuring tone in the home. And this has made such a difference! Now I try to use a softer tone of voice, and I try not to dominate the conversation.

My mission statement helps me maintain perspective. It’s so easy to react when you have small children.

But now when I’m in the middle of a situation, I try to stop and think: Is this something that really matters? I find I can justify being strong with the children only if it’s something that really affects their life. I realize now that when I overreact to a cup of spilled milk or crayon on the wall, it doesn’t do them any good.

How do you control anger? Very simple: **you tell yourself that anger is a bad thing**. That sounds simplistic, but it works. Just saying that (either mentally or out loud) is powerful. The process of thinking about what you want to be (a patient person) and then putting that down in a statement of purpose has tremendous transformative power.

A mission statement will help define you. The principles of your mission statement become the DNA of your character and your home. They become your default. Instead of defaulting to anger, you default to patience and kindness. The mission statement helps bring you back to center. It becomes the roadmap to help you see where you want to go. It is the compass. You may get off track, but the mission statement continues to point north.

Weathering the Storms

A sailor needs a map and a compass most when a storm blows in. The wind and the waves of life can get intense at times. It is easy to get thrown off course when severe trials hit.

In his book, Stephen Covey shares a letter he received from a divorced mother of four about how a family mission statement helped save her and her four children from completely self-destructing after her husband walked out on them.

Twenty years ago my husband moved out, and I was left alone with four children—ages four, six, eight, and ten. For a while I absolutely lost it. I was devastated. For several days I just lay in bed and cried all day. The pain was so deep. And I was so frightened of what lay ahead of us. I didn’t know how I was going to do it.

It was the children that finally gave me the strength to pull through. I realized that if I didn't get my act together, not only was I going down the tubes but I would be taking four precious people with me. And so they were my real motivation, the reason for my conscious choice.

I began to realize that I needed a new vision. We were no longer a 'traditional' family. And since our family no longer 'looked' the same—it no longer looked like the family we had been and had thought we were always going to be—I needed to change the "look."

So we talked together about this new family structure. We made some fundamental decisions. It was okay if we went to church meetings or school plays. We were missing an integral part—there was no denying that—but that was okay. We could still do the good things. We could still have the values, the principles, the happy things in life almost as well.

I had to come to a place with my own personal feelings about the children's dad where I could value his goodness and still allow those things I didn't agree with. I didn't want to forgive him. I didn't want to allow the children to go with him and do things with him. But my higher conscience, my better self, told me that that kind of attitude wasn't going to work out in the end. I knew that my hatred and anger would eat away at me and destroy my family. And so I prayed for courage. I prayed for the desire to want to do what was right...

It wasn't easy. There were times when I was so angry I actually wanted to kill the man—especially when his choices kept hurting the children. But over the years I was able to work through my anger, and I finally reached the point where I could care for this man almost like a brother. I began to look at him not as my former husband, not as the father of my children, but as a man who made some really tragic mistakes.

Now each of the children has had crises with their dad, and each has come to the point of letting go of having the dad he or she had always wanted... They've all come to the point where they can value the goodness and still allow him to have his imperfections that are so painful. They know now that they have to deal with their dad as he is, not how they wish he would be, because he's not that person—not now, maybe never.

What helped us most was in coming up with a new end in mind. We created a new vision of what our family would be.

This woman did not want her circumstances to define her. So she took control of her life by choosing what

her values would be. She chose to swim up stream. She chose to go against feelings and emotions. She decided to follow principle. She set her compass north and ploughed through the turbulent waters of her life.

You can do that too. You may have a lot of baggage from past failures or present disappointments. You don't have to let that keep you from moving forward. That is the beauty of vision. As Stephen Covey says, "Vision is bigger than baggage."

Creating Your Mission Statement

How do you develop a mission statement?

Well, to begin you need to take a long, honest look at yourself. When you want to go somewhere you first need to know where you are to begin with. A map is useless until you can first locate where you are on it.

Go through the self-evaluation survey at the end of the book (Appendix). It will take you back over all the Fruit of the Spirit. How do you measure up to the standard of God's Word? Once you have finished it discuss your evaluation with your mate. They will help you see yourself more clearly. Do not get upset when they point out flaws in your character you missed.

Now, you need to think about where you want to go. Once you have found your location on a map, the next step is to find your destination. With those two points (the starting point and the destination) you can plot a course. That will be your mission statement.

The destination is your ideal self. If you were the ideal husband or wife, what would that look like? But this is not something you do by yourself. Do this together with your mate. Here are some questions to get you started:

- What kind of marriage partners do we want to be?
- Who are our heroes and why do we admire and look up to them?
- What does the ideal husband/wife look like to us?
- What will be the principles and guidelines that regulate our behavior?
- How do we want to treat each other?
- How do we want to handle finances?
- How do we want to resolve differences?
- What is our ultimate goal?
- What roles (earning, financial management, housekeeping) will each of us have?
- How will we relate to each other's family?
- How will we as a couple serve others?

- If we have children, what kind of parents do we want to be?
- Why do we want children?
- What is our purpose in raising them?
- How will we develop the spiritual potential of each child?

Of course, these questions will not relate to every couple, nor is this an exhaustive list. Not everything you write down or talk about will end up in the mission statement either. This is a brainstorming session where you discuss your goals and ideals. This is just a step in the process.

The process is important; in some ways it is as important as the finished product. Just talking about these things gets us thinking the way we ought to. We are investing time and energy into our spiritual growth and development. The more we invest in this growth, the more important it will be to us. It will become a priority in our minds.

Once you have all your ideas out on the table, then you can start whittling it down into a concise statement of purpose.

Here are some sample mission statements that families have made (taken from Covey's book):

Our family mission:

To always be kind, respectful, and supportive of each other,

To be honest and open with each other,

To keep a spiritual feeling in the home,

To love each other unconditionally,

To be responsible to live a happy, healthy, and fulfilling life,

To make this house a place we want to come home to.

Our family mission:

To love each other...

To help each other...

To believe in each other...

To wisely use our time, talents, and resources to bless others...

To worship together...

Forever.

Choosing Your Destination

Benjamin Franklin said,

We stand at the crossroads, each minute, each hour, each day, making choices. We choose the thoughts we allow ourselves to think, the passions we allow ourselves to feel, and the actions we allow ourselves to perform. Each choice is made in the context of whatever value system we've selected to govern our lives. In selecting that value system, we are, in a very real way, making the most important choice we will ever make.

What is the value system that governs your life? What governs your marriage?

Benjamin Franklin is right; it is your value system that defines you. Until this is changed, we are going to continue to do the same thing. It is not enough to try to change behavior without changing our thinking.

The beauty of the way God created us is that he allows us the freedom of choice. We have the power to choose what we value. There are a lot of competing forces in the world, but we can overcome those forces. We can swim upstream.

Are you ready to begin the journey?

Yesterday I was talking with a lady who was recently baptized. She is in a horrible marriage. They have only been married two years and things are so bad that it already looks like divorce is inevitable.

She is almost fifty and married for the first time. With tears in her eyes she told me of how she had prayed every single day for years that God would give her a husband. Was this the answer to her prayers? Had God let her down?

God had not let her down. The fact is, if she had not married she would most likely not be a Christian today. I assured her that God had answered her prayers. She had prayed for a husband and God gave her the perfect mate.

He gave her Jesus.

A marriage made in heaven.

Do you want to know what it is all about? This is it right here. Read these passages from Revelation slowly. Read them out loud. Let these words fill your heart with awe and wonder at God's love for you.

Put yourself in this scene. This is you. Jesus has come again. He is waiting for you with open arms. You are his bride. Go now to your husband...

Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out,

*Hallelujah!
For the Lord our God
the Almighty reigns.
Let us rejoice and exult
and give him the glory,
for the marriage of the Lamb has come,
and his Bride has made herself ready;
it was granted her to clothe herself
with fine linen, bright and pure”—*

*for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the
saints...*

*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. And I saw the holy city,
new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from
God, prepared as a bride adorned for her
husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne
saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with
man. He will dwell with them, and they will be
his people, and God himself will be with them as
their God...*

*Then the angel showed me the river of the water
of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne
of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the
street of the city; also, on either side of the
river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of
fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of
the tree were for the healing of the nations. No
longer will there be anything accursed, but the
throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and
his servants will worship him. They will see his
face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And
night will be no more. They will need no light of
lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light,
and they will reign forever and ever. Revelation
19:6-8; 21:1-3; 22:1-5*

Love Dare for the Week of April 10

Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness that God requires.

James 1:19-20

I read somewhere that women use twice as many words per day as men. I don't know if that's true or not, but it does seem that women are more verbal than men.

When's the last time you called up one of your male friends "to just talk." When I call my dad or mom on the phone it's usually because I need to ask them about something practical. The conversations tend to be very short and to the point. When my wife calls her mom, the conversations can go on for some time. When she talks with her dad, well, the conversation doesn't last nearly as long.

Now, I'm not arguing that one sex is superior to the other. We're just made differently. I'm sure there's a reason, in God's infinite wisdom, why he made us the way he did, either verbal or nonverbal. It doesn't really matter to me.

What does matter is how I respond to my wife's need to talk. It is easy for us to tune out our wives when they are talking with us, but this is not wise. Neither is it loving.

We are to show honor to our wives (1 Peter 3:7). We are to cherish them (Ephesians 5:29). And when our wives can't get our attention (unless it is during a commercial break), we are not showing them honor, nor do they feel cherished. However, when we listen to our wives (and I mean really listen to them), we are letting them know they are important to us.

So the challenge this week is simple: Listen to your wife!

Here are some tips on how to do this effectively:

- Don't try to fix. Sometimes your wife just needs to blow off steam. Allow her tell you about what's wrong with the kids without offering advice on what she should have done. Only offer advice when asked for it.
- Give undivided attention. Turn off the TV, the computer, the iPod, the cell phone, etc. Make her the center of your world when she's talking to you.
- Be an active listener. Ask questions. Show a genuine interest in what she is saying.
- Focus on feelings. This is hard for us to do, but we must try. Listen not only for the content of what she is saying, but for how she feels about what she is saying. Let her know you're picking up on this. Say, "You must really feel _____ about that."
- Acknowledge her point of view. Even if you don't agree with it, let her know you understand and respect what she is saying. If she is upset about something, it may involve you. Try to not to overreact. Take a deep breath, think about James 1:19-20, and let her know you understand what she is saying in a calm, composed manner.

Love Dare for the Week of April 17

Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.

1 Peter 3:7

I can still remember how my grandfather would act around my grandmother. He would get the door for her, hold her hand, gently help her out of her seat, tenderly call her name. After fifty years of marriage it was like they were still dating.

Women thrive on this. They love to be treated like they are something special. They have a glow about them when we honor them (1 Peter 3:7) and cherish them (Ephesians 5:29) and make them feel like they are a queen. No wonder God put such emphasis on this.

The challenge for you this week is to make your wife feel like she is special.

Here are some tips:

- Pay attention. Be aware of what they like to receive from you. We tend to give our mates those things we would want to be given. For example, if we don't respond too much to compliments, then we don't give them. Everyone is different. Try lots of different things and do those things that make her feel important.
- Go all out. If your wife likes little notes left for her, write "I love you" on little sticky notes and plant them all over the house. Send her a love letter in the mail. That's right, put a stamp on it and put it in the mailbox! If that's the kind of thing she responds to then go overboard doing it.
- Be consistent. Don't just do this tonight and then forget about it the rest of the week. Make this a regular habit. Think of something different to do for her each day. I have a friend who brings home a flower for his wife every week (and he's done this for about five years). I believe Anita Gurley told me that her husband brought her home a dozen roses every week.
- Be creative. But it doesn't necessarily have to be expensive. It is the thought that counts. Maybe a simple back rub or foot massage at the end of the day is all she needs to feel like a queen. Maybe the simple act of reaching for the door to open it for her wherever she goes will make her feel special. Maybe she just needs to hear how wonderful she is to you (Proverbs 31:29).
- Take her out on a date. And don't do what you typically do. Change it up. Maybe she would enjoy a romantic candle lit dinner at home. Call a sitter. Put out the white tablecloth. Fix her favorite dish (or order it from her favorite restaurant). Pull together some pictures of your years together and put it in a photo album for her. Reminisce and talk together about your first date, the first time you told her you loved her, etc.
- Act like you are dating again. We all used to do this when we were courting our wives. That's how we convinced them to marry us! There's no reason that has to end. Treat her like she is the most special woman in your eyes. And watch her glow!

Love Dare for the Week of April 24

giving thanks always and for everything to God
the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ
Ephesians 5:20

Thanksgiving began as a holiday in 1908 by order of proclamation by President Theodore Roosevelt:

Now, therefore, I, Theodore Roosevelt, President of the United States, do set apart Thursday, the 26th day of November, next, as a day of general thanksgiving and prayer, and on that day I recommend that the people shall cease from their daily work, and, in their homes or in their churches, meet devoutly to thank the Almighty for the many and great blessings they have received in the past, and to pray that they may be given the strength so to order their lives as to deserve a continuation of these blessings in the future.

For the last hundred years, Americans have used this Thanksgiving Day as a special day to give thanks. We thank God for our health and prosperity, our peace and security, and for those of us who are Christians, our spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus.

We should count our mates as one of those spiritual blessings. This passage in Ephesians 5:20 exhorting us to give thanks is just two verses before Paul discusses the respective roles of husbands and wives. No doubt, one of the things Paul had in mind when he told us to give thanks “always and for everything” was our mates.

So, for the first time in our study, the love dare of the week is the same for both the husbands and the wives. Your love dare this week is to give thanks for your spouse.

- If your mate is a godly man or woman, the gratitude in your heart should be especially profound. We take our godly mates for granted. We have no idea just how blessed we are.
- Even if your mate is not a godly person, giving thanks is especially important for you. You may feel justified in your heart in your complaints to God. God wants you to unload your burdens on him, but even as we do that we must give thanks (see Philippians 4:6). Paul is a good example of this. There wasn't much good that could be said about the church in Corinth, yet he began 1 Corinthians with an expression of thanksgiving (1:4-9). Even though they may have many flaws, give thanks for your husband or wife.
- This is something you should do out loud before others. If you have children, they should hear these words come from your lips before the meal on Thanksgiving Day. They need to hear their father express thanks for their mother.
- This is something you should share with your mate. Paul began almost every letter he wrote with a message sharing the regular thanksgivings he made to God for the ones he was writing.
- Don't just do this during this week because you've been given an assignment to do it. Make this a habit to give thanks for your spouse “always” (Ephesians 5:20).

Love Dare for the Week of May 1

And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness
James 3:6

The tongue is the cause of so many problems in marriage. James also comments in the previous verse, "How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire!" (James 3:5) All it takes is a single comment and a huge argument ensues.

We have to be careful with our tongues. Uncaring and thoughtless comments, careless words said in jest, harsh and abusive tones... they all have a destructive force.

This week our challenge is to control criticism. Criticism is used most often to gain control in the relationship. She doesn't feel like he is pulling his weight around the house or that he cares about her feelings. He doesn't feel like he is respected and wants to "put them in their place." So, instead of dealing maturely with these problems we turn and attack each other like children. (While typing this my children are assaulting each other verbally, and are unfortunately illustrating my point very well.)

So the challenge this week is that we all go on a criticism fast!

Here are some suggestions:

- Instead of criticizing, rephrase your desire in the form of a simple request. Don't unload on him with both barrels blazing. It won't do any good. Gently and respectfully ask them to do what you want them to do.
- After asking, back off! Give them time and space. Get out of their face and allow them the opportunity to follow through with your request. Don't remind them later today. Don't even remind them tomorrow. Just wait.
- Present the issue as a problem to solve together. Instead of criticizing her use of money or nagging him about chores around the house, ask them in the form of a "how to" question. "How do you think we can get all this work around the house done before the weekend?" "What do you think about vacation this summer? How can we save for it?"
- Don't call a special meeting. Keep it as low key as possible. They shouldn't feel like this is lecture time.
- Only make positive comments for a week. If criticism is a problem. Don't bring up anything that you want to change or criticize for at least a week. Go on a criticism fast. Make only positive comments this week!

Love Dare for the Week of May 8

Look carefully then how you walk; not as unwise but as wise,
making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.
Ephesians 5:15-16

You may have heard that a child spells love T-I-M-E. Well, that is true for adults as well. We all understand that love this way.

Time is our most precious commodity. The days are evil, and there are only 24 hours in a day. We all spend time with whatever is most important to us. This is true for both men and women.

To the men: If sports are really important to you, then you'll spend with on it. You will have certain games that you cannot miss. You will block out time in your schedule. You will stay up late to watch. You do not consider the hours you have spent watching your game as wasted, because this is important to you.

To the women: If your appearance is important to you, then you'll spend time on that. You will take hours at the beauty parlor, going shopping, getting yourself ready each morning, working out at the gym, reading up on the latest diets, etc. This is not wasted time for you because of how important your appearance is.

Now, the question is where your mate ranks in relative importance to everything else in your life that you are passionate about. It is not hard to answer this question. Do you feel like "quality time" spent on the weekend with them is wasted time? Do you willingly and eagerly make time to be with them? Are you as interested in spending time to get to talk to them as you are about finding out the latest news on your team or spending time on facebook with your friends?

We feel loved when we know someone wants to be with us. Is this not the way you felt when you were first dating?

So the challenge this week is for us to spend quality time with our mates!

Some suggestions:

- **Schedule it.** That may not sound romantic, but as busy as our lives are you need to block out time in your busy schedule to do this. If you are not intentional about this it will not happen. We are simply too busy! Designate a day and time this week or this month for you to have time alone.
- **Plan for it.** You want no distractions. What are you going to do with the kids? Can't have them there. You want time together where you can talk. Take a walk in the park, a day shopping together (if she wants to do this), an activity together (even a sport, men, if you will talk to her during the game), a dinner together.
- **Make it special.** Whatever you do, make sure the purpose is primarily about your spouse and making them feel important to you. This is about them, not you. If they feel special by having a candle lit dinner, then go all out. If they enjoy outdoors activities, then plan a special trip with them for the day. The more you invest, the more they will see how much you value them.

Love Dare for the Week of May 15

The hearing ear and the seeing eye,
the LORD has made them both.
Proverbs 20:12

All the experts will tell you that healthy communication is vital to any marriage. But what is “healthy communication”?

Communication is basically a matter of talking and listening. However, the two are not equally important. Which is more important, to talk or to listen?

Much of our problem stems from too much talking and too little listening. “If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame.” (Proverbs 18:13)

We are quick to offer our opinion without asking what our mate thinks. We want desperately for our mate to understand our feelings without trying to understand how they feel.

One of the best ways to build trust and love in the marriage relationship is through listening. This is something that should be done daily. Phone calls, texts, emails should be sent throughout the day checking on how our mate is doing. When we get together at the end of the day we should make it a habit of taking at least fifteen minutes to talk about how our mate’s day has been.

There should also be special times each week where we sit down and just talk about how things are going. This is why it is important to continue dating. Dates should be used for the purpose of meaningful conversation. It should be seen, however, as primarily a time of listening and learning.

Take about an hour sometime this week to interview your mate. The questions don’t all have to be serious, but here are some discussion starters you can use:

- **What is your favorite memory of you and me from the past year?**
- **What is something we used to do when we were dating that you miss?**
- **What are some things I do (or don’t do) that make you feel neglected?**
- **What are some things I do for you that really make you feel loved?**
- **If you could go back to one day in our marriage, what day would it be and why?**
- **After going through this marriage class, what are some goals you have set for yourself to improve yourself as a husband/wife?**
- **What are some new goals you think we should set together?**

Group Work for Lesson on Love

Group #1

From your passage *Philippians 2:1-8* answer the following questions:

1. What does your passage say about what true love is?
2. How does this contrast with worldly definitions of love?
3. How would this passage apply directly to marriage?

Group #2

From your passage *Romans 12:9-13* answer the following questions:

1. What does your passage say about what true love is?
2. How does this contrast with worldly definitions of love?
3. How would this passage apply directly to marriage?

Group #3

From your passage *1 Corinthians 12:20-26* answer the following questions:

1. What does your passage say about what true love is?
2. How does this contrast with worldly definitions of love?
3. How would this passage apply directly to marriage?

Group #4

From your passage *Philippians 2:25-30* answer the following questions:

1. What does your passage say about what true love is?
2. How does this contrast with worldly definitions of love?
3. How would this passage apply directly to marriage?

Group Work for Lesson on Joy

Group #1 - Prayer (Philippians 1:4)

1. What is the connection between intercession and joy? How does it change your perspective? What happens when you only pray for yourself?
2. Evelyn Underhill says, *“This is the secret of joy. We shall no longer strive for our own way, but commit ourselves, easily and simply, to God’s way, acquiesce to his will, and in so doing find peace.”* What does she mean by that? How does submission to God’s will produce both peace and joy? How did Paul demonstrate this in the Philippian letter? How did intercessory prayer help develop that attitude in him?
3. Apply this to marriage. What will praying for your mate do to your marriage? How will it turn a grumbling, selfish attitude in marriage into a selfless, joyful attitude?

Group #2 - Service (Philippians 2:4-8)

1. What kind of life did slaves have in the 1st century? In what sense did Jesus become a slave? Why did Jesus come to this earth to become a slave?
2. List some of the things Jesus gave up to come to earth. What is most impressive to you in that list?

Group #3 - Washing Feet (John 13:1-5, 12-15)

1. Who in the household would normally wash feet? The host?
2. Did Peter want Jesus to wash his feet? John 13:8. Why do you think he responded this way?
3. Jesus said we should wash each other’s feet. Does this apply to marriage? What are some practical ways we “wash feet” in marriage?

Group #4 - Drink Offering (Philippians 2:7)

1. What do you do when your mate quits trying to improve your marriage? What if they give up altogether? Can you still find joy in a marriage like that?
2. The lesson talks about loving your mate “recklessly” and to be “wasteful” in your love? What does it mean to be reckless and wasteful in your love? Why do you need think that way in marriage? Why would this lead to joy?

Group Work for Lesson on Peace

Group #1 - Husbands

1. What is the worldly model for what it means to be a man? How does it contrast with the biblical model?
2. What do we learn about headship from Christ? What was his concept of leadership?
3. How do we justify our selfish behavior in the home?

Group #2 - Husbands

1. Did you grow up in a home where this kind of headship or leadership was the ideal? How has that made being a godly leader a challenge for you? How can someone who comes from this background learn how to be a servant leader?
2. What do you think makes your wife's role so difficult? What can you do to make it easier for your wife to submit?
3. How can your servant leadership bring peace to the home?

Self Evaluation

For each statement below, rate yourself on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 - worst; 5 - best). Provide comments below each ranking, thinking of practical ways to improve. Do the worksheet privately and then get together to tell your mate how you rated yourself. Get their feedback. Do not get angry with them when they share their evaluation.

Love

1 2 3 4 5 I always put my mate first, ahead of my own needs and desires (Phil 2:1-8).

1 2 3 4 5 I see loving my mate as a way of loving my Savior (Mt 22:37-39; 1 Jn 4:20).

1 2 3 4 5 I try to understand my mate and what pleases him/her (1 Pet 3:7; Eph 5:28-29).

Joy

1 2 3 4 5 I find great joy in serving my mate because I'm doing it for the Lord (Mt 25:40).

Peace

1 2 3 4 5 I am a good listener. I try my best to understand where my mate is coming from in a disagreement before I express my opinion (Prov 18:13).

1 2 3 4 5 I offer sincere apologies when I'm wrong without making excuses (Prov 12:18).

Patience

1 2 3 4 5 I don't get easily upset over little things (Prov 17:14).

1 2 3 4 5 I am good at controlling my anger in a disagreement (Prov 15:18; 29:22).

1 2 3 4 5 I am good at controlling my tone when I am upset (Prov 15:1).

Kindness

1 2 3 4 5 I find pleasure in initiating kindness. I don't wait for my mate to do something for me before I do something for them (Phil 4:14).

1 2 3 4 5 I use kindness to make peace when we are at odds with each other. Instead of retaliating, I show kindness (Rom 12:20-21).

1 2 3 4 5 I show kindness just because it is the right thing to do. I do this because I want to be like God, not because my mate always deserves it (Lk 6:35).

1 2 3 4 5 I'm as cheerful around my mate as I am around people at work, church, or in the community (Prov 15:13).

1 2 3 4 5 I give my mate regular and sincere praise (Prov 31:28-29; Eph 5:33).

1 2 3 4 5 **For the wives:** I try to dress up and look good for my husband (Prov 31:22).

1 2 3 4 5 **For the husbands:** I show kindness to my wife by diligently and joyfully keeping up with my "honey-do" list taking care of things around the house (Prov 24:30-31).

1 2 3 4 5 **For the wives:** I am sensitive to my husband's sexual needs. I try to show a genuine interest in him (Prov 5:15).

1 2 3 4 5 **For the husbands:** When I come home from work I show kindness to my wife by listening to her, showing sincere interest in how her day went (Prov 20:12).

Faithfulness

1 2 3 4 5 I am faithful to keep all my promises, even the “little things” like promising her to fix a leaky faucet or promising to him to pick up his dry cleaning (Mt 23:16).

1 2 3 4 5 **For the husbands:** I am faithful in keeping my vow before God to love my wife as Christ loves the church. I love my wife as my own body, nourishing and cherishing her (Eph 5:21, 25-29, 33).

1 2 3 4 5 **For the wives:** I am faithful in keeping my vow before God to submit to my husband as the church submits to Christ. I respect him and do this out of a reverence and love for Christ (Eph 5:21-24, 33).

1 2 3 4 5 My faithfulness does not depend on my spouses’ faithfulness. My vows were made before God, so even when I don’t feel like my mate is fulfilling their responsibility in marriage, I am careful to fulfill mine (Lam 3:22-23).

Meekness

1 2 3 4 5 I don’t allow pride to control my actions. I rein in my emotions and act based on principle (what is right) and not on passion (what I feel). I control my tongue. I am not a vengeful person (Mt 5:38-42).

1 2 3 4 5 **For the wives:** In financial decisions I separate my feelings from what is best for the family. I gladly submit to my husband’s authority and offer my suggestions in a respectful way, understanding he has the ultimate say. If I feel he is taking advantage of me, I control my emotions and do not use manipulation to get my way. Money (or control) is not important to me. Doing what is right before God is what matters to me (1 Cor 6:7; 1 Pet 3:4).

1 2 3 4 5 **For the husbands:** In financial decisions I put the needs of the family and my wife’s feelings ahead of my desires. I listen to my wife before any major purchase or any major financial decision. If I feel my wife is attempting to take control through manipulation or persistent nagging, I address those situations in a respectful way. I understand that money is not all that important since I have treasures in heaven and I don’t want my prayers to be hindered (1 Cor 6:7; Mt 6:19-21; 1 Pet 3:7).

Self-control

1 2 3 4 5 I am good at controlling my lusts and desires. I do not have a problem with pornography; substance abuse; overspending; obsessing over my job or career; or my anger (Prov 5:15; 20:1; 22:7; 23:4; 29:11). I have eliminated all idols from my heart (1 Jn 5:21).

1 2 3 4 5 I use the regular study of the Word of God and prayer to keep my passions under control (Psa 119:10; Heb 4:12; Phil 4:5-8).

1 2 3 4 5 I keep my lusts and passions under control by avoiding things that I know will tempt me to sin (1 Cor 10:12-13).

1 2 3 4 5 I have developed self control by keeping my ultimate goal always before my eyes (1 Cor 9:24-27).

Go through the list again and find what you consider your top three weaknesses. List them below giving practical, concrete steps you're going to take to improve.

1.

2.

3.

Then ask your mate to give you their top three for you. What would they most like for you to change?

1.

2.

3.

Finally, write out a brief prayer below expressing your goals and the steps you are going to take to meet those goals:

Review and Discussion of the Movie *Fireproof*

No Breakfast for Caleb

- Caleb: "You have breakfast already?"
- Catherine: "Yes."
- Caleb: "What'd ya eat?"
- Catherine: "I had the last bagel and a yogurt."
- Caleb: "You planning on making a grocery trip soon?"
- Catherine: "Caleb, you work 24 hours and then you're off for 48. You've got a lot more time to go than I do."
- Caleb: "Hey, I just asked you a simple question. You don't have to get smart with me. You could have at least saved me some breakfast."
- Catherine: "Well I never know when you're coming home or going out. You don't tell me these things."
- Caleb: "Catherine, what is your problem? Did I offend you by walking in the door this morning?"
- Catherine: "No, you just can't expect me to work every day and still get the groceries while you sit at home looking at trash on the Internet and dream about getting your boat."
- Caleb: "You chose to take this job and no one said you had to work full time."
- Catherine: "We need the income, especially since you took away a third of your salary saving for a boat we don't need. You've got 24 thousand dollars in saving while we have things in our house that need fixing."
- Caleb: "Like what?"
- Catherine: "The back door needs to be painted, the yard needs better landscaping, and I keep telling you I want to put more shelves in the closet."
- Caleb: "Those are called preferences, Catherine, those are not needs. There's a difference. If you want to spend your money on that stuff, go ahead. Fine. But I've been saving up for my boat for years. You're not taking that from me."
- Catherine: "This is so pointless. I don't have time for this." *She walks out of the house for work.*
- Caleb: "Yea, shut the door on your way out."

1. According to Caleb, what is the problem in their marriage? Is he right?
2. According to Catherine, what is the problem? Is she right?
3. Who is to blame?
4. Do you see yourself in this scene?

I Want Out

Caleb has come home from work and is looking, in vain, for some something to eat. He blew out a scented candle she had lit on the table.

Catherine: "What are you doing?"

Caleb: "I see you've left me no pizza."

Catherine: "Caleb, I just lit that candle. I like the way it smells."

Caleb: "Well I don't. Did you leave me any dinner at all?"

Catherine: "I assumed you were eating with Michael."

Caleb: "Does it not occur to you that there are two people living in this house, and both of them need to eat?"

Catherine: "You know what, Caleb, if you would communicate with me, maybe I could have something for you."

Caleb: "why do you have to make everything so difficult?"

Catherine: "Oh, I'm making everything difficult? Seems to me like I'm the only one carrying the weight around here, while you're off doing your own thing."

Caleb: "Excuse me? I'm the one out there working to pay this mortgage and I pay for both of the cars."

Catherine: "Yeah, and that's all you do. I pay all of our bills with my salary."

Caleb: "Which you agreed to do. That's fair. Do you not like this house? Do you not like your car? "

Catherine: "Caleb, who takes care of this house? Me! Who washes all the clothes? Me! Who gets all the groceries? Me! Not to mention I'm helping my parents every weekend. You know I've got all this pressure on me and the only thing you ever do for anybody is for yourself!"

Caleb: "Let me tell you something. You don't know the first thing about pressure. Alright, you think I put out house fires for myself? Or rush to car wrecks at 2 a.m. for myself? Or pull a child's body out of a lake for myself? You have no idea what I go through!"

Catherine: "Oh yeah, but what do you do around here other than watch T.V. and waste time on the Internet. You know what, if looking at that trash is how you get fulfilled, that's fine, but I will not compete with it."

Caleb: "Well I sure don't get it from you!"

Catherine: "And you won't! Because you care more about saving for your stupid boat and pleasing yourself than you ever did about me!"

Caleb: "Shut up!!! I'm sick of you! You disrespectful, ungrateful, selfish woman!"

Catherine: *She whimpers* "I not selfish..."

Appendix IV

Caleb: “How dare you say that to me! You constantly nag me and you drain the life out of me! I’m tired of it! If you can’t give me the respect I deserve... Look at me! ...then what’s the point of this marriage?!”

Catherine: “I want out. I just want out.”

Caleb: “If you want out, that’s fine with me!”

1. List anything you can think of which contributed to this explosive argument.
2. List any biblical principles we’ve discussed so far in class that would have helped Caleb and Catherine avoid this blow up.
3. Wives, do you see yourself in this scene? What do you learn from this?
4. Husbands, do you see yourself here? What do you learn from this?

He Said, She Said

Catherine is at a restaurant being consoled by her friends

- Friend #1: "Honey I gotta agree with you. You gotta get out. He don't deserve you."
- Friend #2: "You can say that again. A real man's gotta be a hero to his wife before he can be to anybody else or he aint a real man."
- Friend #3: "Catherine, do you need a place to stay. I can't imagine living in the same house with that man."
- Catherine: "No, I decided last night that I am not the one that's leaving. He's the problem, not me."
- Friend #1: "That's right, girl, stand your ground. Make him respect you. If there's one thing a man understands..."

Scene Shifts to Caleb and Michael in the Firehouse

- Caleb: "...it's respect! That's the issue. That's the reason our marriage is failing. She shows me no respect at all. And the saddest part about it is..."

Scene Shift to Restaurant

- Catherine: "...he doesn't have a clue. He thinks our marriage has been fine for the most part. You know, he probably thinks..."

Shift to Firehouse

- Caleb: "...our marriage has been fine until this year. Now, all of the sudden she goes off the deep end."
- Michael: "Do you really think this happened all of a sudden?"
- Caleb: "I don't know what to think. I don't understand her. She's emotional about everything. She's easily offended and way too sensitive."

Restaurant

- Catherine: "I mean he's so insensitive. He doesn't truly care how I feel. He doesn't listen to me. Even if I say it over and over and over again..."

Firehouse

- Caleb: "And then she starts nagging me, and saying I don't listen to her... or something like that... It drives me crazy. I feel like I'm going..."

Restaurant

- Catherine: "...insane! You know, he doesn't understand my needs. I feel like we are completely and totally..."

Firehouse

Caleb: “...incompatible! She’s probably whining to her friends making me sound like a criminal. I can see them all right now crying, having some sort of group hug.”

Group Hug in Restaurant

Shift back to Firehouse

Michael: “So, you think it’s past the point of no return?”

Caleb: “I don’t have a reason to return.”

1. What positive or negative influence are friends exerting in this scene? Why are their motives?
2. What can you do as a friend to help someone who is in a troubled marriage? How should you respond to gripes and complaints?

Salt & Pepper

Michael superglues the salt and pepper shaker

Michael: “Caleb, when two people get married it is for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health.”

Caleb: “I know that, but marriages aren’t fireproof. Sometimes you get burned.”

Michael: “Fireproof doesn’t mean a fire will never come, but that when it comes you will be able to withstand it.”

Caleb: “You didn’t have to glue them together.” *Caleb starts to pull them apart*

Michael: “Don’t do it, Caleb! If you pull them apart now you’ll break either one or both of them.”

Caleb: “I am not a perfect person, but I’m better than most, and if my marriage is failing it is not all my fault.”

Michael: “But Caleb, man, I’ve seen you run into a burning building to save people you don’t even know! But you’re going to let your own marriage just burn to the ground!”

1. What do you take from Michael’s analogy? How is the marriage bond like superglue?
2. Evaluate Caleb’s last statement. Is that true?
3. Think about Michael’s last words. Why do we show more dedication to our career than we do to our marriages?

Day Four

Catherine accuses Caleb of doing all these nice things to “butter her up” for a divorce. She assures him she is going to take all of her share.

- Caleb: “It’s not working, Dad.”
- Father: “What’s not working?”
- Caleb: “This whole love dare thing. It’s not working.”
- Father: “Tell me what’s going on.”
- Caleb: “I’ve been doing everything it says to do and she has completely rejected all of it.”
- Father: “Caleb, this process takes forty days, not four.”
- Caleb: “What’s the point of going down a dead end road when you know it’s not going anywhere?”
- Father: “You don’t know that yet, Caleb. You’re not a quitter and something tells me you’re doing just enough to get by. Am I right?”
- Caleb: “I feel nothing.”
- Father: “I understand, son, but this is not based on feelings. It’s a decision. You can’t give up yet. Keep taking a day at a time.”
- Caleb: “Yes sir.”
- Father: “I love you, son.”
- Caleb: “You too, Dad.”

1. Why did Caleb want to give up? How was he justifying this decision?
2. Why was Caleb doing just enough to get by?
3. Why did Caleb feel nothing for Catherine?

The Turning Point

Caleb is giving up. He made a fancy dinner and she rejected it. His father has driven over to encourage him and they are walking around the lake.

Father: "Caleb, if I were to ask you why you're so frustrated with Catherine, what would you say?"

Caleb: "She's stubborn. She makes everything difficult for me. She's ungrateful. She's constantly griping about something."

Father: "Has she thanked you for anything you've done the last 20 days?"

Caleb: "No, and you'd think after I washed the car, I've changed the oil, do the dishes, clean the house that she would try to show me a little bit of gratitude. But she doesn't. In fact when I come home she makes me like I'm an enemy.

"I'm not even welcome in my own home, Dad. That is what really ticks me off.

"Dad, for the last three weeks I have bent over backwards for her. I have tried to demonstrate that I still care about this relationship. I bought her flowers, which she threw away. I have taken her insults and her sarcasm, but last night was it.

"I made dinner for her. I did everything I could to demonstrate that I care about her, to show value for her and she spit in my face. She does not deserve this.

"Dad, I'm not doing it anymore. How am I supposed to show love to somebody over and over and over who constantly rejects me?"

While Caleb has been talking, the Father has slowly walked toward the cross

Father: "That's a good question."

He looks up at the cross

1. What did the cross teach Caleb here?
2. Caleb's father tells him later in this scene, "You can't love her, because you can't give her what you don't have." What does he mean by that? Why is that true? Why did Caleb's faith in Christ turn things around?

Caleb's Apology

Catherine: "Why are you doing this?"

Caleb: "I have learned you never leave your partner, especially in a fire."

Catherine: "Caleb, I don't know how to process this. This isn't like normal for you."

Caleb: "Welcome to the new normal."

Catherine: "Caleb, what's happened to you?"

Caleb: "I need you to understand something..."

He gets down on his knees on the side of her bed

"I am sorry... I have been so selfish..."

"For the past seven years I have trampled on you with my words and with my actions..."

"I have loved other things when I should have loved you..."

"In the last few weeks God has given me a love for you that I have never had before. And I have asked him to forgive me. And I am hoping... I am praying that somehow you would be able to forgive me, too."

"Catherine, I do not want to live the rest of my life without you."

1. Evaluate Caleb's apology.
2. Did Catherine believe Caleb? Why or why not?
3. Caleb asked Catherine for forgiveness. How did he respond to her reply?

An Alternate Ending

Like most movies, the ending in this one is fairly predictable. That is not a criticism. That's just the way movies are. This is not real life. In real life, marriages that have become this bad are seldom saved in less than two months. Marriages don't get to this point over a matter of months, and so they are usually not fixed in a matter of months.

1. If the conflict had not been resolved so quickly and the movie didn't have a happy ending, what would you think about this movie?
2. If we were Caleb's friends, how many more days would we advise him to keep trying?
3. More important, if you are Caleb, what is a reasonable amount of time for your love dare to last?