



# MARRIAGE

Essential Lessons for Christian Leaders



## BRUCE ZACHARY

Marriage:  
Essential Lessons for Christian Leaders

by Bruce Zachary

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## Introduction

What would you like your marriage to look like? A godly marriage is like a fruitful tree...beautiful to behold! We all remember the image of fruitful trees. I remember growing up near Orange County, California a place where there were still plenty of citrus groves. There were oranges and lemons...beautiful branches bowing, heavy- laden with fruit.

Imagine the sight of ripe fruit in radiant yellow and orange. I remember the scented spray as skin was peeled from fresh picked oranges and, the sweet drops of juice glistening from each slice. The site of a fruitful tree is glorious to behold!

By contrast I've had an orange tree in my backyard that has brought out emotions which were less than pleasant...frustration, hopelessness, and defeat. In the beginning the tree was fruitful...what a joy!

I remember walking in the garden and picking fresh oranges. We would cut the oranges and squeeze fresh juice or peel the skin and eat slices...pure delight! But as the years went by the tree produced less fruit...and finally seemed to die. I thought of cutting it down and removing that good for nothing tree.

Then the gardener, who really knew about trees, told me there was hope for that tree. I admitted to him, as I told my fruitless tree woes, that I had not properly maintained that tree. He waited till he received permission to try and restore that tree and, then he went to work! First, he drove a spike into the ground directed right at the roots. Then he watered and pruned.

Jesus is the Master Gardener who brings hope and restoration. He prompts us to learn and, to admit where we have failed to properly maintain our relationships. Once we allow Him to He drives a spike into the heart of selfishness and the root of bitterness that strangles life. He waters us with the word of God and prunes us so that we can grow.

How wonderful it would have been to walk into the yard the next morning to find full ripe healthy fruit but that was not the scene I awoke to. Yet restoration **had** begun! Surely as the sun would rise and the seasons would pass that tree would once again bear fruit.

The fruitful tree is a metaphor for God's desire for the marriage relationship. Our God loves us and cares for our marriages. The Bible begins and ends with a picture of God's love for marriage. In the Book of Genesis God brings Adam and Eve together and encourages them to be **fruitful** [Gen.1:27-28]. In the Book of Revelation, at the end of the Bible, we see the Marriage Supper of Jesus, The Lamb of God and His Bride the Church [Rev.19:7-10].

As we consider the Bible, we begin to appreciate the importance of marriage to God: His original desire for marriage before the fall of man in the Garden of Eden [Gen.3] and, His plan to restore relationships. We become confident that He has given us all the instruction we need for a godly fruitful marriage relationship.

The **subject** we will explore is the **fruitful marriage** relationship. The **object** of this study is to provide hope and encouragement for those considering marriage and those who are married.

This study is intended to be a resource like a tool belt that will give us easy access for tools to build, restore and, maintain a fruitful marriage. Ideally, we will learn to identify the right tool and how to use it. It doesn't help to have a screwdriver when you need a saw. Similarly, a saw only really helps when you know how to use it.

To provide a framework for our study we will consider the acronym **FRUITFUL**:

**FOUNDATION**  
**RECONCILIATION**  
**UNITY**  
**INTIMACY**  
**TIME AND TRUST**  
**FINANCES**  
**UNION THREATS**  
**LEADERSHIP**

## Chapter 1: Foundation

Our Lord Jesus

In 1Cor.3:10-11 Paul tells us that there is only one sure foundation that we can build on: "According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

God is warning us to be careful what we build the marriage relationship upon. Too often we build our relationships on an unsure foundation that cannot stand the trials and tests of time.

When I was seventeen years old I prepared to move to my first apartment. I was going to the poster shop to buy some framed poster art to decorate the walls. My mom gave me some sound advice: buy something that you like today and that you think you'll like ten years from now. Although I earnestly sought to heed her advice, by the time ten years had rolled by my taste in art had changed almost completely. Not only had my taste in art changed but my taste in music, clothing, furnishings, career goals and relationships etc. had changed!

The problem was that I lacked maturity spiritually and in all other ways to make a wise decision. I could not appreciate as a young man just how much my subjective tastes and preferences would change over a decade in my life. Suffice it to say before I reached the age of twenty-five the posters were gone!

This is a fundamental problem in our relationships...we are building on the wrong foundation. One of the primary ways we build on the wrong foundation is physical attraction. Certainly physical beauty is not a curse per se. But it tends to be a shallow foundation. Also, gravity happens. The physical traits that we value so highly are likely to change!

As an aside, when we consider the creation account we see that God created the earth with the appearance of age. For example trees were mature and bearing fruit from the time they were created. Perhaps God created Adam and Eve with the appearance of age. We tend to think of Adam and Eve resembling Greek sculptures but what if God created them to appear a little older... What if Adam was losing his hair and used to comb it over and, had a pot belly? What if Eve had a little cellulite on her thighs?

Our emphasis on physical attraction is certainly not the foundation that God intended for us. Yet our culture exalts physical beauty and youth and often we are taking our cues from the world rather than The Word.



Other areas where we build upon unsure foundations include wealth, power, position, recreation, hobbies, and cultural tastes. For example, a couple who both like to snow ski might build their relationship on that shared interest.

The problem can arise when they realize that the ski season lasts only a few months and, several years down the road they might not want to ski at all. The couple that builds their relationship on the fact that they both have the same favorite music group might never expect their music tastes to change ... but they will!

Whether we are beginning to build or whether the house is already built, the foundation is essential. Perhaps we come to admit that we have built on the wrong foundation, be encouraged there is hope.

Imagine a Victorian house that is in need of repair and needs to be moved to make way for development. Someone with vision buys the home and arranges to have the home moved to a new foundation.

As the homeowner examines the phone book looking for someone to move the home and oversee the restoration, he comes across an ad for "The Father and Son Home Movers and Restoration Company". He notes a fish symbol in the corner of the ad and figures "I can trust these guys".

A phone call for help is made and soon thereafter a truck pulls up. There in the cab are two men who appear to be The Father and Son. The man behind the wheel appears older than time. His hair is white and his beard is long white and full. He is wearing a nondescript jumpsuit with a nametag on the chest with blue embroidered letters YHWH.

The homeowner thinks to himself 'they must be foreigners'. The Son has shoulder length hair and a beard and the homeowner thinks "great, a hippie, maybe I should call someone else..."

The Son gets out of the cab and approaches the owner and they begin to talk. As the Son looks at the homeowner the man feels as though the Son is looking right through him into his heart. It feels uncomfortable and he looks down and away. The Son continues to speak and encourage the man.

He assures the owner that the home has lots of potential to be a beautiful place to dwell. The Son explains that the most important issue is moving the house safely to a sure foundation. The Son goes on to explain that they have blueprints that will be a perfect plan to restore the home.

The owner knows intuitively that he can trust the Son but he is afraid. The owner asks about the cost and the Son explains that the biggest price has already been paid but there will be

some costs. The owner looks concerned and the Son gently assures that the costs can't compare to the benefits of the restoration. Finally, after being assured of their many years of experience the owner asks "where can I sign a contract?"

The Son urges that a handshake will be sufficient and when they reach to shake the owner notices the wound in the Son's hand...The process of building upon a sure foundation has begun.

### The Lord's Example

In John 13, at verse 15 Jesus says to His disciples "for I have given you an **example**, that you should do as I have done to you." In all of the verses in the Scriptures this is the only time that Jesus tells us He is giving us an example.

We know that in this portion of the Bible that Jesus washed the disciples' feet. Was this merely a lesson in being a servant or were there other spiritual lessons? Was Jesus giving us an example for the marriage relationship?

I believe that in this chapter, the Lord gives us at least seven valuable examples of how we should be in our marriage relationships:

#### *Be Committed*

At verse 1 we read: 'now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, *He loved them to the end*'.

Jesus' commitment is even more remarkable when we consider that Jesus knew that Judas would betray Him. Furthermore as you consider the dynamic of the seating arrangement of the Passover Seder or Last Supper scene we realize that Jesus placed Judas in the seat of honor. Jesus' commitment is sure! Jesus is giving us an example of the kind of attitude that works in relationships.

Too often we approach relationships with the attitude that if it doesn't work out we can leave and get another relationship. Unfortunately this attitude erodes the security and confidence that the Lord desires us to have in our relationships.

Paul [1Cor.15:58;Ac.20:24] and Peter[1Pet.5:9] exhort us to be steadfast and immovable. The steadfast or committed attitude helps to establish security in our relationships.

When our kids were small, we read them a children's storybook about a baby rabbit that wants to run away from home. Each time the mama rabbit impresses upon her child that no matter where he goes she will hunt for him and bring him back home. When the little rabbit says he'll become a fish and swim away the mama says she'll become a fisherman and catch him.

And so the book continues from one scenario to the next. Finally, the little rabbit decides he might as well stay home. Similarly, when we have the attitude of commitment in our relationships it often encourages people to stay and work through issues rather than run away!

### *Be Vulnerable*

At verse 4 we see that *Jesus rose from supper and laid aside His garments took a towel and girded Himself*. Here we see that Jesus was exposed and vulnerable. God desires us to be emotionally intimate and available for one another and this requires vulnerability.

In Genesis 2:25 we see that the man and his wife were both naked and they were not ashamed. Prior to the fall [Gen.3] and, the results of sin, the man and the woman were exposed to one another and they were vulnerable in every way. It is not until the fall that man is hiding in the Garden...separated by the effects of sin

Frequently people have had painful past experiences that effect the current relationship. Often people have been hurt during the relationship. These experiences create fear about being vulnerable. Also, many of us were not raised in an environment where we saw a proper model of emotional intimacy or vulnerability.

I like to eat artichokes and I've learned that relationships can be like artichokes. First, you learn that the sharp points on the end of the leaves can be painful if not handled with care. Second, there is a progressive dynamic to the experience. You begin by encountering the toughest outer leaves on the outside and then progress to softer inner leaves until finally you arrive at the heart.

Part of the fun and delight of eating artichokes is the experience of working your way through the outer and tougher aspects to the most satisfying and vulnerable heart. Similarly we need to learn that relationships are progressive in nature. It takes time to work towards the heart, to be vulnerable.

When we communicate we generally seek to relate at a level that we are comfortable with. This sets a mark for the relationship. For example if the first person to speak discloses to a new friend that they were sexually molested as a child, it would be awkward and perhaps improper for the second to respond in regard to the weather forecast. But the two may be at completely different levels of expectation of vulnerability in their relationship.

In all likelihood, they need to find a level of communication that is comfortable for both and then seek to go deeper at a pace that is comfortable for both. We can become more vulnerable by simply asking and listening. Questions about favorite foods, favorite desserts, favorite songs, favorite colors and favorite activities begin to peel away the tough outer leaves.

Questions about dreams and desires, and greatest disappointments go deeper to the heart. Try to listen to the response to learn and seek to probe about feelings. Try to avoid judging the validity of the other person's feelings. As we learn to be more vulnerable we follow the Master's example.

### *Be A Servant*

We see in verse 5 that Jesus *poured water in a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which he was girded.*

When Jesus cleaned the disciples' feet He was performing the job of the lowest servant. Jesus had every right to expect the disciples to volunteer to clean His feet...after all He is their Master. Nevertheless, Jesus gives us this classic example of a servant's attitude.

Jesus told us that He did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many [Mk.10:44-45]. A servant seeks to fulfill someone else's agenda and their own desires must yield to attain the master's plan.

Imagine a pre-marital counseling session where the pastor asks, "what do you want from the relationship?" What is the likelihood of *ever* hearing someone respond "I just want to serve my spouse". The absence of a desire to serve our spouse is often directly related to difficulty in our relationships.

Similarly, when we serve to accomplish our own agenda it is not really serving but manipulating. For example when we tell our spouse all the wonderful things we did for them and then ask them what they are going to do for us [or tell them what we want them to do for us]. A servant is to serve without his own agenda and, without attempting to manipulate.

The Master has an agenda for us to have fruitful marriages and we need to have a servant's attitude to accomplish His agenda.

### *Be Gentle*

As we consider the scene of Jesus wiping the disciples' feet we need to pause and imagine the scene. Try to imagine the water temperature. Is the water ice cold? Is the water boiling hot or,

is the temperature just right? Try to imagine Jesus wiping their feet with the towel. Does He merely dab their feet so that the dirt remains? Does he scrub their feet so hard that he starts to rub the skin off? Most likely the pressure was just right for the situation.

Note that the whole while that Jesus was cleaning their feet that the towel was connected to Him and he was touching them. Jesus was personal and gentle not using any more force than was necessary nor was he unnecessarily hurting them.

In Galatians 6:1 Paul reminds us that when we who are spiritual see someone overtaken in any sin that we should seek to restore them with a spirit of gentleness... When our spouse blows it they need spot cleansing like Peter not a bath. As we minister the Word of God it is to be a healing balm not a bomb. We need to have an attitude of being gentle.

### *Be An Example*

In verses 12 to 15 Jesus explains that He has given the disciples an example. The example is more than just being a servant and reveals a great spiritual truth. In verses six to eleven Jesus refers to Peter's need for spot cleansing.

Picture the Jewish pilgrims coming to Jerusalem to observe the great feast of Passover. The faithful enter the city and prepare for the ceremony by participating in ritual bathing. As they leave the public baths they must travel the dusty streets of Jerusalem to their homes for the feast.

Peter had undoubtedly bathed before traveling to the Upper Room to prepare for the feast. At verse 10 Jesus tells Peter "He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean, but not all of you."

The fact that Peter was a believer and saved was a picture of the bath. Peter did not need to again be saved, he merely needed spot cleansing, *from the master*, to remove the dirt of the world. Judas, to the contrary, was still in need of a bath from the Master because He did not believe and was not saved.

The key is that people need to come to the Master to be cleansed. No one can clean self. And no one can clean another person. Our job is to help our spouse come to Jesus (or to return to Him). Remember the goal is to win people not to win arguments!

In 1 Peter 3 we are encouraged that we can help bring our spouse to the Lord by our *example* without even the necessity of words. Saint Francis of Assisi encouraged us to preach the gospel at all times and, when absolutely necessary use words. When people see God in us they are drawn to Jesus, by our example, like moths to a light.

A key to a fruitful marriage is to build the relationship on a foundation of Jesus. To the extent that one spouse has never had a relationship with Jesus, or has drifted from the relationship with Jesus, we want to be an example to help encourage them to come [or come back] to Jesus. They need to be cleansed by the Master. The Bible tells us that it is God's love that leads us to repentance. Our loving, Christ-like example helps people see their need to come to the Master. Once, the marriage is being built on Christ, the fruit will come forth!

### *Be Humble*

In verses 21 and 22 Jesus reveals that one of the twelve would betray Him. John records that the disciples looked at one another wondering about which one of them He spoke. Mark tells us that they asked "Is it I?" [Mk14:18-19]. Luke notes that the disciples talked amongst themselves [Lu.22:21-23].

It is important to see that the disciples did not all turn and point to Judas and accuse him. Furthermore, and perhaps more important, the disciples did not point at one another and blame each other.

It is good to ask the question "Is it I?" Too often we are ready to blame someone else for the problems we are experiencing in our relationships. Like Adam in the Garden, when God confronts us about our sin, we are likely to seek to avoid responsibility.

Adam responded to God and said, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate." Adam not only attempts to shift the blame from himself to Eve, but he also blames God [ie. It's Your fault God You gave her to me].

In over 10 years of counseling experience I've heard only one person come and confess that the problem(s) were his fault and that he needed help. Essentially, all of the couples I counsel are convinced that the problem is their spouse. I am persuaded that if we were to humble ourselves and honestly approach the Lord and ask "Is it I" that many marriages would be restored!

The Body of Christ would greatly benefit from an increase in a surgical procedure called the "logectomy". In Matthew 7:1-5 Jesus tells us that before we go judging one another we need to remove the log from our own eye that we would be able to see clearly to remove the splinter from another person's eye. It is interesting to note that the splinter and the log are both from the same material.

Paul notes that often when we judge others we practice the same thing [Rom.2:1]. It has been said that our sins always look worse on others. For example picture two people talking about

what a terrible gossip a third person is. Or imagine a husband accusing his spouse of being selfish because she is not thinking of him as often as he is thinking of himself.

If we could humble ourselves and consider where we have been wrong in our attitudes and behavior then there would be healing and restoration.

### *Be Loving*

In verses 34-35 Jesus states a new commandment He is giving us, that we love one another as He has loved us and by this all will know we are His disciples. *First*, we should note that this is a commandment not a suggestion. *Second*, it is important to remember that the Old Testament had previously commanded us to love our neighbor as we love our self [Lev.19:18].

Now Jesus is raising the standard...we are to love as He loves. It is important for us to pause here and allow the Holy Spirit to speak to our hearts about how Jesus loves. For example Jesus love is sacrificial, and unconditional. It is described for us by the Apostle Paul in 1Cor.13:4-8:

*Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up, does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.*

BUT ON A PERSONAL LEVEL, how do we see the love of Jesus manifest in the Bible, in our lives, and in our marriages? For example, let's assume we read the Bible and note that Jesus shows His love to the disciples by His never-ending patience. We realize that we show much patience with our fellow employees and with our friends but we are impatient with our spouse.

Here, we see the way Jesus shows love and, we see how we have manifest love in our lives. But we also see that although we show that love to others we are not demonstrating that love to our spouse. In this way we can learn to show love to our spouse if we are honest and willing to be changed.

In addition we want to learn how our spouse desires to be loved. If my wife is seeking help with the laundry and trash, she is likely to feel more loved when I help with trash and laundry than when I buy her earrings.

*Third*, Jesus says when we love as He loves it will be a testimony and prove that we are His. In other words this love in our relationships would be the litmus test that we have a Christ-like marriage!

Remember Jesus said if we know these things we will be blessed if we do them. If Jesus is our Lord and Teacher [v.14] then we will learn from His example and do what we have learned!

Perhaps as you are reading this you have been struggling in your relationship for a long time. Perhaps you have lost hope. Be encouraged there is hope! In all likelihood, if we are honest with ourselves, we have not been following Jesus' example with our spouse. Consider how the Lord wants us to be with our spouse:

1. Be Committed,
2. Be Vulnerable,
3. Be a Servant,
4. Be Gentle,
5. Be An Example,
6. Be Humble, and
7. Be Loving.

When we can honestly say that we have followed Jesus example with our spouse the circumstances are likely to change. Certainly our attitude will be different, and we will have hope.

The Seven Cs of Marriage

### *Change*

In Romans 12:2 Paul begs us not to be conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, that we may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

I remember talking to a couple who have been married for about forty years and asking what advice would they give to a young couple. The husband paused for a moment and gently responded "expect change". I have often reflected on how profound that response truly was.

I've heard our Pastor, Chuck Smith, remind us: Blessed are the flexible for they shall not be broken. I used to think of "expect change" in the same light. In other words expect change to happen and be flexible when it occurs so that you are not overwhelmed.

But as Paul exhorts us in Romans 12:2 that we are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds I'm encouraged by the expectation that I'm going to change...and change for the better. Not only am I going to change but, it is reasonable for me to expect my wife to change.



The two of us are going to look more like Jesus in the days, months and years to follow than we do today. The apostle is telling us that as we grow in our experience and understanding of Jesus that we are being molded shaped and changed into His image. This is one of the essential foundations of a fruitful marriage.

### *Communicate*

Peter encourages husbands to dwell with their wives with understanding [1Pet.3:7]. Nevertheless until we start to communicate we cannot understand each other. Sometimes we don't communicate our feelings at all and, other times we don't accurately communicate.

One day as our family was driving up the California coast my wife Karen asked how I would like to decorate the living room? As we drove past a building with yellow and green trim I pointed and told Karen, "I thought those colors would work." I thought about our limited budget and, then hesitantly asked how she would like to decorate?

While anticipating the Country French pitch, Karen threw me a curve ball. She presented to tell me about the leopard and zebra pattern theme {visions of the Jungle Cruise at Disneyland dancing through my head}. When Karen asked: "what do you think?" I made a communication mistake and said: "whatever you want to do is fine honey" Needless to say I was surprised when I came home the next day and discovered that our living room had been decorated in neo Tarzan.

I really wasn't thrilled with the idea when it was first presented but I didn't communicate clearly. Fortunately I've grown to love {really like} the room but if I had spoken clearly in the first place things would have been better understood.

Often we fail to realize that we have different communication styles. One style, I'll call the dry creek, has minimal flow. Imagine that one spouse leaves the house at 6:00 a.m. and on the way to work is involved in a car accident. They are not really hurt too bad but three cars are involved and the fire department and paramedics strongly urge a visit to the local hospital emergency room.

After being discharged from the emergency room at twelve p.m. they contact a rental car company which picks them up. After calling the insurance company and attempting to complete a full day's work in five hours they arrive home at 6:00 p.m. As they arrive home their spouse asks: "how was your day honey?" And the response comes: "fine."

The dry creek would frustrate a spouse who is thirsting for some meaningful communication. Often the dry creek communicator is well intentioned. For example, they may not want to

worry their spouse about the wrecked car and the hospital visit. Nevertheless, their spouse doesn't feel satisfied because they have not had a chance to partake of their partner's life.

One of the best ways to live with a dry creek is to prime the pump. By asking questions, we can obtain information that our spouse may not have initiated. Simple questions may become illuminating. For example, what was the best part of your day? What was the worst part of your day?

Sometimes a person is not generally a dry creek in regard to communication style but when they are overwhelmed or upset they shut down and become a dry creek. In this case we might find that priming the pump is not successful. Here, the person might not be ready to speak about their feelings.

We can be confident that if our spouse is generally a flowing stream of information that the water will once again flow. Perhaps giving them some space and allowing for a brief period of time to pass will allow the ice to melt and the stream to once again flow.

It may be helpful for us to initiate the communication. For instance: "I want to understand what you are feeling can we talk? Go back to the stream when the normal flow has been halted and try to remove any dam.

Another communication style is the babbling brook. Imagine that our first spouse comes home from his car accident ordeal and says their day was 'fine'. The dry creek then asks the babbling brook how their day was?

The babbling brook begins: "well I woke up at 6:00 a.m. just as I heard the door close. I don't even remember you saying goodbye. When I got out of bed it was cold so I went to put on my slippers, you know the fuzzy warm ones, but it took me forever to find them. Then I remembered the dream I had last night about being chased through the jungle by a lion. The jungle was dense and the lion was huge and scary but I got away when I climbed up a vine into a house in a tree. And Jesus was there and you were there and there was a dwarf or maybe it was a midget and they were wearing a strange hat..."

The babbling brook will continue to recount the events of their day from 6:00a.m. until 6:00p.m.. Often including great detail. Unfortunately, the dry creek was looking for a response such as 'fine'. Essentially, before the babbling brook has gotten past the play-by-play through 7:00a.m., the dry creek is ready to pull hair...either their own or their spouse's.

Just as a dry creek does not satisfy the thirst for communication the babbling brook can drown a desire for communication. Here, a babbling brook needs to learn flood control so that they

limit some of the communication flowing out and their spouse needs to learn to be more of a reservoir to receive the information.

It is necessary for couples to recognize that God has cut them from different cloth and that there are differences in communication styles. Regardless of our tendencies we need to become more effective communicators for us to better understand one another. Which brings us to the next area of communication...listening.

At Calvary Chapel of Camarillo we are blessed that the assistant pastor, Nick, is one of the most gifted listeners I have ever had the pleasure of speaking with. He is attentive and is patient as the day is long. People are really ministered to by Nick...sometimes simply because he has listened effectively.

In order to communicate well we must learn to listen well. I know a man who is married to a babbling brook. He wears hearing aids and his way of dealing with it is to turn down the hearing aids so he can't hear her. She keeps talking and he occasionally nods. She thinks he is listening but he doesn't hear a word!

I have to admit that I'm learning that listening is more than just hearing. Sometimes when my wife is talking to me I'm busy doing something else at the same time. Karen will ask are you listening?

I'll often repeat back word for word what she had said because I really was paying attention. Unfortunately, even though I heard, I've ripped her off because I didn't give her the undivided attention she deserves when we are talking.

Have you ever talked with someone on the telephone and heard them typing on the keyboard while you are speaking? Sometimes you feel that they are not really paying attention because they seem to be busy with something else. Sometimes we are guilty of doing the same or similar things in our relationships. In the marriage relationship, it is important to learn to listen so that we can communicate better.

I am slowly learning the need to spend more time trying to listen patiently. I am realizing my tendency to want to quickly offer solutions rather than simply listening. Sometimes people don't even want solutions at all...they just want to be heard. The same principle is true in our marriages.

We will consider the subject of communication more in the section "Intimacy". Suffice it to say we cannot underestimate the need to communicate in a fruitful marriage. And, to communicate and understand one another we need to speak and listen effectively.

## *Consideration*

In Ephesians 4:32 we are encouraged to: be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave us. The key to being kind and tenderhearted is consideration for someone else's feelings. We tend to think of the opposite of love as being hate but it appears that the opposite of love is apathy...just not caring.

The prophet Malachi is the last prophetic voice of the Old Testament and he brings a strong rebuke against the Hebrew men for how they have dealt with their wives. Three times in chapter two they are admonished about dealing treacherously with their wives.

We often associate 'treacherous' with plotting and scheming but here the Hebrew relates to not caring for another. When we become callous and apathetic we don't care if our spouse is hurt or whether we hurt them. This is a dangerous place for a marriage!

A diagnostic heart exam may be helpful to reveal the condition of our heart. When our spouse is upset do we find ourselves saying [or thinking] things like 'I don't care' or 'that's your problem you deal with it'. If so we need to take steps to regain consideration for our spouse.

I have watched couples in my office during marriage counseling when they are callous. I have watched as either a husband or a wife broke down in tears in my office and, their spouse watched, stone faced, unaffected. When we see our spouse hurting and their pain does not stir compassion we have lost consideration.

Similarly, when they are hurting and we think, "good they deserve it" we have become callous.

When someone is examined by a cardiologist and; they are told that there is hardening of their arteries, they need to remedy the situation. Otherwise the quality of their life will be diminished and their life will be shortened. Similarly, in our spiritual lives, when we see that there is hardening of our hearts, we need to call Dr. Jesus, the Great Physician. Fortunately, he still makes house calls.

In Ephesians 4:32, Paul notes that there is a relationship between a tender heart and forgiveness. We will explore this subject more fully in the section dealing with reconciliation. Nevertheless, we need to realize that a lack of forgiveness keeps us from being tenderhearted.

In addition Paul connects the discussion about consideration with the exhortation not to grieve the Holy Spirit in Ephesians 4:30. As we are sensitive to the work of God's Spirit in our lives we remain more sensitive to the feelings of others in our lives.

One of the ministries of the Holy Spirit is to bring conviction when we are grieving God. H.L. Mencken described our conscience as that small voice that tells us that someone may be

watching. When we are sensitive to the Spirit we confess when we are wrong. When we become callous to God's Spirit we are self-righteous and, tend to deny when we have become inconsiderate of others. Accordingly consideration requires that we walk in the Spirit!

### *Conflict*

In Ephesians 4:15 we are reminded to speak the truth in love. Conflict is inevitable in any close relationship, however, for many of us conflict is extremely uncomfortable. Often people avoid conflict rather than deal with the difficult emotions.

Imagine the couple at the boutique and the wife asks her husband "honey does this make me look fat?" The husband responds "No...you look fat in everything". While he may be speaking the truth he is probably not speaking the truth in love. In this scenario the husband is being insensitive to his wife which hinders his effectiveness to communicate the truth in love.

Another area to consider is the 'volcano syndrome'. Imagine a spouse who is upset that their partner is going out several nights a week. Rather than tell their spouse that they are upset and trying to work through the issue the spouse just 'stuffs' the feelings. Finally, after several weeks or maybe months the spouse explodes like a volcano spewing hot lava! The eruption certainly reveals the conflict, but like a volcano there has been significant damage.

Imagine further that our couple talked about going out at night during the week. As the first spouse discussed the issue they asked their mate 'honey do you mind if I go out three nights a week?' The second spouse had some reservations about it but, did not want to discourage their spouse so they said 'it's fine' and never expressed their reservations.

Within the first week the resentment was beginning to build but the spouse thought it would probably pass...so nothing was said. As the weeks went by the second spouse was feeling more resentful but didn't want to say anything since they initially gave approval. Nevertheless they started acting out. For example they stopped doing laundry and cleaning dishes thinking that 'if you're not going to be here why should I keep working?'

Despite the fact that the resentment was building; and the volcano was about to erupt, there was no discussion. Then the volcano erupted...without prior warning. Unfortunately there are more volcano eruptions than necessary.

By learning to honestly communicate our feelings with sensitivity and love we can deal with conflict in an appropriate manner. In dealing with conflict we want to take responsibility for our own feelings. We often want to blame others for our feelings. As we seek to share the truth in love we want to avoid pointing a finger at others for our feelings.

In our earlier example, it is easy for us to imagine the spouse coming home after the third night out. Their spouse is pointing a finger and shouting: “you are so selfish staying out having a good time while I’m here alone caring for our house”.

The spouse is feeling lonely, but rather than communicate their feelings, they accuse their mate of being selfish and point the finger of blame. Therefore to effectively work through conflict we want to take responsibility for our own feelings and speak the truth in love.

### *Compromise*

In the fifteenth chapter of the book of Acts, we read of the controversy between Paul and Barnabas in regard to John Mark. John Mark was the cousin of Barnabas and he also penned the Gospel according to Mark. It appears that Paul and Barnabas were in agreement that they should go back to the churches they had started on their first missionary journey and seek to strengthen them.

As they prepared for their second missionary journey, Barnabas was resolved to take Mark with them. But Paul was equally resolved that Mark should not go. It seems that when the first missionary journey became overwhelming to Mark that he left the team when they arrived at Pamphylia and returned to Jerusalem.

Paul perceived Mark as a liability. But Barnabas saw the trip as a second chance for Mark and; an opportunity for Mark to be restored in his ministry.

The Bible tells us that the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus; but Paul chose Silas and returned to strengthen the churches. Although God certainly blessed the work of Paul and Barnabas, it may not have been God’s will for them to separate.

It appears that Paul and Barnabas had become so entrenched in their respective positions that neither one would consider potential compromise. For example have reached a compromise that would have allowed Mark to go with them under certain conditions, and if he violated the conditions he would be sent back.

Perhaps Mark and Paul never spoke together about Paul’s concerns to see if there was a meaningful compromise that they could consider. Unfortunately the Scripture does not provide any record that any compromise was sought.

I believe that many of the conflicts that arise in our relationships could be resolved if we looked for compromise. For example, consider the couple that struggles about television viewing.

Perhaps the wife is urging that the couple remove the television completely from the home. Hubby, on the other hand, is a bona fide t.v. junky.

His favorites are news and sports, but he often comes home and spends hours in front of the set watching anything in an effort to unwind. He says the t.v. is harmless and helps him to relax when he gets home. She is concerned about some of the sitcoms and giving the wrong message to the kids. Besides she says it would be better for the family if they spent more time talking with each other or playing games than watching t.v.

Here, a working compromise might involve limiting the type of programs [e.g. sports, news or educational] and the amount of time per night or week [e.g. one to two hours per night or ten hours per week]. In addition, the need for family time away from the television needs to be addressed. Perhaps an hour or two per night or a family game night.

Another area might involve the family finances. Imagine the husband wants to use the finances for an Hawaiian vacation. On the other hand the wife wants to save for a down payment for a house. They talk about the relative value of each of their ideas and try to show each other the advantage of each. Nevertheless, they are still unable to come to an agreement about which direction to turn.

The wife tells her husband that he is the leader of their home and she will let him make the decision. The husband tells his wife that he wants to love her like Jesus loves her and put her desires first. He also says that he is just not sure which direction God is leading and he wonders if there is a compromise which might be God's will for them.

Unfortunately, sometimes looking for a compromise solution is difficult because it requires us to look for answers 'outside of the box'. Here, a possible solution might be to recognize that God's direction for the family makes the purchase of a home a priority. They agree to save to buy the home but agree to delay buying new furnishings until after they have save for their Hawaiian vacation.

Another possible compromise might relate to recognizing God's priority for the family to escape for a needed vacation and get some rest and relaxation. They agree to go on their Hawaiian vacation but scale back the vacation budget so they can start to save for a down payment on a home.

Yet another area of conflict might relate to visiting relatives. It is not too difficult to imagine a situation where visiting the relatives, [or a particular relative] is like fingernails on a chalkboard to a husband, a wife, or both.

The Bible tells us to separate from parents in order to make a spouse a priority. But we are also told to honor our parents. These competing commands provide a challenge to find a proper balance in the best of circumstances. But when there is tension between relatives the conflict makes finding a compromise a challenge.

Perhaps he feels visiting his family once a week would be just perfect. Besides he says 'they live just a mile from us'. She feels that visiting his family is like going to the dentist and should be done once a year absent an emergency. She is also beginning to think that with his family only a mile away maybe it's time to consider moving to another state.

She suggests that maybe he should just visit his parents without her. But he is concerned that he doesn't want to offend his family. She says that she would be willing to visit but only two to three times per year. He feels that they should visit at least once a month.

After praying they agree to a compromise that they believe is God's will for them. They decide that he will visit the family once a month and she will join him every other month. Neither one "got their way" but they believe they found a solution that is a workable compromise.

### *Covenant*

In Malachi 2:14 husbands are reminded not to neglect their mates because they are to be companions and their wives by covenant. A covenant is a sacred oath or vow to perform an agreement. When a couple is joined in marriage they exchange vows.

Couples are asked whether they will take their mate to be their spouse? They are asked whether they will love them, honor them and cherish them? They pledge to maintain these values in sickness and in health, for richer for poorer till death parts them or till the Lord comes for them. They make a solemn pledge to their spouse and to the Lord often in the presence of many family and friends as witnesses.

Yet we see that the divorce rate is approximately fifty percent of marriages. Even more alarming is the trend that the rate of divorce among believers is nearly the same as the rate of divorce for unbelievers. I believe that a significant factor is the neglect of the covenant relationship.

In a lawsuit for breaking a contract it is a legitimate defense to argue that the other side broke the contract first. It appears that we are taking this attitude into our marriage relationships. But our covenant with our spouse, and with God, does not depend on our spouse performing their end of the deal.



As we will discuss more fully later, the Bible provides for divorce in the limited exception of sexual immorality. Otherwise we have entered into a sacred covenant!

Jesus exhorted us that as believers we should avoid trying to assure someone of the sincerity of our oath by swearing to perform the vow by referring to another. Rather than say 'I swear on my mother's grave' or I 'swear to God' we should merely let our 'yes' be 'yes' and our 'no' be 'no' [see, Matt.5:33-37]. In other words be the type of person who makes an agreement and sticks to the agreement whenever possible.

Sometimes when an agreement is made the parties are excused because it is impossible to perform. For example, I agree to lease a house for a year and the house is destroyed in a fire before the lease begins. The landlord is excused from leasing the house because, it is impossible to lease a house that no longer exists.

On the other hand, imagine that I lose my job in the middle of the lease. I want to be excused from paying. Yet, I am still responsible for the payments.

The courts recognize that there is a difference between an agreement that is difficult to perform and an agreement that is impossible to perform. Too often in marriage relationships we are seeking to break the covenant because it has become difficult to perform. Be encouraged...we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us [Phil.4:13].

### *Christ*

In Phil.1:6, Paul encourages us 'that He who has begun a good work in us will be faithful to complete it until the day of Jesus Christ'. This Scripture has always encouraged me that God is working in my life. And God will continue to do so until Jesus returns or I go to be with Him! It makes me want to go out with yellow warning tape 'under construction'.

Construction sites are always exciting to watch. There is the anticipation and wonder about what will be built, and what it will look like when it is finished. Construction sites can also be dangerous places...hard hats and caution advised.

Similarly watching God's work in building a man or woman of God is exciting. Will this be the next Billy Graham, Elizabeth Elliott, Mother Theresa, or Chuck Smith? God is working in that person's life. Sometimes the construction progress can be more obvious than at other times ...nevertheless the work continues.

As God work's in my life, and in your life, we can look and see there were times that the progress seemed to be happening on a fast track and other times when the work seemed to have stalled. Often times when we seemed to have slowed the construction by our "labor

strikes" it may have seemed that the construction was permanently halted. But God was building.

As we consider the life of Joseph [Gen.37 et seq.] we see that God had a purpose in allowing Joseph to be sold into slavery as well as his imprisonment on false charges. We see that God raised up Joseph to become the second in command in Egypt, the greatest empire of the day. God used Joseph to provide famine relief for Egypt, its neighbors and Joseph's family.

Surely we recognize God's hand in the construction of Joseph as a man of God. Joseph was being prepared during the difficult years for what God wanted to do in Joseph's life and through Joseph to minister to others.

On the other hand we may not recognize as clearly the work that God was doing in the life of Joseph's brothers. God had just as surely begun a work in the other sons of Jacob...and He would finish it!

It takes more than twenty years for the encounter between Joseph and His brothers. When the youngest brother Benjamin, the favorite of Jacob, is at risk of being enslaved the brothers rally at his side. No longer were they motivated by anger and jealousy to sell out their little brother.

Instead they stand with Benjamin. Judah, the family spokesman offers his life in the place of Benjamin. Judah's impassioned plea on behalf of his brother revealed the change of the brothers' hearts.

Similarly, we see God's work in the events related to the life of Moses. At forty Moses sought to deliver his people, the Hebrews, from the oppression of Egypt. Nevertheless, the effort was premature and was not received by the Hebrews.

During the next forty years Moses was obtaining his BSD degree [back side of the desert]. While in the desert of Midian for forty years we assume that Moses lived during the first few seasons/years in eager anticipation of God's call to deliver the Hebrews.

Months and seasons and year after year passed and still no call. For much of that forty year period it probably seemed that God was no longer working in Moses life. But in fact God was preparing Moses as a shepherd not a prince. And at the end of forty years the call came that the time had come to deliver God's people.

We tend to forget that God was also working in the hearts of the Hebrews. They were under construction as well. God was using the heavy hand of Egyptian tyranny to stir the Hebrews to finally cry out to their God for deliverance. Most likely the work that God was doing in the life

of His people was not readily evident during those forty years. But as Paul urged, we can be confident that God was working.

Similarly, we can trust that not only is God working in us but, He is working in our spouse! Nevertheless, it is difficult for us to relinquish trying to control our spouse's development and growth. We tend to want to see the changes we desire to be accomplished on our time schedule, rather than trusting God's plan and His schedule. We would only be willing to consider doing that if we were confident that Jesus was going to finish the work! And, we can be confident that Jesus will finish His work!

Another reason to release our spouse to the work of Jesus is that He has a plan and does much better work than we can. I must confess that I am not exactly 'Mr. Handyman'. I go to change light bulbs and I'm reading the package for directions... 'Insert the bulb and turn clockwise'. When I tried to build an armoire for my boys' bedroom it was a virtual disaster.

First, there were more screws than I've seen in a hardware store. Then, I thought it was cute when my three-year old hid the screws until he forgot where he hid them [inspiring an impromptu treasure hunt]. When I started to examine my nearly completed construction project with the pride and joy that only a truly "unhandy man" can demonstrate at his work, I found to my dismay that the project bore a strange resemblance to the Tower at Pisa.

This unfortunate turn of events prompted a phone call to my brother in law...a truly handy guy. Remedial measures were implemented and my kids' clothes are now safe and secure in a well built armoire.

Through this experience I'm reminded that the "Carpenter" is a much better builder than I am. In the long run it is much wiser for me to trust Him and His plans than for me to impose my design. My job is not to build my spouse. But to trust that God is doing His job in working in my life and hers.

In Summary, be prepared to sail the 'Seven C's' of marriage: change, communication, consideration, conflict, compromise, covenant and, Christ to a fruitful marriage. Remember we should expect and desire change. We need to learn to communicate more effectively.

We want to be considerate of our spouse's feelings. We can expect conflict in our relationships and, we can seek compromise. Most importantly we can trust that Christ is working in our lives. Knowing and doing these things we have assurance of a fruitful marriage.

How to Find the Right Spouse

Is there a match made in heaven for me? Is there a right one for me that God has chosen? Do I need to search or will God deliver that person to me? How will I know that they are truly the right one for me? Wouldn't it be easier if we were all coded and merely used special scanners to find the right one?

I am not sure that God has told us in His Word that there is a right one or that we have to search for them. Nevertheless, I am certain that God has given us guidance to know how to find the right spouse. Much of this guidance can be gleaned from Isaac's marriage to Rebekah recorded in Genesis 24.

### *Be equally yoked*

In Genesis 24:3-4 Abraham instructs his servant to seek a bride for his son Isaac. The servant is specifically told not to take a wife from among the Canaanites among whom he dwelled; but to go to Abraham's country and kindred. The principle is repeated to us in the New Testament in 2 Cor. 6:14-16 where Christians are warned against being unequally yoked with unbelievers.

God is warning us of the dangers when one spouse does not believe. There is the risk that the unbelieving spouse will draw the believing spouse away from God. Or the spouse can be drawn from the True and Living God to other gods.

Similarly, the home life of an equally yoked couple is a stronger environment for children to be raised to know Jesus. A home where the couple is unequally yoked is a confusing place for children to learn about Jesus.

The first step is to make sure that the person loves the same God as you. Too often a couple begins to date and become emotionally involved knowing that they don't share a common faith. This situation creates pressure and momentum to move the relationship forward despite the lack of a sure foundation.

Sometimes we put the cart before the horse and agree to marry hoping that our spouse will then be motivated to come to the Lord. This scenario often ends up breaking hearts...especially when children enter the picture. Therefore the first step is to make sure we are equally yoked before we are married.

### *Let God Lead*

In verse seven Abraham assures his servant that God will go before him and intervene to find the right one. The servant later confirms 'the Lord led me to this house' [v.27]. At verse 48 the servant declares "and I bowed my head and worshipped the Lord, and blessed the Lord God of

my master Abraham, who had led me in the way of truth to take the daughter of my master's brother for his son." The servant confirms that God in fact did lead!

Sometimes when we are feeling lonely and we desire a relationship we start to lead before allowing God to lead. We can trust that God will go before us to lead us that we would know the right one. It is wiser to wait for God to lead than to try to force the situation in our strength and wisdom.

Imagine a couple that begins dating and they are physically attracted to one another and end up falling into sexual sin. She becomes pregnant and wants to keep the baby and get married. He respects her for wanting to keep the baby but, he is afraid of being a father and; he is not sure they should get married.

Here is a situation where a couple is likely to get ahead of God. He might be the father of the baby but he might not be called to be her husband. Nevertheless there is tremendous pressure now for them to move forward with marriage even though God may not be leading. It is better for us to wait for God to lead us before we give our hearts [or any other part of us] to another.

#### *Character More Than Beauty*

As Abraham's ambassador seeks confirmation from God that he has found the right one he asks for a sign. He prayed, "Behold I stand by the well of water, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water. Now let it be that the young woman to whom I say, please let down your pitcher that I may drink, and she says, 'Drink and I will also give your camels a drink' let her be the one that whom You have appointed for Your servant Isaac. And by this I will know that You have shown kindness to my master."

As Rebekah comes to the well with her pitcher on her shoulder we are told that she was a virgin and that she was very beautiful. The servant asks for a sip of water. And Rebekah offers to draw water for the camels until they have finished drinking. As soon as she gave him his drink she hastened and ran to the well and drew water for the camels [Gen.24:12-20].

In our culture it is difficult to imagine the burden that Rebekah offered to undertake and, then completed. The servant likely had a caravan of at least ten camels in light of the distance of the journey, the provisions and, the gifts which were taken. To water the camels would involve two hundred to two hundred fifty [200-250] gallons of water.

Rebekah would likely have to descend several stairs and then carry the water in a ceramic pitcher up the stairs. A conservative estimate of the time involved is likely in excess of two to three hours! Imagine carrying ten bathtub loads of water on behalf of a guest you had never met before...

Rebekah demonstrates several outstanding attributes of Christian character. First she is willing to serve. Jesus is our model as one who enters into a relationship seeking to serve rather than be served [See, Mk.10:44]. A desire to serve is a tremendously important character trait. We might ask ourselves: Is our prospective mate willing to serve as well as being served?

Second, Rebekah is diligent. She not only offers to bring water for the camels but, she begins the difficult task promptly. She then finishes her work without unnecessary delay. In part Rebekah's effort is remarkable because of the frequent lack of diligence that we see in our world.

Paul exhorts Timothy "be diligent to show yourself approved unto God a workman who need not be ashamed rightly dividing the word of God"[2Tim. 2:15]. Diligence is a Christian character that can often be lacking. Even Timothy the young Pastor needed to be reminded to be diligent. Again, we might want to ask ourselves whether our companion is diligent in completing tasks or assignments?

A third character trait that we see in Rebekah is that she was pure. Rebekah was a virgin. She had set herself apart and remained pure until her wedding night. The Master told us in the Sermon on the Mount that the pure in heart were blessed. We know the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount as the Beatitudes because of the blessings of Christian character. But the Master's teaching is a handbook on what our attitudes should be!

It has become apparent to me after several years of ministry that many of the men and women I meet with in pre-marital counseling are not virgins. There are a host of problems arising from neglecting God's counsel that sexual intimacy is to be reserved for the marriage relationship. Those who have remained sexually pure until marriage are becoming an exception rather than a rule.

Remaining sexually pure in a culture where there is tremendous peer pressure to engage in sexual activity outside of marriage is a character statement which screams a message to all who hear. The value of this character of sexual purity should not be underestimated.

In this context it is important for us to remember that sexual relations outside of marriage is not the unpardonable sin! Purity is primarily a heart issue rather than other body parts. We need to consider whether our future spouse has demonstrated a period of time where they have set themselves apart to God as pure in heart [and other body parts].

A fourth character trait to be admired is hospitality. Peter describes hospitality as a spiritual gift [1Pet.4]. A partner who is willing to show kindness to strangers and open their heart and home to help is precious. A person who enjoys opening their home to guests for meals, parties and,

fellowship might find it a difficult situation being in a relationship with a person who perceives 'entertaining' like fingernails on a chalkboard. We should consider our attitudes and preferences in regard to opening our home before marriage.

As we consider the important character traits seen in Rebekah we are also told that she was very beautiful. Few women in the scripture are noted for their beauty: Sarah, Rachel, Ruth, Abigail and Bathsheba are noted. Beauty is not a curse but clearly it is only skin deep. The aforementioned women are praised for the character they demonstrated more than for their beauty.

Although Rebekah's beauty was remarkable as she was very beautiful, the servant asked God for a sign that would confirm the woman's character rather than her appearance. Character was and is the priority!

As the prophet Samuel prepared to anoint Israel's second king he was sent the house of Jesse. As the sons of Jesse were presented to Samuel, the prophet of God fell into the trap of looking at their appearance to determine their fitness for what God was calling them to. Finally God reminded Samuel that men look at the outward but God looks at the heart [1Sam.16:7].

Even godly men and women can focus on outward rather than inner beauty. This is especially true in a culture where youth and physical beauty are exalted as virtues. In our culture a model is over the hill at age twenty-five. It is important to remember that gravity happens!

Although we would like to think that the reason why clothes aren't fitting is because of the dryer there is probably another reason...When people mention to me that they are seeing more gray hairs on my head I'm grateful that there is still hair. God knows the number of hairs on our heads and many of us are making it easier for Him to take inventory! Suffice it to say we are not likely to look the same on our 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary as on our wedding day.

In the 1950's a song lyric provided tongue in cheek advice 'if you want to be happy for the rest of your life make an ugly woman your wife'. On the other hand, sound advice tells us: 'if you want to be happy for the rest of you life make a godly woman your wife'. Finally, recall that in the description of a virtuous wife in Proverbs 31 there is no exaltation of physical beauty.

### *Confirm God's Will*

In Genesis 24 we see that the servant received confirmation in regard to the sign he sought from God. Essentially the servant asked that God would confirm His choice by bringing forth a woman who would offer to provide water for the camels when the servant merely asked for a drink for himself. Rebekah's response was exactly what the servant was looking for.

The circumstances, especially the remarkable nature of the event would tend to confirm God's intention that Rebekah was the one for Isaac. What I consider to be truly remarkable is what the servant did next.

At verse twenty-one we read "And the man, wondering at her, remained silent so as to know whether the Lord had made his journey prosperous or not". In other words the servant was waiting to hear from God to confirm the Lord's direction. I marvel because frequently we merely look to the circumstances to confirm God's will.

Effectively we have a model here that confirmation of God's will is provided not only in the circumstances. But, also in hearing God's voice. The servant was not content to merely look at the circumstances as providing confirmation despite the specific and seemingly divine set of circumstances.

In the ninth chapter of the book of Joshua we see Joshua's failure as a leader when he enters into a peace agreement with the Gibeonites. In a portion of Scripture that could be titled "Trick or Treaty" we see that the nearby people of Gibeon deceived Joshua.

They worked craftily and placed old sacks on their donkeys, gathered old wineskins, and wore old sandals and clothes. They gathered old crusty and moldy bread for provision and approached Joshua and the men of Israel. The Gibeonites persuaded Joshua that they had come from a very far country and were seeking to enter a peace treaty with Israel because of fear of the greatness of Israel's God.

We read in verses fourteen and fifteen that "the men of Israel took some of their provisions; but they did not ask counsel of the Lord. So Joshua made a covenant with them to let them live..." Here, we see one of the few mistakes that Joshua made as a leader. The irony is that it appears this serious mistake in judgement could have been avoided by simply asking counsel of the Lord and waiting for a response.

I remember when I was teaching a home Bible study in Orange County. God had blessed the study and it had grown to about fifty or more people. As fall was approaching we knew that we would not be meeting in the backyard much longer. So we began to look for a place to meet outside of our home.

We found a location that offered us two large meeting rooms to accommodate the adults and the kids as well as the use of the gym and recreation room. All of this was available on a Friday night for only seventy-five dollars. The circumstances looked great...everything we were looking for and more. We agreed to rent the facility. Unfortunately, I failed to hear from God before



making the move. It turned out that the rooms had cockroaches and not even the most spiritual people could deal with the distraction.

The lesson to learn is that before we enter a covenant, whether for a peace treaty, a lease, or a marriage we need to receive confirmation from God. Certainly God can use circumstances to give an indication of open doors or closed doors. But He may want to speak to us beyond mere circumstances.

Please allow me to digress for a moment to share about an important time in my life when God used circumstances and His Word to confirm His will for me.

Before coming to Camarillo, California to plant Calvary Chapel of Camarillo I had served as an interim pastor for a Calvary Chapel church in the State of Oregon. The ministry was being blessed and I was in love with the people and the ministry in Oregon. My wife and I had placed our home for sale and, I probably would have accepted literally almost any offer. Nevertheless, there were no offers, not even bad offers. I subscribed to the Sunday edition of the largest newspaper in Oregon. Each week I would send my resume in response to numerous classified ads. Yet there were no job offers, not a single one. And I probably would have accepted almost any job.

When God had prepared a local pastor to lead that church and; God did not confirm that I was called to go there we knew it was a closed door for us.

By contrast, when we were considering the move to Camarillo to plant the church God was apparently opening doors in a miraculous way. We came to visit the city on a Saturday with plans to check out the area. As we drove through town, in a convertible, we came to a large hill. It seems mandatory when you are driving in a convertible and you come to a large hill that you have to drive to the top to check out the view.

When we got to the top there was a beautiful home with a large panoramic view of the city. The view was spectacular and we soaked up the city like a huge sponge on a small puddle. We prayed for the city as we drove down the hill and; we said to ourselves that would be a great place for a Bible study.

As we drove through town we went to a real estate office to inquire about rentals. As we spoke with the real estate agent she asked "why are you moving to Camarillo". We told her about our desire to start a Calvary Chapel in town. And she told us about friends of hers who wanted to open their home for a Bible study. We gave her our phone number to pass along to her friends.

As we were leaving the real estate office we met a man in the parking lot who asked us why we were thinking about moving up to Camarillo. We told him about the church and than he told us

that he was the Mayor of Camarillo. He then encouraged us that the town could use a good church.

The next couple we met told us that he had led worship before and offered to help us for a few weeks [those few weeks turned into more than five years and three C.D.s]. God was apparently moving.

The next week we spoke with the family that wanted to open their home for a Bible study and we arranged to meet in Camarillo for dinner at a local restaurant along with the worship leader and his wife. At the end of the evening they asked if we wanted to see their home. As we followed them through town they led us to their home...the house on the top of the hill! God was apparently moving in a big way!

On the proceeding Friday we had placed our home on the market for sale or lease. A sign was placed in the front yard and our listing would appear during the next week. When we got home from dinner late Saturday night there was a message on our answering machine about our house.

It appears that a family came to look at a house on our street and saw the sign in our front yard and decided to also check out our house. They liked the house and left a message on our machine that they wanted to lease our house [and they offered more per month than we were asking for].

That Sunday night I was calling real estate rental ads in the Camarillo paper. When I got to the third call the homeowner asked why we were considering moving to Camarillo and I told him the vision for planting the church. He then told us that he wrote a column in the religion section of the local paper and asked if he could do a story. I got a pager with a local number for Camarillo and he placed the number at the end of the article.

That Monday I went to work and my bosses asked if I would be willing to consider relocating to the valley so that the law firm I worked for could open an office north of Los Angeles in the San Fernando Valley. This would allow us to move to Camarillo and I would have a job to support the family. The amazing thing was that I had not yet discussed the idea of moving to Camarillo with my employer.

As we considered the incredible chain of events that had transpired like a whirlwind in a period of two weeks it seemed that the circumstances were confirming that God was sending us to Camarillo. Nevertheless we wanted to make sure that we were in God's will so I wanted to hear God speak.

God spoke to me in two ways. First, on our first day in Camarillo we had stopped at a coffeehouse and there was a fountain in the courtyard. As I was drinking espresso and praying I felt a burden from the Lord that I was going to be ministering to Catholics. Since I was raised Jewish I thought this was unusual and wanted to make sure it wasn't the espresso talking. But God was continuing to speak that I was going to be ministering to Catholics in Camarillo.

The next day as I was reading in the Book of Romans, as part of my devotional reading, I found myself in the tenth chapter. As I read Paul's words written as inspired by the Holy Spirit I knew God was speaking to me:

Rom 10:13-17

*13 For "whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."*

*14 How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?*

*15 And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!"*

*16 But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our report?"*

*17 So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*

(NKJ)

God was confirming His will regarding planting a church in Camarillo through the circumstances, through the desires of my heart and through His Word. Whenever I have faced a very important decision in my life, God has been faithful to confirm His will for me. I must confess, that I would probably not earnestly seek to confirm God's will when I am in line at a drive-thru trying to decide whether to order the chicken sandwich or a burger. But I do believe that God would confirm His will even in the small issues if we seek Him.

God will certainly confirm whether it is His will for us to marry, who we are to marry, and when we are to marry, if we will seek Him! In a decision as important as marriage, we need to confirm God's will. It is certainly more important than deciding whether to eat the chicken sandwich or the burger.

How can we confirm God's leading beyond the circumstances? The following reminders may be helpful:

1. *His Word*: God's word is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path [Ps.119:105]. The Bible is the primary way that God wants to speak to us to reveal His will and direct us. God is faithful and will confirm His will to us in His Word if we patiently and diligently seek Him.

2. *Our desires*: In Phil. 2:13 we are told that God works in us both to will and to do for His good pleasure. God will not only confirm His will through the circumstances or resources but He also places the desire in our hearts.

3. *The still small voice*: We read in 1Kings 19 of how God spoke to Elijah the prophet. God was not speaking by the windstorm, the earthquake, or the fire. But God spoke in a gentle whisper...the still small voice. God is still speaking for those who are seeking to hear and willing to turn down the static that would distract and keep us from hearing.

4. *Godly counsel*: the wisdom literature repeatedly reminds us to seek godly counsel and avoid the counsel of the ungodly [see,e.g.Ps.1;Pr.27:9].

Ps 1:1: *“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful.”*

Prov. 27:9: *“Ointment and perfume delight the heart, and the sweetness of a man's friend gives delight by hearty counsel.”*

In the context of wondering whether the person is ‘the right one’ it may be particularly helpful to seek godly counsel. Often Christian friends, a pastor, or church leader may have insight that we have failed to consider. Sometimes it is easier to talk to friends who will tell us what we want to hear and avoid counsel that may take the wind out of our sails. But in the end, the issue is what did God want to say, not what did we want to hear. In summary, before we decide that we have found the right spouse we want to confirm God’s will in the circumstances as well as hearing God speak!

#### *Willingness to Leave the World*

In Genesis24:54-59 we see that the servant made the appeal to Rebekah, her mother and her brother and then sought to return with Rebekah to Isaac and Abraham. The mother and brother suggested that rather than leaving immediately that they delay at least ten days and then go. The servant urged that his return not be hindered. So mom and brother agreed to ask Rebekah what she wanted to do. Rebekah responded ‘I will go’.

Here, we have a picture of a call to leave as it were the world and move to the Promised Land. In addition the request calls for an urgent response. In 2 Cor.6:2 we are reminded that today is the day of salvation. There is a need to respond to God’s call and, an urging to respond promptly.

Sometimes one member of the team has a greater longing for the things of the world. Their focus is on climbing the corporate ladder and succeeding in the workplace. They are focused on

a bigger home, a more expensive car, new clothes and better 'toys'. The other member of the team is more focused on spiritual issues and, is more content with their material provision. How willing is the first to leave the world?

The willingness to leave the world is similar to the issue of equally yoked but, they are distinct. Equally yoked may be seen as a threshold issue in the sense that the couple share the same faith in God. Willingness to leave the world focuses on the depth of desire for spiritual as opposed to material things.

A couple considering a marriage relationship needs to address this issue. If a wife is seeking an abundant spiritual life and, is focused on everlasting life and, her husband is focused on the material world they are headed for conflict.

If our mate has been sitting on the fence with one foot in the world and one foot in God's kingdom they are headed in two different directions. Either they have become comfortable, despite what would appear to be an uncomfortable position, or they desire to move. The question becomes which direction are they likely to move in?

Do we see some evidence that they truly desire to leave the world? If not, we need to consider that they are likely to hold on and pull us into the world. Keep in mind that if you are standing on a chair and trying to pull your spouse up from the floor, it is easier for them to pull you down from the chair than for you to pull them up.

### *Humility*

As Rebekah is led by the servant to Isaac Isaac was out in the field meditating. As he lifted his eyes and looked he saw the camel caravan approaching. Then Rebekah lifted her eyes, and when she saw Isaac she dismounted from her camel; for she had said to the servant, "Who is this man walking in the field to meet us?" And the servant said, "it is my master." So she took a veil and covered herself [24:63-65].

Here, we see Rebekah's humility and modesty. Rebekah sought to promote the beauty of the inner person, rather than the fact that physically she was very beautiful. Too often in our culture people are dressing up like Christmas trees seeking to draw attention to themselves. Humility is a virtue that may be on the endangered species list in our culture.

Consider all the statements made by Jesus during His ministry [you know, the red letters] and realize that the only autobiographical statement that Jesus made was that he was humble [see, Matt.11:28-30]. Humility is important to God.

A man or woman who attracts their spouse because their body was 'unveiled' might find out that their mate doesn't appreciate them parading their body before others now that they are married. Also, the need to have that attention may be indicative of other issues which can be a problem for the marriage relationship.

Humility is not thinking less of self but thinking of self less often. Sometimes the desire for attention, especially sought in the wrong ways, can reflect a lack of humility. We want to consider whether our future spouse is humble.

### *Comfort*

At the end of chapter 24 we see that Isaac took Rebekah as his wife, and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after the death of his mother Sarah. After the death of Sarah, Isaac was grieving the loss of his mother. There was a void in Isaac's life and God brought Rebekah to Isaac to bring comfort to him.

A spouse should be a source of comfort to their mate. Inevitably there will be some conflicts in any relationship that may be uncomfortable. But generally, does our prospective spouse bring comfort to us?

As we consider the context of marriages in the Old Testament we realize that they were generally arranged between the parents. Effectively, the bride and groom learned to love the one that they had married. We see that Isaac married Rebekah than he loved her than he was comforted. The sequence shows the progression in an Old Testament model.

By contrast, in the New Testament we see that Jesus loves His bride, the Church and draws us to Himself with His love. We love [Him] because He first loved us. In other words, we enter into the relationship with Jesus as His Bride because of the love that He showed us before the marriage relationship.

Jesus promised His disciples in the Upper Room that He would not leave them orphans but He would send the Holy Spirit, the Comforter. God sees the need for us to be comforted in this ideal marriage relationship between us, and His Son.

Sometimes, when a couple is courting they realize that they are truly comforted when they spend time together with that special person. Other times we realize that the other person irritates us like forty grain sandpaper rubbing the wrong way. The latter situation is a yellow caution flag warning us to proceed with caution.

In considering this section on finding the right spouse, many of us realize that we wish we had read this section before we got married. What should we do when we learn that our spouse

doesn't meet the criteria described? First, we are called to show our spouse mature Christian love. Second, be encouraged. In 1Peter3, the apostle gives us hope when he tells us that by our Christ-like example we can help lead our spouse to the Lord. And once they come to Jesus the right relationship truly begins.

## How to be Fruitful

In John 15 we find ourselves in the Upper Room with the disciples as Jesus imparts essential truth before His imminent death. Jesus is instructing the disciples, and us about the type of relationship we need to have with Him to be fruitful. We must remember that we cannot have a fruitful marriage relationship without a personal relationship with Jesus that bears fruit!

In the Gospel of Mark, chapter four we read of the Parable of The Soils. The good soil is the heart of a person who hears the word of God, receives it and bears fruit: some thirty-fold, some sixty, and some one hundred. Note it is characteristic for us to produce fruit. Also, a healthy relationship with Jesus can be reflected in an increased yield.

In Matthew 3, John the Baptist challenged the religious leaders of the day to "bear fruits worthy of repentance". Here, we see that true repentance, and submission to God, is demonstrated by bearing fruit. Further, mere outward religious action or works does not constitute bearing fruit.

Fruitfulness is a serious priority to our Lord. In Matthew 21 we see Jesus during the last week of His earthly ministry. He had cleansed the Temple of those who were extorting worshippers. As Jesus was returning to Jerusalem He came upon a fig tree. The tree looked like it would be fruitful because of the leaves. But in reality the appearance was deceiving because there was no fruit on the tree.

Jesus then cursed the fruitless tree and it immediately withered up. This was the only time in Jesus ministry that He cursed anything or anyone. Why was Jesus so upset? Perhaps the fig tree was a reminder of man's effort to cover his sin apart from God. Remember how Adam and Eve tried to cover their guilt in the Garden of Eden using fig leaves [Gen.3:7].

More likely is the interpretation that the fig tree as a symbol of Israel was fruitless. The nation had rejected their Messiah Jesus and would now be judged. Although the people were religious, when the Master inspected He found only leaves and no fruit. Although the interpretation relates to the nation of Israel, the important application for us to be fruitful must be grasped!

In Galatians 5:22-23 the Apostle Paul describes the type of fruit we should bear. The spiritual fruit God desires to produce in us is love. This type of love, is characterized by: joy, peace,

patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control. When this type of fruit is abundant in our lives our marriages our marriages are blessed.

As we consider how to be fruitful in John 15 we see the relationship between Jesus and believers described. Jesus says I am the true vine, and we are the branches.

In central California we see an abundance of grape orchards used for raisins. The huge clusters of grapes cascade down the stakes used to lift up the grapes from the ground. As soon as the grape branches are removed from the vine they begin to turn into raisins.

As you look at the orchards you see large clusters of grapes lying on brown paper placed on the ground in the hot California sun. Soon those grapes will be raisins. The relationship of being connected to the vine is the difference between growing grapes and raisins.

By contrast, I remember being on vacation in Hawaii. The orchids were marvelous to behold in their beautiful colors. But orchids don't need to be attached to the vine to obtain nutrients to grow. Note, we are like grapes, not like orchids...we must be connected to Him!

#### *What Jesus is Doing*

This portion of Scripture shows us three ways that Jesus is helping us to be fruitful. They are briefly described as follows:

a. Lifting us up: In 15:2 we are told that every branch that does not bear fruit He takes away [NKJV]. The Greek word translated "take away" is *airo*. This same word is frequently translated to lift up. For example in 1Tim2:8 where men are encouraged to lift up holy hands in prayer. The translation re lifting up also fits the agrarian image of grapes lifted up on stakes. More significantly, the idea of lifting up fits the spiritual picture.

James 4:10 tells us that if we humble ourselves before the Lord that he will lift us up [Ja.4:10]. Here, the beginning of bearing fruit occurs when we submit to God. Once we yield to His authority He lifts us up and the process of bearing fruit begins.

b. Pruning us: verse two tells us that every branch that bears fruit He prunes that it may bear more fruit. God graciously cuts away the dead branches that we might be more fruitful. For me, one of the first areas I saw pruned was my language.

Unfortunately, I used profanity in my speech like some people use salt and pepper to flavor their meal. God cut away the profanity from my speech so that my life could be more fruitful. I discovered that the way to clean up my speech was not to brush my tongue but to change my heart.



Sometimes when The Gardener prunes it is scary to us. When God wants to end a relationship with a boyfriend or girlfriend that is keeping us from being fruitful it is threatening to us.

We can take comfort that The Gardener is never closer than when He prunes. You can water at a distance and you can even fertilize at a distance but you can't prune at a distance! There is also comfort in the fact that when He prunes us, spring will arrive with even more fruit on the branches.

c. Cleaning us: Jesus told His disciples that they were already clean because of the word which He had already spoken to them [John15:3]. The word of God is an agent for cleaning us. In Ephesians 5:26 husbands are encouraged to love their wives as Christ loved the church giving up His life for her to make her holy having cleansed her by the washing of water by the word.

Just as grapevines are lifted up and pruned to make them more fruitful, so to they are washed. The vine dresser washes or cleans the grapes to remove dirt and insects as these impurities can inhibit the fruit yield. Similarly, God has given us His Word to guide us and clean us.

For example, Paul tells us in Romans 7:7 that he would not have known that coveting was wrong had God's Word not said 'do not covet'. Here, the Apostle was referring to the tenth commandment recorded in Exodus 20:17. This was the last of the Ten Commandments written with the very finger of God. Accordingly, this provision of God's law would seem particularly worthy of our attention. In addition, this commandment deserves our attention for the contrast with the values of our culture.

Imagine if you were elected to be the mayor of a newly forming city. The city counsel and the city attorney asked you to consider the laws that would govern the new city. Because the city would be new they suggested that the city start with only ten laws. They asked you to suggest the ten most important laws to govern the people. Chances are we would not have suggested 'don't covet' as part of the 'top ten'...but God did!

Our culture tends to exalt coveting. We erect shrines of coveting and call them malls. And the faithful visit religiously. We live in a culture that believes 'He who dies with the most toys wins'. The message of our culture repeats that if we can get 'one more' we will be satisfied. But the truth is that if we are not content with what we have today, we won't be content with twice as much tomorrow. More things never bring contentment!

But God gave us the Bible to clean us so that we can be fruitful. So when God tells us not to covet we get a clear message that transcends our culture. As we learn about God and experience His power in our lives, we learn to be content. In a seemingly natural way, a

supernatural transformation occurs. We become a generous person rather than remaining covetous. This is an example of becoming fruitful as a result of the cleansing of God's Word.

Similarly, our culture encourages us to take pride in ourselves and, our accomplishments. Pride is linked with self-esteem. By contrast, God tells us that He hates pride. Hate is a strong word and shows us the extent of His contempt for pride. God will not share glory with us. Essentially, He wants credit to be given where credit is due. If there is anything good in us or done through us it is because of God, not us [see, e.g. John 15:5 'without Him we can do nothing'].

God links our sense of self esteem with the love that the Creator of the universe has for us as individuals because of who God is rather than our relative value or merit. Our sense of worth comes from God esteem rather than self esteem. It is not until we see the contrast between our culture and God's view, as illuminated by the glorious Word of God, that we can be clean and fruitful.

To summarize, we are told in John 15 of three ways that God is making us more fruitful: lifting us up, pruning us, and cleaning us by His Word. When we humble ourselves before Him He will lift us up and we begin to grow. God will then help us to bear more fruit as He removes obstacles that hinder growth. This is pruning. God brings forth more fruit as we learn His instruction for us from the Bible. This is cleansing by His Word. We can be confident that God will do His part that we can be fruitful!

The fruitful life with God translates to a fruitful marriage. The work that God is doing to make us more fruitful in general is necessary to make our marriages more fruitful. When we fail to realize our need to be fruitful it becomes an obstacle to the work that God wants to do in our lives and in our marriages.

#### *What We Need to Do*

a. Abide: ten times in John 15:4-10 we are told that we need to abide in Christ. God will frequently repeat a principle for us two or three times to provide emphasis and show us the importance of the lesson. Here, Jesus tells us to abide ten times in a few verses...I think we can agree this important!

Note fruit is not doing, but we bear fruit as we abide. To abide is to dwell or to remain. When we dwell with Jesus we become like Him.

When I was in elementary school and in junior high I had the same best friend. We used to hang out together at school and play together after school. We dressed alike, liked the same kind of music, and played the same sports. We even talked the same and used the same slang.

We had been hanging out together for so long that we had started to become like one another. Our parents and our friends recognized it long before we did. Perhaps you can relate. Maybe you have had a friendship where your friend started to rub off on you and your life was changed.

This is what happens when Jesus is our best friend. He rubs off on us and we start to change to look more like Him. This is what it means to bear fruit. The fruit of the Spirit is modeled in the life of Jesus. Certainly he demonstrates: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness, goodness, and self-control.

Abiding also implies remaining in close proximity. Sometimes I picture Jesus atop a tall ladder in the midst of a fruitful apple tree. As he drops fruit from His tree those who are close are catching the fruit and filling their baskets. As people walk away the fruit keeps coming.

Some fruit falls to the ground. New people enter the picture and come close and catch the falling fruit. Those who remain in close proximity always have the fullest baskets!

The fruitful life and, the fruitful marriage are both seen as a progressive relationship. In John 15, the progression goes from no fruit [v.2] to more fruit [v.2] to much fruit [v.5,8]. Similarly a godly marriage is a progression yielding more fruit

God has certainly made it easy for us to be fruitful. The only thing we have to do on our end is to abide in Him. He will do all the rest!

#### Foundation Support

Jesus is the greatest teacher who ever walked on the earth. Arguably the greatest teaching He ever shared with the world is recorded in the Sermon on the Mount. As you consider the lessons it is clear that the world would be a much better place if we would simply follow those ideals.

Jesus concludes His great manifesto with the portion of Scripture that we know as Matthew 7:24-27:

*“Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.*

*But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.”*

The Master Builder shows us that there are only two types of building foundations. We can either build on the rock, which will stand when we are rocked or, we can build on sand, which cannot stand the forces of life's struggles.

Consider with me the storms that try a marriage relationship. For example: differences in upbringing, financial struggles, work/job pressures, strain related to raising children, health issues, caring for parents, perceived unmet needs, differences in spiritual beliefs and maturity etc.

James tells us to count it all joy when we fall into various trials [Ja.1:2]. Note James tells us *when* we have trials, not *if* we have trials. Maybe you are reading this and thinking 'Pastor Bruce we've never had trials in our marriage'. Don't worry you will have your turn...[one of God's promises we are not too eager to embrace].

James also warns us that trials will come upon us suddenly. We often fall into trials like an open manhole, rather than merely sliding into trial in a slow descent like a burrow going down into the Grand Canyon. The routine health examination that ends with the doctor's warning that there may be cancer is an example of a sudden trial that can destroy a marriage. The trials of cancer treatment, loss of health or possible death can destroy a home that is not built on the rock. Sudden trials will happen!

Finally, James tells us that trials are various. Rarely is a marriage only tested in one area. My boys like to play an arcade game where the object is to smack the gophers with a mallet. As soon as one gopher is smacked, another pops up! Often times the trails of a marriage can look like this. As soon as a couple overcomes one trial another pops up.

When I was in college I had a friend whose parents owned a home on the beach in Malibu, California. The home was an older home and they planned to rebuild one day when they retired. Meanwhile my friend and his college buddies lived at the beach in Malibu. One year there was a terrible storm and the house was destroyed along with many other expensive homes along the beachfront. I got to see Jesus' teaching firsthand in a dramatic way.

When that home was rebuilt they made sure the foundation was reinforced. And now there stands a beautiful home, at a beautiful location, but most importantly on a sure foundation.

The premise of our study is that if we build our house [ie. marriage relationships] on the foundation support of God's word, than our house will withstand the storms and trials of life

The Bible is adequate to deal with any test or trial that we encounter. In 2 Tim3:16 we are told: "that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for

correction, for instruction in righteousness” In over ten years of counseling ministry, I have yet to encounter a situation that God’s Word did not have the answer. We can trust the sufficiency of the Bible!

When I was working in downtown Los Angeles one year I watched a skyscraper being built. As I watched from my window on the twenty-third floor I wondered how tall the new building would be? One of the most amazing things I saw was how deep they were digging...the proverbial half way to China.

Although I don’t know the exact height, I recall the building was over seventy stories high!

The lesson is simple: if we want our marriages to stand tall and touch the sky and; if we want incredible views, we need to dig deep into God’s Word to support the structure.

### Building Design

To understand God’s design we need to go back to the beginning, before the fall of man recorded in Genesis 3. As we look to Genesis 1 and 2 we glean some important specifications from God’s blueprint on marriage.

#### *His Image and Being Fruitful*

In Gen.1:27 we read that, “God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them”. His image is not a reference to attributes reserved for God such as: all knowing, all-powerful, or ever present. Rather it is a reference to attributes described as: loving, patient, forgiving, holy, gracious, and merciful. These are the qualities that God desires us to demonstrate in our marriages.

As an aside, please note that God created man in His image and men have been returning the favor ever since. For example, when I remind someone that God reserved sexual intimacy for the marriage relationship and they tell me, “well you know God gave me the desire for sex so it must be okay”.

They have ignored a clear teaching of God and replaced it with an image that meets their own wants or desires. It is like going down the buffet line at a Chinese restaurant and picking and choosing the things we want... ‘I’ll take the sweet and sour chicken but I don’t like the beef with broccoli’. God’s directions and warnings are to guide us for what is best for us. They are not merely setting forth ideas to pick and choose according to our preference.

As we yield to God’s word we are being transformed into His image. When we recognize that God is God and yield to Him, not only do we discover that His way is better than our way but we start to be conformed to His image.

In Genesis 1:28 we are told: "Then God blessed them, and God said to them, 'be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'" As we have already seen, God has commanded us to be fruitful and; being fruitful is not limited to procreation.

### *The Need For Completion*

In Gen.2:18 we read that there is trouble in Paradise. God said " It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him. This is the first time in the creation account that we read that something is 'not good'. Creation is good and, at the end God declares that it is very good. God is declaring that it is not good to be alone when there is a desire for a spouse to make someone complete.

In 1 Corinthians seven at verses seven to nine the Apostle Paul explains that some are called to celibacy. But, others are called to marriage and have the desire to be wed. There is a sense that like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, the complimentary parts fit together to make a whole picture.

When I meet with a couple for pre marital counseling I ask them why they believe that God is bringing them together. They often tell me how much they have in common. I generally encourage them to consider their differences. It appears that God takes two people with complimentary differences and, brings them together to make a whole. As the saying goes...opposites attract.

Consider the differences between you and your spouse. There are probably differences when you consider how you organize [or don't organize] your closets. One of you probably eats significantly faster. One of you probably talks noticeably more. Generally as we are courting we tend to focus on the similarities. But God is using the differences to make us complete.

For example I am generally uptight about being on time. Karen, although she is prompt, has learned that the world will not end if we are fifteen minutes late. God has used Karen in my life to help me to relax about being on time. This is just one of many lessons I have learned from the differences between my lovely bride and I.

We often make the mistake of trying to make our spouse to be just like us assuming this will make our relationship perfect [since we generally believe that any problem in the relationship is our spouse's fault].

God wants us to learn from one another. But He does not want us to become one another.

When working to put a jigsaw puzzle together it is the fact that the pieces are different which actually allows them to fit together. On the other hand, two pieces with the same shape don't really fit together.

Two smooth sided pieces can be put next to one another. But they can't connect!

When God speaks of a 'helper comparable' we tend to assume that a helper is a weaker person who is subservient to the one who is helped. But the Hebrew language provides four words describing a helper. Here, the Hebrew word is generally used of God in His relationship to Israel. We know that God is not weaker or less than Israel. Accordingly, helper should not imply that a wife is less than her husband.

Remember God formed woman from man's side ...not Adam's foot to be walked on, or his head to rule over him. Furthermore in Gal.3:28 God makes it clear that men and women are equals in Christ.

In Genesis 2:24 we are told, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." This verse is repeated by Jesus in Matthew 19 and, by Paul in Ephesians. We have a picture of God's blueprint for marriage.

First, one flesh is not a picture of sexual intercourse but is the union of intimacy in a spiritual and, emotional realm more than a physical realm. Second, 'shall become' refers to a process. We grow to become one flesh as we learn about one another and understand each other.

At the marriage a husband and wife are one flesh in their position. But in their experience, they grow to become one flesh. Consider the concept of sanctification. When we receive Jesus as our Lord and we are born again we are sanctified or set apart to God.

We are as holy as we will ever be in our position because of our relationship with Jesus. Nevertheless, in our experience we continue to grow. It has been said that Jesus catches His fish and then He cleans them. As we are being cleaned we become more set apart to God in our experience rather than our position.

Similarly a husband and wife are one in their position at their marriage according to the work of God as described in Ephesians 5. As the couple grows together the process of the experience is manifest so they become one.

We should also note that we don't lose our identity as individuals. But, we no longer relate to one another as individuals. As Paul notes in Ephesians 5: no one wants to hurt their own flesh.

Note the message to Adam and Eve is a message for us. When God said 'a man must leave father and mother and be joined to his wife' Adam had no mother to leave [he probably didn't

have a belly button either]. The King James Version translates 'joined' as cleave. The admonition is, to leave, cleave and weave. We must make our spouse a priority over other family relationships. We must be joined to our spouse and, we must weave together to become one flesh.

Finally, consider Gen.2:25 "they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed." The man and the woman were vulnerable, no guilt, and no fear. There was refuge in the Garden of Eden and in the relationship. This is God's blueprint and design for our marriages. Sometimes this ideal seems particularly elusive when paradise has been lost. But without doubt God has given us His design and, He has also specified the building materials.

## Building Materials

### *Love*

1 Cor.13:4-8 is perhaps the best known portion of Scripture in our land. Proudly displayed on refrigerator magnets, posters and, read at almost every wedding. The Bible's description of God's love has become perhaps so familiar that we have lost sight of the wisdom and impact of the words. It would be good to go back and visit this passage like an old friend and spend some time together.

1 Cor.13:4-8: "Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails..."

Love is patient. We are told that love suffers long. Our culture is extremely impatient. We are in such a hurry that we get upset about waiting in line behind three people to pay for groceries or order fast food.

We get irritated when we buy microwave food that takes more than two minutes to prepare. Then we are too impatient to wait for the food to cool. So we eat the food any ways and pull the cheese and part of the roof of our mouth away. Barely slowing down as we inhale our food.

Our culture pressures us to think instant! On the other hand God is outside our time schedule. It reminds me of a story of a man who started a dialogue with God: He said " God you really are God and a thousand years is like a day to you, right?" And God said 'that's right'. Then the man said "and you own the cattle on a thousand hills, so a million dollars is like a penny to you right?" And God said 'that's right'. Then the man said "God can I please have a million dollars?" And God said "maybe in a day"



God is in the eternal and we are temporal. We tend to pray 'God give me patience and, I want it now.' A great way to learn patience is to have children [twins are especially good at bringing home the lessons]. Children, especially small ones, are not particularly receptive to getting 'our program'.

So we learn to be patient with their program. We are willing to do this because we change our expectation level to accommodate their maturity level. Similarly, we show love when we adjust our expectations and slow down to consider the pace of others in our world.

Love is kind. An antonym of kind is mean. When we have been hurt, we want to hurt them back. Mean hurtful words cut deep scars. Real love does not seek to hurt back or be mean. Instead, we are to stop someone else's anger by being kind.

Love does not envy. We can become jealous of the time and attention that our spouse gives to someone else. First time parents learn this quickly. The affection that used to be shown solely to a spouse is now directed in a large portion to a baby. The desire for the attention is likely to stir jealous feelings. Real love communicates their feelings without the ugliness of jealousy. We will consider this issue more when we discuss "Union Threats".

Love is not proud. One of the most damaging attitudes in a relationship is pride. Pride keeps us from saying 'I'm sorry, I was wrong'. Real love admits wrong. A spouse who is so proud that they refuse to admit where they were wrong will certainly harm their relationships.

Love is not self-seeking. Real love allows us to put our spouse's needs before our own. Most of us tend to be oriented to think 'what about me' rather than 'what about your needs'. We tend to be selfish. We spend ninety percent of our waking hours thinking about ourselves and; the other ten percent wondering what others think about us.

When I watch kids at the church nursery I marvel at how often I hear the word 'mine'. We don't need to train the children to be selfish...it comes naturally. If there are twenty toys in a room with only two children there are not enough toys because both want the same toy. God's love is spiritual and contrary to our natural behavior and attitudes. We learn to be selfless not selfish as we learn to love.

Love thinks no evil. Essentially, we want to be judged on our motives rather than for our actions. On the other hand, we tend to judge others for their actions without considering their motives.

For example, if you expect me to call you tomorrow and, I fail to call you, you are likely to be upset. You might start to think about how important the phone call was to you. And you might start to think about how insensitive I must be to forget to call. You might start to think about

how selfish I must be to utterly fail to call. You might even start to think that having a relationship with me is a waste of your time and effort since apparently I only care about myself!

That picture might change if I call you the next day and apologize and explain what happened. Your view might be different if I explained that I was at the hospital with my son all day. You might even feel bad that you had wrongly judged me.

Real love does not think evil but assumes the motives of others are good. Effectively, we think good about others until there is conclusive proof otherwise!

This kind of love keeps no record of wrong. When Peter asks Jesus how often he must forgive, Peter felt he was being generous when he proposed seven times. The Rabbis of Jesus' day taught that we were to forgive three times based on the picture in the prophetic book of Amos. In Amos, we see that God judged the nations for their fourth offense. Therefore, they presumed "three strikes and you're out".

Peter likely anticipated that Jesus would be pleased with Peter's apparent spiritual growth and his gracious offer. To our amazement Jesus corrects Peter and suggests that the correct number is seventy times seven or four hundred ninety. In the Bible seven is a number representing completeness or perfection. Seventy times seven is a picture of completeness forgiveness.

We tend to keep a record of wrongs... 'This is the third time you were late'. 'This is the tenth time you forgot to call' or ' This is the ninety-ninth time I asked you to slow down'. Then we say "Yes I'll forgive you". But we are thinking ' that's number four hundred seventy-five...you've got fifteen left!'

When Jesus told us to forgive give four hundred ninety times He was not suggesting that we keep score. To the contrary he is suggesting that we learn to forgive without keeping score. Real love keeps no record of wrongs.

Love is enduring. Real love is committed. We often think, "when the going gets tough the tough get going". Unfortunately, rather than get going and begin to work we get going to abandon ship. The type of love that works in relationships is enduring love.

Love never fails. Paul concludes this picture of love by telling us that God's love never fails. If we can learn to show this love in our marriages they will flourish and never fail!

As a diagnostic tool it may be helpful for us to go back and read 1Corinthians thirteen and insert the name of Jesus every time we see the word love. We find that the passage makes perfect

sense and flows smoothly. On the other hand, when we insert our names, it is difficult. This would be a particularly good practice when we are in the middle of a dispute with our spouse.

So many of our disputes could be stopped if we looked at our reflection through the mirror of God's description of love. If we were willing to consider where we were not being loving and, allow God to correct us, the foundation of our marriages would be stronger. Therefore we see that love is an essential building material for a strong foundation.

#### *Sanctity:*

In Ephesians 5 Paul tells us that husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church. Paul notes how Jesus gave himself for the church to sanctify it by the washing of water by the word. In Hebrews 13:4 we are told "marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled".

The marriage relationship is to be set apart or sanctified. The relationship is different from all other relationships. The marriage relationship is not defiled but is pure. We want to keep the marriage as set apart to one another and to God.

When we treat the relationship as different and pure we preserve the sanctity. In 1 Corinthians seven we learn that besides our relationship with God our marriage should be our top priority. We can compromise the sanctity of the marriage by treating it like any other relationship.

When we understand that our relationship with our mate should be different than our relationships with our parents, our children, our friends and, those we work with we are building a strong foundation.

#### *Appreciation:*

In Proverbs 18:22 we learn that 'he who finds a good wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the LORD'. Similarly, we are told in Proverbs 12:4 'that an excellent wife is the crown of her husband...'

Sometimes we forget that our spouse is a gift from God. Or we see them as a gift...but, a gag gift. Often times we have merely forgotten to appreciate our spouse. Sometimes I will share these verses with an individual or a couple during counseling. When they remind me that the verses contain qualifying language: 'good' and 'excellent' I must agree. But I tell them that they may be missing the spirit of the verses as they look for 'loopholes' to justify why they don't appreciate their spouse.

I marvel at how quickly we can change our feelings for a significant person in our life. Perhaps I shouldn't be surprised. In all likelihood many who cried out to Jesus "Hosanna...save now" as Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, were screaming "crucify Him" a week later.

We can fail to appreciate our spouse relatively rapidly. A couple that has been in a fight for a few days has lost sight of their spouse's traits that they previously appreciated. Sometimes, by simply stopping to think about what we appreciate, our perspective can change and; the conflict can be reduced.

When I meet with a couple in pre-marital counseling and, ask them to make a list of characteristics of their future mate that bless them, they often take out several large pieces of notepaper. When I meet with the same couple a year later for marriage counseling and ask them to make a list of traits that bless them they often pull out a one-inch post-it note. We need to learn to appreciate our spouse!

#### HOMEWORK:

1. Make a list of at least five characteristics of the person, you are in a relationship with, which are pleasing to you. Share the list with them.
2. Find out about the other person's: favorite food, dessert, song, color, Bible verse, dreams and, disappointments. Share with them about yourself.
3. Make a list of character traits that you see described in the Bible that you consider admirable. Don't limit your list to the character traits that you believe you already demonstrate. Ask yourself where you need to grow and whether you are willing to change?

## Chapter 2: Reconciliation

Issue of Resentment:

In the book of Hebrews we are told “looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any *root of bitterness* springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled...” [Heb.12:15]. The picture of the root of bitterness helps us to see that bitterness is often below the surface and grows deep.

We often approach dealing with bitterness like most of us do our yard work. When we see a weed we take our lawn mower and cut the top off. We assume that we have dealt with it. We are surprised when we see that weed pop up a few weeks later. The root of bitterness, like the roots of a weed can strangle out life below the surface.

When a weed springs up it causes trouble. Not only is it unsightly in the garden, but it then spreads causing other weeds to pop up. This does more damage. That is how the root of bitterness is.

Imagine a couple in a conflict. She has been spending money on the credit card for clothing. They are on a tight budget and she is afraid that he might be upset. So she decides not to tell him about the credit card. When he asks about the new clothes, she responds ‘these old things...I just haven’t worn them for years’.

She hides the credit card bills and tries to keep him from finding out. Finally he discovers the truth. He is angry and hurt. He is mad that she lied and, questions her faith for the deception. They talk about the events and she says ‘I’m sorry...will you forgive me?’ He tells her he forgives her and soon thereafter they say goodnight.

Three months later he discovers that she has once again hidden the credit card bill. He understandably assumes that she is on another shopping spree. When she comes home he angrily accuses her of lying and deception. He yells at her ‘you’re doing it again! How can you call yourself a Christian! You’re a hypocrite!’

Her eyes swell with tears and then the silence is broken as the children are heard looking and listening through the doorway. She starts to cry and begins to explain that the credit card bill had a charge for his birthday present and, she wanted to keep it a surprise. He examines the bill, once again, and to his surprise she is telling the truth. He is embarrassed and ashamed for what he thought, what he said, and how he said it. He then tries to reconcile and apologize to his wife and his small kids.

In this example, we see the problem of the root of bitterness. After the initial confrontation, she apologized and asked for forgiveness. He agreed to forgive. But, he merely removed the weed above the surface! The evidence that the root was still present and growing was seen in the way he responded regarding the second incident. The extent of anger and resentment was proportional to the angry manner in which he confronted his wife.

Similarly, we see that many were defiled when the bitterness sprang up. The children were frightened and threatened by the conflict. They wonder: 'why is Daddy yelling at Mommy? Why is Mommy crying? What is going to happen to us? Did we do something wrong? Clearly the children suffered when the bitterness sprang up.

There is another way that many people can become defiled when our bitterness springs up. Many of us have had the experience of being upset with our spouse and talking to a third party to seek comfort. Most of the time we don't approach the third person truly seeking counsel where we are blowing it. Rather we seek to gain support for our position, which generally paints us as the hero and our spouse as the bad guy.

The problem is that conceptually we are forcing the third person to effectively choose between us. Frequently that third party cares about both husband and wife. We have just created division, whether or not we intended to. And many become entangled in the web and are defiled.

Therefore we need to honestly consider how bitter and angry we are and; we need to dig deep to remove the root of bitterness. The picture of the gardener on their knees removing weeds, root and all, is a good picture to see. On our knees is a good picture of the position of prayer and humility.

Where does the problem of bitterness and anger begin? James asks: "Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?" {James 4:1}.

The problem is often related to our own selfishness and self-righteousness.

In Proverbs 18:17 we learn that 'the first one to plead his cause seems right, until his neighbor comes and examines him'. When people in a relationship are in conflict and, they describe the problem to us, they generally tell us how the other person is at fault. Then we hear from the other person and the story is one hundred eighty degrees different. Generally, the truth lies somewhere between the two polar extremes.

I have a neighbor who has a perfect lawn. Every Saturday morning I see him diligently on his knees carefully scrutinizing his lawn to remove any weeds and their roots. Although I must

confess that I have not been inspired regarding my lawn, I have certainly seen an example regarding dealing with bitterness and anger.

We will once again see the need to remove the log from our own eye that we can see clearly to remove the splinter from our neighbor's eye. Self-examination is necessary to remove the weeds and the root of bitterness [see, Matt. 7:1-5].

Unbridled anger is one of the major factors related to the issue of resentment and need for reconciliation. In Proverbs 14:17 we read 'A quick tempered man acts foolishly, and a man of wicked intentions is hated'. Some people seem to have a longer fuse when it comes to anger. Those with a short fuse often do foolish hurtful things when they explode.

Anger can often have a cyclical dynamic in relationships. We can learn to respond with anger to others who show anger towards us. I once watched a woman at the shopping mall "smack" the older son who was hitting his little brother. As she hit him she said: "where did you learn to hit your little brother..."

It is not exactly a mystery where he probably learned to hit his little brother. The cycle of anger frequently generates more anger as we respond in kind by reacting to the anger. Note that it only takes one person to stop the cycle and break the chain.

In Proverbs 15:1 we see that a soft answer turns away wrath. But a harsh word stirs up anger. And in Proverbs 17:14 we see that the beginning of strife is like releasing water; therefore stop contention before a quarrel starts. Conflicts and resentment can be reduced when at least one person in the relationship learns to respond in love rather than react in anger.

James instructs and reminds us: 'Therefore my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.' James tells us we are brothers and that relationship should bridle our anger. He shows us that we should truly listen to what the other person is saying rather than rehearsing our defense or our scathing rebuttal. There is a reason that God gave us two ears and only one mouth. The instruction to be slow to wrath should stir us to ask God to extend our fuse.

As a practical matter it may be helpful for us to take a brief time out before responding. It is good to think about what the other person has said before responding. Also, we should think about our proposed response before we actually say a word.

Initiating Reconciliation:

First we must come to realize that reconciliation is primarily a spiritual more than an emotional issue. The Master told us that love for our enemies would distinguish Christians [Matt. 5:44].

This love is based on obedience, not circumstances, emotions or how others are responding to us.

An enemy could be described as a person who harms us or is perceived as a threat to harm us. Our tendency is to withdraw from enemies or confront them in battle [the fight or flight syndrome]. When a couple begins to withdraw from each other their communication and contact becomes minimal. They look for separate areas in their home to establish as their territory and, they arrange their schedules to avoid contact with each other. After a few weeks of living like this it becomes their 'normal' way of living.

A couple which has lived like this stops feeling that a spouse is their friend. When they come to me and explain their situation I often nod in agreement and say, "so it sounds like they feel more like a neighbor than like a spouse". They are quick to nod in agreement and commend my insight. Then I ask, "How does Jesus say we should we treat our neighbor?"

Then they start shaking their heads and begin to explain to me how bad the situation is. They tell me that they don't talk with one another and they avoid seeing each other. Then I interject: "Oh I see, the situation is so bad that they are not really like a neighbor but it's like enemies". At this point they are encouraging me that I have been gifted by God to counsel couples. Then I interrupt and ask, "how does Jesus tell us we should treat our enemies?" At this point they realize the point.

One of the difficult steps in the dynamic of restoration is taking the first step to initiate reconciliation.

When God has spoken to our heart that restoration is needed, the issue becomes who will take the first step. Often a couple is thinking: "I would be willing to forgive if they ask. But I shouldn't have to ask first".

Jesus instructed us about initiating reconciliation in the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 5:23 we are told: "therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

We have all experienced how difficult it is to focus on God when we are thinking about an argument with our mate. When we realize that our dispute focuses our attention away from worshipping God we want to get right with others so we can restore our relationship with God! This can be a powerful motivation to take the first step.

The process does not depend on who is at fault. We are told to seek reconciliation if our brother has something against us. It does not matter whether we believe they are wrong or whether we are ready to admit where we are wrong. Our responsibility is to seek to be



reconciled. I can focus on God more clearly once I have tried to be reconciled whether my offer was received or not.

In Matthew 5:44 we see a snapshot of how we are to love our enemies. Jesus teaches us

“But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.”

Essentially, Jesus tells us to:

1. bless,
2. do good, and
3. pray.

Notice that Jesus does not tell us to run up to our enemy and give them a big hug and kiss and, tell them that they are God’s precious gift to us. As we initiate reconciliation we recognize that there is a progression which needs to develop before restoration truly takes place.

I believe that compatibility is not how much we have in common but how we resolve our differences! In Ephesians 4:26 we are reminded, “not to let the sun go down on our wrath or give place to the devil”. This verse provides some particularly important lessons about initiating reconciliation.

First, we want to get in the habit of seeking to reconcile before the end of each day. If possible, we should talk, begin to address the issues, and ask for forgiveness where we are wrong. At the least, we are encouraged to seek reconciliation as promptly as possible. Sometimes someone is so upset that they want to delay the discussion until the next day. When we are concerned about saying hurtful things in our anger that would only escalate the conflict, it may be helpful to wait until we have cooled off.

Second, we need to learn to deal with it rather than stuffing it. When we go to bed angry and we have ‘shut down’ rather than communicate our feelings we are merely stuffing it rather than dealing with it. It might be sufficient to say ‘I’m really angry and I’m not ready to talk about it. Let’s just pray and we’ll talk more in the morning’. This communication acknowledges the feelings and along with the prayer helps to defuse the bomb. In this situation, we want to remember to follow-up the next day rather than ignoring or stuffing the feelings.

Third, we need to be on guard to avoid giving a place to the devil. The enemy of men’s souls is just as real as the True and Living God. And as much as God loves marriage, Satan hates marriage. The devil wants to drive a wedge of division between a husband and wife. Our

refusal to initiate reconciliation allows that wedge to drive deep and deeper to separate a relationship.

Consider the **steps of preparation for restoration** seen in the case of Joseph and his brothers in Genesis 42. We can identify these steps as follows:

1. *clock*
2. *communication*
3. *compassion*
4. *conviction*
5. *confession*

*1. clock:* in the context of Joseph and his brothers, more than twenty years passed since Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers. Joseph spent thirteen years as a servant and a prisoner. For more than seven years Joseph has been the second in command in Egypt. Joseph has been the administrator during seven years of plentiful harvest and now continues to govern in the midst of seven years of famine.

The passage of time in this case was necessary to bring about restoration that could not have taken place twenty years before. The passage of time has allowed God to work to prepare the hearts of Joseph and his brothers. I am not encouraging you to wait twenty years to initiate reconciliation but we should recognize the clock. Sometimes days or weeks or even months may need to pass for us to be prepared for reconciliation.

*2. communication:* As a result of the famine the brothers are compelled to go to Egypt. The brothers do not realize what God has been doing in the life of Joseph. Nor do they realize the position their brother now holds. Nevertheless, God is orchestrating the circumstances so that they communicate. Although they were not seeking to communicate, God will use the communication to prepare for restoration.

Imagine a couple that is not talking because he forgot Valentine's Day. She is hurt and angry and doesn't even want to talk with him. Then the sink is clogged and backs up. She tries to fix the problem with a plunger because the last thing she wants to do is ask for help. But the drain remains clogged. Finally, although she does not want to, she asks her husband to help. They start to talk about the sink and, the beginning of dialogue begins to prepare the way for restoration.

*3. compassion:* as Joseph's brothers are presented to him he recognizes them. But they don't recognize Joseph. They would not expect Joseph in that position. Also, he is speaking to them in an Egyptian dialect through a Hebrew interpreter. He is wearing the clothes of an Egyptian

official and, is clean-shaven like Egyptians unlike the bearded Hebrews. Furthermore it's been over twenty years since they have seen their little brother.

Joseph orders that his brothers be placed in prison for three days. It is during the time of imprisonment that the brothers get a taste of what Joseph experienced as a result of their mistreatment of him. Compassion generally must flow from empathy for another person's situation.

The husband who forgets Valentine's Day may not appreciate why his wife is upset or her disappointment. Perhaps if he was hoping that she would organize a surprise 50<sup>th</sup> birthday party for him and, instead she merely makes dinner reservations, he could better understand.

They drive home after an early birthday dinner at one of his favorite restaurants and he is sure there is going to be a house full of people ready to scream 'surprise' as he opens the door. He thinks to himself as he is driving that she and his friends really did a good job since nobody 'let the cat out of the bag'. He's even more impressed when he considers how careful everyone was to park there car where he would not see. He tries to hide his anticipation as he opens the door...but there is no surprise [except that there is no surprise]. Being the eternal optimist, he assumes everyone is in another room...but there is no surprise party.

He tries to hide his disappointment but later tells his wife what he was thinking and feeling. He then tells her he thinks he better understands how she felt when she was hurt about Valentine's Day. Compassion for another person's feelings is a necessary step to prepare for restoration. As an aside, I am not suggesting that a spouse intentionally mistreat their mate to prove a point or attempt to generate compassion.

*4.conviction:* As the brothers have three days to reflect, God is preparing their hearts. They say to one another "We are truly guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear; therefore this distress has come upon us." The compassion for Joseph's situation prepared the way for a sense of conviction that what they had done to Joseph was wrong.

The husband who forgets Valentine's Day might not initially have a sense of conviction that what he did was hurtful. He might be thinking 'she is overreacting, and why is she so upset...it's no big deal'. But after his disappointment on his 50<sup>th</sup> birthday he now sees that he was insensitive about Valentine's Day. The awareness of where we have been wrong is the next necessary step to prepare for restoration.

*5.confession:* As the narrative unfolds we see that the brothers are talking to one another in Joseph's presence. They do not realize that it is Joseph nor do they realize that this Egyptian official can understand their comments in Hebrew. As they admit to one another that what

they did to Joseph was wrong and that God is now correcting them Joseph is understanding every word.

Not only did Joseph understand every word but he was touched by the words. We are told that as Joseph heard the words that he turned away so that his brothers would not see his tears. The brothers' confession, albeit unintentional, allowed Joseph to be vulnerable to consider restoration.

The husband who sincerely apologizes to his wife for forgetting Valentine's Day and hurting her is likely to see real restoration. The husband who merely says that he is sorry without any real sense of wrongdoing is far less likely to experience true restoration.

**Insuring Restoration:** Consider with me Paul's words to the Church at Ephesus and to us: Eph 4:29-32: "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you. Preliminarily, we should note that our words have power. Our words can either build up or tear down. The saying that 'sticks and stones can break our bones but words can never hurt us' is clearly false. I am persuaded that countless hours of counseling time is devoted to undoing the damage of hurtful words

We need to realize that our hurtful words are damaging to our relationships and grieve God as well as our spouse. We also need to learn that we need to affirmatively insure that we speak words that build up and encourage rather than tearing down, hurting our spouse or even being silent.

Imagine a couple that has been married for ten years who are meeting with a counselor. She explains how all he ever says is 'she is doing something wrong'. And he never tells her that he loves her. He interjects to explain 'I told her when we got married that I love her and that if I ever changed my mind I'd let her know. Besides if I don't tell her she's doing something wrong she can assume she's doing fine'. Is it a mystery why they are seeking help from a counselor?

The essence of this passage, in the context of insuring restoration, is the need to forgive one another as God in Christ forgave us. We see that a prerequisite is to be kind. As we have seen the need to stop being mean and to love is contemplated in kindness. You can't really have restoration and forgiveness until you stop wanting revenge and payback.

Also, we need to be tenderhearted. The opposite of a tender heart is a hard heart. Jesus told us that the problem of hardness of heart was the reason why relationships end in divorce

[Matt.19:8]. Hardness of heart is a condition of callousness, which keeps us from feeling. When we stop caring for our spouse it is impossible to forgive or be restored.

The key to insuring restoration is to learn to forgive as God forgives us through the work of Jesus. The question then becomes how does God forgive?

In Micah 7:19 we learn that “God will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities. He will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.” It has been said that God casts our sins into the depths and, places a sign “no fishing”.

In Psalm103:12 we are told “as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.

In Jeremiah 31:34 we see that: God will forgive our sin and He will remember our sin no more. Since God is all knowing, it is impossible for Him not to know. God does not literally forget. When we read that God remembers our sin no more it means He no longer accounts our sin against us.

When we read that our sin is removed and cast to the depths of the sea, or cast as far as the east is from the west, it means that God is not going to bring it up again. In contrast, we generally say things like “ I forgive you but I can’t forget.” God wants us to forgive and not throw it back in each other’s face later!

Imagine the situation where a husband has been secretly looking at pornography, or a wife has had an affair. These situations cause deep wounds. The feelings of anger, rejection, loss of trust, betrayal, and separation are intense. Many of those feelings [and others] are overwhelming. It is reasonable to expect that there will be some time before there is reconciliation.

The person, whose conduct has been exposed, either voluntarily or involuntarily, will ideally confess their wrongdoing and ask for forgiveness as soon as possible. Ironically this places their spouse in a difficult situation. They know that God desires them to forgive, but especially initially they are not ready to forgive.

It takes some time to work through the feelings in order to understand and accept. A biblical example of this principle is seen in the life of Job. In the first chapter of the book we learn that Job loses his children and his property. Job’s initial response is characteristic of this godly man: “Naked I came from my mother’s womb and naked I shall return there. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.”

While we certainly admire Job's godly response to this tragedy, we also must realize that it fails to adequately address the feelings Job is experiencing. As we read through the book, we see that Job wrestles for the next thirty-six chapters with his feelings. He is sad and angry as he is grieving. He wonders why these tragedies have come upon his family. Finally, Job is ready to hear God; and Job learns an important lesson in trusting God even in calamity.

Consider once again the marriage situation. The first spouse asks for forgiveness and now the ball is in the other's court. Less than twenty-four hours have passed. There is essentially no way that the one who has been hurt can process all of these feelings fast enough to truly forgive at that point. A responsible communication might sound like 'I want to forgive but I'm not able to yet. It's going to take some time for me to process all of these feelings'.

It is then reasonable to begin communicating feelings. When we have been hurt, we want to hurt back. Ideally, we can focus on our own feelings without pointing a finger to tell our spouse how horrible they are. This process can take days, weeks or months. But then comes the time to forgive. When we forgive our spouse we are agreeing with them and with God that we desire to no longer hold our resentment against our spouse. Also, we no longer want to bring it up and throw it in their face.

God must be truly saddened when we think and say things like 'well what about what you did ten years ago?' If we have truly forgiven someone we no longer have a need or desire to write something on the chalkboard that we supposedly erased.

What could motivate us to forgive like this, especially after such a painful event? Remember Paul's charge to us in Ephesians 4:32 'forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you'. This is the key that unlocks the chains of resentment that binds relationships.

Once we begin to apprehend and appreciate how much God has forgiven us we can start to understand the grace we have received and the need to show that grace to our spouse. Imagine someone who shares about their life before they knew Jesus.

They tell about how they were the biggest drug-dealer in Florida [I'm always amazed how many people were the biggest drug dealer in Florida. Do they have an awards ceremony like a beauty pageant?]. As they learn that God has forgiven them of all of their sins, because of Jesus, they probably have a sense that they have been forgiven much.

On the other hand, imagine someone who has been a Christian since childhood. They start to think about some of the bad things they have done. Then they say: "I once thought about stealing a pack of gum from the market when I was thirteen. I felt so bad because I knew it was wrong...and besides it wasn't sugarless gum. I didn't take it but I felt bad for wanting to."

This person probably feels that when God got them “on the team” that God got a pretty good deal. It will be very difficult for the second person to forgive because they don’t really appreciate just how much they have been forgiven. In Isaiah 64:6 we discover that all our righteousness is like filthy rags to God. If our best efforts, apart from God, are filthy rags imagine just how ugly our ‘other stuff’ looks...

It can be very difficult for the concept of forgiveness to travel the short distance from our head to our heart. Sometimes, we need to feel that we have really blown it, and then been forgiven, before we can truly demonstrate grace and forgive someone else. It is because God has forgiven us of so much that we are motivated to forgive one another.

This is a deep spiritual truth. The ability to forgive is an evidence of spiritual maturity. Similarly an unwillingness to forgive demonstrates a need to grow in the grace and understanding of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ [2 Pet.3:18].

The key to insuring restoration requires us to understand what biblical forgiveness means, and to be willing to demonstrate that forgiveness in our relationships.

#### *Inspection of Reluctance:*

Why don’t we forgive? There are probably several factors that impact our ability to forgive. Many of these reasons we are consciously aware of and others we probably have not thought about. Here is a few to consider:

1.*control*: By refusing to forgive someone we feel that we have some sense of power and control over them and their conduct. The desire for control may be limited to the issue or area that is the cause of pain, however, it will more likely spill into many areas. This desire for control is contrary to God’s ideal of a team.

2.*the desire for revenge*: sometimes we won’t forgive because we want to inflict pain upon the person who has hurt us. By refusing to interact with our spouse [ie. ‘The silent treatment’] or, reminding them how horrible they are we want them to hurt. Remember it is God’s job to avenge and our responsibility to love them [Lev.19:18].

3.*fear of being hurt again*: When we truly forgive, we are vulnerable to be hurt again. Sometimes the deep level of pain that we have experienced causes us to build thick walls like a heavily fortified city. Forgiving someone who has attacked and hurt us is threatening.

It may be helpful to approach this situation progressively. For example, imagine that the walls can initially remain in place but we allow the gates to be open to permit a delegation to enter. Over the course of time we learn that our former enemy truly seeks peace and we begin to

allow a larger delegation in. Ultimately we take down the walls and live in peace with a neighbor who was a former enemy.

*4.fear of relationships:* some of us seem to function better independently and, don't function particularly well in the marriage setting. When there is a conflict that appears to justify the lack of intimacy in our relationship it can provide a mask for an underlying fear of the marriage relationship. By not forgiving, we can justify our fear of the marriage relationship by blaming the other person's conduct. We need to learn to forgive and, to take responsibility to deal with our own issues.

*5.rebellion against God:* our refusal to be willing to forgive is a picture of rebellion against God. Sometimes we are not aware of the rebellion. On the other hand, there are some occasions where people think "I don't care what God says, I'm not going to forgive them". This is a dangerous place to be! Remember that Jesus linked our ability to forgive others and God's forgiveness of us.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said:

"If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" [Matt.5:14-15].

Refusal to be willing to forgive may be the result of temporary rebellion against God or, may mean we have yet to generally yield our life to Him. If we have received God's forgiveness we desire to forgive others.

*6.a lack of appreciation of God's grace:* even Christians who know that they have been forgiven may fail to appreciate just how much we have been forgiven. Unfortunately, until we understand just how ugly our sin looks to God we cannot begin to perceive just how much we have been forgiven. When we mature in our understanding of God and, how much we have been forgiven, we desire to forgive others.

HOMEWORK:

- 1.List three traits about yourself which you desire God to change about you.
- 2.List three traits about your spouse which upset you and, you would like to change about them. Ask God to help you accept those things.
- 3.Divide a piece of paper, or several pieces of paper, into two columns. In the first column write down a history of the major issues or conflicts with you and your spouse. Write down



exactly how you feel without trying to be “more spiritual” than you really feel. As you prepare the history describe the problems as well as the cause of the problems.

Once you have completed the entire list, review your history. Most of us will see that we have blamed the other person in the relationship for [all] the problems. Now go back and, in the second column consider where you were at fault. When you have finished this phase, go back again and reconsider where you were at fault. Confess where you have been wrong to God and the other person and, ask for forgiveness [James 5:16].

4. Review the section: Inspection of Reluctance: Why Don't We Forgive? Consider why you have been unwilling to forgive.

5.If you are still having problems reconciling, consider seeking godly biblical counsel. Avoid the counsel of the ungodly [Ps.1:1]. Ideally seek counsel together. But if your spouse is not willing at this time, consider seeking counsel as an individual to work on your own issues. Seeking godly counsel can help us to see godly solutions to our problems. It will also provide some objective insight as to areas where we are wrong. The Bible warns us that every way of a man seems right in his own eyes [Pr.21:22].

6. Remember the exhortation of Rom.12:21 “do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good”. Try to do good to your spouse.

7.Remember to be patient...love suffers long and is kind [1Cor.13:4].

## Chapter 3: Unity

### Problem of Divorce

A story is told of a woman who came to see a lawyer about a divorce. As she shared with him the problems in their relationship he listened carefully. Then he clasped his hands together upon his desk and looked across the desk and said to her “okay here’s the plan. For the next thirty days I want you to treat him like a king. Make him his favorite meals, suggest he watch more sports on the television, and give him everything he wants...everything.” She said “everything ...I don’t want to give him anything except a divorce.”

The lawyer then explained that if she treated him like a king for thirty days it would be like taking him to the penthouse suite of a fifty-story hotel in a glass elevator. Then they would serve the divorce papers and, it would be like cutting the elevator cable and watching him crash into the basement! She gleefully began to rub her hands together and mischievously smiled. And she said to him “I’ll do it!”

At the end of thirty days the lawyer called the woman and said “I’ve got your divorce papers ready if you want to come in and sign”. The woman had a noticeably different tone to her voice, gone was the anger and desire for revenge. She told the lawyer “You know I followed your advice and did exactly what you told me to do. And somewhere during the last thirty days things changed. He’s been treating me great and, we’re doing a whole lot better.”

The lawyer then asked her “ so I guess that means that you don’t want to file for divorce?” And the woman said to him “no...we don’t need a divorce. But I want to pay you for your work. How much do I owe you for preparing the papers?” The lawyer said to her “don’t worry...you don’t owe me anything”. As the lawyer hung up the telephone he smiled. He had never actually prepared divorce papers for them. He knew that what they needed was for one of them to love the other, not a divorce.

The issue is whether divorce is the solution to marriage difficulty or whether there is a better way? We need to consider whether divorce is the solution or, in the alternative whether divorce is in fact a problem? This debate is certainly not new and, was presented during Jesus’ day.

In Jesus’ day there were primarily two rabbinical views regarding the issue of divorce. The issues related to the interpretation of the Mosaic Law as codified in Deuteronomy 24:1. Therein we read that a man could divorce his wife if she lost favor in his eyes because he found some uncleanness in her. What was meant regarding the term ‘uncleanness’?

The liberal view stated that a man could divorce his wife for any reason. This view focused more on the aspect of losing favor. This view allowed for divorce if a man found a woman who was prettier, if a wife burned a meal and, if a wife said something critical about her husband's parents.

The conservative view interpreted the term uncleanness to relate to sexual immorality [e.g. adultery]. Matthew nineteen records the religious leaders encounter with Jesus regarding this issue.

"The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him and saying to Him, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason? And He answered and said to them, "have you not read that He who made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate."

The Pharisees then asked why did the law make provision for divorce? Jesus explained that the Mosaic Law made provision for divorce because of the problem of hardness of our hearts. But God's plan from the beginning of creation did not contemplate divorce.

Jesus concluded his response by saying: "whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery..." Thus, Jesus clearly taught that the only biblical ground for divorce is sexual immorality. It should be recalled that the Old Testament penalty for adultery is death by stoning. Once the offender was punished, the widow or widower was free to remarry. Effectively sexual immorality is seen as breaking the union of husband and wife such that the "one flesh" is ripped apart.

In our culture, we are faced with a conflict between competing views regarding the issue of divorce. The secular courts state that "irreconcilable differences" are a sufficient ground for divorce. This would apparently include the following: finding a prettier mate, burning a meal and, a disparaging view of the in-laws. In contrast, Jesus is still saying the same thing...divorce is recognized only in the case of sexual immorality.

Clearly divorce is not the unpardonable sin, however, in light of the Lord's teaching we need to seek to preserve the unity of marriage and avoid divorce wherever possible! The last prophetic voice of the Old Testament was the Prophet Malachi. In the second chapter, God rebuked the Hebrew men for mistreating their wives.

Mal 2:14-16

14 Yet you say, "For what reason?" Because the LORD has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, with whom you have dealt treacherously; yet she is your companion and your wife by covenant.

15 But did He not make them one, having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth.

16 "For the LORD God of Israel says that He hates divorce, for it covers one's garment with violence," says the LORD of hosts. "Therefore take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously."

In this portion of scripture God gives us five reasons not to divorce:

1. *Companion* : the term companion refers to helping to meet another person's needs. It is great when your spouse is your best friend or your buddy. But here, the concept of companion relates to our obligation to care for our spouse, not merely God saying 'remember you buddy'.

God warns us twice in this passage not to deal treacherously with our spouse. We tend to associate being treacherous with plotting evil. Yet, again this term is related to failing to consider the other person. God tells us twice not to be treacherous for emphasis...we need to be reminded because we tend to be selfish.

2. *Covenant*: God reminds us, that husbands and wives are bound by sacred vows. The marriage covenant is distinct from other contracts that we can break at the risk of paying damages. The vows we make to our spouse on our wedding day are not only between two parties. But the vows are made with God. We pledge to love, honor and care for our spouse, despite the circumstances, till death do us part or till the Lord comes. God wants us to honor this agreement as a sacred covenant.
3. *Cleave* : God has taken two and made them into one. As a man leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife the two become one flesh [Gen.2:24]. The divorce rips apart the fabric of a marriage where God has brought two together as one.

I remember a factory in Oregon where they manufactured plywood. I marvel at the strength of the boards. Pieces which have been pressed and, glued together can withstand an impressive load. But when the pieces are splintered and pulled apart it is an ugly mess. Similarly, when the two cleave as one, a marriage can withstand an impressive load. And when a marriage is pulled apart it is generally an ugly mess.

4. *Children*: God seeks to bring godly offspring from the marriage relationship. An environment to raise godly children is one of God's primary reasons for the marriage

relationship. This is often one of the most difficult issues to address in the context of marriage and divorce.

Parents contemplating a divorce struggle to make a decision that will be best for their children. The conflict between raising children in a marriage that is struggling or divorcing and raising the children alone or in a new relationship is gut wrenching.

Parents are unlikely to intend to hurt their children. It is fair to assume that a parent wants what they believe is best for the child. Trusting that God knows what is best for us, and our children, especially in tumultuous times is difficult. Accordingly, we want to learn that God desires to preserve the unity of the family because it is best for the family

5. *Contempt*: We see that God hates divorce! This is an intentionally strong statement of God's contempt for divorce. Divorce, we are told, covers one's garments with violence. Nothing can bring out the ugliness of the human flesh like divorce.

When we hear of a couple that is going through an 'amicable' divorce we marvel that they are being 'civil'...why? Because we have learned from God and, our anecdotal observations that divorces are ugly wars! God hates divorce because it violently rips apart at the fabric of unity. While I agree that most divorces do not involve physical violence, the emotional and spiritual violence is just as real and, just as devastating!

The unfortunate reality is that the children are often conscripted to be the little soldiers in this battle. Whether the parents intend to or not, children are often manipulated in the battle like pawns on a chessboard! Frequently they become casualties of friendly fire. In my counseling ministry I have counseled many adults who are still struggling with issues relating to growing up in a home where there has been a divorce. I have also ministered to many children who are struggling with issues because of their parents' decision to divorce.

In addition I have observed 'communities' torn apart because of a couple's decision to divorce. There is a sense that friends, extended family, neighbors and associates are asked to choose between the combatants in the family feud. The husband and wife are either covertly or overtly seeking to rally allies in the battle.

The tactic in the battle plan seems harmless. The husband and wife merely seek to demonstrate to others the righteousness of their behavior and, to justify their decision by demonstrating how impossible it is to be in a relationship with their spouse. Unfortunately, the logical result of this process is an implicit expectation that the listener will choose to agree with them and, reject the position of their spouse.

Accordingly, it is not merely a husband and wife who are torn apart in the violence of divorce. We should not be surprised that God tells us plainly that He hates divorce! Similarly, I am certain that God is not particularly thrilled with 'bad marriages'. Please realize that I am not advocating bad marriages. I want encourage couples that there is hope for struggling marriages and that divorce is not the answer. There is a better way! If we will yield to God and do it His way our relationships will be changed and we will be blessed!

I have been blessed to watch marriages that were on the endangered species list being transformed. I have seen marriages that were dead be resurrected by God. I have heard couples testify at marriage retreats, church, small groups and, in my office that they wanted to get a divorce. They were going to give God just one more chance. And then the miracle happened...and now their marriage is great!

God wants to encourage us not to give up hope for our marriage! If it appears that 'It will take a miracle' ...remember God is in the miracle business!

### The Separation Consideration

The Bible addresses the issue of separation in Paul's first letter to the Church at Corinth.

1 Cor 7:10-16

*10Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband.*

*11But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife.*

*12But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her.*

*13And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him.*

*14For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy.*

*15But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace.*

*16For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?*

*(NKJ)*

In the cultural context, Paul is writing to the church to address the issue where only one spouse comes to the faith. The church sought to determine whether to remain married or what to do in light of the difficulty navigating these previously uncharted waters in their marriages. Verse eleven speaks of 'depart'.

Here, we can examine principles regarding the issue of separation.

In verses ten to thirteen, God instructs believers that they are not to end the marriage relationship merely because their spouse has not yet come to the faith. In that situation a wife should not depart from her husband. Yet, the Lord goes on to tell us that if she does depart, she is to remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband [see,v.11].

There is recognition of the fact that circumstances may necessitate separation, however, may not warrant divorce. For example, a spouse who is being physically abused is certainly free to separate from the abuse. Similarly, a parent who discovers that their spouse is abusing drugs, alcohol, or pornography would certainly have liberty to remove herself and the children from the dangerous environment.

To the extent that a spouse is at risk of imminent serious harm there is a corresponding need and basis for separation. On the other hand, separation should not be a tool to be used *carte blanche* when there is any type of conflict. For example, imagine a couple that gets into an argument. The mere fact that they are in an argument would probably not justify an extended separation.

A more difficult scenario involves abusive language including but not limited to profanity. Here, it would probably be better to have an agreed 'time out' .The couple would agree to 'separate' into neutral areas long enough to cool down, seek the Lord, and come again to be reconciled. A time out would generally be limited to a couple of hours or less. This brief 'separation' is distinct from moving out of the house for a period of weeks.

In this scenario, a brief time out appears preferable to an extended separation. Nevertheless, as the verbal abuse becomes more inflammatory and habitual, a more extended separation may become necessary. Furthermore, where there has been a history of angry and violent outbursts, getting away for a more extended period may be appropriate and necessary where there is a real risk of imminent harm.

What is the purpose of a separation? We are told that the purpose of separation is to help facilitate reconciliation [see 1Cor.7:11]. The object is to change the dynamic of the conflict to help to identify issues and solutions and; to encourage restoration and a fruitful marriage! The purpose of separation is not to merely take a preliminary step before completing a planned divorce.

Too often people enter into a separation arrangement without intending to be reconciled. In other words, they arrange for separation assuming that they are going to be getting a divorce. It should not be surprising to them or to us that in fact these people often end up divorced. On

the other hand, someone who enters into a separation arrangement with the intention of being reconciled as soon as possible seems more likely to experience restoration.

How long should a separation last? In 1Cor.7:5 Paul encouraged couples that they should come together again so that Satan would not tempt them. In verse five Paul was addressing sexual intimacy, but the principle is where I want us to focus. A separation should be intended from the onset to last only as long as absolutely necessary.

Satan desires to draw a wedge between husbands and wives and to divide marriages. Recall that Eve was tempted in the Garden of Eden while she was separated from Adam. The ideal is for husband and wife to dwell together not apart. The longer the separation the greater the risk of temptation and further division.

Also, we are generally “creatures of habit”. After developing a pattern of behavior for twenty to thirty days or more it becomes a habit. When a married couple is apart, they start to learn to function essentially as a single person. This becomes their norm.

As these patterns are repeated they become more ingrained, more familiar and more comfortable. Similarly, they become more difficult to terminate. Accordingly, we want to approach a separation seeking restoration as soon as possible.

In Matthew 3, John the Baptist told the religious leaders to bear fruit worthy of repentance. I believe this is helpful counsel in regard to the duration of separation issue. As soon as a couple sees evidence of true repentance and change, as opposed to empty words, it is time to plan to end the separation.

Finally, note that in v. 16 Paul reminds us that a godly influence in the home can help bring our spouse to Jesus, which is the key to the fruitful marriage! The presence of a godly influence in a family is likely to have greater impact if the family is together. Accordingly, we want to get that godly influence back into the dynamic of the relationship as soon as practicable.

Therefore, consideration should be given to as brief a separation as possible, if necessary, rather than divorce. Remember the goal is unity and restoration of the relationship. Divorce is generally not the answer.

Consideration should be given to separation as an alternative to separation. But if separation is sought, it is as a means to assist restoration and unity, not a step along the way to divorce.

#### HOMEWORK:

1. Be patient. Don't expect problems that have existed for a long period to change overnight. Imagine someone who started a proven diet plan. They get on the scales five days after starting



the diet and discover that they haven't lost any weight. We would consider them foolish if they stopped the diet simply because they did not lose the desired weight in five days. We can trust that if we follow God's proven plan, we will have the desired result of a fruitful marriage.

2. Review the section on reconciliation. Where have we grown regarding the issues relating to reconciliation? Where do we still need to grow?

3. Remember the encouragement of Luke 4:18 that Jesus came to heal the broken hearted. Jesus came to minister to our broken hearts and to bring restoration and unity.

4. Remember the story of the woman and the divorce lawyer at the start of this section. In what ways could you seek to please your spouse? When was the last time you sought to do those things, especially with a loving attitude? Ask God to help you to demonstrate that love to your spouse [it will make a difference].

5. Make a list of differences between you and your spouse. How many of those differences do you believe are related to the problems in your marriage? How many of those differences represent objectively unacceptable behaviors or attitudes as opposed to subjectively unacceptable?

For example, alcohol and drug abuse would clearly be objectively unacceptable. On the other hand, a spouse who fails to demonstrate affection in public may likely be a more subjective issue. Ask God to help you accept the subjective areas and; ask God to help your spouse to overcome the objective issues.

6. Consider seeking godly counsel. A person with a gift to provide biblical counsel can be a tremendous help to a couple that is struggling. The counselor can provide insight, perspective, objective opinion, helpful tools and, hope. Certainly, before considering a divorce or separation, a couple should participate in biblical counseling.

## Chapter 4: Intimacy

### Emotional

When a husband or a wife says: “I want us to be intimate” their expectation may be substantially different whether it was the man or the woman who spoke. Men frequently associate physical intimacy and emotional intimacy as being synonymous. Accordingly, when men are thinking of intimacy they are thinking of sex. Men are willing to try to be emotionally intimate to have physical intimacy.

Guys often blow it because we don’t know how to be intimate. Furthermore we often lack sincerity when we seek to establish emotional intimacy.

For example, imagine that as a joke I placed a section in this book ‘for men only’ and gave advice on intimacy. And as a joke I told the guys that they did not have to bother reading the book, but merely dog-ear several pages throughout the book. Then highlight some areas and write occasional margin notes like ‘I feel so convicted, please forgive me’ and ‘boy did I really need to hear that’.

Then place the book in a place where their wife was sure to see it. But, not to be too obvious [e.g. don’t put the book on the nightstand by your wife’s side of the bed]. I am convinced that many guys would actually do those things thinking it would actually create intimacy. Women, on the other hand, would likely be highly offended at the suggestion that actual intimacy could be achieved in such an insincere way.

Guys have many cultural obstacles to intimacy. At our church people hug each other as a greeting similar to the early church’s greeting of a holy kiss. It’s fun to watch new guys who comes into the church. The new guy puts out his hand to shake and the other guy puts out his arms to hug. The first guy is taken aback and, the two of them start to position themselves like sumo wrestlers.

The newcomer’s reaction is shaped by a cultural expectation. This creates a sense of discomfort hugging another man, especially a stranger. Most guys in our culture were not raised with instruction and encouragement regarding emotional intimacy

Women recognize that sexual intimacy and emotional intimacy are clearly different. There is a desire to bond emotionally which should precede any physical bond. Women are willing to be physically intimate in an effort to encourage emotional intimacy.

Many of us have not realized the different desires and needs that exist for a husband and wife. The truth is that if we learn to be intimate in the emotional, spiritual and physical spheres, our marriages will be more fruitful.

In considering emotional intimacy, we will examine the following topics:

1. communication,
2. cure,
3. connect and
4. conflict

a. *Communication:*

The primary tool to develop emotional intimacy is communication. Peter encourages husbands that they are to dwell with their wives with understanding [1Pet.3:7]. The Greek tense indicates that this is a continuing process. The first problem relates to a lack of communication.

When a spouse says: 'If they really loved me they would know how I feel without me having to tell them' this is a yellow warning flag. Not only are they blaming their spouse for their lack of communication. But, they are making their spouse be a mind reader.

The first solution is to learn to communicate our feelings. For example, gathering at the dinner table and talking about our experiences during the day. Sometimes we merely report the facts of the day. Presenting facts is a relatively shallow level of communication.

The next level of communication explains some feelings associated with the factual events. For example, imagine that hubby comes home from work and tells his wife he was stuck in traffic for two hours that morning. So far, all she knows is a fact.

She wants to be intimate with her husband so she asks: 'How did that make you feel?' He says gruffly, 'Angry and frustrated! How do you think it made me feel?' They are now at a slightly deeper level because she now knows, at least in part, how he felt.

Nevertheless, if he doesn't explain that he was an hour late for his very important meeting with his boss and; he felt afraid and threatened about the consequences, they won't go deeper. Furthermore, if he were to tell her that he felt humbled because he has never been late for a meeting and everyone in the company knows he is always on time. And that he felt God was really revealing an area of pride through the experience, the couple would be more intimate through the communication.

For a couple to learn to communicate it is helpful to set aside time daily to talk. The more time the better! As they talk they need to consider at what level they are speaking. If they are merely exchanging facts or superficial feelings, they need to learn to probe like a journalist and ask questions to go deeper.

b. *Cure:*

The second problem relates to the attempt to cure the problem rather than just listening. James tells us to be swift to hear and slow to speak [James 1:19]. Intimacy requires us to be good listeners. Sometimes when someone shares about a problem they simply want to be heard. Often times their spouse is offering solutions to the issues rather than merely listening. This can be very frustrating for someone who wants to be heard.

A solution is to listen to the issues. Avoid interrupting with proposed solutions to the problems. Ask the person about their feelings associated with the situation. Then, before offering a solution, ask if they would like to hear a potential solution. If they are not seeking a solution, honor their request.

Learn to listen and give full attention to what the person is saying rather than focusing on your perceived brilliant solution. Don't drop out of the conversation because you feel you have the solution to the problem. The person who shares about their struggles and receives a listening ear will feel far more intimate with their spouse than if they merely heard proposed solutions.

c. *Connect:*

Another obstacle to intimacy is our failure to connect below a superficial level. In Romans 12:15 we are told: "Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep". This speaks of intimacy, empathy, and compassion.

Sometimes it is difficult for us to weep with someone who is weeping. We may feel overwhelmed by their emotions or uncomfortable with our inability to bring comfort. We may even resent that someone continues to be sad when we feel they should have gotten over it by now.

For example, when our spouse is grieving over the death of one of their parents it is an extremely difficult time. They are likely to initially experience a phase of denial where they are still in shock about the loss. The impact has not really hit. Then comes a phase of anger while they process the loss. They then experience sorrow as they grieve the loss of a loved one.

A person who connects with their spouse during these difficult times and demonstrates compassion and empathy will experience emotional intimacy. Notice that it is not literal tears that are necessary. But the emotional capacity to be effected by another's pain.

Generally, it is easier for us to rejoice with someone who is rejoicing than to weep with someone who is weeping. It seems less difficult to share in someone's good news than the bad news. Nevertheless, there are exceptions.

For example when we are jealous. Imagine a wife coming home full of excitement. She is elated and, wants to share the good news of her promotion. She had worked hard for the recognition and, the promotion means a substantial raise. Her husband says "I'm really happy for you honey". But really he is also jealous. She will now be earning substantially more than he is and; he has not received a promotion for years.

It will be a challenge for the husband to share with his wife his own feelings of jealousy and; to get past his jealousy to experience her joy. Nevertheless his ability to rejoice with her creates intimacy.

Another area where it can be difficult to rejoice with someone relates to how the person with good news presents the information. In Genesis 37 Joseph receives dreams that his family members will bow down to him. Perhaps the seventeen-year old Joseph did not present the 'good news' with great tact and diplomacy to his older brothers, who then proceeded to sell Joseph into slavery.

The moral of the story is that we should share our good news with our spouse in such a way that it is easy for them to connect and rejoice with us.

#### *d. Conflict:*

Contrary to popular opinion, conflict is an excellent opportunity to develop emotional intimacy. Rather than avoiding conflict, develop intimacy by "playing by the rules". In Ephesians 4:29 we read "let no corrupt communication proceed out of our mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers."

First, practice focusing on the issue at hand. Avoid words like 'always' and 'never'. Also, avoid unnecessarily bringing up the past. If my wife is gently rebuking me for mixing the red clothes and the white clothes in the laundry, it is not appropriate for me to say "well what about the time you washed my silk Hawaiian shirt?" As an aside, my wife has never put a silk shirt in the washer but, I've put plenty of white and red clothes together in the wash...and we have the pink clothes to prove it.

Second, learn to express feelings rather than fault. For example, imagine that my wife wants to go out with her girlfriends to a candle party. And I feel hurt or rejected that she didn't want to be with me. I should express how I feel rather than 'wagging' a finger at her. It would be wrong for me to say: "You are so selfish! You never think about me, you're always thinking about yourself!"

Unfortunately, we all too often fail to play by the rules when addressing conflict. When we play by the rules, we are more likely to have a deeper level of emotional intimacy because of the conflict. Conflict creates an environment that is emotionally charged. And that environment can be fertile soil for intimacy and, a fruitful marriage.

Finally, a warning about failing to cultivate emotional intimacy. If we neglect our spouse's need for emotional intimacy, they will seek it elsewhere. Unfortunately, the places where that affirmation is sought can be extremely dangerous to a marriage relationship.

### Spiritual

Spiritual intimacy is developed as a couple share spiritual experiences. Going to church together is a great beginning to bonding together spiritually. Praying and reading the word together will deepen the spiritual intimacy of a couple.

Praying together, as well as praying alone, is difficult. Prayer is a spiritual discipline. Nevertheless, prayer helps to establish hunger for God, humility, and honesty. Here are some practical suggestions about your prayer time as a couple:

First, set aside time for prayer. Agree on a start time and a suggested end time. Start off with a relatively brief period such as fifteen minutes. Work your way up to longer intervals when you both feel comfortable extending your prayer time. Try to start on time and end on time.

Second, take turns and keep the prayers short. Rather than one person praying for ten minutes and then the other praying for ten minutes, try to go back and forth after about a minute. This way, both of you will ideally be focused on both your own prayers as well as your partner's prayers.

Third, keep the prayers personal. To the extent that God gives you a burden to pray for the President of the Country, that is great. It would help your spouse to see what issues concern you. On the other hand, praying for the President because you are avoiding personal issues such as fear of losing your job, is not great. Try to be personal in your prayers...remember the goal is intimacy.

Fourth, remember to pray for your marriage, your spouse, and your kids. It is very reassuring for your spouse when you are praying for those relationships. Also, take time during your session to thank God for your spouse and children. This is affirming and encouraging to your spouse and pleases God!

Another way to develop spiritual intimacy is by studying God's word together. I encourage couples to find a Bible teaching church where the word of God is being taught. I believe systematic expositional teaching is the best approach. In this method, congregations are taught through books of the Bible. For example, the Pastor will start in chapter one of the Book of Romans and teach through all sixteen chapters.

This is a great way for couples to learn God's word. It is also a great way for a couple to develop spiritual intimacy. Reading the Bible helps to develop spiritual intimacy because God promised that His Word would never return void, but will accomplish what God pleases, and shall prosper in the thing for which He sent it [Is.55:11]. God desires to create intimate relationships between God and man, and between married couples.

A great way to develop intimacy is to read portions of Scripture together. The Psalms are a great place to read and be intimate. Consider the Psalmist's feelings as you read. Consider the circumstances, especially the difficult times.

Discuss how you relate to those feelings. How do you relate to those circumstances? Consider how the Psalmist relates to God and others at those times. Discuss how you relate to God and others at this time. Discuss with one another what lessons you need to learn from the Psalmist's example.

Another suggestion is to read the word together about an area you are struggling with as a couple. For example, exploring passages together about prayer, finances, or alcohol consumption. I suggest you approach the time together with an understanding that you are both seeking to draw closer to God and to each other rather than trying to prove that you are right. Remember the goal is to establish spiritual unity not to win arguments.

I suggest using a concordance or a topical Bible index. The program is really simple. First, pray and ask God to help you learn from Him. Then read the passage(s). Write down what you observe, what you believe it means, and how you can apply this truth to your lives and to your marriage. As you consider the insights that God is showing you, discuss them with your spouse. You will find that you are growing together as a couple

Finally, remember that we cannot truly establish spiritual unity with another person unless we have first sought to establish unity with God. We must desire an intimate relationship with

Jesus! Too often, we have neglected to know Jesus and have been satisfied to know about Jesus or to remain ignorant.

Sometimes, we might think we know all about our spouse only to be surprised that we don't know nearly as much as we thought. I remember one Mother's Day my friend and I sought to hatch a scheme and surprise our wives.

The basic plan was that we would go out and buy them identical outfits and present them to our wives the Saturday night before Mother's Day. We would then insist that they wear them on Sunday to church. Meanwhile, we would get identical outfits and wear them as well. We thought this was a great photo opportunity, a clever scheme, and the wives would love their new outfits!

The scheme was unfolding perfectly as we went to the department store and found the perfect outfits that our wives would love. Unfortunately, we soon discovered, by the looks our wives gave Saturday night, that the outfits were not in fact perfect. Nevertheless, my friend and I did manage to get back to the department store that night and get new outfits for our wives and, we did salvage the scheme.

The moral of the story is that sometimes we think we know someone so well but, we find out we did not know them as well as we thought. Similarly, in our relationship with Jesus, we may be surprised that we don't know Him as well as we thought we did.

Remember, spiritual intimacy with our spouse results from time together pursuing God. But unless we want to have a relationship with God as an individual, we cannot truly seek God together.

### Physical Intimacy

God gave the desire for sexual intimacy Adam and Eve. In the Garden of Eden, God blessed the man and the woman and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth..." God's plan is for the marriage relationship to be the proper place to fulfill the desire for sexual pleasure.

In Hebrews 13:4 we read that: "Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge". The Greek word for bed is 'coite' from which we derive coitus referring to sexual intercourse. God has set aside the marriage relationship as the only proper relationship to seek pleasure from sexual intercourse.

After the fall of man in the Garden of Eden, we still have sexual desires. But we need to learn to consider those desires in light of the instruction of God's Word. Preliminarily, we should remember that God loves us and, when He tells us not to do something it is for our own good!



God does not command us to avoid something because He wants our life to be miserable. But as a loving parent, who is perfect and all knowing, He desires to protect us.

The first issue to consider is God's instruction to us regarding sexual activity prior to marriage. God expressly tells us His will for us that He desires us to remain sexually pure outside of the marriage relationship [see, 1Thess.4 ].

1Thes 4:1-5

*1 Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God;*

*2 for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus.*

*3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality;*

*4 that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor,*

*5 not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God;*

*(NKJ)*

As a practical matter, sexual activity prior to marriage can become an obstacle to sexual intimacy with your spouse. The past sexual experiences cannot be erased. Often issues regarding feelings of inadequacy flow from concern regarding measuring up to past experiences and, the inevitable comparison.

This is often a very uncomfortable area for a couple to talk about. Nevertheless, when we talk with our spouse about our feelings of inadequacy, fear of rejection, jealousy and anger etc., we gain sexual intimacy. In addition, we need to realize that although pre-marital sex is certainly a very important issue to God, as seen by His express will concerning the subject, it is not the unpardonable sin.

The next area to consider is sexual relations in the context of the marriage relationship. Paul addresses this subject in his first letter to the church at Corinth.

1 Cor 7:3-5

*3 Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband.*

*4 The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.*

*5 Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.*

*(NKJ)*

In Proverbs 5:19 we read “ as a loving deer and a graceful doe, let her breasts satisfy you at all times; and always be enraptured with her love.

In these passages we learn that physical intimacy helps to satisfy desires and, helps to discourage adultery. Sexual intimacy is a right as well as a responsibility in a marriage. In considering sexual relations we need to keep in mind the “big picture” of seeking to develop intimacy.

In an ideal world, both partners would have the same level of sexual desire, would find each other totally satisfying in every way and; would be comfortable with their partner’s sexual fantasies. We are now leaving fantasyland...

The reality is that often times the expectations of the partners do not line up! Sexual intimacy is not imposing your will upon your partner at the expense of their feelings. In light of these differences, what should a couple do?

First, communicate your desires to your spouse and, allow them to communicate their desires. Try to avoid passing judgment when considering your spouse’s request. Too often we tend to judge in our thoughts or words [ e.g. “you are a pervert”, “you are a sexaholic”, “you’re frigid”].

Keep in mind that we tend to assume that our subjective preferences are objectively correct. Accordingly we assume that our spouse’s desires are out of line. Keep in mind that a married couple gets great liberty in Christ in regard to what they do in their own bedroom [Heb.13:4].

By avoiding passing judgment upon your spouse, we create an environment where can be more comfortable speaking about our desires. This in and of itself helps to create intimacy.

Second, in discussing differing needs and desires, look for areas of compromise. Issues regarding frequency and style leave plenty of opportunity to look for compromise. Couples are often uncomfortable talking about the subject and, this makes it more difficult to reach meaningful compromise. By discussing needs and trying to find appropriate compromise we enhance intimacy.

Third, remember that God does not view sexual desire between a husband and a wife as a ‘dirty’ or profane feeling. To the contrary, as we read the Song of Solomon, we find a picture of passion, romance and desire as an ideal for marriage. When God saw Adam and Eve naked in the Garden of Eden there was purity of sexual intimacy. They were not ashamed and; God did not tell them to put clothes on. Everything was very good [Gen.1:31].

Fourth, recall that if we have developed spiritual and emotional intimacy in our marriages, it provides a framework to develop sexual intimacy. We are seeking intimacy in an emotional,

spiritual and physical sense. Merely seeking physical pleasure pales in comparison to the union that God desires [ See, Gen.2:24 and, Song of Solomon]. Be patient...sexual intimacy is frequently a complicated process because of the overlapping emotional issues.

Fifth, seek to learn from your spouse some of the emotional issues connected with their sexual desires. Again, avoid passing judgment. Sometimes certain desires in sexual relations flow from emotional issues outside of the marriage context.

Perhaps one of you was sexually molested as a young person. This will certainly effect your feelings about sexual relations in the context of marriage. Other issues may arise from a desire for control. Still other issues can arise from a sense of rejection and a desire to be wanted. Still other issues relate to hormonal or other physical aspects. By communicating about these issues, we can better learn how to minister to our needs in regard to physical, emotional and spiritual intimacy.

Sixth, sexual intimacy flows from God's love. God's love is pure and never exploits us. As we consider the subject of intimacy we must base intimacy on God's love. Therefore, we want to take care to avoid exploiting our spouse. And in seeking to experience physical intimacy we should place our spouse's needs before our own.

In summary, God intends a fruitful marriage to be an intimate relationship. Intimacy between a husband and wife contemplates an emotional, a spiritual and a physical bond that typifies God's desire that the two shall become one flesh.

#### HOMEWORK:

Read the Song of Solomon together. As you read, consider the romance as a picture of Jesus love for His Church. Realize His passion for His Church.

In Song of Solomon 4:7, Solomon describes his bride: "You are all fair, my love, and there is no spot in you." This is how God looks at the Church because of the forgiveness available through Jesus. Because of His grace, He sees us without any imperfection.

On the other hand, we tend to focus on the spots, blemishes and, imperfections. It seems that even the prettiest and the most handsome of people tend to focus on their imperfections. The super model is aware of her blemishes whether we see them as being "perfect" or not.

When we can see our spouse as Jesus sees them, as all fair and without imperfection, we are likely to encourage intimacy. Similarly, when we focus on what we perceive as imperfections, it tends to inhibit true intimacy. Let us consider how we have tended to look at our spouse and, how we desire to look at them.

As you read the Song of Solomon notice the love and passion that characterize the relationship. Consider how often they exchange encouraging and affirming words to each other. How does this relate to intimacy? Examine your relationship in regard to these areas. Where do we need to grow?

## Chapter 5: Time and Trust

### Time

If I were to lay a steel beam across the floor and ask someone to walk across the beam and, I would give them fifty dollars, I would probably have a lot of volunteers. If I raised the beam to eight feet off the ground and, raised the stakes to a one hundred dollar offer, I would still probably have several volunteers, albeit fewer volunteers than before. But if I raised the beam to fifty feet above the ground and, raised the stakes to five hundred dollars, I would probably have few, if any volunteers.

On the other hand, imagine that I was holding someone's four-year daughter from a platform fifty feet above the ground. And I announced to them that unless they walked across the steel beam, suspended fifty feet above the ground, within the next minute, that I would drop that little girl to her death. I am certain they would be across that beam within 30 seconds [If it was a teenager, it might take closer to a minute].

This simple illustration helps us to realize that we value the relationship with our child more than money. Nevertheless, few of us have learned to manage our time to reflect God's priorities as well as our own values. Let us consider some of the guidelines God has given us regarding the issue of time and our marriage.

As we examine the issue of time we will focus on the following four areas:

1. Circumspect,
2. Care,
3. Companion, and
4. Comfort.

#### *Circumspect:*

To be circumspect means to be heedful of circumstances and potential consequences; prudent, careful and cautious. Paul urges us to live circumspectly in his letter to the Ephesians:

Eph 5:15-16

*15 See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise,  
16 redeeming the time, because the days are evil.*

(NKJ)

We learn that living circumspectly is characteristic of the wise. But the foolish have no concern about the potential consequences. Paul tells us that we need to be careful how we live our lives because time is a precious and fleeting resource.

The Greeks portrayed this idea in the reference to “chronos”. Time is depicted as a small winged man with a long ponytail. As time goes by, you must grab the ponytail or it’s gone. Solomon urges us to consider the fleeting nature of time when he reminds us in Ecclesiastes of the vanity of life.

We often fail to realize just how fast time passes. The kids grow up, dads walk their daughter’s down the aisle and they can’t believe they are standing next to their daughter. The thought of ‘Sunrise Sunset’ ... ‘where was that little girl I carried’ dance through the head.

Paul notes the need to redeem the time because the days are evil. In a fallen world, far different than God’s design in the Garden of Eden, there are so many distractions that negatively impact our marriage relationship.

The Genesis record tells us that one of the results of the fall was the need to work. One of the greatest distractions in our culture is work. Generally, work requires us to be separated for at least eight hours per day. Assuming that a couple gets approximately eight hours of sleep, eight hours of work represents one half of their waking hours. Often the day includes a commute and occasional overtime. Accordingly, more than one half our day is devoted to work obligations.

Another result of The Fall is decay and the need for maintenance. Before The Fall there was no death or decay. No need to do laundry, no need to take out trash, no dishes to clean, no need to repair anything, no need to pick up and cleanup!

The need to maintain order in our world often poses an obstacle to the time available to maintain our marriage relationship. The potential time available for a husband and wife to maintain their relationship is compromised by the time spent trying to restore things.

An additional result of The Fall is pain. Pain, hurt and separation were not part of God’s original plan. Nevertheless, as a result of the current reality of pain, hurt and separation, we need to spend time and energy to seek restoration.

In this context, Paul’s exhortation to redeem the time becomes clearer to us! Marriage relationships require maintenance. But we also need to realize that different people and different relationships have different maintenance needs.

For example, consider two different vehicles. The first is a Ferrari and the other is a Hummer. Imagine that the Hummer can go 100,000 miles with essentially no maintenance. On the other hand, the Ferrari is a stereotypical Italian sports car requiring frequent maintenance.

If the owner of the Ferrari treats that sports car like the Hummer, he is likely to experience breakdowns, frustration, and a lot of expensive repairs due to improper maintenance. Most of us would not be too upset if we were given either a Ferrari or a Hummer. The key is to recognize whether we have a Ferrari or a Hummer.

Generally, most of us could look at the two vehicles and recognize which one is which. Unfortunately, many of us are unable, or unwilling to make this distinction in our marriage relationships. Another difference relates to the owner's manual. The auto manufacturer provides a schedule of anticipated necessary maintenance. On the other hand, marriages don't come with a maintenance schedule.

As many of us are aware, the fact that the manufacturer provides a maintenance schedule does not guarantee compliance. Thus, we see two separate issues. First, we need to determine the maintenance need of the relationship. Second we need to comply with the maintenance schedule.

Paul urges us to be careful or circumspect to redeem the time available, especially in light of the consequences of failing to do so. Which leads us to the question(s) "how can we determine the maintenance needs and; comply with the schedule?"

Preliminarily, maintenance needs should be discussed. Try to avoid labels during the discussion. These rarely benefit the conversation. For example, "I'm comfortable with myself, I really don't need to spend time with you. But you are so needy, and dependent...you're really high maintenance!" And the corresponding response "you're not comfortable with yourself, you're afraid of intimacy...That's why you don't want to spend time together!" These types of salvos are unnecessary and are harmful.

Whatever your desired need for time, tell your partner. If you are finding it difficult to make time to talk about the time you want to spend with each other, this should indicate you need more time. The question is how much time?

Discuss your ideals, consider some of the practical obstacles, and look for compromise in regard to unresolved areas. For example, imagine a husband who says to his wife "I just wish we could spend every day and night together". He may have expressed a wonderful sentiment but, as a practical matter, it won't happen since both of them work.

What if husband says to wife "I wish we could spend every night together". Again, perhaps a wonderful sentiment. But what if she takes a class two nights a week and; she wants to go out with her girlfriends one night a week, there is a conflict between his ideal and her desired schedule.

They have expressed their needs as well as identifying an obstacle. Here comes the need to consider compromise. An obvious potential compromise would be for her to give up time with her girlfriends or to not take any classes during the next semester.

Perhaps she needs to take the classes as part of her work responsibility and; she really feels she needs the time with her girlfriends that is special and distinct from time with her husband. Is there a way to work through the conflict that represents a compromise solution for their marriage maintenance needs?

Perhaps she can take her class two nights a week and, see her girlfriends, as well as taking care of his needs. A solution might involve a weekly date night where they get a baby sitter and get away from any distractions. This would allow them to enhance the quality of their time together.

Similarly, if the wife does her homework early in the morning or late at night it would be less intrusive on the nature of the family time or the couple's time alone. A possible compromise might involve the wife getting together with her girlfriend's every other week. On the alternating weeks the family might decide to have a game or video night.

The point to see is the need to think "outside of the box". Try to be creative in coming up with solutions that take into consideration both of your needs as well as compromise. Once you have a proposed solution, give it a test run for an agreed period of time such as thirty, sixty, or ninety days. This brings us to the compliance part of the program.

In considering compliance, I would recommend that all the "players" have a calendar. Both husband and wife should have a calendar and be responsible to schedule date nights, family nights, and quiet time together. Discuss appropriate responsibility. For example, consider who will arrange for the babysitter, make dinner reservations, pick a movie etc.?

Once everyone is 'on the same page' the key is to make the time together the priority! Try whenever possible to avoid conflicts that interrupt time that has been reserved for a fruitful marriage. Remember that part of this whole process is to impress upon your spouse that they are a priority to you.

Use your calendar to monitor your compliance. Are you actually going out on the date night or setting aside the family night? Are you spending the designated quiet time together? How well did you do during the first thirty, sixty, or ninety days? Are you batting 100%, 90%, 70%, less than 50%? Where do you need to improve in the compliance area?

Next, agree to periodically follow up to discuss how needs are being met as well as whether needs have changed. Schedule your follow up meeting in your calendars and be sure to devote



an agreed upon amount of time as necessary to discuss your maintenance needs. Remember that you are trying to demonstrate to your spouse how important their needs are to you.

Finally, remember Paul's warning too consider the consequences. If we fail to give our spouse the time and attention they are seeking, ideally they will seek it from the Lord, however, they are likely to look for that attention in wrong places. A spouse who does not feel that their needs for attention and time are being met is ripe for temptation! Please, let us heed the warning!

#### *Care:*

In the Apostle Paul's first letter to the Church at Corinth, he explains the need to care for our spouse as a top priority:

1 Cor 7:33-34

*33 But he who is married cares about the things of the world-- how he may please his wife.*

*34 There is a difference between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman cares about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. But she who is married cares about the things of the world-- how she may please her husband.*

(NKJ)

Paul's argument is that an unmarried person has the liberty to focus on serving God and being set apart to God. On the other hand, a married person is focused on pleasing their spouse. For the married person, their thoughts and concern should be focused on pleasing their spouse.

If you are married, your spouse is your first ministry! One of the ways we demonstrate that we care is by spending time with our spouse...to show we care. One way to evaluate the time that we are spending with our spouse is to consider a time graph. It is recommended that a couple evaluate a typical week in their life to learn how they are actually spending their time. Then they can consider how they want to spend their time.

One way to approach the time graph is to obtain a planning calendar that allows for scheduling throughout the day. It may be helpful to have a planner with fifteen or thirty minute increments. Plan your schedule beginning from the time you wake up until the time you go to bed for the whole week. As you go through the day, record the actual time you spend in connection with each event.

For example, if you plan on waking up at 6:00 a.m., but you don't actually wake until 6:30, note the scheduled time as well as the actual time. If you planned to go to the gym at 6:30 and work out for an hour that should be noted in the schedule. But if you arrived at the gym at 7:00 and only worked out for thirty minutes and spent the next half hour talking with people at the gym...you need to honestly record that time as well.

Plan time that you will spend with your family. Consider a typical week. Record what time you anticipate is spent with your spouse and family and how it is spent. Note your schedule from the time you wake up until the time you go to sleep. As you go through the week try to live your typical week without altering your behavior because you are 'being tested'. Honestly record the time you actually spent and how it was spent.

For example, if you plan to spend an hour with the family at the dinner table, but you spent forty minutes eating dinner and then excused yourself to answer the phone, note your actual time. If you were on the phone for fifteen minutes and then returned to the dinner table for five minutes note the time. This is how we discover that we spent forty-five minutes at the dinner table and not one hour at the dinner table with our family.

Similarly, if we planned to spend an hour after dinner talking, but our actual time varies, we need to see how we actually spend our time. We may have believed that we were actually spending the hour after dinner talking and having "family time".

We might discover that rather than actually talking about the day, and helping with homework, we were busy doing dishes, returning phone calls, and finishing up a project for work. We might discover that rather than watching one hour of television, we actually spent two and a half hours watching television.

The purpose of this exercise is to help us to see the actual amount of time we are spending with our spouse, our family, and how we are spending it. For most people, the time graph is a reality check and a reality shock. We are generally surprised to see how we spend our time. Also, remember that time spent with the spouse and kids is different than time spent alone with your spouse.

The next step is to review the week and see how we actually spent our time. As we consider the plan to review, schedule the review a week in advance. Plan the start and finish time. You and your spouse are to review the week together.

See if you actually perform the review together as planned. See how you planned to spend time as compared to how you actually spent the time. As you review, give yourselves liberty to be flexible, especially in areas where you have minimal control. For example, you may have planned that the baby would take a nap at 2:00, but you find that the baby had his own schedule.

On the other hand, avoid the trap of failing to schedule your time because you realize that you have no control over the baby. And it would only be frustrating to review the schedule and see how you were unable to keep your schedule because of circumstances out of your control.

The purpose of this exercise is not to make us more efficient regarding time management per se. The purpose is to help us to see how we actually spend our time...especially with our spouse!

As you review the week with your spouse see the contrast between the time you planned to spend with your family, especially your spouse, and the time you actually spent. Also, note how the time was actually spent. Then consider how you need to alter your schedule to meet your needs. Plan a second week, and repeat the time graph exercise.

Time is a precious commodity, and how we spend our time reflects our priorities and values. The amount of time that we spend with our spouse relative to other competing interests sends a message to our spouse about how much we care!

We want to make sure that our spouse knows that we care as reflected in the amount of time spent together. Each individual in a couple has a different threshold level before they feel that enough time is being spent to show that they are cared for. The goal is to identify that need and seek to minister to the need.

*Companion:*

Mal 2:14

*14 Yet you say, "For what reason?" Because the LORD has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, with whom you have dealt treacherously; yet she is your companion and your wife by covenant.*

(NKJ)

God closes the prophetic message of the Old Testament with the inspired words of the Prophet Malachi. God tried a last effort to get the attention of the Hebrews. The Hebrews refusal to hear the words of the prophet, and change their ways resulted in over four hundred years of prophetic silence. It would not be until the ministry of John the Baptist, as the forerunner to Jesus, that God would once again cry out to His people to turn back to Him.

The second chapter of the Book of Malachi records a stinging rebuke of the Hebrews that reveals the hardness of their hearts. In light of the hardness of their hearts, they had effectively declared that they did not care what God had to say.

Accordingly, God stopped speaking. Suffice it to say that being unwilling to hear God speak is a dangerous place for us to be. Therefore, let us approach this section with a desire to hear from God and, to correct our ways.

God expressed His contempt for the neglect of a spouse: You have dealt treacherously with your wife. God declares his view of the marriage relationship that a spouse is a companion. What does God mean when He tells us that our spouse is our companion and; what does that have to do with time?

The English translation 'companion' comes from the Hebrew root 'chabar' which means: to unite, to be joined, to charm, to tie a knot, to join together, allied, touch or touching. God views the marriage relationship as two who are tied together.

The idea of having a spouse who is a best friend is an ideal. To have someone in our life who is our favorite person in the world to be with and, to have that person be our spouse is a blessing. Unfortunately, it appears that most marriage relationships are missing this element.

The proverbial trick is how do we get linked or united? I have a friend who has a ministry doing slight of hand 'magic' tricks. He uses this medium to share the gospel by showing how Satan seeks to deceive us. And things are not always what they appear to be.

One of the tricks involves multiple steel rings that appear completely solid. Nevertheless, in his hands the rings are linked together. The key appears to be that there is a small opening in one of the rings which is not apparent to us. As the rings are brought close together and aligned, they link. They become companions.

As you might imagine, unless the rings are brought close together they don't link.

Similarly, in the marriage relationship, companions are made as time together acts to bring the rings closer together. As time is spent together, the rings begin to align so that the opening, that was initially concealed, becomes the place of linking under the control of The Master's Hand. As Jesus links us together, we unite as companions.

What a blessing to be able to honestly say to your spouse 'I don't care what we do honey just as long as we are together'. That does not mean that there are not times when we annoy one another. But generally, we want to be with our spouse!

My wife Karen and I have a marriage where we use the 'buddy system'. When I'm driving too fast, she says "Slow down buddy!" When I'm following too close, Karen says: "Back off buddy!" Now without doubt, Karen is my best buddy and, there is no one I would rather spend time with.

Nevertheless, I have never been a big fan of the 'buddy system'. It is far easier for me to be annoyed by Karen telling me how to drive than for me to empathize with the fact that my driving is frightening her. It is easier for me to think about taking separate cars than for me to think about driving more appropriately.

This tends to be a big obstacle to becoming companions. When the metal rings clash together we get discouraged and can stop looking for the opening where the rings can come together. Spending time together will include some conflicts. But don't let the clashes keep us from seeking the openings where we can come together.

Another major obstacle to us becoming companions is our selfishness. We have different interests and, to spend time together means we need to compromise our desires. Yet by spending time together, even when it is "not our thing" helps us to come together as companions.

For example, I love baseball games. My boys are third generation baseball fans...yet Karen is indifferent to the game. I delight to try to explain the nuances of the 3-6-4 double play and the virtues of left handed pitching. Karen enjoys that vendors deliver cotton candy, peanuts and ice cream without us even having to leave our seats. Yet there we are together, spending time, becoming companions.

Karen likes going to a teahouse and enjoying high tea. While I confess that there is a certain charm to the experience, I generally feel out of place. First, I like to say, "The wind is really blowin' today". People at tea say, "It certainly is a blustery day". Second, the little sandwiches never seem to fill you up. I leave wanting a burrito on the way home. Third, I'm generally the only 'x chromosome' in the house. Nevertheless when we go together, we are becoming companions.

Ask yourself whether your spouse is your buddy? Do you desire to be with your spouse? If not, why isn't your spouse a companion? If you are thinking to yourself that it is because, "She's a shrew" or "He's a jerk", you need to dig deeper.

As a practical matter, two reasons why we don't connect are:

1. We allow the clashes to discourage us from trying to connect; and
2. We are too selfish to put aside our interests to embrace our spouse's interests.

As a spiritual matter, we have lost sight of God's plan that our spouse is our companion and, instead we have dealt treacherously with them. The Prophet Malachi warned of the dangers of this condition.

The next issue becomes what needs to change? First, practice spending time together. When conflict arises, seek the patience of the Spirit. Try not to withdraw, but instead try to understand your partner's perspective.

Second, try to explore what interests your spouse, whether it is your interest or not. Spend time asking questions about what interests them and doing what interests them. Also take time to share what interests you as well as doing what you like to do.

Remember, you're not losing your lifestyle, you're gaining a companion!

*Comfort:*

Solomon reminds us that the time we spend with our spouse should bring comfort:

Eccl 9:9

*Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life which He has given you under the sun, all your days of vanity; for that is your portion in life, and in the labor which you perform under the sun.*

(NKJ)

God brings a spouse into our life to bless us and bring comfort to us. In Genesis 24:67 we learned that Isaac was comforted after his mother's death after he took Rebekah as his wife and he loved her.

It appears that Isaac's love for Rebekah was a source of comfort. We would expect to read that Rebekah's love for Isaac was a source of comfort to him, however, it is Isaac's love for her that is connected with his comfort.

This is similar to Solomon's wisdom as recorded in Ecclesiastes 9:9: that we are to live joyfully with the wife that we love. In other words, our ability to enjoy the time with our spouse is related to our love for them more than their love for us!

For most of us this is a stunning revelation. We assume that we would be comforted and enjoy the time with our spouse if only they loved us more.

The truth is that we can enjoy all the days of our life with our spouse if we have God's love for them. How exciting and encouraging to know that my time with my wife can be a comfort and joy to me if I love her! That I am not dependent on how she feels about me for comfort and joy from my spouse.

Most of us feel that if our spouse loved us more that we would have more joy. When we are not experiencing the joy and comfort from our spouse that we are seeking, we tend to resent them for the pain and sorrow that we are experiencing.

Nevertheless, God tells us that we have the key in our hand. We can enjoy the time with our spouse simply because we love them. Therefore, there is no need for us to be frustrated or

resentful. Instead as we seek to love our spouse we will experience comfort and joy in the time spent with our spouse.

#### SUMMARY:

To have a more fruitful marriage relationship we must consider the issue of time. We are to manage our time to reflect God's priorities as well as enhancing the value we place on our marriage relationship. We should be circumspect to be careful about the consequences of failing to spend time with our spouse. Demonstrate to your spouse that you care by spending time with them.

Make sure that as you spend time with your spouse you are seeking to unite with them as a companion. And finally, remember that the comfort and joy that you experience when you spend time with your spouse is related to your love for them, more than how they may or may not show love for you.

#### HOMEWORK:

Review the section regarding care in connection with time and the fruitful marriage. Pay special attention to the discussion concerning the time graph. This week arrange with your spouse to utilize the time graph to address issues regarding time and your relationship.

#### Trust

When our boys were born, I made a covenant with God. I wanted my boys to be able to trust me so that they would have more confidence in trusting God. If I made a promise, I would go to virtually any lengths to fulfill the promise.

When I promised my boys that we would get ice cream after church, they would get ice cream after church. Sometimes this would be difficult, especially when we left church at 10:00 p.m. after mid-week Bible study and the next day was a school day. Nevertheless, I made sure they got the ice cream because I wanted them to learn that they could trust that a promise made was a promise kept.

As I write, my oldest son is almost eight years old. I am blessed to say that to this day, God has allowed me to deliver on the promises. This has been a great blessing in teaching my children that they can trust. I ask my children with confidence, "Has there ever been a time when I made a promise and I didn't come through?"

Inevitably, my oldest says, "What about the time at the swimming pool?"

Trust is frequently developed over an extended course of time. But trust can be compromised or eroded in a moment and; in a variety of ways. Nevertheless, trust is fundamentally based on the truth.

At Jesus' trial before Pilate, He testified " You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness of the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice." Pilate responded " what is truth?"[John 18:38-39].

Jesus declared to His disciples in the Upper Room "I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."[John14:6].

The cynic, Oscar Wilde said, " The pure and simple truth is rarely pure and never simple". But, the Apostle Paul taught " speak the truth in love".

Here, we see the conflict between Jesus who declares that there is objective truth and an unbelieving world that seeks to avoid "this truth". The existence of truth and the call to communicate truth is a foundation of trust.

Trust is like credit, it can take years to develop good credit, but one or two late payments can destroy your good credit. If you imagine a beautiful Victorian home and, a construction crane with a big metal wrecking ball you can see the potential harm that a breach of trust can cause. Lies and deception smash against the marriage relationship like a wrecking ball striking a home!

Trust can be eroded in a variety of ways. For example the spouse who lies about their past. Lies regarding your life before the marriage can become a source of great damage when the truth is discovered. For example, the person who is arrested or convicted of crimes involving narcotics, alcohol abuse, pornography, sexual exploitation of minors or other offenses, who fails to disclose the truth to their spouse is going to have a difficult time regaining trust when the facts become disclosed.

We tend to 'color code' lies. We have white lies and black lies and, we have a variety of shades including beige and charcoal gray. We place our subjective value as the liar. For example, consider the spouse who says they were going to be working late who in fact was working out at the gym. When confronted with the truth might say "it was just a white lie...it's not like I was out drinking or hanging out with my friends".

More often than not, the person who has been lied to does not associate the same color scale value. In other words, they know they have been lied to and; they don't care if it is a white or black lie. The Bible calls the truth, truth and lies, lies. Similarly, we need to see that our 'big lies' as well as the 'little lies' erode trust.



Another area involves failure to disclose information. Failing to disclose the fact that you got a ticket, whether for speeding or parking, may make your spouse feel that you are trying to deceive them. Credit card purchases can be another area where nondisclosure can erode trust.

For example, imagine a couple that has prepared a budget and included clothing items in the budget. If one of them decides to buy some new clothes on the credit card and; they know the purchase is beyond the budget, they may be tempted to conceal the purchase. The failure to disclose is deception that erodes trust!

The concealment can be compounded by a lie. Consider the spouse who asks, "Honey I like that outfit...is it new?" And the response "Oh this old thing..." When the truth is discovered and, it likely will be, there is damage to the relationship.

Another area of extreme damage in the relationship is betrayal. The betrayal can take place in many ways. For example the spouse who threatens to leave the marriage every time there is a heated argument. A spouse who does not trust their mate's commitment does not trust their spouse. The threat of divorce erodes trust.

The spouse who commits adultery engages in blatant betrayal that is a huge wrecking ball to the marriage relationship. Trying to restore trust after an affair is extremely difficult because of the intimate nature of the breach of trust.

An adulterous affair is likely to effect the trust relationship for an extended period of time.

Another area that effects the trust relationship in the marriage is our past experiences that effect the level of trust in our current relationship. Imagine someone who enters into a marriage after a history of relationships with people who have been unfaithful. It should not be surprising that they find it difficult to trust in the current relationship. Someone who has been repeatedly bitten by dogs is likely to be afraid of dogs.

Someone who felt that they could not trust their parents or others in a position of authority is likely to have difficulty trusting their spouse, especially in the early stages of the relationship. Past experiences that leave us feeling suspicious about our current relationship strain the marriage due to a lack of trust.

Which brings us to the heart of the inquiry: How to develop trust in the marriage relationship? We will consider the following essentials:

1. confidence,
2. confession and,
3. character.

*Confidence:*

First of all, we need to develop confidence in God. King David the Psalmist learned this truth. David's counselors, generals and sons betrayed him. Yet, as you review David's life, he continues to appear to be a trusting guy!

David learned that his true trust rested in God alone. Listen to David's heart:

Ps 61:3-4

*3 For You have been a shelter for me, a strong tower from the enemy.*

*4 I will abide in Your tabernacle forever; I will trust in the shelter of Your wings. Selah*  
(NKJ)

Ps 62:7-8

*7 In God is my salvation and my glory; the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God.*

*8 Trust in Him at all times, you people; pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us.*  
*Selah*  
(NKJ)

David had learned that since he could trust God, he could enter other relationships with trust. Even though David continued to experience pain in relationships, he continued to demonstrate trust in relationships. It is important for us to realize that we can enter relationships with trust because our confidence is in the Lord.

For example, consider a woman who prior to entering a marriage relationship has had several experiences where her trust was violated. She has been lied to and betrayed. It is reasonable to expect that she is going to have difficulty trusting her husband.

Of course it is easier if her husband is a man of integrity who helps give her security. But, regardless, she is likely to have difficulty trusting because she expects her trust to be violated. And the associated feelings of pain, anger, helplessness, betrayal, etc. related to the violation of trust make her wary of him.

The key is for her to grow in her trust in the Lord. When she knows in her heart that even if he does violate her trust, God will be faithful and, He will care for her, then she will be able to trust him. Primarily, because she trusts God and secondarily because she trusts him.

I'm not suggesting that we be naïve. A person who has their trust repeatedly violated is going to have a difficult time trusting their spouse. This is understandable. Essentially, repentance, forgiveness and restoration are required.

Jesus does not command us to be naïve, but tells us to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. Nevertheless, being wise as serpents is not the same as being suspicious; [As an aside, I've always wanted to go to a Paranoids Anonymous meeting but they never publish where the meetings are held]. I believe we would have fewer suspicious ideas and, more wisdom if we trusted the Lord more.

As we trust the Lord more, it gives us confidence to allow more trust in the marriage relationship. Often times, simply by trusting God, many of our fears about our partner's faithfulness are reduced. This allows the defensive posture to change and allow for trust.

Imagine a walled city like those described in the Bible. The walls are thick and fortified and the gates are strong. For me to suggest to you to tear down the walls, when you are afraid of being hurt if you trust, is difficult. On the other hand, you might feel safe opening the gate and keeping the walls.

After a series of experiences of opening the gate and being able to trust without being violated, you may be ready to begin tearing down the walls. Confidence in God allows us to open the gate even though we are afraid to take down the walls. Therefore, confidence in God is the first step in developing trust in the marriage relationship.

#### *Confession:*

To establish trust in our relationships we need to realize that lying is a sin and we need to stop lying. Consider Paul's exhortation: to put away lying, and let each of us speak truth with his neighbor for we are members of one another [Eph.4:25].

Paul is telling us that because we are Christians we need to stop lying and instead speak the truth. All of us have lied! If you are reading this and trying to defend yourself that you have never lied...you're lying.

I remember one case in my law office where we were defending against an accident claim. We were sending the claimant to a medical examination and we provided a check for about twenty dollars to cover the expected mileage costs. Shortly after the examination he mailed my office a check for thirty-one cents telling us that he was overpaid.

As soon as I saw the check, I knew the guy was going to be a complete liar [and he was]. Perhaps you are thinking, "Pastor Bruce that doesn't sound very trusting of you". Perhaps you are right. Nevertheless, when someone is effectively screaming at the top of his lungs that you can trust him [eg. I sent you a 31cent check] he often can't be trusted.

Many of us are very honest most of the time but, all of us have lied and; we need to confess and stop. I confess I have told a story or illustration from the pulpit where I have exaggerated a fact. Exaggeration is a more sensitive way of saying I lied.

It is wrong and I am grieved that I would misrepresent God or hurt Him in any way. Lies are damaging to the integrity of any relationship. Nevertheless we can't stop lying until we realize it is wrong and confess that we have lied.

Consider the cry of the Psalmist: "In my distress I cried to the Lord, and He heard me. Deliver my soul, O Lord, from lying lips and from a deceitful tongue [Psalm 120:1-2]. The psalmist recognizes how hurtful lying lips and a deceitful tongue can be. He is praying for deliverance from the lies of others and; by implication that he would not lie.

I am confident that we would all agree and say amen that we have been hurt by other people lying to us or about us. I am also confident that we are unlikely to be ready to confess where we have lied.

We live in a culture where our national leaders are often exposed for telling lies. We expect that we will be lied to by salespeople and; that publicly regulated corporations will lie about the value of their stock. We have received cues from our culture that to lie is normal.

We have developed a language of lies. We call lies: misrepresentations, exaggerations, omissions, half-truths and a host of other terms to eliminate any potential stigma that may still be associated with being a liar. In a culture that 'normalizes' lying it is not surprising that we are skeptical about trusting people.

When we confess that we have lied and cry out to God and; ask Him to deliver us from lies then there will be change. When we stop lying then trust will be established!

When I observe small children I note that as group they are extremely trusting. When a small child is on a ledge and you say, 'jump' they jump. They trust that you will catch them and they won't be hurt. Essentially, they have to learn that they can't trust.

In our relationships, people have come into the relationship either trusting or not trusting based upon our past experiences. Once we are in our relationship we are either developing trust or giving people reason not to trust.

The difficulty relates to the fact that we fail to acknowledge the damage that our conduct causes in the area of trust. And until we acknowledge the harm we can't confess. And until we confess, there is no change and. And until there is change, trust is not restored.

For example, let's go back to the swimming pool incident where we started this section. My flesh wants to declare proudly that I have come through with every promise I have made to my kids. My son says, "what about the swimming pool?"

My flesh and my intellect quickly survey the scene and I want to respond, "The swimming pool wasn't a promise, that doesn't count. I'm still batting a thousand"  
But my heart and spirit say; "My son still remembers the pool incident, I need to confess that I violated his trust."

Not only do I need to confess but, I need to ask for forgiveness. And I need to let my son know that I don't ever want to violate his trust again. This is how trust is gained and restored.

When we are willing to confess that we have violated trust by betrayal, lies, and broken promises trust can be restored. We need to not only confess, but ask God to help us be trustworthy. This is the second part of developing trust. The third area is character.

#### *Character:*

In Matthew 12:27-31 Jesus quotes from the Prophet Isaiah that the Gentiles will put their trust in Jesus. Similarly, we read in Psalm 33:21 our hearts rejoice in Him [God the Father] because we have trusted in His holy name. God's character is trustworthy. We put our trust in Him because He is worthy to be trusted.

In Proverbs 31, we read of the character of a virtuous wife. We are told that: "the heart of her husband safely trusts her [v.11]. It is a fundamental character of Christians that we are trustworthy.

Paul exhorted the church to stop lying and instead to speak the truth [Eph.4:25].  
In context, Paul was addressing the issue of Christian character. He is telling us we need to stop acting and thinking like unbelievers. Instead, we need to be acting in a Christ-like manner.

The Christian character of truth is a particularly Christ-like virtue. The Greek and Roman worlds of Jesus day did not place a particularly high value on truth as seen in Pilate's cynical comment "What is truth?" [John 18:38]. Nevertheless, Jesus character makes people want to trust Him.

To develop trust in our relationships it is particularly helpful for us to be trustworthy. Obviously, none of us will be perfect like Jesus is. Each of us will have "our swimming pool" event(s). Yet when we realize that being trustworthy is first a Christian character and, second related to being trusted, we are on our way to developing trust in our relationships.

As we grow in Christ, we become more trustworthy people. Similarly, we become more trusting of others. It is essential to a fruitful marriage to develop or restore trust.

Even if your relationship has been lacking trust, be encouraged there is hope.

To develop and restore trust remember:

1. Confidence that we can trust God and, therefore can trust others;
2. Confess where we have compromised our spouse's trust and; ask for forgiveness and God's strength to change; and
3. Christian character involves being trustworthy. So as we grow in Christ we become trustworthy [and more trusting of others].

## Chapter 6: Finances

When I was growing up it seems that my family frequently did not have enough money. I vaguely remember when I was a small boy and we were evicted from our apartment. I thought it was cool that guys in uniforms and guns were helping us move [ ie. marshals/sheriffs].

When we got to the next apartment with little to no furniture, Dad made it an adventure by telling my brother and I it was 'camping'. Sleeping bags in the living room. We thought it was cool.

I was too young to appreciate the effect the financial stress and strain was placing on my parent's marriage relationship. Nevertheless, I watched my parents fight about money issues. My parents did not know the Lord and, I know it would have been different had they done it God's way.

Financial difficulties and the issues regarding finances can take a tremendous toll upon a marriage relationship. So we want to approach this matter soberly and see what God would speak to us. As we explore the issue of finances, we will consider the following areas:

1. Contentment vs. covetousness,
2. Cure vs. curse,
3. Children,
4. Certainty,
5. Collection, and
6. Considerations

### Contentment

It has been said, "that living within our budgets is really not living". Many of us are living with burdensome debt acquired unnecessarily. Is there a better way?

Paul encouraged Timothy, and us, when he shared the insight, " Now godliness with contentment is great gain" [1Tim.6:6]. He also told the church at Philippi that he had learned to be content regardless of his material wealth:

Phil 4:11-13

*11 Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content:*

*12 I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.*

*13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*

(NKJ)

In both portions of Scripture contentment is connected to one's relationship with God. Contentment is linked with appropriating Christ's strength and; is also linked with godliness.

Many of us believe that enough would be 'just a little bit more'. The famous preacher, C.H. Spurgeon, once remarked, "If we aren't content with what we have, we won't be content with twice as much".

The opposite end of the coin is coveting. Coveting can be described as an insatiable desire for worldly gain; greed. We don't generally think about just how covetous our culture is.

Our society builds shrine to coveting ...we call them malls! In our town we have the "Premium Outlet Mall". Busloads of tourist shoppers come to this mall...amazing! What is even more amazing to me is that people get off the bus and start snapping pictures of the shopping mall.

Can you imagine being at their home when they pull the photo album off the shelf to share their pictures of the vacation. "Here we are at the Camarillo Premium Outlet Mall". How exciting is that? Give me a break! Yet that scene is probably repeated countless times all over the land because we are clueless about our issue with coveting.

Consider the fact that of the more than six hundred commandments in the Old Testament, God wrote only ten "with His own finger" [Exodus 31:18]. That should stir us to pay attention to those ten as being of particular significance.

The tenth commandment states,

Exod 20:17

*17 "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's."*

(NKJ)

Now, if I was starting a new civilization and, I only got to make ten laws to govern the people, I probably would not have included 'don't covet'. But God did!

I remember when I started working in the Burbank City Attorney's Office. I was fresh out of law school. My first assignment was to review the municipal code to determine if there were any outdated laws that could be eliminated from the books. There were provisions regarding marathon dances that had not been an issue for forty or more years.



Yet despite the many seemingly unnecessary rules, there was no provision regarding coveting in the Burbank Municipal Code. But there was in God's Book!

God said not to covet your neighbor's house, spouse, servants, his Jaguar, his Harley, his electronic toys or anything that belongs to your neighbor. Unfortunately, unless we are filled with God, we will try to fill 'that big empty' with things.

This is the essence of the content vs. covet issue, which filling station are we going to? Are we going to the Lord or are we going to the mall? The whole design of the world's marketing system is to create a sense of need where one really doesn't exist.

When I was thirteen years old, 'designer' athletic shoes had just come on the market. Now I had a perfectly good pair of shoes, but it seemed that all of my friends had the new shoes. And I felt that I had to have the new shoes or else I just wouldn't be cool or accepted. I'm sure this sounds like an all too familiar scenario.

Please understand that I am not suggesting that we should not have material possessions. But, when your closet is so full that you can't squeeze another garment inside and; you say, "I don't have a thing to wear" or "I need a bigger walk-in closet" the problem is not your closet!

The problem with seeking our satisfaction in material things is that they never satisfy. You get that brand new car and think, "alright I'm really happy now". You tell the kids, 'no more drive through food, no eating in the new car'.

Every morning you gleefully open the garage door to gaze upon your idol. You open the doors and deeply inhale the aroma of 'new car' like the sweet smell of ceremonial incense. You engage in worship rituals... 'wax on, wax off'.

Then, as the weeks go by you finally give in to the whining requests to go to the drive through at "Happy Burger". And then it happens...spilled french-fries in the back seat! The car will never be the same... gone is the aroma of new car, replaced by the odor of "Happy Burger Super Size Fries". Plenty of "Happy Fries", but no more happiness.

The truth is that material things will never satisfy! A fundamental truth is that as we seek contentment in Christ, like Paul, we can learn to be content in whatever state we are in. Whether we have a little or a lot, we are content because Jesus satisfies.

In regard to a fruitful marriage, we must ask ourselves are we more on the content side of the coin or more on the covetous side of the coin. To have a fruitful marriage, we must learn from Jesus so that we can learn to be content.

Paul told us that he had learned to be content. But, he did not tell us any particular key. We know that Paul had extensive knowledge of the scriptures and tremendous religious training. Yet these things did not provide contentment in and of themselves [see, Rom.7].

Effectively, Paul is telling us that by growing in his relationship with Jesus contentment was the natural fruit that was produced supernaturally. Accordingly the answer to the question, "How do I become more content?" is to draw close and abide with Jesus.

David wrote, "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want" [Psalm 23:1].  
If we feel that we are lacking, perhaps we are not letting Jesus be our Shepherd.  
When Jesus is our Shepherd, we are content.

### Cure vs. Curse

Many of us think if we just had more money, than all of our problems would disappear. But the truth is that although poverty is not a blessing, riches come with a price tag as well. Both poverty and riches can result in adverse consequences for our spiritual life.

Consider the words of wisdom found in the Proverbs:

Prov 30:8-9

*8 Remove falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches-- feed me with the food allotted to me;*

*9 Lest I be full and deny You, and say, "Who is the LORD?" Or lest I be poor and steal, and profane the name of my God.*

(NKJ)

Here, we are warned that if we have too much money we are likely to trust in our wealth and deny God saying, "Who is the LORD?" Here, money becomes a curse.

Jesus asked, "What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" [See, Matt.16:26 ].

An abundance of wealth can make people callous to the true message of the gospel regarding our dependence upon God.

When we first came to Camarillo, we were driving through town trying to get familiar with the area. As we drove into the foothills, we saw beautiful homes and gated communities. The area is an affluent community. Yet, it is estimated that only five to ten percent of the community goes to Church.

This is the curse of riches. We can send our kids to private schools; we can send our kids to lessons; we can send our kids to exclusive camps and; unfortunately we can end up sending our kids to hell.

Unless our children see a reality in our lives of dependence upon God, it is difficult for them to come to a true knowledge of God, and a personal relationship with Him. Fortunately, riches don't have to be a curse.

The scriptures show us godly men who also happened to be extremely wealthy. For example, Job, Abraham, King David, King Solomon, and Joseph of Aramathea. While it is certainly possible to have wealth and to live in harmony with God it can be difficult.

On the other hand, being poor is no blessing either. Being poor puts a tremendous strain on us and can cause us to do things that profane the name of God. I remember my parents telling me when I was a young man how Dad had written checks when we were small boys to buy toys at the Holidays. The problem was that there wasn't money in the account to cover the cost.

My Dad was raised as an Orthodox Jew and, he was a man of great faith in God. It grieved my Dad to do what he did so that his boys would have presents at Hanukkah. But being poor can strain us to do things that hurt God.

It has been said that money is essentially neutral. It is noted that it is the love of money that is a root of all kinds of evil rather than money itself:

1 Tim 6:10

*10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.*

(NKJ)

It is true that it is the love of money that corrupts. But, I would assert that money has more of a corrupting value than a neutral value. When we get accustomed to a certain lifestyle that is dependent upon a certain income level, we go through 'financial withdraws'. We can be addicted to money. The desire for the things of the world has a tendency to choke out the things of God.

Consider the life of Demas. In Paul's letter to Philemon, he describes Demas as a fellow laborer. In the letter to the Colossians, a few years later, Paul no longer refers to Demas as a fellow laborer but merely says, 'and Demas' [Col.4:14].

By the time of Paul's last letter, the sad commentary is presented, " Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world" [1Tim.4].

Here, we see the tension between too much as well as not enough money. Money can be a curse and it can be a cure. But a fruitful marriage is not based on income level.

In Proverbs 17:1 we read, “Better is a dry morsel with quietness, than a house full of feasting with strife”. The wise family realizes that it is better to have peace and contentment despite having only a little than to have plenty with contention.

Many have found that their efforts to acquire more money would be a blessing...they would finally arrive. Imagine a couple that has a home, cars, ‘toys’, and some disposable income. They seem to be doing just fine.

Yet, there is a desire for a bigger house, in a better neighborhood, and a new European sedan. More hours are spent at the office, a quest for a promotion, and the reach for the “brass ring”. Finally, they arrive. A new European sedan parked in the driveway of the new house in the new neighborhood

Unfortunately, they are not living happily ever after. As a matter of fact, they are miserable. The stress to maintain the lifestyle that they have stretched to try to attain is a constant burden. As the pressure of the work world is released at the home, the whole family feels like they are walking on eggshells.

They are making more money than they have ever made, or imagined making, and yet there is near constant strife. The truth is that money can't buy happiness [although you can rent happiness for brief periods].

Therefore, before you prepare to take the first step, on the first rung, of the corporate ladder, consider the consequences of reaching the top only to find that you have fallen from a great height. Be sober! Money may not be a cure, and may end up being a curse.

A related issue involves working overtime. God is not opposed to hard work. The Hebrews assumed six days labor and one day rest [Ex.20]. The Old Testament is written in a context of an agrarian society where hard work is needed to provide food and necessities.

As we consider working overtime, we need to evaluate why? Are we working to secure necessities? Also, we need to consider what effect the additional hours will have upon our relationship with God.

Too often, I have seen Christians fall away from God as they squeeze Him out of their schedules to make time for more work. Often the family is the next to suffer. Accordingly, what effect does the decision to work more hours have upon the family?

Evaluate and consider what effect the choice to work more will have on the family's spiritual life. Be ready to reevaluate the decision at periodic intervals [e.g. 60 days] to determine the wisdom of the decision.

Another related issue is whether both husband and wife should work to provide additional income for the family? In our culture, we are seeing more families with both husband and wife working. There are certainly many economic advantages, however, there are also risks involved, especially when small are being raised.

In Titus 2:3-5, young women are encouraged, "to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers..."

Here, young women, with presumably young children, are being encouraged to be primarily responsible for raising children as homemakers. First, it should be noted that God does not prohibit women from working. Second, the discussion of women being homemakers as opposed to men may be limited to a cultural context. Third, God is not demeaning the status of women or compelling them to a life of making casseroles [See, Gal. 3:28].

God has not prohibited women from working. Consider Lydia, a business women, and her encounter with Paul's missionary team:

Acts 16:13-15

*13 And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met there.*

*14 Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul.*

*15 And when she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." So she persuaded us.*

(NKJ)

The Scripture shows Lydia as a woman with a household and also a woman with a business. We see that Lydia was not told that she was wrong. Nor is there a record of her being corrected by the Apostle Paul. Accordingly, we see that women can work as well as having a family.

In a historical context, we know that servants were used as tutors or teachers and, they had great responsibility for helping to raise children in the Greek and Roman world. Nevertheless, God is encouraging parents that they should be available, especially when children are young, to raise the children. Accordingly, parents are encouraged to be the primary caretaker(s) as opposed to another person.

In considering whether both parents should be employed outside of the home, consideration should be given to the need for small children to be raised by parents. God is expressing a principle that it is best that children, especially young children, have the influence of godly parents as much as possible.

Accordingly, it is wise to consider the needs of small children to be raised by parents as much as possible and; to weigh that need against the family's financial needs. A family may want to consider restructuring their budget to allow a parent to be home to raise a small child or children. Perhaps waiting until the children go to school may be a helpful guideline for consideration.

Ultimately, the needs of small children and, the benefit of being raised by a parent who is home may outweigh some of the competing financial desires. Remember that a fruitful marriage has realized that it is better to have enough with contentment, than a lot with contention!

## Children

In Proverbs 13:22 we learn that, "a good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children".

Issues of inheritance and insurance are relevant to our financial plans. The Scriptures show us that we are to provide for the financial future of our family. Nevertheless, when many of us live from paycheck to paycheck it is difficult.

In Luke fifteen we are told of the familiar parable of the Prodigal Son. In the parable, a son asks for his portion of the inheritance, while his father is still alive. The father is sad about his son's desire, but he agrees to the request.

The son goes and spends the money on frivolous living and, is left penniless. Finally, the son comes to his senses and humbly comes to his father to seek forgiveness. The primary point of the story is the father's loving, gracious restoration of his son. This is a picture of God the Father and His love for the lost sinner.

As an aside, it is implicit in the story that the father's provision of an inheritance [albeit upon his passing] was to be expected. In other words, of course a father would provide an inheritance.

The Hebrews had a respect for the right of inheritance as property was passed from one generation to the next. We see that Naboth refused to sell his vineyard to King Ahab saying, "The Lord forbid that I should give the inheritance of my fathers to you!" There was an understanding of his duty to provide an inheritance to his family.

Learning to set aside a portion of our earnings for the future is a fundamental practice of good stewardship. This requires discipline and planning. Preparing a family budget that addresses savings is essential.

God commends the wisdom of planning for the future:

Prov 6:6-8

*6 Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise,*

*7 Which, having no captain, overseer or ruler,*

*8 Provides her supplies in the summer, and gathers her food in the harvest.*

(NKJ)

The ant labors in the time of plenty to prepare for the future time that are leaner. The ant does not require a leader to direct it to do this, because God has given the ant this wisdom.

Similarly, we read in the book of Genesis how God revealed to Joseph that there would be seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine. Joseph was raised up to be Pharaoh's administrator to oversee God's plan to store food during the seven years of plenty to provide food during the seven years of famine.

It is interesting to note that God used Joseph to oversee His plan to provide food to preserve Egypt, but also Joseph's father Jacob and, Joseph's brothers. Although Jacob and the brothers did not labor, God provided for them.

Jesus taught us in the Sermon on the Mount that we could trust God that He would provide for our needs. Consider the Lord's comforting words:

Matt 6:24-34

*24 "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.*

*25 "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?*

*26 "Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?*

*27 "Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?*

*28 "So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin;*

*29 "and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.*

*30 "Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?"*

31 *"Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'"*

32 *"For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.*

33 *"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.*

34 *"Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.*

(NKJ)

Here, we see the tension between two seemingly paradoxical truths: that God wants us to depend on Him and, God wants us to plan for future times where there may be less provision for our family.

As a rule of thumb, trying to set aside ten percent of our income for savings may be prudent. Provision for savings and investment should be prayerfully considered and, counsel should be obtained from a professional.

An investment and saving strategy that is appropriate for your family may not be appropriate for another family. Accordingly, securing counsel from qualified people is suggested.

A related issue involves insurance. Insurance is available for all types of risk. Many states require mandatory automobile liability insurance as a condition of operating a vehicle. Also, most Christians in our country have some form of health insurance providing medical coverage.

Rarely, do I hear questions from believers whether it is proper from a Christian perspective to have these forms of insurance. On the other hand, sometimes I will be asked whether purchasing life or disability insurance is proper.

I believe the same principles apply to all forms of insurance, whether health, life or disability etc. God wants us to be good stewards who would be planning wisely to provide for our family's future. Purchasing insurance does not mean that you don't trust God. Furthermore, God does not prohibit Christians from purchasing insurance.

In summary, God wants us to be wise stewards of the resources that He has entrusted us with. We are to be prudent to make provision for our children so that we leave them with an inheritance. Also, consideration can be given to using various types of insurance as part of your planning. Finally, consider the counsel of trained financial planners.

Certain



We tend to approach our financial situation and status as if our wealth was guaranteed. For example, when we invest in the stock market, we assume that the stock will certainly increase in value. We know that it is theoretically possible for stock prices to collapse, but we don't ever really anticipate that it will happen to us.

Similarly, when we buy a home, we expect the home to increase in value and for us to have equity in the home. We know that it is possible that a neighborhood could change and the value of our home could actually decrease, but we are certain that it won't happen to us.

When we consider our savings, we assume that our 'nest egg' is safe for our retirement. Even though we put the savings aside in case of an emergency need, we are certain that no emergency or crisis will happen to us!

Unfortunately, what we consider to be certain, such as our financial status, and what God considers certain, may not be in harmony. Listen to what God considers certain:

1 Tim 6:7

*7 For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.*  
(NKJ)

We are not taking our possessions with us. Have you ever noticed that there is never a trailer hitch on a hearse? When I see a bumper sticker that says, "He who dies with the most toys wins", I think, "he who dies with the most toys is dead"

At a funeral for a very wealthy man, someone leaned over and whispered, "Just how much did he leave behind?" And the hushed response came, "everything". The truth is you can't take it with you when you go.

The Egyptians, as well as the Babylonians, believed that they could take possessions into the next life. The pyramids and, other elaborate tombs, were prepared with objects of treasure and warfare. Every material need that they could anticipate in the next life was provided for at burial.

Nevertheless, the treasure was left behind for others to loot ...you can't take it with you. That is certain!

On the other hand riches, are described by God, as being uncertain:

1 Tim 6:17

*17 Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy.*

(NKJ)

I knew a man who epitomized the “rags to riches” story. He had worked in construction as a general laborer and then became a carpenter. The company that he worked for built hotels and, so he learned about building hotels.

One year he decided that he would start his own business. His first contract was to build a dugout at the baseball field of a local park... not exactly enough to retire on. But soon, he had landed some contracts to build hotels and, he was becoming wealthy.

As time went by, he decided to open his own hotels [kind of like playing Monopoly]. Soon he had a chain of hotels. Along with the chain of hotel, he had a mansion overlooking the ocean at one of the most expensive pieces of real estate on the planet.

The mansion was so large that when he would throw parties, he would discover people at his home two or three days later that he had no idea that they were staying at his home.

In the driveway of his mansion were some of the most expensive cars in the world. It looked like everything was going great! Certainly, he would live happily ever after.

But, then things changed [as is often the case in the story with an ironic twist].

The country was in the midst of an oil crisis such that people were not traveling. People that are not traveling are not staying in hotels. And without people to stay at the hotels, banks are not being paid on loans.

Soon he lost the hotels, the mansion, and the cars...he lost everything! He even lost his faith because his faith had been in himself and his money. He had learned in a tragic fashion the uncertainty of riches.

But, like a phoenix rising from the ashes, he vowed to pull himself up from his bootstraps. Ironically, his first contract was to build a dugout at a local park. Within a few years, his construction company was once again building hotels.

Again, he was living “the good life”. Soon, he was once again building his own hotels. He was living in a beautiful home on the beach, within a mile from the mansion. And he was driving a red convertible Rolls Royce.

One night his wife heard a noise in the bedroom. As she entered, she found him lying on the floor. He had suffered a massive heart attack and was dead. His rags to riches, to rags to riches saga had come to an end.

Before the funeral arrangements could be made the three children were fighting among themselves and, with their stepmother his widow, for the assets of the estate. At his funeral, only a handful of people attended...the crowd was dramatically smaller than those who attended the parties.

Throughout his life, he never bought green bananas from the market...only ripe bananas. He said he didn't know if he would be around when the green bananas got ripe.

As far as anyone knew, he had never had a relationship with Jesus. He had tried to gain the whole world, but he lost his soul! He traded the certainty of God for the uncertainty of riches.

Perhaps the greatest irony in this tale is the fact that with all of the money and, all of the things, he was perhaps the most miserable man I ever knew...

Another way that we can trust in the uncertainty of riches is in the area of personal debt. When we accumulate debt on credit cards and other installment loans we must take care. The tendency is to extend our debt beyond our ability to realistically pay. This may represent faith in action or it may represent fiscal irresponsibility by trusting in uncertain riches.

The bible discourages the accumulation of debt. We should learn, whenever possible, to live within our means. Learning the discipline of saving for purchases before making the purchase is helpful in reducing our indebtedness and, our reliance upon uncertain riches.

Too many of us have accumulated significant credit card debt such that we are unable to pay. We struggle to make minimum payments on ever escalating debt. As the debts continue to mount up, we consider bankruptcy as a viable solution to our problems. This is not God's means of financial planning!

As Christians we need to be responsible to live within our means so that we are not trusting in uncertain riches. But, instead we are trusting in a certain God!

## Collection

I have saved the instruction regarding the collection, in other words, our giving back to God, for last because, unfortunately that is when many Christians consider this issue. Too many people approach this area in their budget as the last item to be considered. Such that effectively the approach becomes, " If there is anything left at the end, we can consider giving to God".

Three Christians were talking about how to decide how much of their income to give back to God. The first one said that he drew a six-foot circle on the ground and then threw his money into the air and, whatever landed within the circle he gave to God.

The second said that his method was similar except he gave whatever landed outside of the circle. The third said that he didn't use a circle. He merely threw the money up in the air and figured whatever part God wanted He would keep and, whatever landed on the ground was his to use as he saw fit.

God does not give us instruction to give because he needs our money. God is not poor! But God has given us instruction to give because it is for our good. Remember Our Lord's words recorded in Acts 20, "that it is more blessed to give than to receive".

Also, our giving is a tangible way that we can demonstrate our love for God. Our checkbooks can be a litmus test of the extent of our love for God! There may be no better indicator of spiritual growth than the area of giving. The fallacy is that many Christians believe that charitable giving is merely giving away their money.

They fail to realize that giving to God is an investment. God will not be a debtor to any man. No matter how much we give to God, he will always give us more than what we give Him!

Consider some of God's promises in this area:

Prov 3:9-10

*9 Honor the LORD with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase;  
10 So your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine.*  
(NKJ)

Here, we are encouraged that we are to give God honor with our possessions and our firstfruits. God deserves to receive honor by receiving our best and, by being placed first. God guarantees that the result will be that He will give us back plenty.

Imagine someone who buys new furniture and then decides to donate to the church. What is the likelihood that they are going to donate the brand new furniture to the church as opposed to the old furniture that they did not want in their house in the first place?

But what if we understood that if we had saved a thousand dollars for the new furniture and, gave the new furniture to God, He would likely insure that we received something better than a thousand dollar set of furniture. Than we might see God's people thinking and behaving differently in the area of giving to God.

Consider another similar promise recorded in the Book of Malachi:

Mal 3:10

*10 Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this," says the LORD of hosts, "If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it.*

(NKJ)

God is saying test me in this. This is remarkable! In all the verses, in all the chapters, in all the books of the Bible, this is the only time that God says 'test Me'. Consider with me for a moment how sad it must make God to have to say to us 'test Me'.

Effectively, God is saying that He realizes that for most of us, our love for Him is so shallow that we are unwilling to loosen our grip on our precious money without a guarantee from Him. Even with the guarantee, most of us choose immediate pleasure rather than a guaranteed eternal investment.

Assuming that God has spoken to our hearts to give, we can trust that He has provided instruction for us on how to give. Consider the following scriptures regarding the collection:

1 Cor 16:1-2

*1 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also:*

*2 On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.*

(NKJ)

2 Cor 9:6-7

*6 But thus I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.*

*7 So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.*

(NKJ)

The first observation is that God is more concerned about our attitude than the gift itself. Our giving should be cheerful. When we enjoy giving back to God a portion of what He has given to us then everything else will be appropriate.

As a general principle, consider how much is left after giving as a standard rather than how much has been given. The New Testament Church is not instructed to tithe [ie. to give a tenth]. Instead we receive other instructions regarding giving.

Three guidelines can be seen in 1Cor.16:2 : First, giving is to be regular. Paul references 'on the first day of the week' because the church meets on Sunday, the first day of the week. To

regularly give each Sunday can create beneficial accountability to be at Church each week. But, the guideline is to establish a pattern of giving.

For example, some people are paid once a month, or every two weeks. They find themselves giving in connection with their pay period. This is their pattern and, that is appropriate.

Second, giving is universal. Each member of the Church is to “lay something aside”. Regardless of whether someone is involved in ministry to the Lord, or having a difficult season financially, each person is to give.

Third, giving is to be proportional. We are to give as we prosper. A couple with significant income should probably be giving more than ten percent. Because, they have substantial income, the amount they have left is still likely beyond their reasonable needs.

On the other hand, a couple that is truly struggling to just meet their needs should not feel that they must give ten percent to appease God. Similarly, their giving is to be proportional.

Guidelines are also revealed to us in 2Cor.9:6-7. First, to the extent that we give back to God what he has given us, we are promised a proportional yield on our investment. We are told, “he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

Second, we should give because we want to. Attitude is everything! God does not want us to feel that we have to give, but that we get to give! God loves a cheerful giver. Rest assured when you want to give, it will be in the right amount and; the desire to give is evidence of spiritual growth.

## Considerations

Two issues that should be considered are:

1. separate or joint accounts; and
2. prenuptial or pre-marital financial agreements.

I believe both issues are related and require a similar analysis. The issue generally arises when there is a gross disparity in wealth or a desire to maintain separate control of assets and avoid co-mingling. There are potential practical values to maintaining separate funds, however, I believe the advantages are outweighed by the adverse consequences.

The Lord's desire is for husband and wife to become one flesh. When we separate funds we are creating a potential barrier to coming together. Often there is a sense that the separate accounts are protection, like an insurance contract, against a future disaster.

The Bible does not prohibit prenuptial agreements, nor is there a prohibition against separate accounts. It does not appear that these were relevant issues in the culture. At that time, there was the custom of dowry.

In that culture, a 'fund' was provided to the parents of the bride prior to the marriage. The dowry could be money or goods and; would provide compensation to the father for the loss a daughter's help to the family. In the case of divorce, the groom was effectively paying alimony up front. God does not prohibit dowry either [see, e.g. Gen.34:12; Ex.22;16-17].

Although these measures are not prohibited, God's ideal is for husbands and wives to become one flesh. Often, these arrangements are an obstacle to unity. The problems are the implied messages.

We may be giving a message to our future spouse that we really don't trust them completely and; that we love our treasure more than we love them. Also, we may be intimating that we are not really sure the marriage will work. Accordingly, when approaching these issues, consideration should be given to approach these issues soberly. A couple must communicate about their concerns and feelings honestly and openly.

#### SUMMARY REGARDING FINANCES:

Our attitudes regarding finances can effect how fruitful our marriage is. We considered contentment. Are we generally content with God's provision or do we generally covet such that we are not satisfied?

We saw that while poverty is a burden, wealth is not the cure. As a matter of fact, we see that wealth can be a curse because we tend to exclude God from our lives.

We see our responsibility to our children to be good stewards of the resources that God has provided. God has called us to provide an inheritance for our heirs. We saw how insurance policies can be part of the plan to provide.

We were reminded not to trust in riches that are uncertain, but to trust in the true and living God. We also explored considerations such as prenuptial agreements and separate versus joint accounts.

Also, we considered the collection. Our responsibility to give back to God, from the financial resources that He has provided, to support the work of God in ministry. We are warned that our failure to give back to God is robbery. And we learned principles from the New Testament about how Christians should give.

Therefore, we have considered important financial issues as follows:

1. Contentment vs. covetous;
2. Cure vs. curse;
3. Children;
4. Certainty;
5. Collection; and
6. Considerations.

#### HOMEWORK:

1. Prepare a family budget revealing your current spending patterns. Budget preparation materials such as software or other spreadsheets are recommended to assist in setting up categories/accounts.
2. In reviewing your family budget, consider the issues of savings and whether you are giving to the work of God.
3. Analyze your family budget in light of the principles you have learned regarding finances.
4. Prepare a proposed budget that takes into consideration the lessons learned regarding savings and giving financially to support God's work. Recall lessons learned regarding being content versus covetous.
5. As you prepare your proposed budget, consider eliminating or minimizing credit card or other installment debt. Plan on saving for purchases and, living within your means.
6. Reevaluate at the end of one month to see how well you are doing at living per your budget. Make any necessary adjustments. Schedule a time to reevaluate, once again, three months down the road.



## Chapter 7: Union Threats

### Union Treats:

Before considering threats to the union, it may be helpful to consider treats from the union. The union of marriage can provide the greatest blessings in a person's life.

I remember one of our first dates. Karen and I had gone to a movie. She was wearing her jeans, a purple t-shirt, and a jean jacket. She had her hair in a French braid.

Although I don't remember the movie, I remember going up to the mezzanine to use the restroom and looking down at Karen as she stood in line for popcorn. I looked and I thought she was breathtakingly beautiful. I recall how I marveled at her beautiful braided hair.

Braided hair is not only beautiful, but it can be a picture of how God wants the union of marriage to be. In Ecclesiastes 4:12 we are told, "a threefold cord is not quickly broken"

God's desire is for a husband and wife to become one flesh. But, it is not only two, but three becoming one flesh. When you look at a braid, you realize that one strand is actually holding the other two together. This is what the union of husband, wife and Christ should look like... beautiful and strong!

The strength of the marriage union depends on how God is woven into the fabric of the marriage. The closer we draw to Jesus, the closer we draw to one another.

On my desk, I have three rocks and, each one is painted. The first one says 'Jesus' and has a fish symbol painted on it. The next one is round and says 'Christ, Love, and Joy'. The third one is painted pink and says 'Calvary Chapel'.

Sometimes when I am meeting with a couple, I will illustrate this truth by arranging the rocks in the shape of a triangle. I will place "the Jesus rock" at the top of the triangle and the other two rocks form the bottom of the triangle. As the two rocks on the bottom are moved up the edges of the triangle, they in fact are closer together.

Similarly, when husband and wife are moving closer to Jesus they in fact are moving closer to one another! Unfortunately, when only one of us is moving closer to Jesus, we don't necessarily move closer together. Accordingly, the union of our marriage is strengthened as we move closer to Jesus together. But a marriage in union with Christ has several advantages. Consider the wisdom of Solomon regarding the subject of a marriage with a strong union:

Eccl 4:9-12

*9 Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor.*

*10 For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up.*

*11 Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; but how can one be warm alone?*

*12 Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.*

(NKJ)

Here, Solomon describes four benefits of the union:

1. Reward;
2. Help;
3. Comfort; and
4. Strength.

### *Reward*

First, consider the reward, “Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor”. A marriage in Christ still requires labor. But a couple can know that they are building together. As a farmer labors in his fields, he has comfort knowing that in due time he will reap a harvest. The reward of his labor is a bountiful, fruitful yield.

Similarly, in a fruitful marriage, the couple can be comforted in their labor. They can know that Jesus will produce fruit in their marriage. Christ will reward their labor. By contrast, a single person, no matter how spiritual they are cannot have the reward of a fruitful marriage, regardless of their work for the Lord, until they are married.

When Jesus brings a husband and wife together in the union of marriage, the result is something greater than the individual parts. Both the groom and the bride can be wonderful people as individuals, well liked and loved by many. But when they are brought together as one in Christ, they become greater as a whole than the sum of the parts. This phenomenon is a great reward for their labor.

Consider the wedding feast at Cana recorded in John 2. In that day, a village would be invited to partake in the joy of the wedding feast. The feast could last for a week and, would be a special event on the community’s calendar.

This was the location of Jesus first miracle as he changed the water into wine. As the feast was progressing, the wine ran out. This would be a tremendous burden for the host who was trying to meet the expectation of the guests that the wine would continue to flow to celebrate the marriage. It is here that Jesus chose to perform His first miracle.

In performing the miracle, Jesus was taking water, something that is good in and of itself, and transforming it into something that was even better. Jesus was doing the same thing in the life of the couple that had just been married.

Similarly, the transformation produced joy in the life of others. Again, we see a parallel as a fruitful marriage produces joy in the life of others...especially children.

Another blessing from the changing of water into wine was the production of something that was right for the time and the occasion. When a couple is brought together in marriage in God's timing the transformation is perfect for the occasion and, time of their lives.

Accordingly, from the wedding feast at Cana we can draw at least three rewards resulting from the work of marriage:

1. Something good becomes something better;
2. Joy flows to the married couple, their children and others; and
3. The relationship is right for the times and occasions in the couple's life.

### *Help*

A second reward for the union of marriage is help. We are told, "For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up".

I remember the commercial for a medic alert product featuring an elderly woman who has fallen and, uses the product to summon help with the famous line, "I've fallen and I can't get up".

When we consider the topography of the Christian life we see that there are mountains, plains and valleys. Rarely do Christians get to spend their entire Christian life on the mountaintops. Often we enter valleys without ever realizing we are going down. Remember when we are coasting...we are going downhill!

When we are going down in our relationship with God it is a picture of rebellion against God. Remember Jonah's rebellion? When God called Jonah to deliver a message, intended to bring salvation to the wicked Ninevites, he refused. Jonah decided to go in the opposite direction.

Four times in the first chapter of the Book of Jonah we are told that Jonah went down. He went down to Joppa, to go down to Tarshish. He went down to the boat, he went down below deck and, finally went down into the sea. In Jonah's case, God miraculously used a great fish to help Jonah up.

The union of marriage provides the blessing of help in many areas, but here Solomon is focused on help when a companion has fallen.

When I was about thirteen years old, albeit a long time ago, my friend and I were playing near a high rise building. As we ran across a grading atop a fifteen-foot shaft, my friend fell into the shaft. He had split his skull in the fall and, he blacked out.

I got to a phone and called 911. The ambulance and fire trucks came and the emergency workers rescued my friend. One of the rescue workers told me that my call for help had saved my friend's life.

Having someone in your life that can call out to God or others for help is a blessing. To have someone who cares and wants to help when we have fallen is normal in a marriage union.

A fruitful marriage union is characterized by accountability between a husband and wife such that when one stumbles and falls, the other is there to encourage and, help them up!

### *Comfort*

A third characteristic of the marriage union is comfort. Solomon encourages us that, "If two lie down together, they will keep warm; but how can one be warm alone?" There is a certain comfort associated in the marriage relationship merely by the presence of our spouse.

Not only am I warmed on a cold night when we snuggle under the comforter but; my heart is warmed as my wife's presence brings comfort to me. When Karen and I are separated it is comforting when we speak on the phone and, when we are reunited.

When we are not together, it feels as though something is missing. When I walk into an empty room and, I am aware that she is not there, I miss her. It is a wonderful feeling to be in the presence of someone you love and, to be comforted.

One of the great blessings of the marriage union is the comfort of having a person in your life that you love. A spouse who has become one flesh with you brings comfort. Unfortunately, those who are not married are unable to experience the fullness of this comfort in the absence of a true union.

### *Strength*

A fourth blessing is strength, "Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken".

It has been said that behind every great man is a great woman. Often times our strength has been enhanced by the encouragement of a spouse. Sometimes an encouraging word from a spouse can strengthen us when we are feeling overwhelmed.

Sometimes we feel inadequate as a mate, as a parent, as a boss, as an employee, as a minister, and as a human being. We face opposition in the physical world as well as in the spiritual dimension. Having a mate to stand with you shoulder to shoulder, and back to back is encouraging.

I remember sitting on a park bench with my wife one day. We sat back to back talking and enjoying being together. As we sat there together, we were supporting one another. If either one of us got up, the other would have fallen back. But even though we were supporting one another, it did not feel like a burden.

In considering the union of marriage, realize there is strength from the union that does not create a burden to either individual. This strength allows the relationship to endure significant challenges without breaking. But there are many challenges that we face that are overwhelming to us and require God's strength.

One night I was coming home from a hockey game when a man jumped out from behind the bushes. He stuck a pistol in my forehead and; he demanded me to give him all my money or he would kill me. Growing up Jewish, this was quite a dilemma for me. But I reluctantly handed over my wallet... it was not time to be a hero.

Had Karen been there, I don't suspect that we would have tried to withstand him. We would have been overpowered. There are certain battles where you need someone else's protection.

When I was a small boy, the kids on our block used to play ball in the alley behind our apartment building. One day, a boy who I will call Robbie [because that is his name] started to bully me. He was about the same age as my brother who is four years older.

My older brother walked into the alley and saw what was going on and grabbed Robbie by the shirt. He threw Robbie against the garage door and told him in no uncertain terms never to lay a hand on me again [a right my brother was apparently reserving for himself].

It was awesome! It is probably close to forty years later and, I still remember my brother as a hero [When you read this Seth, I mean it]!

May I digress for a brief moment? I remember my orientation day during my first day of law school. The Dean told us that only one-third of our class would graduate. He said, "Look to your left and look to your right, only one of you will be here in three years."

As I looked to my left, there was Robbie. Three years later I graduated. Need I say anything more? God is good!

Getting back to my point, my big brother had defended me when I could not defend myself. And truly it was God who defended me. Hadn't it been God who brought my brother into the alley at the exact right time? Wasn't it God who gave my brother the desire and ability to protect me? Wasn't it God who got me through law school?

We are told that a threefold cord is not quickly broken. When Jesus is intertwined into the marriage union, he holds the other two strands together like the French braid. This strength allows a marriage to endure threats to the union that might otherwise cause it to break.

There can be tremendous weight that could cause a twofold cord to break under pressure that will not break a threefold cord. If you are reading this and feel that your rope is about to break, maybe it is because you have not allowed Jesus to be intertwined in the fabric of the union.

So far we have considered the treats from the union of marriage including:

1. Reward;
2. Help;
3. Comfort; and
4. Strength.

#### *Protection from adultery*

Now let us consider the threats to the union of marriage. A primary concern relates to the need for protection from adultery.

Consider generally, a wise father's concern for his son about this issue and his advice:

Prov 6:20-29

*20 My son, keep your father's command, and do not forsake the law of your mother.*

*21 Bind them continually upon your heart; Tie them around your neck.*

*22 When you roam, they will lead you; when you sleep, they will keep you; and when you awake, they will speak with you.*

*23 For the commandment is a lamp, and the law a light; reproofs of instruction are the way of life,*

*24 To keep you from the evil woman, from the flattering tongue of a seductress.*

*25 Do not lust after her beauty in your heart, nor let her allure you with her eyelids.*

*26 For by means of a harlot a man is reduced to a crust of bread; and an adulteress will prey upon his precious life.*

*27 Can a man take fire to his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?*

*28 Can one walk on hot coals, and his feet not be seared?*

*29 So is he who goes in to his neighbor's wife; whoever touches her shall not be innocent.*

(NKJ)

Preliminarily, note that God's guiding Word is a means of protection from the danger of adultery. The threat of adultery is not only an issue between a husband and wife, it is a sin before God!

In verse twenty-four we are warned of the flattering tongue of a seductress. Please remember that there is no such thing as innocent flirtation. Avoid flirtation because it is dangerous!

So called innocent flirtation puts thoughts in our heads that has no business being there. Our thoughts lead to actions that lead to habits that lead to our destiny!

If a woman calls her husband at work and a female employee answers the phone with a comment like, "your husband is so nice and, he is so good looking...you're so lucky", should it bother the wife? Well it is probably reasonable if it does bother her. What should she do?

Let's assume she approaches him and tells him about the phone call. She expresses her concern that a woman at work is making these comments that just don't seem right to her. He assures her that there is nothing going on.

She believes him, but she is just not comfortable about the situation. What if anything should she do and; what if anything should he do? I believe that the ball is now in his court. In all likelihood he has either engaged in some flirtatious comment(s) or allowed the female employee to do so without stopping the situation.

Flirtation must be stopped! Usually, affirmation of how happily married we are is a general deterrent to stop flirtation. In more serious cases of advance, we need to make it clear that "we are not going there".

In verse twenty-five we are warned about the dangers of lusting after her beauty and, being allured by her eyes. In Gen. 3:6 we learn that Eve's temptation began as she saw that the tree was pleasant and, that desire sprung forth.

It is the second look that kills. When we are busy checking her out or checking him out, it is a dangerous place. Trying to explain, "Oh I was just admiring the beauty of God's creation" just won't cut it.

I heard a story about Billy Graham. He was addressing a group of Christian women. A woman who attended the function was a skeptic. She assumed that Rev. Graham was probably “not as holy as people thought”.

As Rev. Graham spoke with each woman who approached after his presentation, the skeptic watched his eyes. When it was finally her turn to speak with Rev. Graham, she told him what she had been doing, and she commended him.

During the whole time that he was speaking with the various women, he only looked at their eyes. He never once looked where he was not supposed to look.

This is a great example for us... keep our eyes looking at where they should be focused. Nevertheless, there is a significant likelihood that we will be looking where we are not supposed to be looking. I believe it is real helpful for us at these times to remember that there is a real spiritual element to the battle.

The enemy of men’s souls hates marriage probably in direct proportion to God’s immeasurable love for marriage. Satan wants to tempt us with the desires of our flesh that we lust after them and sin against God. In light of this truth, here’s some practical spiritual counsel.

When I catch myself taking the second look, I start praying. I’ll pray, “Lord I just pray for this woman that if she doesn’t know you yet that she will come to know you. Lord I pray for her husband or her husband to be that he would be a godly man. Lord I pray for her kids or her kids to be that they would grow up to be strong in you. Lord forgiver me...” Suddenly, the temptation is gone!

If Satan was seeking to tempt me, he retreats as soon as I start interceding in prayer. The last thing the enemy of men’s souls wants is for me to be doing is praying for someone. Furthermore, when I am walking in the Spirit, I don’t have a desire to fulfill the lusts of the flesh.

In verse twenty-six we are warned about the danger of destroyed lives caused by adultery, “For by means of a harlot a man is reduced to a crust of bread; and an adulteress will prey upon his precious life”. Adultery destroys lives!

The adulterous relationship rips apart the fabric of the marriage relationship. Frequently, divorce follows adultery. Even when God intervenes and there is restoration of the marriage relationship, there is a sense that although the fabric of the marriage has been sowed together, that there is a big stain. It seems that it takes a long time for the stain to fade. Ultimately, only a powerful work of the grace of God can make that stain disappear.

The Scripture tells us that a person who becomes involved in a pattern or lifestyle of adulterous behavior without any sense of conviction of their sin has no place in heaven. They have no



reason to believe that they are saved or have an assurance of eternal life. This is the ultimate destruction of life!

Someone may come to me and say, “ Pastor Bruce I believe that God wants me to leave my wife and marry my secretary. My wife just doesn’t understand or love me; and my secretary is a Christian and she loves me. And besides I just have a peace from God about the decision”. I will tell them that regardless of what they believe or what they feel, that it is definitely not a peace from God. God hates divorce and adultery! Because God loves a fruitful marriage!

In an effort to find **protection from adultery let us consider five keys as follows:**

- 1.Choices,
- 2.Captivity,
- 3.Caught,
- 4.Consequences,
- 5.Considerations.

*Choices:*

The Scripture shows us that we are responsible for our choices [see, James 1:14-16]. Our choices can’t be blamed on the devil, God, our spouse for failing to meet our desires or those who tempted us. We need to assume responsibility! Consider the following:

Prov 7:8

*8 Passing along the street near her corner; and he took the path to her house*  
(NKJ)

In this Proverb, the adulteress seduces a young man. His first wrong choice was to take the path that led by her house. There is a process that leads up to committing adultery. Along the way, God is extremely gracious to provide several opportunities for escape [see,1Cor.10:13], however, we need to choose to escape the temptation.

For example, the person who is tempted to drink alcohol should probably not spend a lot of time hanging out at bars. Chances are if they keep hanging out at bars they are going to drink. If you hang out at slippery places, chances are you are going to slip. The logic here is not rocket science! In the same sense, the person who places himself in a compromising position is likely to be compromised. We should choose to avoid, wherever possible situations where We are likely to be tempted.

Another thought about choices is that we should make our decision early, before the choices or temptations are presented. For example, the person who is dieting might want to decide before

they even enter the restaurant that they are not going to eat dessert. That way when the server comes at the end of the meal with a dessert tray containing the 'carousel of calories' they are more likely to resist, even if their favorite dessert is on the tray. When we affirmatively decide that there is no way that we are going to be involved in adultery, it makes the choice easier if the opportunity or the temptation arises.

We see a great example of someone who made the right choices as we consider the account of Joseph and Potiphar's wife:

Gen 39:1-12

*1 Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. And Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him down there.*

*2 The LORD was with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian.*

*3 And his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD made all he did to prosper in his hand.*

*4 So Joseph found favor in his sight, and served him. Then he made him overseer of his house, and all that he had he put under his authority.*

*5 So it was, from the time that he had made him overseer of his house and all that he had, that the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of the LORD was on all that he had in the house and in the field.*

*6 So he left all that he had in Joseph's hand, and he did not know what he had except for the bread which he ate. And Joseph was handsome in form and appearance.*

*7 And it came to pass after these things that his master's wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me."*

*8 But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Look, my master does not know what is with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand.*

*9 "There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"*

*10 So it was, as she spoke to Joseph day by day, that he did not heed her, to lie with her or to be with her.*

*11 But it happened about this time, when Joseph went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the house was inside,*

*12 that she caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me." But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside.*

(NKJ)

Joseph had been sold into slavery by his brothers and; finds himself serving Potiphar, an official of the Pharaoh. Potiphar's wife notes that Joseph was handsome in form and appearance [v.6] and makes sexual advances saying, "Lie with me." It is reasonable to assume that Potiphar's wife was attractive. In light of his position, power and possessions she is likely 'a trophy bride'.

This would tend to make the temptation even greater especially in light of the opportunity or access.

Access tends to heighten the risk of falling and making bad choices. Someone who has no access to drugs is not likely to be as frequently tempted as the person who has drugs offered to them daily. Similarly, the easy access to pornography via the internet makes the temptation greater.

Joseph reminds Potiphar's wife of how well her husband has treated Joseph and; how he has trusted Joseph [v.8-9]. Joseph then makes the interesting statement, "How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" Joseph understood fundamentally that adultery with Potiphar's wife was a sin against God more than a sin against Potiphar. Joseph had apparently decided that he would not sin against God and; this choice was reflected in his response to the temptation.

Nevertheless, we see Potiphar's wife continuing to make advances. We see Joseph being tempted on a daily basis by Potiphar's wife to lie with her [v.10].

An interesting thought is to consider whether Joseph told Potiphar's wife in no uncertain terms that there was just no way. The text is silent in this regard, however, it appears that if Joseph had made his position strong and clear the advances were likely to stop. This may have been Joseph's only poor choice.

Joseph continues to resist the daily temptation [v.10] and, finally she grabs him by his garment saying, "Lie with me" [v.11-12]. And then we read of Joseph's choice to flee. Joseph literally runs from the temptation...a wise decision.

We have to be willing to flee from the temptations that threaten our marriage union. There may come a time where we are left with no other choice but to run. We may have failed to make wise choices earlier that created the situation and, we must now take responsibility to make the right choice.

Paul told Timothy, a young pastor, to flee youthful lusts. Paul not only told Timothy what he needed to avoid [ie. youthful lusts], but he also told him what he needed to do:

2 Tim 2:22

*22 Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.*

(NKJ)

We need to understand that not only do we need to flee lust but, we need to choose to pursue a spiritual life characterized by righteousness, faith, love and peace. When we are truly seeking

a deep spiritual relationship with God, we are not as likely to seek fulfillment and satisfaction through an adulterous relationship. One of the best ways to be protected from adultery, lust, pornography and the like is to make a choice to commit to grow in Christ.

Finally, we must remember that we are responsible for our choices. Proverbs 6:29-35 goes on to tell us that the person who commits adultery will bear the guilt, responsibility and, the consequences of their conduct. It is a sobering warning to make wise choices:

*29 So is he who goes in to his neighbor's wife; whoever touches her shall not be innocent.*

*30 People do not despise a thief if he steals to satisfy himself when he is starving.*

*31 Yet when he is found, he must restore sevenfold; he may have to give up all the substance of his house.*

*32 Whoever commits adultery with a woman lacks understanding; he who does so destroys his own soul.*

*33 Wounds and dishonor he will get, and his reproach will not be wiped away.*

*34 For jealousy is a husband's fury; therefore he will not spare in the day of vengeance.*

*35 He will accept no recompense, nor will he be appeased though you give many gifts.*

(NKJ)

*Captivity:*

A second key to protection from adultery is taking every thought into captivity. Paul reminds us that the battle is not fought in the physical realm per se, but in the spiritual realm. Specifically, the battlefield is the mind. Hear Paul's words to us:

2 Cor 10:4-5

*4 For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds,*

*5 casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ,*

(NKJ)

Lust and temptation are born and cultivated in the mind. Paul is telling us that in order to have protection from adultery we need to take every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. When we are standing in line at the supermarket we are bombarded with provocative images on the covers of magazines. When we drive through metropolitan areas, the roadways display enticing billboards. If our minds are not bridled, we will run with a host of ideas that are not edifying. Yet we have a choice to look away and to take the thoughts captive.

God designed our minds so that we only think about one thought at a time. Sure, there are people who can perform multiple tasks at the 'same time'. But, in reality, we only think about one thing at a time.

If I were to suggest to you not to think about the theme from "It's a Small World" ride at Disneyland, chances are you are already hearing it in your head. You could probably have that song stuck in your head for a pretty long time. You would probably be ready to look at the back cover of this book to find my e-mail address to send me a note to let me know just how much you appreciated this pseudo-torture! You would probably have a new compassion for the Disneyland "cast members" who work in that ride for hours at a time and are compelled to hear that song like fingernails on a chalkboard.

But, if I asked you, "Do you know the melody of 'Amazing Grace'?" You are already humming the song. And if I then asked, "Do you know the lyrics of the first two verses?" Your mind is feverishly searching your memory to retrieve the words to the song.

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me!  
I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see.

Tw'as grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved;  
how precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed!

Viola! No more "It's a Small World" [whoops there we go again]. Now you see, you can take "It's a Small World" captive by merely thinking about "Amazing Grace". This is an extremely powerful truth to apprehend and experience.

Consider God's advice to us as recorded in Paul's letter to the Phillipians:

Phil 4:8

*8 Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy-- meditate on these things.*

(NKJ)

Rather than focusing in negative things that pollute, we are encouraged to focus on things that build us up. If we are thinking about the things of God, we have effectively taken captive the thoughts that we want to eliminate. It is like entering a dark room in your house. You don't have to cast out the darkness to see, you merely have to turn on the light!

Another related way that we take thoughts captive is to feed the Spirit. The Spirit and the flesh are in battle. Have you ever noticed that some of the strangest thoughts can creep into our minds when we are reading the Bible or praying?

There is a war going on and God wants us to be more than victorious so that we are protected from adultery.

So how do we win the war? There is a story of a man who raised fighting roosters. The birds were all fierce, but some were more ferocious than others. Yet the man seemed to know how to control the contest such that he would know the winner before the contest began. When asked his secret, the man replied, "That's simple, the one I feed the most". Similarly, in the battle between our flesh and the Spirit, the one we feed the most will win the war! While it is true that we may lose some battles, we will win the war!

If we are living with a spiritual focus on Christ, we will take captive the desires of the flesh...guaranteed:

Gal 5:16

*16 I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.*

(NKJ)

Unfortunately, our flesh will continue to lust as long as we are alive on this earth until the Lord comes...so be prepared for the battle!

*Caught:*

The lie of adultery is that no one gets caught. Yet God in his grace reveals our sin to correct us and keep us from sinning. People are discovered, or they are so overwhelmed with guilt that they confess. Yet people continue to believe that they won't get caught. Consider the words of the adulteress as noted in the Proverb:

Prov 7:19-21

*19 For my husband is not at home; he has gone on a long journey;*

*20 He has taken a bag of money with him, and will come home on the appointed day."*

*21 With her enticing speech she caused him to yield, with her flattering lips she seduced him.*

(NKJ)

The seduction begins with the temptation that her husband is not home and won't be home for a long time. In other words, we won't get caught. Nevertheless, people do get caught!

One day, I'm at Disneyland, along with about fifty thousand other people. As I come around a corner to enter Frontierland, there is a married woman I know hugging and kissing a man who

is not her husband. It was an awkward moment to say the least. She was embarrassed and did not know what to say. I was shocked and didn't know what to say.

She stumbled through an introduction and, we exchanged brief pleasantries. I'm sure she was wondering just how long I had been watching. The next morning, shortly before 6:00 a.m. she called me begging that I would not tell her husband. I told her that under the circumstances, that I thought it was time for her to tell her husband.

I can't tell you how many times I have counseled couples who have gone through the betrayal of adultery. I'm certain that at the time of the temptation they never expected to be caught. Yet the truth was revealed! Accordingly, before you ever go down the road towards adultery, know you will get caught!

*Consequences:*

The partner to the lie that we won't get caught is the lie that there won't be consequences. Consider the warning of the Proverbs:

Prov 7:22-23

*22 Immediately he went after her, as an ox goes to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks,*

*23 Till an arrow struck his liver. As a bird hastens to the snare, he did not know it would cost his life.*

(NKJ)

Prov 6:27-28

*27 Can a man take fire to his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?*

*28 Can one walk on hot coals, and his feet not be seared?*

(NKJ)

Adultery is appealing because the consequences are not considered. People who commit adultery are not thinking about the consequences. They are too busy thinking about their lust and planning how not to get caught. But there are consequences. Not only are couples likely to divorce after adultery, but there are other consequences.

The grieving and sense of loss experienced by the spouse of an adulterer is great. They have feelings of anger, resentment, betrayal, inadequacy, and malice. These feelings are likely to be expressed in inappropriate ways. Words are likely to be said in the emotions of the moment that are later regretted. The volcano is likely to erupt and spew hot lava. Where lava flows, death follows!

The children suffer in the midst of the turmoil and; their lives are impacted by the aftermath and during the cleanup. Parents who try to insulate the children minimize the fallout, but the children are never fully spared from the devastation.

Finally, the other person involved in the adultery is effected, along with their family, if any. We need to realize that lives are destroyed by adultery and; that God hates adultery! Certainly, we are to heed God's warnings that there will be consequences!

#### *Considerations:*

People expend a tremendous amount of energy planning and concealing adultery. If they would commit to God and to their spouse, and invest the energy in their marriage, there would be far less adultery.

The best protection from adultery is to recognize needs and, recognize appropriate ways to seek to satisfy those needs. As we learn what our needs are, this becomes a beginning to communicate to our spouse. For example, one spouse's sexual desire may be really a desire for affection and affirmation. Another spouse's desire for an adulterous relationship may be related to a desire to be emotionally intimate. They may be looking for someone who will listen to them or make time to let them know they are special.

The first step is to identify needs and begin to talk to our spouse about those needs. The second consideration is to commit to seek to satisfy those needs in an appropriate way. Essentially, we are to seek to satisfy those needs through our relationship with God, our spouse and, other appropriate relationships.

For example, imagine a person who is struggling with lust and is frustrated that their spouse has "gained a few pounds". They notice that their spouse doesn't seem that attractive to them anymore. Chances are that the person who is struggling is not walking closely with the Lord. I say this because when we are walking closely with God, we tend to be satisfied. Therefore, the first diagnostic check is to consider our relationship with God.

After considering our relationship with God, we consider the relationship with our spouse. We make a commitment that we will not engage in adultery and, we will be faithful to our spouse. In Proverbs 5 we are told in the first fourteen verses not to commit adultery. In the second half, we told to be faithful to our spouse:

Prov 5:15-21

*15 Drink water from your own cistern, and running water from your own well.*

*16 Should your fountains be dispersed abroad, streams of water in the streets?*

*17 Let them be only your own, and not for strangers with you.*



*18 Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice with the wife of your youth.*

*19 As a loving deer and a graceful doe, let her breasts satisfy you at all times; and always be enraptured with her love.*

*20 For why should you, my son, be enraptured by an immoral woman, and be embraced in the arms of a seductress?*

*21 For the ways of man are before the eyes of the LORD, and He ponders all his paths.*

(NKJ)

Our spouse is to be a source of satisfaction for our desire for intimacy. We must seek to minister to our spouse's needs and, seek satisfaction from our spouse for our needs. We want to be very careful where we go looking for satisfaction.

In considering other appropriate relationships, be prudent about seeking intimate relationships with members of the opposite sex. This can be a slippery place! When we have developed emotional and/or spiritual intimacy with a person who is not our spouse, a desire for physical intimacy can soon follow. I encourage people to find an accountability (small) group of friends of their same sex where these issues can be addressed. In this manner, the other members of the group can encourage us, as well as the fact that we can encourage others. Also, the accountability of the group helps us to keep from acting on our desires.

SUMMARY: we have considered five keys to protection from adultery as follows:

1. Choice: Remember the decision to commit adultery is your choice, not someone else's fault. Your spouse did not make you do it, the devil did not make you do it and, the other person did not make you do it.

2. Captivity: The battle about adultery begins in the mind. We want to take thoughts into captivity to the obedience of Christ. We can choose what to focus on.

3. Caught: The big lie about adultery is that you won't get caught. Don't believe the lie...you will get caught!

4. Consequences: The related lie is that there won't be any consequences. You will reap devastating consequences for you, your family and others.

5. Considerations: Rather than spending all that energy regarding an adulterous affair, commit to God and your spouse and spend the energy improving your marriage.

HOMEWORK:

Review the section regarding intimacy and work on developing intimacy in your marriage.

### *Protection from Ancestors:*

Parents, in-laws, as well as children are a tremendous blessing, but they can also be a burden to the union of marriage. God anticipated this dilemma as He instructed Adam and Eve. In Genesis 2:24 we read, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh".

Remember, Adam did not have a mother to leave... the instruction was for our benefit.

Often times, well-meaning parents and in-laws interfere with a married couple's ability to "leave, weave and cleave". Parents want to help their kids and advise them and, their adult children often feel that parents are exerting too much control. The tension can become a threat to the marriage union. Children are faced with conflicting commandments to honor their parents and to make the marriage the first priority.

Here, the key is establishing appropriate boundaries. For example, the time spent visiting parents. The parents might express a desire to see the kids (and grandkids) every weekend. The young couple might find that the once a week schedule is a burden. Actually, they would prefer to see the parents only two to four times a year. In addressing the issue, and seeking a working compromise, the marriage relationship must come first!

Other areas might relate to grandparents spoiling the kids or failing to discipline the children. Here, establishing boundaries for what is appropriate for your children is the key. Parents should be respectfully told that you appreciate their wisdom and are grateful for their ideas and suggestions. But as a couple, you have a right to make decisions as to how to raise your children.

If grandparents continually refuse to respect the boundaries, than you may need to reduce contact or even be present to monitor contact. Prayerfully consider these choices as a husband and wife. You want to be united in dealing with establishing boundaries with parents and enforcing those boundaries. This is a difficult issue to approach for a couple. Talk about your different feelings as you seek to decide where to draw lines. Also, be willing to be flexible as God stirs you to move the boundary lines.

Remember, whether it is our parents, or our children, or our friends, or our jobs, or our ministry that potentially threatens the union of marriage, we need to set the marriage relationship above all others! Be on guard for threats to the union of marriage.

## Chapter 8: Leadership

One of the most important areas to consider in order to develop a fruitful marriage is the issue of leadership. It is important consider God's view regarding raising children, authority in the home, the roles of husbands and wives. These issues have become more complicated in a culture where roles of men and women in the workplace are changing. Also, there are increasingly more single parent homes and; there are more blended families as a result of divorce and remarriage.

Having children changes your life forever. Being a father is a biological issue, but being a daddy is more of an emotional and spiritual issue than a physical one. Children change our lives in a variety of ways. It takes a lot longer to get out of the house to go anywhere. Anyone who says "I slept like a baby" has either never had kids or has forgotten that it means you are up every two hours crying. Vacation locations change... if you even get to leave your house for a vacation.

But kids also change our lives in different ways. You can no longer see a new story about suffering children the same way. You can no longer see a child separated from its parents at a mall or amusement park without your heart breaking. You drive down residential streets where kids play ball in front of their homes a lot slower than ever before. The remarkable thing about being a parent is that it changes your life forever!

Let us consider some of the important lessons that God would teach us about leadership to develop a more fruitful marriage and family.

### Child Raising

#### *Disciple*

In Deuteronomy 6 we find the premier prayer of Judaism, the SH'MA, in reference to the first word in verse 4 translated "Hear". The prayer proclaims the Hebrews' unique identity as the first monotheistic people to believe in The True and Living God. Linked with this prayer is a sober admonition, as well as a word of encouragement, to pay attention to the Lord's instruction. Let us consider this portion of God's Word together:

Deut 6:4-9

4 *"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!*

5 *"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.*

6 *"And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart.*

7 *"You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.*

8 *"You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.*  
9 *"You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.*  
(NKJ)

We are instructed to love God with all that we are. Jesus instructed that this was the greatest commandment. It is difficult for us to understand this concept, especially with all the competing interests. How can we love God with all of our heart, soul and strength when we have families, jobs, and self apparently competing for love?

It will be helpful for us to consider some examples to better understand. First, imagine a pie. Some of us approach the issue by considering slices of relative sizes devoted to our various interests. A slice of approximately one-third of the pie is devoted to work. A slice of about one-quarter of the pie is dedicated to sleep. That leaves about 40% of the pie. Then they devote 20% to family. Another 10% of the pie we give to self and the remaining 10% to God (and other miscellaneous responsibilities).

This approach does not satisfy Jesus' command to love God with all that we are. But, if we consider the pie example once again with God as the crust of the pie, the picture changes. Now in each part of our life, God is connected as the foundation. I believe that this is a better picture of the concept. Similarly, if we imagine a wheel with multiple spokes. When Jesus is the hub of the wheel, providing a connection with every part of our life, we have a picture of the concept of loving God with all of our hearts.

The threshold issue for child raising is whether we have a true demonstrable love for God?

Many parents exert tremendous energy and are showing great desire and interest to insure that their kids are provided for in a variety of material ways. We are concerned that the kids have a nice place to live and play. We want to make sure that the kids have a good education. We want to save for college, computers and cars! But if our children don't see a true love for God in our lives, chances are they will not grow up to accept Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior.

What a shame, what a crime! That in our sincere desire to provide for our children's needs, we neglect the most important need! If I have to live with a sense of guilt that I helped send my child to Hell, I will find little comfort in the fact that they received a degree from a major college. We need to realize that anecdotally it appears that about seventy-five percent of the decisions to receive Christ are made before the age of fourteen.

We demonstrate a sincere love for God by desiring to learn about Him, and learning from Him. We are told to put God's words in our hearts (v.6). The Bible is the primary way that God wants to reveal himself to us. So if we are passionate for God, we will be passionate about His word.

Do our kids see that we have made reading the Bible a priority in our lives? Do our kids see that going to Church is a priority over competing interests?

When I was in Junior High, I had a crush on a girl who lived a block away. I would walk a block out of the way just to see her and maybe get to talk to her. When we started to exchange notes, I would go over them with a fine-tooth comb.

If she said, "I like you", I would wonder what does "like" really mean? Does it mean she has feelings for me, would she be my girlfriend, does she merely think I'm a nice guy and nothing more? When you are really interested in that relationship, each word is important. You pull out that note every chance you get just to look at it one more time!

Before we can share truth about God with our kids, we have to have received first. Paul wanted to encourage the Corinthian Church about the glorious truth of The Resurrection. He began by saying, "that which I received, I also declared to you" [see, 1 Cor.15:1-4]. In other words, we can't give away what we don't have!

Once we have drawn near to God, we can fulfill our responsibility to communicate truth to our kids. This is the next step in God's plan prescribed in Deuteronomy 6:

Deut 6:7-9

*7 "You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.*

*8 "You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.*

*9 "You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.*

(NKJ)

God wants us to be regularly talking about Him to our kids. In the morning, in the evening, and throughout the day, we are telling our kids about God. How might we do that? Some families like a morning family time when the family gathers for breakfast and can talk about God. Many wonderful devotional resources are available through any Christian bookstore for this purpose. Some families like to use the Book of Proverbs, focusing on a different one of the thirty-one each day.

A family prayer time in the morning and/or evening where the kids learn the importance of talking to God and hearing Him is also an important part. Similarly, talking about God when we walk. Since people living near Los Angeles don't walk, we drive everywhere, it's great to have Christian teaching or praise music playing in the car stereo. Reading a Bible story for a "bedtime story" is a great way to help our kids learn about God.

Talking about what we learned at Church and at Bible study is another way. We like to hear from our kids what they learned at Church. I'm frequently blessed and amazed at the insights my children teach me.

What about binding God's word to our hands and our doorposts? The Hebrews were commanded to have these tangible reminders of God's commandments and The Covenant. How should Christians observe this command, if at all?

First of all, the Church is not commanded to observe, however, there would be nothing wrong with placing a Mezuzah on our doorframe as a reminder. Another thought is to have Bibles open throughout our homes. I've heard that Billy Graham has Bibles open in every room of His house. My wife and I have Bibles open in every room of our house. No matter where we are in our house we see and read God's word, and so do our kids. Also, taking a Bible with us when we leave the house is like binding the word on our hands. We can take a "pocket Bible" with us when we go out to eat and read a chapter or more together and talk about what that part of God's Word means and how we can apply it to our lives. This also helps our kids to learn to be bold about their faith and not to be ashamed about God or His Word!

In summary, we see child raising in a fruitful marriage begins with the parents' own commitment to God. Parents are responsible to show their children in a tangible way that they love God. Parents are also responsible to communicate God's Word to their children. In essence, love God, love your family, and love His Word.

From the responsibility to disciple, we move to the responsibility to discipline.

### *Discipline*

An important issue in child raising is discipline. How should children be corrected? Should parents use spanking to correct their children? If so, what type of limits may be appropriate? Let us consider how God addresses these issues:

Eph 6:4

*4 And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.*

(NKJ)

Col 3:21

*21 Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.*

(NKJ)

Prov 13:24

*24 He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly.*  
(NKJ)

First, it is important to note that God expects us to correct our children when they have done something wrong. Parents should not ignore behaviors or attitudes that are inappropriate. There are many image son network and cable television, as well as movies that portray children without authority in the home. The images show young people that it is not only cool, but it is proper for youth people to rebel against parental authority. In essence the message tells young people that there is no need to respect parents or parental authority.

The cultural context is certain to create a crash between parents and children.

Many parents struggle to determine just how long “a leash” that they should give their children. For example, do children need a “long leash” to have the liberty to discover for themselves and where they need to correct themselves? Or do children need a “short leash” to stay on the right path and learn to avoid the wrong trails? As we consider the issue, it is probably necessary to remind us that God has commanded us to correct our children. It is not good for our children not to discipline them.

Second, discipline is a spiritual issue. We understand that there is an intellectual component to discipline. For example, here we are considering proper strategies and philosophies regarding discipline. We tend to view the subject by reasoning about which “program” is likely to work best for us. Also, as we will see in a moment, we view discipline in an emotional context. We often react to improper behavior by correcting our kids when we are angry or frustrated. Our emotions and our flesh are calling the shots rather than the spirit.

Consider the fact that God corrects us because He loves us. He demonstrates His love for us by the very act of correcting us. God’s correction of us is always spiritual and always appropriate. Consider the inspired words penned by the author of the book of Hebrews:

[Heb. 12:5-11]

*5 And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons:*

*“My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD,  
Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him;*

*6 For whom the LORD loves He chastens,  
And scourges every son whom He receives.”*

*7 If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?*

*8 But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.*

9 Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?

10 For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness.

11 Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

[NKJ]

Here, we want to learn three important principles:

1. Relationship
2. Respect
3. Righteousness

In verses 5-8, we see that our *relationship* with God is established and strengthened as He corrects us. God's correction shows that He loves us! Don't miss this: our kids want to be corrected. When we correct them, especially properly like how God corrects us, it lets us know that we love them! Contrary to popular opinion, our kids greatly desire to be corrected. Our correction strengthens our relationship as a parent to our children.

In verse 9 we see that correct and *respect* are related. When our earthly fathers correct us, we learned to respect them. When children are not corrected, they tend to lose respect for a parent's authority and position. Accordingly, we see that correction is a necessary element to develop respect.

In verses 10-11 we see the result of *righteousness*. The child who receives correction will bear the fruit of righteousness. The failure to correct encourages a child to continue on the path of unrighteousness. While we all understand that disciplining children can be uncomfortable for both parents and children, we must see that it is necessary for spiritual growth, and show me administered spiritually.

We see that God corrects us. And His discipline of us is always proper. We should consider a key question before we discipline our children: how would I like God to discipline me in this situation?

One night when my family was driving home from a wedding reception we were all joking with one another. I called my eight-year-old a name that bothered him. It was wrong for me. Unfortunately, before we had a chance to address the issue my son called me a name that clearly pushed the envelope over the edge. I pulled our car over and told him we were going to deal with it right now. He said, "Right here in the street?" I knew he was concerned about being



embarrassed, but I said, “Yeah buddy, right here and right now.” As we both got out of the car, I heard God speak, “Bruce, how would you want me to discipline you right now?”

I ended up just holding and hugging my son and telling him that I love him. And explaining how what he said was wrong and never to do it again. That’s how I would want God to deal with me in that situation.

When we discipline, we want to avoid reacting in the emotion of anger and try to respond in the spirit.

In Ephesians 6:4 we see that fathers are not to provoke their children to wrath but to bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord. The same concern is expressed in Colossians 3:21 where we are told: fathers don’t provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. We need to realize that how we discipline our children is as important as the need to discipline. When we discipline harshly, it can provoke our kids to wrath or discourage them. Sometimes our discipline is more severe than the situation requires... remember, you don’t need a bazooka to deal with a mosquito.

For example, with younger children a spanking may be appropriate along with denying privileges. With older children, spanking may no longer be proper and the focus is likely to relate to the denial of certain privileges. In either scenario, we want to consider does the punishment fit the crime?

Imagine a parent who has been telling their child to clean their room. The child has been told three times that if they don’t clean their room some of their toys are going to be thrown away. On each visit to the room the parent is becoming increasingly upset because the child has not begun to clean the room.

On the next visit to the room, the parent is “ready to lose it.” The child hasn’t started to clean the room and the parent is angry. The parent starts to pick up the clothes and toys lying on the floor and begins to violently throw them across the room. The child is scared and begins to cry. While the child will certainly respect the parent’s authority, the parent has no probably frightened or discouraged the child. How painful it might be for the parent to see the child shrink in fear the next time the parent is angry about the slow response to room cleaning. A similar response is likely for excessive spanking.

What if the parent calmly came into the room and said “I told you I was going to throw this stuff out if you didn’t clean up”? The parent then proceeds to throw the items away. Here again, the child is likely to respect the parent’s authority. But the child may be stirred to wrath or be discouraged depending on what is being thrown away. For example, the child’s prized possession such as a diary, autographed pictures, or baseball glove may not be the proper item

to throw away. In this case, there is an advantage that the parent did not frighten the child. When the parent is clam rather than angry or violent, the child is not as likely to be afraid. But the child may be discouraged or extremely angry depending on the item that was thrown away. Accordingly, a parent must be wise regarding the selection of an item or items to throw away.

Discipline should be as soon as possible. In Proverbs 13:24 we are reminded that he who loves his son disciplines him *promptly*. Children need to see follow through to believe that we mean business. How many times have we been in a scenario where we tell our kids, "This is your last warning?" Unfortunately, most of us have been in the situation where we follow-up by saying, "This really is the last warning." Then we finally say, "Ok, I really mean it, this is your last warning!" Suddenly, the behavior changes. The kids see a change in our facial expression or a change in our tone of voice and they know we mean business.

The key to effective discipline is to establish a pattern of prompt discipline. In this manner our kids learn to respect their parents' discipline. They also learn to connect the discipline and the wrong behavior. When we fail to address the wrong behavior, our kids don't have the opportunity to connect the discipline and the need for change.

The Bible shows us the problem of great and godly men who failed to correct their children and the consequences. Jacob failed to correct his sons Simeon and Levi for their violence against the people of Schechem and God deemed they were unfit to lead His people because of their violent and unstable ways. The judge and prophet Samuel failed to correct his children such that they grew up unfit to lead God's people because they were corrupt and ungodly. So Israel cried out for a king to lead them rather than Samuel's sons.

David, Israel's greatest king, failed to discipline his son Amnon when he raped his half-sister Tamar. So Tamar's full brother Absalom avenged his sister by killing his half brother. David failed to discipline Absalom for murdering his brother. David's failure came to full bloom when Absalom led a rebellion to seize the throne from his father David. The failure ultimately ended in Absalom's death.

Accordingly, we see the need to discipline our children for their own good. As stated in Proverbs 13:24 if we don't discipline our children, "We hate them." On the other and, if we love them we will discipline them promptly.

## Child Raising

Let us consider some of the most important principles of child raising described as follows:

### **Consistency** **Consequences**

**Chastisement**  
**Communication**  
**Compassion**  
**Comfort**  
**Courage**

Consistency

In the book of Joshua, we see Joshua prepare to lead the Hebrews into the Promised Land. He has watched Moses lead God's people for years, but now Joshua is responsible to lead the Children of Israel. Joshua is understandably concerned about what he will need to do in his new job as "spiritual parents." As the account begins, God encourages Joshua:

[Joshua 1:7]

*Only be strong and courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go.*

[NKJ]

God is encouraging Joshua to remain consistent. God's chosen leaders must stay on God's course, and not deviate to the right or the left. As Joshua was going to face many battles and struggles, despite being in the Promised Land he needed to be reminded to face the challenges consistent with God's ways.

Similarly, in the "promised land" of parenting there are many struggles and battles to be fought. We want to remain consistent in that we follow God's battle plan in dealing with these challenges. Certainly, God is not surprised by the challenge of parenting! Furthermore, God gave us an abundant parenting resource in His Word.

Philosophies regarding parenting are going to change like the direction of the wind, but God's Word will always remain the same! For example, philosophies regarding issues such as breastfeeding versus bottle-feeding, how and when to discipline, and adolescent sexual behavior seem to change with each generation. These views frequently reverse course with each passing generation, yet God's Word remains consistent.

In addition, children are seeking consistency in regard to their parents' behavior. Children derive a sense of security from the consistent behavior of their parents.

I am not suggesting children thrive on monotony... there is nothing wrong with change per se. What I am suggesting is that children desire a sense of stability. For example suppose a family starts to go to church regularly, and becomes involved in the life of that church. Then they

decide to go to another church. They become disappointed in the second church after only a few months. They then decide to stop going to church altogether. After several months they are aware of spiritual hunger, but decide Christianity is not the answer. So they decide to try a metaphysical “new age” church. The parents effectively renounce their former beliefs regarding Jesus. After three or four months they realize the new age church does not satisfy, so they decide to find a Protestant church that works for them. As they come back to the Lord, they once again affirm their beliefs in Christ.

The spiritual roller coaster takes a toll on the children’s sense of confidence in the parents’ ability to wisely lead them. Little lambs desire consistency from their shepherds!

### Consequences

It is a fundamental spiritual law that operates in our world: there are consequences from our behavior. Sometimes the consequences are not readily apparent to us. For example, God told Adam, “But of the tree of knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” Adam lived physically for many years after that and had many children. Yet, he surely died *that day* for on that day the fellowship with God was broken, and Adam was cast out of Eden.

Paul expresses the same principle in the New Testament as seen in his letter to the Galatians:

[Galatians 6:7]

*Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.*

[NKJ]

Children need to know that there are consequences to their attitudes and behaviors. For example, a child that doesn’t turn in homework assignments or do well on exams can anticipate a lower grade in the class. Similarly, a child that turns in his homework assignments and studies for exams will generally do better in school. Furthermore, the child who pays attention will likely have a better grade because of the effect of his attitude than the child who lacks interest and attention.

One area where parents may fail to affirm and teach this principle is in regard to praise and affirmation (ie rewards). Frequently, we are more inclined to punish or discipline than to affirm and encourage. Children need to be affirmed and encouraged for their efforts. Sometimes our standards for their performance are unreasonable. When we withhold praise because our children did not reach our unreasonable standard, we are likely misrepresenting God to our children. God is certainly more concerned about our motivation and attitude than our performance per se [see 1 Corinthians 3].

When I was in high school, I had a friend named Myron. His parents did not have very much money. One year Myron was promised that if he got straight As he would get a brand new basketball. That semester Myron got seven As and one B. When his parents declined to buy him a new basketball I felt sad for Myron, and mad at his parents. Myron had tried real hard and had come very close to straight As. Certainly, I am in no position to judge Myron's parents, and I only had limited information. But if the event made that type of impression on me, now almost twenty-five years later, I wonder what impression, if any, is left upon Myron.

When I was a young boy, my friends and I went to a toy store where they sold sports equipment. Back in the corner of the store were football jerseys and helmets of our favorite teams. Also, in the same corner was an open window above a trash bin. We tossed the jerseys out of the window and into the trash bin and walked out of the store. We proceeded to the back alley and gathered our stolen booty.

When my Dad drove home and saw us kids wearing our new football uniforms playing in the street, he asked the logical question: "Where did you boys get the new uniforms?" Despite having committed what we perceived to be the perfect crime, we had failed to consider this inquiry from our parents. At this point I likely resembled the startled look of a deer in bright headlights. I don't recall what "whopper" I tried to tell my Dad, but he wasn't buying. Soon I confessed the crime.

Then Dad told me we were going to the store, and I would have to confess to the owner what I had done. I pleaded with my Dad not to make me go. I promised I would never steal again, I promised I would never go to that store again, and I promised I would never get another toy again. But Dad would not be moved. So off we went to the store. One of the most embarrassing moments of my young life was confessing that I had stolen that uniform. Suffice it to say, despite the fact that the police were not called, I learned that there are consequences to my conduct.

A couple of years later, when I was eleven years old, I won a Most Valuable Player award in our local Little League. This was one of the highlights of my young life. My parents got into an argument and my friend's parents ended up taking me to the banquet... my parents never made it. When I got home they were too distracted to share in my excitement. More than thirty years later, I still remember the feeling that they were not there for me. Approval and affirmation from a parent can be more potent than the approval from others.

When kids try to do something and have a good attitude, they should be encouraged. We should be just as quick, and emotional, and passionate about our praise as our criticism. We should be just as eager to reward as to punish! We need to teach our kids that there are consequences to our behavior... both positive and negative.

## Chastisement

As we have already seen, discipline is a necessary element to child raising. We need to correct our children in a way that brings home the message that we love them and want to see them restored. Also, we need to be careful not to discourage them or provoke them to wrath. God has commanded parents to discipline their children, as God disciplines us:

[Hebrews 12:6]

*For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.*

[Proverbs 13:24]

*He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly.*

Sometimes it can be real helpful for us to think “outside of the box” when it comes to discipline. For example, methods such as timeouts, spankings, denial of certain activities, and grounding are all effective means to communicate correction to our kids. But, in some regard, there is a certain routine quality to the dynamic.

Consider a teenager who misses curfew. That teenager probably has an idea of the consequences depending on how late they arrive home. For example one hour late means no television for a week. One to two hours late might mean no phone rights for a few days. Two or more hours late might mean they are grounded for a week or two. To the child, these are all “in the box” punishments. They are expected, and although the consistency provides benefits, they can lose some impact merely because of the routine nature. Sometimes an outside the box consequences can be used to get the young person’s attention.

For example, telling a teenager that they can't buy any new clothes for a period of time, or that they will give some of their favorite clothes away to a charity might be a wake up call. And thinking out of the box, we went to get the child's attention without discouraging or provoking to wrath. Accordingly, seek wisdom from the Lord.

With my brother and I were small, my older brother engaged in the time honored right of beat up on your little brother. Despite repeated efforts by your parents to keep me from provoking him and keep him from beating me, there was little progress. Then one day Dad came home with bright new red kid’s boxing gloves. Dad told us to put on the boxing gloves. We were somewhat puzzled in light of their earlier protests about us fighting. Dad then instructed Seth to beat me up.

At this point, I was wondering what Dad was doing as this certainly did not appear to be standard in-the-box routine. To my surprise, my brother was not wholeheartedly embracing the instruction to beat on me. Seth was telling Dad that he didn’t want to beat on me, but my Dad

assured him that his behavior was clearly showing that he wanted to beat on me. Besides, my Dad made it clear that if Seth didn't beat on my, Dad would beat on him.

So Seth reluctantly threw the first soft punch as his terrified little brother. Dad's response was, "Good, now hit him harder!" Seth didn't want to hit me at all, but Dad insisted. Soon we were both crying (albeit for different reasons). Then Dad said to stop. I don't recall ever seeing the boxing gloves again in our apartment, and I don't recall my brother ever hitting me again.

On another occasion when we were young, I remember my brother and I were remiss in cleaning our room. After a couple of warnings to clean our room, Dad took my brother and me into the kitchen. He calmly walked over to a cupboard and grabbed a bag of dried peas. He opened the bag and spilled a "countless" number of peas over the kitchen floor. He then told me brother and me that we were not going to sleep or eat until every pea was picked up. From that day forward, I don't recall my brother or me having a problem cleaning up our room when Dad told us to.

The moral of the stories is that it is good sometimes to think outside the box as we seek to correct our kids. We must remember if we love our kids, we will correct them!

## Communication

Parents have a responsibility to teach their children about God's love and to teach their children that their parents love them. Communicating with children is a challenge. When they are infants, they lack the verbal skills to effectively communicate, and we often mistake nonverbal skills. A father, who thinks his baby is smiling because of joy at seeing Dad, is bound to be disappointed when he learns that it was merely gas. Then they kids become toddlers and the conversation is dominated by kids saying "mine" and parents saying "no."

Soon kids become preschoolers, kindergarten age, and elementary school age. I am frequently blessed and impressed by the insight kids have learned about God. I was recently teaching a group of four and five year olds. I asked them, "What would you like to do with Jesus if He came to your home?" The kids shared about laying with their favorite toys with Jesus, and showing Him their pictures. Then I asked, "What do you think Jesus would want to do with you if He came to your home?" One four year old said, "He'd like to show me heaven." What a powerful and insightful response! Yet, before the child could share this insight, the truth had to be communicated to the child.

Then the kids become teenagers. It seems that it is more difficult than ever to communicate. The kids don't understand the parents, and the parents don't understand the kids. It is difficult to relate when the generation gap broadens and the culture changes. Yet, God's Word remains a steady bridge to reach out to our teenagers.

[Deuteronomy 6"7]

*You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit down in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.*

Despite the change in culture, God remains a constant. As we continue to seek to share God's love with our children, there is consistency in our communication. I am not suggesting that we seek to be a broken record. But our kids will appreciate the stability of a relationship with Christ, and the communication that flows from your relationship.

The teenage years are particularly difficult for parents and children alike. Children are seeking to establish their own identities. They are often rebelling against God, their parents, and any other authority. God gives us the comforting promise that if our children are raised in the Lord, that when they are older they will not stray from the Lord, or if they have strayed, they will return to the Lord:

[Proverbs 22:6]

*Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.*

As difficult as those years can be, we can be comforted knowing that our kids are not lost forever, they're just working on their testimony!

It is important to strive to maintain to keep the communication lines open during the teenage years. One of the important ways to encourage communication is to realize who our children are in the Lord. For example, we generally translate the Hebrew of Proverbs 22:6 "Train up a child in the way that he should go..."

But the Hebrew can be translated "Train up a child in the way that he is going..."

This is an important distinction. If we are to train our child in the way that they are going, it means we need to discover the cloth that God has cut our child from. God gives gifts and abilities, as well as interests according to His good pleasure. Therefore, children will grow up with different personalities, desires, and aptitudes. The parent that wants all their children to be scholars, or spiritual superstars is going to have a hard time communicating with their children if they are not listening to their children's desires.

A child's need for attention from other people or the need to express themselves may not be manifest in a way that a parent desires. But if we are going to communicate, we need to first accept the cloth that they are cut from, and listen and counsel where appropriate with love.



## Communication

Children are in need of compassionate love. Although children are remarkably resilient, they are also tender. A necessary element for fruitful parenting is to be gentle with our children. We need to have compassion for the struggles that they are going through. We want to try to relate not only to the events of their lives but the feelings they associate with those events.

When a small child breaks or loses a toy it can be extremely upsetting to the child. It may not be the time to say, "I told you to be more careful with your toys." The teenager who is going out with friends and feels like the Cyclops because of a pimple on their forehead probably does not want to hear, "Why are you upset? It's just a little pimple... you're so vain."

When our kids need to be corrected, we should try to learn what is motivating them as well as addressing the behavior. We may find that we have misjudged our children and their motives. When we can be compassionate about what they are experiencing, we can seek to be gentle when we correct them.

[Galatians 6:1]

*Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.*

When Paul wanted to paint a picture of his ministry to the Church at Thessalonica, he reminded them that he was a spiritual parent to them. But he also told them what kind of parent he was:

[1 Thessalonians 2:7]

*But we are gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children.*

It is important that he was gentle, like a nursing mother with her own children. When they needed correction, Paul corrected them as firmly as necessary. But the relationship was characterized by gentle love. Gentle love is born from compassion.

## Comfort

Children are seeking comfort for the pain they experience. They often feel inadequate, lonely, confused, unloved, and unappreciated. They are seeking relief from feelings of being overwhelmed by life. Many lack the emotional and spiritual maturity to seek to receive that comfort from God. So they are ripe to be tempted to seek to find comfort in the wrong places.

Adolescents are turning to booze, drugs, and sex to try to get comfort and fit in somewhere. I have heard anecdotally that close to 90% of high school students will have sexual relations

before they graduate. Fundamentally, I believe kids are looking for comfort, albeit in the wrong places.

Parents need to be sensitive to a child's need for comfort. When Paul told the Church at Thessalonica about his relationship with them as a spiritual father he noted how a father encourages and comforts:

[1 Thessalonians 2:11]

*As you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children...*

Paul was able to write to the Church at Thessalonica and say "you know" how we comforted and encouraged. It makes me stop and think... would we be able to confidently say to our kids "you know" how we encourage and comforted? Sometimes as we have sought to teach our kids lessons about respect and discipline we may have neglected to be a place of refuge and comfort.

Every football season guys are out teaching their kids to play the game. They spend hours working with their kids to teach them the fundamentals of passing, catching, and running. The kids grow each year practicing for hours with Dad. One day they make it to a big time college football team, and a nationally televised game. As the camera pans the team bench, there is a close up of Junior. Inevitably, what does the boy say but "Hi Mom!" Why? Because their son learned motivation, discipline, respect and the desire for achievement from "coach Dad" but he learned comfort from Mom.

It is important that our kids learn that they can come to parents for comfort. If we have neglected to develop that relationship with our kids, we need to take time now to develop the relationship. Generally, it takes time to develop the relationship so that kids are seeking comfort from a parent. Nevertheless, the process begins with the parents' decision to be a place of comfort for their children.

The next step is to communicate to our children that we want to be there to comfort them. This can be difficult if there has been a period of years where we have not been there. The next step is to reach out regularly to her children to let them know that we care. We can begin to build a bridge by simply asking them, "how are you doing? What's the biggest trial you're going through right now?" We need to give the kids time to learn that it is safe to confide in us as a place of comfort. This can take years, so be patient. Try to avoid giving kids solutions to their problems until we are asked for those answers instead try to listen, and find out how the kids are feeling.

Remember, if our kids don't learn that they can come to us to receive comfort from us, they will

seek it elsewhere. Unfortunately, it is likely that they will be tempted to seek comfort in the wrong places. So we need to learn to be a source of comfort.

## Courage

Being a parent is a challenging experience. The questions seem to be abundant and the answers don't seem to come as quickly as the questions. I remember when our oldest son Joshua was born. What a glorious feeling it is to be a new dad! I wanted to change his first diaper, so I asked the nurse if I could change him. She watched as I began to change his first diaper. As I removed his diaper I noticed a dark black streak on his behind. So I turned to the nurse and said, "Is there some ointment you put on babies' behind?" She responded "You're new at this Mr. Zachary aren't you?" She corrected my rookie mistake, enabling me to realize that the black streak was exactly what you were thinking it was. Suffice it to say I didn't have a clue.

After Joshua came home, our friend Helen visited. Helen has four kids and was a veteran of many campaigns with young kids. As I was cleaning the changing table I asked about whether I should use one cleaning particular cleaning product or another. Helen gently explained that I didn't need to worry too much about those details. To illustrate her point she told me how when her first child swallowed a penny she rushed to the emergency room at the hospital and they told her essentially, "This too will pass." When her fourth child swallowed a dime, she had learned that she could relax and wait to see whether it would be heads or tails. The difference between an anxious rookie and a trusting veteran!

God sought to encourage Joshua at the time he was preparing to bring the Hebrews into the Promised Land. Joshua was about to begin his epic adventure as a new parent to the Children of Israel. Four times in the first chapter Joshua is told to be strong and of good courage.

[Joshua 1:9]

*Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.*

Joshua is told to be strong and of good courage because the Lord is with him wherever he goes. A parent must have courage in facing the challenges of raising children. At times the trials of being a parent can seem overwhelming. When you feel like running away, be strong and of good courage! The best way that we can have courage is to know that God is with us wherever we go. We need to remember that God loves our kids even more than we do. He is going to give us all the skills and abilities we need to be good parents, so we can have courage.

Let us summarize the seven Cs of parenting. We must seek to be *consistent* in our relationship with God and our kids. We must teach our kids that there are *consequences* of their behavior,

both positive and negative. We must *chastise* or correct our kids when they are off course. We must *communicate* with our children to teach them as well as listening to them.

We are to show our children *compassion* for the trials that they experience, and we must seek to be a source of *comfort* for our kids or they are likely to seek comfort in potentially unhealthy places. Finally, we want to remember to have *courage* as we face the trials of raising kids knowing that God is with us.

## Authority

The issue of authority in the house and the roles of husbands and wives is confusing in our culture. The issues have become more confusing in light of changing roles in the workplace, the rise in single parent homes, and the increase of blended families resulting from divorce and remarriage. The key is to understand God's view regarding authority and the various roles of husbands and wives.

Preliminarily, it should be noted that a distinction in roles does not equate with a statement of value or worth. In Christ, there is no distinction between men or women:

[Galatians 3:28]

*There is neither Jew nor Gentile, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male or female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

The New Testament elevates women to a status previously unknown in the patriarchal societies of the Hebrews, Romans, and Greeks. Jesus does more to establish the rights of women than any other person who walked on this earth. We are told from the very beginning that God recognized that Adam and Eve were equal and were both able. Consider Adam's need for a helper:

[Genesis 2:18]

*And the LORD God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him."*

We tend to think of a helper as someone who is subordinate or an assistant. But in the Hebrew language, there are four words that convey the concept of helper. Three of the four words would imply someone who is subordinate or an assistant; however, the fourth is used in the Old Testament most frequently of God helping Israel. That is the term used in Genesis 2:18 for helper. Certainly, as God is a helper to Israel there is no implication of God being less than Israel in any way... to the contrary, God helps Israel from a position of strength and ability. In a similar way, we see that the woman as a helper to the man should not be seen as inferior.

In considering the subject of authority, we look to Jesus as our example. Consider the following:

[Philippians 2:3-5]

*Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.*

Jesus put the rights of others before His own, and demonstrated respect for those He ministered to. He does not exercise authority in our lives a tyrant or a despot. He does not seek to rule with an iron fist. He is not manipulative, controlling, abusive, disrespectful, or apathetic! We are to have the mind of Christ in us as we consider the issues of authority and leadership in the home.

The concept of *mutual respect* introduces the discussion of marriage in Paul's letter to the Ephesians. This portion of Scripture is probably the most thorough discussion of the marriage relationship, and it begins with a call for mutual respect: "submit to one another in the fear of God" (Ephesians 5:21). It should be noted that the context of chapter five makes it clear that a right relationship with God is a prerequisite. We cannot show respect to one another in a marriage until our relationship with God is in order. Accordingly, a lack of respect for our spouse is likely evidence that our relationship with God needs alignment. Too often we assume that our lack of respect is justified because of our perception of our spouse's lack of responsibility.

Why do we need a Biblical discussion of authority? Without a means to address the issues facing a home and a system of leadership, there will be confusion. I heard a story of a two-headed turtle that was found in Florida. The problem was that the turtles was starving. As one head would seek to go in one direction for food, the other head sought to go in the other direction. When they came to food, one head would try to take food from the other. The two-headed turtle did not realize that the conflict for authority was damaging its life! Clearly this was a case where two heads were not better than one. In the marriage relationship, we don't need any two-headed turtles.

With these principles of the marriage relationship in mind, let us consider the roles of husbands and wives as set forth in Ephesians five.

The Wife's Role

[Ephesians 5:21-23]

*Submitting to one another in the fear of God. Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as also Christ is the head of the church; and He is*

*the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their husbands in everything.*

Preliminarily, wives are to *submit* to their husbands. Submission conjures up images of cavemen pulling the hair of cavewomen as they drag them or professional wrestlers with their opponent in a headlock, but this is not Biblical submission. Submission is not obedience, nor is it being a doormat. The issue relates to respect. Wives are to yield to their husband's leadership authority, not to men in general.

The middle voice, a Greek tense, is used in the Greek to indicate that the wife is to place herself under her husband's authority. Too many husbands are trying to force their wives to yield. This is not God's intention. A wife will desire to submit herself to her husband's leadership when the husband treats the wife as Christ treats the Church.

The idea that a wife would yield to her husband's authority is not a politically correct notion in our culture. However, the truth remains that this is God's place. A similar instruction is given in the letter to the Colossians:

[Colossians 3:18-19]

*Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them.*

As we consider how a husband is to exercise this authority in a moment it will help us to understand the concepts. But before we consider the husband's role, we should consider the primary application of this authority in the decision making. For example, let us imagine that a husband and wife are trying to decide whether to send their elementary school age child to a private school or to a public school. The wife is very concerned about the curriculum in the public school and feels the private school would be a much better environment to strengthen their child in Christ. The husband is concerned that the family can't really afford the private school tuition, and feels their child will be strengthened by taking a stand for the faith in the public schools. They talk for many hours and consider the relative merits of each view as well as the potential options such as home school. Nevertheless, after all of the discussions and prayer they still are not in agreement.

This is the type of situation that God is seeking to address in establishing a system of authority in the home. God has give authority to husbands; however, God has prescribed how the husband is to exercise this authority.

The Husband's Role

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her.

Husbands are called to *sacrifice* for their bride. A husband is not only to love his wife, but he is to love his wife as Christ loved the church. Jesus' love can be described in a variety of ways. For example, Jesus' love is unconditional and pure. But here, the focus is on His sacrifice... "He gave Himself for the church." A wife will not have to struggle to yield to a man who loves her as Christ loves the church.

That He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word.

Husbands are also called to *sanctify* their bride. To sanctify is to set apart. Jesus has set the church apart as a special relationship. Similarly, husbands are called to set their marriage relationship apart. The marriage relationship should take priority over all other relationships except our relationship with God.

That He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

A husband should also view his bride as *spotless*. God views the church as spotless because of the work of Jesus. This is the position of the church and should be the perspective of a husband to his wife. In Song of Solomon 4:7 the groom praises his wife, "*You are all fair, my love, and there is no spot in you.*" This is how the Lord looks at His church, and it is how we as husbands should view our wives.

If I had a car that had suffered the ravages of rust so that there were many holes I could call that car "Spot," it would be easy to focus on those blemishes. But perhaps I could need to realize that if I had better maintained that car there might not be any spots at all. Similarly, if there were only a few tiny spots, but that was all I focused on despite the fact that the car was otherwise great, I might have a problem with perspective. Similarly, in my marriage, am I focusing on small imperfections and failing to see the virtue? Also, if I had taken care of my wife might I find fewer spots today? A husband should be a spot remover, not a spot maker!

[Ephesians 5:22-32]

*So husbands out to love their own 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 the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.*

A husband should love his wife as he loves *self*. It is presumed that we are overtly occupied with ourselves. We think about our needs and our desires and often neglect to discover and consider

our spouse's needs and desires. Yet, God says I am to nourish and cherish my bride.. build her up and appreciate her!

When a husband demonstrates to his wife that he cares about her as much as he cares about himself, she will want to yield to his leadership. When she knows that he will strive not to hurt her, and will seek to help her, she will feel comforted by him as a leader.

How might a husband's Christ-like love be seen in the dynamic of authority and decision making? Imagine the couple is trying to plan their family vacation. He wants to go to the beach and she wants to go to the mountains. They talk about the benefits of each. After praying and talking about the options they still can't come to an agreement. The wife looks at her husband and says, "Honey, I don't agree with you, but I'll let you decide for us." Here is the challenge for the husband. If he is truly convinced that it is God's will for his family to go to the beach or believes it is in the family's best interests, he should decide to go to the beach. On the other hand, if he is unsure about God's will, he should put his wife's interests ahead of his own. In other words, "mountains here we come."

[Ephesians 5:33]

*Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife respect her husband.*

This is the essence of Godly authority and leadership in the home. When the husband loves his wife as himself, and the wife respects her husband there will not be a problem with authority in the home. And there will be a fruitful marriage.

In summary, husbands and wives are to *submit* to one another. This speaks of mutual respect. In regard to decision making the wife is to respect her husband's authority. A husband is to love his wife as Christ loves the church. This love requires husbands to *sanctify* or set apart the marriage relationship. A husband is to *sacrifice* for his wife. Also, a husband is to view his wife as *spotless* and to love her as he loves *self*.

## Blended Families

The rate of divorce in our country is approximately fifty percent of marriages. Divorce and remarriage create new stepfamilies or blended families with children under eighteen. The likelihood of a second marriage with children ending in divorce is estimated at sixty percent. In order to strengthen these families as part of a fruitful marriage, we must realize that there are distinct issues related to the dynamic of the blended family. The blended family is not likely to operate like a "natural family."



Preliminarily, a couple must recognize the priority of maintaining their relationship as a couple, in order to successfully establish a blended family. The children in the blended family are experiencing a maze of emotions. They often have a sense of guilt regarding their parents' divorce. They are angry with their parents because of the divorce as well as potential anger regarding the remarriage. They are often angry with the stepparent who is often seen as an intruder. Children are confused about the shift from a two-parent to a one-parent and back to a two-parent situation. There are often unresolved issues related to grieving the loss of their natural family. There are conflicts regarding loyalty and allegiance. There is fear regarding the loss of their natural parent's attention that is not being given to a stepparent. There is a fear of a subsequent divorce, and of course feelings of insecurity.

In lights of the challenges facing a blended family consider the following suggestions:

1. *Pray* as frequently as possible with your blended family. Recognize the need to involve God in blending the family, and affirm the desire to blend the family God's way.
2. *Proceed slowly*. It will generally take years for a blended family to stabilize. Don't expect the blending to occur smoothly in thirty, sixty, or ninety days.
3. *Patiently* endure tests of authority. There will be rejection, resentment, and rebellion. You will become a convenient target for misplaced resentment. Patiently seek to love those who are treating you like an enemy. Your patient love, without compromise, will win the hearts and minds of your blended family.
4. *Plan* as a couple how you want to discipline and disciple your blended family. Have a consistent plan and adhere to it. Support your spouse as they seek to implement the plan. Try to avoid disagreeing with your spouse in regard to the plan in front of the kids. When there is disagreement try to approach the issues privately with your spouse, apart from the kids.
5. *Play* together as a family. Play helps to establish bonds as a family. Playing together helps parents to build bridges that allow the children to one-day crossover. Take plenty of pictures of the family playing together. The pictures will provide a framework of the family's history and identity. The photo album provides a chronicle to document your growth and identity as a new family.
6. *Past* mistakes are frequently the best way to learn about parenting. Although the cost of tuition is expensive, you have now entered the graduate program. So utilize what you learned in the new blended family opportunity.
7. *Process* the feelings as your family develops. Often the blended family does not feel like a "natural family"... it is appropriate for it to feel awkward. A stepparent often cannot fully

replace the parent-child bond that exists with a natural parent. Nevertheless try to treat your stepchildren as your own natural children. As you process your feelings encourage the other family members to do the same. Remember to relate to each member of your new family as an individual.

8. *Prioritize* the relationships. The parents' strongest relationship is with their own children. The parents have cared for and protected their children when they were married, when they were single, and now in the blended family. Nevertheless, husband and wife need to now make the marriage relationship the priority. Effectively, the couple needs to agree to shift their priorities to make the marriage the strongest relationship.

#### Leadership Study Guide

1. Describe the characteristics of effective leaders.
2. How could your leadership style be improved to make it easier for people to follow?
3. What do you believe is the most difficult challenge of leadership in the family?
4. How can communication skills impact our ability to lead our children?
5. What advice would you give to parents about how to discipline children?
6. Why is it important to remember to show compassion to our children?
7. How would you describe Jesus' leadership style?
8. What are some important lessons we learn from Jesus about leadership?

## Chapter 9: Conclusion

The subject we have explored is the fruitful marriage relationship. The object of this study is to provide hope and encouragement for those who are marriage, and those considering marriage. The study is to be utilized like a tool belt that will give easy access for tools to build, restore, and maintain a fruitful marriage relationship. Ideally we have learned to identify the right tools and how to use them.

As a framework to the study we have considered the acronym **FRUITFUL**:

**FOUNDATION  
RECONCILIATION  
UNITY  
INTIMACY  
TIME AND TRUST  
FINANCES  
UNION THREATS  
LEADERSHIP**

In conclusion, consider a summary of some of the keys to a fruitful marriage:

1. Desire to have a fruitful personal relationship with Christ.
2. Desire to build your marriage on a solid foundation of Christ.
3. Desire to minister to your spouse's needs.
4. Desire to accept who your spouse is in Christ.
5. Desire to forgive and to ask for forgiveness.
6. Desire to trust that God is working in your life and in your spouse's life to produce a fruitful marriage.

## PRE-FRUITFUL MARRIAGE GUIDE

### A. COURSE

As you consider your current or future relationships, you want to set a course that will direct you to a fruitful marriage. If you are serious about the relationship, you want to approach the relationship with spiritual maturity.

We not only need to consider where we want to be and, how we need to get there but, it is also helpful to see the course that we are going on to see if we are on track.

1. How did you meet?
2. What attracted you?
3. Describe the history of the relationship? How do you spend time together? What do you like to do together?
4. List five traits about your friend that are a blessing to you.
5. Why do you believe that God is bringing you together?
6. How does your friend affect your relationship with God?
7. What foundation or foundations are you building the relationship on?
8. Consider some of the areas where you are opposites.
9. Describe what you want the marriage relationship to look like.
10. Review the "Foundation" section regarding "how to find the right spouse."

### B. CONCERNS

Many couples are afraid to deal with their concerns while they are courting. During pre-marital counseling, couples have no problem telling me how they are blessed about the relationship. But, when I ask about their concerns regarding their potential spouse they say, "Oh Pastor Bruce they're perfect I can't see anything wrong with them"

At this point I resist the obvious temptation of pointing out the glaring defects. Instead, I insist that they consider the areas of concern. Couples are often afraid to discuss their concerns. They

are afraid of hurting their loved one's feelings or afraid to jeopardize the relationship by bringing up these issues

As a practical matter, these issues will be addressed... one way or another. Essentially, the issues either come up in pre-marital or they will come up in marriage counseling. We have to deal with these issues.

It is much easier to deal with the issues during pre-marital, because it is an ideal time in a relationship. Couples sit together on the couch in my office. They are so close that sometimes I can't see light between them. Whenever they interrupt one another they apologize.

They see things like, "I'm sorry for interrupting honey, you go ahead first. What you have to say is much more important than what I have to say." They are so sweet to each other you worry about getting diabetes from being in the room with them too long.

On the other hand, during marriage counseling, they sit on the opposite ends of the couch, as far apart as possible. They often interrupt each other with endearing thoughts such as "Don't listen to her, Pastor, she's lying." The tension is so thick you can cut it with a knife.

Accordingly, I would rather encourage couples to discuss their concerns in the pre-marital context, rather than ignore the issues. When addressing the issues, be real. Tell them "what bugs."

Also, don't avoid talking about the issues regarding your mate by trying to take the load upon yourself. For example, the person who says, "I just don't know if I'm good enough for her." He has not really identified any issue about her.

1. List at least three concerns you have about a relationship with this person.
2. Consider whether you would be willing to spend the rest of your life with this person if there were no changes in these areas.
3. Discuss your list with your companion. As an aside, generally one list is longer than the other person's... so don't be concerned about list lengths.
4. Pray about areas where God might want you to change based on the insight received as you share the lists. As you believe God is leading you, share with your partner the areas that you desire to work at change. Also, indicate the areas where you are unwilling to seek to change.
5. Consider areas where there may be a compromise solution that would represent God's plan for you.

6. Remember: compatibility is not that you agree about everything, but how well you resolve your differences.

### C. CONSIDERATIONS

1. Consider past relationships. Consider areas where you want to change. What lessons have you learned about yourself? For example, maybe you have learned that you are selfish, impatient, a private person, jealous etc.
2. Are you seeing patterns in this relationship that are similar to past relationships? Are any of these patterns a concern?
3. What would you like your marriage to look like during your first year of marriage?
4. What would you like your marriage to look like after five years of marriage.
5. Talk with your future mate about their expectations for marriage.
6. What are some potential conflicts based on your different expectations? For example, if you want to have three kids during the first five years of your marriage, and your prospective spouse does not ever want to have kids, there is a conflict. If your spouse wants to pursue a career that requires them to be frequently away from home, there is a conflict if you want a marriage where you are both home most of the time.