



FAITH BIBLE COLLEGE

2 Timothy 2:15

*"Study to show thyself approved unto God,
a workman that needs not to be ashamed,
rightly dividing the word of truth."*

PASTORAL COUNSELLING "BIBLE & MONEY"



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*"Leaders are those whose aroma lingers long after they have completed
the task and others who sniff it, wants to be like them"*

*"Leadership is not a title but a Function
& that Function pulls you to its Position
& the Position determines your Title"*

*Blessings & Graceful Studying
Professor Ronnie Moodley*

MINISTRY OF MARRIAGE

PASTORAL COUNSELING: THE PREPARATION OF THE WEDDING COUPLE

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INTRODUCTION

Inadequate preparation for marriage has been listed as one of the main reasons why marriages today run into trouble and cause separation and divorce. Pre-marital counselling and marital courses should therefore be used as a means by which the bridal couple can be better equipped to settle disputes, understand differences and stand against the plans of the devil to destroy the gift that God has given them.

Pre-marriage preparation is based on the reality that it's important to strengthen the couple's relationship and prepare them constructively for future challenges and conflicts that everyone will inevitably face at some point in their marriage, now while you have so much fresh positive energy in your relationship.

Why is Christian pre-marital counselling necessary?

- Christian premarital counselling has glue: Many forms of premarital counselling will give instruction in dealing with the basics, such as finances, child rearing, and even basic communication skills. However, secular premarital counselling will not provide the "glue" that will help couples deal with conflict or the damaged emotions that may follow chronic disappointment in each other, and in the marriage relationship.
- Christian premarital counselling has foundation: Christian premarital counselling is often offered through the local church. It is designed to teach couples about the truth about marriage, according to God's Word, the Bible.
- Christian premarital counselling has Godly intent: Christian premarital counselling prepares a couple seeking marriage to enter into a relationship based upon sacrificial love for one another, and to place the needs of others before the needs of self.

BUILDING UPON THE RIGHT FOUNDATION

When a builder begins to build a house, one of the key concerns that he has is whether or not the foundation that he will be building on is secure enough to hold the structure that he is building. If the foundation has not been properly laid, then the entire edifice will be unstable.

In a similar way we need to ensure that when we are helping the bridal couple in building their marriage, that the foundation that they will be building their knowledge and understanding on, is solid. That it is based upon the truth that is found in the Gospel of Christ.

Jesus spoke of two different types of foundations in the Gospel of Matthew. The first foundation was that of sand and the second foundation was that of building upon a rock. One of these builders was called a wise builder whilst the other was called foolish. What was the difference between these builders? Their foundation!

Matthew 7:24-27 "Anyone who listens to my teaching and obeys me is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against that house, it won't collapse, because it is built on rock. But anyone who hears my teaching and ignores it is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand. When the rains and floods come and the winds beat against that house, it will fall with a mighty crash."

If we are not able to teach the bridal couple how to build their marriage upon a strong and solid foundation of the truth found in the Word of God, their marriage will be unstable and can result in them being "... like children, forever changing our minds about what we believe because someone has told us something different or because someone has cleverly lied to us and made the lie sound like the truth (Ephesians 4:14).

Understanding God's purpose for marriage is of the utmost importance, because to marry and not have an understanding of the biblical basis, purpose and building blocks of marriage can lead to problems later in the marriage. It is therefore imperative that both parties understand the following concerning marriage before they commit to this covenant relationship.

- Marriage as God intended (its purpose)
- God, the Architect
- Jesus, the Foundation
- The building blocks to a successful marriage
- The difference in the roles of the husband and wife
- The problems that sin brings into the marriage
- Divorce and separation from God's perspective

PASTORAL OBJECTIVE

As a pastor and marriage counsellor you will aid the bridal couple in becoming aware of not only the romantic side of marriage (the stage that they find themselves in after becoming engaged), but also the issues that lead to building a solid marriage that will be able to withstand the storms and the tests of time.

As a pastor you should therefore make it your objective to become committed to the pre-marital process and decide that you will not conduct a wedding ceremony unless the couple has agreed to complete the pre-marital counselling that you feel is necessary and required of them.

The material that has been supplied in this course is the basic pre-marital counselling course material that should be dealt with when providing pre-marital counselling. However together with this material it should be obvious that the pastor deal with any emotional and relational issues that come up during the process of the sessions. Questions and couples homework should also be provided by the counsellor/pastor, which the couple would be required to do together whilst they are alone.

HOW TO KNOW IF IT'S THE REAL THING

PASTORAL OBJECTIVE:

The pastoral objective in this session will be to find out:

- Why the couple wants to get married?
- How have they dealt with the temptations of their physical relationship?
- How strong their relationship is at present?
- What the goals of their relationship are?
- Any problems that they are facing whilst being engaged?

WHAT IS THE MOTIVATION OF BEING MARRIED?

As a pastor / counsellor, you need to find out from the couple the correct motivation for their getting engaged and desiring to marry.

1. THE WRONG MOTIVATION FOR MARRIAGE:

In order to do this, you need to look at the following common causes of premature commitment:

Age: The couple may think that being over a certain age and unmarried indicates something is wrong with them or gives them an increasingly poor chance of ever marrying. Others worry about their "biological clock" and marry to have children.

Loneliness: They may feel that marriage will solve their loneliness and/or make their life more meaningful. A person who has a deep hunger to be loved and accepted will rush into a relationship in order to fill that gap. It is for this reason that before they get married that they come to realize that true satisfaction for their needs can only come through Jesus and not another man or woman.

Avoidance: Some single men and women marry to find someone to take care of them--financially, emotionally and/or socially so that they can avoid becoming responsible for themselves.

Freedom: This is usually one of the motivations of those who want to get married very young. They usually do not have a very good relationship with their parent. Generally the parent may be expecting them to "grow up" and become independent but they do not want to.

Happiness: Marriage does not guarantee happiness. A marriage will only be a joyful union of two people when they have found fulfilment firstly in God and then in each other. No person should be expected to fulfil the expectation of another as this will only lead to disappointment, resentment and bitterness which can and will destroy the relationship.

Sex: They may confuse the desire to have sex with the desire to marry or they confuse lust with love. They may also have an overwhelming sense of guilt because of pre-marital sex and therefore decide to marry so that they will be "legitimate". A couple may also decide to marry as a result of falling pregnant.

ROMANTIC LOVE – SEX

Romantic love can be defined as the word "eros" which means a "physical love". Although this type of love is necessary, it should always be placed in the right perspective and in the right place - marriage. Romantic love (sex) is the connection, communication and union in the deepest possible human level and therefore should always be considered with wisdom.

Three ways in which wisdom leads and guides us into skillful romantic relationships:

- Romance says, "I want it now", wisdom urges patience.
- Romance says, "Let feeling decide what happens", wisdom leads to pursue a purposeful relationship. In God's plan, the personal benefits of an intimate relationship (sexual) are always inseparably linked to a commitment to another person's long-term good, within the covenant of marriage.
- Romance says, "enjoy the fantasy", wisdom calls us to base our emotions and perceptions on reality.

The difference between love and lust:

Lust says:

- Me, me, me
- Now!
- More-more
- If it feels good do it
- I can't wait

Love says:

- You
- Later, when it is right and when we are protected under the covenant of marriage
- Less – let us steer clear of temptation
- I'll put our future before my short-term pleasure
- I'll do what it takes to protect your purity
- I am willing to wait

Why has “sex” become common amongst couples, even Christians?

Because of:

- Physical attraction: Many people have not as yet learnt the art of self-control and therefore allow their bodies to dictate their behaviour. Galatians 5:22-23 “But when the Holy Spirit controls our lives, he will produce this kind of fruit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Here there is no conflict with the law.”
- Alcohol and drugs weaken the defences.
- “No one will get hurt attitude”: Ephes. 4:17-19 “With the Lord's authority let me say this: Live no longer as the ungodly do, for they are hopelessly confused. Their closed minds are full of darkness; they are far away from the life of God because they have shut their minds and hardened their hearts against him. They don't care anymore about right and wrong, and they have given themselves over to immoral ways. Their lives are filled with all kinds of impurity and greed.”
- “We are engaged and will be married soon, so why wait”.
- Pressure: One of the partners may be placing undue pressure on the other party to enter into a sexual relationship.
- Greater intimacy: One of the greatest lies of the devil concerning sex outside of the marriage covenant is that it will create a greater intimacy. This is not correct as true intimacy can only be built when there is a commitment to honest, trust, love and freedom.

Why is abstinence important?

1 Peter 1:16 "For he himself has said, "You must be holy because I am holy."

1 Thes. 4:3-8 "God wants you to be holy, so you should keep clear of all sexual sin. Then each of you will control your body and live in holiness and honor— not in lustful passion as the pagans do, in their ignorance of God and his ways. Never cheat a Christian brother in this matter by taking his wife, for the Lord avenges all such sins, as we have solemnly warned you before. God has called us to be holy, not to live impure lives. Anyone who refuses to live by these rules is not disobeying human rules but is rejecting God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you."

1 Cor. 6:16-18 "And don't you know that if a man joins himself to a prostitute, he becomes one body with her? For the Scriptures say, "The two are united into one." But the person who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Run away from sexual sin! No other sin so clearly affects the body as this one does. For sexual immorality is a sin against your own body."

God has called His children to walk in holiness. This holiness requires abstinence from sex outside the bounds of marriage. Sex as seen in 1 Corinthians acts as superglue that binds a couple together, and if separated at a later stage can cause significant harm to one another. Sex should therefore only be a celebration between a husband and a wife (Ecc 9:9, 1 Cor 7:3-5, Eph 5:28-29).

There is a high price for premarital sex:

- Physical problems: STD's, pregnancy
- Emotional problems: Premarital sex causes, guilt, performance based sex, misleading feelings about sex and love, poor self esteem
- Relational problems: Premarital sex does not grow a relationship but rather destroys it slowly. Sex outside of marriage can lead to the couple being full of guilt and shame. If these feelings are not dealt with they can lead to resentment and bitterness which if not dealt with can breakdown the relationship. If this is not dealt with before the wedding, it can cause problems later in the marriage.
- Spiritual problems: God placed these limits on physical gratification as a means to protect us from spiritual decline, sinning against the body (1 Cor 6:18), God's judgement (Heb 13:4) and interrupted fellowship with Him. Isaiah 59:2 "But there is a problem—your sins have cut you off from God. Because of your sin, he has turned away and will not listen anymore." John 3:20 "They hate the light because they want to sin in the darkness. They stay

away from the light for fear their sins will be exposed and they will be punished."

MAINTAINING PURITY IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP

Being in love and remaining sexually pure is possible. When the couple has come to understand the meaning of true love (agape love), sexual purity will become a priority in their relationship. The desire of love is to protect the person and the relationship. Romans 13:10 "Love does no wrong to anyone, so love satisfies all of God's requirements." Philip. 2:4 "Don't think only about your own affairs, but be interested in others, too, and what they are doing."

Maintaining self control when engaged is possible and can be done when the couple follows the following steps:

- Make a commitment with each other to remain sexually pure until married
- Ensure that they are not spending too much time alone and in compromising positions.
- Include prayer and study of the Word of God together in their times of dating.
- Focus on building their communication skills rather than the physical aspect of their relationship
- Honour each other. Romans 12:10 "Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other."
- Think long term instead of in temporal gratification
- Know their limits and therefore are careful not to place themselves in situations where these limits can be stretched.

WHAT IF THEY ARE ALREADY INVOLVED IN A PREMARITAL SEX?

If the bridal couple has already engaged in pre-marital sex take them through the following steps:

- Repent and ask God to forgive them. Isaiah 43:25 "'I—yes, I alone—am the one who blots out your sins for my own sake and will never think of them again.'" 1 John 1:9 "But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong."

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- Accept Christ's forgiveness and understand that they have been given a clean slate from that day forward. Hebrews 10:11-12 "Under the old covenant, the priest stands before the altar day after day, offering sacrifices that can never take away sins. But our High Priest offered himself to God as one sacrifice for sins, good for all time. Then he sat down at the place of highest honor at God's right hand." Col. 2:12-14 "For you were buried with Christ when you were baptized. And with him you were raised to a new life because you trusted the mighty power of God, who raised Christ from the dead. You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ. He forgave all our sins. He canceled the record that contained the charges against us. He took it and destroyed it by nailing it to Christ's cross."
 - Show fruits of repentance by making a commitment to no longer engage in premarital sex. Matthew 3:8 "Prove by the way you live that you have really turned from your sins and turned to God."
 - Ask forgiveness from one another. Allow the couple to communicate with one another how they have been feeling since the incident and bring them to a place where they are able to resolve these feelings with one another through forgiving one another.

2. THE RIGHT MOTIVATION FOR MARRIAGE:

When the bridal couple enters into the marriage relationship for the right reasons, they will have a good chance of an enduring, satisfying, and life-long relationship.

Regardless of their age, make certain that they wait until:

- Their focus is not on what they can get from the relationship but rather on what they can give to their partner.
 - They realize that marriage is not the possession of another person.
 - They realize that marriage is a lifelong process of learning and change that will affect their lives
 - They are willing to commit to the marriage with no thought of making a way of escape when things are not working right.
 - They have developed a means by which they manage conflict in a positive way.
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- They are in love with one another, not only romantically but they have also developed a friendship which is based on mutual respect and trust. Romantic and passionate love are a necessary ingredient to a love relationship however, marriage is based on more than just this. Often times when a couple is experiencing romantic love they feel that they may be ready for marriage – however marriage is more than just infatuation. Friendship love and agape love must be felt by the couple. Friendship love is an unselfish dedication to their partner's happiness wherein the fulfilment of their needs become important to them first before their own. It involves a certain amount of intimacy, an openness and vulnerability to one another. Agape love is a transparent love which allows each other to get up close and personal and removes all walls and defences. It is a love that is drawn from Christ and is not based on romantic feelings.
 - They desire to share their lives with one another and do not have the mentality of living together but separate.
 - They have realistic expectation of the marriage and the negative influences that can destroy their relationship.
 - They are willing to deal with any major problems that they find effecting their marriage
 - They have learnt to be patient with their sexual desire and are not only marrying for this reason.

PART ONE: BUILDING UPON THE RIGHT FOUNDATION

PASTORAL OBJECTIVE

The objective of the following session is to teach the bridal couple that:

- Marriage is an institution of God
- Marriage was designed as being a good gift from the Father
- Marriage is between a man and a woman
- Marriage is a bond where the two become one
- Marriage was designed with a purpose

THE WORLD'S VIEWPOINT OF MARRIAGE

Webster's dictionary defines it as "The state of being married", "the mutual relation of husband and wife" and the "institution whereby men and women are joined in a special kind of social and legal dependence for the purpose of founding and maintaining a family."

In the world system, marriage is seen as being uniquely beneficial to society because it is the foundation of the family and the basic building block of society.

- It brings significant stability and meaning to human relationships. As social science research and government surveys increasingly show, the decline in marriage since the 1960s has been accompanied by a rise in a number of serious social problems. The Heritage Foundation has produced a book of charts called "The Positive Effects of Marriage" which documents the positive affects of marriage on men, women and children as well as the detrimental affects of broken marriages on individuals.¹
- It remains the ideal for the raising of children.
- It plays an important role in transferring culture and civilization into future generations.

Marriage is not merely a private contract, but a social institution of great public concern. Marriage has traditionally been understood as the union of one man and one woman, however this is progressively changing to include marriage of the same sex as well.

¹ www.heritage.org/research/features/marriage/index

GOD, THE MARRIAGE ARCHITECT

Marriage is not an invention of man but it is an institution that God designed.

Genesis 2:18 "And the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a companion who will help him."

Genesis 2:22-24 "Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib and brought her to Adam. "At last!" Adam exclaimed. "She is part of my own flesh and bone! She will be called 'woman,' because she was taken out of a man." This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one."

What can we learn from these two portions of scripture?

- In all of Creation, which God had declared as being "good" (1:31), this one thing, Adam being alone, was "not good". God then said, "...I will make a help meet for him." The Hebrew word translated "help meet" suggests a counter-part. Some versions have the footnote, "helper comparable to him."
- When God gave Adam a marriage partner, this partner was a woman. In the Bible there is no mention of a same sex marriage however there is mention of same sex relationships which are spoken of as being sin. Romans 1:27 "And the men, instead of having normal sexual relationships with women, burned with lust for each other. Men did shameful things with other men and, as a result, suffered within themselves the penalty they so richly deserved." Leviticus 18:22 "Do not practice homosexuality; it is a detestable sin."
- Adam received his wife as a gift from God. Proverbs 19:14 "Parents can provide their sons with an inheritance of houses and wealth, but only the Lord can give an understanding wife."
- Because God is the architect it was created for "good". James 1:17 "whatever is good and perfect comes to us from God above, who created all heaven's lights. Unlike them, he never changes or casts shifting shadows." Proverbs 18:22 "The man who finds a wife finds a treasure and receives favor from the Lord."
- God designed marriage to be a bond. Adam said that Eve was "part of my own flesh..." Marriage was designed by God as being a strong bond that the two people involved in the marriage are no longer two but are melted together as one flesh. This bond was made so strong that it could only be broken by death (see Matt 19:3-9). Paul said, "Nevertheless, neither is man

independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord. For as the woman was from the man, even so the man also is through the woman; but all things are from God" (1 Cor 11:11, 12).

Eccles. 4:9-12 "Two people can accomplish more than twice as much as one; they get a better return for their labor. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But people who are alone when they fall are in real trouble. And on a cold night, two under the same blanket can gain warmth from each other. But how can one be warm alone? A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken."

GOD'S INTENDED PURPOSES OF MARRIAGE

PURPOSE ONE: MARRIAGE TEACHES US THE NATURE OF GOD

Fundamental to the Christian understanding of God's nature is the concept of relationship, expressed not only in the Trinity but also in the knowability of God and the possibility of human-divine communion. This communion, reflected in all human relationships, particularly in marriage, is used by Scripture in a unique way to illustrate the nature of God.

In the Old Testament, God uses the husband and wife relationship to illustrate His own relationship with Israel.

- Isaiah 54:5 "for your Creator will be your husband. The Lord Almighty is his name! He is your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, the God of all the earth."
- Isaiah 62:5 "Your children will care for you with joy, O Jerusalem, just as a young man cares for his bride. Then God will rejoice over you as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride."
- Jeremiah 3:14 "Return home, you wayward children," says the Lord, "for I am your husband. I will bring you again to the land of Israel—one from here and two from there, from wherever you are scattered."
- Hosea 2:19 "I will make you my wife forever, showing you righteousness and justice, unfailing love and compassion."

In His revelation as being a husband to Israel we notice His character being revealed:

- God is compassionate. Exodus 34:6 "He passed in front of Moses and said, "I am the Lord, I am the Lord, the merciful and gracious God. I am slow to anger and rich in unfailing love and faithfulness."
- God is a patient husband even in times of great stress and provocation.
- God shows sacrificial love for His chosen bride which has no limits and is without qualification
- God is faithful in the midst of her unfaithfulness (2 Tim 2:13)

PURPOSE 2: GOD DESIRES MAN TO EXPERIENCE HUMAN LOVE

Genesis 2:18-23 "And the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a companion who will help him." So the Lord God formed from the soil every kind of animal and bird. He brought them to Adam to see what he would call them, and Adam chose a name for each one. He gave names to all the livestock, birds, and wild animals. But still there was no companion suitable for him. So the Lord God caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep. He took one of Adam's ribs and closed up the place from which he had taken it. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib and brought her to Adam. "At last!" Adam exclaimed. "She is part of my own flesh and bone! She will be called 'woman,' because she was taken out of a man."

Through marriage, God desired for man to experience love in its entirety:

- **Physical Love:** The love between man and wife is a physical love, for "they shall be one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). "...To avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and every woman have her own husband," (1 Cor. 7: 2). The conjugal aspects of marriage are clearly and unashamedly taught 1 Cor. 7:3-6 "The husband should not deprive his wife of sexual intimacy, which is her right as a married woman, nor should the wife deprive her husband. The wife gives authority over her body to her husband, and the husband also gives authority over his body to his wife. So do not deprive each other of sexual relations. The only exception to this rule would be the agreement of both husband and wife to refrain from sexual intimacy for a limited time, so they can give themselves more completely to prayer. Afterward they should come together again so that Satan won't be able to tempt them because of their lack of self-control. This is only my suggestion. It's not meant to be an absolute rule."
- **Emotional love:** In Genesis 2:24 it speaks of the husband "cleaving" to the wife. This provides the idea of holding her warmly without ever letting her go. It speaks of more than physical love but reveals sharing, caring, compassion etc.
- **Friendship love:** The love that God has designed for man and woman to experience in marriage is also friendship love. This can be seen in that the woman was made to be the husband's constant helper (Gen. 2:18). God ordained marriage so that Adam might have a companion throughout his life to be with him. God and the animals were present in the Garden of Eden with him however he had no one after his kind. People sometimes have animals for pets and these pets can provide protection and love. However, they can never bring true fellowship to man because they are not the same. For this purpose Eve was created as the same kind of Adam.

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- **Spiritual and intellectual:** The failure of any animal to provide adequate companionship for Adam (Gen. 2:20) demonstrates that the love of man and wife also has intellectual and spiritual facets.

PURPOSE THREE: MARRIAGE IS FOR PROCREATION

Genesis 1:27-28 "So God created people in his own image; God patterned them after himself; male and female he created them. God blessed them and told them, "Multiply and fill the earth and subdue it. Be masters over the fish and birds and all the animals."

In verse 28 of this chapter we notice that five creative purposes were revealed to man and woman when they were created:

- Be fruitful
- Multiply
- Fill the Earth
- Subdue it
- Have dominion

These are the 5 aspects that reveal God's destiny for every individual, every family, every Church, and every nation in the Earth! The first three of them (be fruitful, multiply, and fill the Earth) require a relationship filled with true love, intimacy and commitment.

PURPOSE FOUR: RULE AND HAVE AUTHORITY

The last two purposes show us the original and ultimate purpose for our existence as God's people (subdue the Earth and have dominion).

Psalms 115:16 "The heavens belong to the Lord, but he has given the earth to all humanity."

When we look at the story of Creation we note: That mankind's creation was the climax in the Creation story and that everything that God created had some value and purpose. For example, vegetation was for food (1:11-12), the stars for telling the time (1:14), etc. Man was created to have dominion and rule on the earth.

The Bible speaks of the believer as being the head and not the tail: Deut. 28:13 "If you listen to these commands of the Lord your God and carefully obey them, the Lord will make you the head and not the tail, and you will always have the upper hand."

God has given us dominion of the earth, but possessing that dominion is a "four-letter" word called work. After creating Adam and Eve for dominion of the earth and declaring the calling of dominion over them, God placed them in the Garden of Eden and told them to get to work. "Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden *to tend and keep it*" (Genesis 2:15). Their work in the garden was not so much for provision as to take dominion! We have been given dominion of this earth, but we must work to lay hold of it. It is much like when Israel was given dominion of the Promised Land. It was theirs by right and the will of God, but then it had to become theirs in possession. How did that happen? By them exercising the authority God had given. Just as with Adam and Eve they were required to "subdue it."

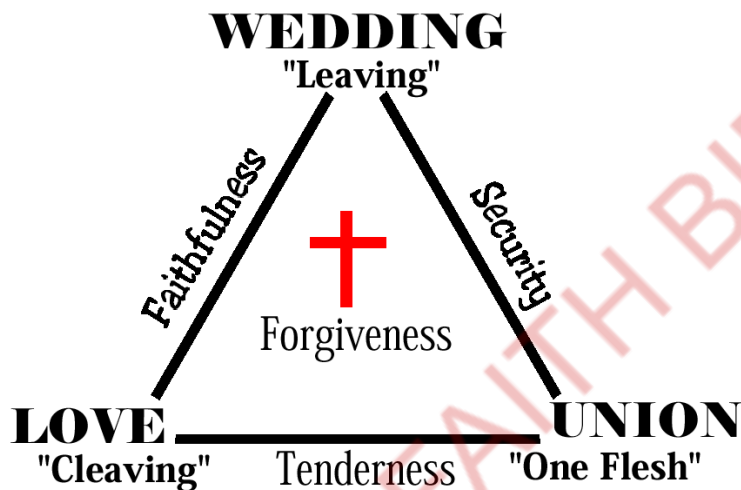
THE BLUEPRINT OF MARRIAGE

Genesis 2:24 "This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one."

There are three key words that we see in this verse when it speaks of marriage:

- Leave
- Cleave
- One

These three words set forth the blueprint of marriage as it was designed by God.



1. LEAVE

The husband and the wife are directed by God to leave their mothers and fathers and join together as one.

What It Does Not Mean

- It does not mean you ignore, abandon or forsake your parents. The Bible is very clear in both the Old and the New Testament, that children (irrespective of age as no age limit is given) are to honour and obey their parents. Ephes. 6:1 "Children, obey your parents because you belong to the Lord, for this is the right thing to do." Col. 3:20 "You children must always obey your parents, for this is what pleases the Lord." Exodus 20:12 "Honor your father and mother. Then you will live a long, full life in the land the Lord your God will give you." The responsibility to "Honor your father and mother" (Ex 20:12) is applied

by Jesus to adults (Mark 7:6-13). We do not evade our responsibility toward our parents as they grow old. Jesus scorned the hypocrisy of those who gave to the Temple the money they had set aside for their parents (Mark 7:9-13). As adults, however, we assume responsibility *for* our parents rather than *to* them. The Bible never suggests that married couples should sever their ties with their parents, but that they must "let go" of their former lives as sons and daughters in order to cement their relationships as husbands and wives.

- It does not mean that you must make a move away from the vicinity in which your parents live. "Living too close to parents at the beginning of a marriage may make it more difficult to leave, but it is possible to leave your father and mother and still live next door. Conversely, it is possible to live a thousand miles away from your parents and not leave them. In fact, you may not have left your parents even though they are dead." 2

What It Does Mean

The Hebrew word for "azab" means to "to leave, loose, forsake". When the Bible tells the couple to "leave" it means that they must loosen or relinquish that priority position of commitment and devotion previously given to parents in order to give that position to the spouse. Marriage requires releasing parents and all others, including children (except Jesus) into a lower priority than the spouse.

Once you are married there is to be a fundamental change in your relationship with your parents. Leaving your parents means...

- The husband-wife relationship is now the priority relationship: Their relationship with their parents must now take a back seat to their relationship with their spouse. In fact, all other relationships must now be secondary. What "leaving" means is that all lesser relationships must give way to the newly formed marital relationship. A leaving must occur to cement a covenant relationship of husband and wife. This principle of leaving applies likewise to our covenant relationship with God. It is said of the disciples that "they *left* everything and followed Him" (Luke 5:11).

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- Leaving indicates that in a family there are two types of relationships. The parent-child relationship is the temporary one and there will be a “leaving.” The husband-wife relationship is the permanent one—“what God has joined together, let man not separate” (Matthew 19:6). Problems occur in family life when these two roles are reversed and the parent-child relationship is treated as the primary relationship. When an adult child has married and this parent-child relationship remains primary, the newly formed union is threatened.
 - It means that they will be more concerned about their spouse's ideas, opinions, and directives than they are of their parents. Some times there is a power struggle between the two sets of parents. A husband and wife must be careful that they do not allow the parents to manipulate them.
 - It means they must not try to change their spouse simply because their parents do not like something about him or her.
 - It means that they are not primarily dependent on their parents for finances, affection, approval, council, etc. Leaving involves not only leaving behind their positions as dependent children, but also ending the financial dependence that they have to their parents. The couple who never learns to stand financially on its own feet will have difficulty in developing their future plans independently.
 - Leaving also involves learning to abandon some of their parents' attitudes and influences. This is not always easy since we are largely the product of our upbringing. The process of adjustment to a new marital relationship requires that they learn to distinguish between what is fundamental and what is incidental to their past upbringing, being willing to leave behind the latter for the health and growth of their marriages.
 - Leaving also means leaving behind the inner wounds and hurts of their childhoods. We come to our marriages with the good and bad emotional experiences of the first two decades of our lives. Through the healing power of the Holy Spirit, we can be delivered from the past wounds that can infect our marital relationships. The love of Jesus and the encouragement of our spouse can set us free from our pasts and enable us to be the understanding partners God wants us to be.

2. CLEAVE

To leave and cleave stresses the necessity of radical change in one's pre-eminent loyalty - a husband is to transfer to his wife the primary familial loyalty. The responsibility is on the husband in the first place to give pre-eminence to his wife because a wife's sense of security comes from being bonded to her husband.

"Cleaving" reflects the central concept of covenant-fidelity. The Hebrew word for "cleave" *dabaq*, suggests the idea of being permanently glued or joined together. It is one of the words frequently used to express the covenant commitment of the people to God: "You shall fear the Lord your God; you shall serve him and *cleave to Him*" (Deut 10:20; 11:22; 13:4; 30:20). The word is used to describe Ruth's refusal to leave her mother-in-law Naomi: "Ruth clave unto her" (Ruth 1:14).

Dr. Wayne Mack says this of marriage – "Marriage means that a husband and wife enter into a relationship for which they accept full responsibility and in which they commit themselves to each other regardless of what problems arise."

God's kind of marriage involves a total and irrevocable commitment of two people to each other in good times and in bad times, agreements and disagreements, in joy or in sorrow, in sickness or in health. God's kind of marriage means that people know that they must face problems, discuss them, seek God's help in them, resolve them rather than run from them, because there is no way out. They are committed to one another for life. They must cleave to one another today and tomorrow, as long as they both shall live.

Accepting the Biblical standard of cleaving means asking ourselves when contemplating marriage: Am I prepared to make a lifetime commitment to my prospective spouse, for better or for worse till death do us part? Once married, cleaving means to ask ourselves: Will this action, word, decision, or attitude draw us closer together or further apart? Will it build up or tear down our relationship? For a Christian committed to living by the principles of God's word, any course of action which weakens the cleaving must be regarded as contrary to God's design for a marriage covenant.

AN IRREVOCABLE COVENANT:

A covenant is a "formal, solemn and binding agreement made between two or more parties". The Old Testament word for covenant comes from the word meaning "bond" and literally means to "bind two (or more) parties together".

Marriage is an irrevocable covenant to which the bridal couple is bound. Malachi 2:14 says "Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant." (See also Romans 7:2-3; Matthew 19:8-10)

The concept of the covenant stands out in Scripture among all the signs and symbols used by God to reveal His saving grace. In His mercy, God chose to enter into a solemn covenant of love, not only with individuals such as Abraham, but also with the whole household of Israel. They did not deserve His love which He freely manifested toward them. God's covenant of love, though not always reciprocated, is everlasting, extending from generation to generation: "The Lord your God is God; He is the faithful God, keeping His covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love Him and keep His commands" (Deut 7:7-9).

To help His people understand and accept the unrelenting nature of His covenant of love, in the Old Testament God often used the metaphor of the husband/wife relationship. The obvious reason is that the marriage covenant, characterized by love, compassion, and faithfulness, fittingly exemplifies God's covenant relationship with His people.

- **Hosea's Marriage:**

In the final days of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, when they were threatened with extinction by the expansionist policies of the neighboring nations, God appealed to His wayward people through a succession of prophets. Among these was Hosea, who was told by God to marry a prostitute, Gomer, and raise a family by her. Through this experience, Hosea was to act out God's unrelenting covenant of love to His people. When Gomer went after her lovers, Hosea was sent to take her back and love her again. Through Hosea's marital experiences, God revealed Himself to Israel as a compassionate, forgiving husband: "In that day, says the Lord, you will call me, 'my husband,' . . . And I will betroth you to come to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness; and you shall know the Lord" (Hos 2:16, 19-20).

By revealing Himself as a faithful, compassionate and unrelenting husband, God sets a pattern for the husband/wife relationship. What God does on a larger scale as Israel's husband, a human husband is called to do on a smaller scale in his relationship with his wife.

- **Jeremiah and Ezekiel:**

The imagery of the marriage covenant is used by later prophets to remind the people of their covenant relationship with God. For example, Jeremiah reminded the people that God had entered into a covenant with them and had become their husband: "my covenant . . . they broke, though I was their husband" (Jer 31:32). Even though they had broken the covenant, God remained a faithful husband who would make a new covenant with His people, working to transform their hearts (Jer 33:33). The implication is clear. Marriage is a sacred covenant in which the husband and wife must be faithful to their commitment as God is faithful to His promise. Jeremiah's message was ignored. Eventually Judah was captured by the Babylonians and all her leading citizens were taken into exile.

There in exile, Ezekiel graphically portrays God's unfailing love as that of a husband wooing and winning back an unfaithful wife: "When I looked upon you, behold, you were at the age for love; and I spread my skirt over you, and covered your nakedness; yea, I plighted my troth to you and entered into a covenant with you, says the Lord God, and you became mine. . . . But you trusted in your beauty, and played the harlot . . . Wherefore . . . I will judge you as women who break wedlock . . . I will deal with you as you have done, who have despised the oath in breaking the covenant, yet I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish with you an everlasting covenant" (Ez 16:8, 15, 38, 59).

- **Isaiah:**

On a similar vein Isaiah describes the final restoration of Israel in terms of a loving husband forgiving and restoring his unfaithful wife: "Your Maker is your husband . . . For the Lord has called you like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, like a wife of youth when she is cast off, says your God. For a brief moment I forsook you, but with great compassion I will gather you. . . with everlasting love I will have compassion on you, says the Lord, your Redeemer" (Is 54:5-8).

The above examples suffice to show how the Old Testament prophets often describe God's covenant relationship with His people in terms of an ever-loving, faithful husband who never tires of wooing back an unfaithful wife. This example of God as a faithful and loving husband reveals what God intends marriage to be: a sacred covenant where love and faithfulness prevail.

- **Malachi's Teaching.**

Malachi, one of the last Old Testament prophets, fittingly sums up the Old Testament view regarding the sacred and inviolable nature of the marriage covenant. In his time, the Jews were languishing in a ruined Jerusalem and lamenting that God no longer accepted their offerings. Malachi responded by pointing out that the cause of their suffering was found in their unfaithfulness to God manifested especially through their unfaithfulness to their wives: "You cover the Lord's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because He no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor at your hand. You ask, 'Why does he not?' Because the Lord was witness to the covenant between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant" (Mal 2:13-14).



Here the Scripture tells us explicitly that marriage is a covenant to which God is a witness. Since God does not break covenants (Lev. 26:40-45), the marriage covenant is all the more binding. This means that what we do to our marital partner we do also to the Lord. Christian commitment and marital commitment are two sides of the same covenant. For this reason, Malachi admonishes the people, saying: "So take heed to yourselves, and let none be faithless to the wife of his youth. 'For I hate divorce, says the Lord God of Israel, and covering one's garment with violence, says the Lord of hosts'" (Mal 2:15-16).

Malachi admonishes the people that in the best interest of their families and communities they should not violate their marriage covenant by divorcing their wives. The reason is that divorce violates not only God's original plan for marriage but also the marriage covenant to which the Lord is a witness. Divorce betrays life's most intimate companion and as such is a grievous sin which God hates.

- **Christ's Teaching:**

Malachi's teaching on the sacred nature of the marriage covenant was reiterated and expanded four centuries later by Christ Himself. In response to the Pharisees' question regarding the concession of Moses regarding divorce, Christ

pointed back to the institution of marriage, saying: "For your hardness of heart he [Moses] wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of creation 'God made them male and female.' '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 they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder" (Mark 10:5-9).

In this memorable statement Christ appeals to the divine institution of marriage (Gen 2:24) to point out that marriage is the strongest human bond that transforms two people into "one flesh." Moreover, Jesus affirms that God Himself is the one who actually joins a couple in marriage. This means that when Christian couples exchange their marital vows in the presence of witnesses, they are in actual fact uttering their vows of mutual commitment to God Himself. At the deepest level, marriage is a covenant between a couple and God, because God is not only the witness but also the author of the marriage covenant.

A man and a woman marry by their own choice; but when they do, God joins them together into one permanent union. Because marriage is God's indissoluble union of the couple, no human court or individual has the right to put it asunder. It is evident that for Jesus marriage is not a mere civil contract, but a divinely ordained union which God alone has power to establish and terminate. The full force of this truth was explained by Christ privately to His disciples in these terms: "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another, commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery" (Mark 10:11-12).

By this statement, Jesus declares unambiguously that the marriage covenant must not be violated by divorce and remarriage because it is a sacred inviolable bond. To do otherwise is to "commit adultery," a sin clearly condemned by God's moral law (Ex 20:14; Deut. 5:18). With a few simple words Jesus refutes the view that divorce is a viable option for a married couple. The covenant structure of marriage makes divorce an act of covenant breaking, a failure to keep a moral obligation.

- **Paul's Teaching:**

Following the teaching of Jesus, Paul affirms in different words that marriage is a lifelong and indissoluble covenant. In Romans 7:1-3, Paul sets forth the principle that death ends the dominion of the law and then illustrates the principle through the marriage relationship. The point of the illustration is that death and death alone releases a person from the bond of marriage: "A married woman is bound by law to her husband as long as he lives; but if her husband dies she is discharged from the law concerning the husband. Accordingly, she will be

called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies she is free from the law, and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress" (Rom 7:2-3).

Paul's illustration sheds light on his view of marriage as a lifelong covenant which can be terminated only by death. The same teaching is presented by Paul again in 1 Corinthians 7:39 where he declares: "A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives."

The covenantal nature of the marriage relationship is expressed by Paul again in Ephesians 5:31-32 where he uses the marriage union to illustrate the covenant relationship between Christ and His bride, the church: "'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one.' This is a great mystery, and I take it to mean Christ and the church."

Just as the prophets in the Old Testament used the marriage covenant to portray the relationship between God and Israel, so Paul in the New Testament uses the marriage union to represent Christ's covenant of sacrificial love and oneness with the church. Just as marriage unites two people when they commit their lives to each other, so the Gospel joins the believer to Christ as he trusts Him for his salvation. Since the marriage covenant represents the permanent relationship between Christ and His church, it must be permanent; otherwise it would be an inaccurate representation of the indissoluble relationship between Christ and His church.

The use of marriage in the Old and New Testaments to reveal God's covenant relationship with His people serves also to demonstrate what marriage today should be like. We may call this "reciprocal illumination." By revealing through human marriage His covenant of salvation, God has simultaneously revealed to us the unique meaning of marriage as a sacred and permanent covenant.

QUALITIES GOD MANIFESTS IN ENTERING AND MAINTAINING COVENANT RELATIONSHIP

- **The love of God:**

Deut. 7:6-8 "For you are a holy people, who belong to the Lord your God. Of all the people on earth, the Lord your God has chosen you to be his own special treasure. "The Lord did not choose you and lavish his love on you because you were larger or greater than other nations, for you were the smallest of all nations! It was simply because the Lord loves you, and because he was keeping the oath he had sworn to your ancestors. That is why the Lord rescued you with such amazing power from your slavery under Pharaoh in Egypt."

God is never motivated by self-interest or selfishness, but He chooses to enter into covenant relationship because of His Divine Love.

- **The faithfulness of God:**

Deut. 7:9 "Understand, therefore, that the Lord your God is indeed God. He is the faithful God who keeps his covenant for a thousand generations and constantly loves those who love him and obey his commands."

God is absolutely faithful because He is stable and unchanging in His commitments. He is a "rock" and we can depend on the fact that if He has made a vow today, it will still be in His heart to keep that vow tomorrow (Hebrews 6:16-19).

- **The forgiveness of God:**

Psalms 130:4 "But you offer forgiveness, that we might learn to fear you."

God maintains His faithfulness to the covenant that He has made with us because He readily forgives the offences of men.

- **The selflessness of God:**

God loved the world so much that He sacrificially gave of Himself to establish a covenant relationship with us (Phil 2:3-8).

CHARACTERISTICS OF A MARRIAGE COVENANT:

- A marriage covenant is serious: In the Old Testament, when a covenant was made, the flesh was cut and blood flowed. The Hebrew act of "cutting covenant" was so serious that it was inaugurated with blood. When a covenant was broken, God held those who broke the covenant accountable (See Mal 2:13-16).
- A marriage covenant is sacred: The covenant of marriage is ordained and blessed by God. Not only does the bridal couple make a covenant with each other but with God as well.
- A marriage covenant is sacrificial: All covenants found in the Old and the New Testament was based on sacrifice. Covenant represents total surrender and involves the merging of one's life with another. Selfishness is the root cause of all marital problems. Therefore the key to a successful marriage is to learn the "I must die" principle.

3 ONE FLESH – UNITY

According to Genesis 2:24, quoted by Jesus in Matthew 19 and by the apostle Paul in Ephesians 5, God's blueprint for marriage means first that we must LEAVE our families of origin, then we must CLEAVE to one another in a commitment to the permanence of the relationship, then we must become ONE.

To be one flesh is the result of leaving and cleaving; and this is much more than just a physical union. This is about giving and receiving; joining and responding. This is emotional; this is intellectual; this is about love and care and attention. And - only as we leave and cleave and develop closeness in all these other ways - can there be the kind of physical union that's right, ideal and nourishing.

This union should last as long as we live. The Bible teaches one man and one woman for life with only one exception (Matt. 19:9). The term "one flesh" means that just as our bodies are one whole and cannot be divided into pieces and still be a whole, so God intended it to be with the marriage relationship. There are no longer two entities (two individuals), but now there is one entity (a married couple). There are a number of aspects to this new union. Emotionally, spiritually, intellectually, financially, and in every other way, the couple is to become one. Even as one part of the body cares for the other body parts (the stomach digests food for the body, the brain directs the body for the good of the whole, the hands work for the sake of the body, etc.), so each partner of the marriage is to show like care for the other. Each partner is no longer to see money earned as "my" money but now as "our" money. Ephesians 5:22-33 and Proverbs 31:10-31 give the application of this "oneness" to the role of the husband and to the

wife respectively. Physically they become one flesh and the result of that one flesh would be found in the children that their union produces; these children now contain genetic makeup as a result of the union. And even in the sexual aspect of their relationship, they are not to consider their bodies as their own but as belonging to their partner (1 Corinthians 7:3-5). Nor are they to focus on their own pleasure but rather the giving of pleasure to their spouse.

THE BENEFITS OF MARRIAGE

Genesis 2:18 "And the Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a companion who will help him.'"

Companionship – not “alone”

Eccles. 4:9-12 "Two people can accomplish more than twice as much as one; they get a better return for their labor. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But people who are alone when they fall are in real trouble. And on a cold night, two under the same blanket can gain warmth from each other. But how can one be warm alone? A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken."

Matthew 19:4-6 ""Haven't you read the Scriptures?" Jesus replied. "They record that from the beginning 'God made them male and female.' And he said, 'This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.' Since they are no longer two but one, let no one separate them, for God has joined them together."

Comfort – “an help”

Titus 2:4-5 "These older women must train the younger women to love their husbands and their children, to live wisely and be pure, to take care of their homes, to do good, and to be submissive to their husbands. Then they will not bring shame on the word of God."

Completion – “meet for him”

The word, meet, means fit, proper or just right for a particular need (2Timothy 2:21). The husband and wife are made for each other (1Corinthians 11:10-11). They compliment each other (1Peter 3:1-7)

THE FOUNDATION OF MARRIAGE

PASTORAL OBJECTIVE

The objective of the counsellor during this session is:

- To establish whether the couple is equally yoked and both have committed their hearts to Jesus
- If one is not committed to Jesus, then you need to advise that they remain engaged until this matter has been resolved. Teach them why being unequally yoked is and / could become a problem in their marriage
- Spend time with the person who is not as yet a Christian and teach them the Gospel of Christ.
- Help them prepare themselves whilst dating for the spiritual intimacy that they can have during marriage

JESUS – THE FOUNDATION FOR THE MARRIAGE

"For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." 1 Corinthians 3:11,

"Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;" Ephesians 2:19-20,

Jesus is the Foundation on which we must build our lives, homes and marriages. A foundation is a prepared base on which structure rests. It is the beginnings or first principals of a system of truth. The idea of foundation speaks of the very core of our understanding of truth and life. It speaks of what we believe to be the bottom line. Our foundation is not what we say or think it is. It is the reality of what makes us "tick". It reveals to us what we believe is of lasting and eternal value. It is what we will fight for. It determines how and what we do with our time, life and resources. It also is the lens by which we understand the meaning of everything.

Therefore when the bridal couple decides to build on the foundation of Christ in their marriage, they are beginning their married life in truth and are then using this foundation (the Word of God) to build the rest of the structure (relationship).

In so doing, they begin to build their homes on the Rock (which cannot be moved or shaken – unconditional love). 1 Cor. 13:4-7 "Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. Love does not demand its own way. Love is not irritable, and it keeps no record of when it has been wronged. It

is never glad about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance."

However, when the couple fails to build on the foundation of Christ, they build on the sand, that which is constantly changing and moving (they build upon worldly principles and conditional love)

DO NOT BE UNEQUALLY YOKED

For a couple to have spiritual intimacy, they need a foundation of shared beliefs about who Jesus is and basic agreement on the central tenets of the Christian faith. Once that is established, they can deepen their unity by encouraging each other's spiritual growth. Developing a solid relationship on earth begins with a desire to develop a solid relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

2 Cor. 6:14 "Don't team up with those who are unbelievers. How can goodness be a partner with wickedness? How can light live with darkness?"

Definition of *YOKE*: (from Latin *to join*) - a wooden bar or frame by which two draft animals (as oxen) are joined at the heads or necks for working together. 3

Yokes have two characteristics by which we can always identify them:

- The first one is that a yoke is **not** easily broken. It is a kind of permanent relationship. When you yoke two animals together they are bound together; they do not have any choice. Uncomfortable as it may be, they must do things together.
- The second mark of a yoke is that it constrains someone; it does not permit independent action. There is something that forces you to comply with what the other one wants to do, whether you like it or not.

Literally: the Bible uses beasts of burden as an example. If a donkey and an ox are yoked together (which God forbid the people of Israel to do in Deuteronomy 22:10), the yoke will weigh heavily on one animal while choking the other, or as the animal with the longer stride moves ahead it will painfully drag the other along by the neck! They would *not* be able to pull smoothly or painlessly together and little work would get done. But when two animals of approximately the same size and weight are yoked together, they pull the plow smoothly, helping each other, and work is accomplished.

3 Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary

Spiritually: becoming attached to a person who does not share your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior can be just as painful and counterproductive as the illustration of the unequally yoked animals. Whether attached financially (as in a business partnership) or emotionally (as a spouse), you are connected to someone who cannot "pull" equally with you in life.

The word of God distinctly declares that a child of God is not to be united in marriage with an unbeliever. In the Old Testament we read that the Israelites were forbidden to marry anyone who was not an Israelite. To God's ancient people Israel the following command was given, concerning the nations around them:

- "Neither shalt thou make marriage with them ; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son, for will turn away thy son from following Me" (Deut. 7:3, 4).
- Ezra 9:12 "You told us not to let our daughters marry their sons, and not to let our sons marry their daughters, and not to help those nations in any way. You promised that if we avoided these things, we would become a prosperous nation. You promised that we would enjoy the good produce of the land and leave this prosperity to our children as an inheritance forever."
- Neh. 10:30 ""We promise not to let our daughters marry the pagan people of the land, nor to let our sons marry their daughters."
- Neh. 13:25 "So I confronted them and called down curses on them. I beat some of them and pulled out their hair. I made them swear before God that they would not let their children intermarry with the pagan people of the land."

To the saints of the present age the word is equally explicit :- "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers" (2 Cor. 6:14); and "Married...only in the Lord" (1 Cor. 7:39). These are clearly the commandments of the Lord to us.

This aspect of the "Unequal Yoke" is a snare into which many mighty men have fallen. Solomon, the wisest of men fell into this snare, and the "outlandish women" of the Ammonites and Moabites turned away his heart from God, and caused him to sin (see 1 Kings 11:1-13; Neh. 13:23-31). Samson, the strongest of men, was also caught in it, and shorn of his strength.

The requirement for believers to be equally yoked (married to like-minded believers) is still binding; and most religious authorities will agree that couples who ignore this basic guideline do so at great risk.

Why?

Exodus 23:32-33 ""Make no treaties with them and have nothing to do with their gods. Do not even let them live among you! If you do, they will infect you with their sin of idol worship, and that would be disastrous for you."

1 Cor. 15:33 "Don't be fooled by those who say such things, for "bad company corrupts good character."

The problem is not so much that the unbeliever intends to drive the believer away from God. The problem is that the sinner's deadness to the things of God will, in time, adversely affect the saint who lives with it, day in and day out. For a sinner and saint to live together, a compromise must occur, and since a carnal mind cannot be subject to God (Rom.8:7), the compromise must always be on the believer's part.

PRACTICAL ASSIGNMENT

A bridal couple has come to you to get married within the next three months. They have asked you to go through the pre-marital course with them. Upon going through this lesson with them you find out the following scenarios

- One is a Christian and one is not
- One is a newly saved believer whilst the other has been a Christian for many years
- One believes that they have been called into full time ministry whilst the other was brought up in a pastor's home and wants nothing to do with the ministry

How would you counsel and deal with each of the above situations. Which of the above couples would you advise to place a hold on their marriage? Why? What godly counsel would you be able to give to these couples?

ROADBLOCKS TO GROWING TOGETHER SPIRITUALLY

Growing together spiritually is not our natural bent. Most people had very few role models in this area; maybe their own parents' marriage was less than helpful in setting an example. And of course, even with good role models and knowing what we should do in terms of building spiritual intimacy, we often let other less-important things get in the way.

Busyness: Busyness is perhaps the main issue to blocking intimacy of all kinds—especially spiritual intimacy. Why can couples feel closer on a vacation or a church retreat? There really is a simple answer to that question: They slow down and focus on each other.

Low-Level Anger: Relationships are bumpy. Without good communication and healthy conflict resolutions we build up resentments and minor irritations that escalate more than they should. Pretty soon we are carrying around a whole lot of baggage called anger, annoyance, fury, as well as other resentments. When these issues are left to boil, it is very difficult to come together spiritually. The Bible says, "Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry" (Ephesians 4:26).

Lack of Forgiveness: When your spouse has done something against you and you are unable to forgive him or her, you are blocking spiritual intimacy. Forgiveness is a necessary ingredient for a right relationship with both God and your spouse. We live in a society that has taught us to have conditional love, and that kind of love harbours a lack of forgiveness. This may be a major issue for your relationship; if you can't resolve it, you probably won't grow spiritually.

DEVELOPING YOUR SPIRITUAL INTIMACY

When two people come together, there is often an incredible amount of combustibility. Combustion occurs when two or more substances react chemically together, resulting in the giving off of heat and light; often called burning. In the same manner, two people joined together by God can spiritually set each other on fire. However, after being married a while that sense of combustibility can easily be lost if the spiritual life of the marriage is not cultivated. But, a couple that intentionally and actively engages in maintaining the spiritual life of the marriage continues to be a strength one to another, and ignites new sparks that blazes through every area of marriage and family.

First, each spouse must keep their fire burning. Each partner keeps their fire burning by maintaining a growing and intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus, through personal prayer and Bible study.

Second, spend time together with God. In addition to the above, a Christian couple spreads the spiritual flames through joint spiritual habits. The most obvious of these is having scheduled devotions. In devotions couples pray and share biblical truths with each other in an open and transparent way. A natural outflow of a joint spiritual life is spiritual dialogue. Spiritual dialogue is qualitative and interactive conversation concerning our application, thoughts, feelings, and conclusions on spiritual matters as it relates to our life and society. Put simply, it is enjoyably talking about how spiritual things affect our life and the world around us. Spiritual dialogue is qualitative and interactive. It is more than surface talk, it involves sharing our deep spiritual thoughts to each other, such as "this is how I'm going to apply the sermon to my daily life..", or "the Lord showed me weakness in that area". Remember to interact, and allow each other ample time to share insights and thoughts.

WAYS OF GROWING TOGETHER SPIRITUALLY:

The faith of the bridal couple needs to become a pillar in their marriage. This can be done by:

Being committed together to a local church: Unless the bridal couple is committed to attending a church together every Sunday, their spiritual intimacy together can become affected.

Finding a community of faith for you as a couple: A "fellowship" group or a Bible-study often provide support as you grow together spiritually. You need people who, like God, are *for* you as a married couple—people who know you both well, who interact with you frequently, and who believe in you as a unit.

Pray together: Prayer is a deeply intimate exercise, with great personal vulnerability. Prayer is a connection point for our day. It reminds us our faith is the glue that holds us together. Praying together is probably the strongest knot that binds the couple together. Praying together may feel uncomfortable in the beginning, so encourage the couple to use these tips to help minimize any self-consciousness and aim you toward God-consciousness

- Set aside time together to prayer. Be committed to the time that you have decided on.
- Discuss some of the aspects in their life, relationship, work etc that they would like to prayer about. Remember that there is power where there is two people coming into agreement. Matthew 18:19 "I also tell you this: If two of you agree down here on earth concerning anything you ask, my Father in heaven will do it for you."
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- Study the prayers of the Bible together
 - Buy a book on prayers and pray them together
 - Talk about and make a list of how God has answered the prayers that they have prayed together as a couple.

Study the Scriptures together: Spiritual intimacy can be greatly enhanced when a married couple is involved in Bible study together or shares with each other the fruit of individual Bible study. As we study the Scriptures, we discover how God views the world and our role in it. You can begin by sharing one thing that impressed you or one question you have after you each have studied your weekly Bible lesson. Then try reading a devotional book together each day. Eventually you might even enroll together in a discipleship course or Bible study offered by your church and discuss the lessons with each other.

Serve God Together: The great challenge of the Christian life is to give our lives in service to others under God's direction. Because service to God is so central in the Christian life, it also plays an important role in developing spiritual intimacy within marriage. Spiritual intimacy greatly increases when a husband and wife serve together.

PRACTICAL EXERCISE TO START THE COUPLE OFF:

Sharing is a great way to start so encourage the couple to share the history of their spiritual life. Use these questions to discover more about the bridal couple's faith.

1. What did your parents believe about God, Jesus, church, prayer and the Bible?
2. How and where did you first learn about God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit? At what age?
3. What questions did you have as a child, and as a teenager, about faith? Who gave you the answers?
4. Did you memorize any Scripture as a child? Which of those verses do you remember now?
5. As a child, if you could have asked God any questions, what would they have been?
6. If you could ask God any questions now, what would they be?
7. Did anyone you looked up to as a Christian disappoint you as a child? If so, how has that affected you as an adult?
8. When you went through difficult times growing up, how did that affect your faith?
9. What has been the greatest spiritual experience of your life?

THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF MARRIAGE

PASTORAL OBJECTIVE

In this session the pastor needs to show the correct building blocks which the bridal couple will use when building their relationship. During this session they will learn the importance of commitment in the marriage relationship. This commitment will involve:

- Understanding the different types of love that are necessary in the marriage. Keep in mind that agape love can only be reflected in a Godly marriage where both partners are committed to God and allowing His Holy Spirit to work in their hearts.
- Understanding that commitment is more than the vows that are said on the wedding day but is “work”. It is a doing word that both are to be committed in throughout the marriage.
- Understand that with commitment comes the faithfulness and exclusivity of both partners to each other.

A COMMITMENT TO BUILD THEIR RELATIONSHIP

Once a builder has received the blueprint from the architect on how to build a building, before he starts to build, he counts the cost of the task that he has been given and makes a commitment to build. In the same way, now that the bridal couple have learnt about the blueprint of marriage and what marriage means from God's viewpoint, they need to decide that they will be building upon the Word of God that they believe is His Word to them. This is the first step in building the marriage relationship.

The glue that keeps the marriage together is not love but it is commitment. Marriage is an unconditional commitment and not a contract. The word commitment is a verb which means to “do or to perform”. It is a binding pledge carried out to completion or promise. Commitment has little to do with your feelings – it is an act of the mind and the will. It is a decision to stick with it.

James 1:2-3 “Dear brothers and sisters, whenever trouble comes your way, let it be an opportunity for joy. For when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow.”

Commitment is inherent in the most fundamental definition of marriage, found in the Bible: “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.” (Genesis 2:24) This decision is

presented as a once-and-for-all experience. Jesus said, "Therefore, what God has joined together, let man not separate." (Matthew 19:6) The description of marriage in Genesis 2 goes on to say, "The man and his wife were both naked and they felt no shame." This implies that commitment is required in a relationship in which a man and woman desire a sense of union and freedom to be themselves. We need security in order to express our thoughts, feelings, and desires openly.

THE ELEMENTS OF MARITAL COMMITMENT

- Marriage is a personal commitment to one another: It is a unique relationship that involves two people at the depth of their beings. In marriage the couple give of themselves that is unmatched by any other relationship that they have. It is a pledge to share with the other person at an unequalled level, all that is "me" – their mind, heart and soul.
- Marriage can only begin and continue to grow as a mutual commitment: In the beginning, the middle and the end of this process, we call marriage, throughout every stage, it always takes two to make it and one person to break it. Marriage causes the couple to be interdependent and not independent. The success and the growth of the marriage requires a commitment from both of the people involved.
- Marriage is permanent and exclusive. The couple in the marriage choose each other, "dying" to all other possibilities of marriage and sexual intimacy, in order to create a unique bond of faithfulness, lasting trust and love. It is the exclusiveness of this commitment that enables the couple to give of themselves without reservations.
- Marriage is a commitment to an intimate partnership and love. As partners, both of the people involved pledge to be partners, on equal footing. Neither one being superior to the other in terms of personal dignity and human rights. No one lording it over the other (Matt 20:25-26). This partnership is one of life but embraces all areas of the marital life. It is a partnership of love whereby they each are willing to place the needs of the other person before their own. This partnership is an intimate one.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM GOD AND HIS COMMITMENT TO US?

Deut. 7:7-9 "'The Lord did not choose you and lavish his love on you because you were larger or greater than other nations, for you were the smallest of all nations! It was simply because the Lord loves you, and because he was keeping the oath he had sworn to your ancestors. That is why the Lord rescued you with such amazing power from your slavery under Pharaoh in Egypt. Understand,

therefore, that the Lord your God is indeed God. He is the faithful God who keeps his covenant for a thousand generations and constantly loves those who love him and obey his commands."

There are three *principles of commitment* which we can learn and implement in marriage from God in this portion of scripture:

- **SET YOUR AFFECTION ON YOUR SPOUSE (7).**

There are four kinds of "love" needed to make a marriage relationship complete. They are AGAPE, PHILEO, STORGE, and EROS. All are essential in a marriage.

Agape: The highest form of these types of love is agape. Agape love is an unconditional love. It loves when all other types of love quit, and cares when there is no apparent reason to care. This love comes from God into a person when they ask Jesus to come into their heart and to be their Lord and Savior. God is our example. He "...demonstrates His own love [agape] toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). He likewise commands all husbands to "...love [agape] your wives as Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for her" (Ephesians 5:25). Agape does not grasp after what it can get, but pursues only what it can give, and it keeps giving even when it gets nothing in return. The agape love of God goes past the surface, enabling us to look deep into our spouse's heart and love them for who God has made them to be despite their faults and shortcomings

Phileo: Phileo love is the kind of love that makes agape love enjoyable. Phileo love is having tender affection toward your mate. Most friendships are built on phileo love. Phileo love is that "something" that you see in another person that draws you to be their friend. It's one thing to unconditionally love (agape) someone who you don't like to be around because they irritate you. It's quite another thing to unconditionally love someone who is tenderly affectionate (phileo) toward you. The tender affection of phileo love makes the unconditional love of agape enjoyable. It's the joy of the friendship! God's desire for the husband and wife is that they tenderly love (phileo) each other while they overlook each other's faults and failures (agape).

Storge: Another kind of love needed in a marriage is storge. Storge is a physical show of affection that results from a pure motive. It may be a hug, a kiss, or another expression of genuine affection. Because males are different than females, the wife usually needs this kind of love more from her husband. It is important for the husband to set aside his need of companionship and meet his wife's main need, which is affection.

Eros: Eros love is needed to make a marriage. Eros is the fulfillment of the physical sexual desire that a husband and wife show toward each other. It's when "...the two ...become ONE FLESH" (Matthew 19:5).

When all four types of love operate in a marriage, the marriage is complete. A picture of a complete marriage is a husband and wife who lay down their life for each other (agape love) no matter how many times the other offends them or causes them to have ill feelings. They both have tender affection toward each other (phileo love). They enjoy each other's company because they're best friends. Because they enjoy each other so much, they hug, kiss, hold hands and do nice things for their mate (storge love). Because their hearts are filled with agape, phileo and storge, a warm passionate desire arises within both of them to enjoy each other sexually (eros).

AGAPE LOVE ACCORDING TO 1 CORINTHIANS 13:

Love suffers long. It is long-tempered, slow to anger, slow to take offense, slow to become resentful. True love causes us to bear patiently with our loved ones when they wrong us, offend us, nag us, or criticize us. It is slow to assert itself or to retaliate in self-defense.

Love is kind. This is the positive side of the first principle. Patience refrains from reacting to provocation, while kindness finds constructive ways of doing good for the ones we love no matter how they have acted. Kindness is showing appreciation for little things we like and saying so with sincere commendation.

Love envies not. Love is not jealous; it is not in competition with its loved one, nor is it hurt when it comes out second best. Agape love is not possessively jealous, and does not insist on having all the attention all the time.

Love vaunts not itself, is not puffed up. These two ideas are similar to each other. To vaunt means to brag or boast. To be puffed up is to be arrogant and conceited. Love is not inflated; it does not carry an exaggerated estimate of its own importance. It does not consider itself superior to its object.

Love does not behave itself unseemly. Love is never unmannerly, but always acts courteously and politely. When we truly love, we make the effort to do little things that show how much we care.

Love seeks not her own. Here is the very essence of love unselfishness, the absence of all self-seeking. Love does not insist on its own way or on its own rights.

Love is not easily provoked. It is neither touchy nor irritable. Since it has surrendered all its rights for the one it loves, it has nothing to get upset about. Love is not easily aroused to anger, doesn't wear its feelings on its sleeve, is not temperamental.

Love thinks no evil. Love does not dwell on the wrongs it has suffered from the object of its love. Neither does it magnify human faults. Love forgives and forgets; it doesn't hold grudges or tabulate grievances!

Love rejoices not in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth. This statement alludes to that sinister satisfaction which we sometimes feel when someone who has injured us is caught doing something wrong. "He only got what he deserved" is our heartless reaction. The verse may also refer to those occasions when we gloat over the shortcomings of our mates in a selfish attempt to vindicate ourselves.

Love bears all things. The word translated "bear" means literally "to cover, to pass over in silence, to keep confidential." Love does not broadcast the faults of its object. It does not belittle the one it professes to love by exposing his shortcomings and failures in the presence of other people.

Love believes all things. This does not mean that love is gullible, but that it is beyond suspicion, doubt, and mistrust. True love eliminates the third degree. Love keeps on believing.

Love hopes all things. Love does not magnify problems in order to justify quitting. Love never gives up hope, never despairs. It just keeps on going.

Love endures all things. The concept is that of sustaining an assault. Love weathers every storm of suffering or persecution. It takes every blow and still keeps coming back for more—cheerfully!

Love never fails. It never falls to pieces, never collapses, never terminates. As long as the Spirit of God is in control of our lives He just keeps on producing love and we just keep on displaying it! If we ever stop, we will know that the Spirit of God is no longer in control, for His love never ends.

The Apostle Paul concluded his magnificent discourse on love by listing three great Christian virtues—faith, hope, and love. It should come as no surprise to us that his very last statement is, "But the greatest of these is love." This *agape*—this love of God—is the greatest thing in the world. It can revolutionize our homes and make them into everything we ever dreamed they could be. But it all depends on us—on our willingness to allow God's Spirit to produce this phenomenon of love in our hearts and lives.

- **KEEP THE OATH YOU MADE AT YOUR WEDDING (8).**

Oath: Those are promises or commitments that both parties made to each other. Example: "For better or for worse". A marriage is based on the covenant that the husband and the wife make to each other on their wedding day. This covenant comes as a result of the commitment which they make to one another. The covenant is not conditional. It is not based on whether the husband or the wife remain a certain way or look a certain way. It is not conditional on the couple's happiness or sex life. Love can remain if the commitment to the marriage remains. Happiness can be sustained if the commitment is maintained and acted upon, that means that the commitment needs to be worked at.

Keep: The word "keep" is a verb that means to "keep in a certain state, position, or activity" or "continue a certain state, condition, or activity". A couple will work at maintaining a fulfilling marriage if they remain committed to their spouse and to the marriage. The important thing to see here is that if you are no longer committed then you will no longer work to keep the marriage strong. If you are no longer committed then love will eventually die since you have cut off its fuel.

The union will become weaker until the two separate either physically or effectively (living in the same house but not together). Let's look back at Genesis 2:24. The Hebrew word translated "cleave" is an action word. It means to cling or adhere; figuratively to catch by pursuit or to pursue. This pursuit is work and is constant. It doesn't end after the wedding day. There should be a constant pursuit for the wife, and likewise the husband. Both have to work at maintaining a healthy marriage.

- **BE FAITHFUL TO YOUR COVENANT OF LOVE (9).**

Webster's Dictionary defines the word fidelity as "the quality of being faithful - steadfast in allegiance, firm adherence to a duty, true to the facts".

In the context of marriage faithfulness means:

- Trusting one another
- Having confidence in one another
- Being assured of each other's character and dependability
- Being convicted of your ability to trust each other
- Being certain of each other's fidelity
- Being true to one another
- Being certain of one another
- Being permanent to each other

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- Resting in each other

A faithful spouse is one who can be trusted, depended upon, and believed in and one in whom you can rest.

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus teaches on the stability of marriage, that "...what God has joined together, let man not separate." (Mark 10:9). While there are several parts of the Bible that discuss God's design for marriage, this verse is one that, provides the best description of fidelity. When people wed, God unifies husband and wife into a relationship that is meant to bring glory to Him through the faith that grows exponentially when they come together to live for Jesus. Not only are we married because of the love that we possess for each other, but the love we feel and share for Jesus allows us to spread the Word and create delight for His name. For this reason (to grow in the love of God), marriage is uniquely special. The faithfulness that a husband and wife share to one another is their promise to God that they both will live their days to heed His call.

Fidelity is the state of acting on this vow. Because sin is what drives a wedge in our relationships, causing us to move God's plans to the side, it's sin that poses a great threat to fidelity in our marriages. Allowing ourselves to be controlled by sin and not the love of Christ is what shakes off our resolve and detracts our thoughts from godly matters.

"...let man not separate." (Mark 10:9). The man who interferes in the faithfulness of a marriage...is the individual people in the marriage. No one can stand in the way of serving our Lord but us. Nothing can break the cords that bind our hearts with Jesus except us. In marriage, nothing can dissolve the promise that we make to create a union that seeks to bring glory to God except us.

Marriage is a place of absolute faithfulness. Marriage calls for total fidelity on the part of the husband and the wife. They are to be true to one another.

- The writer of Proverbs cautions: "Can a man take fire to his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? Can one walk on hot coals, and his feet not be seared? So is he who goes in to his neighbor's wife; whoever touches her shall not be innocent" (Proverbs 6:27-29).
- Paul told Titus to have the older women in the church instruct the younger women in the church ". . . to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste . . ." (2:4, 5).

Adultery is forbidden in the Bible. "You shall not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14). And Paul named adultery first in his list of the sins of the flesh (Galatians 5:19).

Implications of faithfulness in a marriage:

- We will concentrate our love on our mate.
- We will not be disloyal in little matters.
- We will not be involved in flirtations.
- We will flee from temptation.
- We will control our fantasies.

STEPS TO PROVIDE THE BRIDAL COUPLE IN BEING FAITHFUL TO ONE ANOTHER:

Agree upon trusting one another. Once you have taken your vows, believe that overt possessiveness is no longer a "cute" trait that your spouse appreciates - you have both taken vows to be faithful. Now it's time to believe in one another and trust your partner. Suspicion, jealousy and doubt don't cause a spouse to cheat, but if one spouse exhibits high degrees of any of these, it spells trouble for the relationship, because the spouse being constantly accused or suspected becomes weary of fighting. Set reasonable boundaries and stay within them - this fosters trust, and the longer you each stay within the boundaries you have agreed on, the more "bank" you will build as time goes on

Accept the fact that you are no longer single. You may *not* come and go as you please. You have a responsibility to your spouse or partner now. Acting as if you are free and unaccountable can cause problems in your marriage. Set some boundaries and abide by them. Examples: When you go your separate ways for the day, agree when you will meet back at home, or wherever. If you agree upon 6pm, then be there at that time. If you realize you will be late, call as soon as you know - definitely do not leave your spouse wondering for more than 30 minutes - it worries him or her needlessly

Don't stir up trouble where there isn't any. Doing things to see how your spouse will react is a bad idea. A lot of insecure people actually go out of their way to make their spouse jealous in order to feel better about themselves. The problem is that it creates a climate of anxiety and turbulence.

Avoid even the appearance of wrongdoing.

Take your spouse with you. If you know you'll be in a situation where you can't avoid a particular person, take your spouse along. Knowing your partner is watching will keep you in line, and hopefully will deter any questionable acts on the part of the other person

Leave the situation. It doesn't matter whether it's a job or a circle of friends.

Remember that your behavior early on will set the tone for the rest of your relationship. If you set a tone of faith, trust and belief in one another, and give each other a real sense that your relationship is solid and unshakable, it will be a great comfort to you and help you through difficult times. If you prove yourself worthy of her trust today, in ten years when someone accuses you of something, she'll dismiss it, knowing that you would *never* betray her because of your history together.

PASTORAL OBJECTIVES

In this session, the pastor will teach the importance of building with the right materials. The materials that are provided to us in the Bible are wisdom, understanding and knowledge. These three building materials will be applied to the marital relationship. The important issues to be learnt will be:

- The importance of communication in marriage
- The roadblocks to effective communication
- Developing effective communication
- Learning to listen to one another

The pastor will need to ask the bridal couple specific questions during this session so that he/she will be able to gauge the ways in which the couple at present communicate and how he can help in providing them with steps to communicate more effectively.

BUILDING WITH THE CORRECT BLOCKS:

Marriage is the union of two imperfect people from different backgrounds, in covenant before God. Because of the "imperfection" of both the wife and the husband, many times, when building of the marriage relationship takes place, the walls that are built and the structure that is completed is unstable, lopsided, broken and not permanent. In order to build the walls of the relationship so that it will stand the test of time, being permanent and plumb-lined, the bridal couple will need to ensure that they are building their house according to the Biblical pattern that Solomon gives us in Proverbs:

Proverbs 24:3-4 "A house is built by wisdom and becomes strong through good sense. Through knowledge its rooms are filled with all sorts of precious riches and valuables."

The bridal couple is able to build their house with wisdom by:

- Asking God to give them wisdom in their relationship with one another. Proverbs 2:6 "For the Lord grants wisdom! From his mouth come knowledge and understanding."
- Gaining knowledge and understanding of each other, the dynamics of the relationship and the Word of God. Wisdom can be defined as "having gained knowledge, understanding, experience, discretion, and intuitive understanding, along with a capacity to apply these qualities well."

- Applying their understanding of the building blocks of the relationship to their every day lives.

1. UNDERSTANDING – COMMUNICATION

How is understanding developed between both the husband and the wife? Communication is the key to understanding the motives, the actions and the feelings of the spouse. No person is a mind reader and therefore unless communication of these needs, motives etc takes place, the other partner in the marriage will not have understanding. Therefore one of the major building blocks in any relationship, especially that of marriage, is effective communication.

The word communication is derived from the Latin word “communis”, which means to have in common. Commonalty is essential to every form of love. Studies consistently reveal that the primary cause of marital problems and divorces is a lack of communication. Communication is the process of sharing thoughts and feelings, through verbal and non-verbal means, with another person so that he or she understands what you are attempting to express. Effective communication does not happen by accident; it is a skill which requires the discipline of development.

Communication is an exchange of feelings or information. Communication happens when both individuals feel that they are free to tell each other who they are, what they think, how they feel, what they esteem, what they fear, what they love, hope for, desire, believe in etc. Deep oneness in a marriage can only be achieved when good communication exists between the husband and the wife.

Communication is...

Sharing of ideas – This can involve two people or one person gaining knowledge from an outside source.

A dialogue not a monologue – Communication happens when one person is speaking and the other listening.

An **expression of ideas** – Communication is more than an echo of your own opinion. A differing opinion should not spark an argument.

To **give of each other by sharing** in an unselfish manner, looking for no gain in return other than a closer relationship with the person whom you love.

The key to understanding another person.

THE FIVE LEVELS OF COMMUNICATION

- **Cliché conversation:** This is the lowest form of communication where we reveal nothing about ourselves and often do not even mean what we are saying.
- **Reporting facts about others:** Much of the conversation during this level of communication is centered on others – what they say, what they are doing, how they are feeling.
- **Expressing ideas and judgements:** When we begin to reveal our own ideas we are expressing what we think about certain issues. We express values and judgements on things that are happening around us. At this level of communication we are beginning to reveal things about ourselves.
- **Sharing emotions:** In each one of us is hidden the “real person”, the unique individual that we often do not reveal to just anyone. When we begin to reveal what we are feeling with the things that are happening around us, we will reveal who we are as a person.
- **Peak communication:** This can be described as intimate communion that makes two people one. It is here in peak communication that there is a unity of the two individuals where they will begin to feel, think and experience what their partner thinks, feels and experiences.

THE BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF COMMUNICATION IN MARRIAGE

Amos 3:3 “Can two people walk together without agreeing on the direction?”

No two people can effectively walk together, work together and live together unless there is an effective communication system that exists between them. As we see in the verse found in Amos, harmony in a relationship can only come when the two people in the relationship are agreeing and are enjoying sweet fellowship together. If this communication is hampered in any way, they no longer are able to walk together harmoniously.

In the Book of Genesis we read about, “leave”, “cleave” and become “one flesh” (Gen 2:24). This was God’s purpose for the marriage relationship – that the couple develop and experience the closest of all interpersonal relationships which if we refer back to the scripture in Amos, is only really made possible when the couple are walking together in effective communication. The extent of the “oneness” of a couple is only really determined by how effectively they are able to communicate with one another.

Jay Adams says, "Christian communication is the basic skill needed to establish and maintain sound relationships..."⁴

Dwight Hervey Small says, "the heart of marriage is its communication system ... It can be said that the success and happiness of any married pair is measurable in terms of the deepening dialogue which characterizes their union" ⁵

It therefore is for this reason that Paul wrote about the basic requirements for good communication. Ephes. 4:25 "So put away all falsehood and "tell your neighbor the truth" because we belong to each other."

WHY IS COMMUNICATION SO HARD IN A MARRIAGE?

There is a common problem in marriage – before the couple was married, the couple used to sit and talk for hours but now that they have been married for a time, they find that they have nothing to say.

When intimate communication dies, the relationship begins to die. When communication in a marriage ceases, we stop growing as individuals.

What is the problem?

- Lack of time in talking to each other: We live in a world where there is speed and instant gratification for everything. Because of this when it comes to communication, we want to go straight into the deep level of communication and therefore by pass the other two levels. But God has designed us to develop closeness slowly, with considerable time and effort. Great marriages are a series of great conversations. These conversations can not be measured in minutes but more in hours and days.
- Our speech is imperfect and therefore we stumble and say things that hurt each other. This causes one or both parties to stop communicating how they really feel. James 3:2 "For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body."

⁴ Jay Adams, Christian Living in the Home, page 26-27

⁵ Dwight Hervey Small, After You've said I do, page 11

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- We are marred by sin Matthew 12:34 "O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." Because our hearts are sinful that which overflows from it is not always blessings. James 3:8-10 "But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be."
 - We may not place a high value on the time that we spend with one another. When something else comes up we disregard talking to each other for the other event/ person.
 - Familiarity with the other person is one of the major reasons for communication decline in marriage. We assume that we know our partners and therefore feel that there is nothing new to learn about the person. This is a fallacy as you will never know a person completely as you are constantly in a transition of change. Individuals grow and change all the time and therefore by stopping to discover who that person is you will miss the change that takes place. This is why people so often say, "I don't even know who you are anymore"

We have been given a new heart!

Jesus has given us a new heart because we are new creatures in Christ and therefore we can communicate with the fruit of the Spirit.

Galatians 5:22 "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,"

Philip. 2:3 "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves."

- Love keeps us from selfishness and causes us to consider one another
 - Kindness helps us to speak with respect
 - Gentleness cultivates a soft answer diffusing any anger Proverbs 15:1 "A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger."
 - Self-control gives us the ability to control our tongue and avoid strife Proverbs 11:12 "He that is void of wisdom despiseth his neighbour: but a man of understanding holdeth his peace."
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MAJOR FEARS THAT SABOTAGE COMMUNICATION

- **Fear of failure:** Often the husband is hesitant to share with his wife because he is not practiced or well equipped in this type of communication. A man has been taught to keep everything inside and not to show emotions. He therefore needs to learn how to communicate on this level. A man will be more motivated to act when he feels able and capable. Communication therefore has to be taught and encouraged within a marriage.
- **Fear of rejection:** If one of the individuals in the conversation feels that they might be rejected after expressing how they truly feel, they will not share their emotions.
- **Fear of starting a fight:** Many couples fear conflict and therefore this fear can result in a barrier against emotional intimacy.
- **Fear of losing control:** It is natural to want to remain in control of your life, but marital intimacy challenges that control. With increased vulnerability one partner might feel that the other has a certain amount of "control" or "confidential information" that can be used to exploit them
- **Fear of getting too close:** This type of fear will occur if one or both of the partners do not feel secure in the relationship. Trust is not the foundation of the marriage and therefore one of the partners does not want to get too intimate in case they are hurt later on.

BUT! 1 John 4:18 "Such love has no fear because perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of judgment, and this shows that his love has not been perfected in us"

HINDRANCES TO GOOD COMMUNICATION

- Dishonesty: Ephes. 4:25 "So put away all falsehood and "tell your neighbor the truth" because we belong to each other." Col. 3:9 "Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old evil nature and all its wicked deeds.
- Abusive language: Ephes. 4:29 "Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them." Proverbs 12:18 "Some people make cutting remarks, but the words of the wise bring healing.
- Anger and bitterness: Ephes. 4:31 "Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of malicious behavior." Col. 3:8 "But now is the time to get rid of anger, rage, malicious behavior, slander, and

dirty language."

- Belittling: Proverbs 11:12 "It is foolish to belittle a neighbor; a person with good sense remains silent."
- Harsh words: Proverbs 15:1 "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but harsh words stir up anger."
- Lack of trust: Proverbs 17:9 "Disregarding another person's faults preserves love; telling about them separates close friends."
- Lack of listening: Proverbs 18:2 "Fools have no interest in understanding; they only want to air their own opinions." Proverbs 18:13 "What a shame, what folly, to give advice before listening to the facts!"
- Insults: Proverbs 18:23 "The poor plead for mercy; the rich answer with insults."
- Lying: Proverbs 19:5 "A false witness will not go unpunished, nor will a liar escape." Proverbs 26:18-19 "Just as damaging as a mad man shooting a lethal weapon is someone who lies to a friend and then says, 'I was only joking.'"
- Quarrelling: Proverbs 26:20-21 "Fire goes out for lack of fuel, and quarrels disappear when gossip stops. A quarrelsome person starts fights as easily as hot embers light charcoal or fire lights wood."
- Arrogance: Proverbs 27:2 "Don't praise yourself; let others do it!"
- Insensitivity: Proverbs 29:20 "There is more hope for a fool than for someone who speaks without thinking."

RESULTS OF THE LACK OF COMMUNICATION IN THE MARRIAGE

When a husband and a wife do not effectively communicate and follow the three components that are necessary for communicating with openness and honesty, the following can occur:

- Issues and conflicts remain un-clarified. Proverbs 18:17 "Any story sounds true until someone sets the record straight."
- Wrong ideas are uncorrected
- Conflicts and areas of misunderstandings are not resolved.

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- The development of deep intimacy and unity is hindered (Amos 3:3)
 - Interpersonal problems accumulate and form barriers to other areas of the relationship
 - Lack of knowledge of the other person occurs.

THE COMPONENTS TO THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

There are three essential components of the communication process: talking, listening, and caring.

COMPONENT ONE: TALKING

The most obvious aspect of communication is verbalizing. Scripture exhorts us to speak the truth in love (Eph 4:15), and this requires a mutual attitude of openness and honesty. For love to grow in a marriage there must be regular times of interaction and comradeship. At some point in each day, both partners should make an effort to move beyond the level of routine conversation to verbalize hopes, disappointments, joys, fears, prayer requests and answers, plans, ideas, and interests. As a couple talks things over, confides in each other, and spends time together, they become better and better friends. Friendships are cultivated by shared thoughts, feelings, and experiences.

When speaking, the husband and the wife bring these areas into every communication:

Consequential History

- Knowledge and wisdom
- Past experiences
- Self-image

Current state

- Emotions
- Moods
- Current conflicts

The conditions of the heart:

- Matthew 12:35 "A good person produces good words from a good heart, and an evil person produces evil words from an evil heart."
- Ezekiel 36:26 "And I will give you a new heart with new and right desires, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony heart of sin and give you a new, obedient heart."
- Matthew 12:34 "You brood of snakes! How could evil men like you speak what is good and right? For whatever is in your heart determines what you say."

The Body:

- Body Language
- Tone and volume of your voice

TIPS FOR SPEAKING

- Let love be your motivation: Ephes. 4:15 "Instead, we will hold to the truth in love, becoming more and more in every way like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church."
- Speak the truth: Ephes. 4:25 "So put away all falsehood and 'tell your neighbor the truth' because we belong to each other."
- Speak words of encouragement: Ephes. 4:29 "Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them."
- Deal with issues of anger: Ephes. 4:26-27 "And 'don't sin by letting anger gain control over you.' Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry, [27] for anger gives a mighty foothold to the Devil."
- Display the fruit of the Spirit in your communication: Ephes. 4:32 "instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you."
- Be self controlled in your communication: Psalm 141:3 "Take control of what I say, O Lord, and keep my lips sealed."

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- Be wise: Isaiah 50:4 "The Sovereign Lord has given me his words of wisdom, so that I know what to say to all these weary ones. Morning by morning he wakens me and opens my understanding to his will." Proverbs 15:23 "Everyone enjoys a fitting reply; it is wonderful to say the right thing at the right time!" Proverbs 20:15 "Wise speech is rarer and more valuable than gold and rubies."
 - Think before you speak: Proverbs 15:28 "The godly think before speaking; the wicked spout evil words."
 - Be gentle: Proverbs 15:1 "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but harsh words stir up anger." Proverbs 25:15 "Patience can persuade a prince, and soft speech can crush strong opposition."
 - Don't ask for a fight: Proverbs 17:14 "Beginning a quarrel is like opening a floodgate, so drop the matter before a dispute breaks out."
 - Provide good advice: Proverbs 20:5 "Though good advice lies deep within a person's heart, the wise will draw it out." Proverbs 25:11-12 "Timely advice is as lovely as golden apples in a silver basket. Valid criticism is as treasured by the one who heeds it as jewelry made from finest gold."
 - Be kind: Proverbs 31:26 "When she speaks, her words are wise, and kindness is the rule when she gives instructions."
 - Speak respectfully with love: Romans 13:7-8 "Give to everyone what you owe them: Pay your taxes and import duties, and give respect and honor to all to whom it is due. Pay all your debts, except the debt of love for others. You can never finish paying that! If you love your neighbor, you will fulfill all the requirements of God's law." Ephes. 5:33 "So again I say, each man must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband."

COMPONENT TWO: LISTENING

Proverbs 18:13 "What a shame, what folly, to give advice before listening to the facts!"

James 1:19 "My dear brothers and sisters, be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry."

Listening is the biggest problem in effective communication. Most of us have developed poor listening habits, and this is especially true in the way we listen to our spouse. Because we think we know our partners so well, we often tune them out and miss what they are really trying to say. Preoccupation, daydreaming, worry, distractions (e.g., television), and lack of interest are a few of the barriers to real listening. Norm Wright mentions another barrier in his book, *Communication: Key to Your Marriage*. He observes that when one person talks to another, there are actually six messages that can be communicated:

- What you mean to say.
- What you actually say.
- What the other person hears.
- What the other person thinks he hears.
- What the other person says about what you said.
- What you think the other person said about what you said.

It is easy for the speaker to fall short of the ideal in verbalization, "Say what you mean and mean what you say." It is even easier for the listener to incorrectly perceive, interpret, evaluate, and respond to a message.

A study conducted by Albert Mehrabian demonstrated that a listener determines the attitude of a speaker toward him by three components: the words themselves, the tone of voice, and non-verbal factors. Significantly, the words account for only 7% of the message; the remaining 93% is communicated by the tone of voice (38%) and non-verbal cues (55%). This is a sharp reminder that what we do speaks so loudly that our partners often cannot hear what we say. ⁶

⁶ <http://www.businessballs.com/mehrabiancommunications.htm>

DEVELOPING LISTENING SKILLS:

Here are several suggestions for improving your listening skills:

- Listening requires focused attention. Avoid the temptation of doing other things while conversing with your mate.
- Make an effort to establish good eye contact. Much is communicated through facial expressions and the eyes, so look at your partner, not at the floor, ceiling, or television.
- Because you can think faster than a person can speak, there is a temptation to drift away and get engaged in your own thoughts. Use this extra time by looking for key words, feelings, and subliminal messages. Work on concentrating on what your mate is really saying.
- Show enthusiasm and interest, and be sure to ask probing and clarifying questions to ensure effective communication.
- Try to set aside a special time for undistracted conversation. For many people, the late evening is best.
- Be careful not to interrupt or jump to premature conclusions.
- Look for understanding even when you disagree; try to see issues from your partner's perspective.

Follow the E.V.E. Acronym:

- **Echo:** Repeat what your spouse says to let them know you are listening to them.
- **Validate:** Show your spouse that what they said to you was important to you and not trivial.
- **Empathize:** Show them that you understand why they feel the way they do. When someone is very upset then empathy should be the first thing you show in order to calm them down and get them to a good place for a less heated discussion.

COMPONENT THREE: CARING

Caring is a key ingredient in effective communication, because it is the genuine desire to understand the other person, to build areas of common ground, and to deepen the relationship. Real caring requires a willingness to concentrate on another person's strengths and accept his or her weaknesses. Caring involves transparency, vulnerability, and supportiveness; it is other-centered rather than self-centered.

Here are some suggestions for developing this aspect of your relationship.

- You can enhance positive associations with your mate by visualizing times of shared joys and experiences and remembering the good things you have done together.
- At least once a year, plan an overnight or a weekend retreat (if you have children, get a baby sitter). Use this time to relax and discuss your marriage, family goals, spiritual life, recreation, finances, and so forth.
- Display physical affection. Touch, pat, hug, and kiss your partner.
- Make it a point to notice and pay attention to your spouse when other people are present.
- Steer away from the habit of nagging and criticism.
- Stretch your sphere of interests to include at least some of your mate's, and look for ways to do things together (gardening, special projects, cultural events, tennis, etc.).
- Compliment your husband or wife whenever possible.
- Don't take your partner for granted; extend the kind of courtesy you showed when you were dating.

Some questions to ask the bridal couple:

- How well do you communicate with your spouse? In which of the above levels would you define a majority of your conversations?
- How much quality time do you spend in a day speaking to your spouse?
- How well would you define your understanding of what is happening in your spouse's heart? For e.g. fears, hopes, dreams, etc.
- In which of the three areas of communication do you find yourself and your spouse lacking? Talking, Listening or Caring?
- How could you encourage them in this area? What changes would you have to make in your communication to encourage them?

2. KNOWLEDGE - INTIMACY



WHAT IS INTIMACY?

The concept of marital intimacy is derived from the Biblical principle of oneness. Although the word 'intimacy' is not used in the Bible, the concept is found there:

- First, the phrase 'the two shall become one' is used to define the marriage relationship. Intimacy is living in full view of the other so that the two function as one. God designed and appointed the husband to be head and for the wife to submit to the husband. If they are to function as one rather than two, then they need a way to relate to one another that does not cause conflict but encourages harmony.
- The meaning of 'oneness' can be further understood by the words used to describe physical intimacy or the sexual union. The Hebrew word used to describe the sexual relationship is 'to know.' The Hebrew word *yadah* has many usages including: to know, learn to know; perceive; find out and discern; discriminate, distinguish; know by experience; recognize, admit, acknowledge, confess; consider and sexual union. "Now the man had relations (literally 'knew') with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, "I have gotten a manchild with the help of the Lord". (Genesis 4:1). When it says, for example, that Adam knew Eve, the scriptures are saying that they came together in sexual union. There is much more happening than the fulfilment of the individual's sexual drive. There is the intimate sharing of soul and person. If a couple wants true intimacy, they need to deepen their relationship with the other. They need to 'know' each other in their different spheres of life.

When Paul wrote, "that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His suffering being conformed to His death" (Phil 3:10), He was speaking of becoming intimately acquainted with God. The Amplified Bible says, "[For my determined purpose is] that I may know Him [that I may progressively become more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him, perceiving and recognizing and understanding the wonders of His Person more strongly and more clearly], and that I may in that same way come to know the power outflowing from His resurrection [which it exerts over believers], and that I may so share His sufferings as to be continually transformed [in spirit into His likeness even] to His death, [in the hope]"

Therefore when speaking of “knowing” your spouse, it does not only reflect having knowledge of them through facts but it speaks of an intimacy that comes from being familiar with them, understanding them and being close to them on a day to day basis through communication, affection, sex etc.

FORMS OF INTIMACY

Intimacy can have different meanings for men and women. However all human beings have the basic need to be intimate and close with another person. Women are often portrayed as having the desire for emotional intimacy while men are portrayed as only having a desire for sexual intimacy. However, intimacy can take many forms, including the following:

Emotional intimacy is the closeness created through sharing feelings. Because girls are encouraged to recognize and express their emotions from an early age, women generally understand emotions better than men. Unfortunately, society tends to discourage men from feeling or showing emotion. Emotional intimacy can occur once people know what they are feeling, convey those feelings to each other, and express concern and understanding of their feelings to each other. The Four C's of Emotional Intimacy:

- **Communication:** When couples are able to accurately convey their feelings to each other without intimidation, worry of reprisal, or embarrassment, they are on their way to relating within a context of acceptance.
- **Caring:** Authentic caring promotes openness, honesty, and vulnerability to know and be known by others. Coupled with this caring comes a sense of freedom to be completely yourself, with no pretenses, regardless of other people's expectations.
- **Commitment:** There is no better definition of emotional intimacy than a connectedness that exists when two people are enjoying the benefits of commitment and trust toward each other. Each is committed to the well being and development of the other; each fully trusts the other, and knows they are perfectly safe with each.
- **Common Values:** Holding common fundamental beliefs and core values result in couples seeing and “feeling” the world in the same way.

Mental or intellectual intimacy involves a mutual understanding about all the important issues in your marriage. Setting goals together is one way to further intellectual intimacy. Most couples don't realize the importance of intellectual intimacy in a relationship, but it is a vital component to an overall sense of closeness. Mental intimacy is a process of two minds working as one. It is being

like-minded, or having the same purpose or goal. Mental intimacy is best described by the acronym L.O.V.E.

- L-Listen
- O-Overlook and Forgive
- V-Value Each Other
- E-Express Love

This form of intimacy only grows through communication, which creates a better understanding of each other. Mental intimacy is difficult because communication is difficult; however, it is vital to remember that love is a choice, commitment is a decision, and success is a matter of the mind first and the heart second. Mental intimacy is a thought process that realizes that the needs of your spouse should be more important than your own.

Spiritual intimacy involves sharing their beliefs and observing prayer and study of the Word together. Spiritual Intimacy is a bonding of the deepest level of the individual. It is a true change from a “me versus you” to an “us” attitude. This is done through a personal commitment to each other and the moral and spiritual absolutes of the marriage vows. It is a building up of faith in one another because of the spiritual commitment. Developing spiritual intimacy requires a commitment to God that will keep you faithful to your mate. It is a protection against temptation and doubt, an assurance that what was right then continues to be right now. A strong spiritual basis is a foundation for a positive self-image, which allows the individual to commit with all their heart and all of their mind to their spouse.

Recreational intimacy is enjoying activities together, like running, golfing, or reading.

Financial or monetary intimacy comes with discussing and sharing your finances. If you have separate accounts and separate incomes, you probably lack financial intimacy in your relationship.

Sexual intimacy is one of the most important dimensions of healthy marital intimacy. Healthy sexual intimacy includes sexual frequency that both partners are satisfied with, sexual activities both partners enjoy, and an open dialogue about sex. Olson and Olson (2000) say, "A major strength for happily married couples is the quality of the sexual relationship" 7

7 Olson, D. H., & Olson, A. K. Empowering couples: Building on your strengths (page 126)

They found in their research that the most common sexual concern is differing levels of interest in sex. Happier couples tend to agree in their definition of sexual satisfaction and have fewer worries about their sex lives than unhappy couples. More than half of all married couples, they note, have trouble discussing sexual issues.

CHARACTERISTICS OF INTIMACY

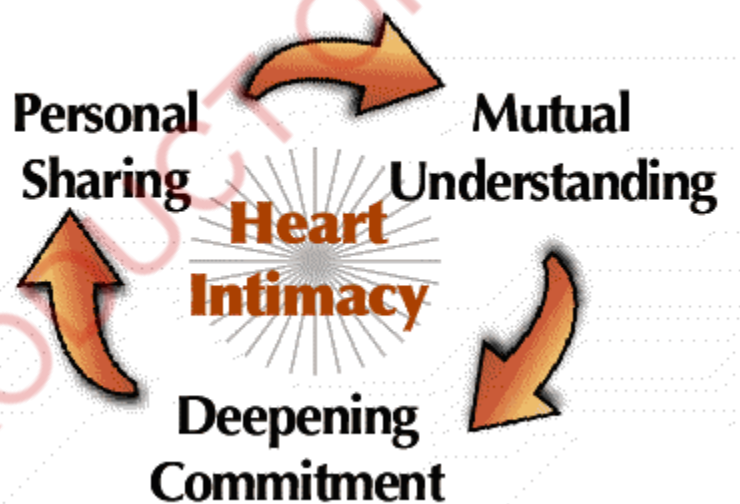
Relationships with healthy intimacy have several factors in common, including the following:

- **Mutual trust** builds a sense of security for both spouses. You can show it by having no desire to injure your spouse in any way. Though you might unintentionally cause hurt, you won't hurt one another on purpose.
- **Tenderness** includes gentle expressions of caring. Through touch you can express your love to your partner. This affectionate contact "is absolutely essential in building the emotion of love" ⁸
- **Acceptance** is unconditional approval in a relationship. No one is perfect, but acceptance means not holding weaknesses against one other. If you find yourself frequently pointing out your spouse's faults, work on focusing instead on the qualities you fell in love with.
- **Open communication** is the ability to discuss anything with your spouse. It includes sincere expression of thoughts and feelings as well as careful listening. Signs of poor communication include feeling reluctant to tell your spouse about the events of your day or being unwilling to listen when your spouse is explaining how he or she feels.
- **Caring** is genuine concern for your spouse's well-being. If you do things you know hurt your spouse, you cannot have healthy intimacy. You can develop a more caring heart and mind by learning to think of your spouse's feelings before your own. Always ask yourself before acting or speaking, "If I do this or say this, will I hurt my spouse?"

⁸ Wheat, E. Love life: For every married couple (page 184).

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- **Apologies** are the remedy for mistakes that spouses inevitably make. Recognizing mistakes, taking responsibility for them, expressing remorse for any hurt caused, and making a commitment to change the hurtful behavior are all essential to mending the relationship after a mistake. For spouses who have created a chasm of hurts that separate them, offering a sincere and humble apology is the first step in building a bridge over that chasm. Even if you believe that your partner made the mistake, you can begin the healing by finding something you did that calls for an apology.
 - **Forgiveness** is the process of letting go of anger, desire for revenge, and obsessive thinking about times your spouse has hurt you. It includes giving your spouse permission to have weaknesses, make mistakes, and change. Seeing the goodness and strengths of your spouse along with the weaknesses can open up emotional space for good will to build toward your spouse. Forgiveness does not automatically create trust or reconciliation, nor does it mean you approve of bad behavior. But it is an important early step toward rebuilding a fractured relationship.
 - **Appropriate boundaries** are the limits you place on a relationship. The limits can be created individually or as a couple. These limits include saying "no" when your spouse asks you to do something that goes against your values or is more than you can handle. Setting firm, clear boundaries for yourself and respecting the boundaries of your partner create feelings of safety and trust.

GROWING IN INTIMACY



There are three important aspects of growing an intimate marriage.

- **PERSONAL SHARING**

Conversation between spouses must be honest, other-focused and true.

- **An honest conversation eliminates pretense.** We don't need to pretend all is well when it is not. In fact, we are dishonest if we allow our spouse to think one way when it is not that way. Our job is to help the other know who we really are. We might share our personal struggles. When we take that honest step forward, the secrecy veil falls away, and we can grow in intimacy. Most conversations are shallow because they are not honest. It is fine to talk about buildings, races and school, but in the end, we need to share about our real person. This is where and when growth begins to take place.
- **Conversation must be other-focused.** Just as conversation can be superficial, it also can be selfish. If you always talk about yourself rather than inquiring into the life and concerns of your spouse, you don't need to wonder why your friendship with your spouse doesn't grow. No one likes those who like to talk only about themselves. This is true in a marriage too. The 'me' person focuses on himself because he is content with knowing himself. If there is a need, it is only as listening post. We are not speaking of how much a person speaks but whether he actually employs his words to find out more about the other person. This is simple love. Intimacy by necessity demands an ongoing investigation into the life of our spouse. We want to explore their life because we are interested in them.
- **Our conversation must be true.** Honesty and truth are admittedly rather closely related. Usually when a person thinks of honesty, he is only thinking whether or not his words are honest. Truth, though, speaks at a deeper level. It gets deeper than just the words down to what he feels and thinks. Allow the relationship to grow in truth. "*Speaking the truth in love*" (Ephesians 4:15).

Conversing with our spouse is the most basic step that enables us to know how he or she thinks about or perceives different issues. We are beginning to know how our spouse is motivated. We gain insight into his or her struggles and temptations. As we gain more knowledge about them, then we can better serve and care for them, and gain support from them. Personal sharing leads us to mutual understanding.

• MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING

Depth of personal conversation allows us to dive deeper into the lives and experiences of our spouse. Mutual understanding has one great side benefit that we are often oblivious to. It cripples the evil one's tactic of using misunderstanding and assumption to stir up trouble. The better the husband and wife know each other, the less they will misunderstand the other's motives. When the past is fully revealed to one another, then they know they are fully accepted, just as they are by the Lord. The threat of blackmail is removed.

Intimate marriages are formed by the unconscious deepening of trust in each other. Intimacy is normal and good. As trust deepens, the Lord enables you to grow into the oneness that He declared on your wedding day. The word "know" is significant. Communication speaks about revelation. Understanding addresses the issue of trust or accepting the knowledge into oneself and adjusting one's life. As one better understands the other, they can begin to more closely work, share and love together. They like being 'one' and sharing their hearts and lives. Shared knowledge enables the couple to increase their trust in one another, thereby growing in mutual understanding. With mutual understanding a couple is able to take deeper steps of commitment.

• DEEPENING COMMITMENT

Just as a child cannot grow into an adult overnight, so the couple cannot mature in their intimacy through one or two special experiences like a wedding. It is a life-long process. A couple must engage in tens of thousands of special conversations and shared experiences for mutual trust to grow. Fears are overcome and replaced with an invigorating confidence in each other. As a result of this deepening mutual understanding, a firmer commitment evolves.

This commitment shows itself in being:

- **One-hearted:** A couple must increasingly come to the point where they have only one love. They are committed to each other and no other. This will show itself by putting aside fascinations and fantasies.
- **Willing to sacrifice:** Once committed, the spouse is further willing to sacrifice him or herself to care for the other. Their faithfulness to bettering their spouse is more important than their own self.

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- **More fond of:** With commitment, we gain a deeper sense of being cherished. The more we resolve to love our spouse, the more excitement and joy comes from the relationship. We are excited to see our spouse grow and be helped in some area. Their life becomes most important to you.

PRODUCT OF FAITH BIBLE COLLEGE

PASTORAL OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this session is to show the couple that they have not been created the same in the manner in which they deal with life and relationships. It is important that these differences are clearly understood and discussed so as to remove any misunderstanding and future problems in the marriage.

MAXIMISE YOUR DIFFERENCES – MAKE YOUR DIFFERENCES WORK FOR YOU

Men may ask:

- Why do women cry so much?
- What is the great need to have so many clothes and accessories?

Women may ask:

- What happens to man's spirit of romance – during courtship he pulls out all the strings and then once you are married he stops?
- Why do men not like to help in household chores?

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN A MAN AND A WOMAN?

Men and women have been created differently as well as having been raised with different standards. Let us look at some of the differences:

- Women are in touch. Men are out of touch. A woman is always in touch with how she is feeling in herself and about situations and topics. A man is not and therefore needs to have time to think about what he is feeling.
- Women share their feelings while men suppress them. Men keep it all to themselves. They have been taught to suppress their emotions from an early age and therefore it has become an automatic reflex.
- Women relate while men retreat. Women share with others what they are going through. Men have been programmed to retreat and process what is going on inside of them alone.
- Women “wing” it while men “mull over it”. A woman will process a situation and her feelings as she talks. She therefore will make a connection to her feelings whilst she is talking. Men like to have it all figured out before they speak about it. Their processing is done internally.

WHY DID GOD MAKE MAN AND WOMAN DIFFERENT?

- God made men and women different to force them to depend on Him. Without God marriage is impossible. He wants to be the center of the man and woman relationship.
- Differences can lead to a complimentary relationship whereby each person is contributing unique qualities that make a balanced whole.
- Differences can lead to intimacy. Because of the differences of a man and a woman they can come together again and again in a limitless number of physical, emotional and spiritual combinations without being bored.

Being different should not be a problem in marriage but rather a benefit. When you partner has an alternative viewpoint to yours in parenting, in home furnishings etc. you have been enriched. Your world has been enlarged. Because of these differences you are forced to listen, to interact and consider the feelings of another human being.

The Bible teaches that we need these differences. For example: 1 Cor. 12:17-18 "Suppose the whole body were an eye—then how would you hear? Or if your whole body were just one big ear, how could you smell anything? But God made our bodies with many parts, and he has put each part just where he wants it."

But these differences can tear a marriage apart:

Unless couples learn that they need to embrace their differences and use them constructively to strengthen their relationship it will tear them apart.

HOW ARE WOMEN DIFFERENT?

David Clarke in his book, Men are Clams, Women are Crowbars, likens women to crowbars because they are always trying to get their husbands to open up to them and tell them all that they would like to know.

From birth women have been taught to develop qualities of connection, co-operation, openness, understanding and intimacy. Therefore when they come into a relationship they desire to fulfil these within the relationship. The problem however is in the fact that men do not want their wives to pry them open. They desire to talk or not to talk at their own discretion. Their lack of sharing deep information and being intimate with their wives on an emotional aspect becomes a matter of contention for both the wife and the husband.

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- The wife says, "I wish he would talk to me like he talks to his friends", "I wish I knew what my husband was feeling about ..."
 - The husband says, "I wish she would stop nagging me to speak to her about ...", "I am being open and honest to her about what I am feeling"

Unless we begin to understand why it is that men feel the way that they do in not opening up to his wife, conflict and contention will arise. The woman's intensity will become the issue and the problem of discussion – this turns the man off deeper conversation. As a result the woman will suffer damage and hurt if she presses too hard – resentful, depressed and hurt.

Words of wisdom: What should you do?

- Pull back a little: Allow him the space to initiate telling you how he is feeling instead of always badgering him about it. Give him emotional space.
- Get a life of your own: Your husband should not be your life, he is only a part of it. He can't meet all your needs.
 1. Develop and nurture a relationship with God. He is the One who can fulfil every need that you have.
 2. Have a close female friend that you can share your heart with.
 3. Develop a life outside of your home: do volunteer work, become involved in church programs, get a job or a hobby
- Grow and develop who God has made you to be: Marriages that stay together over the long haul are composed of two people who are growing in all areas of their lives. They are not the same people who got married with the same problems but they are continually changing and growing. They are continuing to mature and improve and this growth gives them a new aspect to learn about each other.

Find out more about who you are and grow in those areas by making a list of activities that you enjoy doing? How can you get involved with more of these activities? Make a list of your dreams? Are they impossible? With God you can fulfil your dreams. Allow yourself to dream the impossible and begin to fulfil your dreams.

Knowing that your husband does not need to meet all your needs actually frees him to do more for you. He will feel that he is still in control of the relationship. When a man feel like he does not have to do something he is

more likely to do it. By individual enrichment you are taking the pressure off of him to fulfil what you need.

- Stop talking so much and get comfortable with silence. Give him the space to initiate.
- Change your conversational style: Avoid triggering the man's control mechanism that causes him to go into clam mode.
- Learn to praise him
- Help him open up: Talking about work can feel like work so try and steer the conversation away from this unless he initiates it. Instead of pressing him to talk about work look for more areas of common interest that he will be able to open up to. Something that you will be able to enjoy together. For example: your common church involvement, sports etc. As your communication in this area improves so it will be carried over into the other areas of your marriage.

HOW ARE MEN DIFFERENT?

Men are clams; they resist all efforts of being opened up and withdraw even further into their clamshells. Men are taught from birth to develop and express qualities of respect, status, strength, power and independence. Whenever something threatens these qualities, they immediately take action.

Why do men avoid emotions?

- They believe that all things are to be looked at with logic and reason and not emotion.
- They are able to quickly forget things that happened in the past because they are focused on the present and the future. They therefore may not be interested in a situation that you may bring into the conversation.
- To a man, emotion means that you are no longer in control of a situation. Remember that they have been taught to "control" from young. Why are men clams? Because they believe that in sharing secrets they will seem vulnerable and weak. Because of their intense drive to remain in control they therefore resist this. They will therefore respond to you trying to get them to open up in three ways:
 1. Become silent
 2. Get angry and snap verbally

3. Physically leave the situation

A practical example of their need to be in control is their reaction to being asked to do a chore immediately. Men resist and fight against doing chores when they are asked because they feel that they have lost control and are now their wives' servant. They feel that the roles have been reversed where they are at the wife's beck and call. They will therefore wait as long as possible to do the chore and most times the wife will end up doing it herself. This results in conflict and resentment. The issue however is not the chore; it is the feeling of being controlled instead of being in control.

Why should a man talk to his wife even if it is difficult to do so?

- Talking and sharing is a necessity if you want relationship. It is a way in which you are able to express your love for her. You are meeting one of her needs, that of expression. You can only truly love a person when you express love in the way that person will need it to be expressed. Remember your wife does not want control (she knows that you are head of the home) but what she does want is closeness (therefore she wants you to open up). Remember to love your wives (Eph 5:25).
- Talking is also good for a person. It cleans the system and reduces stress therefore leaving the person more happy and healthy. The best person that you can talk to about what you are feeling is your wife because your relationship is based upon commitment and trust.
- The result of talking creates emotional intimacy with a member of the opposite sex that will flow naturally into physical intimacy.

Learn to initiate in your relationship:

The husband needs to learn to initiate as before so that he does not feel like his wife is trying to control the relationship.

Initiation was part of the pursuit before you got married. As the man you were the one to initiate dates and important events. As soon as a man is married this becomes the responsibility of the wife. When men fail to initiate it sets the woman up as the leader and the initiator. This is not what God desired. Ephes. 5:22-23 "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body." The result of this is that problems occur. The husband feels controlled, angry and frustrated and the wife feels that she is doing everything and just wants some help.

Practical help:

Start initiating as the head of the home. Take an active role by:

- Leading family devotions
- Take a more active role in the discipline of the children
- Help them with their homework
- Do chores that you are responsible for without having to be asked.
- Initiate times of intimacy and conversation with your wife.

Why do men need to initiate? Women are not designed for initiation and therefore it wears them out, causing fatigue. Take your role as being the head and therefore initiate.

Maximize your differences:

In God's plan our differences were never meant to divide us. God is the author of diversity. When He instituted marriage as a union of two unique individuals He knew that He was creating unity out of diversity. Not only are we different in the aspect of being male and female, but we are different in our emotions, the way in which we deal with situations etc. We therefore need to gain an understanding of why we do the things that we do and then maximize those differences. This can be done by:

- Identifying your differences: Before you are able to maximize the unique qualities that your spouse has you need to know what the differences are. The most obvious differences are those that are the most irritating. Make a list of all the things that you find irritating about your spouse. Ask yourself these questions :
 1. Why do these things irritate me?
 2. What differences do these irritations reveal?

In most cases the reason why you get irritated with your spouse is because they do not do things the way you would do them.

- Look for assets in your differences: Every difference has a positive side. We do not always need to look at these differences as things that irritate and ultimately divide us. For example: There is nothing wrong with a person who is laid back and relaxed just because you are a go-getter.
- Learn from your differences: Remember that God's design for our differences is that they be complementary. They are not meant to divide us but rather to unite us. Ask God to help you to learn from these differences. For example if

you are a go-getter and work very hard while your spouse is someone who is more relaxed, what can you learn from this - to enjoy life, that life is not only about work. God's intention for differences is that it will stimulate our spiritual, intellectual and emotional growth. When we begin to look for lessons that we can learn from our differences we will find them and benefit from them.

- Replace condemnation with affirmation: When we view our differences as irritations, we typically deliver sermons of condemnation for example "I can't believe that you are so lazy" or "why can't you sit down here and relax with me". Such criticism only creates resentment and conflicts. Appreciate the person for who they are and enjoy their differences with them.
- Discover a plan for maximizing your differences: Maximizing your skills and minimizing your weaknesses are part of moving to a more positive and successful marriage. Learn from one another and work on the areas that you are weak in so that the change will be positive to the marriage.
- Spend time together praying for one another. Ask God to help you by giving you patience and understanding towards your partner.

BIBLICAL ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE HUSBAND AND THE WIFE

PASTORAL OBJECTIVE

The objective of this session is to teach the biblical truths of the roles of both the husband and the wife and to provide them with practical ways in which these roles can be applied to their relationship. It is if these roles and responsibilities are not met within the relationship that conflicts can arise. Therefore deal with issues of submission and leadership within this session so that both partners understand what biblical leadership and submission really is and deal with any "problems" that they are experiencing in their relationship with regards to these two matters.

1. THE ROLE OF THE HUSBAND

Oneness in a marriage can only happen when both the husband and the wife know and fulfil their biblical role within the marriage.

THE HUSBAND IS TO BE HIS WIFE'S LEADER

Ephes. 5:23 "For a husband is the head of his wife as Christ is the head of his body, the church; he gave his life to be her Savior."

1 Tim. 3:4-5 "He must manage his own family well, with children who respect and obey him. For if a man cannot manage his own household, how can he take care of God's church?"

1 Tim. 3:12 "A deacon must be faithful to his wife, and he must manage his children and household well."

1 Cor. 11:3 "But there is one thing I want you to know: A man is responsible to Christ, a woman is responsible to her husband, and Christ is responsible to God."

What is Biblical leadership?

Leadership in biblical perspective is not giving orders and being the boss, but according to Matthew 20:20-28, leadership is first and foremost being a servant. A leader is someone who is not concerned about himself, his concern is not to have his own way but rather it is to meet the needs of another person. "Indeed, if the best interests of others are not on his heart, if he is not willing to sacrifice himself – his personal needs, wants, desires, aspirations, time, money – if the needs of others are not more important than his own, he is not qualified to lead"

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Follow the example of Christ:

When we apply this biblical concept of marriage, we note that as a husband, he should be the family's biggest servant. Whose example should he follow? Christ's! His greatest example and model, is that of Jesus as mentioned in Philippians 2:6-8.

Philip. 2:6-8 "Though he was God, he did not demand and cling to his rights as God. He made himself nothing; he took the humble position of a slave and appeared in human form. And in human form he obediently humbled himself even further by dying a criminal's death on a cross."

When we look at Christ during His earthly ministry we are able to note some of the ways in which He modelled this leadership:

- **Jesus continuously associated with those whom He led.** Jesus did not lead at a distance but rather He spent great amounts of time with those whom He was leading. John 1:39 "'Come and see," he said. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon when they went with him to the place, and they stayed there the rest of the day." Peter spoke of this same principle in 1 Peter 3:7 where he said, "Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them ..." It is the husbands responsibility to ensure that he is spending time in association with his wife, dwelling with her not only in a physical structure (home) but dwelling with her in knowing who she is.
- **Jesus taught and instructed His disciples with relevance and care.** Sometimes He taught in a formal way (Matt 5, John 13-16) whilst at other times He taught informally as crises were faced or when asked a question. God also desires that the husband teaches the wife. Paul emphasized the duty of the husband to teach spiritual matters to his wife in 1 Cor. 14:35 when he said, "And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church."
- **Jesus led His disciples by being a good example.** Jesus lived a life which spoke of everything that He believed in. He not only taught on the love, forgiveness and sovereignty of God, but He demonstrated it in His every day life. He did not merely preach the Scriptures and the Be-attitudes, but He lived them. 1 Peter 5:3 "Don't lord it over the people assigned to your care, but lead them by your good example." Being a leader as a husband means that he needs to be a model of godliness, holiness, compassion, dedication and devotion to God.

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- **Jesus led His disciples by making decisions and then delegating authority to them.** Matthew 10:1 "Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority ..." See also Matt 28:18-20. "Christian husbands are called upon to lead their wives by making decisions and by delegating responsibility. To be the leader does not mean that he must bear all the responsibility and do all the work while his wife bears nothing and does nothing." 10. He needs to provide her with responsibilities in issues that she is best suited to handle through the principle of delegation.

As a husband, he will need to be the final decision maker however in making these decisions it is important that he listen to and take into considerations his wife's opinion, advice, desires, suggestions, requests, fear and questions.

PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF LEADERSHIP:

- Exercise Authority. Take the lead and make decisions.
- Be Responsible: Be accountable for the decisions and actions that you make.
- Provide:
 - Physical: food, clothing, shelter, 1 Tim. 5:8 "But those who won't care for their own relatives, especially those living in the same household, have denied what we believe. Such people are worse than unbelievers."
 - Spiritual: Ephes. 5:26-27 "to make her holy and clean, washed by baptism and God's word. He did this to present her to himself as a glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish. Instead, she will be holy and without fault."

THE HUSBAND IS TO BE HIS WIFE'S LOVER

Not only is the husband to lead in the home, but he is to provide loving leadership. Twice in Ephesians Paul speaks of the husband loving his wife:

Ephes. 5:28 "In the same way, husbands ought to love their wives as they love their own bodies. For a man is actually loving himself when he loves his wife."

Ephes. 5:33 "So again I say, each man must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband."

10 Wayne Mack: Strengthening your marriage

The type of love mentioned here is “agape” which is the type of love that describes the love of God. The love that God gives freely, unconditionally and regardless of response. The word “agape” as used in this chapter by Paul was:

- In the imperative mood which means that it was a command. God takes the matter of husbands loving their wives so seriously that He commands/mandates it. This love therefore is not based on a feeling but a decision and a commitment to follow.
- In the present tense, which indicated continual and habitual action. This love is to be displayed consistently.
- In the active voice which tells us the subject carries out the action of the verb. The husband needs to be proactive in the relationship.

Christ his example:

- His love is unconditional and free (Rom 5:8)
- His love is volitional love (Deut 7:7, Eph 1:6-7)
- His love is an intense love (John 13:1, Eph 5:2, 25)
- His love is an unending love (John 13:1, Jer 31:3, Rom 8:39)
- His love is an unselfish love (Phil 2:6-7)
- His love is a purposeful love (Eph 5:26-27)
- His love is a sacrificial love (Eph 5:2, Gal 2:20, 1 Peter 3:18, Rom 5:6-11, 1 Peter 2:24)
- His love is a manifested love (John 10:1-4, 14:1-3, Rom 8:32, Phil 4:13, 19, Heb 4:14-16)

HOW TO SPELL LOVE TO YOUR WIFE – COUPLE

In his book, Love and Respect, by Dr Emerson Eggerichs, he says that the love that a husband is to express to his wife is to be expressed through the acronym COUPLE:

- **CLOSENESS:**

The first verse that we see in the Bible concerning marriage relates to this aspect of love that a man should show his wife – “cleave”. Cleaving is more than sexual gratification, it is emotional and spiritual. In the book of Deuteronomy, under the Law, we notice that “A newly married man must not be drafted into the army or given any other special responsibilities. He must be free to be at home for one year, bringing happiness to the wife he has married.” (Deut. 24:5). It was during this first year of marriage that the husband was to set the tone for the rest of the marriage by being close to her – spending time with her, placing her and her needs above his own desires to be “out with the boys”.

One of the greatest desires of a woman is to be able to feel close and connected with her husband and his affections. Leah desired to have her husband's affections and therefore she said “Now this time my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons.” (Gen 29:34).

How can the husband provide “closeness” during marriage?

- By being affection without sexual intentions: holding hands, hugging
- By putting aside something they really would like to do with their friends, in order to talk or listen to her
- By creating a special date that she loves to do: like watch a romance movie, walk on the beach etc.

- **OPENNESS:**

Men often compartmentalize their problems and therefore are able to distance themselves from their feelings. Because of this, often times, men do not relate to their wives things that they are going through that are causing them stress, pressure etc. However, one of the ways in which a woman feels love is for the man to be open to her in the same way that they were during their courtship.

This openness is to be based on trust – a trust that she will keep his confidence, a trust that she will be willing to pray instead of gossip about what he is going through. Proverbs 31:11 when defining the godly woman said, “Her husband can trust her, and she will greatly enrich his life.” Proverbs 31:12 “She will not hinder him but help him all her life.”

How can a husband become open and vulnerable to his wife?

- By sharing his feelings with her
- By telling her about the stress that he is going through
- By being willing to “talk” and showing it with your face.
- By giving her your full attention when she is talking

- **UNDERSTANDING**

1 Peter 3:7 “In the same way, you husbands must give honor to your wives. Treat her with understanding as you live together. She may be weaker than you are, but she is your equal partner in God's gift of new life. If you don't treat her as you should, your prayers will not be heard.”

As closeness and openness are made a priority in the relationship, the husband will come to understand aspects of his wife.

How can the husband come to understand his wife?

- By listening to her and repeating what she has said back to her
- By being quick to listen and slow to speak (James 1:19)
- By praying with her
- By not trying to dismiss how she is feeling but rather to talk about it.

- **PEACEMAKING**

Dr Emmerson says, “If you are angry with your wife, even for a brief moment, she is grieved in spirit and rejected and needs reassurance that you love her (Is 54:5-8)”¹¹

Without peace in the relationship the wife will not feel openness and connection in the relationship. Therefore a husband,

- Must “be of one mind, full of sympathy toward each other, loving one another with tender hearts and humble minds.” (1 Peter 3:8).
- Have “a gentle answer turns away wrath, but harsh words stir up anger.” (Prov 15:1)
- Must “Do your part to live in peace with everyone, as much as possible.” (Rom 12:18)

¹¹ Dr Emmerson Eggerichs: Love and Respects (page 156)

• LOYALTY

Song 2:10 ""My lover said to me, 'Rise up, my beloved, my fair one, and come away.'" Every woman wants her husband to be "faithful to his wife" (Titus 1:6).

Job knowing the impact of his fidelity on his spiritual life as well as on his marriage said, "I made a covenant with my eyes not to look with lust upon a young woman" (Job 31:1).

Song 8:6 "Place me like a seal over your heart, or like a seal on your arm. For love is as strong as death, and its jealousy is as enduring as the grave. Love flashes like fire, the brightest kind of flame."

How can a husband show loyalty to his wife?

- By speaking highly of her when speaking to others
- By not looking lustfully at other woman
- By making the marriage and her a priority
- By including her in decisions
- By being sensitive to call and tell her what you plans are if you are going to be late
- By keeping your commitments and promises

• ESTEEM

A wife wants to be honoured and cherished. 1 Peter 3:7 "In the same way, you husbands must give honor to your wives. ... is your equal partner in God's gift of new life. If you don't treat her as you should, your prayers will not be heard."

How can the husband show her esteem?

- By saying "I'm proud of the way you ..."
- By opening the door for her and helping her with heavy parcels
- By encouraging her, praising her and providing her with enthusiasm
- By noticing things about her – her hair, her dress, her kind acts etc
- By valuing her opinion of important matters
- By asking her for her opinion before making decisions
- By refusing to compare her unfavourably with another person.
- By demonstrating to her that she is your priority after your relationship with Christ.

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- By providing her with tender respect and courtesy. Col. 3:19 "And you husbands must love your wives and never treat them harshly."

1 Cor. 13:4-5 "Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. Love does not demand its own way. Love is not irritable, and it keeps no record of when it has been wronged."

PRODUCT OF FAITH BIBLE COLLEGE

2. THE ROLE OF THE WIFE

Eve, in the book of Genesis was called to be a “helper”. She was meant to compliment her husband and follow the godly principles and roles that were given to her.

THE WIFE IS TO SUBMIT TO HER HUSBAND

Ephes. 5:22-24 “You wives will submit to your husbands as you do to the Lord. For a husband is the head of his wife as Christ is the head of his body, the church; he gave his life to be her Savior. As the church submits to Christ, so you wives must submit to your husbands in everything.”

Ephes. 5:33 “So again I say, each man must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.”

Col. 3:18 “You wives must submit to your husbands, as is fitting for those who belong to the Lord.”

Titus 2:4-5 “These older women must train the younger women to love their husbands and their children, to live wisely and be pure, to take care of their homes, to do good, and to be submissive to their husbands. Then they will not bring shame on the word of God.”

SUBMISSION IS NOT:

We note as we read the Bible that:

- Submission was not merely a concept for women. Ephes. 5:21 “And further, you will submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.”
- Submission does not mean “slavery”. Read Prov 31:10-31
- Submission does not mean being silent and never having an opinion. Proverbs 31:26 “When she speaks, her words are wise, and kindness is the rule when she gives instructions.”
- Submission does not mean that you never use your God given talents and potential and become a wallflower (See Proverbs 31).
- Submission does not mean inferiority. When Jesus was born, He was not inferior to Mary and Joseph even though he was subject to them (Luke 2:51). In the Godhead, Jesus is not inferior to the Father and the Holy Spirit, even though He became submitted to the Father (John 5:30). 1 Peter 3:7 “ ... She

may be weaker than you are, but she is your equal partner in God's gift of new life."

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE WIFE'S SUBMISSION:

- It is to be voluntary. It is the responsibility of the wife to become submitted to her husband. 1 Peter 3:1 "In the same way, you wives must accept the authority of your husbands, even those who refuse to accept the Good News. Your godly lives will speak to them better than any words. They will be won over"
- It is to be continuous. The Greek word used in Ephesians 5 is in the "present tense" which speaks of having a continuous life cycle.
- It is mandatory not optional. Like the word "love" spoken to the husbands, the word, "submit" is in the imperative mood thereby referring to a command. This command is not based upon the way in which her husband loves her and treats her, but despite this.
- It is a spiritual matter. Submission is not possible in the natural but "as to the Lord" it becomes possible. John 14:15 "If you love me, obey my commandments." How does it become possible? By living a Spirit led life, by being transformed into His image and being a new creature in Christ. Submission is not an act of the will but it is a condition of the heart. In order to be able to submit to the husband, the wife first needs to be able to submit to God.
- It is positive. It emphasizes what the wife should do rather than what she should not do.
- It involves attitudes and actions. When Jesus said, John 4:34 "My nourishment comes from doing the will of God, who sent me, and from finishing his work", He did not say it with resignation and heaviness. Rather He said it with delight. It was His delight to do the will of the Father. When speaking of the woman on Proverbs 31, she is described as "worketh willingly with her hands" (Prov 31:13).
- It is to be extensive: Just as Christ is Head over "all things for the Church" (Eph 1:22), so the Husband is to be head over his wife in all aspects. This means that she needs to willingly submit in finances, in the running of the home, in decisions etc. Her submission needs to be extensive and "as it is fitting in the Lord" (Col 3:18).

HOW TO SPELL RESPECT FOR YOUR HUSBAND: CHAIRS

• CONQUEST

The wife needs to appreciate his desire to work and achieve. It is a natural inborn desire for a man to want to go out and conquer the challenges in his world. When Adam was created, God placed him in a Garden and he worked. Genesis 2:15 "The Lord God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and care for it."

It is the desire for the man to be able to provide for his family. Just as Jacob said in Genesis 30:30, "You had little indeed before I came, and your wealth has increased enormously. The Lord has blessed you from everything I do! But now, what about me? When should I provide for my own family?" It is for this reason that men place value and importance on what they do, their work. The husband therefore needs a wife who appreciates his work for the family and the household. Someone who will say, "I believe in you".

How can the wife show appreciation for his desire to work:

- She can verbally appreciate his work efforts
- She can express faith in his ability to accomplish his work and be promoted in his field
- She can listen to his work stories and show interest in what is happening in the work place
- She can be his helpmate and talk to him and give opinions of issues that he is going through at work
- She can allow him to dream big
- She must not criticize his work in front of friends and family

• HIERARCHY

The wife needs to appreciate his desire to protect and provide for the family. The wife is called upon to place herself under the protection of the husband. Ephes. 5:22-24 "You wives will submit to your husbands as you do to the Lord. For a husband is the head of his wife as Christ is the head of his body, the church; he gave his life to be her Savior. As the church submits to Christ, so you wives must submit to your husbands in everything."

How can a wife show appreciation for his desire to protect and provide for her?

- She can thank him for his willingness to protect her
- She can thank him for his commitment in providing a secure and stable

home for her

- She can be sensitive when dealing with financial problems in the marriage without pointing a finger at his ability to provide for her.

- **AUTHORITY**

The wife needs to appreciate his desire to serve and to lead. God has placed a biblical hierarchy in the family where the husband is the head of the wife. As a wife be careful not to usurp his authority and try and undermine his ability to lead by trying to lead yourself. Dr Emerson says, "When women 'follow the lead of their husbands' (Titus 2:5), they trust God to guide their decisions" 13

How can a wife appreciate his authority and leadership?

- She can tell him that she is thankful for his strength in making decisions
- She can enjoy leaning upon him when things are tough instead of trying to work things out herself.
- She can support his self-image as a leader
- She will praise him when he makes wise decisions and never says "I told you..."
- She never disagrees with him in front of other people
- She provides valid reasons why she does not agree with certain decisions and then gives him the opportunity to take it from there without causing problems when he chooses to do things another way
- She must respect him. The definition of respect is "to feel or show honour for, to think highly of, to look up to, to have polite regard and to be thoughtful and show kind consideration and concern for an individual." This respect should be shown towards the position that he has been given as well as to his person – who he is.
- She must acknowledge his calling as the high priest in their home.
- She needs to respond positively to his leadership without it being a source of contention
- She needs to praise him in his leadership role
- She needs to be unified with him in purpose and in will. Amos 3:3 "Can two people walk together without agreeing on the direction?"
- She needs to help him and not compete with him
- She needs to listen to him.
- She needs to pray with and for him. Ephes. 6:18 "Pray at all times and on every occasion in the power of the Holy Spirit. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all Christians everywhere."

13 Dr Eggerichs: Love and Respect (Page 217)

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- She needs to bless him with her words bringing encouragement and not criticism. Numbers 6:24-26 "May the Lord bless you and protect you. May the Lord smile on you and be gracious to you. May the Lord show you his favour and give you his peace."
 - She must be thankful to him.

- **INSIGHT**

A wife needs to appreciate his desire to analyse and counsel. A marriage needs both her intuition and his insight in matters.

How can a wife appreciate his insight and counsel?

- She can value his opinion with regards to problems that she is going through
- She can recognize his problem solving approach to things and allow him to express this
- She can allow him to provide the solutions to problems when he want to "fix it"
- She can thank him for his godly counsel and insight

- **RELATIONSHIP**

A wife needs to appreciate his desire for friendship. Song 5:16 "His mouth is altogether sweet; he is lovely in every way. Such, O women of Jerusalem, is my lover, my friend." A husband needs to know that he is a friend to his wife. Therefore she needs to ensure that she has made time for him to express himself and give him priority above friends, family and children. She also needs to be wise in that there is "A time to be quiet and a time to speak up." (Eccles. 3:7) At times the wife needs to be quiet and just be with her husband. This may mean sitting quietly with him while he is watching sport etc.

How can a wife value this friendship?

- She can show that she likes being with him
- She can engage in a recreational activity with him that he has been suggesting for a while
- She can allow him to start a conversation and provide him with the space to communicate without any pressure.
- She can allow him time to be with his friends

- **SEXUALITY**

The wife needs to appreciate his desire for sexual intimacy. 1 Cor. 7:3 "The husband should not deprive his wife of sexual intimacy, which is her right as a married woman, nor should the wife deprive her husband."

How can a wife respond to her husband in this area?

- She can respond to him sexually more often and initiate sex periodically
- She can understand that he needs sexual release in the same way that she needs emotional release
- She can allow him to acknowledge his temptations without fear and jealousy
- She must never use sex as a tool to get back at her husband or to get what she wants.

THE WIFE IS TO BE HER HUSBAND'S HELPER

Proverbs 31:12 "She will not hinder him but help him all her life."

Psalms 128:3 "Your wife will be like a fruitful vine, flourishing within your home..."

Genesis 2:18-21 "And the Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a companion who will help him.'" So the Lord God formed from the soil every kind of animal and bird. He brought them to Adam to see what he would call them, and Adam chose a name for each one. He gave names to all the livestock, birds, and wild animals. But still there was no companion suitable for him. So the Lord God caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep. He took one of Adam's ribs and closed up the place from which he had taken it."

- God made the woman to be man's helper
- God made the woman to be a suitable helper (Prov 31:10-11, Prov 18:22)
- God created the woman to correspond to man. She is man's complement. 1 Cor. 11:11 "But in relationships among the Lord's people, women are not independent of men, and men are not independent of women."
- God made her to be a unique helper. She is to fulfil the needs, the lacks and the inadequacies of her husband.

How is she a helper?

- She makes the home a safe place: Proverbs 31:11 "Her husband can trust her, and she will greatly enrich his life." Titus 2:5 "To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed." The main focus of a wife is not to be her career, but her husband, home and children. The home should be a place of comfort and refuge.
- She is trustworthy and dependable: Proverbs 31:12 "She will not hinder him but help him all her life."
- She maintains a good attitude. Proverbs 31:26 "When she speaks, her words are wise, and kindness is the rule when she gives instructions." James 3:13-18 "If you are wise and understand God's ways, live a life of steady goodness so that only good deeds will pour forth. And if you don't brag about the good you do, then you will be truly wise! But if you are bitterly jealous and there is selfish ambition in your hearts, don't brag about being wise. That is the worst kind of lie. For jealousy and selfishness are not God's kind of wisdom. Such things are earthly, unspiritual, and motivated by the Devil. For wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and every kind of evil. But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and good deeds. It shows no partiality and is always sincere. And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of goodness." Philip. 4:4 "Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice!"
- She is loving, open and honest. Ephes. 4:25 "So put away all falsehood and "tell your neighbor the truth" because we belong to each other."
- She is satisfied with her possessions, position and her tasks (Phil 4:6-13)
- She is longsuffering, forgiving and forbearing. Col. 3:12-14 "Since God chose you to be the holy people whom he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. You must make allowance for each other's faults and forgive the person who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. And the most important piece of clothing you must wear is love. Love is what binds us all together in perfect harmony."
- She shows an interest in his concerns (Phil 2:3-4)
- She is industrious, diligent and ambitious (Ps 128:3, Prov 31:10-31)

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- She offers advice, suggestions and correction when needed in a loving manner. Proverbs 31:26 "When she speaks, her words are wise, and kindness is the rule when she gives instructions."
 - She maintains a strong spiritual life (1 Peter 3:1-2, 7)
 - She is grateful to him. Romans 13:7 "Give to everyone what you owe them: Pay your taxes and import duties, and give respect and honor to all to whom it is due."
 - She shows confidence in his decisions.
 - She must show her husband affection. Titus 2:4 "That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children". The word "love" in this verse is Strong's #5362 which means to be affectionate to your husband, to be your husband's affectionate companion.

PART TWO: IDENTIFYING THE CRACKS IN BUILDING THE MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIP

In this session the pastor will be focusing attention on cracks that can cause great rifts in the marriage relationship. Often times these cracks are already visible in the relationship and can therefore be dealt with and new attitudes and actions can be taught to replace negative responses to these issues. In this session we will be looking at four common marriage problems:

- Past failures
- The in-laws
- Conflict
- Finances

SIN AFFECTED OUR RELATIONSHIPS

As with all other things, The Fall is seen as altering and defacing God's purposes through marriage. An immediate result was the breakdown of the intimacy and the trust between man and woman (Gen 3:7). What had once been a natural out flow of a special relationship would now need to be worked at. Therefore as part of your pastoral counselling before the couple become joined in a covenant that is a permanent institution, cracks and potential cracks need to be seen and dealt with. Once things are brought into the open and the couple has been made aware of issues, these issues can be dealt with. However if these cracks remain hidden, they can eventually destroy the whole structure – the relationship.

The good news that we have is that in the Cross, Christ has provided us with a means by which God will bring back creation (including marriage) to its original state. Romans 8:22 "For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time." As Christ becomes the foundation of the relationship, He transforms it so that it can once again reflect God and His plan for it as seen in creation. Even though mankind still lives in a broken world, through Christ it is redeemed enough so that Paul can use human marriage and sexuality as an illustration of the relationship between Christ, His people and the Church.

Hebrews 13:4 "Give honor to marriage, and remain faithful to one another in marriage."

PASTORAL OBJECTIVE

In this session the pastor needs to ensure that all areas of conflict, hurts, failure within their relationship so far have been dealt with and resolved. As the counsellor it is vital that they come to:

- Be open about issues that they feel they would like to deal with before they get married
- Be willing to discuss the incident in a non aggressive manner whereby closure can come to the incident
- Be willing to forgive and move past this incident

1. DEAL WITH PAST FAILURES

In the medical profession, if a wound has not healed properly, a doctor will reopen it in order to ensure that any dirt or infection is completely removed for proper healing to take place. Before a marriage can be the success that you as a couple desire it to be, you may need to reopen wounds of the past so that true healing can take place.

Dealing with the past requires three steps:

IDENTIFY PAST FAILURES

Identify the hurts of the past and the things that have caused road bumps in the relationship is important. This does not mean that you are only looking to see what your partner has done to you but it is also identifying your responsibility in the relationship.

Matthew 7:3-5 "And why worry about a speck in your friend's eye when you have a log in your own? How can you think of saying, 'Let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye,' when you can't see past the log in your own eye? Hypocrite! First get rid of the log from your own eye; then perhaps you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend's eye."

The couple needs to therefore:

- Look internally at themselves and how they have contributed to problems in the relationship.
 1. Own their "own" feelings, attitudes and actions: In a marriage relationship ownership is very important. If I know where the boundaries are in the relationship then I will know who owns things such as feelings, attitudes and actions. I know to whom they belong and to whom the problem

belongs as well. A relationship like a marriage requires each partner to have a sense of ownership of themselves. If we do not take ownership with things that go wrong because of our own feelings, attitudes and behaviour the ball will continue to be hit back from one to another and there will be no resolution to the problem.

Adam and Eve never took ownership of who was in the wrong (Gen 3:1-13). Adam had chosen to disobey God. There was no doubt about it that Adam had done it. When God asked what happened he refused to take ownership and therefore blamed Eve. Eve did the same thing – she blamed the devil.

When we refuse to take ownership of what is happening in our marriage then our attitude is always, “I did this ... because you said ... or did...” Ask yourself what is the problem and where is it? Is it in you or your spouse?

2. Take responsibility for their part in issues of conflict: If we know who owns which feelings, attitudes and actions, then we will know who is to take responsibility for it. If we can discover who is responsible for what then we have an opportunity for change. Once they take responsibility for their own actions they can then begin the process of change. Responsibility involves action. If something is going to happen, we need to change our attitude, actions, reactions or choices.

What should we take responsibility for? Feelings, behavior, attitudes, choices, limits, desires, thoughts, values, talents, love. Responsibility tells us that we are the ones that need to work through our feelings and learn how to feel differently. It is our attitudes – not our spouses – which causes us to feel depressed, unhappy and powerless. How we react and behave is part of the problems and we have to change this pattern. Each spouse can act both to avoid being a victim of the other spouse's problems and to change the relationship itself. The process however always starts with ownership and responsibility.

If they are battling to try and identify their part in the past failures and mistakes ask God to help them by praying Psalm 139:23-24 “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life.”

- Write down how they felt with things that have gone wrong in their relationship, past hurts that have not been resolved. Begin by writing the feelings of the past failures by saying: “I felt ... when you ...”

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- Discuss these with their spouse or give them the letter that they have written. Begin each sentence with words like "I felt..." before you describe what the other person did or said. In this way not only will you be able to identify why you were hurt or angry but it also allows the other partner to see it from your perspective. When you are dealing with the issue it no longer comes across as being critical and therefore opens the other person up to deal with the issue.

CONFESSION AND REPENTANCE

The second part of dealing with the past is confession and repentance firstly to God and then to one another. Confession means, "to agree with". Therefore when you confess your failures and admit that you have hurt your spouse you are agreeing with God that you were wrong. You are agreeing that your actions have caused hurt and pain and that you have not only hurt the person that you love but you have also grieved God.

Repentance means "to turn around and walk in the opposite direction". By repenting you are expressing to God your desire to behave differently in the future. You are asking the Holy Spirit for the power to enable you to love your spouse with agape love.

1 John 1:9 "But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong."

Psalms 51:1-5 "Have mercy on me, O God, because of your unfailing love. Because of your great compassion, blot out the stain of my sins. Wash me clean from my guilt. Purify me from my sin. For I recognize my shameful deeds— they haunt me day and night. Against you, and you alone, have I sinned; I have done what is evil in your sight. You will be proved right in what you say, and your judgment against me is just.

Psalms 51:10-12 "Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a right spirit within me. Do not banish me from your presence, and don't take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me again the joy of your salvation, and make me willing to obey you."

Caution:

- Don't rush through the things that have caused hurt in the relationship. Deal with one thing at a time so that it can be dealt with properly.

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- Don't judge the other person's sincerity. We have different personalities and therefore will express ourselves differently. Choose to receive the words from your spouse as being sincere and heartfelt.

FORGIVENESS

We can expect failure from even the greatest and the best people in our lives. This is a reality. Eccles. 7:20 "There is not a single person in all the earth who is always good and never sins." Yet even though our loved one will fail us and hurt us, no failure is larger than grace.

Forgiveness is always the Christian response to confession and repentance. Forgiveness is not a feeling! It is a commitment! It is a choice to show mercy. Forgiveness is an expression of love.

Luke 17:3 "I am warning you! If another believer sins, rebuke him; then if he repents, forgive him."

There is no room in your life for unforgiveness. 1 Cor. 13:5 "or rude. Love does not demand its own way. Love is not irritable, and it keeps no record of when it has been wronged." Nothing in a relationship has to permanently destroy that relationship if forgiveness is in the picture. Forgiveness means that we don't bring up past failures. It means we recognize that Christ has already paid the penalty for our sins and therefore we do not need to make our spouse pay for something that he/she did to us. Forgiveness is a huge step forward towards Christian maturity. Forgiveness makes possible the restoration of your marriage relationship.

How can forgiveness be possible when you are deeply hurt by your spouse? Before healing and forgiveness can take place, compassion and tender heartedness must be expressed. The Bible describes God's compassion as "to bend or stoop in kindness to an inferior". For God to have compassion on our brokenness or sins is certainly to stoop to an inferior. But we need to have the same attitude towards an equal spouse for two reasons:

1. Firstly, you forgive what is inferior to the ideal standard. You humble yourself to identify with your loved one. You give up all demands for your spouse to be something he isn't at that moment.
2. Secondly, if your spouse is hurting or failing, you are not morally superior to them but you are in a stronger position to be able to help.

Col. 3:12-14 "Since God chose you to be the holy people whom he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. You must make allowance for each other's faults and forgive the person who offends you. Remember that the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. And the most important piece of clothing you must wear is love. Love is what binds us all together in perfect harmony."

Remember: Hardness of heart, much more than failure is the true relationship killer. Jesus taught that the cause for divorce was not because of failure but rather it was because of the hardness of heart of the couple (Matt 19:8).

It is therefore for this reason that we need to be tenderhearted:

- Identify with their sin and failure by having an attitude of humility. If you are always aware of your own sins you will have more grace to forgive your spouse.
- Identify with their weaknesses. When we have dealt with our own pains and hurts we are able to help our spouse (2 Cor 1:4). Don't get angry with your spouse for their weaknesses but rather choose to help them to overcome.
- Be willing to become vulnerable. Be open and vulnerable with your partner again.

2. LEARN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

PASTORAL OBJECTIVE

In this session the pastor/counsellor will be instructing the couple on effective conflict management. Conflict is generally thought to create trouble in a marriage. This is not true. Conflict can be a source of creative change that if handled correctly can bring two people closer together. The counsellor will therefore:

- Deal with the negative patterns that have adversely affected their relationship
- Instruct the couple on positive patterns in conflict management
- Teach them steps in resolving conflict rather than avoiding it

HOW PEOPLE REACT TO CONFLICT

How we react to conflict will determine if the conflict that we face in our relationships will bring us closer or separate us and cause a rift that if not scaled will lead to more serious problems like separation and divorce. According to marriage and family professionals, there are many interaction patterns that can harm a marriage and make dealing with differences and disagreements very difficult. Look over the following list and ask the bridal couple how often these wrong patterns occur when they are having a disagreement. Bring them to a place of commitment where they will resolve to eliminate the negative pattern from their relationship and will use the methods of conflict management learnt in this session.

- **Withdrawal and Stonewalling:** Here the person will “pull out” of the conflict with no intent to return to it. They disengage from the disagreement.
- **Win at all costs:** Here the person will use any tactic that they have in order to win the argument. This may include criticizing, crying, manipulation
- **Yield:** Here the person gives in to the situation and just accepts it even though they still do not agree with it.
- **Compromise:** Here the couple always finds that they have to compromise on situations. Instead of resolving them logically it feels like they both give up what they want to just bring the peace.
- **Criticism:** Here the person complains with the intent to attack the other person's character. This can eventually lead to contempt whereby the person will convey disgust in the person (this usually takes place when the

marriage is broken down and at the point of separation and divorce.)

- Invalidation: Here the person is made to feel devalued, not cared for or put down.
- Defensiveness: Here the person will launch a counter attack on their partner's character by reflecting blame for their own behaviour on the other person.

THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF CONFLICT:

Conflict is not all the same and therefore the way in which you deal with each different type of conflict will not be the same.

CONFLICT 1: SIN OF A SPOUSE

In this type of conflict there is a culprit.

- Someone has done something wrong.
- Someone has sinned against the other.
- It is a real and not imagined problem.

For example:

- An angry outburst
- Sexual sin
- Loss of self-control
- Impatience
- A critical attitude
- Being judgmental
- Substance abuse
- Pride
- Selfishness
- Jealousy

The way in which this type of conflict can be dealt with is if the person who has caused the "sin" repents and asks for forgiveness. This requires humility from both people – humility to humble and ask for forgiveness and humility to receive the forgiveness without holding a grudge.

CONFLICT 2: IMMATURITY OR BROKENNESS OF ONE PERSON

A conflict could be the result of certain issues in our lives that we have not dealt with. For example: our shortcomings, a lack of maturity, feelings of inability, depression etc. These issues in the individual lives can cause us to place unrealistic expectations on our spouse or can result in lack of empathy and judgmental attitudes. It is these issues that cause constant conflict that will not be resolved until we begin to change.

After the wedding, reality will surface and therefore both individuals need to face it constructively and maturely so that it does not cause a decline in the marriage commitment. This can be done when:

- You accept the reality of the situation: Accept the fact that there are shortcomings in both yourself and your spouse and make a commitment to work through these issues individually so that they do not destroy your relationship.
- Communicate your support for your spouse: Appreciate the fact that they are working on those areas. 1 Thes. 5:14 "Brothers and sisters, we urge you to warn those who are lazy. Encourage those who are timid. Take tender care of those who are weak. Be patient with everyone." Let your spouse know that you will be supportive and patient with them.
- Make it mutual: Do not expect your spouse to do all the changing.

CONFLICT 3: HURT FEELINGS THAT ARE NO ONE'S FAULT:

There will be situations in a marriage where one person does something and unintentionally hurts the other person. For example: coming home late because you had an important meeting when your wife has prepared a surprise dinner. If we were to look at this situation in its perspective, no one is at fault. The husband had to work late and therefore was justified in being late. The wife made a surprise dinner and therefore cannot blame him for not caring by being late.

However what really happens is:

- One of the spouse's feels hurt
- The hurt person communicates as if the other person has sinned against them.
- The accused party becomes defensive.
- They "go to court" to defend their own innocence
- They end up being alienated

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- The problem is never resolved and they go on the next day, “forgetting” about it until the next time something similar happens.

CONFLICT 4: CONFLICTING DESIRES

Whenever you have two people, you will have conflicting ideas and desires. For example: one of you might want to buy furniture, whilst the other might want to save the money for a holiday overseas.

Your differences however are part of what brought you together. Normally these differences can be negotiated by a give and take system, yet there are some circumstances when a stalemate will be achieved.

What can you do when this happens?

- Avoid moralising your preferences: Make sure that you realize that your desire is not “higher” than your spouse’s. Do not try and win by making you right and your spouse wrong.
- Empathize with and understand the importance of your spouse’s desire. Avoid devaluating what your spouse desires. Validate the other’s desires as real and good.
- Move to meet your spouse’s desires before you meet your own: Philip. 2:3-4 “Don’t be selfish; don’t live to make a good impression on others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourself. Don’t think only about your own affairs, but be interested in others, too, and what they are doing.” Sometimes it may be necessary to keep an account of whose “turn” it will be next time to make a decision on what restaurant or movie you will be going to see.
- Question your preferences: Some of the things that you may hold a strong stance for may not be your true feelings or desire. Make sure that your motives for wanting what you do are right (James 4:3).
- Expand and grow: Be willing to try things that you would normally not like as an experiment to see whether you will be able to expand and grow. You may find that after you have done what your spouse desires you may enjoy it enough for it to become a “we” activity. For example, trying new foods that you would normally not try.

CONFLICT 5: DESIRES OF ONE PERSON VERSUS THE NEEDS OF THE RELATIONSHIP:

Sometimes the desire of the one person will be in conflict with the needs of the relationship. One person might want to stop work in order to go and study further but as a couple you may need the money from that source of income.

No relationship is going to survive if all the members are not getting some of their desires met. No relationship is going to thrive if the members always get what they desire and the relationship as a whole suffers. It is therefore good for a relationship at times to "serve" its members. The problem comes when the marriage always serves the same member and never the other.

Marriage means giving up some "individual" rights for the sake of the marriage. There therefore needs to be a balance between serving the individuals and growing the relationship. Remember that the marriage comes first. Give the best to your relationship before your individual desires.

CONFLICT 6: KNOWN VERSUS UNKNOWN PROBLEMS

When we are in denial and refuse to see the other person's point of view concerning a problem that we have we destroy the process of resolving the conflict. However there is another source of conflict that can come about by "blind spots" that we have.

These blind spots are not intentional denial but they are aspects in our personality or character that we are not aware of. In marriage your spouse may know more about you than you know about yourself. The trick to growth is becoming a partner to this secret knowledge so that change can take place. Avoiding the "fault" will not make it go away.

RULES FOR TIMES OF CONFLICT

Choose the right environment to speak:

- Being open about your problems should be done in an atmosphere of love and support. Be careful in the manner in which you approach resolving the conflict. You do not want to be viewed as personally attacking them as this will cause them to immediately shut down. Woman, allow the man his time and space to process the information that you give him so that when he comes back and initiates the conversation again he has processed the information internally.
- Be sure to ensure that where you speak will not be filled with interruptions.
- Do not bring your conflicts up in public, example by sarcastic or embarrassing remarks. Publicly arguing or proclaiming resentment only increases and deepens it.

Agree that the time is right:

Talk about the situation that you do not agree on when you can be alone or when enough time has been given for one or both of you to cool off. Reserve time to talk: Time must be reserved for meaningful talks.

Be careful of your attitude when confronting your partner:

When you are facing a conflict that has come about due to your spouse's sin, you need to demonstrate the same attitude that God has towards someone who sins.

Ephes. 4:32 "Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you."

When we approach an area of sin in a person's life with pride and "I am better than you", change and resolution will not be the outcome. It is therefore important that we clothe ourselves with humility and grace.

Galatians 6:1-2 "Dear brothers and sisters, if another Christian is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help that person back onto the right path. And be careful not to fall into the same temptation yourself. Share each other's troubles and problems, and in this way obey the law of Christ."

This does not mean that you minimize the hurt or the pain that your partner has caused, but you do not lord it over them.

Listen before you speak:

James 1:19 "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:"

When you speak, choose your words wisely:

Ephes. 4:29 "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.

Psalms 19:14 "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer."

- Think before you speak: Why is it important that we think before we speak? Many of your thoughts and feelings are only transitory and therefore do not represent the way that you really feel all the time. If we just speak without thinking we can say something that will make our partner think that that is how we always feel about them.
- Do not criticize: We usually will criticize the one we love when we are unhappy or dissatisfied with the other person. The thought behind this type of criticism is "They will change if I criticize them enough about that issue."
- Do not use disparaging remarks: What does this mean? It occurs when you remark to others about your spouse in a "joking manner" whilst your spouse is there. If you find that you often do this in a way to get through to your partner, ask yourself:
 1. Would I make this remark about someone who is not my spouse? We often treat strangers better than we do those who we dearly love.
 2. Regardless of my intention, will this remark hurt or embarrass my spouse?
 3. Will this remark diminish the other person's opinion of my mate and make my spouse feel silly?

Learn the art of encouraging words: Avoid put downs and look for opportunities that will build your spouse up.

Commit yourself to honesty and mutual respect:

Ensure that when you are being open that you are not disguising the root problem by expressing your feelings. Total openness can be harmful if it masks rather than illuminates your problems. Total openness is also harmful when it lead us to say hurtful things to others for the purpose of hurting them rather than to bring resolution to the marriage.

James 1:26 "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridled his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain." Refuse to speak those thoughts that you know will bring pain to the other person

Take responsibility for your part in the conflict:

Do not throw stones. See the example of the adulteress and the scribes and Pharisees. John 8:7 "They kept demanding an answer, so he stood up again and said, "All right, stone her. But let those who have never sinned throw the first stones!" The best way to deal with any conflict or disagreement is to ask yourself - "What is my part in this conflict?"

Lay down your deadly weapons:

A temper that slips out of control is sin. Sin will crush the inner spirit of one or both partners. This will lead to a decline in the emotional intimacy of the marriage.

How can you handle your anger sensibly?

- See anger as a powerful tool for truth. For example: Jesus used His anger in the Temple as a means to communicate the truth. He did not use His anger to get it out of His system and feel better but He used it as a means of communicating to the temple authorities a message from God. In this way anger can become a constructive force and will not be used to humiliate and destroy.
- Learn to accept grace for each other. I do not need to be perfect to be loved by God (Rom 5:8) and therefore we should be more tolerant to accept each other's imperfections.
- Learn new skills for handling angry feelings. Before expressing how you feel ask yourself:
 1. What is the actual event that I am angry about?
 2. What is my personal interpretation of this event (this might not always be the truth).

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3. Reflect how your body is reacting to this anger.
 4. Ask God to help you see things clearly and reveal how you are feeling to your partner in a healthy manner that will bring constructive results.

Find out what you are really arguing about

Deal with it so that there is closure to the issue. Issues that are left to fester, causes damage to marriage just like a sore that is left to fester irritates and causes harm to the body.

Do not compromise:

Do not merely settle for compromises as a means by which you can get the peace back. Rather assemble a creative alternative together. How can you successfully work through your decision making process and come to a place where you are confident that you have made the right decision?

1. Be willing to listen to the spouse
 2. Be direct about your wants and needs. Learn to express your love by using the right words. To eliminate misunderstanding, sharing of your needs, wants, and desires must take place yet in a non-demanding manner.
 3. Learn to brainstorm. This helps in showing the person that there is not only one solution to the problem that you are disagreeing on. Make a list of all possible solutions and choose one that you are both happy with.
 4. Define the decision so that you are both clear with what has been decided.
 5. Make a list of the pros and cons.
 6. Understand both decision making styles (logical or emotional)
 7. Be willing to use outside resources if necessary.
 8. Treat your spouse with respect
 9. Learn from the example of others. Sometimes looking at how other people have solved similar problems helps.
 10. Wait for the right time before you discuss your decisions
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11. Remember the power of prayer

When it is all over, forgive.

Be gracious enough to wipe it off your mental slate. Ephes. 4:32 "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

3. IN LAWS

PASTORAL OBJECTIVES

The objective during this session is to help the bridal couple set boundaries with the parents and future parents in law concerning their relationship. It also is a way in which the pastor / counsellor can highlight issues that should be dealt with before the wedding.

PROBLEMS WITH THE IN-LAWS

Parents can be a blessing to a married couple by offering love, wisdom, and encouragement. The Bible makes note of several supportive in-law relationships, namely Ruth and Naomi, Peter and his mother-in-law, and Jethro, who guided Moses.

The book of Ruth presents the most incredible relationship between two women who were thrust together. Both were widowed, and the mother-in-law, Naomi, decided that she would return to her own hometown of Bethlehem in Judah. Her two widowed daughters-in-law set out with her, but when they got to the border, Naomi tried to send them back, saying she had nothing to offer them. Orpah turned back, but Ruth stayed, saying the words that would become a popular declaration in wedding ceremonies: "I will go wherever you go and live wherever you live. Your people will be my people, and your god will be my God. I will die where you die and you will be buried there. May the Lord punish me severely if I allow anything but death to separate us!" (Ruth 1:17) These loving words were spoken from a daughter-in-law to her mother-in-law!

Yet the abundance of in-law jokes and stories testifies to the fact that parents can also be a heavy burden for a couple to bear. The Bible also has an example of this. David's father-in-law, King Saul, tracked him down to try to kill him.

In-law conflicts are certainly nothing new. Occurring in many forms, they tend to be ongoing issues that revolve around the couple as a whole. The first step towards finding a solution is to identify the problem. Here are five circumstances to consider.

Favoritism: Parents develop an older and deeper relationship with their adult child, which is to be expected. Even so, healthy parents will welcome their child's spouse into their lives, if that person is loving and kind. However, when a parent's preference for their own child over their child's spouse exists and is expressed, distance and hurt can result. During a visit or phone call, parents may show more interest in their child's goings-on than in a spouse's. Or they may give

more lavish gifts to their child, disregarding a spouse. These gestures of favoritism can lead a spouse to feel left out and not valued when around in-laws.

Intrusiveness: Some parents cross over the line of responsibility and respect. Becoming too involved with the couple, they may meddle unintentionally, leaving the couple feeling smothered or controlled. Although they think they are acting lovingly, they are not allowing the couple enough breathing room.

Parenting: Along the same lines as intrusiveness, some in-laws have difficulty letting go of their roles as parents. Instead of transitioning into a mutual adult relationship, they may offer unasked-for advice, criticisms, or even withhold approval if they disagree with the younger couple's preferences.

Emotional Distance: On the opposite end of the spectrum, some parents maintain cold, disconnected relationships. They seem emotionally unavailable, self-absorbed, aloof, or unfriendly. Although the couple desires a warmer relationship, they find themselves rebuffed or ignored. Sometimes, unresolved issues or hurts may account for this problem between couples. But other times, it has to do with the character of the in-laws as people.

Dependency: Although we are told to care for our parents (1 Timothy 5:4), there are times when couples should not become involved in the problems of their in-laws. For example, parents may impose on the younger couple to referee their arguments, or try to get them to take sides. They may want the couple to rescue a drug-addicted child that they can't fix. Or they may be financially irresponsible, and ask the couple to bail them out. Taking responsibility for issues like these can be inappropriate for the young couple.

BUILDING IN-LAW RELATIONSHIPS:

1. START WITH YOURSELF:

- **Reality-check:** First, find out if there really is a problem, or if it's merely your perception. Sometimes we react to others based on our experiences, which can cloud judgment. A reserved husband may see his in-laws as intrusive, when in fact, they are merely outgoing. To help gain a proper perspective, ask a trusted friend to observe and verify your perception of the situation.
- **Do a self-inventory:** After you've identified the problem, ask yourself how you might be contributing to it. Jesus reminds us that we must first deal with our own actions before we help others correct theirs (Matthew 7:1-5). Deal with any unloving attitude you might have. Beware of promoting a problem by being silent, compliant, or rationalizing. By speaking the truth in love (Ephesians 4:13), we can foster growth and healing.

2. BE COMMITTED TO YOUR SPOUSE

Strengthen your role as spouse. An in-law problem can sometimes be a marriage problem. Favoritism, intrusiveness, and other conflicts can be perpetuated by a spouse who is unaware or unwilling to deal with the issues. Though you and your spouse love your parents, you should be more aligned with each other than with them. When a spouse isn't loyal to their mate, there may be a "leaving and cleaving" problem (Genesis 2:24). This problem is exhibited in behaviors such as needing parental approval or respect, being afraid to confront parents, going to parents for self-image support, being emotionally or financially dependent on parents, or feeling responsible for parents' emotions. If your spouse struggles with these issues, let him know how you feel and how his actions affect your sense of safety as a couple. Encourage him to work through these issues, perhaps by getting involved in a healthy church group. Becoming responsible in your union often goes a long way toward solving in-law problems.

3. COMMUNICATE THE PROBLEM

Be direct: Approaching the situation as a united front provides new courage. Confront your in-laws gently, but directly. Though you may need to involve your spouse, don't avoid dealing with the problem personally. Let them know how you feel and that it gets in the way of being close to them. They may react with hurt, withdrawal, or anger. Or they may be surprised at what they learn, and thank you for letting them know.

4. CHANGE YOUR BEHAVIOUR:

"Fill up and complete my joy by living in harmony and being of the same mind and one purpose, having the same love, being in full accord and one harmonious mind and intention. Do nothing from factional motives —through contentiousness, strife, selfishness or for unworthy ends—or prompted by conceit and empty arrogance. Instead, in the true spirit of humility (lowliness of mind) let each regard the others as better than and superior to himself—thinking more highly of one another than you do of yourselves. Let each of you esteem and look upon and be concerned for not [merely] his own interests, but also each for the interests of others. Let this same attitude and purpose and [humble] mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus. —Let Him be your example in humility" Philippians 2:2-5

"Be gentle and forbearing with one another and, if one has a difference (a grievance or complaint) against another, readily pardoning each other; even as the Lord has freely forgiven you, so must you also [forgive]" (Col 3:13)

“And whatever you do—no matter what it is—in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus and in [dependence upon] His Person, giving praise to God the Father through Him” (Col 3:17)

- **Mutual Respect:** In all things, respect your mother and father-in-law. Remember, they are the parents of someone very special — your spouse. Exodus 20:12 says, “Honor your father and mother. Then you will live a long, full life in the land the Lord your God will give you.” Honoring does not mean letting them order you around, pry into your personal finances, tell your kids to get haircuts, or rearrange your cabinets each time they visit. It means honoring their position.
- **Recognize independence:** It is best for each family to realize the independence of the other. Your spouse must know your parents will not interfere with the family you are building. Your parents must realize you and your spouse need to build a life and relationship separate from them. This requires patience and, at times, may be painful. It's important to honor and respect your in-laws, but above that, protect your marriage. This principle will pay great dividends in the future.
- **Refuse to argue:** Here's where we have to look to the Lord as our example. Remember, he won people—not arguments. Be careful to guard your mouth. Remember; you never have to ask forgiveness for those sharp things you don't say.
- **Keep praying:** 1 Samuel 17:47 “And everyone will know that the Lord does not need weapons to rescue his people. It is his battle, not ours. The Lord will give you to us!” Keep in mind that the battle is the Lord's and therefore just keep praying for a peaceful relationship with them.
- **Schedule time with your in-laws:** Be sure to include your in-laws in your life. Make time to visit them and to know that they are still apart of your life even though you have started a family on your own.
- **Don't go looking for trouble:** Remember, if you expect the worst, you'll get the worst. Remember, Jesus has promised us his power, his peace, his purpose, his presence—and trouble. But even as he promises us trouble, he promises to be with us: “Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world” (John 16:33)
- **Refocus your perspective** by looking for the positive. Get a proper perspective: Our view of any situation will color the way we see it. What if we looked at the situation from the in-law's view?

- **Find those things you can sincerely praise:** Remember that criticism destroys while encouragement builds.
- **Offer an unexpected gift**
- **Be sure to include your in-laws in significant family events.** Even if the others live so far away they could never attend, they would appreciate being thought of. Purposeful exclusion because of problems and hurts serves only to deepen the distance between everyone.
- **Don't blame any in-law for a problem that you may have in your own marriage.** And don't blame them when your spouse isn't as supportive of you as you'd wish. It will only spread your difficulties to others.

ASSIGNMENT:

Using the example below, create an inventory that you will be able to use with the bridal couple to assess their relationship with their future in-laws.

EXAMPLE:

- In relating to my in-laws:

___ I feel very comfortable in knowing what to call them.
 ___ I wish I knew what to call them (Mom, Dad, or first name).

- I feel that my spouse is:

___ too close to his/her family.
 ___ not close enough to his/her family.
 ___ well-balanced in his/her relationship with his/her family.

- **My spouse feels that I am:**

___ too close to my family.
 ___ not close enough to my family.
 ___ well-balanced in my relationship with my family.

- **I wish:**

___ I felt more comfortable with my spouse's family.
 ___ my spouse felt more comfortable with my family.

- **My spouse and I disagree over:**

___ how much time to spend with family.
___ whose family to visit for the holidays.

- **I sometimes feel pulled between:**

___ what my family wants from me and what my spouse wants from me.
___ my loyalty to my own family and my loyalty to my spouse's family.

- **Since our wedding, my relationship with my own family:**

___ has changed for the better.
___ has changed for the worse.

- **Since our wedding, my relationship with my spouse's family:**

___ has changed for the better.
___ has changed for the worse.

Review the statements that the bridal couple has marked and use it as a spring board for further discussion and / or counseling.

ADVICE FOR MOTHER IN LAWS:

Don't give advice unless the young couple specifically asks for it. Even if they ask your opinion, be careful how the counsel is given. Do not preach or lecture. Instead, simply suggest solutions, giving the couple freedom to accept or reject them.

Don't offer financial aid unless the young couple explicitly requests it. It is important for the couple to establish their independence—emotionally and financially. As difficult as it may be to watch your child and his or her spouse face financial struggles, realize that those trials are valuable for them as they develop their life together.

Keep your personal questions to a minimum. Remember, a couple's primary allegiance should be to each other, not to either set of parents. The new couple needs privacy in order to develop a meaningful relationship.

Respect the couple's confidence when they confide in you. Don't repeat what they have told you to friends or other relatives, or you may lose their trust — and rightfully so.

Don't expect the new couple to live according to your standards and values. Your child and his or her spouse are individuals starting their own home. They need to develop their own family traditions, independent of those observed by their parents.

Let go of your offspring, giving the couple room to live their own lives. Rather than living through your children's lives, find activities of your own. Don't expect the couple to spend excessive amounts of time with you. Only by letting go will you be able to build a healthy relationship with them.

Treat the couple with respect, and don't belittle them or their decisions. They may have a lot to learn, but they need to learn these lessons themselves. Allow them to make their own mistakes, and don't adopt an "I-told-you-so" attitude if they fail.

Don't expect your in-law to call you "Mom" or "Dad." He or she may feel most comfortable using your first names. Accept the decision gracefully — don't make a major issue out of it.

Take a genuine interest in your new in-law as a person. Try to find out about his or her interests. Attempt to relate to your in-law in a meaningful way and on his or her terms

Don't treat your in-law as a rival who has stolen your child's love. Welcome the new addition into your family— you'll multiply the love, rather than divide it.

4. FINANCES AND MARRIAGE

PASTORAL OBJECTIVE

The objective of this lesson is to allow the couple to talk about their values concerning their finances and the way in which at present they spend their money. Newlywed couples benefit from understanding the source of their differing money styles. They learn to communicate effectively about money from the start and create a partnership approach to the family's finances, with shared goals and decision-making and a clear definition of daily financial responsibilities. They also set up an effective money management system early in their marriage, getting on the road to financial freedom years before many of their peers

FINANCIAL ISSUES IN MARRIAGE

Jesus spoke about money more than any other subject. Not only did He repeatedly speak concerning money, but most of His pronouncements included warnings about it. He said:

Matthew 6:21 "Wherever your treasure is, there your heart and thoughts will also be."

Money and material blessings are meant by God to be a source of blessing and security. However, studies show that money issues are the highest cause of marital conflict and cause for divorce. Conflicts over money and money management outweigh conflicts over sex (including affairs) and differences over raising children as the greatest trouble area in a marriage. Partners enter a marriage with an intensely personal history of how they have handled money that has usually been learned from their families of origin. When the two people who are part of a couple have different expectations, fights and conflicts can occur. Arguments over how to spend money, who decides what to spend it on, and who has better claim on the money are all things that lead us to become caught up in money.

1 Timothy 6:10 points out: "For the love of money is at the root of all kinds of evil. And some people, craving money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows."

MAJOR FINANCIAL ISSUES THAT CAN DESTROY THE MARRIAGE:

- Making the accumulation of wealth an ambition in life. This ambition can rob the person of time and energy which could be spent with the spouse. 1 Tim. 6:6 "Yet true religion with contentment is great wealth." Hebrews 13:5 "Stay away from the love of money; be satisfied with what you have. For God has said, "I will never fail you. I will never forsake you."
- Disagreements concerning what they should use the excess of funds on.
- Paying large debts which produces tremendous anxiety and pressure. These excess debts are often incurred because of:
 - Overindulgence: Proverbs 21:17 "Those who love pleasure become poor; wine and luxury are not the way to riches."
 - Impulsive buying
 - Bad investments: Proverbs 28:20-22 "The trustworthy will get a rich reward. But the person who wants to get rich quick will only get into trouble. Showing partiality is never good, yet some will do wrong for something as small as a piece of bread. A greedy person tries to get rich quick, but it only leads to poverty."
 - Slothfulness: Proverbs 21:25-26 "The desires of lazy people will be their ruin, for their hands refuse to work. They are always greedy for more, while the godly love to give!"
 - Greediness: Luke 12:15 "Then he said, "Beware! Don't be greedy for what you don't have. Real life is not measured by how much we own."
 - Covetousness: Psalm 73:2-3 "But as for me, I came so close to the edge of the cliff! My feet were slipping, and I was almost gone. For I envied the proud when I saw them prosper despite their wickedness."
 - Materialism
 - Wrong use of credit

HOW TO DEAL WITH FINANCIAL DIFFERENCES?

- **Look for underlying issues.** Sometimes finances are only one part of the equation. Perhaps security and control are problems. Many couples find that money is tight at some point in their marriages. It is important to realize that this is a security issue as much as a money issue. Rather than become irritated, recognize that fights over money originate in other problems as well.
- **Merge the Finances**

The Wrong Approach: United we stand, divided we bank	The Right Approach: It's yours, mine and ours.
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One of the first issues newlyweds face is how to handle their finances. "Couples struggle about this one," says Ruth Hayden, author of "For Richer, Not Poorer: The Money Book for Couples." Should you merge everything you have and earn into one joint account, or should you maintain individual accounts and open a joint one for household expenses?

- **Deal with Debt**

The Wrong Approach: Your debt will ruin us; you must find a way to pay it off.	The Right Approach: It's our debt: Let's decide how to pay it off together.
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Couples often don't see eye to eye on how much debt is too much and which kind of debt is bad. Compounding the problem in many cases is that one spouse enters the marriage with a lot more debt than the other.

- **Keep spending in check**

The Wrong Approach: I'm a saver and you're a spender. That's the problem.	The Right Approach: We both spend, but on different things. Let's budget.
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Understand that you may have different money styles. Listen to your partner and understand where he or she is coming from. Realize that part of your problem is how you may view money differently. Talk about your finances openly, and talk about how you view money and how it should be spent. And listen to your spouse. This is the foundation for developing a financial plan that has a bit of you both.

Make some money ground rules - set some boundaries. Compromise is necessary. Neither of you will get everything you want, but both of you will get some of what you want. It's what marriage is about. Decide on rules like "if something costs more than 'x' amount, consult before buying".

- **Invest wisely**

The Wrong Approach: You're a risk-taker, I'm risk-averse. Hands off our retirement savings.	The Right Approach: Let's think in time frames and take as much risk as our goals allow
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Set financial goals together. Rather than viewing finances as something that you disagree on in marriage, set goals to work toward. Working together to save for retirement or for a new house, or even to save up for a fancy night out, will bring you closer together over your finances.

- **Commit to not hide money issues**

The Wrong Approach: What my spouse doesn't know will never hurt him/her.	The Right Approach: Big financial secrets can ruin a marriage.
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- **Plan for an emergency**

The Wrong Approach: We're fine. We don't need to worry about money.	The Right Approach: Anything could happen. Let's plan for emergencies.
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- **Prepare a monthly budget**

You can create your own budget worksheet by following general categories below:

- Tithe
- Savings
- Food
- Housing
- Electricity and water
- Insurance
- Transportation
- Medical expenses
- Recreation

-
- **Realise that God will supply all your need when you have placed Him first in the relationship and first with your finances.**

Philip. 4:19 "And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus."

Hebrews 11:6 "So, you see, it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that there is a God and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him."

Malachi 3:10 "Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my Temple. If you do," says the Lord Almighty, "I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won't have enough room to take it in! Try it! Let me prove it to you!"

Proverbs 3:9-10 "Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the best part of everything your land produces. Then he will fill your barns with grain, and your vats will overflow with the finest wine."

Some of the issues that you can discuss with the bridal couple would be:

Money Background:

Discussing your money background with your spouse can be helpful in understanding his or her perspective. We grow up with different feelings and values associated with money. Take some time to discuss the following questions.

- Do you have any childhood memories that involved money?
- Who brought money into your family?
- Who controlled the distribution of money in your family?
- What were the overt messages you received regarding money in your family?
- What patterns related to money can you trace through the generations?
- What did your parents say about money?
- What were the money rules in your family? Which ones have you changed?
- How comfortable was the discussion of money in your family? Who could you talk to and not talk to about money?
- What was the connection between money and work in your family? Education and money?
- How did your family view charity? The poor? The wealthy?
- What messages did you receive about money and success?

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- How did your family define security?

Personal financial values:

Discussing your personal financial values with your spouse will open the doors of communication and help you understand what motivates each other. Many couples have never had these discussions and later find that they have assumed their spouse felt the same way they did.

- What does money mean to you?
- What is important to you?
- How am I honoring my values as I live day to day?
- What values are important to me as I look at my financial picture?
- What values will be important 10 years from now? 20?
- What is the first thing that comes to mind in the area of finances that I have been meaning to get to?
- If I got to it, how would it affect my life?
- Do I link self worth to what I have or what I am spending?

Rank the following items from 1 to 10 with 10 being the most valuable to you.

- _____ A comfortable retirement
- _____ Helping the poor, sick, or handicapped
- _____ Accomplishment in life
- _____ Financial Independence
- _____ Traveling and vacations
- _____ Financial security
- _____ Success in a job or career
- _____ Social recognition
- _____ Freedom to live life as you choose
- _____ New experiences and adventure
- _____ Being outdoors, away from the city
- _____ Living in the city, access to city living
- _____ Having nice things, such as cars, boats, furniture

Financial goals:

Goals are an important part of what make us happy as individuals and couples. Take some time to discuss your financial goals with each other and then set goals for your-selves as a couple. The following questions will help you.

- What is something you would like to have accomplished within the next year?

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- What would you like to have done in five years?
 - Now visualize yourself in ten years. You are older and your children are older.
 - Where do you see yourself then?
 - At what age would you like to retire? Do you have any goals to meet before you retire? Do you want to help fund your children's college education?
 - What are your plans and goals for education in the next few years?
 - How far do you want to go in school?
 - What are your personal financial goals for the future? What are your short-term goals dealing with the next year and your long-term goals like saving for retirement? List your personal long and short-term goals below.

PART THREE: WHAT HAPPENS IF THINGS DON'T WORK OUT?

1. WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT SEPERATION?

When a couple enters into the covenant of marriage, the Bible tells us that God joins them together into one flesh. "Since they are no longer two but one, let no one separate them, for God has joined them together" (Matthew 19:6).

Marriage is intended to be a lifelong commitment, not a temporary solution for loneliness or other emotional needs. God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16) and never intends for anyone to separate once they are married (Matthew 19:8).

Because separation, whether it is legal or physical, involves the division of a married couple, it displeases God. First Corinthians 7:10-11 says, "...A wife must not leave her husband. But if she does leave him, let her remain single or else go back to him. And the husband must not leave his wife." Separation is never an ideal situation, but because of sin, it is sometimes necessary.

Marriage vows should not be taken lightly, and separation should not be undergone casually. Far too many couples decide to have a "trial separation" in order to discover what they truly want out of life, but do so without any attempts at rebuilding the marriage during this time. Instead of reconstructing the family on a foundation of faith in Christ, they drift farther apart until they eventually divorce. This is not in God's perfect plan for marriage and family, even if it has become acceptable in our culture. "Live happily with the woman you love through all the meaningless days of life that God has given you in this world. The wife God gives you is your reward for all your earthly toil" (Ecclesiastes 9:9).

2. WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT DIVORCE?

PEOPLE GOT DIVORCED IN THE BIBLE.

In the Bible there was divorce.

- In the Old Testament only men were able to divorce their wives. Deut. 24:1-4 "Suppose a man marries a woman but later discovers something about her that is shameful. So he writes her a letter of divorce, gives it to her, and sends her away. If she then leaves and marries another man and the second husband also divorces her or dies, the former husband may not marry her again, for she has been defiled. That would be detestable to the Lord. You must not bring guilt upon the land the Lord your God is giving you as a special possession."

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- In the New Testament women were also able to initiate divorce. Mark 10:12 "And if a woman divorces her husband and remarries, she commits adultery."

1 Cor. 7:13 "And if a Christian woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he is willing to continue living with her, she must not leave him."

WHY WAS THERE DIVORCE IN THE BIBLE?

- **Adultery:** Jesus said, "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery," (Matt 19:9). The word in Greek for immorality is porneia from which we get the word pornography. Sexual immorality, i.e., adultery, was one of the grounds for divorce according to Jesus. Jesus said God only allowed divorce in the Old Testament because of the hardness of our hearts (Matthew 19:8).
- **Abandonment:** In addressing the issue of husband and wife, Paul said, "Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace," (1 Cor 7:15)

BUT WHAT IS GOD'S PERCEPTION OF DIVORCE?

God wants the Christian to take marriage very seriously. Jesus said, Mark 10:9 "let no one separate them, for God has joined them together."

1 Cor. 7:10-11 "Now, for those who are married I have a command that comes not from me, but from the Lord. A wife must not leave her husband. But if she does leave him, let her remain single or else go back to him. And the husband must not leave his wife."

Hebrews 13:4 "Give honor to marriage, and remain faithful to one another in marriage. God will surely judge people who are immoral and those who commit adultery."

Malachi 2:16 "'For I hate divorce!' says the Lord, the God of Israel. 'It is as cruel as putting on a victim's bloodstained coat,' says the Lord Almighty. 'So guard yourself; always remain loyal to your wife.'"

We notice as we read this portion of scripture that in looking at the people who were divorcing, their lives were no longer lining up with the Word of God. They were:

- Calling Him Father but not honouring Him (1:6)
- Calling Him Father but not respecting Him (1:6)
- Despising His Name (1:6)

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- Bringing offerings but not what He required of them (1:8-11)

What were the priests doing? They were

- Turning aside from the way (2:8)
- Giving wrong instruction (2:8-9)
- Dealing treacherously (2:10-12)
- Divorcing their wives (2:14-16)
- Whitewashing sin (2:17)

These people, both the priesthood and the congregation were no longer walking with God. They were professing to be Christian but their hearts were hardened towards God and His commandments. Therefore in the marriage there probably was no communication, no forgiveness, no agape love. All of which, when lacking in a marriage, brings problems like adultery, conflicts etc. These things will and do eventually lead to divorce if they are not dealt with.

WHAT SHOULD OUR ATTITUDE BE TOWARDS DIVORCE?

- **Remain with God.** Keep your spiritual life as a priority.
- **The same attitude as God's:** Therefore as Christians we need to embrace God's attitude towards divorce. The Bible says that when two are joined together in marriage, they are no longer two, but one (Genesis 2:23-24; Mark 10:8), and that God hates divorce. You and your spouse are "one" no matter how poorly your marriage is functioning. Divorce, in God's eyes, is not an option except in specific situations--and even then, forgiveness and rebuilding are usually best.
- **Realize that divorce has consequences:** Divorce always brings painful consequences. Not only do you distance yourself from God when you divorce, you also damage your spouse, wound your children, injure other family members, hurt friends, set the stage for future pain for yourself and bring shame upon the name of Christ.
- **Never say, "Let's divorce":** Suggesting divorce without scriptural reasons opens the door to sin. When you are broke you would never say, "Let's rob a bank." Along the same lines, when you are unhappy, do not say, "Let's divorce," "I don't see why we should stay married" or "You'd be better off without me."

FINAL ASSIGNMENT

Design your own marriage questionnaire that you would use when counselling the bridal couple. Remember that the purpose of this questionnaire is to find any "cracks" that have not been evident to the couple so far so that the repairs to these cracks can be made before it causes damage to the structure – the relationship. Therefore include questions for the following topics:

- Finances
- Physical relationship
- Anger
- Conflicts
- Where they will live when they are married
- In law problems
- Expectations
- Needs that they feel are not being met

ETC.

Remember: The more comprehensive the questionnaire, the more intense the pre-marriage counselling will be and therefore will be able to deal with issues that were under the surface of their relationship.

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