

Messages on Marriage

PASTOR BEVANS WELDER

Index of Lessons and Sermons

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Men Preparing for Marriage, Part 1

Men preparing for marriage should be much more concerned with preparing themselves than with finding a woman. As a man, here are some practical and spiritual things that you can do to prepare for your marriage, even long before you find the woman that you believe God would have you to marry.

Establish consistent personal devotions – Ps 55:17 — David prayed three times a day; Is 34:16 read your Bible daily; 2 Tim 2:15 study the words of God; 1 Tim 4:13 Paul exhorted Timothy to “give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.” The best way to prepare yourself to love your wife is to love the Lord with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind, Lk 10:27. Jesus loves the church and we are to love our wives the way that Christ loves the church, Eph 5:25. Your love for your wife should always be secondary to your love for the Lord. If, therefore, you don’t love the Lord very much, you won’t love your wife very much either. Or else you will end up loving her more than you love the Lord and that will cripple your marriage.

Find and do the Lord’s will for your life – Phil 2:12-13 — if you begin following the Lord now and doing his will in the fear of God, when you meet your future bride, you won’t be pulled away from the Lord’s will by trying to appease her. In 1 Cor 11:3 the head of every man is Christ. Therefore, you have to be under his authority if your wife is ever going to be under your authority. A man may leave the path of the Lord’s will to please the woman he wants to marry. Later, he discovers that he can’t get back to the Lord’s will, because his wife won’t let him without making his life miserable or without threatening to divorce him.

Develop strong convictions – 1 Tim 4:12 – as the old saying goes, “a man that will stand for nothing will fall for anything.” There is some truth to that statement. You have to know where you stand in your personal convictions and then you have to stand there. Your convictions concern the Bible you believe, the church you attend, the doctrines you hold, the purity you preserve, the music you listen to, the books you read, the associations you have, and so forth. These will make it easier for you and your “girlfriend” to determine whether you are agreed on important matters. If not, then you’ll find yourself giving ground that you cannot recover just to keep your marriage together. Like Amos asks, “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?”

Be very faithful in church – Heb 10:25 – attend all the services faithfully [i.e., Sunday school, preaching morning and evening, and prayer meeting]. Occupy your time with things in the ministry. Learn to be a helper and concentrate your efforts on getting lost people saved and in church. That way it will be natural for your family to grow together and be actively involved in church.

Rule your spirit – Prov 25:28; 14:29 – loving relationships between men and women involve emotions. Therefore, you must have control of your spirit and your emotions to keep from making rash statements, doing things that hurt your spouse, and exhibiting volatile emotional swings. One thing women have a hard time forgetting is things you say that hurt them. Many men have hurt their wives because they have lost their temper at a time when they should have maintained control. Their marriages have suffered from then on, to some degree.

Control your eyes – Ps 101:3; Job 31:1 — men have a terrible time with this problem, particularly today. You have to discipline yourself to keep from developing an attitude about women that they are simply objects for your personal pleasure. So, don’t watch television where women are on display, watch few movies and be sure there is nothing suggestive or explicit that you will view, don’t surf the internet, and don’t lust after women [Matt 5:28].

Control your thoughts – 2 Cor 10:4-5; Prov 16:3 – once you’ve seen an image, you have an imagination. And the trouble with our imagination is that “the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth,” [Gen 8:21]. You must control your thought life. If you don’t you could very easily end up marrying the wrong woman for the wrong reason and be very miserable in your marriage. Furthermore, with an out-of-control thought life, you will not be satisfied with the wife of thy youth [Prov 5:18-19]. Before long you will be looking for pleasure from other women. Think only on the things found in Phil 4:8. Reject the philosophy of the world. Fill your mind with good things.

Keep yourself pure – 1 Cor 7:1 — when you are courting, keep your hands off of each other. Hugging and kissing stir up youthful lusts. 2 Tim 2:22 says to flee also youthful lusts. The best way to avoid trouble here is to not play the dating game. And covenant that you will wait till you are married before physically loving your wife.

Conclusion: If you will follow these practical yet very important steps, you will find that preparing for marriage is superior to falling in love and soon falling out again.

Men Preparing for Marriage, Part 2

Whether you are a man preparing for marriage or whether you are already married, this lesson will do you some good. Men don't often think about preparing for marriage; they think about the woman they are going to marry. You will be much happier if you prepare yourself before you find your spouse than if you try to figure it out after you are married. Men preparing for marriage need to:

Be manly – Prov 12:2 — “a good man obtaineth favor of the Lord.” In Acts 11:24 we see that Barnabas was “a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith.” Today there are many sissies in church because Christianity is soft and more about feelings than about truth. Be a man. A good woman deserves a man with a backbone. She'll be extremely insecure if your backbone is no firmer than a noodle. When a woman is insecure she will try to take control.

Develop friendships with good men – Prov 13:20 – most of the problems that young men have with young women stem from friendships with bad young women and bad young men. If you run with the wrong crowd, they will chide you and persuade you to do the wrong things. Likewise, the converse is true. If you run with the right crowd, you are much more likely to do the right things.

Follow the example of men in successful marriages – Phil 4:9 – ask the men who have been married to the same woman for at least twenty five or thirty years how they did it. Listen carefully and do those things. You will generally find that these men are stable, sober, compassionate, friendly, secure, humble, and good natured; they are good listeners and good leaders; they are not harsh and they are not cruel; they are honorable and trustworthy.

Study and develop leadership characteristics – Gen 3:16 — about husbands and wives, God said, “he shall rule over thee.” In 1 Cor 11:3, “the head of the woman is the man.” How can you expect a woman to follow you if you cannot rule. A preacher said, “a man will either rule his house or he'll wreck it.” So, you have to learn how to lead. And the first step to leading is following your proper authority, Jesus Christ. His authority is expressed in the words of God. You will never be over the person who is under you until you get under the person who is over you.

Prepare financially – 2 Thes 3:7-10, Prov 24:27 – you have to be able to pay the bills without straining your marriage. It's too easy to crave the companionship of a bride so much that you neglect to be responsible about the future of your family. Learn to work, learn to budget, and learn to live within your means.

Study spiritual qualities in virtuous women – Prov 31:10-31; Tit 2:3-5 – a man once told me what his mother told him about marrying the right woman. She said, “Don't you marry no woman what you loves ... you marry a woman who gonna prove she love you.” Now you may fault her grammar but you can't fault her wisdom. That is sound wisdom. She explained that a man is prone to fall in love with the first woman he sees who'll “look back at him.” Forget about her physical qualities for a minute and check out her character and her spiritual qualities to see if they match the qualities of a virtuous

woman. Remember that “beauty is vain... a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised.” I’ll guarantee you this, if she’s virtuous she won’t let you start a physical relationship with her until you two are married. When Jenna Cammilleri Simpson was thirteen, some teens asked her if she was still a virgin. When she replied, “Yes,” they asked her if she felt like she was missing out on something. She said, “I can have what you have in one night; but you will never have what I have.”

Honor the women who are in your life – 1 Pet 3:7 – a man is to give honor unto his wife. So, learn the proper honor and respect for the women who are in your life. Honor your mother. Treat your sisters with honor. Treat your aunts and grandmothers and personal friends with honor and respect. That way when you marry, you will know how to honor your wife. Many men treat their wives with less honor than they do their dogs.

Pray for the right woman – Prov 18:22; 19:14 – “a prudent wife is from the Lord.” God can direct you to the woman he wants you to have. You would be wise to start praying now for the discernment to know who she is when she shows up. A friend of mine prayed for years for a wife and when visiting a church he identified her. Shortly thereafter they married. And they have been married now for over 40 years. They have wonderful children and grandchildren faithfully serving the Lord.

Conclusion: Men need to be prepared for marriage and you can’t be without preparing for marriage. Follow these words of counsel and scripture and may the Lord bless you when you find a good wife [Prov 18:22].

Women Preparing for Marriage, Part 1

Most women preparing for marriage concern themselves with finding a man, making wedding plans, coming up with the right invitations, registering for their gifts, finding the right photographer and florist, and so forth. They neglect to prepare themselves. When you are preparing for marriage, you should be much more concerned with preparing yourself than with preparing your wedding. Women spend a year preparing for their wedding, which lasts a day. They make no plans to prepare for their marriage, and it's supposed to last a lifetime. When preparing for marriage, you should:

Develop virtuous qualities – Prov 31:10-29; 1 Pet 1:5 – the virtuous qualities of the virtuous woman in Prov 31 are essential to a good marriage. She is trustworthy [Prov 31:11], she is not spoiled [Prov 31:11], she is good [Prov 31:12], she works willingly with her hands [Prov 31:13], she takes great care of her home and her family [Prov 31:15-22], she is wise [Prov 31:26], she is kind [Prov 31:26], and she is not idle [Prov 31:27]. A virtuous woman like this excels them all [Prov 31:29].

Fear the Lord – Prov 31:30 – the fear of the Lord is the highest quality of all among her virtuous qualities. The fear of the Lord is essential not only for marriage but for working out your own salvation [Phil 2:12-13]. This is a fear that draws you closer to the Lord and further away from sin.

Serve the Lord – 1 Cor 7:34 – you should learn to serve the Lord at an early age. You may find that you don't want to marry because you care for the things of the Lord. Kristine is a registered nurse who is a medical missionary in Africa. God has used her labors to open the door of the gospel to villages that the missionaries, with whom she works, could not get in. Rachel was born in Africa as the child of missionaries. She moved to Haiti and God used her to care for children who would have otherwise been killed because they were twins. Many children and their mothers came to Christ through her labors. Neither of these women ever married.

Develop a meek and quiet spirit – 1 Pet 3:4 – this meek and quiet spirit is of great price because it is unnatural and rare. It includes a chaste conversation in 1 Pet 3:2. Realize that you will never brow beat your husband into obedience by contentious murmuring and complaining. You must learn to trust God [1 Pet 3:5].

Mortify your members on earth – Col 3:5 – much of the trouble among young people today is connected with their use and abuse of the internet and cell phones. You are seeing and learning things that are not good. Covetousness, inordinate affection, and envy are among the sins that result from your time on social media. In Eph 5:3-7, Paul said, "Let it not be once named among you... be not ye therefore partakers with them." The stuff to which you are exposed and the things that people display and post are not suitable for your eyes, your mind, or your heart. They defile your spirit and adversely affect your life.

Conclusion: when you are preparing for marriage you must start by preparing yourself. This is the first part of a two part series on this subject.

Women preparing for marriage, Part 2

Women preparing for marriage must be more concerned with preparing themselves than they are with finding the right husband or planning the best wedding. This lesson today is the second of a two part series in which we discuss the most important aspects of women preparing for marriage. You are not ready for marriage just because you are old enough to marry and you have a man that says he wants to marry you. It takes years of work for you to become a suitable bride. Just as it takes men preparing for marriage years to become suitable husbands. Many of us made our wives endure a few years of struggle and heartache as we developed into what we should have been by the time we married. By the same token you should want to be what you ought to be before you marry. When preparing for marriage, you should:

Honor your parents – Eph 6:1-3 – in marriage, you must obey and reverence your husband. If you don't obey and honor your parents, you won't obey and reverence your husband. Home is a good place and honoring your parents is a good way to learn submission. In marriage you are to be submissive to your husband [Eph 5:22-23]. Of course, he is to love you as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it [Eph 5:25]. When he loves you that much, it is certainly easier to be in subjection to him.

Learn from older women – Titus 2:4-5 – older women who have been married for years have already seen what you are going to see when you get married. They have much more experience than you do. They will teach you to be sober, to love your husband, to love your children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, and obedient to your husband. In this way the word of God is not blasphemed.

Learn the good qualities of good men – Acts 6:3 – you want to make sure when you marry that you marry a godly man. It is not too much to ask the Lord to give you a man whose qualities match those of deacons [1 Tim 3:8-13]. Someone like Timothy would be a good man [1 Tim 4:12]. Before a young lady is a teenager she should write down the characteristics of the man she wants to marry. Don't settle for less.

Learn to care for children – Titus 2:4 – you need to learn to love and care for children. Babysitting, caring for your younger siblings, working the nursery at church, and so forth are all good ways to learn to care for children.

Learn to care for your home – Prov 31:10-29 – know as much as you can about keeping your home. Learn how to cook, clean house, shop, and maintain your home. "Every wise woman buildeth her house," Prov 14:1.

Adorn yourself modestly – 1 Pet 3:3; 1 Tim 2:9-10 – don't dress to attract the attention of the opposite sex. Rather, dress to please God. You cannot keep up with the current trends, styles, and fashions and still dress modestly. Much of what is designed for young women today is designed to show off the flesh.

Abstain from fornication – 1 Thes 4:3-5 – wait till you are married. Heb 13:4 says that the marriage bed is undefiled. From 1 Cor 6:19-20 you learn that your body is a

member of Christ and it is the temple of the Holy Ghost. Therefore, abstain from fornication; flee fornication, 1 Cor 6:18..

Conclusion: if you will follow these simple principles in preparing for marriage, you will be amazed at how much happier you will be than your peers in the world who are not properly prepared for marriage. God will bless your preparations. And you and your husband will find greater delight in each other, as a result.

Pastor Rick Sowell's 5 F's For Finding a Spouse

Pastor Rick Sowell preached on the 5 F's, even though two of his points start with "Ph." These have to do with finding the right mate from Proverbs 18:22 and Matthew 19:5. Today, too many people marry "looks." And if the marriage doesn't work out, then they divorce to "fix it."

The question is, "How do I know whom to marry?" You know by these five things:

Faith – Christians should marry Christians of like faith. It's not enough that they testify to being saved. They should be a Bible believer. They should have a good testimony. They should have a solid relationship with Jesus Christ.

Family – Family background creates tendencies. How you deal with things will often be how you've seen your family deal with things. Is this person prone to anger? Do they have a good sense of humor? Are they adaptable? Are they compatible? How do they demonstrate affection?

Finances – American kids these days are train-wrecks with finances. Two people interested in marriage should exchange financial statements and medical records. You ought to know what you're getting into. How do they handle money? Do they save? Do they spend it all? Do they tithe? Are they responsible?

Philosophy – What is their philosophy of life? Do they love the Lord so much that they make every church service? Or do they make excuses to justify missing services? Are they dependable? Do they live it up? Are they happy at home? Do they witness? What are their future plans?

Physical – You should marry somebody that you find desirable. It's just that this should be fifth on your list, not first. Marry a lifelong mate.

Conclusion: you should know the answer to all of these before you say, "I do." Consider these before you are already emotionally committed to the relationship. Several Christian young ladies have testified how following these 5 F's saved them from getting into a bad marriage and directed them, instead, to a wonderful marriage.

Preparing for Courting

When you start courting, keep your relationship spiritual, not physical. Before you are married, there is no commitment, there are no vows to each other before God. You can break up. This is why you must not take advantage of each other physically.

Don't get physical - you need to keep your hands off of each other before you're married. 1 Cor 7:1 says, "It is good for a man not to touch a woman." The touch stimulates lust. In 2 Tim 2:22 Paul told Timothy to "Flee also youthful lusts." In 1 Cor 6:18 Paul wrote, "Flee fornication." It is too easy to go too far or to go all the way when you start kissing and hugging while you are courting. According to Deut 22:20-21, a girl is a "whore" who is not a virgin when she marries.

Don't go "out" alone - don't put yourselves in a position where you could be easily tempted to do something wrong. Spending time with each other with your parents and with close friends and in public places provides you with a safeguard of protection.

Get to know each other - spending time together should be enjoyable, of course. But it should also be a time for getting to know each other. For this reason, premarital instruction is so valuable. In premarital instruction you are prompted to discuss your strengths and weaknesses, your expectations, your philosophy of life, your finances, and so forth.

Responsibilities in Marriage

Our text for this lesson is Eph 5:22-33. The subject is marriage.

The pattern for marriage is the relationship between Jesus Christ and the church. In Eph 5:30, we are members of Christ's body, of his flesh and his bones. This is the result of being baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ, 1 Cor 12:13.

Similarly, Eve was a member of Adam's body, of his flesh and bones, Gen 2:21-23. Thus, in Eph 5:31 we see the reference to Gen 2:24, where a man and his wife become one flesh when they marry. Paul said this was a mystery concerning Christ and the church, Eph 5:32. The mystery is that we are currently in Christ's body and we will come forth out of his body to be his bride in the same way that Eve came out of Adam's body to be his bride. That's why Jesus is called the last Adam in 1 Cor 15:45.

So, in marriage, the wife is like the church and the husband is like Jesus Christ. Jesus is the head of the body, Eph 1:22-23. Therefore, as the church is subject unto him, so, the wife is subject to her husband. She is to be submissive. God set her husband up to rule, Gen 3:16.

To fulfill their respective needs in marriage, God assigned responsibilities to husbands and wives. The husband's need is to rule. So God assigned his wife the responsibility to submit to him to meet his need, Eph 5:22-24. The wife's need is to be loved. So God assigned her husband the responsibility to love her to meet her need, Eph 5:25-29.

A wife is to be subject unto her own husband, Eph 5:22. She has one head, and that's her husband, Eph 5:23; 1 Cor 11:3. God leads her through her husband and no one else. Though the context of 1 Cor 14 is tongues, the principle of spiritual leadership is well established in 1 Cor 14:34-35.

A wife is to be subject to her husband as unto the Lord, Eph 5:22. If she is not submitted to the Lord, she is not going to be submitted to her husband. She must have a good relationship with the Lord and must trust God, 1 Pet 3:5. She is trusting God to lead her through her husband. This takes a lot of faith.

A wife is to be subject to her husband in every thing, Eph 5:24. She is in subjection to her own husband, even when he's not right with the Lord, 1 Pet 3:1-6. Because of her trust in God and her subjection to him, God uses the hidden man of her heart to convince her husband to get back in line with the word of God. This takes time.

A wife is to be subject to her husband for her benefit, Eph 5:23. As Christ is the savior of the church, Eph 5:23, even so, the husband "saves" his wife from spiritual deception, 1 Tim 2:11-15. Even when he is disobedient to the word, she wins him with her chaste conversation and her meek and quiet spirit. *Submission is for her benefit.* She accomplishes with her submission something that a disobedient wife will never accomplish. A wife who is not in subjection to her husband will never "win" her husband. Instead, she will just take over his responsibility to rule. Then she is out from under her head and she is not safe.

A husband must love his wife as Christ also loved the church, Eph 5:25. Jesus Christ gave himself for the church. And a husband must give himself for his wife. A husband loves his wife not for how much he can get out of their relationship but for how much he can give her in their relationship.

A husband must expend effort for his wife's benefit, Eph 5:26, 29. Jesus sanctifies and cleanses the church with the washing of water by the word. This is why the Bible is so important in our lives. It cleans and sanctifies us, Jn 17:17. Jesus expends effort for the church's benefit, to improve her. Likewise, in Eph 5:29, a man expends effort for his body's benefit by nourishing it and cherishing it; he doesn't hate it. He feeds and cares for his body. Since he is one flesh with his wife, thus she is his body, then he expends effort to nourish and cherish her in their relationship for her benefit.

A husband receives a benefit for his effort, Eph 5:27, 28. Because Jesus Christ gave himself for the church and because he sanctifies and cleanses us, he presents us to himself a glorious church, without spot and blemish. He receives the benefit for his effort on our behalf. Likewise, the better a man takes care of his body, the better his body is going to be. His care for his body is for his benefit.

The idea in marriage is that the better a husband takes care of his relationship with his wife, the better their marriage is going to be. The more a husband loves his wife, the better wife she is going to be. His care and love for her is for their mutual benefit. A man that loves his wife loves himself. That is, he receives the benefit for his effort.

Conclusion: In marriage then, a husband must love his wife even as he loves himself. And his wife must reverence her husband, Eph 5:33. They have a mutual respect for each other. He honors her, 1 Pet 3:7, and she reverences him.

Personal Expectations in Marriage

One of the principal reasons couples experience trouble in their marriage is that they have unmet expectations. Therefore, early on in your relationship with each other it is a good plan to sit down and discuss with each other your expectations for yourself and for your spouse. In one case, when I was teaching premarital instruction to a young couple, they decided to discontinue their relationship after we did this lesson on their expectations. The girl said, "I know now that he's not the man for me." It's better to make this decision before you're married rather than after.

In this lesson, you will each take a week or two, individually, to prepare a thorough, yet concise, list of expectations. Divide a page into two columns. In the first column, write your expectations for yourself. In the second column, write down your expectations for your future spouse. Don't discuss these with each other. Prayerfully and honestly list each point. You must absolutely cover the most important expectations you have. The list is going to form the basis for accountability you have to each other to make sure these expectations are being met.

When the lists are completed, you will meet together with pastor to discuss your lists. The man will first read his list of expectations for himself and discuss these so that each person understands what the expectations are and what they mean. Then the woman will read and discuss her list of expectations for herself. After these have been discussed, then the man will read and discuss his list of expectations for his wife. Then the woman will read and discuss her list of expectations for her husband.

During the discussion, it is important that the couple listens very carefully to what each person is saying. These expectations cannot be ignored. Each person will work on his or her expectations to ensure that they are doing what they expect of themselves. And they will be careful to keep in mind what is expected of them and strive to do those things if they agree that these expectations are right and reasonable.

One woman had prepared these lists before she was ever involved in a relationship with a man. At some point, a fellow expressed an interest in going out with her. When she came to ask me about whether she should accept his invitation, I counseled her to check her list of expectations. She turned down his invitation because he didn't even meet her first expectation. She saved herself a lot of heartache because she stopped this potential relationship before her heart was ever involved. That's wisdom.

In another relationship, when the couple finished discussing their expectations, the woman said, "There's no way I can be married to him. I doubt his spiritual leadership and I can't submit to him." I'm not sure which one was the weaker, but ending this relationship was certainly the right thing to do.

Personal Strengths and Weaknesses

Every person has strengths and weaknesses. But often, people don't know what their strengths and weaknesses are. Nor do they understand that sometimes, as Pastor DiMichele says, "you're greatest strength can become your greatest weakness."

Men and women must identify, understand, and evaluate their individual strengths and weakness. This can be hard to do, but it is essential to the future success of your relationship. What you'll begin to understand, as your relationship matures, is that your strengths and weaknesses complement each other. The strength of one spouse mitigates the weakness in the other spouse, which provides for balance in your relationship.

As in the previous lesson, divide a page into two columns. In the first column, write down your strengths and in the second column write down you weaknesses. Be very specific and honest. Don't discuss these with each other until you meet together with pastor. At that time, you can take turns reading and discussing, first, your strengths, and then your weaknesses. This should be a very frank discussion, where each person has the liberty to comment freely about their own or the other person's strengths and weaknesses. Often the other person has a clearer view of your strengths and weaknesses than you do. No excuses or justifications need be offered in this lesson.

Married couples often fight and argue with each other because they become critical of the weaknesses that they see in their spouse, and that they don't see in themselves. You must realize that these weaknesses that you identify and see in each other aren't going away. You cannot change your spouse's weakness by griping about it or trying to fix it. Unless the person who has the weakness can and will change it, it isn't going away. However, if their area of weakness happens to be your area of strength, then you have a balance in your relationship that is actually healthy. Look for ways these differences complement each other, rather than for ways to change them in the other person. You'll see some of these complementary differences in the lesson on Balance in Your Marriage.

Communication in Marriage

In relationships, like marriages, effective communication is vital to understanding and happiness. *To be effective in communication you must:*

Listen – Jas 1:19 you are to be swift to hear, and slow to speak. You can't hear if you are preparing your answer rather than listening. Prov 18:13 says, "He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him." If you respond before you understand what the other person is saying, you will be ashamed and look foolish. Give the person with whom you are talking your undivided attention. Ask questions if you aren't sure. And don't get riled up over something that your spouse didn't say, but you "thought" he/she said. Listen to what your spouse is saying; don't be thinking about how you're going to respond. You'll each end up in a one-sided conversation... what they're saying and what you're thinking about won't be the same thing.

Consider these reasons why you may not be hearing what your spouse is saying:

1. Misperception - you're receiving what your spouse is saying the wrong way.
2. Misunderstanding - you're not understanding what your spouse is saying.
3. Inattention - you're distracted and not paying attention to your spouse.
4. Irrelevance - what your spouse is saying is not important to you.
5. Emotion - you're listening to your feelings and not to the facts.
6. Anger - you're angry and your anger is affecting your spouse's ability to speak.

When you're not communicating for one of these reasons, stop and figure out where you've gotten off track. Get back on track. Get on the same page.

If what you're talking about is a big deal to you but not to your spouse, your spouse should be honest and tell you! If your spouse still doesn't want to listen, but is willing to be there so you can "get it off your chest," at least you won't be hurt because they don't seem to "care." It's not a big deal to them. Often you just need an audience.

Minimize your words – Prov 17:27-28 – "he that hath knowledge spareth his words... even a fool when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise." Get to the point; say what you mean. Make sure your spouse gets what you're saying. Don't assume anything. If your spouse wants to know more, he or she can ask for details. You can avoid a protracted argument by keeping your answers short. The short answer is the best answer in everything you say, particularly the hard stuff. It is harder to argue with the answer than it is to argue with the reason for the answer. Listen carefully when you are asked a question and simply answer the question.

Speak the truth – Eph 4:25 – "wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor; for we are members one of another." You must always tell the truth, every time. Be honest about EVERYTHING. Relationships are built on trust. Be 100% honest with yourself and with your spouse. Don't lie; don't exaggerate; don't embellish your stories.

Pick the best time - Est 5:6-8 - Esther waited a day to tell the king her petition. That extra day was crucial to the success of her petition. The timing on some conversations is essential to good communication. There are better times than others to talk about certain things.

Honor your wife – 1 Pet 3:7 and reverence you husband – Eph 5:33. Hold each other in high esteem and respect. Don't berate or upbraid each other. The more respect you show for each other the more your children will be inclined to show the same respect.

Rule your spirit – Prov 25:28 – “he that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls.” Be honest when your emotions are involved in the conversation. They affect your communication. You're feeling something and you should express what you're feeling. Don't let things get to you, where emotion overrides reason. If that begins to happen stop and admit that you are becoming emotional or that you are too emotional to continue at that moment. Alert your spouse that you are beginning to react badly to the topic. Wait until you calm down and you're able to talk about it, before continuing the conversation. And then deal with the emotions (whether you are fearful, sad, mad, etc.). Remember to H.A.L.T. Never have serious discussions when you are Hungry, Angry, Lonely or Tired. When you feel pain or something such as anger, STOP.

You have to be in control of your spirit. Don't let your emotions rule you; learn to rule your emotions. Don't be dysfunctional. If you find it hard to rule your spirit:

1. Rebuild your city - work on yourself; you're broken down.
2. Rebuild your walls - protect yourself from letting others get to you. Build some walls and close your gate. Get your city in order, first, and then you can let others in.

Illustration: when you find that you're emotional over something that happened, empty your emotional basket. Get the stuff that's bothering you out of your basket. Don't carry it into the next day, or the next week, or however long you're used to carrying things.

Control your anger – Prov 14:17 he that is soon angry dealeth foolishly (Ecc 7:9). When you respond with anger you have shifted from a conversation to aggression. Your spouse will change his/her way of communicating with you. He could shut down, she might become timid, he might become political, she might become passive and then aggressive, or you could escalate the conversation into a rock fight. Furthermore, don't be manipulated by a spouse's anger. When you give in to anger once, you will be forced to give into anger again and again.

Proverbs 19:11 says, “the discretion of a man deferreth his anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression. You don't have to get angry over every little thing that can anger you. Let stuff go. Let it pass.

Speed limit Illustration - When you drive the speed limit, you don't get nearly as aggravated with other drivers as you do when you are driving aggressively. Likewise, when you aren't pushing to get your way in a conversation, your spouse is much easier to get along with. Settle down. Like one preacher says, “Breathe through your nose.” It's hard to hyperventilate when you breathe through your nose.

Watch your body language – 1 Peter 3:1-2 “Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands, that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; while they behold your chase conversation coupled with fear.” A woman can say a lot by her behavior. In Prov 20:8, “A king that sitteth in the throne of judgment scattereth away all evil with his eyes.” A man can say a lot by just looking at you a certain way. You can say a lot without saying anything.

Remember:

- Conversation is not only what you say, but it’s also your actions and reactions.
- Body language is a powerful communicator.
- If your body language reveals your true reaction, own it. Don’t fake it or lie.

Conclusion: if you will practice these seven points of communication in your marriage, you will see notable improvements in the effectiveness of your communication.

Budgeting and Finances

One of the most common reasons couples get divorced is financial trouble. They often go into the marriage without a good handle on budgeting and finances. They start their marriage in financial trouble and they don't know how to deal with it. Before long, the financial pressures lead to myriad other problems and they divorce. You can avoid this problem by learning to budget and handle your finances before you marry. Several young couples, who have gone through premarital instruction, learned this valuable lesson about their finances and waited until they got their finances in better shape before getting married. They were very wise and have avoided undue pressure in their marriage.

Here are some helpful guidelines for getting your finances in order and keeping them in order.

Do a budget. The best way to do this is to estimate what you think it costs you to pay your bills, groceries, gas, sundries, and so forth. Estimate everything. Then for two months, write down everything you spend each day, including a single candy bar or a coffee, or whatever. Then compare the actual expenses with what you estimated and you will be surprised. Your spending habits are "nickel-and-diming" you to death. You probably spend \$200.00 to \$500.00 more each month than you think you do.

Then from your actual expenses, come up with a real budget. Cut out all the fat and discipline yourself not to cheat. Quit buying small, prepackaged food, for instance. Buy in quantity. It takes more work to prepare a meal than to go to a restaurant, but you can't afford to eat out all the time. So, change your habits. Check yourself at the end of each month to be sure you are staying within the budget.

Make sure to budget each paycheck and the expenses associated with that check. This keeps you from spending your paycheck before your bills are paid. Most people have bigger bills to pay out of one check than they do out of the other. So, they usually end up short on the one that has the biggest bills coming out of it. Budget for:

Tithes/Offerings. Take at least 10% of your income and give it to the Lord through your local church. You'll never make it financially by hoarding all the money for yourself (Prov 11:24-25, 2 Cor 9:6-7). People don't start working out of their financial troubles until they give God his money. 10% is what Abraham gave God before the law (Gen 14), and you should do at least that much. The first opportunity you have, give to the Lord, through your local church, for your tithe and missions, which is above the tithe.

Bills. Put everything that you are going to spend on bills and necessities out of each paycheck in your budget. You should pay everything that's coming due before the next paycheck. Don't wait for the "cutoff" notice. That's past due. It helps to make a ledger that shows when the money is due and how much is due. Mark it paid as you pay it. That way, you won't lose track of your money. You will undoubtedly need some of the money from the paycheck where the bills are low to help cover your bills from the other paycheck where the bills are high. So, don't spend the extra money for anything other

than the bills and necessities that are to be paid out of it. Otherwise, you are going to come up short.

Expected Large Expenses. Throughout the year, you may have large expenses to pay. These could be expected purchases or expenses like annual or semiannual insurance premiums. Budget for these and set aside the money each month so that you can afford the purchases when you make them or the expenses when they come due.

Savings. Pastor Randy Knipple taught the College and Career class a good guideline for budgeting called the 10-20-70 rule. Tithe 10%, Save 20%, and Spend 70%. Of course, you should use some of what you can save to give to missions.

Unexpected Expenses. A wise man or woman realizes that saved money must be used, at times, for unexpected repairs and emergencies. Therefore, they won't spend all their money on impulsive buying. They save it.

Stay out of debt. Rom 13:8, "Owe no man any thing." Debt is a killer. Most people can't handle it responsibly. Money is easy to borrow and hard to pay back, particularly credit cards. If you must borrow to stay afloat, you are in bad trouble already. Pay down your student loans, if you have any. Pay off your credit card(s) and don't use them unless you can pay off the balance each month. Don't buy an expensive vehicle just because you qualify for a large loan from the finance company. Rent when you first marry until you save for a large down payment on your home.

Live within your means. 1 Tim 6:6, "And having food and raiment let us be therewith content." An unbelievable amount of money is spent at restaurants and convenience stores. One coke and a bag of chips each day will cost you over \$75.00 in one month. One taco and a cup of coffee on the way to work each day will cost you nearly \$100.00 each month. Get rid of those habits and make some better choices. Your expenses will be much lower and your nourishment will be much better. Stay within your budget every month. Don't blow it gradually, with these small daily expenses, or all at once, with impulsive purchases.

Cut out the fat. Prov 21:17, "He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man." You only bring in so much money each month and you must pay all your bills and live off the rest. In addition, you must have a little set aside for car repairs, unforeseen problems and taxes. If you spend some of that hard-earned money that was for bills and food on something that you don't need, you are going to come up short at the end of the month. Just look at all the excess that you spend on pleasure: movies, cable TV, fancy cars, sporting goods, club fees, knick-knacks, you name it. You wouldn't need all that junk if you weren't so depressed about your finances. That stuff doesn't make you happy, anyway.

Quit talking and fix the problem. Prov 14:23, "In all labour there is profit, but the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury." There is a system that will help you get a handle on your money problems and fix them, if you have the character and discipline to do it. Go to work on getting your finances under control.

Get some credit counseling. Prov 15:22, “Without counsel purposes are disappointed.” You might already be in debt over your head. If so, there are several reputable consumer credit counselors that can help you consolidate your debt and lower your payments. That could help you immensely. The idea behind debt consolidation is to get the debt paid off, not to get your credit score up so you can borrow more money.

Turn to God for help. Matt 6:30-34, “Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” It is the Lord that gives you power to get wealth. Most people in financial trouble lay out of church on Sunday and Wednesday night because they are working, depressed, or tired. You court financial disaster when you do that. Stay in your Bible, on your knees, and in your pew.

A Spiritually Good Marriage

We have prepared a three-lesson series on marriage. The first lesson is on a spiritually good marriage. A spiritually good marriage is established on a strong spiritual foundation. A spiritually good marriage requires these five things:

Salvation – 1 Cor 7:39, “she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord.” To have a spiritually good marriage, it is very important that both the husband and the wife are “in the Lord.” There’s trouble enough in marriage without complicating it by having one spouse saved and the other spouse unsaved. You are better off not marrying. To avoid the possibility that you might marry an unsaved person, don’t date people who are not saved. If you are already married and your spouse is not saved, then follow 1 Cor 7:13-16. The saved spouse should be very faithful in attending to the things of the Lord. Often, this is not the case. Rather, the saved spouse shirks his or her responsibilities to the Lord to keep “peace” in the marriage. That’s not the way to have a spiritually strong marriage.

Fellowship with Jesus Christ – 1 Jn 1:3, “and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.” It is one thing to be saved and another thing to be in fellowship with the Lord. There are saved couples who struggle more than they should in their marriage because Jesus Christ is not at the center of their relationship. Jesus should be at the center and head of your marriage. Then, as in the case of a pyramid, where Jesus is at the head and each spouse is in one of the corners, the closer that each spouse is to the Lord, the closer they will be to each other. Have devotions together. Spend time together in fellowship with the Lord.

Fear of the Lord – Eph 5:21, “submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.” A spiritually good marriage will survive intense pressure when the spouses fear God and do not divorce. God fearing couples get through trouble when they fear the Lord. The difficulties that should destroy them, in fact, make them stronger and the fear of the Lord is what keeps them together through their difficulties. Every marriage endures stresses and strains. They are the ingredients that strengthen your commitment to each other, if you can survive them. When you fear God, you obey him and you look to him rather than men to fix your problems. And he can fix them better than anyone else in the world.

Contentment – 1 Tim 6:6, “but godliness with contentment is great gain.” It is vital to your marriage that you learn to be content in your relationship with Jesus Christ. Marriages often collapse because one spouse or the other is not content. It is not the duty of your spouse to make you happy or content. Contentment is something that comes from your relationship to Jesus. The strongest marriages are the ones where each spouse is godly and content. That combination yields the greatest gain individually and mutually in the marriage.

Church Attendance – Heb 10:25, “not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more as you see the day approaching.” You must regularly and faithfully be under the preaching and teaching of God’s words. A spiritually good marriage is strengthened in a good

church. Be sure you are active in a Bible teaching, Bible preaching, Bible believing church. Anything short of that is merely a religious social club and won't do you much good.

Conclusion: these are some simple spiritual ingredients that yield a spiritually good marriage. In the other lessons in this series we will deal with some practical considerations and with some individual responsibilities of husbands and wives.

A Practically Good Marriage

This is the second lesson in our series on a good marriage. This message is on a practically good marriage. That is, there are practical things that you can do in your marriage to make it good and keep it good. A practically good marriage requires:

Benevolence – 1 Cor 7:3, “let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband.” To render due benevolence is to do good for your spouse and to promote his or her welfare. It is to regard with affection. So, spend time together. Offer mutual support. Do nice things for each other. Be affectionate. Speak fondly of each other and to each other, publicly and privately. Be courteous. Be thankful for each other. Rejoice together. Console each other.

Natural Affection – 1 Cor 7:4-5, “that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency.” As John R. Rice said, “Sex relations between husband and wife are normal, beautiful, and good, and have not only the permission, but the blessing of God.” Heb 13:4 says, “Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled.” Sex should be enjoyed for your mutual pleasure. A good marriage benefits from a good bedroom. Don’t defile it by bringing perversion and the world into it. Your natural affection is inhibited when you fornicate before marriage, so don’t do that. Save yourself for your spouse and wait until you are married to begin to understand and enjoy sex.

Purity – Matt 5:28, “whosoever looketh upon a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.” So, husband, keep your eyes from other women. Keep yourself from pornography and fornication. Heb 13:4 says, “but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.” 1 Tim 2:9, says, “in like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel.” Wife, don’t dress to attract the attention of other men. Be very modest. Keep yourselves pure. Flee youthful lusts. Be faithful to each other in thought, word and action.

Kindness and Forgiveness – Eph 4:32, “and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.” You and your spouse are not perfect. So, when you mess up be quick to ask for forgiveness and be quick to forgive when your spouse messes up. Remember that what often seems like the other person’s fault is often your fault. It’s hard to see this when you are mad. So, you must be honest about these things. And be kind to each other. There’s no need to raise your voice. Be tenderhearted.

Contentment – 1 Tim 6:7-10 – live within your means. More marriages collapse over financial difficulties than probably any other single cause. So, be content with such things as ye have. Having food and raiment therewith be content. They are enough. Remember, you have each other and that’s what matters. Money can’t buy happiness.

Conclusion: these are practical means to a good marriage. Use them and live by them.

A Mutually Good Marriage

A mutually good marriage places duties and responsibilities on husbands and wives. We must each do our part. And you should do your part regardless whether your spouse does his or hers. We'll address the husbands first. Husbands provide for their wives:

Love – Eph 5:25, “husbands love your wives even as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it.” The husband establishes the quality of the marriage by loving his wife the way that Christ loves the church. We love him because he first loved us. So, your wife will love you more as you love her more. According to Tit 2:4, women have to be taught to love their husbands. A good way to do this is to love her first. If you want a mutually good marriage, be sure to love your wife.

Praise – Prov 31:28-20, “her husband also, and he praiseth her.” Hopefully your wife will be as virtuous as the woman described in Prov 31. And as such, she deserves your continual praise. You can praise her for her cleaning, decorating, cooking, child-rearing, loving, caring, and so forth. If you want a mutually good marriage, be sure to praise your wife.

Honor – Prov 11:16, “a gracious woman retaineth honor.” Your wife is a gift from the Lord according to Prov 19:14. Prov 18:22 says, “whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favor of the Lord.” So, give her the honor due her. 1 Pet 3:7 requires, “giving honour unto the wife.” If you want a mutually good marriage, be sure to honor your wife.

Wives provide for their husbands:

Submission – 1 Cor 11:3, “but I would have you know that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God.” Husbands must be fully submitted to Jesus Christ and the will of God. But even when they are not, wives must be in subjection to them [1 Pet 3:1]. Eph 5:22 says, “wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.” So, the wife must be submitted to her husband. This is not popular in our society. Wife, if you cannot submit, then you are not ready to be a wife. As a friend said, “A man must rule his house or he will wreck it.” Their mutual responsibilities fulfill the need of the other. He fulfills her need to be loved by loving her and she fulfills his need to rule by submitting to him. If you want a mutually good marriage, be sure to submit to your husband.

Obedience – In Titus 2:5, aged women teach the younger women to be “obedient to their own husbands.” Marriage vows commonly leave out the question, “will you obey him?” and commonly leave out the phrase “to cherish and to obey.” Consequently, we now have a greater than 50% divorce rate in the USA. If you don't want to obey your husband, then don't plan on being married “till death do us part.” If you want a mutually good marriage, be sure to obey your husband.

Reverence – Eph 5:33, “the wife see that she reverence her husband.” To reverence is to deeply respect. He is to honor you and you are to deeply respect him. It is not often that we see women who reverence their husbands these days. So, you aren’t going to have much of a pattern to follow if you only look for this pattern in the world. If you want a mutually good marriage, be sure to reverence your husband.

Meekness and quietness – 1 Pet 3:4 talks about, “the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.” Prov 27:15 says, “a continual dropping in a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike.” Women are becoming more and more vocal as they are in positions of authority, politics, business, and media. Wife, you should learn how to control your mouth. You may not be strong enough to physically control your husband, but you can put him down so hard with your mouth that one would think he had been in a prize fight with a world champion boxer. If you want a mutually good marriage, be sure to address your husband with a meek and quiet spirit.

Conclusion: If spouses will do these few things in their marriage, they will enjoy a mutually good marriage.

Biblical Principles for a Happy Marriage

Some Biblical principles for a happy marriage are conversion, commitment, compassion, communication and cooperation. We will examine these today in a little detail in hopes that they will prepare you for a happy marriage or that they will restore you to a happy marriage. A happy marriage is founded on:

Conversion – 1 Cor 11:11; 2 Cor 6:14 – you should both be saved. And being saved is not the only requirement. Both ought to be growing in spiritual maturity. The proper spiritual order in the home is found in 1 Cor 11:3. If the man is not submitted to the authority of Jesus Christ in his life, his wife is going to be in subjection to a man who is disobedient to the word of God [1 Pet 3:1-7]. Nine times out of ten, she won't submit to a disobedient husband and the marriage will get off track spiritually right from the beginning.

You should seek the direction of the Lord in choosing your spouse. While the choice of spouse is clearly yours [Num 36:6], the Lord will definitely direct in the choice if you seek him [Prov 18:22, Prov 19:14]. Furthermore, your family and acquaintances can provide desirable counsel and confirmation in your choice [Ruth 2:20; 3:10-11; 4:11-12]. Remember that the person you are marrying has family and friends and so do you. You certainly want their support and blessing.

Commitment – Matt 19:6 – you are joined together by God. Therefore, it takes a strong commitment on the part of each spouse to stay together. This isn't a relationship patterned after the world, where you divorce when you are no longer happy. You are committed to work through all of the difficulties of two different people under the same roof. When you are committed, dissolving the marriage is an option that is taken off the table. It's much easier to say "I will" at the altar than it is to say "I will" in the midst of a marital storm.

Compassion – Eph 5:33 – people "fall in love" and decide that they should marry. That's how the world does it but that is not how you ought to decide whom to marry. Love is something that comes from God. So, love God first and foremost [Matt 22:37-38]. Then abound in your love for God [Phil 1:9]. His love will be shed abroad in your heart by the Holy Ghost [Rom 5:5]. And then that love will abound toward others, particularly toward your spouse [1 Thes 3:12]. Love, therefore, is not something you "fall in" but rather something in which you abound.

Communication – 1 Sam 25:39 – being able to communicate is vital to the success and happiness of your marriage. Husbands and wives don't spend that much time talking with each other. You need to communicate. Good communication requires listening, understanding, trust, honesty, courage, patience and a good sense of humor. You have to talk about things that are important to each of you and you have to keep things from building up between you. By the way, these matters are private, so don't discuss them with anyone other than your spouse.

Cooperation – Matt 19:5 – the twain become one flesh. So, we do what we do together. When one of us rejoices it is "our" joy. When one of us grieves it is "our"

sorrow. When one of us has a problem we work it out so that it doesn't become "our" problem. You get married to share your lives together. So, don't build walls of separation between you. Maintain safe boundaries, where you don't get manipulated by a spouse's anger, for instance, but build no walls. Build and strengthen your relationship together.

Conclusion: You could call these the 5 C's of a happy marriage. Don't leave these 5 things out of your marriage and don't get married if these 5 things aren't in your relationship. Wait till you see them present in your relationship or don't go forward with plans to marry.

Your Physical Relationship

The physical relationship between spouses in marriage is important. The Bible has some good things to say about this part of your marriage and does not treat this subject the way the world does. The world's view of sex is either idolatrous or perverted, stemming from man's simple "lust of the flesh," 1 Jn 2:16.

In the Bible, when a man and woman marry, they become "one flesh," Gen 2:24. This bond is created through their physical relationship. As you can see in 1 Cor 6:16, it is the joining of flesh with flesh that makes them "one flesh," even in fornication. Thus, the will of God is for men and women to abstain from fornication, 1 Thes 4:3-5. You should save yourself, physically, spiritually, and emotionally for marriage. Like Paul said in 1 Cor 7:1, "It is good for a man not to touch a woman." Hence, even after you have decided whom to marry, you are not to commit fornication. You are to save yourself until you are married.

Once you have married and have committed to each other by your vows that you will keep your spouse unto you as long as you both shall live, then you are permitted to begin your physical, marital, relationship. Whereas, fornication is against the will of God, "Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled," Heb 13:4. In marriage, the joining of your bodies together is "what God... hath joined together," Matt 19:6. Your relationship is sanctified by God.

It is very important that you treat this aspect of your marriage wisely. *Notice some things Paul advises:*

1 Cor 7:2 - a man is to have his own wife and a woman is to have her own husband. In other words, they are not to stray outside of their marriage. The husband is not to even look at a woman to lust after her, Matt 5:28; Job 31:1. And his wife should not dress for men to look at and commit adultery with her in their heart, Matt 5:28; 1 Tim 2:9-10. Their affections should be for each other, alone, Prov 5:15-21.

1 Cor 7:3-4 - the husband and wife surrender power over their bodies to each other. Thus, they should render due benevolence to each other. Benevolence is the disposition to do good, to promote their spouse's happiness. In 1 Cor 7:33-34, they are concerned with how to please each other. In the context of their physical relations, they should care about their mutual pleasure. They should be careful not to abuse their physical relations.

1 Cor 7:5 - husbands and wives are to maintain regular physical relations to keep from being tempted by the devil for their inability to restrain their passions. They should withhold physical relations only by mutual consent so that they may give themselves to fasting and prayer. They should communicate openly about their physical relations and be aware of changes that might affect them, like pregnancy (1 Tim 2:11-15) and the birth and rearing of children.

Unfortunately, today, it is not uncommon for one or both spouses to have already been involved physically with someone before they marry. In such cases, it is vital to their

future happiness that they don't bring their past into the marriage. If either spouse has had exposure to any kind of perversion, physically or pornographically, this prior experience will likely have a negative affect on their physical relationship with each other. Though the marriage bed is undefiled, husbands and wives cannot bring defiling things into their physical union. These defile their relationship. Like Paul said, "Unto the pure, all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled," Titus 1:15.

Knowing When You're Ready to Marry

You properly prepare for your marriage so it will last a lifetime. Therefore, you're not ready to get married just because you think you've found the right person to marry. A lot of young couples are infatuated with the idea of being in love. You're not living a Hallmark romance.

You're going to "feel" ready to get married before you "are" ready. There is no need to rush into your marriage. There shouldn't be an urgency to get under the same roof and into the same bed just to keep from messing up before you marry. That's not a good enough reason to marry. Have more control over your desires than that, 1 Thes 4:3-5.

Here are some things to consider when you are trying to determine the right time to marry.

The husband should be able to leave his family and cleave unto his wife, Eph 5:31. That is, he must be emotionally, spiritually, and financially ready to handle all of his responsibilities in marriage. This requires, at least, a minimum level of maturity. These days, we won't consider marrying a couple before they are 21 years old. Usually, you don't have enough maturity to handle marriage before that.

You should be faithful in your walk with the Lord and in your attendance and service in church. You should have your expenses under control and enough money in the bank to start your life together. You should have reasonable certainty of the stability of your employment.

Complete your education before you marry. Young people often get very seriously involved in a relationship and neglect to pursue or complete their education.

Establish some good friendships with young men and women and other young couples before you marry. Young couples often spend so much time with each other that they neglect lifelong friendships that can be established in their teens and early twenties. Keep your relationships balanced so that you have a good relationship with your future spouse and good relationships with your friends, Prov 18:24.

You should have the blessings of these four before you marry:

- The Lord - you should be certain of the Lord's will in the timing of your marriage. With the Lord, there is a time and a season for everything, Ecc 3:1.
- Your families - you should have the blessing of your families on the timing of your marriage. Often, but not always, parents can help you discern if you are moving too fast. Don't disregard their wise counsel.
- Your pastor - Pastoral counsel through premarital instruction is essential. We advise young couples to not even discuss the timing of their marriage or the wedding plans until they complete their premarital instruction. Wait to plan till you have completed your premarital instruction. The distractions of planning a wedding will override the application of the truths and lessons you will learn. Your pastor can often help you to discern when you are ready.

During premarital instruction you will be given an assignment in which you interview three men and women who have been married for at least twenty-five years. The answers to your questions will allow you to discern how they have kept their marriage together and what they learned in marriage that they would like to pass along to you. The woman will ask three women she chooses, and the man will ask three men he chooses. Before the interviews, think about the questions you want to ask and write them down. As you hear answers that are wise and instructive, keep notes so that you can discuss these with your future spouse and with your pastor when you meet together for your next lesson.

Practical Steps for Marriage

The main thing is to **just do your part**. In Matt 7:3-5, you cannot change your spouse and you cannot live his life or her life for him or her. So, just take care of your own stuff. Do what you know is right to do. Don't worry about your spouse's part. You do what God shows you to do.

Practical Steps for the Wife

Obey God in everything. A woman came to me and asked me to pray that her husband would start tithing. She was convicted that tithing was right to do. I prayed. But do you know what I found out later? They both worked; so, she had an income, too. Yet, she didn't tithe. She was asking me to pray for her husband to do right when she wouldn't do right. That's how people are. They say, "If you're not going to do right, then I'm not going to do right." That helps. She thinks, "I'm not going to do right, hoping that I can pressure you into doing right." I've never seen that work, though I've seen it tried several times. See Titus 2:4-5.

Stay in submission, regardless. Look at 1 Pet 3:1-4. This woman's husband is not obedient to the word of God and, yet, she is still to be in subjection to him, because that's the right thing for a wife to do. She is to be meek and quiet. That's hard; but that's right. Her conversation is to be chaste coupled with fear. You ask, "Well, what if he walks out on her?" Do you know what Paul said? "But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart," [1 Cor 7:15]. If God can't make him obey, because he's "unbelieving," what makes you think you're going to make him obey? You can't put yourself over him in the place of God and expect to accomplish something that is pleasing to God and beneficial to your spouse. It won't work. In Vietnam, they say, when a woman does this to her husband, "She is sitting on his head." A friend of mine saw a man in Vietnam all stooped over and he said, "Man, that guy must have a bad wife."

Pray for him. The best thing you can do for him is to pray for him. Look at 1 Tim 2:1-3. The first thing we are to do, according to Paul, is to pray and intercede "for all men." Why would you think your husband is an exception here? We are to pray for "all that are in authority." Is he not still in authority, though he is handling his authority wrongly? He is, most definitely.

Look at the result of your prayer, "that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty." Doesn't that fit the goal of a good marriage? It does, indeed. And you should be particularly encouraged to pray for him because "this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior." A wife, in a difficult marriage, sought my counsel and I encouraged her to pray for her husband. I believe that she spent more time criticizing him and talking to others about him than she did praying for him. And things got worse. She wasted her time talking to others when she should have been talking to God.

Practical Steps for the Husband

Honor your wife. Look again at 1 Pet 3. In 1 Pet 3:7, Peter said, “Likewise.” That’s the way he started verse 1. This indicates that he is married to a wife who “obey(s) not the word.” She isn’t in subjection to him. And what is he supposed to do? He is to give honor to her as unto the weaker vessel. They are “heirs together of the grace of life.” In other words, he and she have both been given grace for the other. She has the grace to follow him despite his lack of submission to God and he has the grace to honor her despite her lack of submission to him.

Husband, if your wife isn’t in subjection to you, you aren’t supposed to put the screws to her to make her obey. You are to honor her because she is the weaker vessel. The truth is that you have already tried the “my way or the highway” routine with her and what did it get you? A black eye? A night in the doghouse? You’ve heard in these lessons that her submission to you is voluntary. She is commanded to obey God and submit to you, but she is the one who must do it. You can’t make her submit. But you can honor her. She is your wife!

Love her, regardless. Our example is Jesus Christ. In Eph 5:25 Paul said, “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.” He loves us whether we are in subjection to him, or not. Husbands have a tendency to withhold their expressions of love when they aren’t happy with their wives. We just mow the lawn or stay late at the office or go to work on a hobby or something like that. We shut them out. We get bitter [Col 3:19].

I can testify that my relationship to my wife changed after Dr. Jim Binney taught us on marriage. He showed us that our wives’ greatest need is to be loved. Therefore, God assigned the responsibility to the husbands to love their wives, as Christ loved the church. I was guilty of not fully fulfilling my responsibility. As I began to love my wife more, our relationship improved. She didn’t change, immediately. But my love for her surely changed and my attitude toward her changed, as well. There is a noticeable and beneficial difference in our home.

Pray for her. So, what are you to do when your wife doesn’t want to submit? You are to do the same thing that she is to do for you when you aren’t obeying the word; when you aren’t submitting to God. You should pray for her. Look at the last part of 1 Pet 3:7, “that your prayers be not hindered.” What do you think he’s praying about in the context? No doubt, he is praying about his wife trusting God and being in subjection to him [1 Pet 3:5]. He’s praying for her to get over her fear and her “amazement.” She must get over her fear of and bewilderment by his decisions [1 Pet 3:6].

Continue to lead. In Eph 5:23, you are the head of your wife. You cannot stop leading your home just because your wife doesn’t want to follow. You will be leading with grief and not with joy [Heb 13:17]; but you must keep going in the direction and at the pace that God wants you to go. God may slow you down so that your wife can catch up, but he is not going to stop leading you and you cannot quit following and obeying him.

Conclusion: You are not being selfish to do your part and to let your spouse do his or her part. You are being responsible. If you get your part right, you increase the probability that your spouse can get his or her part right. If your spouse never does get it right, at least you won’t both be messed up.

Balance in Your Marriage

This Bible study is about balancing the relationship of spouses to each other. This study will help you whether you are single, or you have been married for decades, or you are somewhere in between. This lesson is about how to maintain balance in your marriage, and incorporates some of the instruction from other premarital lessons.

You balance each other in your marriage by first fulfilling your responsibilities to each other. Do your part better and your spouse will likely do his or her part better.

Eph 5:22-24. A man's greatest need is to rule. So, a wife's responsibility is to **submit**. When wives submit, they meet their husband's greatest need. The pattern for a wife's submission is found in the relationship between the church and Christ. Christ is the head of the church. When the church is in submission to Christ, Christ rules the church and it functions very well. When the church rules, like you see with so many churches today, Christ is not in charge and the church is a mess. Wives make a mess in their marriages when they try to rule their husbands. God said, in Gen 3:16, "... he shall rule over thee." The world says, "women rule over them," Is 3:12. And notice, when wives take charge, their "children are their oppressors." Not only are their marriages harmed, but their children are, too.

- A submissive woman is not a woman who is under her husband's thumb, nor is she a servant living under the daily commands of her master. The virtuous woman in Prov 31 is strong and very capable. She does all the things you read about her and, yet, she is still submissive.
- Spiritual growth is very important here. Wives get better at submission with spiritual growth and time.

Eph 5:25-28. A woman's greatest need is to be loved. So, the Lord assigns to their husbands the responsibility to **love**. Husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church. That's an unselfish, sacrificial love. That's not easy and requires spiritual growth in him. The church is strengthened and helped by the love of Christ, as you see in verses 26-27. Likewise, when husbands love their wives as Christ loved the church, wives are strengthened and very encouraged by their love.

When wives submit and husbands love according to these instructions in Eph 5, they end up with a mutual respect for each other, which we must have to have a balanced marriage:

- Wives **revere** their husbands, which they really appreciate. A wife's reverence must be seen as an example to her children, and to other children in church.
- Husbands **honor** their wives [1 Pet 3:7]. A husband's honor is wonderful and it is a great example to his children and to the children in church.
 - A husband's honor is important to his prayer life and the value of the couple's inheritance together [1 Pet 3:7]. His prayers can be hindered when he doesn't honor his wife. Wives should not jeopardize their husband's prayers by giving them a reason to not honor them.

- It really helps to have a meek and quiet spirit. But, as 1 Pet 3:4 says, the price of a meek and quiet spirit is great. Wives should pray for this.

You balance each other in your marriage by taking care of yourself. This is like staying on your side of the seesaw.

Couples must take care of their natural life [1 Cor 2:14] and their spiritual life [1 Cor 2:15].

Take care of your natural life. You need:

- Exercise [1 Tim 4:8]. There is some profit in bodily exercise.
- Nutrition [Dan 1:5, 12-15]. You must learn to properly nourish yourself. Control your appetite [Prov 23:2]. Don't go crazy here but learn what gives you strength and what makes you sluggish. We're all different and require different things. Some things you eat or drink may negatively affect your relationship with each other.
- Rest [Matt 11:28-30]. You must learn how to rest and manage stress in your life. Jesus gives you rest. Some people feel stress in their arms, neck and back. Some get hot flashes. Most people don't function as well under stress. Make the changes in your life that reduce stress.
- Husbands and wives can be very different here. You have to go with what works for you. Your exercise routines can be different, you don't always eat the same things, and you may go to sleep at different times. But you should each do what works best for you because when you're well, you're able to do your part of the marriage better.

Take care of your spiritual life. You need to:

- Stay in church, make all the services, keep notes [Heb 10:25].
- Deal with the sin in your life [2 Tim 2:19]. Sins don't only hurt you; they hurt your marriage and your children.
- Pray for each other and pray together [1 Tim 2:1].
- Rule your own spirit [Prov 25:28; Prov 16:32]. "Bad circumstances are not an excuse for bad behavior." You must control your temper and bad behavior. There is no right way to do wrong. You often get maddest at those closest to you because you feel safe with them. Don't do this.
- Stand strong on the truth [Eph 6:10, 14]. Adam should have stood against Eve's temptation [Gen 3:6]. Adam was "with her" and didn't stop her from eating the fruit. Sarah had a bad idea about Hagar [Gen 16:2-5] and Abraham should have refused to get with Hagar. Sarah had the right idea about Hagar and Ishmael [Gen 21:10-12] and God confirmed that Abraham was to go along with her idea.

You balance each other in your marriage by realizing that your strengths and weaknesses complement each other. Don't be critical or judgmental of the differences in your spouse. Your personalities are different. Appreciate and accommodate the differences. In marriage, you are either:

A Brooder or a Duck - Ducks need brooders and brooders need ducks. One spouse is generally a duck, and the other is a brooder. Ducks let things roll off their backs and move on. Brooders process things. But processing helps us understand things better. You can't brood forever, though, or you'll get bitter or you'll get stuck. Limit the time in brooding.

Mary or Martha - in Lk 10:38-42 Martha was mad at Mary for sitting at the feet of Jesus. But by Jn 12:2-3 Martha was comfortable serving while Mary worshipped Jesus. Mary worshipped without distraction while Martha served without distraction. They balanced each other.

Merciful or Just - one spouse holds the sword and the other holds the bandage. One of you wants to discipline and the other one wants to sit down and discuss it. You must blend these two.

Tactful or Blunt - if you don't blend these, one will talk for ever to keep from hurting the other's feelings and never get around to saying anything. The other will talk with the manners of a surgeon and the other spouse will always be offended. Blend them. The tactful person should learn to be more direct and the blunt person should learn to be more graceful.

Emotional or Rational - one of you is going to be more emotional and the other more rational. The thinker helps the emotional person become more stable and the emotional person helps the rational person become more compassionate. Emotional decisions are always bad. A rational person provides stability for an emotional person. He/she keeps the other spouse from pulling everything down in a crisis.

Then there are doers or thinkers, neat nicks or pack rats [pack rats help neat nicks not be so OCD], shoppers or buyers, and so forth. You are NEVER going to change the other person!! So, don't try. They may change on their own or the Lord may change them. But you won't.

You balance each other in your marriage by communicating with each other. But remember the contrast between Venus and Mars when you talk to each other because you will often be on different wave lengths.

It will really help spouses to communicate with each other about your "love language." If you haven't already heard about love languages, we each have a principal way in which we express our love and desire to be loved:

- *Words of affirmation* - some thrive on these "at-a-boys."
- *Acts of service* - some appreciate these. Some husbands like to show their love with acts of service as long as they can work from a list, instead of listening to their wives tell him what to do all the time.
- *Gift giving* - this is how some show love. This can be problematic when your spouse only sees these gifts as fulfilling your desire to go shopping!
- *Physical touch* - it really helps when both are tactile.

- *Quality time* - this is what some call “alone time.”

Learn to listen and respect each other [Jas 1:19]. Be swift to hear. If you aren't sure what your spouse just said, ask him or her. Make sure you know what was said and not what you think you heard.

Think before you speak [Prov 29:20]. Don't be hasty with your words.

Once you know what to say, just say it [Prov 17:27-28]. A man that hath understanding spareth his words.

Keep a good sense of humor [Prov 15:13]. A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance. Learn to laugh at yourself.

Watch out for pride [Prov 13:10]. Only by pride cometh contention.

Keep a lid on your anger [Prov 14:17]. He that is soon angry dealeth foolishly.

Be quick to forgive [Eph 4:30-32]. Be kind and tenderhearted. And remember that it is common for people to take out their frustrations on those they love the most because they feel “safe” with them. Forgive them and don't get pulled into their anger.

Additional thoughts

Be willing to listen to your spouse as he/she sorts things out. You don't have to fix it. Give each other space for your personal time with the Lord and for the time you need to wind down or sort things out on your own. Pray for the specific needs your spouse has. No one knows your spouse like you do.

Instructions to Women in 1 Tim 2:9-15

Paul addressed three major areas of difficulty for women and gave Timothy instructions to help them deal with these potential problem areas. These challenges include:

Adornment – 1 Timothy 1:9-10. Adornment deals principally with a woman's outward appearance. Paul instructed women concerning:

- *Modest apparel.* Contrast this with the apparel of the woman in Proverbs 7:10. Modest apparel properly covers the body. It shows a disinterest in attracting attention to oneself. Modest apparel does not distract from the hidden man of the heart (1 Peter 3:3-4).
- *Shamefacedness.* A woman who is shamefaced is modest, restrained, retiring, and reserved. That doesn't mean she is crestfallen. But it does mean that she is not impudent (Proverbs 7:13). An impudent woman is forward and saucy, bold and brash.
- *Sobriety.* A sober woman is sedate, serene, serious, and quiet. Contrast her with the woman in Proverbs 7:11.
- *Broided hair, gold, pearls, costly array.* Compare these adornments with 1 Peter 3:3. Basically, Paul and Peter are teaching against over dressing. Be simple. Be who you are. Don't try to be something you're not like a flashy model or a worldly actress.

A woman should be adorned with good works. Compare her to the virtuous woman in Proverbs 31:10-31. Pay attention to verses 28 through 31. A virtuous, modest woman who is adorned with good works professes godliness. Her outward appearance matches her inward beauty.

Authority – 1 Timothy 2:11-13. Women can have trouble in marriage by failing to be in subjection to their own husbands. A woman is to learn in silence. Generally, women like to talk. Therefore, Peter said that they should have a meek and quiet spirit, 1 Pet 3:4. This spirit is, in the sight of God, of great price.

A woman is to be in subjection even when her husband is not obedient to the word of God. See 1 Peter 3:1; Ephesians 5:22-24. Therefore, women are not to teach men. However, wives can often "advise" their husbands well. Good examples are Sarah, who advised Abraham to separate from Hagar and Ishmael; Abigail, who advised David not to kill Nabal and his men; and Esther, who advised King Ahasuerus against Haman's wicked decree. These women were in subjection but their advice was invaluable.

Notice that the command for women to keep silence in the church in 1 Corinthians 14:34 is in the context of preaching in the congregation. Women are great in children's ministries. Women are not to usurp authority over men. See 1 Corinthians 11:3 and 1 Peter 3:5-7. Adam was formed before Eve; she was made to help him (Genesis 2:20); not the other way around.

Affection – 1 Timothy 2:14-15. Women often trust their intuition. They have a sense or a "feel" about certain things and people. But this intuition (affection) is not reliable. It

failed Eve in her temptation by the serpent. What he was saying to her felt right but it wasn't right. Genesis 2:17 was plain. She was deceived. Feelings and words often deceive women. They tend to be too trusting or not trusting enough based on their feelings.

Women are particularly vulnerable during childbearing. A wife will be saved from deception if "they" (she and her husband) continue in faith, charity, holiness and sobriety.

- Faith is believing the word of God and the truth and trusting God. Eve did not believe Genesis 2:17.
- Charity is well described in 1 Corinthians 13:1-8. Love is her greatest need. Therefore, her husband is to love her as Christ also loved the church. A woman may feel unloved when her body changes due to bearing children.
- Holiness involves protecting their vessels with purity [1 Thes 4:3-5]. Therefore, abstain from unholy words and things. Husbands and wives should not bring defiling, unholy things into their marriage.
- We have already talked about sobriety earlier in this lesson.

Conclusion: it's in these three areas that women often get tripped up. So, careful attention must be paid to these things.

Rearing Children

The reason for discussing rearing children while in premarital instruction is that you must be thinking about how you are going to raise your children once you start your family. You must agree together on the points of this lesson before your first child is born. Couples often disagree on training, instructing, disciplining, and educating their children and they also disagree on how to enforce their commands. These things must be discussed ahead of time. If not, you may find that the disagreement between you is so serious that you wouldn't have married if you had known these things before you married.

Ps 127:3 - Children are an heritage of the Lord. Therefore, rear them for the Lord. To "rear" is to raise them upright; to bring them to maturity through nurturing care. Pray for them. Emphasize *being* good more than *doing* good.

Train them - Prov 22:6. Andrew Murray said, "Without training, teaching and commanding often do more harm than good." Bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, Eph 6:4. Help them understand the purpose and the expectations of your training. They must know that the things of the Lord come before other things, like sports. And they must learn that your decisions concerning all things are always based on what God says.

Command them for obedience - Keep my commandments, and live [Prov 4:4]. Jer 35:1-10; these are not suggestions; these are rules. Abraham commanded his children [Gen 18:19]. You don't need your children's consent.

Be on the same page - Prov 6:20-23 - a father's commandment and a mother's law are "it" in verse 22. Make some decisions about laws and commandments before the children are born. Then back each other and don't do things differently when one parent is gone or out of the room. The kids know how to manipulate the differences. You can easily see when your spouse is giving in. It's much harder for you to see when you are giving in. The kids see it all.

Be consistent in enforcement - Eph 6:4 - the children can't win. Your children should already know what's coming. But don't provoke them to anger when you do this. David said of the Lord, "... thy gentleness hath made me great," [Ps 18:35]. Dr Shelton Smith said, "Make your soft voice as authoritative as your mad voice. Anger is not a tool for success. Eliminate it from your arsenal." "For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God," Jas 1:20.

Discipline them - the kids are different. They need to know you are the boss, what you says goes, and they must respect you. You have to beat one [Prov 23:13-14], just look at the other one [Prov 20:8], and take something away from the third [Col 3:25]. They must understand that sin brings consequences and the consequences match the offense. Start early [Prov 13:24]. Keep it up as long as you have hope [Prov 19:18]. A young lady was being a brat during her final fitting before her wedding. Her mother peeled her out of that wedding dress and spanked her right there.

Set up boundaries - Prov 30:11 - there is a generation that curseth... but they can't do that in your house. Bad circumstances are not an excuse for bad behavior. Boundaries keep you from crossing into territory into which you shouldn't go and they keep your children from crossing into territory into which you cannot let them come. They are out of bounds if they do.

Make scriptural, proactive rather than emotional, reactive decisions. These are painful decisions sometimes. You must get with God and find out what he wants you to do.

Maintain open communication, if you can. Ruth and Naomi communicated well. Talk about what's inside. Solomon said, "My son, give me thy heart," Prov 23:26.

Be careful with their friends. Don't allow sleepovers. Jonadab and Amnon were first cousins and Jonadab helped Amnon to get into some trouble that cost him his life.

Restoring Your Marriage, Part 1

This lesson is on restoring your marriage, if you are having difficulty keeping your marriage together. In our day, we are seeing more and more marriages messed up by infidelity, irresponsibility, incompatibility, instability, irritability, and you name it. Husbands and wives spend more time fussing and looking for a way out of the mess, than they do trying to reconcile. They know that they vowed at their wedding to stay together till death do us part [Matt 19:6]. And they know that the Bible is against divorce [Mal 2:16]. But they don't have a clue what to do to keep their marriage together and thrive in a happy marriage. It just doesn't seem worth the effort.

So, we offer some advice from the words of God that will help you if you are truly determined to salvage what is left of your marriage and turn things around for the better. If you will follow this little outline of instructions, you will give yourself as good an opportunity as you can get to keep your vows and be glad that you did.

Be honest about your contribution to what has gone wrong. Rom 12:17; Eph 4:25. Own your part of the lust, selfishness, cruelty, dishonesty, broken trust, spiritual weakness, unjust criticism [fault finding], broken fellowship with the Lord, neglect, retaliation, bitterness, living in the past [what happened to you before will happen to you again if you keep imagining that it will], nagging, withholding affection, and all of the other things people do to torment each other in a bad relationship.

Sincerely apologize for what you've done wrong. You don't apologize just so that your mate will let you off the hook. You apologize so that you may acknowledge before your spouse exactly what you did wrong and so that you may sincerely employ your best effort to prevent it from happening again. Your apology allows you to reconcile with your spouse by giving him or her the opportunity to forgive you for what you have done wrong. Learn to sincerely forgive and learn to love; this is something you are not naturally equipped to do, Tit 2:4-5, Eph 5:25.

Establish some ground rules of communication. 1 Cor 15:33. Never bring up prior relationships or infidelity. Get it all out at one time and be done with it forever. Stop all jealous behavior and don't give your spouse the first reason in the world to be jealous about you by hugging all over guys, or hugging all over girls. Stop talking animatedly with a pretty girl or handsome man and then talking gruffly with your spouse. If you continue this kind of behavior, you are not going to fair very well in trying to restore trust in your marriage. Stop all phone calls, emails, text messages, social media and other forms of communication that contribute to some sort of fantasy in your mind. Your body language screams a potential for trouble here.

Establish some appropriate "boundaries" for yourself and your spouse. Prov 27:3-4; Prov 25:28. In broken relationships, the spouses tend to say and do very cruel things to each other. One spouse may point a finger at the other one to blame them for something that might not be their fault at all. Take the blame for the things about which you are truly at fault but do not accept the blame for something that is not your fault, thinking that somehow this is going to make for a peaceful relationship. It is wrong to accept the blame when you aren't wrong. You must learn appropriate and fair ways to

communicate with each other. If you are talking about a subject that is tense, only go as far as you can in the conversation without getting mad. If you need time and space to cool off, take it. Then resume the conversation when you can handle the subject without flying off the handle.

Establish real and achievable expectations for yourself and for your spouse. 1

Cor 7:33-34. It is a good idea to write these down. In dysfunctional relationships, people don't have a very good idea what is truly expected of them and they are not sure that the expectations they perceive are even agreeable to them. So, each spouse should write down what he or she expects of the other and what he or she is willing to do to meet those expectations, if he or she agrees with them. Otherwise, you will end up despising your spouse because God didn't create the spouse who can live up to your fantasies and expectations when they are unreasonable and built upon a Hollywood dream world.

Conclusion: these are just some of the things to do to begin to restore your marriage. The next lesson contains some more practical things that will help you keep it together.

Restoring Your Marriage, Part 2

When your marriage is in trouble you must work to restore your marriage. This is the second lesson on restoring your marriage. In the prior lesson, we discussed the need to be honest about your contribution to what has gone wrong, to sincerely apologize for what you've done wrong, to establish some ground rules of communication, to establish appropriate boundaries and to establish achievable expectations for yourselves. Today, we continue the topic on restoring your marriage with the following:

Calmly, succinctly, and honestly describe the situations that contribute to the problems in your marriage. Prov 27:5. This way, your spouse can work on these areas. You cannot make him or her change, you are not responsible for your spouse's decision to change, and you are not responsible for the decisions your spouse makes when he or she is wrong. Your spouse is the only one who can change him/herself. But you can point out some areas where there are difficulties between you and the steps you are going to take to appropriately protect yourself in those instances and the steps you are going to take to improve your part of the problem. If your spouse wants to please you then he/she can make the necessary changes and take the necessary steps to protect him/herself. And you better be very complimentary and encouraging if your spouse does make some changes because it takes a lot of work and sacrifice to make changes like these. Being appreciated for the effort is very rewarding and encourages more of the same.

Examine yourself in the sight of God. 2 Cor 13:5. Get a true picture of yourself and quit believing your own prideful evaluation of yourself. You are not that great. You are not that deserving of the kind of attention you think your spouse is supposed to give you. Pride goeth before destruction and an haughty spirit before a fall. Humility is a great way to see yourself before God. It tends to keep you humble in your marriage, as well. When Job heard from God out of the whirlwind, he realized how self-righteous he had become and he repented. It would help you to see yourself as God sees you rather than the way that you think you are.

Get the sin out of your life that is contributing to the problems in your marriage. Prov 28:13. Quit going to the bars. Quit tobacco. Kissing a smoker or a dipper is like licking an ashtray. Quit stimulating your imagination with wicked thinking and wicked viewing. Just count the numbers of times you have looked or thought. Quit cussing and intimidating your spouse with your anger. Quit bossing your spouse around and demanding things all the time. Quit spending money irresponsibly. Quit gossiping to your friends about your problems. Gossiping prolongs the problems in your marriage. Those folks can't solve your problems. By talking, you're just relieving tension and taking away the fuel necessary to change what's broken in your marriage. At the same time, you are just making yourself sound right and your spouse wrong, particularly when you get the people to whom you've been whining to agree with you.

Go to work on making your marriage a happy marriage. Prov 5:18. A happy marriage takes a lot of work. Don't just survive; thrive. There is no instant gratification in repairing a marriage. And when it has been messed up it takes even that much more

work to fix it and make it happy. So, look for steady slow progress and rejoice in moves that are in the right direction. Don't wait for huge changes before you can smile and rejoice. Spend time together. You might have to quit fishing and hunting for a few years to ensure that you have years of happy recreation in the future and not just an escape from the misery you are in. Turn off the stupid idiot box [television]. You cannot carry on a conversation when you are distracted all the time by what's on the tube. Get away from the email and text messages, too. Reserve those for a time when you are not together with your spouse. Nothing is more important right now than fixing the most important part of your life. You can survive without knowing all the "bad" news for a couple of years.

Go to work on your marriage together. Eph 5:31. "We" have the problem so "we" must work on it together. It is our problem, not just mine and not just yours. So, "we" aren't going to play the blame game. If you must blame someone, take responsibility for your part of the problem. That's all you can do. And remember, never apologize for something that you did not do just to buy peace. You'll end up crippling your marriage, because your spouse will not have to own what he or she did wrong. Like Bob Jones, Sr. said, "It is never right to do wrong to get a chance to do right."

Pray together, go to church together, and read the Bible together. 2 Tim 2:3-4. Find a good Bible believing, Bible preaching and Bible teaching church. Go to Sunday school, Sunday morning and evening services and Wednesday evening prayer meeting. This faithfulness to your church will help establish faithfulness in your relationship. You will hear things in the preaching and teaching of the words of God that will really help you grow closer to the Lord and closer together. And when you are at home, pray together. As they say, "Folks that pray together, stay together." This is key to restoring your marriage.

Conclusion: Now, these may seem like a lot of things to do. However, if you will take the steps to add each of these things to your marriage and do them faithfully, you will find that you can get through the trouble you have had. You can move on to restoring your marriage and to being rewarded with some much desired happiness.