

The Key To A Christ-Centered Marriage



Bill Loveless
Christ Is Life Ministries

The Key To A Christ-Centered Marriage



Bill Loveless

Christ Is Life Ministries

Copyright © 2017 by Bill Loveless

All rights reserved. This book may not be copied or reprinted for a commercial gain or profit. The use of this material for personal or group study is permitted.

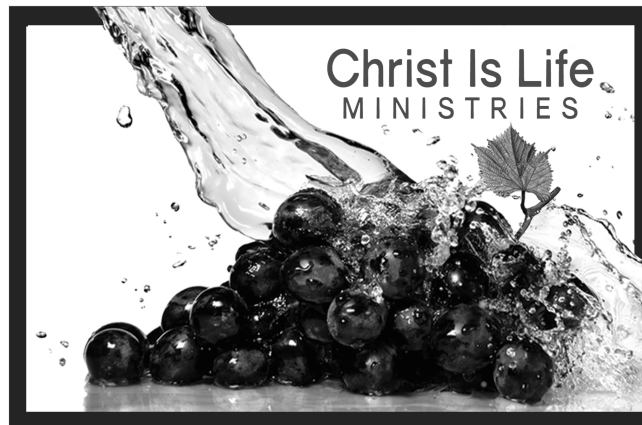
Scripture taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

Scripture taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996 by Tyndale Charitable Trust. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers.

Scripture taken from the New American Standard Bible®, copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Scripture taken from the New King James Version, copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (GNT) are from the Good News Translation in Today's English Version—Second Edition, copyright ©1992 by American Bible Society. Used by permission.



Christ Is Life Ministries

Website: www.christislifeministries.com

Email: cilm@christislifeministries.com

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|------------|
| Introduction..... | 4 |
| Lesson 1 - <i>Three Kinds of Marriages</i> <i>Living “A” Christian Life and Marriage.....</i> | 5 |
| Lesson 2 - “THE” Christian Life - The Foundation For Experiencing A Christ-Centered Marriage..... | 24 |
| Lesson 3 - The Source of Marital Conflict - <i>Engaging God To Deal With The Obstacles To A Christ-Centered Marriage.....</i> | 57 |
| Lesson 4 - Engaging God To Deal With The Obstacles of Fleshly Rights, Unmet Expectations and Unforgiveness/Unrepentance..... | 96 |
| Lesson 5 - Do You Know Your and Your Spouse’s True Identity?..... | 129 |
| Lesson 6 – <i>Satan’s Tactics To Destroy Your Marriage</i> Experiencing An “In Christ Marriage..... | 161 |

The Layout of This Study

There are six lessons and each lesson has five daily readings to allow you to break down the material into five separate parts each week. Throughout each lesson will be exercises, questions, scripture for you to meditate on, and an “Engaging God” section.

Engaging God

The “Engaging God” section is designed for you to seek out the Holy Spirit for personal revelation and understanding of what you have just read. This is especially crucial when you come to truths that contradict what you believe. If you don’t seek God to reveal His truth, then you never will grow beyond your false beliefs.

I can’t stress strongly enough how critical it is for you to take the time to engage God as you go through this study. By engaging God to bring these truths alive, you give Him the opportunity to make His truth a living force not just in your marriage, but throughout your life. Only God can make His truth real to you. Your part is to consistently seek Him over a long enough time to give Him the chance to replace your lying beliefs with His truth and heal both you and your marriage.

The Word “Meditation”

Some people struggle with the word “meditation” because of New Age connotations. But “meditation” is a biblical word that Christians do not need to shy away from. The key is what and Who we are meditating on. The focus of our meditation will be on God and His truth. My definition of the word “meditate,” for purposes of this study, is to stop and ponder the truths you are reading in scripture. If you really have a struggle with the word “meditate,” then substitute the word “think about” or “ponder,” instead.

The Word “Revelation”

I will be using the word “revelation” several times throughout the study. This is a key word that simply means God supernaturally takes His truth and makes it personal to you and to your life situations. Revelation is God’s way of giving you understanding of what you are reading. Revelation takes you beyond cognitive understanding to both deeper spiritual understanding and personal application of God’s truth to your life.

If Your Marriage Is In Conflict

We are going to discover in Lesson One that there are two kinds of marital conflict: overt and covert. If you are going through this study because your marriage is in trouble—in overt conflict—there will be places in this study where I address how the concepts you have just read apply to your situation.

Whenever you see the words, “If your marriage is in conflict,” you will know I am addressing your marriage. You will see this phrase several times throughout the study. My purpose is for you to understand, believe, and choose to walk in the truths I will be sharing. If you do, then you will begin to be set free from the source of your conflict and will start on a new path of intimacy, harmony, and oneness.

INTRODUCTION

I want to personally welcome you to this marriage study. It is a foundational study of God's design for marriage and how He intends His design to function. After discipling a number of married couples, it was clear to me that many Christian couples do not fully understand what it means to build their marriage on the foundation of Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, many believers are trying in vain, through their own strength and ability, to produce a Christ-centered marriage.

My wife Paige and I fell into that category for the first ten years of our marriage. Then we discovered the biblical truths I will be sharing with you that radically changed (and continue to change) our marriage. I trust the Lord will do the same in your marriage as you learn these truths and then allow God, in His power, to make them an experiential reality in your life.

There will be key biblical truths presented throughout these lessons. Some of them you already know but others will be new. As important as it is to gain biblical knowledge, this is only the first step. Someone once told me, "Information without transformation is just information." God wants to take the knowledge you learn and use it to transform your life and your marriage.

Whether you have been married for a short time or for many years, I believe God is going to use this study to give you new insight into how He intends for Christians to experience a deeper intimacy and oneness in marriage.

Lesson One

Three Kinds of Marriages And Living “A” Christian Life and Marriage

DAY ONE

Lesson Topics:

We will be covering the following topics in this lesson

- Expectations versus realities in your marriage
- Improved versus transformed marriage
- Three kinds of marriages
- God’s design for marriage; and
- How living “A” Christian life impacts your marriage

Introduction

The primary focus of this study is to separate biblical truth from the false beliefs or lies that we believe about marriage. Why is knowing the truth so crucial to the marriage relationship? We see part of the answer in John 8:32:

*“You will know the truth, and the truth will set you **free**.”*

This is a wonderful promise we will look further into later in the study. But for now I would like for you to consider the converse of John 8:32:

***If the truth will set you FREE, what will continuing to live from LIES do?
Living from lies creates a BONDAGE that holds
you captive for as long as you believe those lies.***

In so many marriages I see, Christians are not truly living in the freedom God has promised. It is just the opposite. Why is that? It is usually for one of three reasons: (1) either they don't know the truth; (2) they don't believe the truth; or, (3) they know the truth but are choosing not to walk in the truth. It is crucial for you and your spouse to determine if you have been living from God's truths or from some false beliefs or lies about marriage. This is why it is essential, if we are to experience a Christ-centered marriage, that we learn, believe, and choose to walk in the truth. Why is that?

You will not live beyond what you BELIEVE.

WHAT you believe is HOW you will live.

Think about the above statements for a moment. You are making choices in your marriage based on what you believe. If you don't believe the truth, then you are making choices based on false or lying beliefs. My prayer for you, as you go through this study, is you will engage the Holy Spirit to reveal where you have false beliefs or are believing lies about your marriage. I also pray you will seek the Spirit to give you revelation of His truth concerning marriage. Finally, I pray you will seek the Lord to give you willingness to walk in His truth. Let's begin by discovering what your expectations are concerning this study.

What Are Your EXPECTATIONS For This Study?

As you begin this study, I am curious to know if you are going through it for any of the following reasons:

- You are wanting something more for your marriage or something more from it.
- There is something missing in your marriage, and you are hoping to identify what it is.
- You and/or your spouse are “stuck” in one or more areas of your relationship.
- You have some area of ongoing unresolved conflict in your marriage that you want to get past.
- You want a deeper intimacy and oneness with one another.
- You want a more Christ-centered marriage.

I list these because they are the reasons why I wrote this study. I have disciplined many couples that come to me because of one or more of the reasons listed above. I pray that as you go through the truths in this study, the Holy Spirit will meet or exceed the expectations that you have for this study.

I want to start by looking at the expectations you had when you first got married as opposed to the reality you are now experiencing in your marriage.

DESIRES or EXPECTATIONS – In The Beginning

What were your desires or expectations when you got married? Do any of the following apply?

- I wanted to be unconditionally loved by my spouse and to unconditionally love my spouse.
- I wanted to be valued and accepted by my spouse.
- I wanted to be fulfilled and happy.
- I wanted my spouse to meet my needs.
- I wanted to meet my spouse's needs.
- I wanted a godly husband/wife.
- I wanted us to grow together spiritually.
- I wanted to experience increasing harmony, intimacy, and oneness in our relationship.

Question: Are there any other desires or expectations that you had when you got married that are not listed above?

What Is The REALITY Today?

How do your expectations line up with where you are today in your marriage? Are you currently experiencing:

- Unmet needs?
- Unmet expectations?
- Intimacy struggles?
- Communication struggles?
- Unresolved conflict?
- Adverse circumstances?
- Just getting by?
- Wanting more?

Question: What are the realities in your marriage today compared to the desires or expectations that you had when you got married?

If you have been married for a while, how do the expectations you had when you got married line up with reality today? Are your expectations being met? I hope so, but if not I am praying that through this study, you will understand God's truth as it applies to your expectations and your realities.

Is it possible that some of your EXPECTATIONS and REALITIES about marriage DON'T line up with God's truth? If not why not?

Do You Want Your Marriage IMPROVED or TRANSFORMED?

I ask this question for two reasons. One, you may have thought about your marriage as needing to be slightly improved rather than needing to be totally transformed. Two, you may think improvement and transformation mean the same thing. Let me share with you how I define the difference between the two.

Improved Marriage – You and your spouse using your own respective intellect, self-discipline, ability, and willpower to attempt to improve or change your marriage

As you probably know, there are multiple Christian books on marriage that provide tips and techniques on how to improve your marriage. Basically, these books tell you what you can do to improve your marriage using your own strength and abilities. They assert that if you consistently apply those techniques, then your marriage will improve. In light of this, I have a question:

Couldn't NON-Christians read the same books and using their own ability and willpower to try to improve their marriages as well?

Think about this question for a moment. If you are using your own ability and willpower to improve your marriage, then why couldn't non-Christians read the same books and improve their marriages using their own ability and willpower? In light of these observations, how does transformation differ from improvement?

Transformed marriage – involves a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit to transform you and your spouse and enable you to experience God's design, His promises, and His truths concerning marriage.

Couples I counsel have quickly discovered they want more than improvement. They want (and need) their marriages to be transformed. How about you? Look at one of God's key promises of transformation in Romans 12:2:

“Be not conformed to this world, but be TRANSFORMED by the renewing of your mind....”



God's promise in Romans 12:2 for you and your spouse as Christians is that God will transform you and your spouse. The truth is that God is **not** in the marriage “remodeling” business. He wants to transform your marriage as opposed to just improving it.

The crucial word in the definition of transformation is “supernatural.” Keep this word in mind because it is central in God's transforming process. We will talk more about this in Lesson Two. What differentiates this study from many others is we will be focusing on transformation as opposed to just improving your marriage. I want to close this day with the following statement:

Without God's transformation from the INSIDE out, Christian couples will NEVER be able to experience God's design for a CHRIST-centered marriage and to experience the HAPPINESS and FULFILLMENT that they so desire.

Consequently, the focus of this study is on the internal spiritual transformation of you and your spouse. So whether you are newly married or have been married for a number of years, God is able to use His truths to take your marriage to levels that will exceed your expectations.

“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us....” Ephesians 3:20

Question: Do you and your spouse want an improved or transformed marriage?

DAY TWO

Three Kinds Of Marriages

In my years of ministry and marriage discipleship, I have found that marriages among Christians usually fall into three categories:

Category 1 - A TROUBLED Marriage

A troubled marriage is pretty easy to spot. Here are some of the characteristics of a troubled marriage:

- **Overt conflict that is escalating.**
- **Trying and failing to cope with one another's fleshly behaviors.** (I will explain the word "coping" in the next section)
- **Ongoing conflict that results from needs and expectations not being met.**
- **Fleshly behaviors are getting worse and creating more conflict.**
- **No internal spiritual transformation.**
- **Moving toward emotional separation, physical separation, or divorce.**

[**Note: If you are in a troubled marriage,** I want you to know I use this study to disciple couples like you. I know that if you are in conflict, you will want to address the conflict as quickly as possible. I will do that in Lesson Three. Feel free to look ahead at Lesson Three if you feel the need to do so; but, if you do, know that the foundational truths to resolve your conflict are found in Lessons One and Two.]

Category 2 - A CHRISTIAN Marriage

I define a Christian marriage as one where both spouses are Christians. It is a couple who may be attempting to do all the right "Christian" things, such as, reading their Bible, praying, and going to church. Their marriage appears to be doing well on the outside, but it is a marriage where:

- **They are experiencing ongoing unmet needs or expectations.**
- **They are trying without success to fix or change each other and each other's fleshly behaviors.**
- **There is more "covert" conflict than "overt" conflict in the marriage. Covert conflict doesn't get above the surface and hasn't been dealt with.**
- **There is little or no spiritual transformation.**
- **A couple is using their own strength and ability to try to produce happiness and fulfillment in their marriage (though they may be asking God to help them try).**
- **A couple is not experiencing increasing harmony, intimacy, and oneness in their marriage.**
- **Each spouse has learned to employ coping mechanisms in response to the other spouse's fleshly behaviors.**

Let me now define what I mean by "coping."

What Is COPING?

It is what married couples TRY to do using their own ability and willpower to deal with their UNRESOLVED conflict, UNMET needs, or ONGOING fleshly behaviors.

In a Christian marriage, couples use different coping mechanisms to deal with—and in some cases avoid, protect or insulate themselves from—unresolved conflict, unmet needs, and ongoing fleshly behaviors. We will learn more about coping in Lesson Three, but, in the meantime, here are a few examples of some coping mechanisms:

- Silent treatment;
- Anger;
- Controlling;
- People-pleasing;
- Manipulation;
- Avoidance;
- Emotional withdrawal.

Other examples of coping mechanism or strategies that spouses use to deal with negative marital situations are:

- **Learning to put up with the struggles and conflicts.**
- **Overlooking your spouse's fleshly behaviors.**
- **Do whatever it takes to go along in order to get along.**
- **Tap dancing around overt or covert conflict instead of resolving it.**

Question: If you feel like your marriage is a “Christian marriage,” do you believe this is the kind of marriage God intended for the two of you?

Another Way To Describe Category 1 and 2 Marriages: SELF-FOCUSED

Category 1 and 2 marriages are what I call “self-focused” marriages. By this description I mean the husband and wife are each more focused on themselves than being focused on Christ. By self-focused I mean they, in and of themselves without seeking God's involvement, are trying to produce a happy and fulfilling marriage.

If you are involved in a troubled marriage (Category 1), your category will be easy to spot. However, it is the Category 2 - Christian marriages that concern me the most. This is because:

If you and your spouse have learned how to cope with each other's fleshly behaviors and are, for the most part, just getting by in your marriage, then you may be DECEIVED into thinking you have a Christ-centered marriage.

Christian marriages may appear from the outside to be doing well because of minimal conflict or the absence of overt conflict. However, there is a key word that distinguishes both a Troubled marriage and a Christian marriage from a Christ-centered marriage.

The KEY Word That Differentiates a Troubled Marriage and a Christian Marriage from a Christ-Centered Marriage is “SOURCE”

Before examining a diagram that further illustrates Category 1 and 2 marriages, we need to stop and look more in depth at that key word, “Source,” which distinguishes both a Troubled marriage and a Christian marriage from a Category 3 - Christ-centered marriage. I call “SOURCE” a key word because in marriage (as well as in other areas of life), you are living life from one of two sources:

GOD as your Source
OR
YOU and YOUR spouse as your source

From which source are we to experience God’s design for a Christ-centered marriage? To answer that question, let’s go back to the Garden of Eden and look at the first marriage.

How Do We Know That God’s Design for Marriage Is that He Himself is to Be Our SOURCE?

In order to understand God’s design for marriage, let’s revisit the Garden of Eden before the “Fall” and look at Adam’s and Eve’s marriage. There are three key truths that will give us understanding of God’s design.

1. GOD Was The Source To Meet ALL of Adam’s and Eve’s Needs



*“And the LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food.”
Genesis 2:9*

“He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.” 1 Corinthians 1:30

Let’s go back to the Garden of Eden for a moment. Let me ask you a question, “Who was the Source to meet Adam’s and

Eve’s needs?” **God** was the Source and provider to meet every one of Adam’s and Eve’s physical, spiritual, and emotional needs. Why did Adam and Eve need another source other than themselves? The reason they needed God to be their Source is they could **not** meet their own needs. God designed them to need someone greater than themselves to meet their needs.

TRUTH #1

***Before the Fall, God was Adam's and Eve's SOURCE to meet their
PHYSICAL, SPIRITUAL, and EMOTIONAL needs.***

2. For God To Be Their Source, They Had To Live DEPENDENTLY Upon Him.

“And the LORD God commanded the man, ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; ¹⁷ but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.’” Genesis 2:16-17

For Adam and Eve to experience God as their Source, they had to walk in moment-by-moment **dependence** upon God. We see this in Genesis 2:16, 17 above. When they walked in dependence upon God, they continued experiencing eternal life, and God continued to meet all their needs. Once they made an **independent** choice to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, then they went from eternal life to spiritual death, were separated from God and no longer had their needs met by God. Dependence as we see in Genesis 2:16, 17 was a matter of spiritual life or death for them. Equally important is this key truth:

TRUTH #2

***God created man as a DEPENDENT creature.
Prior to the Fall, Adam and Eve walked in moment-by-moment
DEPENDENCE upon God to meet ALL of their needs.***

3. The RESULT Of Adam's and Eve's Dependence Upon God As The Source

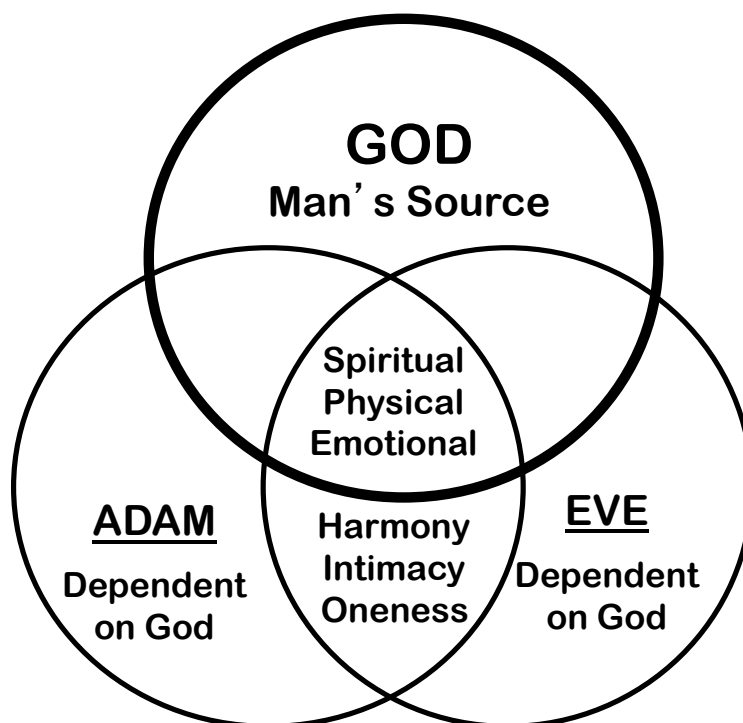
What were the results of Adam and Eve living dependently on God as their Source?

TRUTH #3

***The RESULTS of living from God as the SOURCE were perfect intimacy
between Adam and Eve, perfect harmony within
Adam and Eve, and perfect oneness with each other and with God.***

The diagram below illustrates these three truths.

God As The SOURCE For Adam and Eve



We see from the diagram that:

- God's design for marriage from the beginning was for God to be man's Source.
- The result of God's being the Source was He met every physical, spiritual, and emotional need of Adam and Eve.
- Adam's and Eve's part was to live in moment-by-moment dependence on God.
- The overflow of living dependently on God is that Adam and Eve experienced harmony, intimacy, and oneness in their marriage.

***Since it was God's DESIGN for Adam and Eve to live in moment-by-moment
DEPENDENCE on God as their Source, is it possible this
is also God's design for you and your spouse?***

Question: Does God's design for marriage make sense to you? Is it possible that this is what God designed for your marriage? Hint: Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8).

The DIFFERENCE Between You Versus God Being the Source

Let's look at the difference between living from God as the Source versus living from yourselves as the source of your marriage. If you and your spouse are the source, then:

It is up to YOU both to RESOLVE your conflicts, MEET each another's needs, FIX or CHANGE your fleshly behaviors, and PRODUCE happiness and fulfillment in marriage.

Question: If you believe that you and your spouse are the source to resolve your conflicts, meet each another's needs, fix or change fleshly behaviors, and produce happiness and fulfillment in your marriage, how is that working for you?

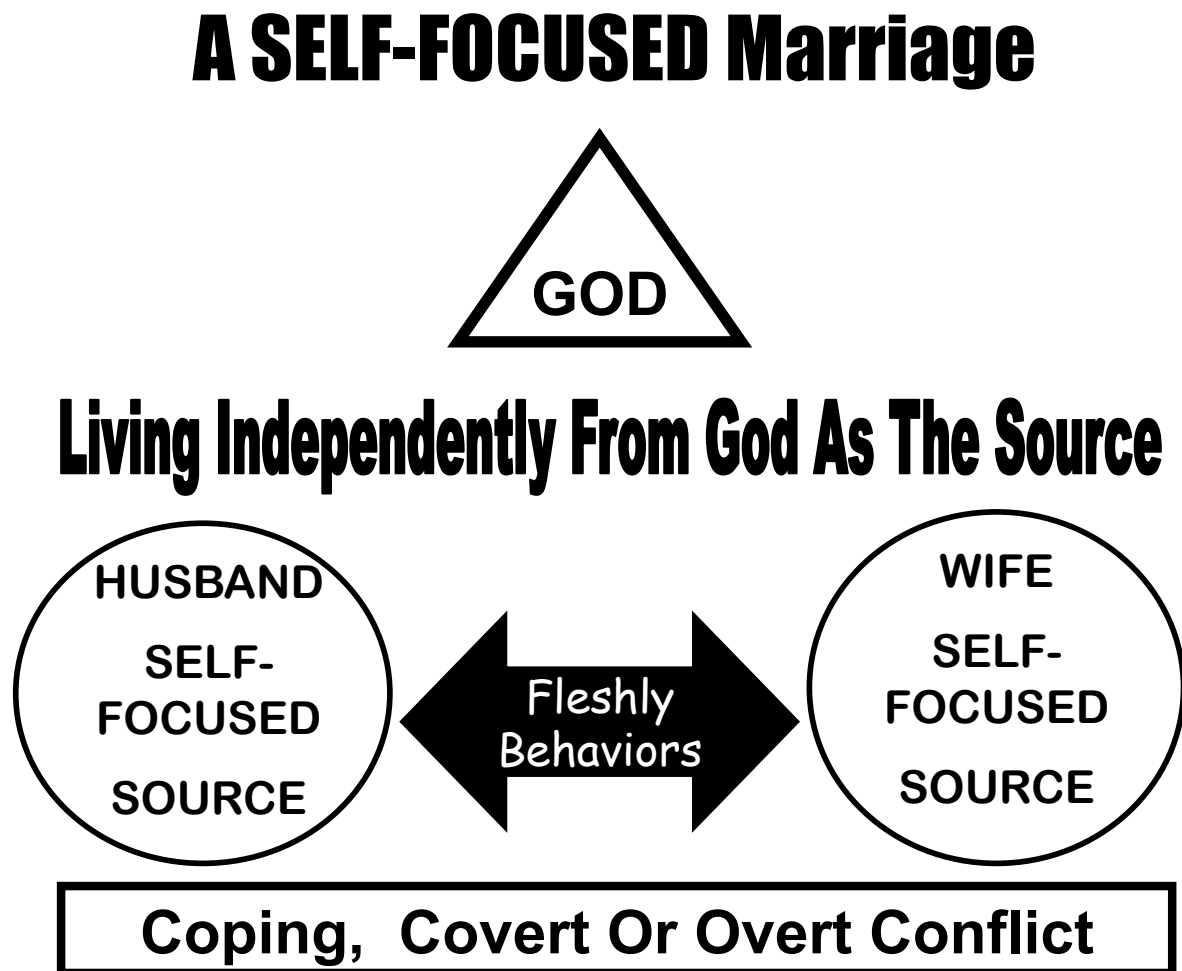
DAY THREE

In contrast to spouses trying to meet their own needs, a married couple living from God as the Source of their marriage can expect:

GOD to RESOLVE their conflicts, MEET each spouse's needs, CHANGE their fleshly behaviors and PRODUCE happiness and fulfillment in their marriage.

I share these truths about God's being our Source because I define Category 1 and 2 marriages as ones where one or both spouses are living from themselves as the source.

Having this understanding, let's look at a diagram that should help you better understand a Category 1 and 2 marriage (or what I call a **self-focused** marriages):



In both a Troubled marriage and a Christian Marriage (self-focused marriages), the husband and wife are each **self-focused** and living **independently** from God as their Source. By **depending on themselves as the source**, they are **experiencing** each other's **fleshly behaviors** flowing between

them. The result is one or both spouses engaging in **coping mechanisms and, when those fail, then covert and later overt conflict.**

Question: Does your marriage fit into either one of these self-focused categories? If so, are you beginning to understand the basis of your frustrations with the marriage?

There is one more key truth I would like to leave you with before we go onto a Category 3 marriage.

***If you are in a CHRISTIAN marriage, and fail to seek God as your Source,
EVENTUALLY have a TROUBLED marriage.***

Category 3 – A Christ-Centered Marriage

Below are some of the characteristics of a Christ-centered marriage.

- **No longer desiring to use coping mechanisms or settle for unhappiness.**
- **Both spouses experiencing victory and freedom from fleshly behaviors.**
- **Each spouse is becoming more selfless and other-focused.**
- **Each spouse's needs are being met in Christ.**
- **Spiritual resolution to overcome overt and covert conflict.**
- **Continually moving into a deeper experience of unconditional love, oneness, intimacy, and harmony with each other and with God.**
- **Both spouses are being transformed into Christ-likeness.**

Question: If you are not experiencing a Christ-centered marriage, would you like to experience one?

In Lesson Two, I will discuss in more depth the meaning of "Christ-likeness." For now, let me give you a simple definition of Christ-likeness:

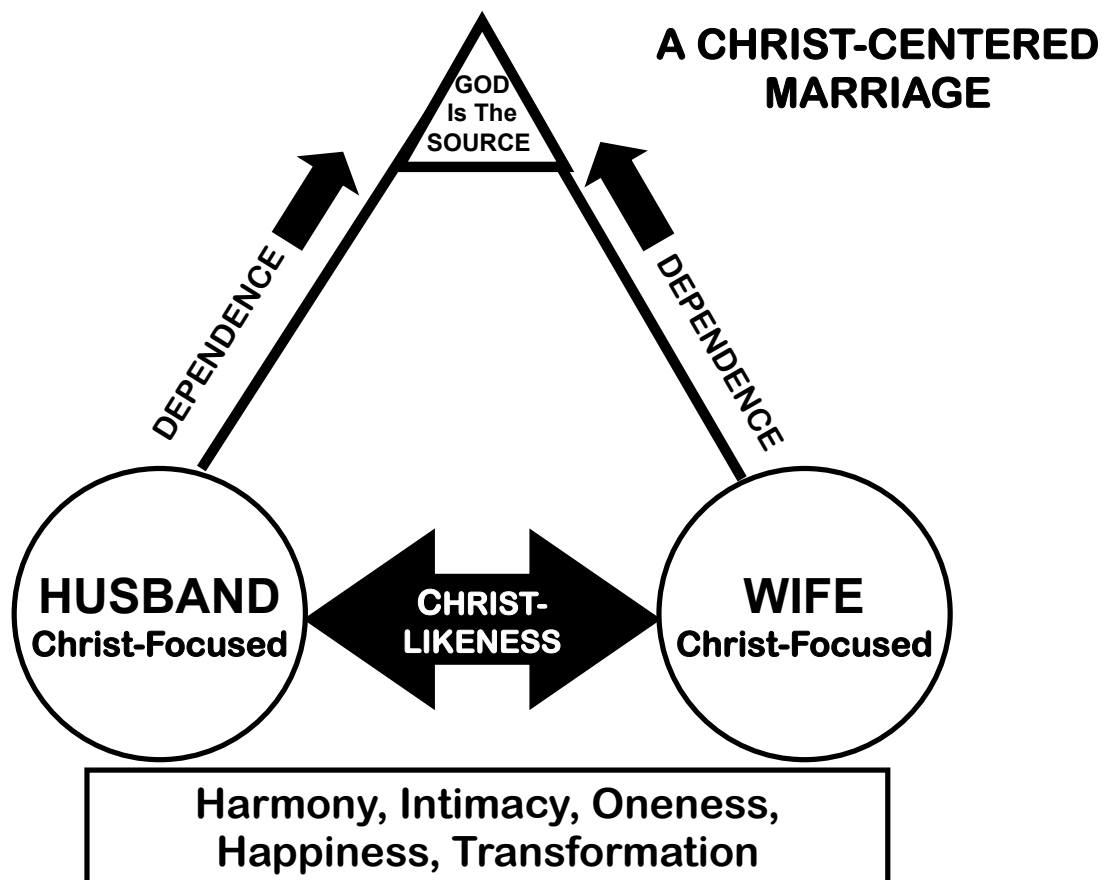
***CHRIST-LIKENESS means that you will think, believe, choose,
and behave like Christ.***

Question: In what ways might it transform your marriage if you and your spouse were thinking, believing, choosing, and behaving like Christ?

Concerning the word “Source” in a Category 3 - Christ-Centered marriage:

***Each spouse is seeking God as the SOURCE in order to experience
a Christ-centered marriage.***

With this in mind, let’s look at the following diagram illustrating the characteristics of a Christ-centered marriage.



In a Christ-centered marriage the husband and wife are both **Christ-focused**, they are living **dependently** upon God as their Source, and they are **experiencing Christ-likeness** flowing between them. The result is increasing **harmony, intimacy, oneness, happiness, and transformation**.

I think at this point in the study that we need to look at what baggage we might have brought into the marriage.

DAY FOUR

Did You REALLY Know What You Were Getting In To When You Said “I Do?”

My answer to that question is a resounding “NO!” Paige and I had no idea what we were getting in to when we said, “I do.” What I mean by this is that we had no idea that we were bringing “baggage” into the marriage. What do I mean by “baggage?” Here are five examples of our baggage:

- We had FALSE beliefs about marriage, about relationships, and even about living the Christian life.
- We had NEEDS that needed to be met (such as unconditional love, acceptance, respect, value/worth, security) that we thought each other could meet.
- We both had UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS about what marriage should look like and how we should function as husband and wife.
- We both brought our FLESHLY BEHAVIORS into the marriage which created ONGOING conflict.
- Finally, we brought our past WOUNDEDNESS caused by our parents and others into the marriage.

Imagine each of you coming to the altar dragging all your baggage with you. The pastor says, “Before you say, ‘I do,’ I want you to open each other’s baggage so you will know what your future spouse is bringing into the marriage.” As I look back on that day and knowing what I know now, I may have been tempted to say, “Let me think about this a little while longer.” I don’t believe any of us really knew what we were getting into when we got married. As a result of this baggage, we all struggle at some level in our marriages.

For some of you going through this study, your baggage has multiplied itself so much that your marriage is in real trouble. That is what happened to Paige and me. First, we didn’t realize what baggage we brought into the marriage, and second, we didn’t recognize that our increasing baggage was the source of our ongoing conflict.

How About You?

Can you identify with some of the things we brought into our marriage? The truth is we all bring some type of “baggage” into our marriage relationship. The question we need to explore is, “How is your baggage negatively impacting your marriage?” Let’s explore some of the aspects of that question by taking a few minutes to answer the questions below.

- What are some areas of conflict in your marriage that you can’t seem to get past?

- Which of the following of your needs is your spouse not meeting: unconditional love, acceptance, respect, value/worth, and security?

- What expectations did you have coming into your marriage that are still unmet?

- **What are some negative or fleshly behaviors that are creating conflict in your marriage? (Choose from the list on page 95 and 96) Yours? Your spouse's?**

- Did you bring past woundedness into your marriage that resulted from such things in the past as abuse, rejection, abandonment, divorce, etc.? If so, in what ways has your past woundedness negatively impacted your marriage relationship today?

- _____

When I disciple couples, I have found that one or more of the things listed above are creating covert or overt conflict in their marriage. The questions that I ask them are:

***What are you doing to deal with your marital conflict?
How is what you are doing working for you?***

Why Our Marriage Was NOT Working

If what you are doing to try to deal with your unmet needs, expectations, marital struggles, or conflicts is not working, it raises the next question: “Why not?” Our marriage was not working for the first ten years for two key reasons:

1. **We didn't realize that what we were taught concerning how to live the Christian life was hindering the happiness and fulfillment that we were looking for.**
2. **We didn't know the truth about experiencing a Christ-centered marriage.**

What we discovered after 10 years of marriage was this:

***The KIND of Christian life that you are living will determine WHETHER
OR NOT you will experience a Christ-centered marriage.***

Paige and I discovered that the way we were taught to live the Christian life was setting us up for failure in our marriage. The same is probably true of you and your spouse. You see, there are two ways to live your Christian life:

***“A” Christian Life
OR
“THE” Christian Life***

Paige and I, for the first ten years of our marriage were living “A” Christian life. As a result of living “A” Christian life, our marriage was never transformed (and got worse), and we never experienced a Christ-centered marriage. Why not? To answer that question let’s look at the difference between “A” Christian life and “THE” Christian life.

What Is “A” Christian Life?

I define “A” Christian life like this:

“A” Christian Life:

***What we believe that we need to DO with God’s HELP to live the
Christian life in order to be loved, accepted, and pleasing to God.***

Does this sound familiar to you? There is a reason I emphasized the word “do” in this definition. Everything in our human experience, from childhood on, is based on a “learn and do” model. We learn how to do something then go out and try to accomplish it. Hence, by default, we are set up to believe this “learn and do” frame of reference applies to living the Christian life. Because of this “learn and do” mentality, when I began my Christian walk at age 22, I asked this question:

What do I need to “DO” to live the Christian life?

See if any of the things I was told to “do” in order to live the Christian life sound familiar to you. I was told:

- To try to accomplish what I learned from the Bible.
- I was taught that I needed to try to stop sinning.
- I was taught to try to keep God’s rules and commands.
- It was up to me with God’s help to try to change myself.
- I needed to try to become more righteous.
- I needed to try to transform my fleshly behavior into godly behavior.

Have you been told to “try and do” some of these things? I believed that if I could accomplish these things “with God’s help,” then I would be a “successful” Christian pleasing to both God and others. By the way, did you pick up on the word “try” in each of the examples above?

Being a “Type A” guy, I tried very hard to accomplish all of those things for my first thirty years as a Christian. The problem was the more I tried, the worse things became. Instead of experiencing freedom, victory, and transformation that God promises, I became increasingly frustrated with my Christian walk because nothing seemed to change. I felt more and more like a failure because I could not accomplish what pastors and teachers were telling me I needed to do.

In addition, I struggled with personal internal feelings of fear, anxiety, and inadequacy, but failed to find a way to be set free.

It was the same for my wife, Paige. When she came into the Christian life, she was given a “to do” checklist, and she too “tried” but failed to live “A” Christian life. She also had internal struggles she wrestled, in vain, to be set free from. The problem for both of us was the more we tried, with God’s help, to live “A” Christian life, the more we found ourselves being stuck. What do I mean by being “stuck?”

For us personally, the results of living “A” Christian life were:

- **NO victory** over our fleshly behaviors.
- **NO freedom** from defeating sin patterns.
- **NO healing** of our past woundedness.
- **NO transformation** or change in our personal lives or in our marriage

The truth is we were not experiencing any of God’s promises for us even though we tried most everything anyone told us to do in order to live “A” Christian life.

Question: What were you taught about living the Christian life? Is it possible that you and/or your spouse have possibly been living “A” Christian life?

One of the ways that you can tell is by asking yourself these questions:

- Am I experiencing ongoing victory over my fleshly behaviors?
- Am I experiencing freedom from my defeating sin patterns?
- Am I experiencing healing from any of my past woundedness?
- Am I experiencing internal transformation with the result that I am thinking, feeling, choosing, and behaving more like Christ?
- Is my Christian life meeting my needs and producing joy and fulfillment?

If your answer is “No” to one or more of these questions, then you might be living “A” Christian life. Before we talk about how living “A” Christian life impacts our marriages, I want to give you one more definition of “A” Christian life.

A Christian Life

is where YOU are trying to be the SOURCE (with God’s help) to meet your needs, solve your problems, and live the Christian life.

Remember the word “source” that we talked about earlier? We said that there were two sources: you or God. Concerning “A” life, it is up to you (with God’s help) to live the Christian life. Is this God’s design for living the Christian life?

DAY FIVE

Now, let's tie in living "A" Christian life to the marriage relationship.

"A" Christian Life and Marriage

Is a marriage where you and/or your spouse are TRYING to be the SOURCE to solve your problems, resolve your conflicts, and produce a Christ-centered marriage with GOD'S HELP.

When you look at the above definition, is it possible that you are living "A" Christian life? Paige and I were taught that we were to be the "source" to live "A" Christian life with God's help, to solve our problems, to meet each other's needs, and to have a "successful" Christian marriage.

Here is what our marriage looked like after ten years of living "A" Christian life:

- We had ongoing unresolved overt and covert conflicts that were getting worse.
- We learned to cope in response to each other's fleshly behaviors.
- Our fleshly behaviors got worse.
- We both had ongoing unmet needs and expectations.
- There was no spiritual transformation in either one of us or in our marriage.

Does this list sound familiar? For those first ten years, Paige and I had a Category #2 - Christian marriage. Both of us were Christians when we got married. As such, we were faithful to read our Bibles, to go to church, and to attend small group Bible studies. We **appeared** to have a spiritually healthy marriage.

We looked at other Christian marriages and felt like we were doing better than most. In fact, if someone had asked us, we would have told them we had a Christ-centered marriage. We were doing several of the external things we thought we needed to do to experience a Christ-centered marriage, but they were not producing the joy, the oneness, and the fulfillment we wanted.

What was the problem? As hard as we tried, we could never produce the happiness and fulfillment we wanted in our marriage or in our Christian life.

Questions: Is it possible you are living from the wrong source? If you are living "A" Christian life, do you think it is possible to experience a Christ-centered marriage?

Living "A" Christian Life will set you up for FAILURE so that you will NOT be able to experience a Christ-centered marriage.

Summary

I hope by this point in the study you have determined whether you are experiencing a Category 1, 2, or 3 marriage. If you have discovered you have a Troubled or a Christian marriage, I want you to know there is great hope for you to experience a Christ-centered marriage. In the next lesson we will learn what it means to live “THE” Christian life and how living “THE” life will produce a Christ-centered marriage.

Lesson Two

“THE” Christian Life and The Foundation For Experiencing A Christ-Centered Marriage

DAY ONE

Lesson Topics:

We will be covering the following topics in this lesson:

- The foundation of a Christ-centered marriage
- Living “THE” Christian life versus living “A” Christian life
- How living “THE” Christian life creates a Christ-centered marriage
- God’s part and our part in living “THE” Christian life
- How to experience Christ’s life in marriage

Introduction

I trust Lesson One revealed to you what kind of marriage you are experiencing. I also hope you have a deeper understanding of what it means to be living “A” Christian life. After reading that lesson, do you believe you are living “A” Christian life? Does it make biblical sense why you can’t have a Christ-centered marriage by living “A” Christian life?

If you are still wondering about, or are even a little perplexed about what I shared, what you read in this lesson should help clear things up. This is a crucial lesson to engage the Holy Spirit to give you revelation of what I am about to share. So, let’s begin by looking at the meaning of living “THE” Christian life and how it will produce a Christ-centered marriage.

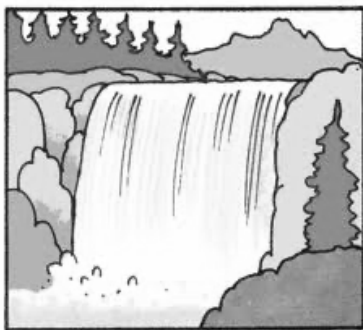
The Foundation Of A Christ-Centered Marriage – “THE” Christian Life

*“For no one can lay any **foundation** other than the one already laid, which is **Jesus Christ**.”
1 Corinthians 3:11*

Being a former builder, I know the importance of constructing the proper foundation. If you don’t have a good foundation, there is no way you can build a sound building on it. It is the same way in living the Christian life and experiencing a Christ-centered marriage. Therefore, we are going to learn that living “THE” Christian life is the foundation for not only producing an abundant Christian life, but also for producing a Christ-centered marriage. Let’s begin by looking at what Jesus says is “THE” Life.

1. What Jesus Says Is “THE” Christian Life

Jesus says:



*“...I AM the way, the truth, and **THE LIFE**...”*
John 14:6

*“...I AM the resurrection and **THE LIFE**.”*
John 11:25

What does Jesus mean in these two passages? Clearly, Jesus is saying He Himself is **THE** Life. What does He mean when He says He is **THE** Life? For many years, I read these verses and concluded they only meant He was the source for my **eternal** life. However, is it possible Jesus is telling us something more in these passages? Look at one more scripture that gives us the answer:

*“God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.
He who has the Son has **THE LIFE**....” 1 John 5:12a*

Let’s explore the answer to this question further by looking at what Paul says about living “THE” Christian life.

2. What Paul Says About Living “THE” Christian Life

Paul took the truth of Christ as “THE” Life to a more personal level when he said in Colossians 3:4:

*“..Christ who is **YOUR** life...”*

What does Paul mean in this verse? He is saying the life of Christ is more than the eternal life He gave you at salvation. He is asserting that Christ is **your** life today, at this very moment. At this point you may be wondering, “What does it mean that Christ is my life? Is the life Paul is referring to THE Christian life?” I believe the answer is found in Philippians 1:21 where Paul says:

*“For me, to live **IS** Christ....”*

Paul is declaring that **life for him is Christ being his life**. Jesus and Paul are revealing to us an incredible truth, and that is:

“THE” Christian Life
is a PERSON. It is Christ HIMSELF!

Have you understood before now that Christ Himself is THE Christian life? Think about this for a moment. If “THE” Christian life is a Person, does that mean that “THE” Christian life is **not** about completing a checklist, trying to keep a set of rules, trying to keep from sinning, or trying to do your best to live for God? I believe what Jesus and Paul were saying is that:

THE Christian life is NOT a life that WE are to produce.

It is a life that ONLY CHRIST can produce.

The truth is the Christian life is not about living “A” life. We know from the last lesson “A” life will never produce what God promises for you as a Christian or as a husband or wife. God’s promises can only happen by your living “THE” life. This is an incredible truth! Think about this: “THE” Christian life does NOT consist of rules to keep, checklists to follow, or lists of things we are to DO. It is a Person. Have you thought about that before? Is it possible that if you really grasp this truth it would change how you live your Christian life?

Meditate: on the truth that the Christian life is not a set of rules or checklists. Instead, THE Christian life is Christ Himself.

Question: How would it change how you live your Christian life if you believed THE Christian life is a Person rather than a checklist or a set of rules?

Engaging God: Begin to ask God to give you revelation of what it means for Christ to be “THE” life.

Knowing this truth began to radically change how Paige and I lived the Christian life, including far-reaching changes in our marriage. Before I go into that, let’s dig deeper into the meaning of “THE” life.

Since Christ Is “THE” Life, Then He Is Also Your Source.

Remember from the previous lesson that God’s design from the beginning is that you and your spouse are to live FROM God as your Source. The following three verses confirm Christ is to be your Source for living “THE” Christian life:

“He is the SOURCE of your life in Christ Jesus,...” 1 Corinthians 1:30
(NRSV) (Emphasis mine)

“In Him (Christ) we live and move and have our being.” Acts 17:28 (Parenthesis mine)

“For from Him (Christ) and through Him (Christ) and to Him (Christ) are all things.....”
Romans 11:36 (Parentheses mine)

These are just three of many verses in the Bible that reveal to us that God is to be our Source for living the Christian life. You may be wondering what it means practically that Christ is your Source. Here are some examples:

Examples of Christ As Your Source

The following are just a few examples of how Christ is your Source in your personal life and in your marriage:

VICTORY - He will be your source of victory over the flesh, the world, and the power of Satan.

*“but thanks be to God, who gives us the **victory** through our Lord Jesus Christ.”
1 Corinthians 15:57*

FREEDOM - He will be your source of freedom from defeating sin patterns and ongoing inner struggles.

*“So Christ has really set us **free**. Now make sure that you stay free, and don’t get tied up again in slavery to the law.” Galatians 5:1*

HEALING - He will be your source of healing of your past and present woundedness.

*“He **heals** the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.” Psalm 147:3*

SUPPLY - He will be your source to supply all your needs.

*“My God shall **supply all your needs.....in Christ Jesus**.” Philippians 4:19*

INTIMACY - He will be your source to draw you into a personal, intimate relationship with Himself.

*“His **unchanging plan** has always been to adopt us into His own family by **bringing us to Himself through Jesus Christ**. And this gave Him great pleasure.” Ephesians 1:5*

Question: Are the truths listed above an experiential reality in your life and in your marriage? Are you experiencing the promised freedom, victory, healing, and intimacy with God that you and your spouse desire? If not, do you desire to experience them?

Meditate: on the truths about Christ being your Source. Think about which of the promises that you most want to experience for yourself and your spouse.

Engaging God: If you are not experiencing these promises to the extent that you would like, ask God to begin making these promises an experiential reality in your life.

Examples of Christ As Your Source

Let’s look at some more examples of what it means for Christ to be your Source personally and in your marriage.

Examples of what it means for God to be your SOURCE personally:

- He will renew your mind to believe His truth. Romans 12:2
- He will produce the fruit of the Spirit in you. Galatians 5:22, 23

- He will make His promises concerning you an experiential reality in your life.
Philippians 1:6

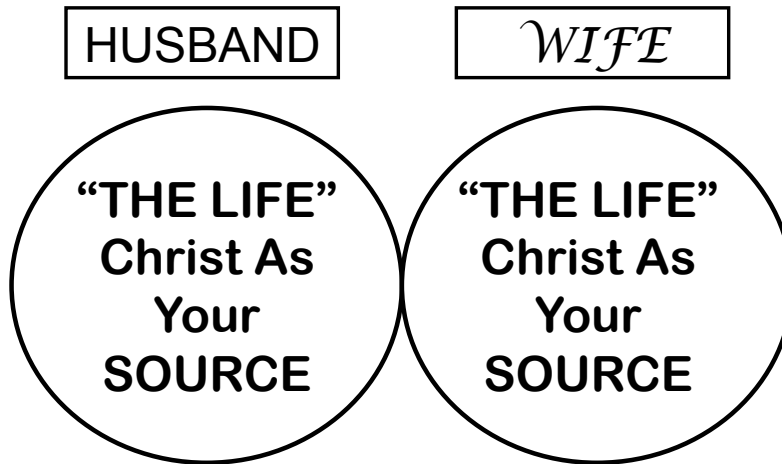
Examples of what it means for God to be your SOURCE in your marriage:

- He will resolve your conflicts.
- He will transform your fleshly behaviors into Godly behaviors.
- He will produce joy and fulfillment.
- He will grow your marriage to experience a deeper intimacy and oneness.
- He will produce a selfless attitude in both you and in your spouse.

I want to end this section by giving you an illustration of the husband and wife living from “THE” Christian life.

DAY TWO

You Contain THE LIFE of Christ As Your SOURCE



Another Meaning Of Christ As THE Life – TRANSFORMATION Of You and Your Spouse To Experience CHRIST-LIKENESS

We touched on this in Lesson One, but we are now going to unpack what it means to be transformed into Christ-likeness. Before we do, let's look at a key truth:

Transformation into Christ-likeness is part of your SPIRITUAL DESTINY.

You and your spouse have a spiritual destiny according to Romans 8:29 and 2 Corinthians 3:18.

"For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren." Romans 8:29

"And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." 2 Corinthians 3:18

This is a tremendous promise from God. His destiny for you is to be transformed into the likeness of Christ. Now I want to share with you what Christ-likeness means.

CHRIST-LIKENESS

SUPERNATURAL, Christ-like CHARACTERISTICS

that can ONLY be supplied by Christ.

To give you a better understanding of Christ-likeness, let's look at some verses that show us some of these Christ-like characteristics: (Focus on the words in bold-face type.)



*“But the fruit of the Spirit is (Christ’s) **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,** ²³ **gentleness, and self-control....**” Galatians 5:22, 23a (Parenthesis mine)*

*“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with (Christ’s) **compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.** ¹³ Bear with each other and **forgive** whatever grievances you may have against one another. **Forgive as the Lord forgave you.** ¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on (Christ’s) **love**, which binds them all together in perfect unity.” Colossians 3:12-14 (Parentheses mine)*

*“Finally, be **strong** in the Lord and in the strength of His might.” Ephesians 6:10*

Examples of Christ-like characteristics include: the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22, 23; what we are to clothe ourselves with in Colossians 3:12-14 (i.e., compassion, kindness, humility, etc.); and the strength of Christ, as stated in Ephesians 6:10.

The following is an expanded list of Christ-like characteristics:

| | | | | |
|--------------------|---------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------|
| Unconditional love | Victory | Worth | Acceptance | Fulfillment |
| Freedom | Patience | Strength | Peace | Faith |
| Forgiveness | Understanding | Security | Fearlessness | Wisdom |
| Discernment | Adequacy | Humility | Christ-confidence | Boldness |
| Righteousness | Selflessness | Rest | Compassion | Courage |
| Hope | Gentleness | Christ-control | Faithfulness | Joy |

Example: Christ as your life means that Christ **IS** your forgiveness, your security, your unconditional love, etc.

Question: Is there anything in the list above that you would like to experience more of in your personal life? In your marriage? Please write down your answers.

Engaging God: Begin asking God to make the Christ-life characteristics that you picked an experiential reality in your marriage.

What Is The Difference Between CHRIST-LIKE Characteristics and HUMAN Characteristics?

To better understand the meaning of Christ-life characteristics, we need to first understand there is a **human** connotation to these characteristics as well as a **spiritual** one. We know in the human realm we may experience temporary, situational peace, patience, security, etc. But what we are talking about in the spiritual realm is not human but Christ-like characteristics. Let's look at the difference between the two.

HUMAN Characteristics – feelings or experiences (internal or external) generated by man **CAN** be **changed** by our circumstances and/or our relationships.

For example, let's assume you are having a good day. You are feeling **human** peace, joy, and security. But then you come home to find someone has broken into your house which is flooded due to a broken pipe and your two-year old son is throwing a temper tantrum.



What happens to your human feelings of peace, joy, and security? They evaporate quickly! What would this same situation look like living from Christ-life characteristics? Before I answer that question, let's define Christ-life characteristics.

CHRIST-LIKE Characteristics – SUPERNATURAL characteristics of Christ's life that are supplied by Christ and CANNOT be changed by circumstances or relationships.

The key word in this definition is "supernatural." In the context of Christ-life characteristics, supernatural means it is a characteristic only Christ can supply. To understand better what a supernatural "Christ-like" characteristic is, let's look at the words of the apostle Paul, in Colossians 1:24:

"I am overflowing with JOY in the midst of all our suffering...."



In Paul's walk of faith, he arrived at a place where he was experiencing great joy even in the midst of his suffering. This was not a human joy because it is nearly impossible to experience human joy when we are suffering. Paul was experiencing a supernatural, Spirit-produced joy that even suffering could not steal.

Using the same example as above, let's assume when you are faced with the robbery, the flooding, and the crying child, instead of walking away in anger, frustration, impatience, etc., you are able to draw on the Christ-like characteristics of peace, joy, and patience. We will talk about what this practically looks like later in this lesson. For now the key truth to understand is:

The KEY difference between a HUMAN characteristic and a CHRIST-LIKE characteristic is that NOTHING or NO ONE can ROB you of experiencing Christ-like characteristics.

Let's look at an example that applies to marriage. Let's assume that you struggle with impatience toward your spouse. What is it that you need from Christ as your life? **His** patience. Have you tried in your own strength to produce patience? How well did that work out? How long did it last? Most likely it did not last long. In contrast, if you are living from Christ's patience, it means that nothing or no one can rob you of His patience. Trying to live from human patience will result in someone or something robbing you of that patience.

Engaging God: Begin seeking God to give you deeper understanding of the difference between a human characteristic and a Christ-like characteristic.

DAY THREE

You and Your Spouse Contain The FULLNESS Of The Christ-Like Characteristics.

Take a close look at the following verse:

*"For **in Christ** all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority." Colossians 2:9, 10*

These verses are telling us two incredible truths:

1. **You have the fullness of the GODHEAD in you. You contain ALL of the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.**
2. **In addition, since you have the fullness of Christ in you, you contain ALL the Christ-like characteristics listed above.**

This means that you contain ALL of Christ's peace, joy, patience, forgiveness, etc. If you and your spouse contain all of the Christ-life characteristics, what does that mean for you?

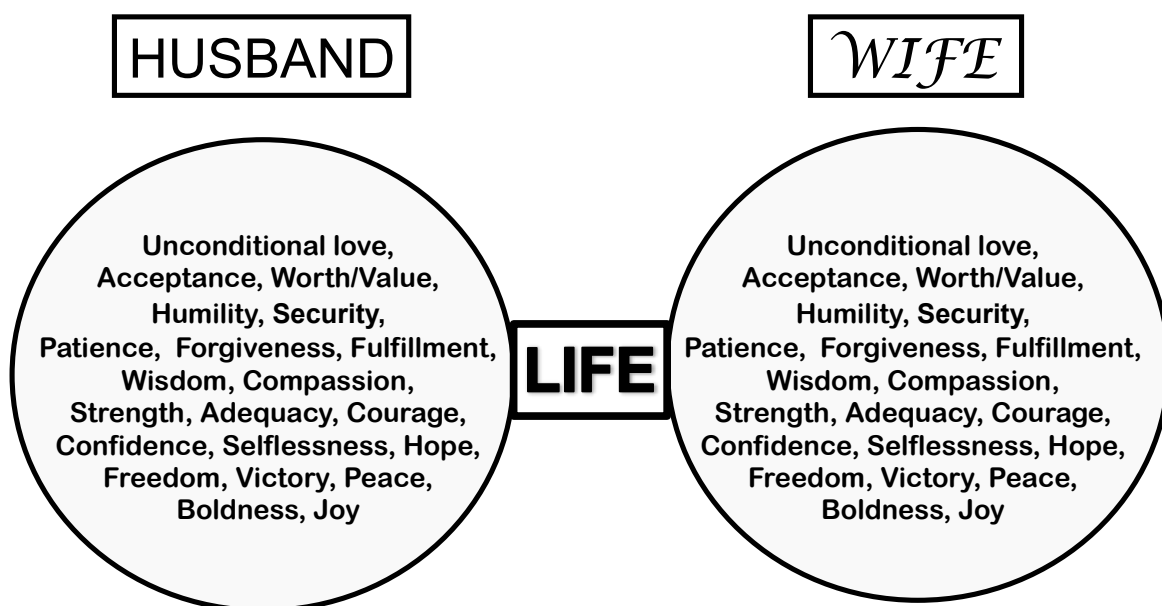
KEY TRUTH

Since Christ is your life, and He is in you, you do NOT need to TRY to PRODUCE Christ-like characteristics in your life or in your marriage.

Think about the above statement for just a minute. Since you have all of the Christ-like characteristics listed above within you, it is NOT necessary (nor is it possible) for you to try to produce them in your life. Have you thought, until now, that it was up to YOU to produce more unconditional love, more patience, more selflessness, etc.? The good news is you can't (nor do you even need to try to) produce THE Life that is in Christ who is in you.

Next is a visual that illustrates the fullness of THE Life of Christ who is in you and your spouse:

Christ's Life In You Means That You and Your Spouse Contain ALL of The Christ-Life Characteristics



Question: Does it make sense that if you contain all of these Christ-like characteristics that you **no longer** have to try to produce them yourself?

What Are We To DO Now That We Understand Christ As THE LIFE?

I believe that Paul gives us that answer in the first part of Galatians 2:20:

*"I am crucified with Christ, and I **NO** longer live, but Christ (THE LIFE) lives **IN** me..."*
(Parenthesis and emphasis mine)

Paul himself is acknowledging that he can't live THE Christian life when he says, "I no longer live." Instead, Paul declares that since he can't live THE Life, he is going to allow Christ, THE LIFE, to live His life in Paul. This is amazing considering all of Paul's credentials, intellect, and ability. However, he clearly acknowledges none of those things qualifies him to be the source.

How do you think Galatians 2:20 may apply to you and your spouse?

Like Paul, neither you or your spouse can live THE Christian life.
Therefore, your part is to ALLOW Christ to live HIS Life, THE Life, in you.

The truth is the only way your life and marriage will ever truly work is to depend on Christ to live His life in and through you. We will further explore what this looks like practically at the end of this lesson.

Questions: Have you realized before now that THE Christian life is about Christ living His life in you? If not, how do you think it might change how you are living your Christian life and allter your marriage if you applied that truth?

Meditate: on the first part of Galatians 2:20, above. Go through this verse and think about the depth of what Paul is saying and the impact this verse could have in your life and marriage if you believed it enough to live it out as truth.

Engaging God: Ask God to give you further revelation of what He means when He says that He wants to live His life in you.

How Does Galatians 2:20 Apply To Your Marriage?

Let's now apply Galatians 2:20 to your marriage because it is the key to experiencing a Christ-centered marriage.

The Key To A Christ-Centered Marriage:
To live FROM Christ
as your Source so that He can live HIS life IN you.

Just as we are to live FROM Christ as our Source in our personal Christian walk, so too are we as a married couple to live FROM Christ as our Source. This is the only way that you and your spouse will ever experience a Christ-centered marriage.

In Addition To Christ's Life, You Contain ALL The POWER of God.

Since you have the fullness of God in you, then you also have all of God's power in you.

*"you will receive **power** when the Holy Spirit has come upon you...." Acts 1:8*

*"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the **power** will be of God and not from ourselves." 2 Corinthians 4:7*



1. What kind of power is God's power?

To get a better sense of God's power in you, look at Ephesians 1:19, 20:

*"I pray that you will begin to understand the **incredible greatness of His power** for us who believe him. This is the **same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead** and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms."*

Think of it!

The SAME power that RESURRECTED Jesus from the dead is IN YOU!

2. God's power in you is the same power that:

- Created the heavens and the earth.
- Opened the Red Sea.
- Is holding the universe together.

3. Why was it necessary for God to put His power in us?

God put His POWER in you to do what He promises and to do what you CANNOT do by your own WILLPOWER.

4. Isn't your willpower enough without needing God's power?

Let me ask you a few questions concerning your willpower:

1. Can your own willpower consistently overpower the flesh within you?
2. Is your willpower any match for Satan's power?
3. Can your willpower set you or your spouse free from a defeating sin pattern?
4. Can your willpower transform you or your spouse's fleshly behaviors into godly behavior?
5. Can your willpower transform you or your spouse to think, choose, believe and behave like Christ?

Have you tried to do any of the above things using your willpower? How well did that work for you? I think it is safe to say that apart from God's power we can accomplish none of those things.

Questions: What is it that you are trying to do in your own willpower to change you, your spouse, and your marriage? Is what you are trying working?

5. What are some things that ONLY God's power can accomplish in your marriage?

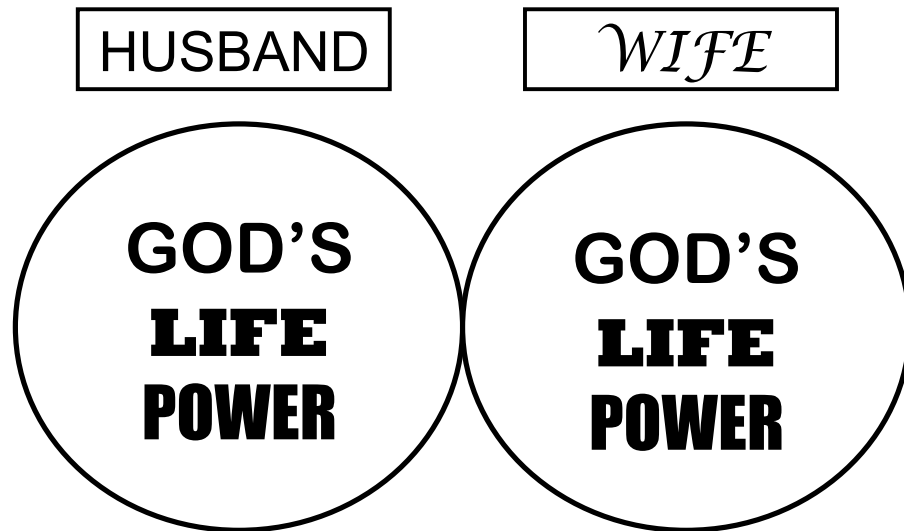
- a. RESTORES a hurting and a broken marriage.
- b. MOVES you and your spouse away from living in the flesh.
- c. TRANSFORMS your fleshly behavior into Christ-like behavior.
- d. TRANSFORMS you and your spouse to think, believe, behave, and choose like Christ.

Question: If only God's power can accomplish those things listed above, doesn't it stand to reason that we should draw on His power and not try to use our own willpower?

Engaging God: Begin to seek God, in His power, to accomplish those things that you are trying to accomplish in your marriage by your own power.

Let's end this section with the following diagram.

**You Not Only Contain All of Christ's LIFE,
You Contain All Of God's POWER.**



KEY TRUTH

It was necessary for God to put Christ's LIFE and POWER in you and in your spouse for HIM to PRODUCE a Christ-centered marriage.

DAY FOUR

Christ As Your LIFE and SOURCE Results In An ABUNDANT Life and A CHRIST-CENTERED Marriage.

*"I have come that you might have life and have it **ABUNDANTLY**." John 10:10b*

As you live from "THE LIFE" of Christ, He will produce in you and your spouse abundant life and a Christ-centered marriage.

What if you were experiencing the following in your marriage:

- **Increasing harmony, intimacy, and oneness.**
- **Greater dependence on God for every aspect of your life and your marriage.**
- **Christ-like behavior instead of fleshly behavior.**
- **Being more selfless and sacrificial instead of selfish and self-focused.**
- **Thinking, feeling, believing, choosing, and behaving like Christ.**

Would you call that abundant life? I believe all of us would call living from these things "abundant" living. Let's conclude with this truth:

***Christ As THE LIFE is your SOURCE to produce an abundant Christian life
and a Christ-centered marriage.***

Meditate: on the thought that God wants you to have an abundant life and an abundant marriage.

Engaging God: Begin seeking the Lord to produce in you and your spouse an abundant marriage.

The Truth Versus The Lie Using "THE LINE"

The final thing I would like to share with you in this section is an analogy I call "the Line." In the next illustration, living above "the Line" is living from the truth, and living below "the Line" is living from the lie.

THE TRUTH Versus THE LIE

**Living "THE" Life will produce
a Christ-centered life
and a Christ-centered marriage.**

THE TRUTH

THE LIE

**Living "A" Christian life
will produce a Christ-
centered life and a
Christ-centered marriage.**

In this next section we are going to learn God's part and your part in Christ living His life in you and through you and your spouse.

What Is GOD'S Part and YOUR Part In Christ Living THE Life In You?

1. GOD'S PART In Christ Living THE Life In You

As your source, God is the INITIATOR and The CAUSE and EFFECT of transforming your marriage.

*"For I am confident of this very thing, that **He who began (INITIATOR)** a good work **in you**..."*
Philippians 1:6a (Parenthesis mine)

What is Paul telling us in the first part of this verse? He is saying that God began the work that He wants to accomplish in you. He began or **initiated** this work in you at salvation. The Father accomplished this work by sending Jesus to die on the cross to save mankind from his sins. However, God promises to do **much more** than just save you. Look at the second part of Philippians 1:6:

*"...He who began a good work in you **will carry it on to completion** until the day of Christ Jesus."*
Philippians 1:6b

We see in the second part of Philippians 1:6 that God not only began the work, but He also WILL complete the work that He began in you at salvation. This verse reveals to us that God is the **initiator** and the **cause** and **effect** for real change in your life and in your marriage.

Based on this verse, I have a few questions I would like you to think about. Where do you find yourself in this verse? Are you the initiator or cause and effect? Or are you the one who is the recipient of what God wants to accomplish? How do you think, "apart from Me you can do nothing" from John 15:5b applies to this verse? Let's look at some examples of what it means in your marriage for God to carry to completion what He has begun.

What God will accomplish to transform your marriage. He will:

- Give you a DESIRE to live from Him as your Source. Philippians 2:13
- Transform your fleshly behavior into CHRIST-LIKE behavior. Romans 12:2
- He will produce the JOY and FULFILLMENT that you want in your marriage.
1 Peter 1:8
- He will meet ALL your and your spouse's God-given needs in Christ. Philippians 4:19
- He will TRANSFORM you and your spouse to think, believe, behave, and choose like Christ. 2 Corinthians 3:18
- Produce a marriage that is INCREASING in harmony, intimacy, and oneness.
Philippians 1:6

Final Note: Are you living from God as your Source to produce a Christ-centered marriage? One way to find out is to ask yourself if you are experiencing any of what is on the above list. If you are not experiencing those things, then is it possible that you are not living from God as your source?

Engaging God: Ask God to begin accomplishing these things in you and in your marriage.

2. YOUR Part In Christ Living THE Life In You

To understand what your part is in Christ living His life in you, let's look at the first part of John 15:5:

***"I AM the VINE, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit..."** John 15:5a*



Jesus is saying that as the physical branch is designed to be totally dependent upon the physical vine for life, you and your spouse, as spiritual branches, are designed to live totally dependent upon God, the spiritual Vine, for life. The word "abide" means "to remain." The key point to understand is that **the branch receives life from the vine**. When the branch is separated from the vine it dies. So, we too as Christians are designed to live **DEPENDENTLY** upon the vine for life.

It is important to understand at this point a very key truth:

KEY TRUTH:

God's design for you and your spouse is to DRAW FROM, DEPEND ON, and LIVE FROM God as your SOURCE.

The key word is "design." Remember that in our first lesson we learned that God's design from the beginning was for Adam and Eve to live totally dependent on Him to meet their every need. God's design has not changed. You and your spouse, too, are designed to live totally dependent upon God.

Question: Doesn't it stand to reason that if God is our Source, our part is to depend on Him to be our Source? What do you think that would look like in your life?

This is why Jesus uses the perfect example of the branch being totally dependent on the vine for life. So, it follows that God's design for you in Christ living His life in you is:

Living with an ATTITUDE of TOTAL DEPENDENCE upon God as your Source

In Marriage, You and Your Spouse Depend on God:

- To change you and your spouse.
- To meet your needs.
- To resolve the areas of conflict.
- To move you away from living in the flesh.
- To transform your fleshly attitudes into Christ-like attitudes.
- To produce harmony, intimacy, and oneness.

Side note: The word “bears” in John 15:5 does not mean “produce.” The word “bears” means “to carry.” The key point is that **the branch does not produce the fruit.** The vine is the source for producing the fruit while the branch is the agent through which the fruit is produced.

KEY POINT

***As you walk with an ATTITUDE of DEPENDENCE upon God as your Source,
He will PRODUCE in you His promises of transformation, and
He will PRODUCE a Christ-centered marriage.***

Question: Do you believe that you have been living in a branch-vine relationship with God by depending on Him to be the Source? If you and your spouse are designed to live dependently upon God, what do you think might be the adverse effects in your marriage if you are living independently of God?

Meditate: on John 15:5 and think about how an attitude of dependence is the key to a Christ-centered marriage.

Engaging God: Ask God to give you a deeper spiritual understanding of the implications of the branch-Vine relationship as it relates to you and your marriage.

You and Your Spouse Were Not Designed To Try To Produce A Christ-Centered Marriage INDEPENDENTLY Of Christ.

Jesus makes a crucial statement concerning the Christian life and marriage in the last part of John 15:5:

“....apart from **ME** (*Christ as the source*) you can do **NOTHING.**”
(Parenthesis and emphasis mine)

What Jesus means by this statement is that:

***Apart from living from Christ as your Source in life and
in marriage, you can do “nothing” which means that God
PROMISES to produce everything in you and in your marriage.***

You see, I have met with many couples who attended conferences, read books, and heard lots of sermons on how to transform their marriages. They were given a “marriage tool pouch” which had “tools” they were to use, being their own source, to try to transform their marriages.

I remember one couple who came to me after attending a 13-week course where they were given several “tools” to use to improve their marriage. They raved about the course but when I asked why they came to see me, they confessed that none of the tools they tried resolved the deep-seated problems in their marriage.

Please don’t hear me wrong. I am all for any tool or technique that can improve your marriage. All I am saying is that these tools, apart from depending on the life and power of God, will never truly transform you and your spouse. This is part of the “nothing” Jesus is referring to in John 15:5b.

Paige and I can bear witness that “nothing” means “nothing” because we tried in vain using all the tools, but none of them worked to transform our marriage.

You can use “tools” to IMPROVE your marriage, but only through DEPENDING on Christ’s LIFE and POWER will your marriage ever be TRANSFORMED.

To further make the point that you and your spouse were not designed to live independently from Christ, this is what you can expect if you fail to depend on Christ:

- **NO power** over sin.
- **NO victory** over the flesh.
- **NO freedom** from defeating sin patterns.
- **NO healing** of woundedness.
- **NO supply** to meet your needs.
- **NO transformation.**
- **NO Christ-centered** marriage.

Question: Isn’t the list above a sobering reality of why **we really have no other option** than to live from the life and power of Christ within us? If any of these things listed above are true of you and/or your marriage, do you see the futility of trying to use man-made tools to transform your marriage?

Here is another key point concerning living independently of God:

***If you are trying to make your marriage work independently of God,
God will bring you to the place of “I CAN’T.”***

The place of “I can’t” in marriage is where you and your spouse come to believe that neither of you, as the source, can produce a Christ-centered marriage. Here are some examples of my “I can’t” that God brought me to in my marriage:

- **I can’t change or fix myself or my spouse.**
- **I can’t meet my own needs or my spouse’s needs.**
- **I can’t produce harmony, intimacy, and oneness in my marriage.**
- **I can’t resolve the recurring conflict in my marriage.**
- **I can’t make my marriage a success.**

Question: Are you and your spouse at the place of “I can’t?” If so, what are some of the areas where you have reached “I can’t” and given up trying to fix your own marriage?

If your marriage is in trouble: This is a crucial truth to understand. God, through your conflict, is trying to bring you to the place of “I can’t.” Are you there yet? Have you realized that apart from Christ you will never experience any of the Christ-like characteristics? Why would I say this? Because as long as you think you “can” when you “can’t,” then you will keep trying to fix, change, or produce something different in yourself, your spouse and your marriage. Accordingly, I leave you with this sobering thought:

Unless you come to the place of “I CAN’T,” you will NEVER experience freedom, victory, healing, or Christ-likeness in your marriage.

Engaging God: Ask God to examine your marriage and to reveal to you the areas where you are trying to make your marriage work using your own resources. Is what you are doing working?

Let’s now look at another word for dependence.

Dependence ON God = FAITH IN God

*“Without **faith** it is impossible to please God.” Hebrews 11:6*

I equate depending **on** God with walking by faith **in** God. If you have been a Christian for any length of time, you know your part in your Christian walk is faith. But, what I find is many people either misunderstand or have false beliefs regarding the issue of faith.

I say this because what they believe about faith has **not** resulted in their consistent freedom, victory, and transformation in their personal lives and in their marriages. How about you?

Is your walk of faith producing:

- Ongoing victory over your defeating sin patterns and Satan?
- Ongoing freedom from your sinful behaviors?
- Ongoing healing of your past or present woundedness?
- Ongoing transformation into the likeness of Christ?

If you can’t answer “Yes” to each of the previous questions, is it possible that there might a problem with your walk of faith? Here is the problem that I have found in most couples concerning faith.

The Problem Is That WE Are The Object Of Our Faith.

If you have been living the Christian life for some time, you know the object of your faith should be Jesus Christ. After ministering to many Christians (who have been Christians for 10, 20,

30+ years), I have observed there is another object to their faith. That object is **their own IQ, ability and willpower**. Think about this statement:

***If you believe that it is up to you with God's help to live the Christian life,
is it possible that the REAL object of your faith is your own
IQ, ABILITY, SELF-DISCIPLINE and WILLPOWER?***

Let me give you an example. If you believe that it is up to you with God's help to live the Christian life, you will take God's promises of victory, freedom, and transformation and try in your own ability and willpower to make those promises an experiential reality in your life.

Really what you have done is put faith in yourself even though you may have asked God to help you be the source for making those promises real in your life.

In actuality, what do we know is true? We know, from Lesson One (1 Corinthians 1:30), God is the Source for living His life in us. For our own sakes, He is not going to "help" us be the source (which He knows would only result in futility and misery) because He never designed us to be our own source.

***If you are TRYING in your OWN strength and willpower to live the
Christian life and to produce a Christ-centered marriage, are you
experiencing any REAL transformation?***

So many Christians today are being taught (as I was) that we must "apply" God's truth to our lives. While that sounds very spiritual, in reality, "apply" means it is up to us to take God's truth and try to make it work in our lives using our own IQ, ability, self-discipline and willpower. But, if it is up to us to make it work, we will **fail** every time because the truth is we are never going to succeed in any real transformation in ourselves or our marriages.

***The truth is that we are TOTALLY dependent upon God for Him to
take His truth and make it WORK in our lives.***

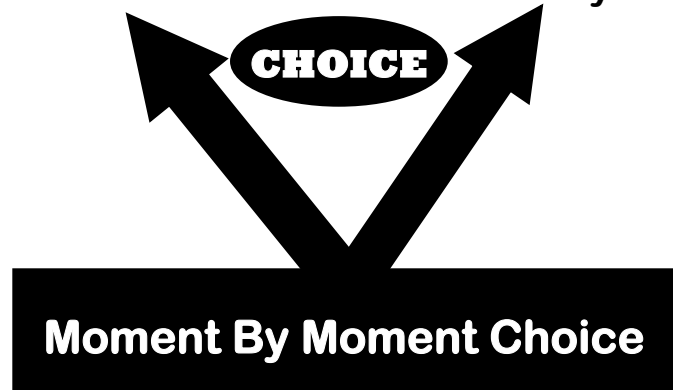
Look at the next diagram to see the results of putting faith in your own ability versus putting your faith in God.

Faith in yourself to produce
a Christ-centered marriage

Ongoing conflict, no change,
coping, separation, divorce.

Faith in God to produce a
Christ-centered marriage =

Ongoing transformation,
increasing harmony,
intimacy and oneness



What Choice Will You Make?

Question: Using this diagram, would you say that the object of your faith has been you or God?

DAY FIVE

Why Do We STRUGGLE With Having Faith In God?

“Then they asked Him, ‘What must we do to do the works God requires?’ Jesus answered, ‘The work of God is this, to BELIEVE in the One Whom He has sent.’” John 6:28-29

Before we go on, I believe that it is important to look at three reasons that I have discovered over the years as to why we as Christians struggle with having faith in God.

1. We bring the “LEARN and DO” mindset into the Christian life.



I believe this is the #1 reason why we struggle with the issue of faith. Why? Because it is so easy to walk by faith in our own abilities since this is how we live life in most other areas. Think about your life. How have you lived life thus far? For most of us, we learn about tasks, and then we go about accomplishing what we have learned.

For example, you learn how to do your job, and then you do it. You learn how to play golf, fish, or hunt, and you go and do them. You learn how to raise your kids and use what you have learned to raise them. The key is that you are using your own intellect and ability to “learn” and then to “do.” This is the way that we have all lived our lives. The question is, “Does this ‘learn and do’ mindset work in living the Christian life?” Think about this question:

Do you believe that you are to LEARN God’s truth about living the Christian life and then in your own ability (with God’s help) go out and DO what God says?

The Truth: The “learn and do” mindset does not work in living THE Christian life. Why? It is because we cannot do what only the Holy Spirit can do and promises to do in our lives. Remember Philippians 1:6? As we learned in the first lesson, it is God’s power and His alone that will create spiritual transformation. As I shared with you about my story, I tried to live the “learn and do” Christian life, and I failed miserably. The problem was that it never produced the life-transformation that God promises. It has only been through dependence upon the Lord that true change has taken place.

2. We want to be part of the CAUSE and EFFECT of our spiritual transformation.

Another problem that we have concerning faith is that we can’t use our intellect, abilities, and talents to be the cause and/or effect of spiritual transformation. This is a problem because we always use our intellect, abilities, and talents (that has worked for us in our jobs, in our marriages, and in raising our families.) It is natural to want to try to transform ourselves or help God through our own efforts to be transformed; however, try as we may, we absolutely cannot produce what only God can produce.

The Truth: In our walk of faith, we are depending on God to bring His intellect, power, and ability to do in us what we cannot do for ourselves. Remember John 15:5b (“... *apart from me you can*

do nothing.”). We struggle when it comes to setting aside our abilities and drawing on God’s ability. I hope to some degree you are in the process of being persuaded that only God, as your Source, can bring about significant change in the way you think, feel, choose, and behave.

Note: This does not mean we are not to use our intellect and abilities. However, those things will do you no good when it comes to spiritual transformation.

3. LEGALISM nurtures “learn and do” Christianity.



If you spent much time in a legalistic church environment like I did, then you have probably been living a “learn and do” Christian life. What do I mean by “legalism?” Legalism is trying to live the Christian life using your own ability to keep or follow certain principles, checklists, or rules to produce spiritual transformation. Legalism promotes the false belief that you are the source for trying to keep certain standards or rules in order to become a good Christian or to please God. For me legalism produced a life of striving for 30 years in my own strength to try to please God and to set myself free. Can you identify with this?

The Truth: Trying to live up to a set of standards or rules will never produce any real transformation. Trying harder or doing more for God will not bring about the changes you desire. It will only result in your either giving up or trying harder to live the Christian life. True freedom only comes when you put your faith in God’s power and ability to produce in you His promises of transformation.

4. The FLESH always resists our willingness to walk by faith in God.

We will talk more about the flesh in the next lesson, but suffice to say that living from the flesh will create an ongoing unwillingness to walk by faith in God. Why? It is because the focus of the flesh is always self.

The Truth: Living from the flesh will never produce a Christ-centered marriage. We will see in the next lesson that living from the flesh only “kills” a marriage relationship over time.

Two KEY Truths That We Need To Understand Concerning The Walk of Faith

I want to look at two key truths about our walk of faith before we look at examples of how to practically engage God to transform our marriages.

Truth #1 - Steps of Faith Release ALL Of Christ’s LIFE and POWER In You.

*“so that your **faith** would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the **power of God**.”*
1 Corinthians 2:5

*“To this end also we pray for you always, that our God will count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and **the work of faith with power**.”* 2 Thessalonians 1:11

Since you contain all of God’s life and power, what happens when you take a step of faith?

The moment when you take a step of faith, ALL of God's LIFE and POWER is RELEASED in you to transform your thinking, your beliefs, and your behavior.

Let me explain this by giving you a visual image. Imagine a plastic bottle full of water with the cap screwed on tight. The water in the bottle symbolizes the fullness of the Godhead and all of God's LIFE and POWER. Imagine that capped full bottle entering into you at the point of salvation since that is when you received the fullness of God's life and power.



However, without the cap off the bottle, you will never be able to drink from or draw on God's life and power. You can turn the bottle upside down and try to pour, but with the cap on nothing flows out of the bottle. I have just described the first thirty years of my Christian life and the first ten years of our marriage. First of all, no one told me that I had the fullness of God's life and power within me. Additionally, they did not tell me how to access this internal "living water."

As a result, I was trying to produce or manufacture a "man-made" water bottle that was both inadequate and irrelevant because I already possessed God's "living water." The key to accessing God's life and power in the bottle is **faith**. When you take a step of faith, God essentially unscrews the cap of the bottle and pours into you His life and power.

***Taking a STEP of faith is the ACCESS to
God's LIFE and POWER within you!***

Truth #2 - God's Process of Transformation Is SUPERNATURAL.

We also need to understand God's transformation process is "supernatural." We talked about this word earlier when we discussed the supernatural Christ-life characteristics. I want to take another look at this word in light of our walk of faith.

a. What Is The Meaning of SUPERNATURAL?

Let's define the word "supernatural":

SUPERNATURAL

***What God accomplishes in and through you as you walk by faith
for which there is NO natural or man-made explanation.***

It is probably safe to say most Christians understand God's power is supernatural. But when I say to Christians that God wants to accomplish a supernatural work in them and in their marriages, they often have difficulty grasping that concept. There are two key truths about the word "supernatural" when it comes to God's power working in us:

1. God is not telling you HOW He is doing what He is doing.

This means we don't know how (and God is not telling us how) He will transform our lives. This can be a struggle for us because we always want to know how everything works. When it comes to God's supernatural work:

***God's working SUPERNATURALLY in your life and your marriage means
He is not telling or showing you His PROCESS for transforming you.***



One of the greatest struggles I have in sharing these truths is my inability to describe to you God's process in transforming your life. I wish I could. Then I could give you a formula you could use in your walk of faith.

There is an additional reason there is no formula for God's transformation in our lives. God has made a unique individual plan for each of us with the result there can never be one formula for each person's individualized walk with Him.

Since God is not going to tell you how He is working in your life, He simply wants you to take steps of faith in Him and assume by faith that He is accomplishing His supernatural work in you. We cannot make a formula out of the Christian life because God's work in you and relationship with you is unique to you and no one else.

***Because God's work is a SUPERNATURAL work and is tailored individually,
we can't make the Christian life a formula or a checklist.***

Questions: Do you have a better understanding of why we can't make formulas or checklists for people to follow to live the Christian life? Does this present a struggle for you?

Meditate: on the truth that God is not telling us what He is doing as we walk by faith and that our part is to trust that He is working.

Engaging God: Ask God to reassure you that as much as you would like a checklist or set of rules to follow in order to experience a Christ-centered marriage, God's process of transformation is a supernatural one.

2. Supernatural also means that you may not FEEL or EXPERIENCE God's work in you.

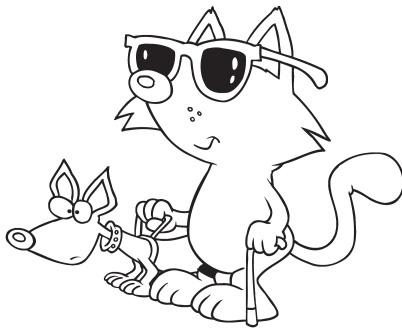
The second key truth that we don't understand about God's supernatural work is:

Since transformation is a SUPERNATURAL process, when you take a step of faith, you may not FEEL or EXPERIENCE God's life and power working in you.

If you will participate with me for a moment, I think I can show you what I mean. Take a step of faith with me right now. Simply say, "Lord, I am trusting You this moment to BE my power." If you did that by faith, are you feeling anything? Are you experiencing a rush of God's power pouring into you? For the most part you will not be feeling God's power in you as you walk by faith. Why is this? Look at 2 Corinthians 5:7 for the answer:

"For we walk by faith, not by sight."

First of all, "sight" in this passage means feelings/experience. Paul is telling us in this verse that our walk is one of faith not one of feeling or experience. More often than not you will not be feeling or experiencing either God's life or His power.



Why can this be frustrating? As human beings we feel and experience life through one or more of our five senses every moment. Since feeling and experiencing are such integral parts of our lives, it is easy to conclude that when we take a step of faith we should feel or experience God's work..

The truth is MOST part you will NOT feel or experience God's life and power flowing in you when you take a step of faith.

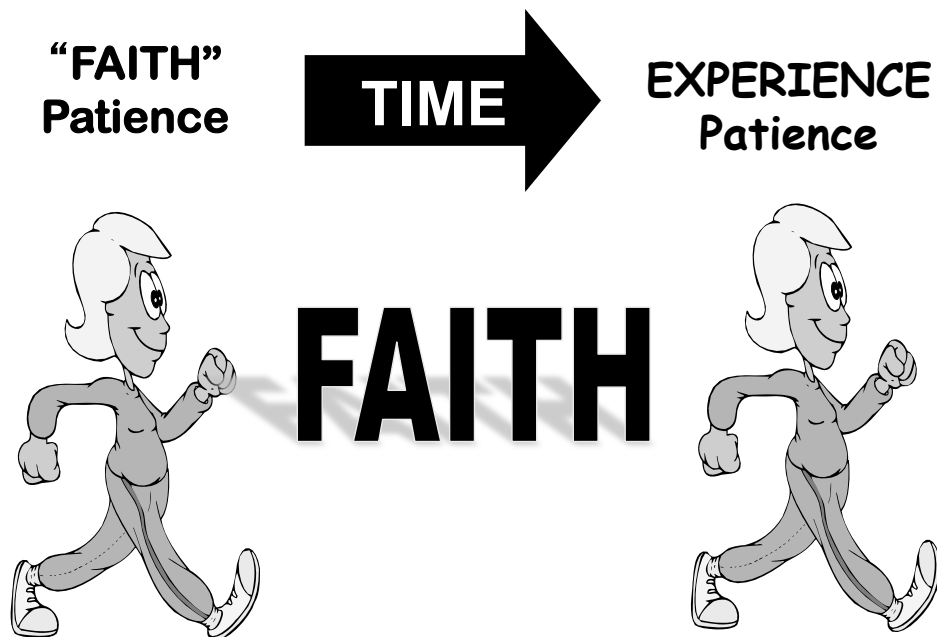
Moving from "FAITHING" It to "EXPERIENCING" It

As we discussed, when you take initial steps of faith, you may not be able to feel or experience God's working in your life. I call this part of the walk of faith "faithing it." You may have to "faith it" for a while. However, there is good news.

The good news is that after you have "FAITHED" IT for awhile, you will eventually EXPERIENCE Christ's peace, patience, etc. in you.

Let me give you an example to illustrate moving from faith to experience. Let's assume because of your impatience in most circumstances, you need Christ's patience. We know in Christ we have available to us all of His patience. The journey of moving from faith to experience may start like this: "Lord, I am asking You to renew my mind to the truth that in You I contain all the patience I need. I am trusting You to BE my patience." At that very moment, all of Christ's patience is being poured into you.

However, early on you may not be feeling or experiencing any of Christ's patience. Even though you were not feeling Christ's patience pouring into you, what does God's truth tell us? Whether you felt it or not, Christ's patience was pouring into you. However, one step of faith is not a walk of faith. Therefore, you must continue to take steps of faith until you experience Christ's patience. Let me show you a diagram that illustrates the above example.



Moving From FAITH To EXPERIENCE

I wish I could tell you how long you will have to "faith it" before you experience Christ-likeness. The truth is that it is up to God to determine that timetable. The question is, "Why is there any time gap between faith and experience?" Because God can't teach us how to walk by faith if we immediately experience Christ-likeness every time we take a step of faith. God designed the "faithing it" part to teach us how to walk by faith knowing, if we persevere, we will experience Christ's peace, patience, etc. The key to faithing it is this:

The Key To FAITHING IT:

CONTINUE to walk by faith until you EXPERIENCE

Christ's peace, patience, love, etc.

What Is Produced As You Experience Christ-Likeness? - CHRIST-CONFIDENCE!

"For I am (Christ) confident of this very thing that He who began a work in you will complete it until the day of Christ Jesus." *Philippians 1:6 (Parenthesis mine)*

What kind of confidence is Paul talking about? He is not talking about a self-confidence. Rather, Paul is talking about a God-produced Christ-confidence. What is Christ-confidence?

CHRIST-CONFIDENCE

***results when you experience the truth that God IS Who He says
He is and that He will do what He PROMISES to do.***

You see, as we experience God's truth and the results of His promises, the outcome will be Christ-confidence. Paul is testifying, in Philippians 1:6 above, that he has experienced such supernatural changes from God that he no longer has self-confidence in his ability. Instead, Paul has a Christ-confidence in Who God says He is and what He promises to do. What do you think you will feel once you experience Christ's supernatural peace, patience, etc. that you never had experienced before? Possibly Christ-confidence?

***Your walk of faith will result in CHRIST-CONFIDENCE once you begin to
EXPERIENCE Christ-like characteristics in yourself and in your spouse.***

I will be honest with you; I don't see much Christ-confidence among Christians because so many have failed to walk long enough by faith to experience Christ-likeness. Accordingly, my encouragement to you is that you continue to walk by faith long enough to experience Christ-like characteristics resulting in your achieving Christ-confidence. Then you will be able to say one day with Paul:

*"Now to **Him** who is able to **do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think**, according to the (God's) **power** that works within us..." Ephesians 3:20 (Parenthesis mine)*

However, **remember that developing Christ-confidence is a process.** Paul uses the word "persuaded" to reveal that process in 2 Timothy 1:12:

*"For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am **persuaded** that **He is able** to keep what I have committed to Him until that day."*

The same will be true of us as we walk by faith and experience God's transforming work in our lives. Just like Paul, we will need to be persuaded concerning God's desire and ability in moving and working in our lives.

***Therefore, as we walk by faith long enough to experience changes in our lives,
our CONFIDENCE in Christ will GROW.***

Question: If you were experiencing the Christ-like characteristics that God promises, what would that do for your confidence in God?

Meditate: on Philippians 1:6.

Engaging God: Ask God to give you Christ-confidence as you move from faith to experience.

Example: “Lord, I want to experience Your Christ-confidence. I am asking You to move me from faith to experience so I will be able to experience Your peace, patience, rest, etc. which will result in my increasing Christ-confidence.”

Summary of The Walk of Faith In Drawing On Christ As THE Life:

1. When you trust Christ to BE those things you need, you receive the FULLNESS of the Christ-life characteristics (His peace, strength, unconditional love, etc.) that you are asking for in that moment.
2. Remember that Christ’s pouring His life into you is a SUPERNATURAL process.
3. Since it is supernatural, you MAY NOT immediately feel or experience what you are trusting Christ to BE (i.e., peace, adequacy, patience).
4. However, that DOES NOT change the truth that Christ IS pouring the fullness of His peace, patience, etc. into you at that moment.
5. WHETHER OR NOT you feel or experience Christ’s life in the moment when you ask for it, you can know by FAITH He is supplying His peace, patience, etc. Be patient and persistent knowing it is a supernatural process.
6. After you have “faithed it” for a while, you will eventually experience Christ-likeness.
7. The result will be Christ-confidence.

Questions: Have you tried to walk by faith in the past but gotten discouraged and quit walking because you were not feeling or experiencing God’s work in your life and therefore concluded He was not really working? Does it help you better understand the walk of faith by knowing the truth early on that you may not initially feel or experience Christ’s life flowing in you but eventually you will experience it?

Meditate: on the truth that you may have to “faith it” for a period of time before you “experience” it.

Engaging God: Ask God to give you a deeper revelation of the truth that you may have to walk by faith for some time before you experience Christ’s life.

A Key FAITH Word In The Transformation Process: ENTRUST



*“and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept **entrusting** Himself to Him who judges righteously”*
1 Peter 2:23

If you are a Christian, you know the usual “faith” words such as trust, ask, etc. However, there is another word that I believe is one of the most active faith words available to us, and that is the word “**entrust**.” What does entrust mean?

ENTRUST

***Giving over to God for safekeeping something or someone
that you are holding on to.***

The problem with many Christians is they are holding on to relational conflicts and circumstantial struggles that God never intended for them to carry. This results in ongoing pain, suffering, and heartache. God never intends for you to take ownership of your struggles. His desire is for you to entrust every struggle, every conflict, and every adverse circumstance to Him. Why? Because He is the only One who can truly deal with your struggles.

A frequent example I use to illustrate this point involves my favorite Mexican restaurant. When the server brings my food, she is wearing oven mitts and warning me my plate is hot. But one day I forgot and grabbed the plate and instantly felt pain. Imagine this hot plate represents every internal and external conflict you are experiencing. What if you hold on to the plate? You will continue to experience the pain and misery that goes along with that conflict. The point is you must treat every struggle or conflict like that hot plate. God does not want you to hold on to it. He wants you to entrust it to Him to resolve.

***The truth is that you were NOT designed to take ownership of any
of your internal and external struggles. God intends for you to
ENTRUST every one of those issues to Him.***

Concerning the rest of this lesson, God wants you to entrust your false beliefs, defeating sin patterns, and woundedness to Him to transform. So as we look at the steps of faith concerning God's promises of transformation, I will use the word "entrust" whenever I show you how to give over your struggles to God to then be able to experience God's promises.

Taking Steps of Faith To EXPERIENCE Christ As Your Life In Your Marriage

Based on what we have studied so far, I now want to show you how to apply that knowledge to enable you to experience Christ as THE life in your marriage. I would like for you to look again at this list of Christ-like characteristics.

Christ as THE LIFE means that Christ is your:

| | | | | |
|--------------------|---------------|----------|--------------|----------|
| Unconditional love | Victory | Worth | Acceptance | Faith |
| Freedom | Patience | Strength | Peace | Power |
| Forgiveness | Understanding | Security | Fearlessness | Wisdom |
| Discernment | Adequacy | Humility | Confidence | Boldness |
| Righteousness | Selflessness | Rest | Compassion | Courage |
| Hope | Gentleness | Control | Faithfulness | Joy |

Let's look at some practical examples of what it looks like to draw on Christ as our life in the moment.

[**Note:** I am NOT giving you a checklist or certain steps you must take to be transformed. Rather, I am only setting out examples of what it looks like to engage God to experience supernatural transformation. Trust God to teach you those steps of faith that will be unique to you.]

Example #1: You know, in and of yourself, you cannot produce the unconditional love of Christ your spouse needs. So, a step of faith you may take to draw on Christ's love for your spouse would be something like:

Step of faith: "Lord, I can't produce unconditional love for my spouse. I am **asking** You, by faith, to love my spouse THROUGH me with Christ's unconditional love."

Challenge: Take this step of faith as many times as it comes to mind in the next thirty days; then take note of any changes in how you see your spouse and/or how your spouse reacts to you. You will begin to see a supernatural change in your marriage relationship. One clue that it is a supernatural work is you won't be able to articulate the changes you see.

Example #2: Let's assume you are experiencing rejection from your spouse. This means you will have a need for Christ's acceptance. Jesus says, "I AM your acceptance."

Step of faith: "Lord, I am feeling rejection from my spouse. I am trusting You to BE my acceptance."

Example #3: Let's assume your reaction to things your spouse does robs you of your patience. At those moments, you can draw on Christ's patience by taking a step of faith:

Step of Faith: "Lord, I am feeling impatient toward my spouse? about my marriage. I am trusting You to BE my patience?."

Note: Do you see that I am not saying, "Jesus, help ME be accepting, loving, etc.?" Jesus does not want to help YOU be accepting or loving. HE IS your acceptance and love.

Exercise: From the list of Christ-life characteristics on the previous page choose those that you feel that you most need to experience. Write down some steps of faith concerning the characteristics you chose.

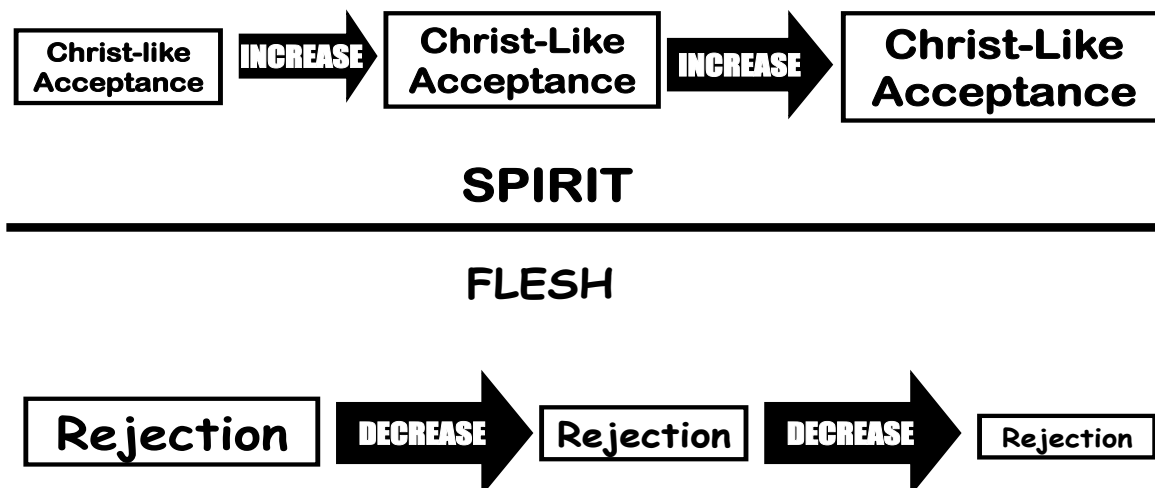
Key TRUTHS To Remember Concerning Being Transformed Into Christ-likeness

1. The key truth concerning transformation is that it is a PROCESS. God very seldom transforms you overnight.
2. It may take weeks or months before you EXPERIENCE Christ-like attitudes.
3. Therefore, it is crucial to keep FAITHING IT until you experience changes.
4. However, at some point you will BEGIN to notice changes in the way that you THINK, FEEL, CHOOSE and BEHAVE based on what God is doing in transforming you.
5. Remember that transformation is SUPERNATURAL. God is not telling you how He is working. Your part is to have faith that He TRULY is working to transform you.

“The Line” Analogy and Growing Into Christ-Likeness

I want to use “the Line” analogy to further illustrate the process of being transformed into Christ-likeness. Above “the Line” is living dependently on the Spirit, and below “the Line” is living from the flesh. For example, when you take steps of faith asking God to accept your spouse through you, then you will be living less and less from wanting to reject your spouse (below “the Line”), and more and more from Christ-like acceptance (above “the Line”).

Growing Into CHRIST-LIKENESS



Christ-Likeness Will Eventually Result In Christ-Like ATTITUDES.

As you begin to experience Christ-likeness, these Christ-like characteristics will eventually become Christ-like attitudes. Look at Philippians 2:5 to understand this truth.

“Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus.”

Let's use the next diagram to illustrate moving from Christ-like characteristics to experiencing Christ-like attitudes. Initially, during a particular situation, you may need to intentionally draw on Christ-like humility. However, eventually as you continue to walk by faith, you will be supernaturally transformed so you will live from a Christ-like attitude of humility. This Christ-like characteristic that you had to consciously draw on at the beginning for each circumstance, will, in time, become part of your own attitude through His supernatural work.



Moving From Christ-Likeness To Christ-Like Attitudes

Some Key Truths Concerning Moving From Christ-Likeness To Christ-Like Attitudes

- The key truth concerning transformation is that it is a PROCESS. God very seldom transforms you or your spouse overnight.
- It may take WEEKS or MONTHS before you experience Christ-like attitudes.
- As you continue to seek God by faith, you will BEGIN to notice changes in the way that you THINK, FEEL, CHOOSE, and BEHAVE based on what God is doing in transforming you.

Meditate: on Philippians 2:5 (*"Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus..."*). Remember, this is a supernatural work of God as you take steps of faith.

Engaging God: Begin seeking God to give you the willingness to walk by faith so that you will experience His process of moving you from experiencing Christ-likeness to experiencing a Christ-like attitude.

How Does Living From Christ as The Life Change our Marriages?

How did Paige and I know living THE Christian life was the truth? We began to experience supernatural changes in our marriage. During that first ten years, whenever there was a problem, I would get angry and Paige would withdraw. As we began walking by faith, my anger subsided and was replaced by Christ's love. For Paige, instead of withdrawing, she began to experience Christ's courage. I also had great struggles with fleshly attitudes of being critical and judgmental. But, as I began to walk by faith, God replaced my judging and criticism with Christ's love and acceptance.

Paige and I began to experience our true identity which radically changed our marriage. God transformed me from inadequacy, insecurity, and unworthiness to my true identity of adequacy, security, and worthiness in Christ. The Lord transformed Paige from believing she was unworthy, fearful, and insecure to now believing she is worthy, fearless, and secure in Christ. The changes the Lord made concerning our identity also transformed how we responded in every area of our marriage.

In addition, over time we began experiencing a greater harmony, intimacy, and oneness in our marriage. Finally, we began to experience a joy and a fulfillment that was not present for the first ten years. There is more that the Lord has done to transform our marriage, but to summarize, we are experiencing a Christ-centered marriage because we started living THE Christian life instead of "A" life.

Summary

I hope that this lesson has clarified why it is crucial that you and your spouse learn to live "THE" Christian life. Below is the truth versus the lie concerning living THE Life versus living A life.

Living "THE" LIFE Versus Living "A" LIFE

**You and your spouse will experience a
Christ-centered marriage if you depend on
Christ to live THE LIFE in you.**

THE TRUTH

THE LIE

**You or your spouse can produce a
Christ-centered marriage by
living "A" Christian life.**

If your marriage is in conflict: I hope you understand, in part, why your marriage is not working. It can never really work apart from God's being the Source. This is a crucial truth to understand

in order for you to move forward in resolving the struggles in your marriage. Even more important to understand is that you cannot be the provider or producer of what you or your spouse needs. I want you to think about what you want or need to change in your current situation. List what those things are below:

Exercise: When Christ says, “I AM the life,” He is saying that I AM whatever you need. Here are some examples.

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| • I feel rejected | • I AM your acceptance |
| • I feel insecure | • I AM your security |
| • I feel angry | • I AM your peace |
| • I feel unloved | • I AM your love |
| • I feel defeated | • I AM your victory |
| • I feel hopeless | • I AM your hope |
| • I feel undervalued | • I AM your worth |

After reading through the examples, from the list on the following page write down what you most need in your marriage most from Christ as the I AM.

Christ As The "I AM"

I AM your love – Galatians 5:22
I AM your joy – John 15:11
I AM your adequacy – 2 Corinthians 3:5
I AM your wisdom – 1 Corinthians 1:30
I AM your way – John 14:6
I AM your truth – John 14:6
I AM your rest – Matthew 11:28
I AM your mind – 1 Corinthians 2:16
I AM your desire – Psalm 73:25
I AM your completion – Colossians 2:10
I AM your sanctification – 1 Cor. 1:30
I AM your purpose – Ephesians 1:10
I AM your identity – 2 Corinthians 5:17
I AM your security – Proverbs 1:33
I AM your goodness – Galatians 5:22
I AM your confidence – 2 Corinthians 3:4
I AM your compassion – Psalm 25:6
I AM your forgiveness – Daniel 9:9
I AM your success – Romans 8:37
I AM your endurance – Hebrews 10:36
I AM your peace – Ephesians 2:14
I AM your perseverance - Hebrews 12:2
I AM your trust – Romans 15:5
I AM your strength – Romans 6:10

I AM your sovereignty – 1 Timothy 6:15
I AM your intimacy – Psalm 139:3
I AM your kindness – Galatians 5:22
I AM your humility – Matthew 11:29
I AM your acceptance – Romans 15:7
I AM your faithfulness – Galatians 5:22
I AM your need-meeter – Galatians 4:19
I AM your deliverer – Psalm 18:2
I AM your freedom – John 8:32
I AM your victory – 1 Corinthians 15:57
I AM your gentleness – Galatians 5:23
I AM your patience – Galatians 5:22
I AM your courage – John 16:33
I AM your conqueror – Romans 8:37
I AM your holiness – Colossians 3:12
I AM your self-control - 2 Timothy 1:7
I AM your salvation – Psalm 27:1
I AM your trust – Jeremiah 17:7
I AM your guide – Psalm 48:14
I AM your shepherd – Psalm 23:1
I AM your comforter – John 14:16
I AM your Abba – Galatians 4:5-6
I AM your hope – Colossians 1:27
I AM your life – John 14:6

Lesson Three

The Source of Marital Conflict

Engaging God To Deal With The Obstacles To A Christ-Centered Marriage

DAY ONE

Introduction

Now that we have discussed God's design and the foundation for a Christ-centered marriage, what I would like to focus on in these next three lessons is:

- **The source of all marital conflict - THE FLESH**
- **Five major obstacles to a Christ-centered marriage**
 1. **Unmet God-given needs**
 2. **Realistic and unrealistic expectations**
 3. **Fleshly rights**
 4. **Unforgiveness and unrepentance**
 5. **Not knowing your and your spouse's true identities**
- **The truth concerning these obstacles**
- **Engaging God to remove these obstacles**

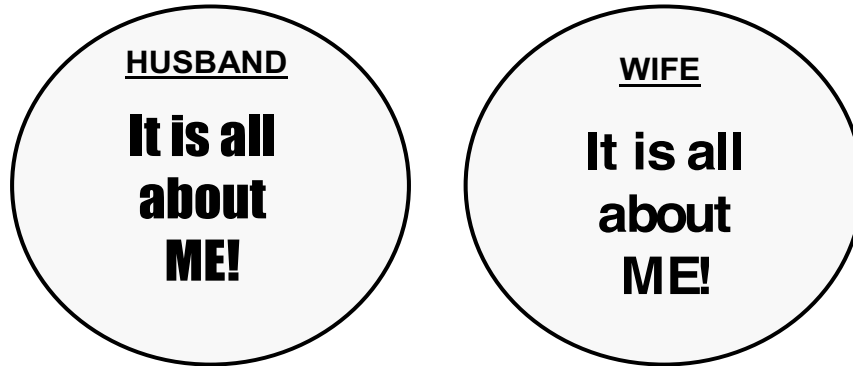
In this lesson we will focus on the flesh and unmet God-given needs. We all have conflicts in some area of our marriages. For some it is more covert than overt conflict. If you are in a troubled marriage, you are experiencing overt conflict. Therefore, I think it is time to explore why conflicts exist and how to engage the Spirit to deal with them.

If your marriage is in conflict: This lesson is crucial in order for you to understand the source of your conflicts. I hope that you will carefully go through this lesson and let the Holy Spirit reveal to you the causes of the conflicts in your marriage. Let's begin by looking at who the focus was on when you got married.

It is All About ME!

When I came in to the marriage relationship, what I failed to realize was this marriage would NOT be all about ME and my needs. But I quickly discovered Paige was not all about me. She came into marriage also thinking about herself and her needs. In other words, I came into marriage as the "lord" of my ring, and she came in to marriage as the "lord" of her ring.

How We Came Into The Marriage Relationship



The Lord Of MY Ring

So, right from the beginning we both had what I call the “It’s all about me” syndrome.

“It’s All About Me” Syndrome

is about getting MY needs met, my spouse fulfilling MY expectations, and my spouse conforming to what I believe that marriage should be about.

The Bible has a name for this syndrome: **The Flesh**

“For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not.” Romans 7:18

“For we know that the Law is spiritual; but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin.” Romans 7:14

THE FLESH is our desire to live life with OURSELVES as the source, INDEPENDENTLY OF or APART FROM God as our Source.

Prior to salvation we had no choice but to depend on ourselves (our flesh) as the source for solving our problems, dealing with life, and becoming a success. We were living life out of our own resources (such as, education, IQ, personality, looks, talents, abilities, capabilities, self-discipline, and self-strength) apart from God as our Source. As we continued to depend on ourselves, this reinforced our desire to be the source for life.

[**Note:** It is worth noting, at this point, that God gave every one of us our IQs, talents, abilities, etc. However, God never intended for us to live from those talents and abilities **independently** of Him. As we talked about in the last lesson, our part is to participate with Christ. As we do, His life and power will flow through us making use of the talents, intellect and abilities He gave us.]

Even though you have trusted Christ for salvation, you still have the influence of your flesh on your life and in your marriage. There is, and will always be until the day we die, the desire within us to live independently of God.

Remember how I previously defined a troubled marriage and a Christian marriage? They are marriages where people are drawing on or living from themselves as the source. Therefore:

***Troubled AND Christian marriages are ones that are primarily
being lived out of the FLESH.***

Question: Do you struggle in your marriage with the “It’s all about me” syndrome? If so, has this produced conflict with your spouse? What has been the outcome for your marriage?

The Source of ALL Conflict In Marriage Is The Flesh.

“For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.” Galatians 5:17 (underlining added)



Living from the flesh is the cause of **all** conflict in marriage. How can I be so sure? Think about this question: “If both of you were walking by the Spirit every moment versus walking by the flesh, would you experience conflict?” We find the answer in Galatians 5:16:

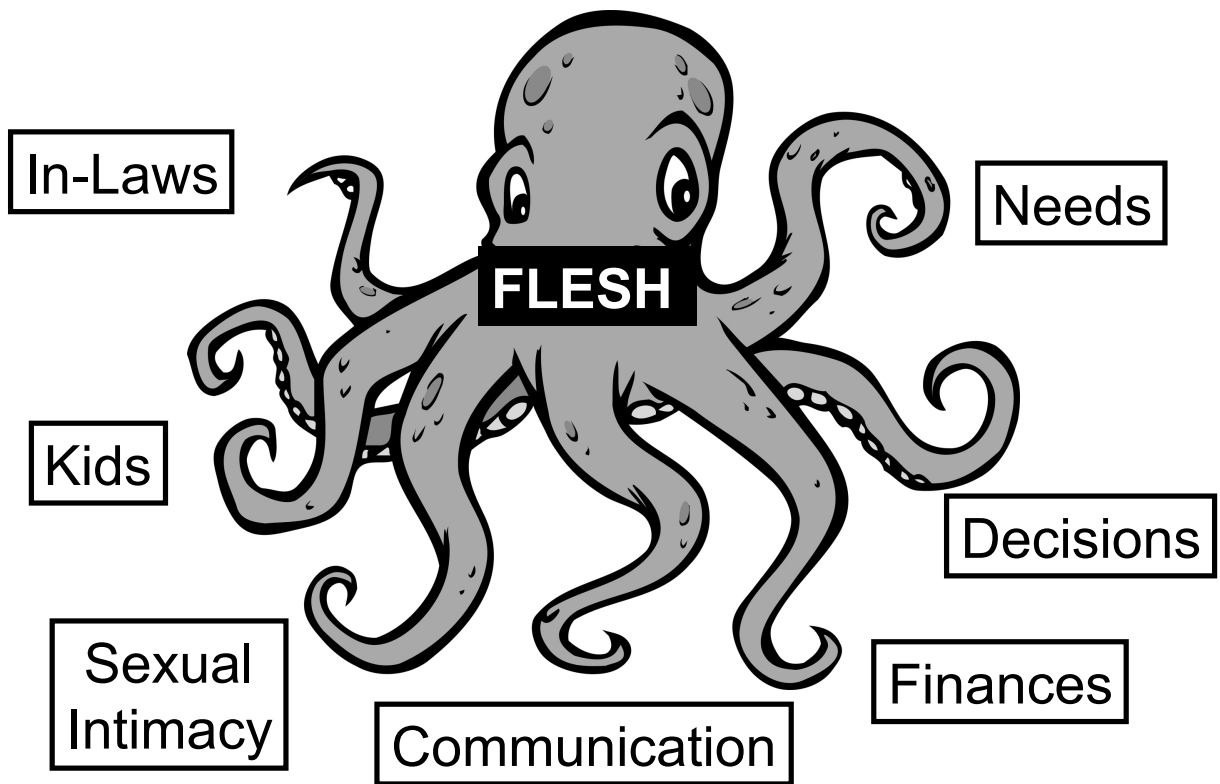
“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will NOT carry out the desires of the flesh.”

It is crucial, therefore, to understand there is a non-stop battle going on within us: the battle between the flesh and the Spirit. If the flesh is in control, there is conflict within you and the overflow of that will be conflict between you and your spouse. In the areas where marital conflicts occur, you will discover the source of those conflicts is the flesh.

I hope that you look at living from the flesh as Paul does: *“I don’t really understand myself, for I want to do what is **right**, but I don’t do it. Instead, I do what I hate.” Romans 7:15.* I hope that your heart does what is right. “Right” in this verse means living from the truth. When Paul says, “I don’t do what is right,” it is because the flesh is impeding him from doing it.

Look at the next diagram of an octopus. The tentacles represent some of the areas of conflict in marriage: finances, communication, sexual intimacy, etc. As you can see from the diagram, the head or source of the conflict in these areas is the flesh.

The FLESH Manifests Itself In Marriage



Question: In which of these areas are you experiencing marital conflict? In what other areas of your marriage not listed above are you experiencing conflicts?

Engaging God: Begin seeking God to reveal to you how your flesh is creating conflict and is robbing your marriage of the intimacy, harmony, and fulfillment you desire. Remember, the flesh is defined as areas where you are not living in dependence on God.

Characteristics of The Flesh

*“For we know that the Law is spiritual; but I am of **flesh**, sold into bondage to sin.”* Romans 7:14

Living from the “**flesh**” in marriage is an **independent attitude** that says:

- **I** can be in control of myself and my spouse.
- **I** can get my God-given needs met from my spouse.
- **I** can, in my own ability, fix, solve, or overcome all of my marital problems/conflicts.
- **I** can change myself and my spouse.
- **I** can produce a fulfilling and happy marriage independently of God.

Question: Do any of these fleshly attitudes apply to you? Write down the ones that apply.

Our DEFAULT attitude in the flesh is wanting to be in control, getting our needs met, trying to change our spouses, etc.

Let's do some self-examination by answering yes or no to the following questions:

Have you **TRIED** to:

- **RESOLVE** your ongoing marital conflicts using your own ability? _____
- **CHANGE** or **FIX** your spouse? _____
- **CONTROL** your spouse? _____
- **MAKE** your marriage a success.? _____

If you answered yes to any one of these questions, then let me ask you a question: "How is it working for you?" If you are honest with yourself, you know that it is not working. The reason that I use the word "tried" is that in the flesh, independently of God, you can't accomplish any of these things. The best that you can do is to "try."

Engaging God: Seek the Holy Spirit to reveal to you those areas of your marriage where you are trying to resolve conflict; change, fix, or control your spouse; or make your marriage a success independently of God.

If your marriage is in conflict: This is a crucial truth to understand. Since you can't accomplish any of those things in the flesh, it is important to recognize that and to come to the place of "I can't" do any of those things independently of God's power within me. If you don't come to "I can't," then you will never get past your conflict. (Remember that "I can't" means that independently of the life and power of God you can't produce a Christ-centered marriage.

Living From The Flesh Produces FLESHLY BEHAVIORS.

*"Now the **works of the flesh** are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these..." Galatians 5:19-21a*

The "works of the flesh" in Galatians 5:19-21a are fleshly behaviors that flow from living from the flesh.

1. Flesh Primarily Falls Into Two Categories: NEGATIVE and POSITIVE

Negative Flesh:

Negative flesh is pretty easy to spot because it produces negative fleshly behaviors or attitudes. Look at the following examples to better understand what I mean.

Examples of negative flesh: angry, insecure, unforgiving, resentful, abusive, fearful, and critical.

Positive Flesh:

Positive flesh is more difficult to recognize because it looks very appealing, especially in our culture. The problem is positive flesh is flesh that looks good but it is either done with the focus on yourself or independently of God. Let me show you examples of both.



Examples of positive flesh: self-confidence, self-reliance, self-sufficiency, success, self-righteousness, competent, and being in control

Do you see the common word in most of these examples of positive flesh? **SELF**. This is what is appealing yet deceiving about positive flesh. It looks very attractive, but it still focuses on self.

Exercise: Go to pages 95-95 and pick out five fleshly behaviors that you are experiencing as they relate to your marriage.

What are your fleshly behaviors creating in your marriage? Harmony or conflict?

2. Not All Your Fleshly Behaviors Are EQUAL.

Your fleshly behaviors are not all equal. By that I mean your flesh has varying degrees of strength and influence in your life. On a scale of 1-10, my anger was a 9, but my insecurity was a 4. Because my anger was stronger than any of my other flesh patterns, I found myself going to anger more frequently than any other flesh pattern.

3. We Push Each Other's "Flesh" BUTTONS.



What happens in a marriage where a couple is living from the flesh is they push each other's "flesh" buttons. You know what I mean, don't you? This is how conflict starts. For example, when your spouse says something and pushes your "rejection" button, you respond by trying to also push his or her "rejection" button. Your flesh is triggered when your spouse pushes your flesh buttons, and then you retaliate by pushing your spouse's flesh buttons. What do you imagine will happen if you don't stop pushing each other's buttons?

If you CONTINUE pushing each other's FLESH buttons, it will create an ongoing "SQUIRREL cage" of CONFLICT.

Question: Are you experiencing any "squirrel cages" of conflict in your marriage? Is this fleshly "squirrel cage" what you want for your marriage?

3. The Flesh BLOCKS The Flow of Christ's Life IN and THROUGH You.

Not only will your flesh create conflict, but it also does something else:

Fleshly behaviors will BLOCK the flow of Christ's life (His love, grace, respect, acceptance, forgiveness, etc.) IN you and THROUGH you.

Let me give you an analogy. You may be familiar with the drug Plavix. It is designed to remove plaque from your arteries. Let's assume you have a spiritual artery I will call Christ's life. In that spiritual artery, you have all of Christ's life available to you and flowing through you. However, there is a build-up of "marital-fleshly plaque" in this artery I call fleshly behaviors.

As this "marital-fleshly plaque" builds up, what is it blocking? It is blocking Christ's life (His love, peace, joy, forgiveness, etc.) from flowing in you and through you. Can you imagine how much blockage there will be after 10, 20, or 30 years of "marital-fleshly plaque" build-up? Eventually, Christ's life is blocked to the point where your marriage will have a stroke and eventually die. If it doesn't kill your marriage, then it may become, instead, a "walking-dead" marriage.

Question: Is it possible that there is "fleshly" plaque build-up in your spiritual artery? What do you think is the "divine" Plavix that will remove your fleshly plaque?

OVERT Versus COVERT Conflicts

OVERT Conflict

We learned in Lesson One that there are two kinds of conflict: overt and covert. Overt conflict is easy to spot. In overt conflict there is no restraint on your flesh. You are simply "vomiting" on each other on an ongoing basis. Ongoing overt conflict is always a sign that you have a troubled marriage or are moving toward one.

COVERT Conflict

I define covert conflict as conflict that we try to keep under control or at least under cover. It may come out from time to time but it is like a tiger in a cage that sometimes escapes (but we still have the ability to force it back into the cage). There are a several problems with covert conflict:

1. If you can keep your fleshly behaviors under some degree of CONTROL, then you can convince yourself that there is no real DETERIORATION of your marriage.
2. If you feel that you are in control of your FLESH (or your spouse's flesh), then you can convince yourself that your marriage is a "GOOD" marriage, especially when you compare it with other marriages that are worse off than yours.
3. At some point COVERT conflict can turn into OVERT conflict. At that point the tiger is "out of the cage," and there is no putting it back in the cage.

The problem is that in COVERT conflict you can be DECEIVED by believing that your marriage is doing well since you are MANAGING your own flesh and each other's fleshly behaviors.

Question: Is it possible that you have covert conflicts in your marriage?

Engaging God: Seek the Lord to expose any covert conflict that you may be experiencing but may not be aware of.

Are You an EXPRESSER Or A SUPPRESSOR?



We tend to function in our flesh in two different ways either as a suppressor or as an expresser. As spouses, we can be both depending upon the situation, but there is a tendency to primarily live from one or the other.

1. **A SUPPRESSOR** is one who internalizes his/her fleshly behaviors. For example, a people-pleaser may not get overtly angry at his/her spouse because they want to be affirmed or accepted. So, they just “stuff” or internalize their anger. The problem with suppressors is they can deceive themselves by thinking suppression is Godly behavior. However, if the fleshly behavior is not repented of, you have internalized sin. The key truth about suppression as a fleshly behavior is that while it may be suppressed in one area, inevitably it will be expressed in another area.
2. **An EXPRESSER** is one who externalizes or verbalizes his/her fleshly behaviors. Frustration, anger, and sarcastic or rejecting remarks are examples of an expresser's fleshly behavior. Expressers don't hide their feelings or their fleshly behaviors.

If both spouses are suppressors, then there will be minimal overt conflict. As a result, you can convince yourselves you are doing okay since your flesh appears to be under control. But, what is the truth?

THE TRUTH

***Whether you are a SUPPRESSOR or an EXPRESSER,
your flesh is POISONING your marriage.***

Question: Are you a primarily suppressor or an expresser? _____

Engaging God: If you are a suppressor, ask the Spirit to reveal the fleshly behaviors you are suppressing or internalizing and the consequences of that choice. If you are an expresser, ask the Spirit to show you the damage you are causing your spouse by your negative outbursts.

Your Flesh Patterns Create PATHWAYS, Then RUTS, And Then CANYONS In Your Marriage.

As you continue to live from your fleshly behaviors, one of the key problems is relational “pathways” begin to form. Your ongoing fleshly behaviors will create a “beaten” path that you will repeat or default to. Let me give you an example.

Let’s use one of the fleshly behaviors you wrote down previously. Insert that fleshly behavior here _____. Do you find yourself going back to this behavior over and over again? If so, you are creating a pathway that you default to every time your flesh is triggered. Unfortunately, it doesn’t just stop there. As you keep on living from your fleshly behaviors, over time your pathways will become “ruts,” and ruts can eventually become canyons. When you get to the “canyon” stage, your marriage is in real trouble.

Question: Do you have pathways, ruts, ditches, and/or canyons of fleshly behaviors in your marriage? If so, identify which fleshly behaviors are pathways, ruts, ditches, or canyons.

Engaging God: Seek the Holy Spirit to reveal or to expose your fleshly pathways, ruts, or canyons in your marriage. Remember, there is no canyon deep enough that He can’t fill in and make level ground.

If your marriage is in trouble: you are definitely at the “canyon” stage.

***Continuing to live from the flesh will produce
PATHWAYS, RUTS, and CANYONS.***

DAY TWO

Your Flesh Is Like A DEFENSE ATTORNEY.

I liken your flesh to a defense attorney. By this I mean when you and/or your spouse are acting in the flesh, your tendency will be to justify, defend, excuse, blame or otherwise make a case for continuing to live in the flesh. For example, whenever I get frustrated with Paige, I will have thoughts like, “Why can’t she see my way is better. She doesn’t understand I know best.” A friend of mine once said the resourcefulness of the flesh is never exhausted. We can always look for new and ongoing ways to justify and defend our fleshly behaviors. Sometimes our fleshly behaviors are so entrenched we can mistakenly think they are necessary survival tools.

Question: Write down the fleshly behaviors that you tend to justify, defend, or build a case around.

The flesh loves to JUSTIFY, DEFEND, and BUILD A CASE for itself.

What Is The OVERFLOW Of Living From The Flesh In Marriage?

What I have seen in my work with married couples are five things that result from living from the flesh.

1. Living From The Flesh Produces DEATH In The Marriage.

a. What Kind Of Death?

If you continue to live from the flesh, it will create what Paul calls in Romans 8:6: “**DEATH.**”

*“For the **mind set on the flesh is DEATH**, but the **mind set on the Spirit is LIFE and peace**, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God...” (Emphasis mine)*



What kind of death is referred to here? It is not spiritual death because we know that as a result of trusting Christ for salvation, we have eternal life in Christ and can never die spiritually again. The death referred to in Romans 8:6 is defined in Strong’s Lexicon as “**the misery of the soul as a result of sin.**” In other words, if you and/or your spouse continue to live from your flesh, the inevitable result will be internal misery.

b. What Are Some Examples of Internal Misery?

Below are some examples of internal misery that is caused by living from the flesh:

| | | | |
|--------------|------------------|------------|---------------|
| Condemnation | Stress | Rejection | Unforgiveness |
| Anger | Self-sufficiency | Bitterness | Guilt |
| Self-pity | Inadequacy | Fear | Worry |
| Frustration | Blame | Shame | Insecurity |

Exercise: Write down any of the examples above that you are experiencing in your marriage.

Question: Do you want to continue living from internal misery in your marriage?

Engaging God: Ask the Lord to expose any areas of “death” that your flesh is causing you in your marriage. Seek the Lord to reveal how your own misery of the soul is harming you, your spouse and your marriage.

c. How High Can Your MISERY Index Go?

I have discovered all human beings have a “misery” index. What amazes me is how much misery Christians can bear. Actually, I am not surprised because my personal and marital misery index was off the charts. Our tolerance for misery is very high. I have witnessed many couples who live in misery that only seems to escalate the longer they stay married. That was the case for Paige and me by the end of our first ten years of marriage. If your misery index continues to escalate, there will come a point where one or both spouses have had enough. Separation and/or divorce will be the only options left.

Question: How would you evaluate your misery index in your marriage on a scale of 1-10? Are you satisfied with where you are in your misery index?

d. WHERE Does Your Misery Take You?

Living in the misery of the flesh takes you to what I call “prodigal pigpens.” Remember the prodigal son who decided to live independently and ended up in a pigpen? This is what happens to us when we go to the flesh. We end up like the prodigal son “wallowing” in the mud and muck of our flesh. Peter addresses this truth in 2 Peter 2:22:

“Of them the proverbs are true: ‘A dog returns to its vomit’ and, ‘A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud.’”



The dog returning to its vomit or a pig returning to wallowing in the mud are great pictures of what going back to the flesh is like. If this is the case, why do we keep going back to the flesh? Here again, it is what we are used to.

As sick as it sounds, we have learned to be at home and to be comfortable with the misery of our flesh. This is another definition for “coping.” Does that sound troublesome to you? I hope so.

Question: Can you identify any of your “marital” prodigal pigpens?

Engaging God: Seek God to reveal to you the prodigal pigpens that you may be stuck in but may not be aware of. Ask Him to reveal your marital relationship patterns that make you miserable yet you still repeat them.

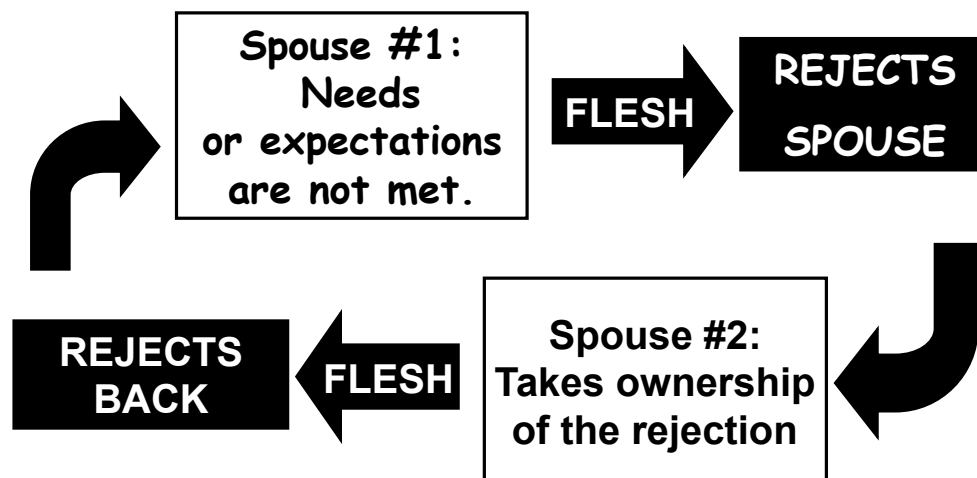
***Living from the flesh produces INTERNAL MISERY
which GROWS over time and keeps us in our PRODIGAL pigpens.***

2. You and Your Spouse Are Living In The “REJECTION CYCLE.”

When you are living from your flesh, there will be a point in your marriage when you will reject your spouse. It may be as a result of your unmet needs or unmet expectations. Rejection can come in many forms such as anger, being critical, being demanding, or withholding sexual intimacy.

In the next diagram let’s assume Spouse #1’s needs and expectations are not being met which leads him/her to reject Spouse #2. When Spouse #2 takes ownership of Spouse #1’s rejection because he/she is living from the flesh, Spouse #2 feels he/she has the right to reject back. This creates what I call the “rejection cycle.”

The Rejection Cycle



OVERT OR COVERT REJECTION

As you see at the bottom of the illustration, the rejection can either be overt or covert. An example of overt rejection is verbal rejection while covert rejection could be giving your spouse the silent treatment.

Question: Are there any areas of your marriage where overtly or covertly you may be in a rejection cycle?

Engaging God: Ask the Holy Spirit to expose any areas in your marriage where you may be experiencing a rejection cycle that you are not aware of. Seek Him to reveal a rejection cycle whenever you tell yourself, “Here we go again!”

***What do you believe will happen in your marriage if you
both CONTINUE living in the rejection cycle?***

3. Belief That YOUR Spouse (Not You) Is The Problem



“The man said, ‘The woman You put here with me, she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.’” Genesis 3:12

We can see from the passage above that the “blame game” in marriage started at “the Fall” and is still alive and well in marriages today. When I disciple couples, I ask them to tell me the problem, and they point their fingers at each other and say, “He/she is the problem.” I often hear this comment, as well: “If you can fix my spouse, I will be happy.” The problem is magnified when I hear the same complaint from the other spouse, too. What is the truth?

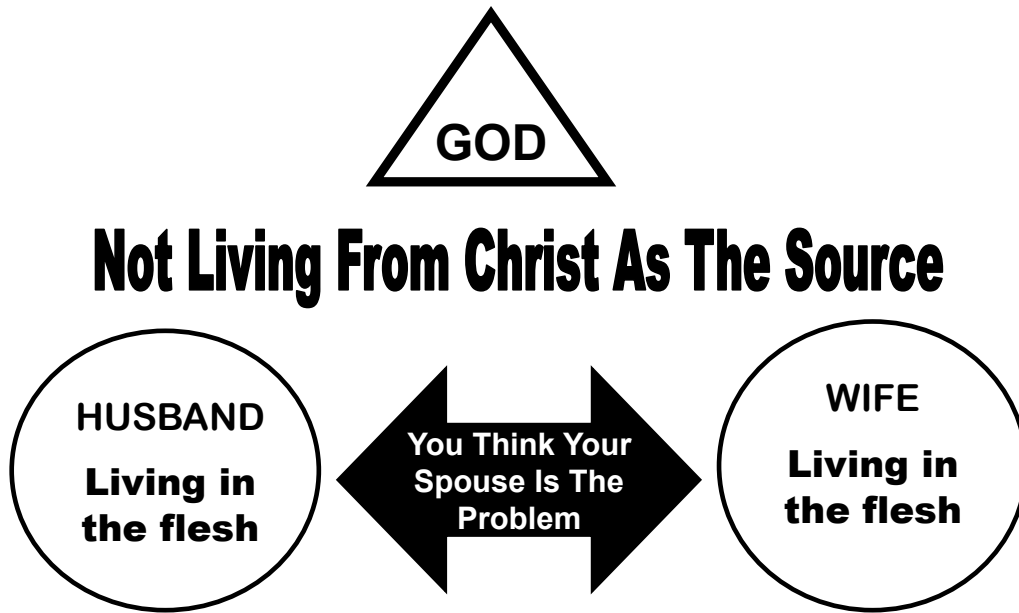
THE TRUTH:

Your spouse is NOT the problem.

***The REAL problem is your relationship with Christ because
you are NOT living from Christ as your SOURCE.***

Remember the diagram in Lesson One about Category 1 and 2 marriages? By now you have probably figured out both of those marriages are what I call “fleshly” marriages. This is because in a “fleshly” marriage, each spouse concludes that the other one is the problem. The real problem, however, is not your spouse. The real problem is that you are not living from Christ as the Source.

A FLESHLY Marriage



The REAL Problem Is Your Relationship With Christ

Question: Do you believe that your spouse is the real reason that you do not have a satisfying marriage?

Meditate: on the comment that “the real problem in your marriage is not your spouse.” Rather, the real problem in your marriage is that you are not living from Christ as your source.

If your marriage is in trouble: This may be a hard pill for you or your spouse to swallow because you have been blaming your spouse for your misery when in fact the real source of your misery is that you are living from your flesh and are not living from Christ as your Source.

Engaging God: If you are having a difficult time believing that your spouse is NOT the problem, ask God to reveal the truth to you that it is your flesh and not your spouse that is the real problem. Remind yourself that God already knows your flesh patterns and He wants to free you from them, not condemn you for them.

Think about this: If you are walking in the Spirit, and your spouse is walking in his/her flesh, do you have to take ownership of your spouse’s flesh, or is it possible that you could continue to walk in the Spirit in spite of his/her flesh?

4. All You Can Do Is COPE With Each Other.

I mentioned earlier in this study that one of the characteristics of a Christian marriage as opposed to a Christ-centered marriage is that a couple learns to just **cope** with one another in the former. Let me remind you of the definition of “coping.”

COPING

is what married couples TRY to do apart from God to produce and/or to maintain happiness and fulfillment in their marriage in the midst of unresolved conflict, unmet needs, or ongoing fleshly behavior.

Coping is the human “substitute” for true transformation. Instead of allowing the Holy Spirit to transform our behaviors, we just learn to live with them. Coping says, “We will figure out some way to make it work.”

Another way of coping is what I call “flesh management.” An example of flesh management is the term “anger management.” Secular psychology teaches you ways and techniques to manage your fleshly anger. Do you believe that managing your flesh is God’s objective? Not according to Romans 12:2a:

“Be not conformed to the world (coping, flesh management), but be transformed (into Christ-like behaviors) by the renewing of your mind...” (Parentheses mine)

God promises is that if we engage Him by faith, He will replace our fleshly behaviors with Christ-like behaviors.

***God does NOT want you to MANAGE your fleshly behaviors.
He wants to TRANSFORM you to live from Christ-like behaviors.***



If you have been married for a while, you may not even be aware of all the ways you cope. Coping can be a great deceiver in marriage because a couple can trick themselves into thinking they have a Christ-centered marriage simply because they have learned how to cope with each other’s flesh. It is like learning not to step on your spouse’s toes while dancing. Some couples, like us for the first ten years, learned how to cope very well.

However, simply coping in the marriage relationship will eventually create death in a marriage because the fleshly behaviors are not being transformed. The key truth concerning coping is this:

***Simply learning how to cope in marriage will NEVER produce
TRANSFORMATION or a CHRIST-CENTERED marriage.
It can only produce MORE coping.***

Some examples of coping are trying to avoid conflict, trying to get the upper hand (i.e., controlling), or withdrawing when conflict arises. Giving in or being passive are two other coping strategies that I often see in marriages. Here is another key truth:

The truth is that the ONLY reason that non-Christians stay married is that they learn how to COPE with one another.

I hope this truth is startling to you because if you are coping instead of allowing Christ to transform your marriage, your marriage is no different from that of a non-Christian. Christian couples can even develop coping strategies that will see them through “till death do us part.” With that being said, now might be a good time for you and your spouse to ask yourselves this question:

Do we want to CONTINUE coping or SEEK God to transform our marriages?

Exercise: Go to pages 95 and 96. From that list choose coping mechanisms that you use to deal with your or your spouse’s fleshly behaviors.

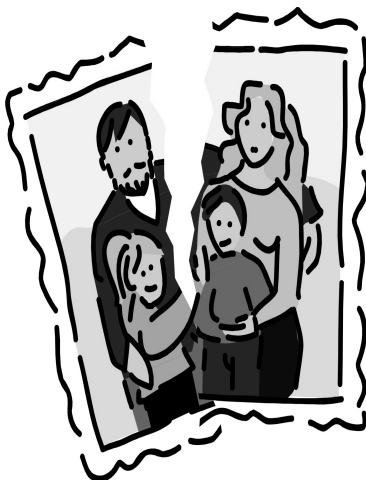
Question: Would you be willing to seek the Lord individually (or as a couple) and ask Him to reveal to you whether or not you are simply coping in your marriage and in what areas you are coping?

Engaging God: If so, ask the Holy Spirit to expose any areas where you are coping in your marriage.

5. UNRESOLVED Overt and Covert Conflict

“For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.” Galatians 5:17

There is no getting away from the influence of your flesh this side of heaven. The flesh is never going away, and living from your flesh will over time produce:



- Growing unresolved Covert conflict which leads to
- Growing unresolved Overt conflict which can lead to
- Emotional separation or
- Physical separation and divorce.

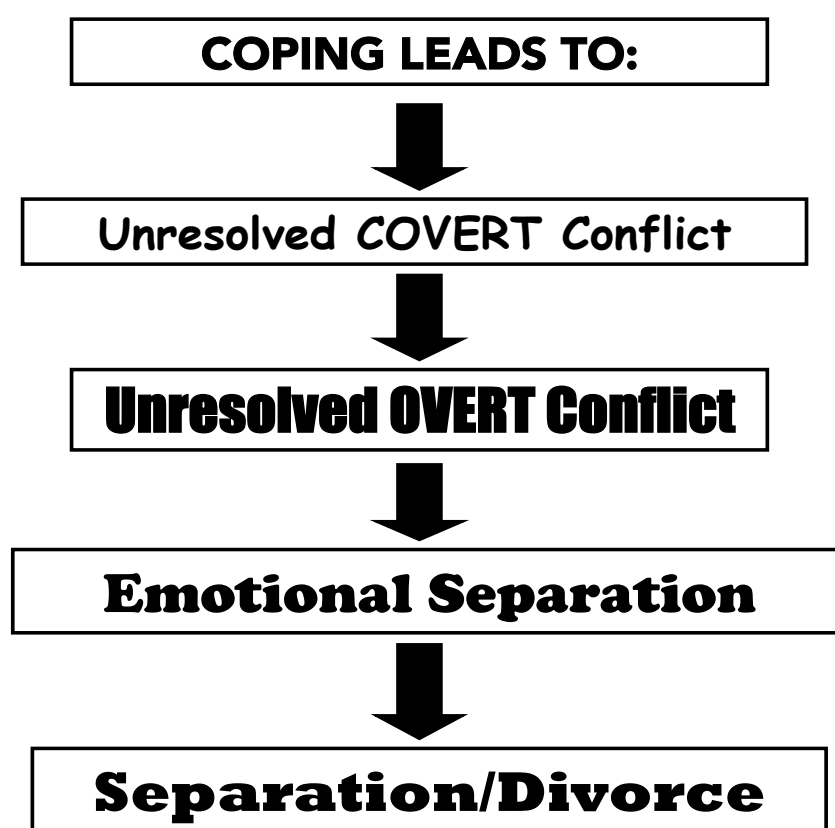
Moving to the place of physical separation or divorce generally happens over time. It usually happens after a number of years of living in unresolved conflict. Couples first try to cope with one another’s fleshly behaviors. When that fails, they become locked into the rejection cycle which produces further frustration, unforgiveness, and even bitterness.

From there they move into creating emotional distance between themselves or develop ways of self-protection or insulation from each other's flesh. This will eventually lead to emotional separation that may end with physical separation* and/or divorce. The key truth to remember is:

UNRESOLVED OVERT and COVERT conflict will eventually lead to emotional or physical separation or divorce.

*The problem with separation is if the cause of the separation is never resolved, then the separation will be in vain, and divorce will usually result.

Question: Look at the next diagram. Can you identify yourself or your marriage in any of the categories?

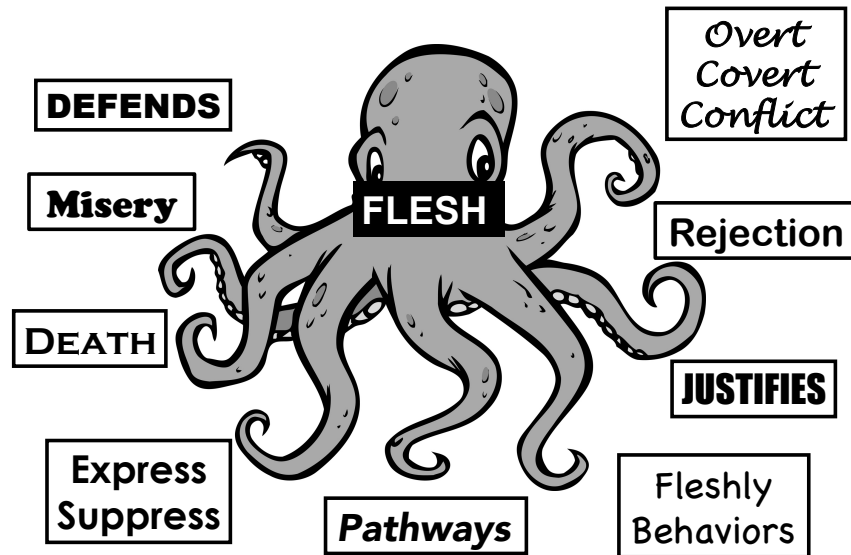


Engaging God: Seek God to reveal to you and your spouse if your marriage is in any of the stages listed above.

Summary

I hope that this section has opened your eyes to areas in your marriage where the flesh is working and is causing conflict. Let me summarize this section by using the octopus illustration:

THE FLESH



Exercise: From pages 94 and 95, pick out the fleshly behaviors that you exhibit when you experience stress, differences, or conflicts in these areas of your marriage.

Communication

Finances

Children – discipline, values, training

Conflict

Intimacy – Emotional and sexual

Needs/Desires

In-laws or extended family members

Spiritual issues

Engaging God: Ask the Spirit to reveal to you some areas above where you may not be aware that the flesh is creating problems in your marriage. Remember, when you operate in the flesh you are trying to get your needs met independently of God.

DAY THREE

Drawing On Christ's LIFE and POWER To Overcome The Flesh

We now know how the flesh works and how it negatively impacts our marriages. So let's turn the corner and talk about the truth.

A. Drawing On Christ's LIFE To Overcome The Flesh

1. The Mind SET On The Spirit Is Life.

We saw in the first part of Romans 8:6 that walking in the flesh is "death", but look at the second half of this verse:

*" but, the mind set on the Spirit is **LIFE**."*

The word "set" means to intentionally focus on. As we walk in moment-by-moment dependence upon Christ, we are "setting" or focusing our minds on THE Life that we have in Christ. Think about this for a moment:

***If we are SETTING our minds on CHRIST, then we will
NOT be focused on our fleshly behaviors.***

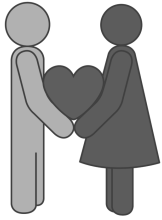
Simply walking in dependence upon Christ will shift our focus away from walking in the flesh.

2. When We Are Being Tempted To Walk In The Flesh, We Can Draw On Christ's LIFE.

Remember our discussion of THE LIFE in Lesson Two? When Paul says in Romans 8:6 above that the "mind set on the Spirit is life," he is referring to the Christ-like characteristics that are ours in Christ. Let's take another look at that list.

Drawing on Christ as THE LIFE means that we have available to us Christ's:

| | | | |
|--------------------|----------------|-------------|-------------------|
| Unconditional Love | Hope | Victory | Worth |
| Acceptance | Faith | Freedom | Patience |
| Strength | Christ-control | Humility | Selflessness |
| Peace | Respect | Power | Adequacy |
| Forgiveness | Security | Surrender | Understanding |
| Fearlessness | Wisdom | Discernment | Christ-confidence |
| Rest | Righteousness | Courage | Compassion |
| Boldness | Kindness | Joy | Grace |



In those moments when temptation comes, we can draw on Christ's love, acceptance, forgiveness, etc. Let's look at some practical examples of what that looks like.

Example #1: When you are feeling anger welling up in you, you can draw on Christ's love in the moment to keep you from going to anger.

Example #2: When you feel yourself being rejected, you can draw on Christ to BE your acceptance.

Example #3: When you are struggling with forgiving your spouse, draw on Christ's forgiveness.

Therefore, as you CHOOSE to walk dependently upon Christ, you can LIVE from His Christ-like characteristics RATHER than from your flesh.

B. Drawing On The Spirit's POWER To Overcome The Flesh

In addition to drawing on Christ as your life when you are tempted to walk in the flesh, it is crucial to draw on the Spirit's power to actually overcome your flesh. Let's look at some truths concerning this issue.

1. Seek The Power Of The Spirit To DEFEAT The Flesh.

*"No, in all these things we are **more than conquerors** through Him (Jesus) who loved us."*
Romans 8:37 (Parenthesis mine)

*"But I say, **walk by the Spirit**, and you will **NOT** carry out the desire of the flesh."*
Galatians 5:16 (Emphasis mine)

We talked earlier about how your willpower is no match for the flesh. This is part of what Jesus meant when He said in John 15:5:

"apart from Me you can do NOTHING."



Let's assume that you want to quit living from the flesh in your marriage. I could give you ten techniques on how to TRY to overcome your flesh in your own willpower, but I would only be setting you up for failure. If you have already tried to have victory over your flesh using your own willpower, how is that working for you? You see, God has it rigged! Without His power, your only option is repeatedly trying and failing to deal with your flesh in your own strength.

However, here is the good news:

When you walk **DEPENDENTLY** upon God, He releases His power in you to **OVERPOWER** the flesh and to set you and your spouse **FREE**.

This is why I love Romans 8:37 and Galatians 5:16 above. As we walk in the power of the Spirit, He will conquer our fleshly behaviors, and we will not give in to the flesh. This is our only hope for victory over the flesh. Here is what a step of faith might look like in overcoming the flesh:

Step of faith: “Lord, I am drawing on Your power to overcome my fleshly frustration.”

Engaging God: In whatever fleshly behavior that you struggle with, seek God’s power to overcome that fleshly behavior.

2. Seek The Spirit To Reveal To You The DEATH “OF” Your Flesh.

*“The mind set on the flesh is **DEATH**...” Romans 8:6a*



*“For what I am doing, I do not understand; for **I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate.**”*
Romans 7:15

We talked about the death of our flesh as being “misery of the soul as a result of sin.” The problem is that we have lived with the “death” of our flesh for so long in some areas of our marriage that we no longer recognize the “death” that it is causing us or our spouse. Therefore, the Holy Spirit has to reveal the “death” of our flesh to us before we are willing to allow God to set us free from it.

Showing you the death **OF** your flesh is simply the Spirit revealing to you the **MISERY** that your fleshly resistance is causing in you and in your marriage.

Here is what a step of faith may look like in seeking the Spirit to reveal the death of your flesh:

Step of faith: “I am asking You to reveal to me the “death” (misery) my fleshly behavior of _____ is causing me, my spouse and my marriage.

Engaging God: Seek the Spirit to reveal the “death” that your fleshly behaviors are causing in you and through you to your spouse.

3. Seek The Spirit To Give You The Desire To Walk In The Death **TO Your Flesh.**

*"For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the **Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.**" Romans 8:13*



As you seek the power of the Spirit, He will give you the willingness to put that fleshly behavior to death. Think again about the illustration in 2 Peter 2:22 where it says the dog returns to its vomit. Isn't that what we do when we go back to the flesh? We get in this vicious cycle of throwing up and lapping it up. (Sorry for the graphic example, but it's crucial you understand this.)

The good news is that once we see the death (smell the vomit) that our flesh is causing, we will turn away from it, and we will turn back to walking dependently upon God. Look at 2 Corinthians 4:11:

*"For we who live **are constantly being delivered over to death (to our flesh)** for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh." 2 Corinthians 4:11*

In this verse, Paul is saying that God is constantly exposing the death OF our flesh so we will walk in the death TO our flesh. Walking in the death TO our flesh means we realize the misery our fleshly resistance is causing us and we turn back to God to continue His transforming work in us. When we walk in the death TO our flesh, it is like nailing our flesh (self-life) to the cross.

***Walking in death TO your flesh is another way of saying that
you are walking in victory OVER your flesh.***

I would strongly encourage you to pray the prayer that David prayed concerning his flesh:

"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way (fleshly behavior) in me, and lead me in the way everlasting (give me the willingness to walk in the death TO my flesh)." Psalm 139:23, 24 (Parentheses mine)

Do you see the humility of David in seeking God to expose his flesh and then seeking Him to walk in the death TO his flesh? This is a powerful prayer.

Here is what a step of faith might look like to walk in the death TO your flesh:

Step of faith: "I am asking You, Lord, to not only show me the death that my fleshly behavior of _____ is causing me and in my marriage, but give me the willingness to walk in the death TO my flesh."

Engaging God: Ask God to give you the willingness to say, "No" to your flesh when you are tempted to walk in it. Seek Him to be your discernment to recognize your fleshly behavior and then to be your power to stop acting out of the flesh and, instead, to walk by His Spirit.

4. Seek The Spirit To Replace Your Fleshly Behaviors With Christ-Like ATTITUDES.

*"Have this **attitude** in yourselves which was also **in Christ Jesus.**" Philippians 2:5*

Remember that as you grow in Christ, the Spirit will move you from drawing on Christ's life to experiencing Christ-like attitudes.

God wants to transform these Christ-like characteristics into Christ-like ATTITUDES:

| | | | |
|--------------------|----------------|-------------|-------------------|
| Unconditional Love | Hope | Victory | Worth |
| Acceptance | Faith | Freedom | Patience |
| Strength | Christ-control | Humility | Selflessness |
| Peace | Respect | Power | Adequacy |
| Forgiveness | Security | Surrender | Understanding |
| Fearlessness | Wisdom | Discernment | Christ-confidence |
| Rest | Righteousness | Courage | Compassion |
| Boldness | Kindness | Joy | Grace |

We focused on the first part of 2 Corinthians 4:11 when we were talking about death to our flesh. However, the story does not end there. What is the fruit or the overflow of walking in the death to our flesh? Reread this verse and focus on the last part of it.

*"For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death (of our flesh) for Jesus' sake, that the **LIFE OF JESUS (Christ-like attitudes)** also may be manifested in our mortal flesh." 2 Corinthians 4:11 (Emphasis and parentheses mine)*

Step of faith: "Lord, I am asking You to replace my fleshly attitude of _____ with a Christ-like attitude of _____."

Engaging God: Choose one Christ-like attitude that you want to experience and begin seeking the Lord to transform you to live from that attitude.

Using "The Line" Analogy

Let's take everything we have learned and apply it to "the Line" analogy to illustrate what it looks like to live above "the Line" from the Spirit rather than living below "the Line" from the flesh. Galatians 5:16 says, *"But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh."* When we apply this to "the Line" illustration, below, we see that walking by the Spirit means we are to depend on Christ moment by moment resulting in "Life." However, if we choose to walk in the flesh, we will experience "death" or misery of the soul.

So how do we get above "the Line?" The answer is by **faith**. As we take steps of faith, we begin to grasp the truth that behind our faith is the POWER of God to move us from living in the flesh to walking in the Spirit. In contrast, if we don't walk by faith, we will be powerless to move ourselves above "the Line." Bottom line: **Faith taps into His power for us to be able to live above "the Line."**

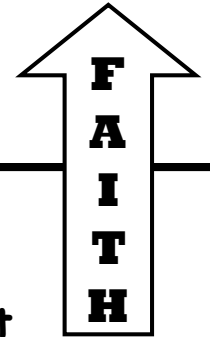
Living Above or Below The Line

**“But I say, walk by the
SPIRIT,...”**

THE SPIRIT = LIFE

THE FLESH = DEATH

**“...and you will not carry out
the desire of the
FLESH.”
Galatians 5:16**



Using “The Line” Illustration Concerning Being Transformed To Live From Christ-Like Attitudes

In addition to living from the Spirit, what else does God offer you and your spouse if you live above “the Line?” Answer: All of the Christ-like attitudes we have in Christ (His love, peace, humility, patience, etc.). So, as we walk by faith, we will be living increasingly above “the Line” resulting in our eventually being able to experience these Christ-like attitudes in marriage. But what is the result if we continue living below “the Line?” See the next diagram:

Unconditional Love
Secure
Forgiving
Compassionate
Adequate
Sacrificial
Free
Joyful

Righteous
Acceptable
Fearless
Discerning
Thankful
Sufficient
Victorious
Peaceful

Humble
Patient
Complete
Wise
Confident
Selfless
Strong
Good

THE SPIRIT = Christ-Like Attitudes

THE FLESH = Fleshly Behaviors

Fear, frustration, controlling,
unforgiveness, impatience, selfishness,
bitterness, pride, critical, judgmental,
anger, guilt, rejection, blame

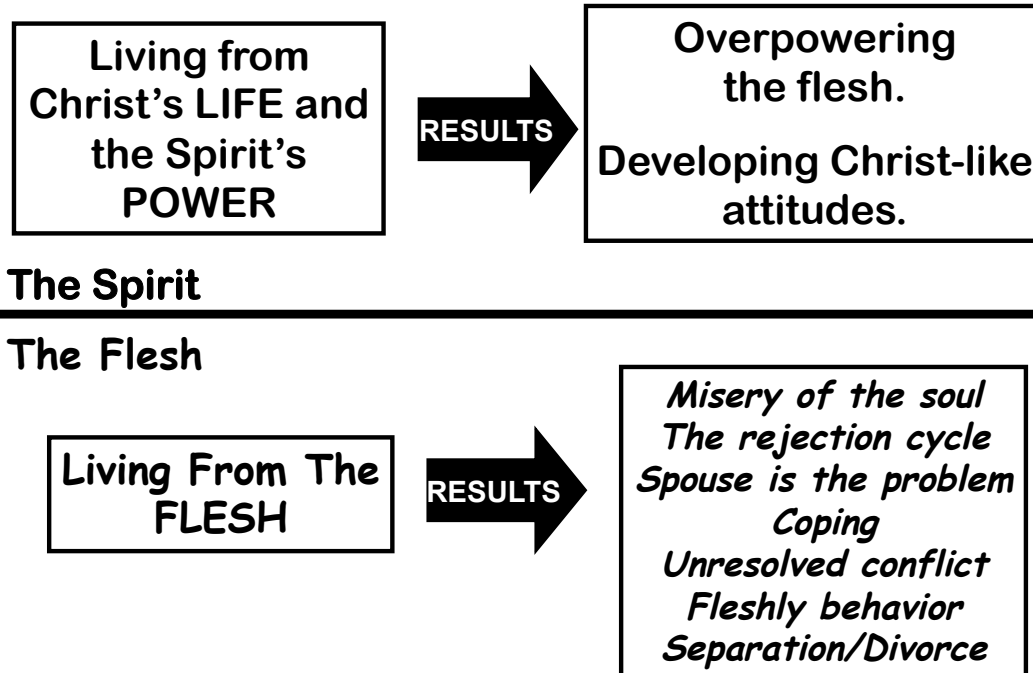


**F
A
I
T
H**

Living From The Spirit Versus Living From The Flesh

In the next diagram, you will discover what you can expect in your marriage if you are living above “the Line” from the Spirit versus living below “the Line” from the flesh.

Living From The Spirit Versus Living From The Flesh



Practical Application Of ENGAGING God To Deal With Fleshly Behavior

In this section I will first give you examples of fleshly behaviors and then show you what it looks like to engage God's power to deal with those fleshly behaviors. Remember these are just examples of steps of faith and are not specific steps I am asking you to take. Engage God to guide you on what specific steps of faith He wants you to take in faith for Him to overcome each of your fleshly behaviors.

THE TRUTH: Taking steps of faith in Christ will result in His transforming your fleshly behavior to Godly behavior.

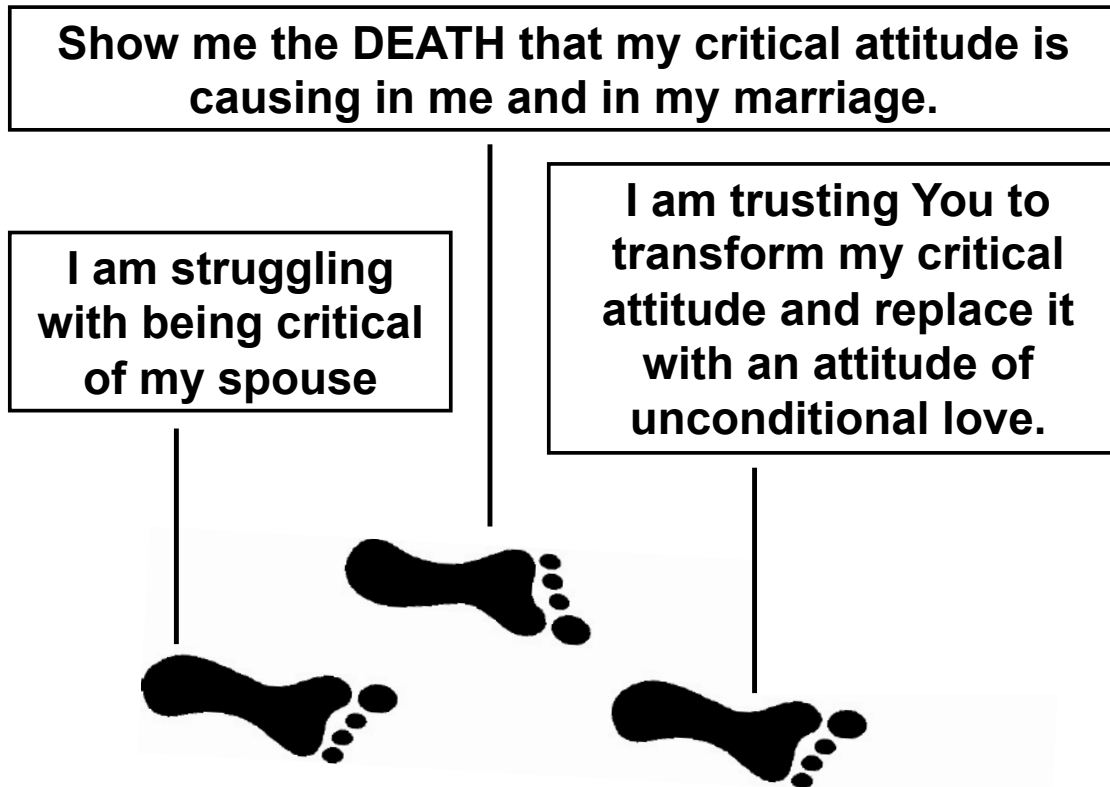
Let's look at examples to illustrate taking steps of faith:

Example #1: Let's assume that you have a fleshly behavior of being critical of your spouse. Some examples of steps of faith might be:

Step of faith: "Lord, when I am being critical of my spouse, expose the death that my criticism is causing me and my spouse."

Step of faith: "Lord, move me away from having a critical attitude to having an attitude of unconditional love."

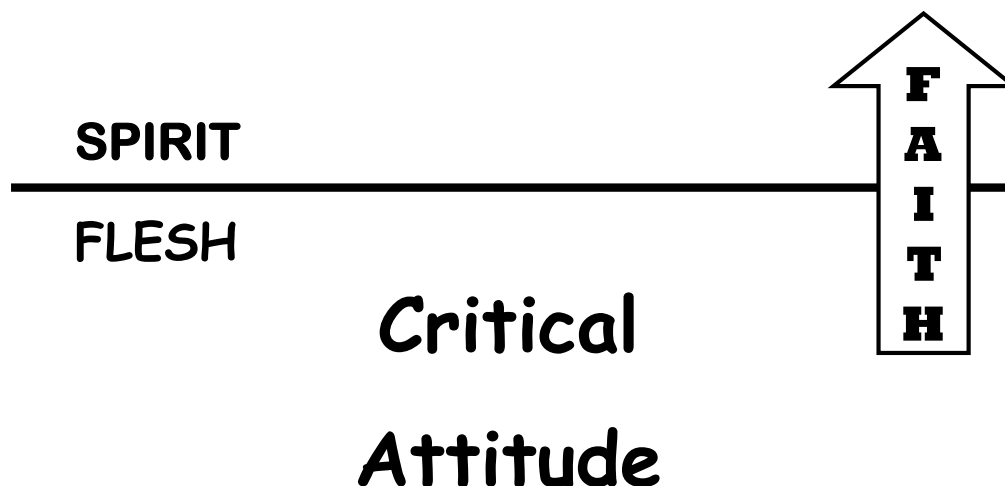
Let me illustrate what these steps of faith might look like:



Using “The Line” Analogy To Illustrate

Let’s take the example above and plug it into “the Line” diagram. Below “the Line,” we live from a critical attitude toward our spouses. However, as we take steps of faith, over time God will replace our critical attitude with His unconditional love.

Living From Christ’s Unconditional Love



DAY FOUR

Example #2: Let's assume your fleshly behavior is your needing to be in control of your spouse. What might be some steps of faith in order to engage God's power to deal with that behavior?



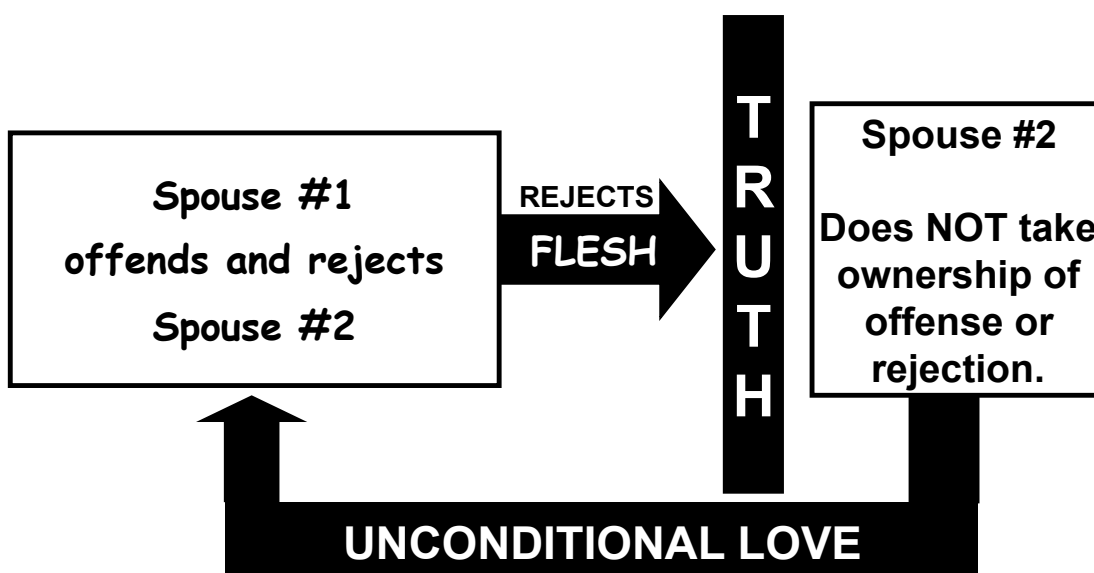
Step of faith: "Lord, expose the lie that I need to be in control of my spouse. Reveal to me the truth that You and You alone are in control. Set me free from my need to control."

Step of faith: "Reveal to me the death that my controlling behavior is bringing into my marriage. Move my will to a place where I am willing to die to my desire to control."

Example #3: Let's assume that you are receiving rejection from your spouse.

THE TRUTH: If you are getting your need for acceptance met in Christ then **you no longer have to take ownership of your spouse's rejection**. Look at this diagram to illustrate this truth.

Not Taking Ownership Of Rejection



Step of faith: "Lord, when my spouse is rejecting me, remind me of the truth that I am totally accepted in You and I don't have to take ownership of his/her rejection."

Step of faith: "Lord, persuade me I am totally accepted in You and I don't have to take ownership of my spouse's rejection and reject back to try to defend or justify myself or retaliate in anger. In fact, give me Your heart of unconditional love for my spouse."

Meditate: on what it would look like to live from a Christ-like attitude of patience, acceptance, and selflessness.

Exercise: Pick one of your fleshly behaviors on pages 94-95 that you would like to be set free from and write down some step(s) of faith that you will take to experience freedom from that fleshly behavior.

Exercise: Pick one of the Christ-like attitudes from page 78 that you would like God to replace a fleshly behavior with and write down some step(s) of faith that you can take to experience that Christ-like attitude.

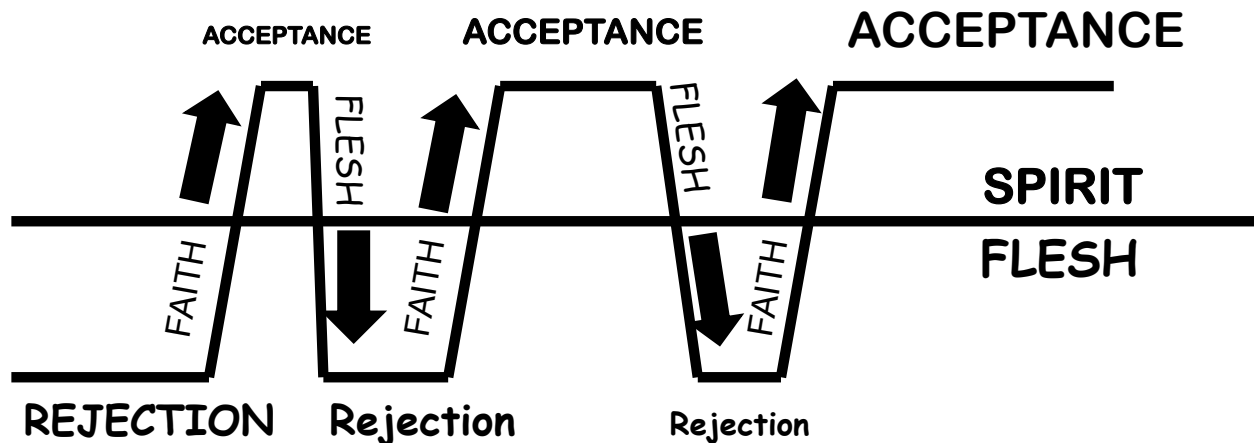
Engaging God: Begin taking steps of faith in order to get your needs met from God versus trying to get them met from your spouse.

Practical Illustrations Of Moving From The Flesh To Christ-Likeness

Let's assume you struggle with rejecting your spouse. When you first start out in the walk of faith, you have logged more time in the flesh than in the Spirit. Therefore, when you take those initial steps of faith, you will likely go above "the Line" for only a short time and walk in Christ's acceptance. But, then you will find yourself choosing to walk in the flesh again and drop below "the Line" and reject your spouse again.

As you continue walking by faith, you will find yourself staying above "the Line" longer and staying below "the Line" a shorter amount of time. Why? It is because you are "seeing" the death of your rejection sooner, and you are beginning to experience Christ's acceptance. It is a process, but, over time, the Spirit will replace your rejecting behavior with a Christ-like attitude of acceptance.

Moving From The Flesh To Christ-Likeness



Question: Does this diagram help you better understand the process of transformation?

Key Points To Remember About Seeking God To Deal With Your Fleshly Behavior

1. Some of your fleshly behaviors are STRONGER than others. It may take more time for God to transform your stronger fleshly behaviors.
2. Early on in your walk of faith you will go back to your fleshly behavior MANY times. Every time that you do, simply confess your sin to God, repent, and seek God to continue transforming you in that area of fleshly behavior.
3. Remember that your flesh is your DEFAULT position. When you are not walking dependently upon God, you will automatically go back to the flesh.
4. God is faithful in that He will continue to EXPOSE the death OF your flesh in order to help you walk in the death TO your flesh.
5. You may have to take many steps of faith before your fleshly resistance WEAKENS.
6. You will have to "FAITH" it for some time before you EXPERIENCE the Christ-like attitudes that you are wanting to experience.

Engaging God: Begin taking steps of faith for God to transform your fleshly behavior. Ask Him to encourage you in this process should you find yourself wanting to give up. God will be your patience and perseverance if you ask and trust Him by faith to act.

"Ask and keep on asking and it will be given to you; seek and keep on seeking and you will find; knock and keep on knocking and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who keeps on asking receives, and he who keeps on seeking finds, and to him who keeps on knocking, it will be opened. Matthew 7:7-8 (AMP)"

Five Major Roadblocks To A Christ-Centered Marriage

Now that we know that the flesh is the source of all marital conflict, let's look at how the flesh is manifested in five key roadblocks to a Christ-centered marriage. They roadblocks are:

- #1 - Unmet God-given needs
- #2 - Fleshly rights
- #3 - Unmet expectations
- #4 - Unforgiveness/unrepentance
- #5 – You and your spouse not knowing your true identity

With each of these obstacles, we are going to:

- Expose the lies concerning these roadblocks.
- Look at God’s truth about these roadblocks.
- Make practical application to engage God to move you and your spouse from living from the lie versus living from the truth.

We will finish this lesson by talking about unmet God-given needs.

Roadblock #1 - Unmet GOD-GIVEN Needs

As human beings we all have needs. I put those needs in three categories: physical, emotional and God-given. In the marriage relationship, we want to meet the physical and emotional needs of our spouse. However, where we get into trouble is when we try to meet each other’s God-given needs. Believing this lie will create a major roadblock in your marriage relationship.

[**Note:** Since God created us as physical and emotional beings, technically all our needs are God-given. But what I define as God-given needs are those God gave us that only He can meet.]

Let’s begin by identifying our God-given needs. You and your spouse have the following God-given needs:

Unconditional Love
Unconditional Acceptance
Respect
Value/Worth
Security

The interesting thing about your needs is that God has “hard-wired” you in such a way that those needs **must** be met. (Look at the list above again and see if any of these needs do not need to be met.) Since those needs are a part of your internal “wiring,” you have no choice but to try to get those needs met.

Remember that before the Fall, Adam and Eve were getting all of these needs met **from** God. He Himself was the Source for meeting every one of their needs. Without God as your Source, you are left **trying** to get your needs met somewhere else apart from God. One of the first places that we go to try to get our needs met is from our spouse.

A. The LIE Concerning Unmet Needs

THE LIE

***You can meet your spouse's God-given needs, and you can get
your God-given needs MET from your spouse
or from SOMEONE or SOMETHING else.***

When we got married, I expected Paige to love me unconditionally. However, on the third day of our honeymoon I got upset with her and I saw her love turn into anger. I realized pretty quickly that she could not meet my need for unconditional love. Equally quickly, Paige realized I would not be able to meet her needs for unconditional love.



The same goes for unconditional acceptance. We are all wired to be accepted unconditionally. Even so, when we offend one another, our tendency is to reject rather than accept one another.

You see, when we come into marriage, our tendency is to try to “take” or get our God-given needs met from our spouse. When our spouse cannot meet those needs, in our flesh we will get frustrated and possibly reject our spouse and/or look to someone or something else to meet those needs. Here are some other sources where we may try to get our needs met.

- **Unconditional Love** – from parents, family, friends, another man or woman
- **Unconditional Acceptance** – from friends, fellow church members, co-workers, another man or woman
- **Value\Worth** – from your job, financial success, what you do for others, ministry for the church, another man or woman
- **Respect** – from your job, accomplishments, co-workers, boss, friends, another man or woman
- **Security** – finances, retirement plans, job, another man or woman

Here are some of the resulting fleshly behaviors that often result when you are trying to get your needs met from your spouse or someone or something else:

- **Anger**
- **Rejection**
- **Frustration**
- **Affairs**
- **Divorce**

I think it is worthwhile to note that most extra-marital affairs begin when one spouse's needs are not being met by the other spouse. Since we have an inborn pressure to get those needs met, and if our spouse is failing to meet them, we will be tempted to try to get these needs met from someone else. If you are tempted to commit adultery, here is something you really need to understand: the only reason you are seeking someone else is you are believing the lie that another person will be able meet the God-given needs your wife or husband can't meet.

But you also need to understand that an “affair” does not always involve another person. Examples of other “lovers” we can turn to when our needs are not being met include pornography, drinking, eating, working, TV, hobbies, shopping, etc.

Question: When you are not getting the following needs met, what fleshly behaviors does that bring out in you? (You can also refer to the list of fleshly behaviors on pages 95 and 96)

Unconditional Love _____
Unconditional Acceptance _____
Respect _____
Value/Worth _____
Security _____

B. The TRUTH About God-Given Needs

What is the key truth concerning your God-given needs:

TRUTH #1

You and your spouse’s God-given needs can ONLY be met IN CHRIST.

We see this in Philippians 4:19:

*“And my **God will meet ALL your needs** according to His glorious riches **IN CHRIST Jesus.**”*
(Emphasis mine)

This verse tells us these God-given needs can only be met in Christ. “In Christ” simply means Christ is the only One who can supply unconditional love, unconditional acceptance, respect, value, worth, and security. As you seek Christ to meet these needs, you will begin to release your spouse from your imposed obligation to meet your needs. Does that sound like freedom to you?

TRUTH #2

***When Christ is your NEED-MEETER, you NO longer have to try to
GET your needs from your spouse.***



Good news! You can let your spouse off the hook from trying to meet needs that were impossible for him/her to ever meet! The fulfillment of your needs will come from the only one able to meet them: Christ Himself.

There are physical and sexual needs that we can legitimately can look to our spouses to meet. However, when it comes to God-given needs, we must seek Christ to supply those needs. Think about this for a moment. If you are truly getting your needs met in Christ, then you no longer have to be a “taker.” In addition, you can become a “giver.” What do I mean that you become a “giver”?

A New Word For Dependence: PARTICIPATION

I now want to introduce you to another another word for dependence which is the word “participate.” Think about this. If Christ is your Source to meet your needs, and Christ is in you, you can “participate” with (depend upon) the Lord to meet your spouse’s needs through you. This may be a new concept for you, so let me give you a few examples to explain:

Example #1: If God is meeting your need for unconditional love, then you no longer have to try to “take” unconditional love from your spouse. Instead, you can become a “giver” of unconditional love by trusting God to love your spouse unconditionally through you.

Example #2: If you are getting your need for unconditional acceptance met from God, then you can become a “giver” by asking the Lord to unconditionally accept your spouse through you.

***Being a “GIVER” means that you PARTICIPATE with Christ to
meet your spouse’s needs THROUGH you.***

In the practical application section, I will give you some examples of what it looks like for God to meet your spouse’s needs through you.

Meditate: on the truth that God not only wants to meets your needs, but He also wants to meet your spouse’s needs through you.

[**Note:** If you are at a place where you may be tempted to have an affair, remember this. Since your needs can only be met in Christ, you could have 100 affairs, and you still would not have your needs met. Consequently, this truth is crucial to create an “affair-proof” marriage for both spouses.]

If your God-given needs are not met in Christ, they will NEVER be met.

Meditate: on the truth that your spouse (and no other human) will never be able to meet your God-given needs.

Question: Which needs are you trying to get met from your spouse? Are these needs truly being met by your spouse? What are your “other lovers” if your needs are not being met by your spouse?

DAY FIVE

C. Engaging God To Meet Our God-Given Needs

Now we know the truth that God (not your spouse) is going to be the Source to meet our God-given needs:

**Unconditional Love
Unconditional Acceptance
Respect
Value/Worth
Security**

Let's look at some examples of what it looks like to engage God to meet our God-given needs.

1. Examples of engaging God to meet your needs.

Example #1: You have been trying to get your need for unconditional acceptance met from your spouse.

The Truth: The need for unconditional acceptance can only be met in Christ. Romans 15:7 says, *"Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God."* Romans 15:7

Step of faith: "The truth is, Lord, that my spouse is incapable of unconditionally accepting me. Continue to remind me of this and renew my mind to the truth that You and You alone accept me unconditionally."

Key Point: If you are totally accepted in Christ, then do you have to take ownership of your spouse's rejection? The answer is "No."

Step of faith: "Lord, reveal to me in a deeper way that since I am unconditionally accepted in You, I no longer have to take ownership of my spouse's rejection."

Example #2: You are not being respected by your spouse in the ways that you expect to be respected.

Step of faith: "Lord, persuade me that You are my Source for respect even when my spouse is not respecting me. Give me Your unconditional love for my spouse even though he/she does not respect me."

2. Examples of engaging God to deal with your fleshly behaviors when you TRY to get your needs met from your spouse.

Example #1: When you take ownership of your spouse's rejection, then, in the flesh, you will likely reject back. If you do reject your spouse, then take the following step of faith:

Step of faith: "Lord, I confess my sinful behavior of rejecting my spouse. I am asking You to persuade me I am unrejectable because my acceptance comes from You. Please unconditionally accept my spouse through me".

Key Point: If you are totally accepted in Christ, then do you have to take ownership of your spouse's rejection? The answer is "No."

Example #2: Let's assume that your spouse is not meeting your needs, and you are tempted by some other man or woman to have an affair.

The Truth: There is no other person other than Christ who can truly meet your needs. Philippians 4:19

Step of faith: "Lord, I am trusting in Your power to resist this temptation to have an affair. Renew my mind to the truth that no one and nothing except You can truly meet my needs. Be my strength to turn away from this temptation and turn to You, instead."

3. Seeking God to meet your spouse's needs THROUGH you.

Example #1: Your spouse is not loving you unconditionally.

Step of faith: "Lord, I can't unconditionally love my spouse. I am asking You to unconditionally love my spouse through me."

Example #2: Your spouse is rejecting you.

Step of faith: "Lord, even though my spouse is rejecting me, I am trusting You to unconditionally accept him/her through me."

Exercise: Pick one of the God-given needs that you would most like to experience and write down some step(s) of faith that you might take to experience that need.

Engaging God: Begin taking steps of faith in order to get your needs met from God versus trying to get them met from your spouse.

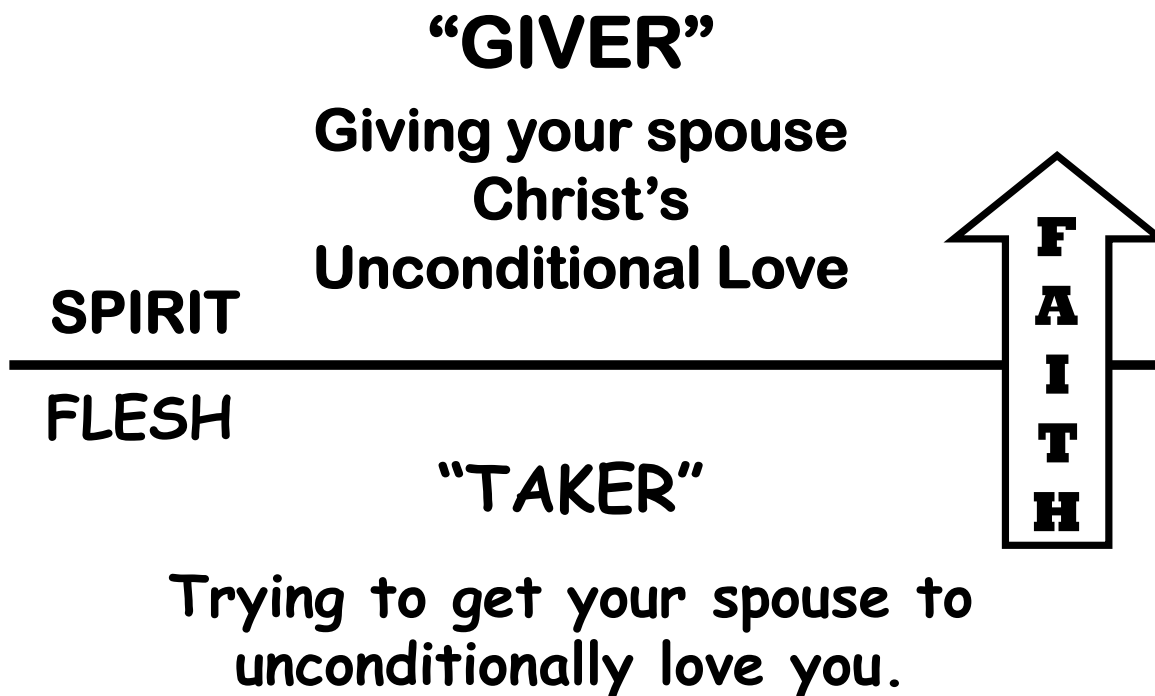
"The Line" and Unmet Needs

Let's look at living above "the Line" versus below "the Line" concerning unmet God-given needs. Let's use the example of your need for unconditional love. If your spouse can't meet that need, fleshly frustration would likely result. As you begin taking steps of faith, you will be drawing on Christ to meet your need for unconditional love.



Moving From Being A "Taker" To A "Giver"

If you try to get your need for unconditional love met from your spouse, you are being what I call a "taker." But if you allow Christ to meet your need for unconditional love and allow Christ to meet your spouse's need for unconditional love through you, then you become a "giver." Which do you think God wants you to be: a "taker" or a "giver?"



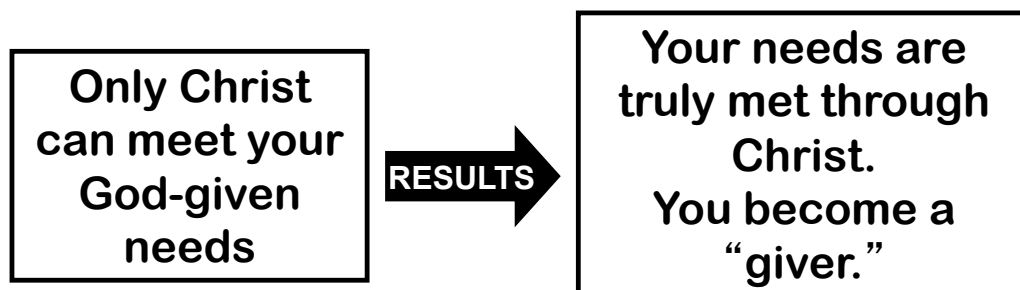
D. Key Points To Remember About Seeking God To Deal With Your Unmet Needs

1. As you begin seeking God to meet your needs, you may have to FAITH it for SEVERAL steps before you EXPERIENCE God's acceptance, unconditional love, security, etc.
2. Initially you WILL go back to your typical fleshly behaviors when your spouse does not meet your needs.
3. However, when you do, confess your fleshly behavior and ask God to further PERSUADE you that only He can meet your needs.
4. As you seek God to be your Source for meeting your needs, ask Him to give you an awareness that you are moving from being a TAKER to becoming a GIVER.

E. The Choice and The Results of Your Choice

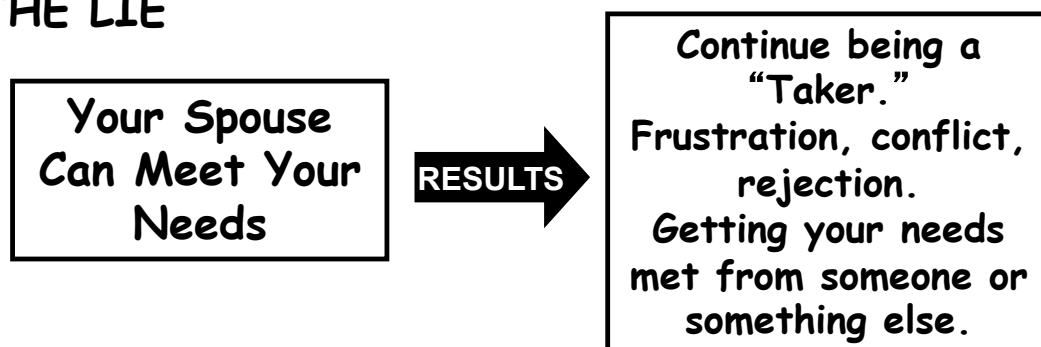
The Choice: You have a free-will choice of whether to live from the truth that only Christ can meet your needs or to continue living from the lie that you can get your needs met by your spouse if you try hard enough. "The Line" diagram below gives you the results of your choice:

THE TRUTH Versus THE LIE Concerning God-Given Needs



THE TRUTH

THE LIE



Question: Where have you been living? Is it above "the Line" from the truth or below "the Line" from the lie? If you believe that you have been living below "the Line," then begin seeking the Lord to persuade you of the truth that only He can truly meet your God-given needs.

Summary

I hope that this lesson was helpful in revealing several negative aspects of the flesh as well as showing you the truth that your God-given needs can only be met in Christ.

If your marriage is in trouble: Have you been trying, in vain, to get your needs met by your spouse? This is one of the major reasons your marriage may be in trouble. That being the case, it is crucial for you to realize that neither your spouse nor anyone else can meet your God-given needs. Your way out of this destructive marital pattern is to begin taking steps of faith to get your needs met by Christ.

Fleshly Behavior and Coping Mechanisms

Be self-absorbed (self-consumed)

become overly introspective
 feel sorry for myself (self-pity)
 get depressed
 beat up on myself
 play the role of victim/martyr
 focus on my suffering to get
 attention and sympathy
 be jealous of another's success
 and happiness

Withdraw (isolate myself)

be aloof (pull away)
 distance myself from others
 avoid others (be a loner)
 go into a shell
 become unapproachable
 give them the silent treatment
 refuse to communicate

Escape (pain/pressure) by using:

promiscuity carousing
 drugs and alcohol talking
 staying busy school
 hobbies/games reading
 computers fantasy
 television movies
 pornography sleep
 overeating religion
 work/career sex

Be anxious (worry and fret)

be fearful (apprehensive)
 lack peace and rest
 become paralyzed (numb)
 be paranoid (overly suspicious)
 refuse to see the positive
 (gloom and doom thinking)
 assume the worst

Seek guidance from:

astrology/horoscopes,
 fortune telling and/or
 the occult

Be self-disciplined (self-reliant)

base acceptance of self and
 others on performance
 become a perfectionist
 try hard so as not to fail
 fear making mistakes
 be legalistic:
 live "by the book"
 feel obligated (have to's,
 should's, ought to's)
 be too hard on myself/others
 set unrealistic standards for
 myself/others

Become obsessed with:

accomplishments
 recognition/status
 acquiring material things
 what others think of me
 how I look physically
 my physical health
 the past (especially past hurts
 and failures)
 a devotion to a cause
 structure, order and regulations

Become dominant

be dictatorial (bossy)
 be demanding (pushy)
 be overbearing (controlling)
 intimidate others
 refuse to give in

Stay in control through:

blackmail (making threats)
 manipulation (use of guilt, pity,
 silence, flattery, etc.)
 coercion (physical threats)
 profanity (swearing)
 passivity (playing helpless)
 not eating (anorexia/bulimia)

Lack compassion, gentleness

understanding, kindness, love
 become defensive

Be self-righteous (self-justifying)

make excuses (rationalize)
 cover up and hide mistakes
 have to prove my point
 assume I am never the problem
 blame someone or something
 else as the problem
 avoid taking responsibility for
 failure or problems
 have difficulty: apologizing,
 admitting I was wrong,
 asking for forgiveness,
 asking for help, and/or
 expressing gratitude
 have a superior attitude
 (saying in effect):
 "I know what is best"
 "My way is the right way"

Be critical (judgmental)

find fault with others, myself
 and everything around me
 nitpick things to death
 be prejudiced (intolerant)
 complain a lot (nothing is
 ever good enough)

Be self-assured (self-confident)

depend on myself instead of
 God or others
 become proud (haughty)
 be egocentric (act pompous)
 brag (be boastful)
 become arrogant (cocky)
 become conceited (smug)

Come across as insensitive,

uncaring, unsympathetic,
 indifferent or unconcerned

Be complacent (nonchalant)

say things like, "it's okay" or
 "it doesn't matter"

Fleshly Behavior and Fleshly Coping Mechanisms (Cont.)

Be pessimistic (negative)

lack confidence and optimism
be skeptical (suspicious)
distrust others, myself, God,
church and/or government
expect the worst
never be pleased with self
or others
never be satisfied or content

Become hostile

be unfriendly
be sarcastic (caustic)
be cynical (contemptuous)
be hateful (mean-spirited)
be cruel (malicious)
have a quick temper
rant and rave to vent my anger
be physically abusive
be verbally abusive
break things

Hold a grudge (be resentful)

become moody (sulk)
harbor bitterness
be unforgiving
keep a scorecard of offenses
try to get even (seek revenge)
want others to fail or get hurt
punish myself or others

Fight unfair (take cheap shots)

be slanderous
misrepresent the situation
gossip (talk behind their back)
engage in passive-aggressive
behavior: use humor to hide
real feelings, forget things,
refuse to communicate, be
late, procrastinate, etc.)

Be self-depreciating

assume I am always the problem
become overly apologetic
be too hard on myself
be uncomfortable with success
or happiness
have difficulty receiving: love,
compliments, forgiveness

be unable to forgive myself

Challenge others

resist authority
be uncooperative (inflexible)
be unteachable (close-minded)
cause dissension (strife)
be irritating (aggravate others)
be argumentative
be stubborn (unyielding)
be unreasonable

Deny reality

ignore problems and hope they
will go away
deny anything is bad or wrong
be subjective instead of objective
deceive others and myself
lie to self and others
exaggerate (overstate matters)
play games to hide real intent

Put up a front

hide what I really think and feel
pretend to be something I'm not
put on a show to impress others
and/or get attention
fake it (act like I know something
even when I don't)
be pretentious (phony, unreal)
be superficial (never let anyone
get to close)

Be passive (lack initiative)

quit too easily (give up)
don't take chances (play it safe)
wait for someone to tell me how
to think and what to do
vacillate (be too changeable)
be indecisive (let others make
decisions for me)
avoid failure at all costs
procrastinate (put things off)
be irresponsible (unreliable)
be lazy (apathetic, lethargic)

Be tense ("on guard")

find it hard to relax
be restless (feel like I have to be
doing something)

become impatient

be easily agitated

Become emotionally insulated

avoid intimacy
have difficulty expressing
feelings and opinions
suppress (stuff) emotions
be inhibited (restrained)

Live by my feelings

believe that truth is what I feel
be too sensitive to criticism
take things too personally
(be hypersensitive)
be touchy (irritable)
be controlled by fear, anger,
doubts and insecurities
automatically read in rejection
(think "it's about me")

Be a pleaser (be nice)

try to keep everyone happy
avoid conflict/keep the peace
say what I think others want
be overly compliant
submissive
have difficulty saying "no" and
setting boundaries
can't stand up for myself
afraid to disappoint others
give in to others too easily

Be a caretaker (rescuer)

be overprotective
be overly responsible
become too involved with
other's affairs/concerns
be possessive (too invested)
talk too much and listen poorly
make decisions for others
give unsolicited advice

Be too serious (intense)

be overly analytical
become stoical (unemotional)
not be able to have fun
be formal and businesslike
lack joy

Lesson Four

Engaging God To Deal With The Obstacles Of Unmet Expectations, Fleshly Rights, Unforgiveness, and Unrepentance

DAY ONE

Introduction

In Lesson Three we looked at the flesh as an obstacle in marriage. In this lesson we are going to look at the next three major obstacles to experiencing a Christ-centered marriage and how we can engage God to deal with these obstacles.

- **Obstacle #2 - Unmet expectations or desires**
- **Obstacle #3 – Fleshly Rights**
- **Obstacle #4 – Unforgiveness or Unrepentance**

Obstacle #2 - Unmet Expectations or Desires



We all came in to marriage with expectations about marriage. [**Note:** If the word “expectations” is a little strong for you, mentally insert the word “desires” as we go through this part of the lesson.] Our expectations/desires are like an iceberg. Some of them are very conscious expectations that are above the surface. But I believe that many more of our expectations are submerged or subconscious. Here is a key truth about expectations whether they are conscious or unconscious:

Our expectations are ROOTED in what we BELIEVE.

So, is what you believe THE TRUTH?



For example, if you believe your spouse should make you happy, then you will form an expectation around that belief. The problem comes when your expectations are not based on the truth. The truth in this case is your “true” happiness can only come from Christ. Therefore, if you expect your spouse to make you happy, but this doesn’t happen, it becomes an unmet expectation. In my experience, when an unmet expectation occurs, the husband or wife often resorts to acting from his/her flesh in response.

Picture each unmet expectation as represented by a brick. As unmet expectations increase unchecked in a marriage, it is like each spouse is laying down a new brick that eventually results in an impenetrable brick wall between them. By the time I sit down with a couple in conflict in a troubled marriage, this brick wall of unmet expectations is so high and thick that the couple cannot

really see each other. Accordingly, in this lesson we need to ask the Spirit to reveal or expose all the unmet expectations and to tear down any walls formed because of them.

1. In Marriage, You Have OVERT and COVERT Expectations.

We as spouses have “overt” and “covert” expectations of our spouses. By overt expectations, I mean those we are conscious of. For example, my overt expectation was that I would be in control of my marriage. I came into my marriage very conscious of that expectation.

But we also have covert expectations that, while not conscious, are just as real and harmful as the overt expectations. For example, one of my covert expectations was that Paige would be supportive of me when I felt I had made a Spirit-driven decision. This expectation was not on my conscious radar, but it was real, nonetheless, and maybe even more dangerous by being covert.

The reason I say this is because God wants to deal with our overt and covert expectations. One of the ways we discover our covert expectations is to engage Him to reveal to us what those expectations are.

2. Where Do Our Expectations Come FROM?

Our expectations/desires concerning marriage primarily come from four sources:

- 1. The way that our parents functioned as a married couple**
- 2. Our observations of other marriages**
- 3. How the world views marriage**
- 4. Legalistic or performance-oriented view of marriage we learned in church**

a. Our PARENTS

I believe most of our marital expectations are created by how our parents functioned as a married couple. If you were raised with loving parents, you may have an expectation that you, too, will have a loving relationship with your spouse. If you were raised in a home with a lot of parental conflict, you may have an expectation that your marriage will be in conflict, also.

I know a husband who said the reason he fights with his wife is because his parents fought with each other and with the kids. So fighting was “normal” for him. In contrast, sometimes we make conscious or subconscious “covenants” with ourselves to do the opposite of what we observed in our parents’ marriage. Here are some examples of these covenants:

“I will never act that way toward my spouse.”

“I will do whatever it takes to prevent a divorce.”

“If my spouse and I fight like my parents did, then I will just get a divorce.”

b. Our Observations of OTHER Marriages

Since we tend to compare ourselves with others, it is likely no different with married couples. We see couples who are happily married or at least appear that way on the surface. If we choose to compare our marriage with theirs, we can create an expectation that if we do what they seem to be doing, we too will have a happy marriage.

c. How The WORLD Views Marriage

Even though you are a Christian, that does not stop Satan, the god of this world, from attempting to persuade you to follow the ways of the world. Some of the views he wants you to take ownership of are:

“It’s all about me.”

“I want what I want when I want it.”

“I can do anything I set my mind to.”

“Marriage is not an everlasting covenant. Rather, it is a covenant that lasts until I am no longer happy.”

We know the world’s messages about marriage are toxic lies. We are barraged every day with those lies. All day long we are assaulted with the view of marriage and relationships perpetuated by Satan and the world (under Satan’s influence).

d. LEGALISTIC/PERFORMANCE View of Marriage

You may have attended a church or a marriage conference, or read Christian books on marriage, that gave you rules, checklists, or steps you should take in order to experience a Christ-centered marriage. If any of those books or conferences fostered the idea that YOU were the source to try to accomplish these steps and then you attempted to follow them, I have a question for you: Did adopting those steps or rules transform or improve your marriage long-term? As I mentioned earlier in the study, I have read many Christian books on marriage, but all of them set you up for eventual failure because of their focus on YOUR being the source to change yourself or your spouse.

I remember visiting a church where the pastor, in his sermon, gave his congregation thirteen steps to take to have a happy marriage. Paige and I tried all 13 steps but they didn't work. Why? Because we were told, and then attempted, to be the source to make the steps work.

After you examine these four influences (parents, other marriages, world’s view, legalistic) on your expectations for marriage, let me ask you a question:

***Do the expectations from the four areas
listed above LINE UP with God’s truth?***

This is the key question because if they don’t reflect God’s truth, then inevitably, your expectations will create conflict in your marriage. Accordingly, we are going to look first at unrealistic expectations and then at realistic expectations.

3. UNREALISTIC Expectations

One type of expectations is what I call “unrealistic” expectations/desires. This is how I define unrealistic expectations/desires:

UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

***any expectations that we have of ourselves, our spouse,
and/or our marriages that are SELF-CENTERED and DO NOT
line up with God's truth.***

Let's look at some unrealistic expectations/desires.

a. Examples of Unrealistic Expectations

My expectation is that:

- I will be in charge of disciplining the kids.
- I will be responsible for the household finances.
- I will be the final decision maker.
- I will do whatever it takes to keep the peace.

My expectation is that my spouse:

- Will make me fulfilled and happy.
- Will respect me regardless of what I do.
- Will love me unconditionally.
- Will accept me unconditionally.

b. We Add Expectations for Our Spouses to meet on Top of Our Expectations.

In addition to our own expectations, we add other expectations that our spouses are supposed to fulfill. Let me give you a few examples of what I mean:

For my spouse to make me happy, I need my spouse to: agree with my way about _____; let me leave and play sports when I want to; or, let me go shopping and buy anything I want to buy.

For me to feel accepted, my spouse needs to: affirm me in the following ways _____; give in whenever there is an argument and not reject me or otherwise retaliate against me.

For me to feel respected, my spouse needs to: defer to my judgment concerning finances or realize that my way is the best way to discipline the children.

Let's make this more personal. Take a few moments and complete the exercise below.

Exercise: Please complete the following sentences:

- I feel accepted when my spouse _____.
- I feel loved when my spouse _____.

- I feel respected when my spouse _____.
- I feel valued by my spouse when my spouse _____.

What is the result of unrealistic expectations:

***Unrealistic Expectations Create Hurdles For Our Spouses To Jump Over
In Order To Be LOVED, ACCEPTED, and VALUED.***

Question: How does it make you feel when your expectations that you listed are not met by your spouse?

4. OUTCOME of Unrealistic Expectations

***The usual outcomes of unmet unrealistic expectations are
FLESHLY behaviors and ONGOING conflict***



Let me share a real life example arising from a husband's unmet unrealistic expectation. A husband I ministered to had the expectation that he had to be in (total) control of the finances. He insisted on controlling every area of their finances including his wife's spending.

When his wife resisted and refused to meet his unrealistic expectations about their finances, he became domineering, critical, and eventually very resentful toward her. This area of their life became a source of ongoing conflict.

Exercise: Write down some of your unrealistic expectations. (If you are brave enough, ask your spouse to give you his/her input. Your spouse may have a clearer understanding than you do of what your unrealistic expectations are.)

Exercise: Write down the fleshly behaviors that you experience when you don't get your unrealistic expectations/desires met.

5. REALISTIC expectations

In addition to unrealistic expectations, there are also **realistic** expectations in marriage. How do I define realistic expectations/desires?

REALISTIC expectations are those that we have of our spouse that are CHRIST-CENTERED and LINE UP with God's truth.

a. Examples of Realistic Expectations

As a spouse, my expectation is:

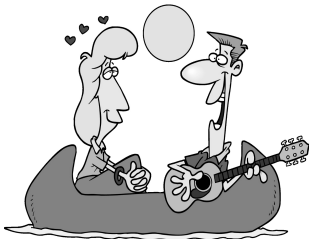
1. To unconditionally love my spouse in Christ.
2. For Christ to meet his/her needs through me.
3. To be an encouragement to my spouse.

I have a realistic expectation that my spouse and I:

1. Will seek Christ as our Source.
2. Will seek to be selfless and sacrificial.
3. Will go to church together.
4. Will seek greater harmony and oneness.

b. What Can Happen When Realistic Expectations Are NOT Met?

The wife of a couple I was ministering to shared with me the following very realistic expectations she had of her husband: that he would seek the Lord, be sacrificial, and fulfill her sexually. These are very legitimate expectations. The problem came when her husband did not meet those expectations.



When her expectations were unmet, she resorted to fleshly behaviors such as frustration, rejection, and withdrawal. So, even if you have realistic expectations, the flesh can manifest itself when those expectations are not met.

Since all the expectations in the example above are selfless or Christ-centered, they should be met. It would be great if the husband were willing to satisfy her expectations, but it does not always happen that way.

Even when expectations are realistic, the key to avoiding marital conflict is whether the disappointed spouse will respond in the flesh or in the Spirit. We will look at some examples of that later in this section. Let me interject one thought here:

It is OKAY to have realistic expectations. However, just because it is realistic does NOT mean that you can REACT in your flesh if they are unmet.

Exercise: Write down some of your realistic expectations you have about your spouse:

Write down how it makes you feel about your spouse when you don't get those realistic expectations met.

***Even unmet REALISTIC expectations can result in
FLESHLY BEHAVIORS and conflict in your marriage.***

6. The LIE Concerning Unmet Needs

Now that we understand the difference between realistic and unrealistic expectations, let's look at the lie or the false belief about our expectations.

THE LIE

***It is up to your spouse to meet your UNREALISTIC as well as
REALISTIC expectations/ desires.***

By the very definition of expectation, we expect our spouses to meet our expectations whether they are realistic or unrealistic. Therefore, let's look at God's truth concerning our unrealistic and realistic expectations.

7. The TRUTH Concerning UNREALISTIC Expectations

a. TRUTH #1

When it comes to unmet unrealistic expectations, there are two key truths to remember.

TRUTH #1

It is crucial to LEARN God's truth concerning your unrealistic expectations.

Romans 8:32 states:

*"You will know the truth and the **truth will set you free.**"*

Let's look at some examples of what freedom would look like concerning unrealistic expectations.

- 1. The truth will expose whether an expectation is unrealistic.**
- 2. God will use His truth to renew your mind to His truth concerning your unrealistic expectations.**
- 3. God's truth removes all of your reasons or excuses for trying to get your unrealistic expectations met.**

Let's examine God's truth concerning some examples of unrealistic expectations:

Example #1 - My expectation (as my own source) is:

- I will be in charge of disciplining the kids.
- I will be responsible for the household's finances.
- I will be the final decision maker.
- I will determine where we go to church.

The Truth: The two key words in each of these phrases is "I will." It is not about your will. Instead, you should be seeking to do God's will rather than your will.

*"He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, **not as I will, but as You will.**" Matthew 26:39*

Step of faith: "Lord, reveal to me where I am wanting my will instead of wanting your will. Move me to a place where I am willing to do Your will."

Meditate: on Matthew 26:39 above.

Engage God: Ask God to renew your mind to His truth that it is His will and not yours that is the priority.

Example #2 - My expectation (as my own source) is that my spouse:

- Will make me fulfilled and happy.
- Will respect me regardless of what I do.
- Will love me unconditionally.
- Will accept me unconditionally.

The Truth: Only Christ can supply and produce true fulfillment, happiness, respect, unconditional love, and acceptance. Remember that our God-given needs can only be met in Christ. Therefore, it is unrealistic to expect our spouses to meet those needs.

"And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus."
Philippians 4:19

"He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus."
Philippians 1:6

Step of Faith: "Lord, I am asking You to renew my mind to the truth that only You can fulfill me and produce Your joy in me."

Meditate: on Philippians 4:19 and Philippians 1:6.

Engage God: Ask God to renew your mind to His truth concerning your unmet unrealistic expectations.

b. TRUTH #2

TRUTH #2

Engage God to reveal the DEATH your flesh causes because of your unmet unrealistic expectations, and to persuade you to DIE TO, or TURN AWAY FROM, seeking to have your unrealistic expectations met.



If you are not living from Christ as your Source, you will turn to your flesh as your default position whenever your unrealistic needs are not met. In order to die to or move away from our fleshly behaviors caused by unmet unrealistic expectations, we must engage the Holy Spirit and His power to move our will to “put to death the deeds of the body” as it says in Romans 8:13:

*“for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if **by the Spirit (power) you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.**”*
Romans 8:13 (Parenthesis mine)

This is a wonderful verse that reveals our need to appropriate the Spirit’s power to put to death (i.e. die to or turn away from) our fleshly responses.

Step of faith: “Lord, I am asking You in Your divine power to move me away from going to the flesh (or to die to it) when my unrealistic expectations are not being met.”

Meditate: on Romans 8:13, above.

Engage God: Ask God to expose your unmet unrealistic expectations and then to apply Romans 8:13 to put them to death by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Later in this section we will look at examples of steps of faith to take to turn away from or die to your expectations.

DAY TWO

8. The TRUTH Concerning Unmet REALISTIC Expectations

a. TRUTH #1:

The key truth when your realistic expectations are not being met is this:

TRUTH #1

Seek the Holy Spirit to transform you so that you will respond to your unmet realistic expectations with CHRIST-LIKE attitudes.



We see this truth in Philippians 2:5

“Have this attitude in yourselves which was in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 2:5

Below are some examples of Christ-like attitudes that you can respond with towards your spouse when your realistic expectations are not met:

Unconditional love
Humility
Understanding
Giving grace

Acceptance
Gentleness
Compassion
Patience

Let's apply some of these to the realistic expectations that we previously discussed.

I have a realistic expectation/desire that my spouse and I:

1. Will seek Christ as our Source.

If your spouse does not choose to seek God as his/her Source, you can respond with an attitude of grace instead of frustration.

Step of faith: “I am asking You, Lord, to give me an attitude of grace toward my spouse because he/she is not seeking You as the Source.”

2. Will seek to be selfless and sacrificial.

If your spouse chooses to be selfish, then you can respond with an attitude of patience instead of being critical in reaction to his/her selfishness.

Let's assume that your spouse comes home tired, and you want to have sexual intimacy but he/she is too tired. You can be willing to give grace and not be selfish or demanding.

Step of faith: "Lord, my spouse is not willing to meet my sexual needs tonight. Would You give me the willingness to give grace instead of being selfish and demanding?"

3. Will pray together.

Instead of reacting in frustration or anger because your spouse does not want to pray with you, choose to express a Christ-like attitude of giving grace by not forcing your spouse to pray or making him or her feel guilty for not praying. Another Christ-like attitude you may express is acceptance. Accept the fact that your spouse is not at a place where he/she desires to pray.

Step of faith: "My desire is that my spouse and I pray together. However, he/she is unwilling. I am asking You give me an attitude of acceptance instead of my rejecting him/her.

b. TRUTH #2

TRUTH #2

***You can INTERCEDE for your spouse in prayer by asking the Spirit
to transform him/her to meet your realistic expectations.***

If your spouse is unwilling to meet your realistic expectations, ask the Lord to give them a willing heart. Let's look at some examples:

1. If your spouse is not willing to seek Christ as their Source

Step of faith: "I am asking You, Lord, to give my spouse a willingness to seek You as his/her Source."

2. If your spouse is not willing to be selfless and sacrificial

Step of faith: "Lord, I am asking You to transform my spouse to be more selfless and sacrificial."

3. If your spouse is not willing to fulfill you sexually

Step of faith: "Lord, I am asking You to move my spouse's heart so that we can experience a fulfilling sexual relationship."

4. If your spouse is not willing to pray with you.

Step of faith: "Lord, I am asking You to give my spouse the desire to pray with me."

c. TRUTH #3

TRUTH #3

***You can ask God to transform you to allow Him to meet
your spouse's realistic expectations through you.***

*“And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, **are being transformed into his likeness** with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”
2 Corinthians 3:18*

As a Christ-centered spouse, your desire is for Christ to meet your spouse’s realistic expectations through you. Here are some examples of those desires:

As a spouse, my desire is to trust Christ to:

1. Unconditionally love my spouse through me.
2. Meet his/her God-given needs through me.
3. Be an encouragement to my spouse through me.

Let’s assume that you are not consistent in allowing Christ to do the things listed above. A fleshly response would be to get frustrated or condemn yourself or to be critical of yourself. However, the truth is that you don’t have to condemn yourself because you have yet to be fully transformed in any of these areas. In addition, you can entrust your frustration to the Lord and ask Him to be your patience as He persuades you to allow Him to meet your spouse’s realistic expectations through you.

Step of faith: “Lord, I have been condemning myself because I have not been consistent in allowing You to meet my spouse’s realistic expectations through me. I am asking You to renew my mind to the truth that this is a process and I don’t have to condemn myself when I am inconsistent.”

Engaging God: Begin asking God to give you the willingness to allow Him to meet your spouse’s realistic expectations through you.

9. The Choice and The Results of Your Choice

The Choice: Ask God to move you to a place where you are willing to die to your expectations and to be able to respond to your spouse with Christ-like attitudes instead of fleshly behaviors when your realistic and unrealistic expectations are not met. Or, you can continue to believe the lie that you have the right to get your expectations met and that you have the right to give in to the flesh if your expectations are not met.

THE TRUTH Versus THE LIE About Unmet Expectations

Depending on
God to transform
you.

RESULTS

Die to your
expectations.
Experience and
respond with Christ-
like attitudes.

THE TRUTH

THE LIE

You must get your
unrealistic and
realistic
expectations/desires
met.

RESULTS

Fleshly behaviors
Ongoing Conflict
More death

10. Key Points To Remember About Seeking God To Deal With Your Expectations

- Early on in your walk of faith you will GIVE IN TO your fleshly behaviors because of unmet expectations (realistic or unrealistic).
- When you do, CONFESS those behaviors and ask God to give you a WILLINGNESS to die or turn away from your expectations.
- As you learn to walk in GREATER dependence upon God as your Source and your “need-meeter,” you will find yourself reacting less and less when your expectations are not met.
- It can be DIFFICULT to give grace concerning your REALISTIC expectations. Therefore, ask Christ to BE your patience and perseverance in the process.

Engaging God: Ask God to expose the fleshly behaviors that result from your realistic and unrealistic expectations not being met. Continue seeking Him to move you to a place where you do not respond in the flesh when your expectations are not met.

11. Examples of Steps Of Faith In Dealing With Unmet Expectations

The Truth: You do not have to react in the flesh when your realistic or unrealistic expectations are not met.

Example #1: You have an unrealistic expectation that your spouse can make you happy. You may also have specific expectations of what he or she should do to make you happy. When this happens, here are some examples of steps of faith.

Step of faith: “Lord, my spouse is not meeting my expectations. I confess my fleshly attitude of frustration and repent of it. I am asking You to move me to a place where I am willing to die to my unrealistic expectations.”

Step of faith: “Lord, persuade me of the truth that You are the real source of my happiness. Renew my mind to that truth and move me away from believing the lie that my spouse should make me happy.”

Example #2: You have a realistic expectation that your spouse will satisfy you sexually. When he/she does not meet your expectation, you choose to withhold sex.

Step of faith: “Lord, I confess my fleshly behavior of withholding sex from my spouse. I am trusting You to transform my fleshly behavior into Godly behavior so that I will love my spouse unconditionally.”

Example #3: Let’s assume that your flesh is unwilling to die to a particular expectation.

Step of faith: “Lord, I confess to You that I am unwilling to die to the expectation of _____. I am asking You to move my will so that I will be willing.”

Exercise: Write down some step(s) of faith that you might take concerning your realistic and unrealistic expectations/desires

Engaging God: Begin taking the steps of faith listed above.

If you have a troubled marriage: You most likely have unrealistic expectations that are not being met which causes you to go to your flesh. In order to move away from the death that your unrealistic expectations are causing in your marriage, you need to ask God to give you a willingness to die to those expectations and the associated fleshly behaviors.

Obstacle #3 - Your Fleshly “Rights”

In addition to fleshly behaviors that result from unmet expectations, another result is what I call fleshly “rights.” Let me define fleshly “rights.”

FLESHLY “RIGHTS”

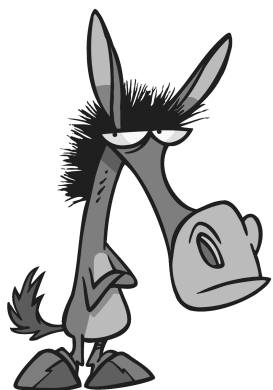
In marriage, fleshly “rights” are SELF-CENTERED, sinful DEMANDS toward your spouse that are produced by your FLESH.

1. The LIE Concerning Fleshly “Rights”

THE LIE

You have the RIGHT to have FLESHLY “RIGHTS” toward your spouse.

The following are some examples of fleshly “rights”:



- | | |
|-----------|---|
| 1. | I have the “right” to be respected. |
| 2. | I have the “right” to be unconditionally |
| loved. | |
| 3. | I have the “right” to be in control. |
| 4. | I have the “right” to reject my spouse. |
| 5. | I have the “right” to have it my way. |
| 6. | I have the “right” to be unconditionally |
| accepted. | |
| 7. | I have the “right” to fix or to change |
| you. | |
| 8. | I have the “right” to be happy. |
| 9. | I have the “right” to withhold sexual intimacy. |

Go back to your wedding day for a minute. Can you imagine if, during your wedding vows, your spouse turned to you and says, “I am going to read you these “rights” (listed above) that I am going to exercise in our marriage. After hearing your future spouse’s “rights,” I wonder how many of you would have then said, “I do?” Even though we didn’t verbalize our “rights” during the wedding, we all brought them, knowingly or unknowingly, into the marriage relationship.

If your marriage is not in overt conflict right now, you may be sitting here thinking you don’t really have any of these “rights.” But, when you go to the flesh, inevitably your fleshly “rights” will “kick in,” and rise to the surface. The ultimate fleshly “right” we think we have is: “I have the ‘right’ to be right.” Since living in the flesh is all about you, it is crucial that the flesh be “right.” In other words, the flesh won’t be satisfied until it gets its “rights” met.

Your flesh is like a stubborn mule. It not only wants its way, but also believes it has a “right” to its way. The problem is that if you are not in overt conflict in the moment, it may be hard for you to identify your fleshly “rights” because they can be very subtle. However, the next time you experience conflict with your spouse, it won’t take long for those “rights” to surface.

Exercise: Being as honest as you can with yourself, write down any of the “rights” from the list above (or any others that come to mind) that are applicable to you. If you are having trouble identifying your fleshly “rights,” ask the Holy Spirit to reveal them to you.

Let me give you a personal example:

I was going to guest preach at a church in another town. It was the first opportunity I had to preach at this church and I was looking forward to it because the pastor was a good friend. I was also looking forward to taking Paige with me.

But the day we were supposed to leave, Paige was not feeling well. Instead of letting her stay home, which she needed to do, I insisted she go with me. My fleshly reasoning was I needed to have Paige be in attendance supporting me. That need turned into a fleshly “right” that demanded Paige go with me. Even though I did not order her to go, I used guilt to manipulate her to attend.

She ended up (under duress) going with me. Even though I had my fleshly “right” met, it was a very long and quiet two hour drive. I realized during those two hours the misery my getting my own way cost both of us.

It is CRUCIAL to understand that as long as you and/or your spouse CHOOSE to walk in the FLESH, you will DEMAND that your fleshly “rights” be met.

2. We Have Fleshly “Rights” Attached To UNMET God-Given Needs.

Some of our fleshly “rights” stem from our unmet God-given needs of unconditional love, acceptance, value or worth, security, and respect. For example, if I am trying to get my need for respect met from Paige, but she is not meeting it, then my flesh rears its ugly head and says, “I have the ‘right’ to be respected. Why are you not respecting me?”

Or if I am not meeting Paige’s need for unconditional love, then her flesh can say, “I have the ‘right’ to be unconditionally loved.”

Engaging God: If you are trying but failing to get your God-given needs met from your spouse, ask the Spirit to expose some of your fleshly “rights.” When He shows you your “rights,” repent (turn away from) trying to get those needs met from your spouse and turn to God who designed you to get those needs met only by Him.

3. We Can Attach Fleshly “Rights” To Any AREA Of Our Marriages.

Some of these areas include:

1. Raising children
2. Finances
3. Sexual intimacy
4. Communication
5. Spiritual issues

You can demand your fleshly “rights” during disagreements about raising your children or managing your finances. You may have attached fleshly “rights” to sexual intimacy when your spouse is unwilling to meet your needs the way you want.

Or, maybe you claim your “rights” when it comes to the way you as a couple do or don’t communicate with one another. In our marriage, when it came to communication, I tried to exercise my fleshly “right” to be heard and respected as head of the family.”

We can even have fleshly “rights” concerning spiritual issues. An example of that kind of right may be your “rights” to determine where you and your spouse go to church and how and when you pray as a couple.

Exercise: In which areas are you experiencing disagreement? How important is it for you to “win” when there is a disagreement between you and your spouse?

Engaging God: Concerning those areas of disagreement you identified above, ask the Spirit to expose some of the fleshly “rights” you think you have that are tied to these areas. Seek God to show you the role your pride plays in your resolve to maintain your “rights” or “win” an argument. Could it also be pride that keeps you from turning to God to have your needs met?

4. What Happens When Your Spouse Does NOT Give In To Your Fleshly “Rights?”

***When your spouse does not give in to your fleshly “rights,” the result is
MORE FLESH!***

Here are some examples of fleshly retribution when your spouse fails to give in to your fleshly rights. For instance, if you believe you have the “right” to always be right, then when your spouse balks at your plans or ideas, you feel justified in getting angry, rejecting your spouse, or withdrawing either physically or emotionally. Or, say your spouse doesn’t meet your fleshly “rights” attached to sexual intimacy. You think you have the right to punish your spouse by withholding sexual intimacy entirely or by not participating emotionally and then withdrawing afterwards.

Getting our fleshly “rights” met can be done overtly through such fleshly behaviors as displaying anger, making your spouse feel guilty, or condemning your spouse. But equally effective you can also use covert tactics like subtle manipulation, passive-aggressive responses, body language, indicating withdrawal, or deceit to get those “rights” met as well.

Exercise: Examine the areas in your marriage where you are in conflict or disagreement. See if you can identify where yours and/or your spouse’s overt fleshly behaviors are involved (**Refer to pages 95 and 96.**).

Engaging God: Ask the Spirit to expose some of the covert or more subtle fleshly behaviors that result from your and/or your spouse’s wanting to exercise his/her “rights” in the marriage. Seek God to make you willing to give up your “rights” to try to make your spouse meet your needs and, instead, to look to Him to meet them.

DAY THREE

5. The TRUTH Concerning Fleshly “Rights” In Marriage

a. TRUTH #1

What is the truth about your fleshly “rights?” The first truth I want to share is this:

TRUTH #1

How many fleshly “rights” do you have in marriage (or anywhere else)?

The answer is: NONE. You have NO fleshly rights or the RIGHT to have fleshly rights.

This is the first key truth we must understand. You have no fleshly rights. Why? The answer is found in Galatians 5:24:

*“Now those who belong to Christ Jesus **have crucified the flesh** with its passions and desires.”*

Paul is telling us since our flesh is already crucified, we are “dead” to our flesh. If you are dead to your flesh, how many fleshly “rights” do you have? Once you have been crucified to your flesh, then you have NO fleshly rights.

Engaging God: Seek the Lord to persuade you that you do not have the right to have any fleshly rights.

b. TRUTH #2

TRUTH #2

INSISTING on your fleshly rights will NEVER produce harmony and oneness in your marriage. It will only bring DEATH to your marriage.



*“For the **mind set on the flesh** is **death** but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace.” Romans 8:6*

Remember how I defined “death” in Lesson Three as “misery of the soul.” Examples of misery of the soul are: rejection, condemnation, anger, etc. Insisting on your fleshly rights in your marriage is like welcoming a slow growing cancer into your body. Your determination to exercise your fleshly rights may not be detected early on but ignore the destruction your rights cause long enough and they will eventually bring death to your marriage.

This does not mean your flesh itself is dead. Your flesh is, and always will be, very much alive. What it does mean is that when you are walking dependently on God, you are walking in the death TO your fleshly rights.

Engaging God: Seek God to reveal to you how your exercising fleshly rights is creating “death” in your marriage. Ask Him to open your eyes to the misery of the soul that you are causing yourself and your spouse by living independently of God by clinging to your “fleshly rights.”

Engaging God: Seek God to reveal to you how your fleshly rights are creating “death” in your marriage.

c. TRUTH #3

TRUTH #3

God will reveal to you the DEATH OF your fleshly “rights” by His truth and will transform your will to be willing to DIE TO them.

*“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and **DIES**, it remains by itself alone; but if it **DIES**, it bears MUCH fruit.” John 12:24*

The “grain of wheat” that must die is your flesh and fleshly “rights.” Just as we previously discussed about the flesh, God wants to reveal or expose the death your fleshly “rights” are causing your marriage and persuade you to “die” TO them. Once you die to, or turn away from, your fleshly “rights,” you will experience the “much fruit” of Christ-life characteristics and Christ-like attitudes.

Engaging God: Ask the Spirit to give you the willingness to die to (or turn away from) your fleshly “rights.”

d. TRUTH #4

TRUTH #4

ONLY through engaging the POWER of the Spirit will you ever TRULY be SET FREE from exercising your fleshly “rights.”

*“Now unto Him who is able to do exceedingly, abundantly beyond all we can ask or think according to the **POWER** that works within us.” Ephesians 3:20*

Remember the power of your flesh is stronger than your fleshly willpower to stop going to your flesh. Acting independently of God (“your flesh”) cannot be overcome by your willpower (also flesh). Flesh can never transform or overcome flesh regardless of your resolve (also flesh). Consequently, you must engage God’s power to experience any freedom from your fleshly “rights.” As you take steps of faith to engage God, He, in His power, will transform you so you will be willing to die to your fleshly “rights.”

Our only hope of being set free from our fleshly “rights” is through seeking and drawing on the power of the Holy Spirit because:

- Only the Spirit can and will PERSUADE you that you have no fleshly “rights.”
- When you are tempted to have your fleshly “rights” met, engage the Spirit’s power to RESTRAIN your flesh.
- Through the Spirit’s power you will be TRANSFORMED so that you die to or move away from your fleshly “rights.”
- As you die or move away from wanting your fleshly “rights,” the Spirit will REPLACE your fleshly “rights” with Christ-like attitudes (peace, rest, love, etc.).

Engaging God: Ask the Spirit to reveal to you one particular fleshly “right” you believe you have in your marital relationship. Then draw on the Spirit’s power to set you free from that fleshly “right.”

e. **TRUTH #5**

TRUTH #5

Ask the Spirit to REPLACE your fleshly “rights” with Christ-like attitudes.

*“Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant.”
1 Corinthians 13:4*

Let’s look at “the Line” analogy below to illustrate this truth. Below “the Line” I have fleshly “rights.” However, if I choose to walk by faith, the Spirit will replace my fleshly “rights” with Christ-like attitudes.

Unconditional Love
Secure
Forgiving
Compassionate
Adequate
Sacrificial
Free
Joyful

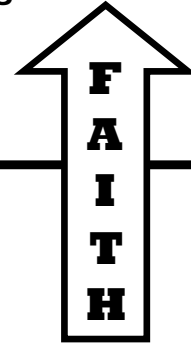
Righteous
Acceptable
Fearless
Discerning
Thankful
Sufficient
Victorious
Peaceful

Humble
Patient
Complete
Wise
Confident
Selfless
Strong
Good

THE SPIRIT = Christ-Like Attitudes

THE FLESH = Fleshly Rights

I have the right to be respected.
I have the right to be unconditionally loved.
I have the right to be in control.
I have the right to reject.
I have the right to be right



e. **TRUTH #6**

TRUTH #6

IN Christ, you DO have SPIRITUAL rights.

*“you have **the right** to become children of God.” John 1:12*

Have you ever thought about the fact that you have certain spiritual rights in Christ? Here are some examples:

You have the spiritual right:

1. To love your spouse unconditionally. Ephesians 5:25
2. To accept your spouse unconditionally. Romans 15:7
3. To die to or surrender to your fleshly rights. 2 Corinthians 4:11
4. To be selfless/sacrificial. Philippians 2:4, Ephesians 5:25
5. To give grace. Ephesians 3:2

As you engage God to move you away from living from your fleshly “rights,” He will move you to live from your spiritual rights.

Engaging God: Ask the Lord to replace your fleshly “rights” with your spiritual rights.

6. ENGAGING God To Deal With Your Fleshly “Rights”

Let’s look at some practical steps of faith concerning your fleshly “rights.”

The Truth: Only God can move you to a place where you turn away from or die to your fleshly “rights.”

Example #1: You believe that you have the fleshly “right” to fix or change your spouse. What does it look like to die to this fleshly “right?”

Step of faith: “Lord, You have exposed my fleshly “right” to try to change my spouse. The truth is that only You can change my spouse. Renew my mind to the truth that I have no fleshly” rights.”

Step of faith: “Lord, I am unwilling to die to my fleshly “right” to fix my spouse. I am trusting You to transform me so that I am willing to die to that “right.”

Example #2: You have the fleshly “right” to be right.

Step of faith: “Lord, the truth is that I do not have the fleshly ‘right’ to be right. I confess my pride associated with this ‘right,’ and I am asking You in Your power to remove my unwillingness to die to this ‘right.’”

Example #3: When your fleshly “right” is not met, you get frustrated.

Step of Faith: “Lord, I confess my frustration to You. Continue to persuade me that I don’t have any fleshly ‘rights.’”

Exercise: Write down some personal steps of faith that you can take in dealing with your fleshly “rights.”

Engaging God: Begin taking the steps of faith listed above.

DAY FOUR

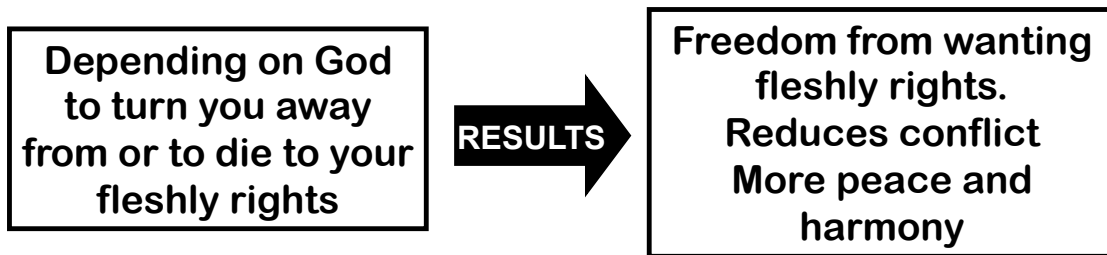
7. Key Points To Remember About Seeking God To Deal With Your Fleshly” Rights”

- Seek God’s POWER to deal with your fleshly “rights.” If you don’t engage God’s power to deal with the dominion your fleshly “rights” have over you, then you will never be willing to give up those rights.
- You may have to be more INTENTIONAL and persistent early on in your walk of faith in engaging God to make you willing to die to your fleshly “rights” because some of your fleshly “rights” are more entrenched than others. The more established and habitual these “rights” are, the greater is their resistance to change.
- Remember dying to your fleshly “rights” is a PROCESS. We know the Spirit can cause us immediately to die to a fleshly “right,” but for the most part it will take time.
- When fleshly behaviors result from your not getting your fleshly “rights” met, CONFESS and REPENT, i.e., turn away from your fleshly behavior, and then turn to God asking Him to renew your mind to the truth that you have no fleshly “rights.”

8. The Choice and The Results of Your Choice

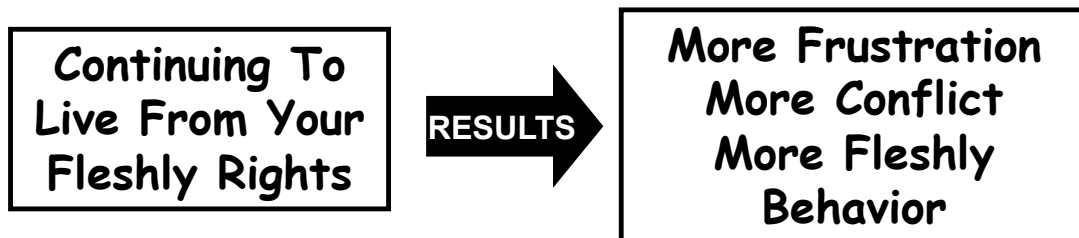
The Choice: Whether to continue insisting on your fleshly “rights” or to seek the power of the Spirit to turn you away from, or die to, or be set free from your fleshly rights is the choice. Look at the results of your choice below:

THE TRUTH Versus THE LIE About Fleshly Rights



THE TRUTH

THE LIE



Question: Concerning the diagram above, do you want to live above or below “the Line?”

Meditate: on Galatians 5:24.

Engaging God: Ask the Spirit to give you the desire/willingness to live above “the Line.”

If you have a troubled marriage: If you are in a troubled marriage, then inevitably one or both spouses are attempting to exercise their fleshly “rights.” Consequently, if you do not seek the Lord to expose the death of your fleshly “rights” and to move you to die to your fleshly “rights,” then you will continue to live in misery and move toward emotional separation and divorce.

Roadblock #4 - UNFORGIVENESS and UNREPENTANCE

Two major roadblocks I see in many married couples in their achieving a Christ-oriented marriage are the attitudes of unforgiveness and unrepentance. Let’s explore these two attitudes further:

UNFORGIVENESS

Usually this process starts with an unmet expectation of one or both spouses. When that expectation is blocked or not met, an offense occurs and the offended spouse believes a debt has been incurred. In other words, your attitude toward the person who offended you is, “You now owe me something.” This is the beginning of unforgiveness. Mix this attitude with your fleshly “right” not to forgive, and an attitude of unforgiveness sets in.

1. The LIE About Unforgiveness

THE LIE

***When your spouse offends you, rejects you, or is sinful to you in some way,
you believe you have the RIGHT NOT to forgive.***

2. REASONS Why We Do Not Forgive

The following are some of the reasons why we don’t forgive:

- Pride - forgiving someone makes me look weak.
- If I were to forgive, I might lose control.
- Revenge - the person has to pay for it, be punished and/or learn a lesson.
- Forgiveness seems unfair because the offender doesn’t deserve it and I’m condoning their sin.
- I don't "feel" like forgiving. “My anger is justified and I want retribution or, at least, a sincere apology and a vow to change from my spouse.”

Questions: Are you holding any offenses against your spouse? If so, do any of the reasons given above apply to you?

3. What Are Some of the RESULTS of Unforgiveness?

If we choose not to forgive, what will be some of the results:

1. It cuts off the flow of Christ's life in you.
2. Inner turmoil or struggle
3. You continue to take an inventory of offenses against your spouse.
4. Emotionally it can cause stress, anxiety, and even depression.
5. It allows Satan to gain a foothold and eventually a stronghold in your life.
6. It eventually poisons all your relationships as your unresolved anger creates a critical and cynical spirit within you.
7. It leads to bitterness.

Question: Are you experiencing any of the above due to your unforgiveness?

4. Ultimately, Unforgiveness IMPRISONS Us.



When you have an attitude of unforgiveness toward someone, you have placed yourself in your own prison. Through unforgiveness, you are now being controlled by the person you have not forgiven.

Unforgiveness obscures the presence of Christ's life in you and keeps you in bondage. Keep this in mind whenever you are tempted not to forgive. Just imagine the person you have not forgiven shackled to your leg. You are dragging this person around with you everywhere you go.

Question: Have you realized before now that the only person imprisoned by unforgiveness is the one who is not forgiving?

Engaging God: Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you if you have any unforgiveness in your heart or if you are holding on to any offenses against your spouse.

UNFORGIVENESS creates a PRISON for the spouse who has not forgiven.

5. Unforgiveness Builds A "WALL" Between A Husband and Wife

Similar to unmet expectations, unforgiveness builds a wall between a husband and wife. Imagine each offense being a brick. When an offense occurs between a couple, and is not dealt with, then brick by brick a wall is being built between them. It may take years to build the wall, but eventually this wall creates an emotional separation between a husband and wife that can eventually lead to a physical separation or divorce.

UNFORGIVENESS builds WALLS between a husband and wife.

Engaging God: Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you if you and your spouse have been building a wall between you due to past offenses.

A. The TRUTH About Forgiveness

Go back to page 78 and see on the Christ-like characteristic list that forgiveness is one of those characteristics. If you contain all of Christ, then how much of Christ's forgiveness is available to you? Answer: **ALL** of it.

Truth# 1 - In The MIDST Of Your Sin God Forgave You.

"And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions" Colossians 2:13

God did not wait for us to confess and repent of our sins before we were forgiven. How does this apply to your marriage?

***You do NOT have to wait for your spouse to
repent BEFORE you forgive him or her.***

Truth #2 - Since God Forgave You, He NO Longer Holds Any Sin Against You.

"But God, being rich in mercy because of His great love with which he loved us made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved) and raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." Ephesians 2:4-5



Unforgiveness is created when one spouse offends the other spouse, and the offended spouse takes ownership of the offense. The analogy that I use is a card box. Imagine that every time when you take ownership of an offense that you write it down and put it into a card box.

If you do not deal with these offenses right away, then over time you will have a card box full of them. The question is, "How many cards should have in your box?" If you answered "NONE," then you are right. If we take ownership of an offense, we should forgive immediately. We don't have to add any more cards to our "offense" box. God wants us **not** to take ownership of the offense. If we do, He wants us to forgive immediately.

Ensure that you NEVER have any offenses in your OFFENSE box.

Forgive IMMEDIATELY when offended.

Truth #3 - You Have NO Excuse For Holding An Offense Against Your Spouse.

"He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west." Psalm 103:12

*"I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and **remembers your sins no more.**" Isaiah 43:25*

When we read the passages above, we can see that God has not only removed our sins, but He also no longer remembers them. In other words, He no longer holds the offense against us. If He no longer holds the offense against us, doesn't it stand to reason that we are to get rid of all offenses against our spouse? Paul answers this question in Ephesians 4:31-32:

*“Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander,
along with every form of malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted,
forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”*

DAY FIVE

Truth #4 - When God Forgives, Forgiveness Is COMPLETE.



“It is finished.” John 19:30

When Jesus said on the cross “It is finished,” He was saying, “I have paid everything in full.” Therefore, when you forgive you must **TOTALLY** forgive your spouse.

B. What Are The RESULTS of Forgiveness?

1. First and foremost it RESTORES Christ’s life flowing through you and your spouse.

*“I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, **he bears much fruit**; for apart from Me you can do nothing.” John 15:5*

We said earlier that unforgiveness cuts off the flow of Christ’s life in you. Conversely forgiveness allows the flow of Christ’s life, love, acceptance, etc. to continue.

2. Forgiveness is the first step in HEALING your relationship with your spouse.

*“If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, **24** leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way; **first be reconciled to your brother**, and then come and present your offering.” Matthew 5:23, 24*

Your part is to forgive and be willing to restore the relationship. Your forgiveness of your spouse is never contingent on whether he/she receives it or not. If you are walking in Christ’s humility and forgive the offense, God honors that step on your part in restoring the relationship.

3. Forgiveness allows you the FREEDOM to unconditionally love and accept your spouse.



*“It was for **freedom** that Christ set us **free**; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.” Galatians 5:1*

Forgiveness will tear down the walls of your prison and set you free. You can now walk in the freedom that you have in Christ. In addition, you are now free to love and accept your spouse unconditionally.

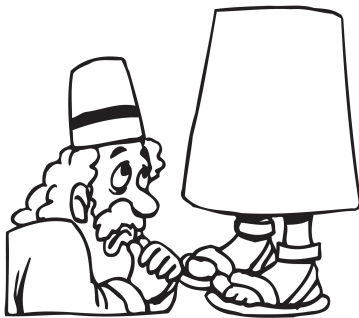
Engaging God: Seek God to give you the willingness to forgive your spouse.

C. Eventually, God Will Transform You To Experience An ATTITUDE or A HEART of Forgiveness.

God not only wants us to commit acts of forgiveness. He eventually wants to transform us so

that we will have an attitude or a heart of forgiveness.

*“So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a **HEART** of **forgiving each other**, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.” Colossians 3:12b, 13a (Emphasis mine)*



The word “heart” means attitude. In this verse, Paul is telling us to have an attitude of forgiveness. There are acts of forgiveness that we practice in the moment forgiveness needs to be given. However, God’s ultimate objective is to transform you so that you will have an attitude of forgiveness. Then you will always be willing to forgive without hesitation. We see this as well in Matthew 18:21, 22 when Jesus says:

“Then Peter came and said to Him, ‘Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?’ 22 Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.’”

What is Jesus telling us in this verse? Is He declaring we are to forgive only up to 490 times? I don’t believe so. The Lord is pointing out that we are to live from a Christ-like attitude of forgiveness. From an attitude of forgiveness, your first response will be to forgive.

In closing, think about this statement:

***What if you never took ownership of the offense in the first place.
Would you have to forgive?***

Meditate: on the truth above that you don't have to take ownership of the offense. If you don't then there is nothing to forgive.

Engaging God: Ask God to not only give you a willingness to forgive but also to move you to a place where you don't take ownership of someone else’s offense.

D. Key Truths To Remember About Forgiveness

- Ask the Spirit to REVEAL to you any offenses you are holding against your spouse.
- Seek the Spirit to PERSUADE you to forgive your spouse of those offenses.
- If you are UNWILLING to forgive, ask God to give you the necessary willingness to forgive.
- Being willing to forgive may take LONGER in some areas of your marriage because of the DEPTH of your unforgiveness and the number of offenses you have accumulated.
- Continue walking by faith until God PERSUADES you to be the FIRST one to forgive.
- Ask the Lord to move you to a place where you don't take OWNERSHIP of offenses.

E. Engaging God to Deal with Your Unforgiveness

The Truth: Because of Christ's total forgiveness of you, you have no excuse for not forgiving your spouse and/or for not repenting of your fleshly behavior toward your spouse.

Example #1: Your spouse offended you, and you took ownership of that offense.

Step of faith: "Lord, forgive me for taking offense and change my heart from unforgiveness to forgiveness."

Step of faith: "Lord, remind me that You totally forgave me so I have no right to refuse to totally forgive my spouse. Persuade me in a deeper way that in Christ I contain all of His forgiveness so I have no excuse for not forgiving my spouse."

Example #2: Let's assume your spouse offended you and you are struggling with forgiving him/her.

Step of faith: "Lord, I am struggling with being willing to forgive my spouse. I am trusting You to move me from unwillingness to willingness to forgive him/her."

Step of faith: "Lord, not only give me the desire to forgive, but transform me so that I will have an ongoing attitude of forgiveness."

Exercise: Write down some personal steps of faith that apply to you, if you are experiencing unforgiveness toward your spouse.

Engaging God: Begin taking those steps of faith.

If you have a troubled marriage: Unforgiveness is almost always an issue in troubled marriages. Offenses have been given and taken and the wall of unforgiveness is pretty thick. Therefore, it is crucial that you engage God and His power to give you the willingness to forgive. If you don't move toward forgiveness, you will be moving eventually to separation or divorce.

UNREPENTANCE

Unrepentance is just the reverse of forgiveness. In the case of unrepentance, you are the offender. You are the one who has committed an offense against your spouse. Once you have committed the offense, you have a choice to repent or not.

A. The LIE About Unrepentance

THE LIE

Even though you are the OFFENDER, you have the RIGHT not to repent.

The main reason spouses do not confess and repent to one another is the same reason they do not repent of their sins toward God. It is **pride**. Even though the offending spouse has sinned against God and wronged another person, his/her pride won't let that spouse repent. Instead, the offending spouse hangs on to his/her fleshly "right" not to repent.

Question: Why do you think it is easier to repent before God than to repent directly to your spouse?

Engaging God: Ask the Lord to reveal areas in your marriage where you have not repented of an offense against your spouse.

How would you answer the following question?

***What do you believe will be the **IMPACT** on your marriage if
you **CHOOSE** not to repent?***

If you choose to live from your flesh, you will insist on holding on to the "right" not to repent. However, hanging on to that right will only produce "death" to you and your marriage. This "death" includes: rejection, more conflict, bitterness, emotional separation, and misery, just to name a few.

Question: Is there something you have done (or left undone) toward your spouse that you need to repent of? If so, what is your unrepentance creating in your relationship?

Engaging God: Ask the Lord to reveal to you the "death" your unrepentance is producing in your marriage.

B. The TRUTH About Repentance

The Truth
***Living from Christ means that you WANT to repent because your **DESIRE**
is for harmony and unity in your marriage.***

*"Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and **repent**." Revelation 3:19*

An attitude of repentance is a great sign of humility. Repentance says, "I have wronged you, and I am sorry." Jesus says in Revelation 3:19 above to "be zealous and repent." In other words, be intentional and initiate repentance. A simple question at this point is, "Do you want to live in the death that unrepentance brings to your marriage? Or, do you, in humility, want to repent knowing by doing so you are closer to having your greatest desire for harmony and unity in your marriage?"

*This is what the Sovereign LORD, the Holy One of Israel, says: "In repentance
and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength...." Isaiah 30:15*

In your own strength and willpower you may not be able to overcome the intensity of your fleshly unwillingness to repent. If that is the case, ask God, in His power, to first give you a willingness to repent and second, to produce in you an attitude of repentance. The outcome of an attitude of repentance is your desire to be the first one to say, “I’m sorry.”

Engaging God: Ask the Lord to reveal to you the “death” your unrepentance is producing in your marriage. Once the Lord persuades you to go to your spouse and repent of your words, actions or inactions, and you act on this, you have done your part to open the door to reconciliation. Leave your spouse’s reaction in God’s hands for He may need to work on your spouse’s heart for him/her to accept your repentance and be willing to move forward.

C. Key Truths To Remember About Seeking God To Move You To Repentance

1. Remember that unrepentance will IMPEDE the flow of God’s life and power in you.
2. Early on, your flesh will RESIST your desire to repent.
3. Even so continue taking steps of faith until that resistance is BROKEN.
4. If you are unwilling to repent, ask the Lord to give you that WILLINGNESS.
5. Continue walking by faith until God persuades you to be the FIRST one to repent.
6. God will not only give you the DESIRE to repent, but He will also eventually produce an ATTITUDE of repentance in you.

D. Steps Of Faith To Engage God To Deal With Unrepentance

Example: You made your spouse angry in some way and are unwilling to repent.

Step of faith: “Lord, reveal to me my need to repent to my spouse. Persuade me that unrepentance only leads to death in my relationship with him/her.”

Step of faith: “Lord, I am unwilling to repent to my spouse for what I did. I am asking You to give me a willing heart to repent.”

Step of faith: “Lord, not only give me the desire to repent but transform me so that I will have an attitude of repentance.”

Exercise: If you are experiencing or struggling with unrepentance toward your spouse in one or more areas of your marriage, write down some personal steps of faith that would apply to those areas.

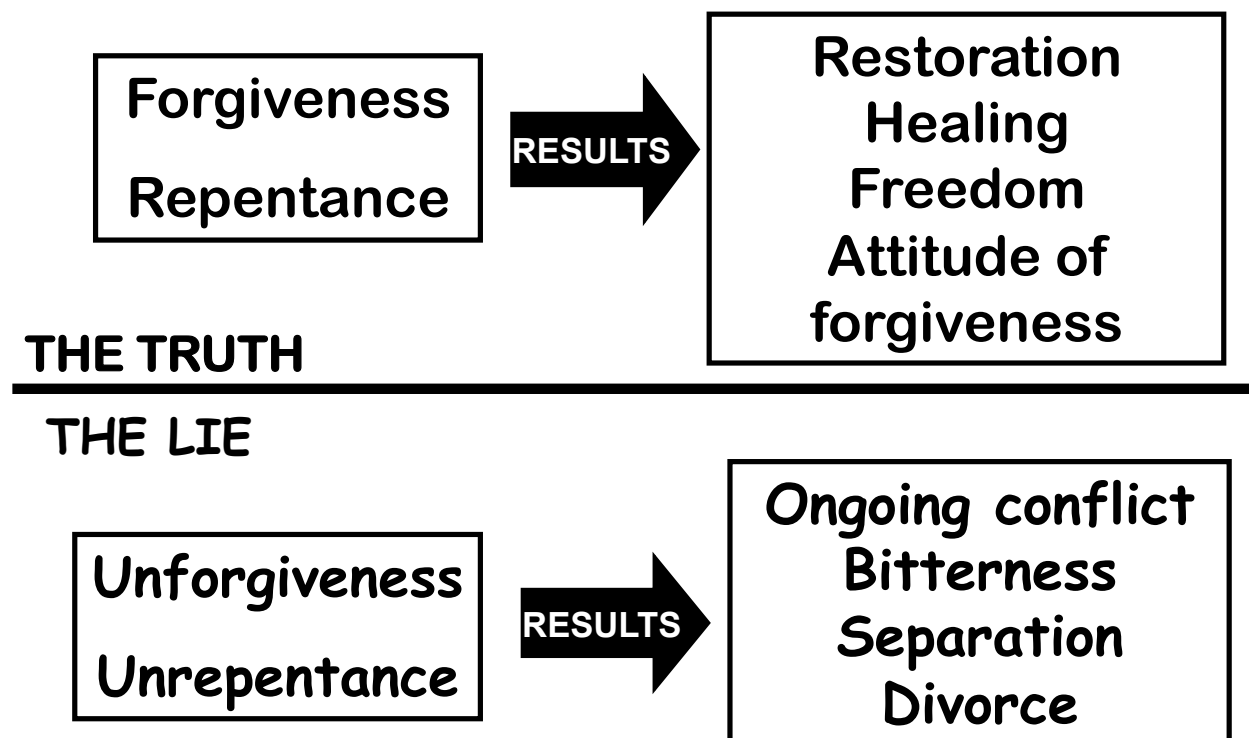
Engaging God: Begin taking those steps of faith.

E. The Choice Concerning Unforgiveness and Unrepentance

Choice: You can continue with an attitude of unforgiveness and unrepentance which will result in rejection of your spouse, ongoing conflict, bitterness, and emotional separation. Even if your unrepentant or unforgiving attitude doesn’t lead to divorce, it will create misery for both of you.

Alternatively, you can choose to live from an attitude of Christ-like forgiveness and repentance which will result in restoration of intimacy, oneness, healing, humility, and freedom from the bondage of unforgiveness and unrepentance.

Unforgiveness Versus Forgiveness



If you have a troubled marriage: Unrepentance, like unforgiveness, is almost always an issue in troubled marriages. Unrepentance over time will lead to the death of your marriage. Therefore, you must engage God to give you a heart of repentance toward your spouse.

Summary

I hope that this lesson has helped you not only to better understand the consequences of the obstacles to a Christ-centered marriage but has also motivated you to seek the Lord to begin removing those obstacles from your marriage. As you do, the overflow will be an increasing harmony, intimacy, and oneness in your marriage.

Lesson Five

Do You Know Your and Your Spouse's True Identity?

DAY ONE

Introduction

*“Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a **new creation (new identity)**; the old things (old identity) passed away; behold, new things (new identity) have come.” 2 Corinthians 5:17*

The fifth major obstacle to experiencing a Christ-centered marriage is:

You and your spouse do not know your TRUE IDENTITY.

I believe without one spouse's knowing the other spouse's true identity, it is extremely difficult for either of them to experience a Christ-centered marriage. One of the foundational truths for experiencing a Christ-centered marriage is for a husband and wife to both know their true identities in Christ. When I disciple couples, most of them have no idea that they have a new identity. As they discover and walk in the truth of their true identities, it radically changes how they see themselves and each other.

This truth is crucial to understand, as well, because when couples talk to me about the problems they are having with one another, these problems are inevitably caused by the negative conclusions each one has drawn based on the other spouse's fleshly behaviors.



For example, they may say things such as, “My spouse is a controlling person” or “My spouse is an angry person.” The problem is that if you don't know your spouse's true identity in Christ, you will likely conclude your spouse's fleshly behavior determines (in a negative way) who they really are. If both spouses are focusing on each other's flesh and not on their spouse's true identity, this will result in ongoing conflict.

Accordingly, in this lesson we are going to focus on the truth of your, and your spouse's, true identity in Christ. Before we start, please keep the following truth in mind as you go through this lesson.

KEY TRUTH

Your FLESHLY BEHAVIOR does NOT determine your TRUE identity.

How We Developed Our OLD Identity

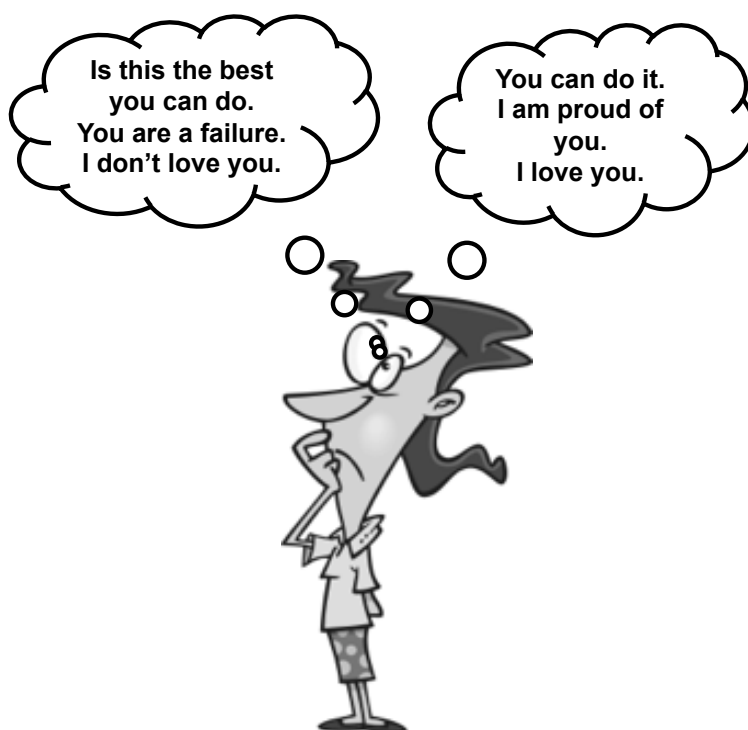
Before we get into the truth about your new identity in Christ, I want to talk about how you formed your “old” identity.

From birth you started receiving messages about yourself. The messages usually came in two categories, **positive** and **negative** messages. For example:

Negative messages might have been: “You are a failure.” “You will never measure up.” “Is this the best that you can do?”

Positive messages might have been: “I am proud of you.” “You can do it.” “You are special.”

Some of you may have heard a mix of both messages. (Remember, these messages may be unspoken as well as spoken messages.)



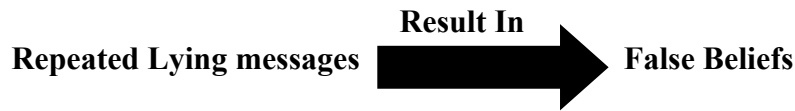
Exercise: Write down some of the messages you heard growing up about yourself from parents, siblings, or friends in the boxes of the diagram on page 156.

As these messages were received and repeated enough times, you started forming **beliefs** about yourself based on those messages. Before we go on, let's look at one key truth:

KEY TRUTH

***Everything that you believe about yourself that
CONTRADICTS the truth of the Word of God is a FALSE Belief.***

Whether it is a repeated positive or a negative message that you heard, it is a false belief if it does not line up with God's truth. These repeated and reinforced negative and positive messages developed into **negative** and **positive** "false" beliefs.



Let's look at a negative and a positive false belief.

Negative false belief: "I am a failure."

Positive false belief: "I am self-sufficient."

I Feel Or Believe That I Am:

| | |
|---------------------|----------------------------|
| Unworthy | Secure in self |
| Unacceptable | Self-confident |
| Rejected | Self-sufficient |
| A failure | Successful |
| Anxious | Self-reliant |
| Inadequate | In control |
| Weak | Resourceful in self |
| Defeated | Competent in self |
| Insecure | Fearless in self |
| Fearful | Strong in self |

Exercise: Find the feelings or beliefs about yourself that you have and write them in the circle diagram on page 156.

I need to let you know at this point that every one of the beliefs listed above are **false** beliefs. The column on the left I call **NEGATIVE** false beliefs, and the column on the right I call **POSITIVE** false beliefs.

The positive false beliefs look appealing, but how do we know that they are false beliefs? The key word is "self." Anything that you believe about yourself that has "self" attached to it is a false belief.

If you picked one or more of the beliefs above as being true of you, then you are still believing false beliefs or lies about yourself. Let's explore some of the adverse effects of believing those lies. But first, please do the following exercise:

Exercise: One way of helping you understand that the two lists above are false beliefs is to add the word "Christian" after each one. For example, a "rejected Christian" or a "self-reliant Christian." I hope that it sounds like a false belief when you add the word "Christian" to your belief.

Living From Your False Beliefs Produces FLESHLY Behavior.

***The major problem with false beliefs is that FLESHLY BEHAVIORS
flow OUT from your false beliefs and ADVERSELY impact your marriage.***

Living from your false beliefs about yourself will result in **fleshly attitudes** or **fleshly behaviors**. Let's look at some examples of fleshly behaviors that result from negative and positive false beliefs.



Example of fleshly behaviors from a NEGATIVE false belief: If you believe you are an **inadequate** person, some of the fleshly behaviors that may result include being critical and judgmental of your spouse, being in denial, being a people-pleaser, etc.

Example of fleshly behaviors from a POSITIVE false belief: If you believe you are a **self-confident** person, then some of the fleshly behaviors that may result include boasting, self-serving, self-promotion, and controlling others.

Exercise: Go to page 94 and 95 and pick four fleshly behaviors and put them at the bottom of the diagram on page 156.

All Of Your False Beliefs Made Up Your OLD Identity.

"IN" ADAM

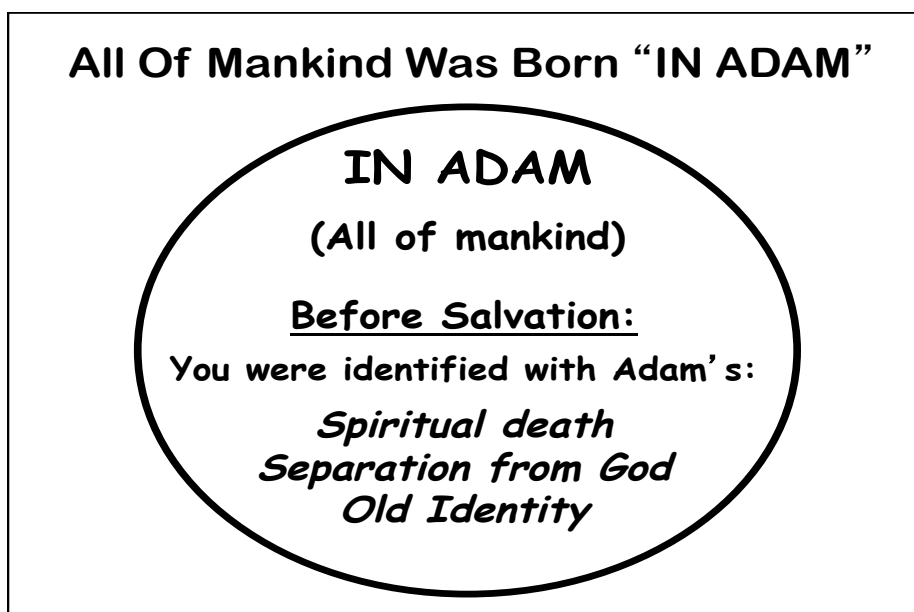
*"For as **IN Adam** all die..." 1 Corinthians 15:22a*

At physical birth, we inherited Adam's spiritual condition. Another way to say this is that since we all came from Adam's gene pool, we were all physically born **IN Adam**.

Before salvation, our being IN Adam meant that we **IDENTIFIED** with Adam in his:

- **Spiritual death** – 1 Corinthians 15:22
- **Separation from God's life and power** – Ephesians 4:18; Isaiah 59:2
- **Old Identity (made up of your false beliefs)** – Proverbs 23:7

We see in the next diagram an illustration of what it looks like to be born **IN Adam**:



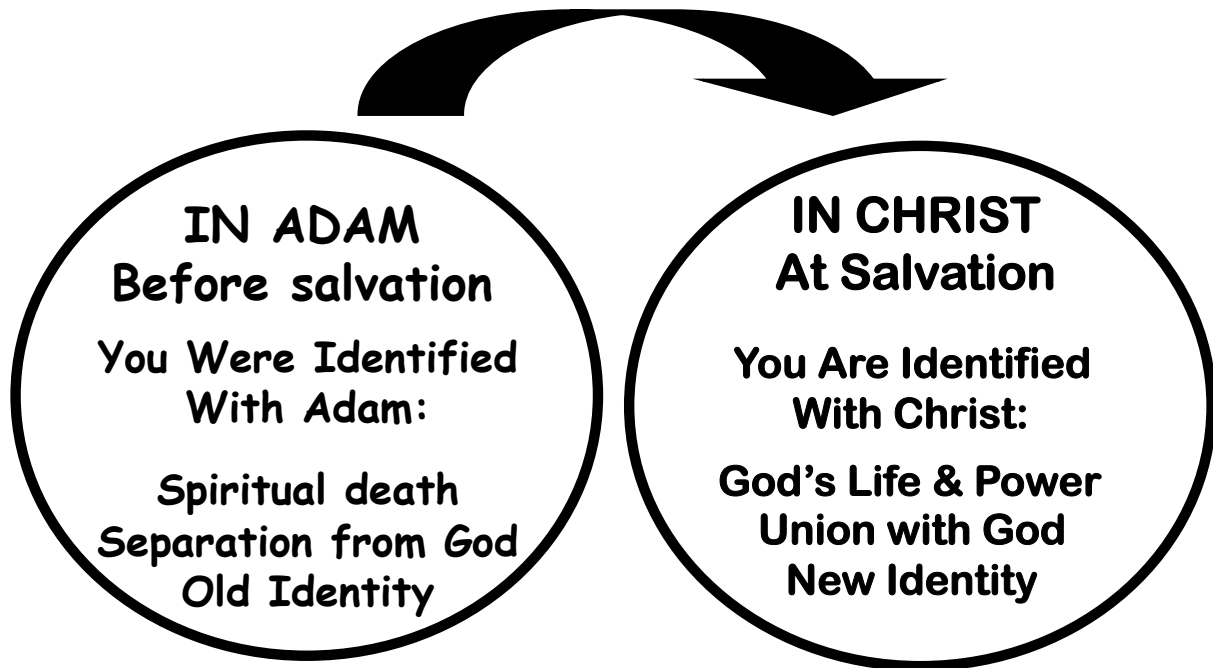
“IN” CHRIST

*“...even so **IN Christ** all shall be made alive.” 1 Corinthians 15:22b*

However, as a result of your trusting Christ for salvation, you are NO longer identified with Adam in his spiritual death, separation, and old identity. At salvation, God took you out of being IN Adam and placed you **IN Christ**, so now you are **identified with Christ**. The next diagram illustrates what God did at salvation in taking you out of being IN Adam and placing you IN Christ.

DAY TWO

God Took You Out Of Being IN Adam and
Put You IN Christ



*You had an OLD identity IN Adam before salvation.
However, now that you are IN Christ, you have a NEW identity.*

What Is Your New Condition Now That You Are IN Christ?

1. You are spiritually ALIVE.

God brought you from death to life. We see this in 1 Corinthians 15:22:

*“For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will **be made alive**.” 1 Corinthians 15:22*

2. You are now in UNION with God.

You are no longer separated from God. We see this in John 14:20:

*“In that day you shall know that **I am in My Father**, and you **in Me**, and **I in you**.”*

3. You have a NEW IDENTITY (You are a PARTAKER of the divine nature).

*“Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a **new creation**; the **old things** (old identity) passed away; behold, **new things** (new identity) have come.” 2 Corinthians 5:17 (Parentheses mine)*

***Having a new identity means that you are a
PARTAKER of God's divine nature.***

*"For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become **partakers of the divine nature**....." 2 Peter 1:4*

God made you a partaker of His divine nature the moment when you were saved. **"Partaker"** in the Greek means "one who shares." Therefore, as a result of your union with God in your human spirit, you share part of God's divine nature. Another way of saying this is that there are some "godly characteristics" that God is sharing with you. This does not mean that you are becoming deity. It means that there is a part of God's divine nature that He is sharing with you or is imparting to you.

Partaker of God's divine nature means that you SHARE with God GODLY characteristics that He imparts to you as part of your new identity.

Before you were saved what you believed about yourself was your **"old identity."** All of your positive and negative false beliefs made up your old identity. You had no choice but to live from your false beliefs and to stay in bondage to the fleshly behaviors that flowed from those false beliefs. Think about this statement:

Before you were saved, your OLD identity was who you really WERE.

What you believed about yourself before you were saved was really who you "were." It is not who you "are" because you now have a new identity. Therefore, let's see what God accomplished at salvation to remove your old identity and to give you a new identity.

What God Accomplished At Salvation To Give You A NEW Identity

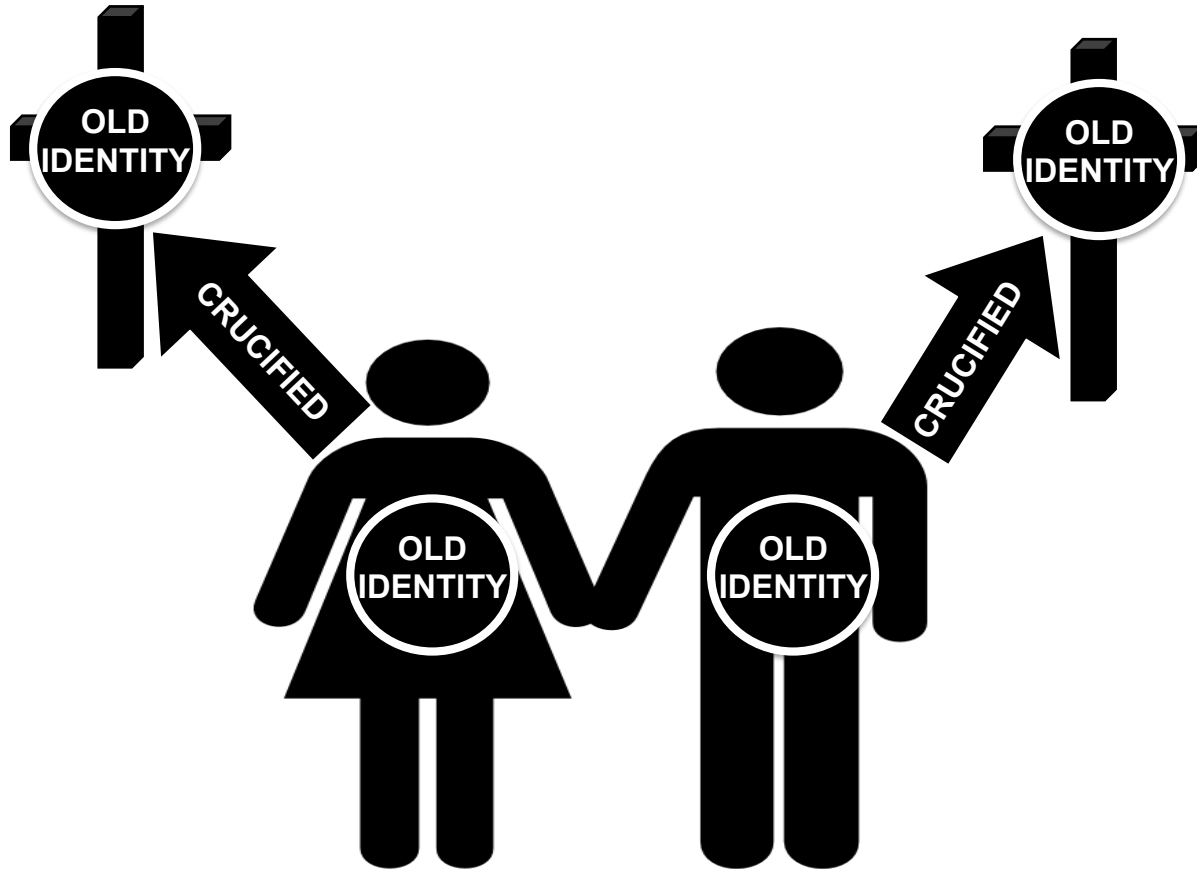
1. He CRUCIFIED Your and Your Spouse's Old Identities.

God knew that you needed a new identity, but in order to give you a new one, He had to deal with the old one. We see in Romans 6:6 that God crucified your old identity:

*"knowing this, that our **old self (old identity) was CRUCIFIED with Him**, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin." Romans 6:6
(Parenthesis and emphasis mine)*

Think about it for a moment. Every false belief that you had about yourself that made up your old identity was crucified with Christ on the cross.

You and Your Spouse's OLD IDENTITY Was Crucified On The Cross When You Were Saved



[**Note:** You may be asking, “How can my old identity be crucified with Christ since the crucifixion of Jesus took place over 2000 years ago?” The answer is that in the eternal realm with God there is no time. Everything is present with God so regardless of when you were saved, you were placed into Christ and your old identity was crucified with Him on the cross. This is truly beyond man’s comprehension. This is one of those mysteries in scripture that we must believe by faith.]

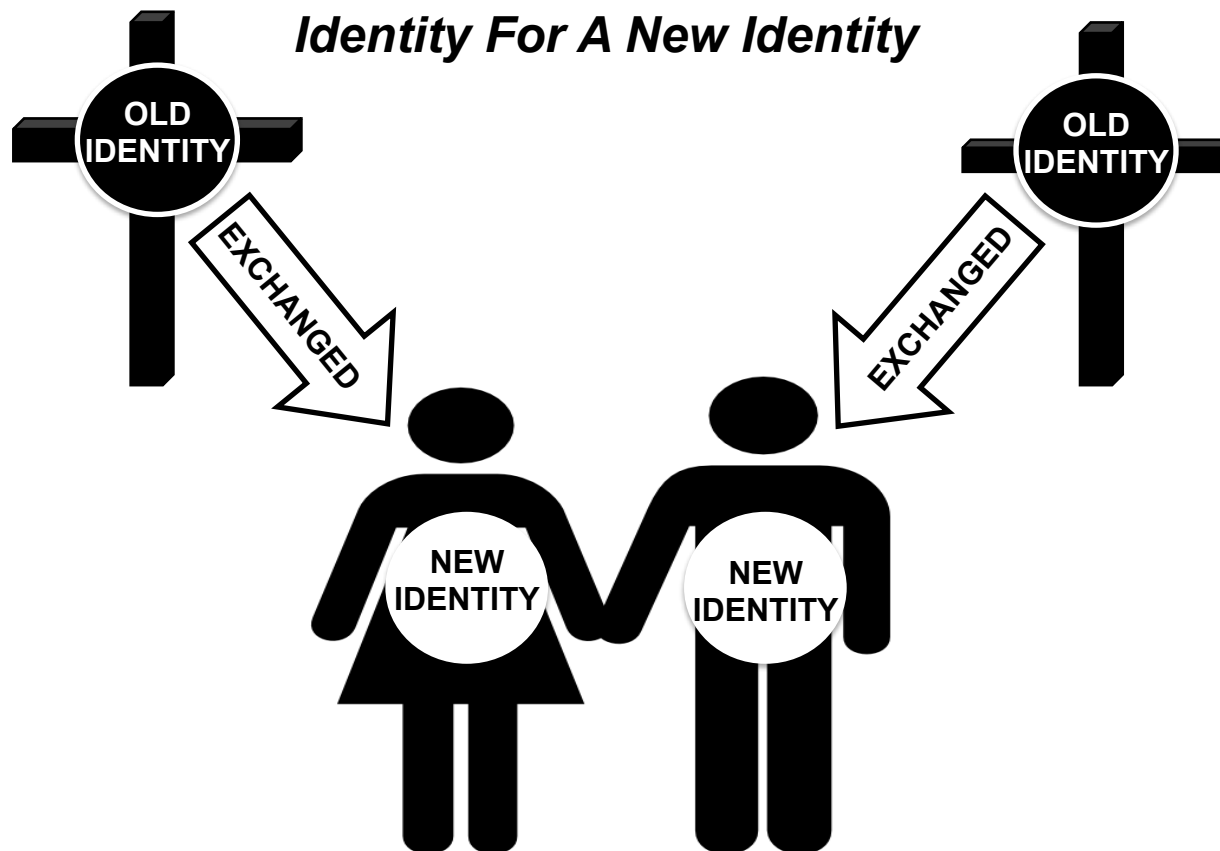
2. God EXCHANGED Your Old Identity For A New Identity.

*“Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creation (new identity); the old things (old identity) passed away; behold, new things (new identity) have come.” 2 Corinthians 5:17
(Parentheses mine)*

In addition to crucifying your old identity, He exchanged your old identity for a new one. Let’s take another look at 2 Corinthians 5:17. The “old things” in 2 Corinthians 5:17 refers to your old identity which was crucified (passed away), and was exchanged for “new things” which is your new identity. As a result of this exchange, you became a **new creation**. Becoming a new creation means that you now have a **new identity in Christ**.

To me, knowing we have a new identity is part of the “great” news of the gospel. As you receive revelation of your true identity and you and your spouse see yourselves and each other as new creations, it will totally change the way you interact with one another.

God EXCHANGED Your Old Identity For A New Identity



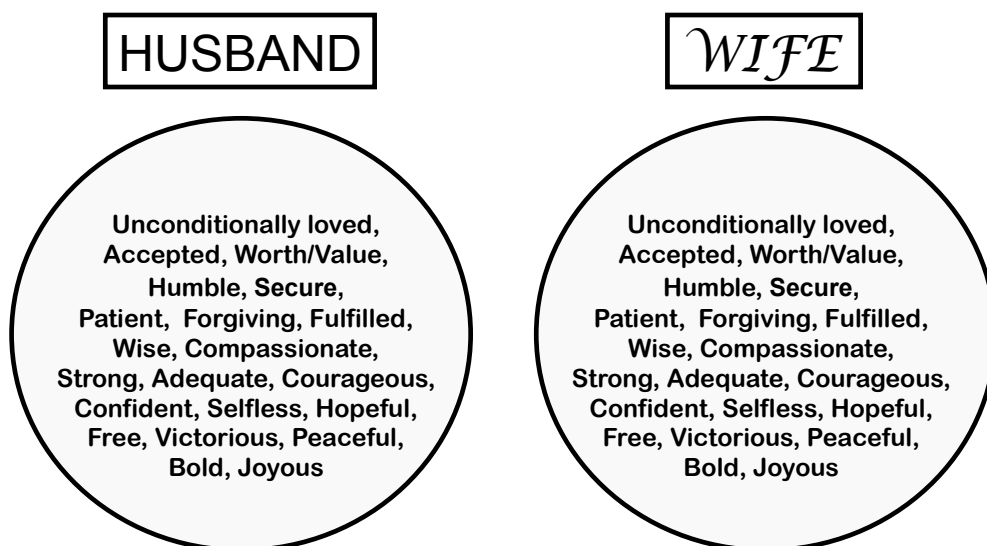
Based on what you just learned, think about this question for a moment.

KEY QUESTION:

Since your false beliefs are part of your old identity that was CRUCIFIED at the cross, then do you NEED to continue believing your false beliefs any longer?

Following is an illustration showing some of the characteristics of your and your spouse's new identities:

You and Your Spouse Have A NEW Identity



Characteristics of Your and Your Spouse's True Identities In Christ

Here is a list of some of the characteristics of your and your spouse's new identities in Christ. When you read through this list, remember "in Christ" refers to who you are in your true identity. For example, you may read each characteristic like this: "In my true identity in Christ, I am victorious."

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| 1 John 4:12 | In Christ, you and your spouse are <u>unconditional lovers</u> . |
| Colossians 3:12 | In Christ, you and your spouse are <u>compassionate, humble, kind, patient</u> . |
| Colossians 2:10 | In Christ, you and your spouse are <u>complete</u> . |
| Colossians 3:13 | In Christ, you and your spouse are <u>forgiving</u> persons. |
| Psalms 139:14 | In Christ, you and your spouse are <u>worthy</u> . |
| 2 Corinthians 3:5 | In Christ, you and your spouse are <u>totally adequate</u> . |
| John 15:13 | In Christ, you and your spouse are <u>sacrificial</u> . |
| Romans 15:7 | In Christ, you and your spouse are <u>accepted and acceptable</u> . |
| Philippians 2:6 | In Christ, you and your spouse are <u>confident</u> . |
| Philippians 2:3 | In Christ, you and your spouse are <u>selfless</u> . |
| Psalms 62:2 | In Christ, you and your spouse are <u>secure</u> . |
| Psalms 56:4 | In Christ, you and your spouse are <u>fearless</u> . |
| Ephesians 4:24 | In Christ, you and your spouse are <u>righteous</u> . |
| Ephesians 1:1 | In Christ, you and your spouse are <u>saints</u> . |
| Galatians 5:1 | In Christ, you and your spouse are <u>free</u> . |
| Psalms 28:7 | In Christ, you and your spouse are <u>strong</u> . |
| 1 Corinthians 2:16 | In Christ, you and your spouse have <u>the mind of Christ</u> . |
| Romans 8:37 | In Christ, you and your spouse are <u>more than conquerors</u> . |
| 1 Corinthians 6:17 | In Christ, you and your spouse are <u>one in Christ</u> . |
| 1 Corinthians 15:57 | In Christ, you and your spouse are <u>victorious</u> . |
| Colossians 3:12 | In Christ, you and your spouse are <u>chosen of God and dearly loved</u> . |
| John 15:16 | In Christ, you and your spouse are <u>chosen by Christ to bear His fruit</u> . |

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| Romans 8:17 | In Christ, you and your spouse are <u>joint-heirs with Christ</u> . |
| 1 Peter 2:9, 10 | In Christ, you and your spouse are <u>a chosen race, a royal priesthood</u> . |
| Galatians 5:22, 23 | In Christ, you and your spouse are <u>containers of all of the Spiritual fruit</u> . |
| Galatians 3:26 | In Christ, you and your spouse are <u>sons and daughters of Christ</u> . |
| John 15:15 | In Christ, you and your spouse are <u>friends of Christ</u> . |
| Colossians 3:4 | In Christ, you and your spouse are <u>expressions of the life of Christ</u> . |
| Hebrews 3:14 | In Christ, you and your spouse are <u>partakers of Christ</u> . |

In Christ, you and your spouse are God's MASTERPIECES.
Ephesians 2:10

In Ephesians 2:10, the word “workmanship” is translated “masterpiece.” God is declaring that you and your spouse in your true identities are “masterpieces.” Have you thought of your spouse as a masterpiece? Remember this is truly who you are whether you believe it or not. The same holds true about all the godly characteristics in the list above.

You may struggle to believe or feel these characteristics of your true identity are really true of you and your spouse. If so, please keep this truth in mind:

How you **FEEL** or what you **BELIEVE** about the truth does **NOT**
change the fact that God’s truth is **TRUE**.

When we first begin to understand intellectually that as believers we all have a new identity, we still struggle to really believe the truth that we are who God says we are. That being the case, we will be addressing later in this lesson how God moves us from unbelief to belief concerning our true identity.

Exercise: Read each of the characteristics of your true identity, listed above, out loud. From that list, write down below five of the characteristics you would most like to experience either personally or in your marriage. Look up the verses for each of those characteristics.

Question: What are some of the characteristics listed above that you don’t believe are true of you?

Engaging God: Specifically ask God to persuade you of the scriptural truth of those five characteristics that you would most like to experience. If you are struggling with believing that some of these characteristics are true of you, begin asking God to renew your mind and to move you from unbelief to belief.

DAY THREE

Another Way of Defining Your True Identity Is The Word “Heart.”

*“I will give them one **heart**, and put a new spirit within them; I will remove the **heart** of stone from their flesh and give them a **heart** of flesh.” Ezekiel 11:19*

According to Ezekiel 11:19, God gave you and your spouse “new” hearts at salvation. The “heart of stone” is referring to your old identity and the “heart of flesh” in this passage is referring to your true identity in Christ. So when it comes to your true identity, remember God removed your “old” heart and gave you and your spouse new hearts.

Let’s now look at some of the characteristics of your new heart.

You and Your Spouse Are RIGHTEOUS.

*“for with the heart a **person believes**, resulting in righteousness...” Romans 8:10*

*“God made Him (Jesus) who had no sin to be sin for us, so that **in Him we** might become the righteousness of God.” 2 Corinthians 5:21 (Parenthesis mine)*

*“and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes **from God** on the **basis of faith**.” Philippians 3:9*

This is an eye opening truth because most Christians see themselves primarily as sinners saved by grace (with the emphasis on the word “sinners”). The truth is you WERE a sinner and you are saved by grace, but the difference is (according to the three verses above) your identity is no longer as a sinner because you became RIGHTEOUS at the point of salvation. Another way of saying this is when God crucified your old unrighteous identity within you, He exchanged it for a righteous new identity. Look at Romans 8:10 again. It says when you believed in Christ for salvation, you became righteous. That is why Paul says in Romans 8:1:

*“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are **in Christ Jesus**.”*

Look at what Romans 5:18,19 says about this:

*“Consequently, just as the result of **one trespass (sin)** was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the **disobedience of the one man (Adam)** the many were made sinners, so also through the **obedience of the One man (Jesus)** the many will be made righteous.” Romans 5:18-19 (Parentheses mine)*

Paul is telling us that through one man (Adam) we were all born into condemnation, but, later, through one man (Jesus) we were taken out of condemnation and made righteous at the moment we were saved.

Do you have to work to become righteous?

Have you believed the lie that you have to work for God to be righteous? Have you thought that it was up to you to do (or not do) something to attain God's righteousness? The above verses (and many others) tell us that we became righteous the moment that we were saved! In other words, righteousness is not something that you earn. It is something that you receive at salvation because God gave you a new righteous identity.

Your RIGHTEOUSNESS in Christ has nothing to do with what you do or don't do. It is the result of what God did IN you at salvation.

Application: Once you come to the place where you believe you are righteous, you can reject the lie that you are a sinner. Accordingly, when you sin, you need to confess that sin before the Lord, but you no longer have to condemn yourself or take ownership of any condemnation from your spouse. What would a step of faith look like in being transformed to believe you are righteous?

Step of Faith: "Lord, I am struggling with my anger toward my spouse. I am trusting You to renew my mind to the truth that I am righteous. As You do, transform me so I move away from being angry."

Key Truth: You no longer have to see your spouse's identity as their fleshly behavior (i.e. angry, controlling, rejecting, etc.). You will see them as righteous with a problem of anger, controlling, or whatever fleshly behavior they are displaying.

Question: Do you see the difference between saying your spouse is an angry person versus the truth which says, he/she is righteous but has a problem of anger? (We will talk more about this later in this lesson.) Which view of your spouse gives you more hope for your marriage?

Step of faith: "Lord, my spouse is very controlling. I am asking You to persuade my spouse that he/she is righteous and no longer has to control. Give me eyes to see my spouse as righteous in spite of his/her controlling behavior."

Questions: What difference might it make in your life and in your marriage if you no longer had to work or strive to be righteous? And what difference would it make in your marriage if you no longer condemned yourself or no longer took ownership of your spouse's condemnation?

Meditate: on Romans 5:18-19, Romans 8:1, 2 Corinthians 5:21 and Philippians 1:1 and 3:9, and ask God to persuade you that you are righteous based on what He did at salvation.

Engaging God: If you struggle with the truth of your righteousness, ask the Holy Spirit to persuade you that righteousness is not something you earn. Also, ask Him to convince you that you no longer have to condemn yourself or take ownership of condemnation by your spouse. Seek the Lord to persuade you that your spouse is righteous despite his/her behavior.

**Now that you are *RIGHTEOUS* in Christ,
God *NO* longer condemns you, and you *NO* longer have to condemn
YOURSELF. Plus, you no longer should condemn your *SPOUSE*!**

In Christ, You and Your Spouse Are UNCONDITIONAL LOVERS

*“And we have come to know and have believed the love
which God has for us. **God is love**....” 1 John 4:16*

*“For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor
principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor
height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, **shall be able to separate us
from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.**” Romans 8:38, 39*

Not only are you unconditionally loved by God, but in Christ you and your spouse are unconditional lovers. We talked earlier about your seeking to get your need for unconditional love met from Christ. As an unconditional lover you will allow God’s unconditional love to flow through you to your spouse.

Application: You no longer have to try to love your spouse with human love because not only is God your source for unconditional love, you are an unconditional lover. Therefore, you no longer have to try to produce unconditional love. You can ask the Lord to love your spouse through you. In other words, you become a giver of love rather than a taker.

Step of faith: “Lord, I can’t love my spouse unconditionally. I am asking You to renew my mind to the truth that in my true identity I am an unconditional lover. Love my spouse through me.”

Application: Even though your spouse may exhibit fleshly behavior toward you, you can love him/her unconditionally.

Step of faith: “Lord, my spouse is very manipulative. My flesh wants to react, but would You persuade me that because I am an unconditional lover in Christ, I can love my spouse unconditionally regardless of how he/she acts toward me.”

Question: How might it affect your marriage if you and your spouse believed that you are both unconditional lovers?

Meditate: on 1 John 4:16 and Romans 8:38, 39 above.

Engaging God: Ask the Lord to persuade you that as part of your new identity you are unconditionally loved by God and are an unconditional lover.

In Christ, You and Your Spouse Are Totally ACCEPTED and ACCEPTABLE.

“Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you...” Romans 15:7

You are accepted by God and are acceptable to Him. You may feel rejected by your spouse or in your job, but that does not change the truth that you are accepted by Him and in Him. As a result, you no longer have to earn or perform for God’s acceptance or others’ acceptance.

The reason why a holy God totally accepts you is because He has made you acceptable. You may feel or experience rejection coming from others, but that does not change the truth that you are accepted by God unconditionally! This means there is no sinful behavior too great to cause God to reject you. (God does not condone your sinful behavior, but He also does not reject you because of it.) As a result, you no longer have to earn (or perform for) God’s acceptance or the acceptance of your spouse or others.

While others may reject you, God’s acceptance gives you the power not to take ownership of your spouse’s or others’ rejection. When you receive God’s acceptance, you can be free from rejection by your spouse and others. Believing you are accepted in Christ will give you the freedom to accept others unconditionally, even when they are not accepting you.

Application: If you come to believe you are accepted and acceptable in Christ, you no longer have to take ownership of your spouse’s rejection. As God renews your mind to the truth that you are accepted and acceptable in Him, you will unconditionally accept your spouse, regardless of whether he/she is accepting you at the time.

Step of faith: “Lord, I see myself as being rejected or rejectable. I am entrusting that lie to You and asking You to renew my mind so that I will believe that I am accepted and acceptable.”

Application: Even though your spouse may reject you, you no longer have to reject back. You can unconditionally accept him/her.

Step of faith: “Lord, my spouse tends to reject me (overtly by words or covertly by actions) when I _____. I am asking You, in your power, to restrain my flesh so I will not reject back. Give me a heart of unconditional acceptance for my spouse.”

Question: How may it change your marriage relationship if you believed you no longer had to take ownership of your spouse’s rejection because you believe you are totally accepted and are acceptable to God?

Meditate: on Romans 15:7 above.

Engaging God: Ask the Lord to persuade you that you are totally accepted by Him and acceptable to Him so that you no longer have to take ownership of your spouse’s rejection.

In Christ, You and Your spouse Are COMPASSIONATE, KIND, HUMBLE, GENTLE, PATIENT.

*“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with **compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.** Colossians 3:12*

When I look at the words, “compassion, kindness, humility, etc.,” those would not be the words I would use to describe my behavior. Early on I struggled with this verse because when it said, “clothe yourselves,” I thought it meant I had to try to “produce,” by my own human efforts, the qualities of compassion, humility, etc. I ended up failing because I could not produce any of these.

However, as I have sought the Lord to renew my mind to believe I am a compassionate, kind, humble, etc. person in Christ, the results have truly been supernatural. I find my behavior lining up more with my true identity. In this context “clothe yourselves” simply means believe and walk in Christ’s compassion, kindness, humility, etc.

Application: If you struggle with being compassionate, humble, or patient toward your spouse, what would a step of faith look like?

Step of faith: “Lord, I struggle with being (compassionate, humble, or patient) with my spouse. Renew my mind and reveal to me that I am a _____ (compassionate, humble, or patient) person in Christ.”

Application: If you struggle with acting in humility because of your pride, what would a step of faith look like for you to be transformed?

Step of faith: “Lord, I struggle with pride. Reveal the “death” that my pride is causing in our marriage and transform me to live from my true identity of humility.”

Question: How may it change your marriage relationship if you could experience from your spouse more compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience? What difference would it make if you were able to express those same attributes to your spouse?

Meditate: on Colossians 3:12, above.

Engaging God: Ask the Spirit to transform you so that you will walk in Christ’s compassion, humility, kindness, gentleness, and patience.

In Christ, You and Your Spouse Are Totally ADEQUATE and WORTHY.

*“Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but **our adequacy is from God.**” 2 Corinthians 3:5*

Many people feel or believe they are unworthy or inadequate. We look at ourselves in comparison to others and think we don’t measure up to the world’s standards of worthiness. We may seek our worth in our spouse, other relationships, our job, or in “things.” However, these things will never bring us the adequacy or worthiness we can only find in Christ. Knowing your worth in Christ relieves you of the pressure of trying to find your worthiness in your spouse or in someone else or in something else. This is Good News!

How might seeing yourself and your spouse as adequate change the way that you look at yourself and your spouse?

Application: If you struggle with inadequacy, whether it is in your marriage, job, abilities, etc. seek God to transform you to live from your adequacy in Him as part of your true identity.

Step of faith: “Lord, I am feeling (or I believe that I am) inadequate in my marriage when it comes to (communication, finances, sexual intimacy, etc.)_____. I am entrusting my inadequacy to You and am asking You to renew my mind to the truth that I am totally adequate in my true identity.”

Application: If your spouse makes you feel inadequate when you do or don't do certain things, you can seek God to transform you

Step of faith: “Lord, when my spouse _____, it makes me feel inadequate. At those moments, remind me that I am totally adequate in my true identity in You.”

Question: How might it affect your marriage if you were living from your true identity of adequacy, and you no longer tried to get your adequacy or worth from your spouse?

Meditate: on 2 Corinthians 3:5

Engaging God: Ask God to persuade you that your adequacy is part of your true identity.

*“Because he has loved Me; therefore, I will deliver him; I will set him
securely on high because he has known my name.” Psalm 91:14*

*“I love you, Lord; you are my strength. The Lord is my rock, my fortress,
and my savior; my God is my rock, in whom I find protection. He is my
shield, the power that saves me, and my place of safety.” Psalm 18:1-2*

What are you feeling insecure about? Is it your job, your marriage, or insecure feelings you've had about yourself since childhood? You no longer have to feel that way because in Christ you are totally secure. Are you trying to find security in something or someone else other than God? The truth is our only true security is in Christ. Since He is sovereign and is the only One Who is truly in control, we can live from our security in Him. Accordingly, if your spouse makes you feel insecure, you can live, instead, from your security in Christ.

How might seeing yourself and your spouse as secure in Christ change the way that you look at yourself and your spouse?

Application: If you struggle with being insecure about yourself, your marriage, your finances, etc., ask God to renew your mind to the truth that you are totally secure in your true identity.

Step of faith: “Lord, I struggle with insecurity. I am entrusting my insecurity to You and asking You to replace my insecurity with the truth that I am totally secure in my true identity.”

Application: If you are putting security in things or people rather than in Christ.

Step of faith: “Lord, work in my heart so that I will realize that my only security is in You and that I am totally secure in my true identity.”

Questions: Does your spouse make you feel insecure? What difference would it make in your marriage if you really believe you are secure in Christ? How would seeing your spouse as secure in Christ change the way you look at your spouse?

Meditate: on 2 Corinthians 3:5 and Psalm 18:1-2, above.

Engaging God: Ask God to persuade you that your adequacy is part of your true identity. If you struggle with being insecure about yourself, your marriage, your finances, etc., seek God to renew your mind to the truth that you are totally secure in your true identity. Ask God to reassure you that He alone is your only true security if you are still seeking security in things or people rather than in Christ.

DAY FOUR

In Christ, You and Your Spouse Are SELFLESS and SACRIFICIAL

“Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves” Philippians 2:3

I believe being selfless and sacrificial are very crucial attributes of our true identity as spouses because one of the primary characteristics of walking in our identity in Christ is being others-focused. When Jesus walked this earth doing His Father’s will, He acted only for the benefit of others and never to benefit Himself. Likewise, as you walk more in your true identity, you will naturally find yourself being selfless and sacrificial.

How might seeing yourself and your spouse as selfless and sacrificial in Christ change the way that you look at yourself and your spouse?

Application: If you struggle with selfishness, begin asking God to transform your heart to become more selfless.

Steps of faith: “Lord, I am trusting You to move me away from selfish attitudes and to renew my mind to the truth that I am selfless and sacrificial in Christ.”

Questions: How may seeing yourself and your spouse as selfless and sacrificial in Christ change the way you look at yourself and your spouse? What difference would an attitude of selflessness by both you and your spouse make in your marriage?

Meditate: on Philippians 2:3, above.

Engaging God: If you struggle with selfishness, begin asking God to transform your heart to become more selfless. Seek God to transform your heart, as well, to become more sacrificial in your marriage.

In Christ You Are VICTORIOUS And Are More Than A CONQUEROR.

*“... thanks be to God, Who gives us the **victory** through ... Christ.” 1 Corinthians 15:57*

*“But in all these things we overwhelmingly **conquer through Him** who loved us.” Romans 8:37*



You may see yourself (or your spouse may see you) as a failure, but in your true identity in Christ you are victorious and a conqueror. There is no problem, conflict, or adversity that Christ cannot conquer in you and through you. On the other hand, you may see yourself as a “self-sufficient” victor or conqueror in life apart from Christ.

Since the truth is that apart from God you can do **nothing** (John 15:5), God loves you enough that He will allow impossible circumstances or marital strife to reveal to you your

inability to overcome that situation. Recognizing your weakness and inability to resolve a situation will turn you to dependence upon God and will allow Him to be victorious through you. Therefore, start living from the victory in Christ in your true identity.

Application: Let's assume you feel like a failure in the area of being a godly husband or wife.

Step of faith: "Lord, I feel like a failure as a godly husband/wife. Remind me that regardless of how I feel, that does not change the fact that I am victorious in my true identity."

Application: On the other hand, let's assume you feel like a "self-sufficient" spouse.

Step of faith: "Lord, I feel like a self-sufficient husband/wife in control of my marriage without the need to turn to you. Renew my mind to the truth that I am a conqueror only because of my true identity in You."

Questions: If you feel like a failure, does that change the truth that in Christ you are more than a conqueror? If in Christ you are victorious, do you have to strive to be victorious? In what ways do you think it would change your marriage if you lived from your identity as a victor?

Meditate: on 1 Corinthians 15:57 and Romans 8:37, above.

Engaging God: Look at the areas where you think you are failing in life. In those areas, ask God to give you revelation of what it looks like to walk in victory in those areas. The areas where you feel you are self-sufficient and think you don't need God, ask Him to reveal your true neediness and the truth that you can only be a conqueror or victor in Him.

In Christ, You and Your Spouse Are FREE.

*"It is for freedom that **Christ has set us free**. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery." Galatians 5:1*

*"For the power of the life-giving Spirit **has freed you through Jesus Christ** from the power of sin that leads to death." Romans 8:2*

Take a closer look at Galatians 5:1, above. It says you have been set free. It is past tense! It is a completed act because your freedom was won at the cross. As a result, in Christ you are free from the power of sin, from your fleshly behaviors, from legalism, and from your defeating sin patterns.

You are also free from the grip of the world and the power of Satan. In other words, you no longer have to live as if you or your spouse are still enslaved to those things. Try to grasp the magnitude of this truth: you and your spouse have been set free from all of these things! The struggle we have as spouses is we don't walk in that freedom because we don't really believe we have been set free.

Application: Let's assume you feel condemned for the way you have treated your spouse.

Step of faith: “Lord, I am feeling condemned for how I treated my spouse. Remind me I am free from self-condemnation.” While this doesn't free you from repenting to your spouse and allowing God to live through you, you no longer have to wallow in self-condemnation.

Questions: Whatever it is that you feel in bondage to, does that change the truth that in Christ you are free? In what ways do you think it would change your marriage if you lived from your freedom in Christ as part of your true identity?

Meditate: on Galatians 5:1 and Romans 8:2, above.

Engaging God: Look at the areas where you think you are failing in life. In those areas, ask God to give you revelation of what it looks like to walk in victory in those areas.

In Christ, You and Your Spouse Have The MIND OF CHRIST.

“...we have the **mind of Christ.**” 1 Corinthians 2:16b

What does it mean that you have the mind of Christ? It means you and your spouse no longer have to rely on your limited and finite wisdom, understanding, discernment, and intellect to make decisions. For every situation you face, both of you can draw on God's infinite knowledge, wisdom, understanding, and discernment. It is like having access to the “spiritual internet.” Since God has the answer for every decision you must make concerning meeting each other's needs, your children, finances, major purchases, etc., you don't need to try to figure out what to do. All you need to do is ask God and patiently wait for His answers.

Application: Whenever you are faced with decisions that impact your marriage (job change, geographical change, your kids, etc.), you can draw on Christ's wisdom and discernment and no longer have to depend on your and your spouse's finite wisdom and understanding.

Step of faith: “Lord, my spouse and I have a major decision to make concerning _____. We are asking You to make this decision in and through us with the wisdom and discernment we have in the mind of Christ. Be our patience and discernment to wait for, recognize, accept and act on Your answer.”

Question: What difficult situations in your marriage are you currently having that you need to rely on Christ's wisdom, understanding, discernment, and intellect?

Question: Could it be that God allows difficult situations into your marriage so that you will need to draw upon Him as your Source for divine wisdom and understanding?

Meditate: on 1 Corinthians 2:16b, above.

Engaging God: What upcoming decisions do you have to make? Begin to seek God's wisdom and discernment for those answers.

In Christ, You and Your Spouse Are FORGIVING Persons.

*“Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, **forgiving each other**, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.” Ephesians 4:32*

You may have been offended by your spouse but don't feel you have to forgive him/her (or you believe you have the right **not** to forgive). The truth is you have no excuse for not forgiving your spouse. Why? First, Christ forgave you unconditionally. Second, in your new identity in Christ, you and your spouse are **forgiving** persons. You and your spouse can now draw on your forgiveness from Christ and each of you can allow Him to forgive the other spouse through you. It is important you know unforgiveness in marriage is one of the top issues that over time will destroy a marriage.

Key Truth:

Whether or not you feel like forgiving is NOT the issue.

You CHOOSE to forgive because that is your true identity in Christ.

Application: If you struggle with forgiving your spouse, then ask God to persuade you that you are a forgiving person in Christ and that you no longer have the right not to forgive.

Step of faith: “Lord, I am struggling with forgiving my spouse when he/she _____. Renew my mind to the truth that I am a forgiving person in You, and give me a heart to forgive.”

Application: If your spouse struggles with forgiving you, you can ask the Spirit to give him/her a heart of forgiveness.

Step of faith: “Lord, my spouse struggles with forgiving me. I am asking that You renew his/her mind to the truth that he/she is a forgiving person.”

Questions: Do you struggle with forgiving your spouse? Since you are a forgiving person in Christ, do you still have the right not to forgive him/her? How would it affect your marriage if you realized in Christ you can forgive your spouse whether or not he/she deserves to be forgiven?

Two More Critical Truths To Understand Concerning Your True Identity

1. Your Fleshly Behavior Does NOT Determine Your Identity In Christ.

The TRUTH, not your FLESHLY BEHAVIOR, determines your true identity!

In the introduction to this lesson I shared with you that your fleshly behavior does not determine your identity. I want to expand on that thought. However, before I do I would like for you to honestly answer two questions.

Question #1: What are some of the negative conclusions you come to about your spouse based on his/her fleshly behavior? (Example: My spouse is a controlling, demanding, passive, fearful, angry, selfish, etc., person.) Fill in the blank below:

My spouse is _____ person.

Question #2: What are some of the negative conclusions you come to about yourself based on your fleshly behavior? Fill in the blank below.

I am _____ person.

You may be asking, “Even though God’s truth says my spouse and I are righteous, accepted, forgiving, etc., my (or my spouse’s) attitudes and/or behaviors seem to indicate just the opposite. Which is true, what my fleshly behavior or my spouse’s fleshly behavior indicates, or what God’s truth says?”

Regardless of the fact that your behavior and your spouse’s does not always line up with what God says is true about both of you, does it change the truth of your identity in Christ? The answer is NO! As believers, God has given you a new identity that is separate and apart from your sinful behavior.

However, now that you have a new identity your fleshly sinful behavior no longer determines who you really ARE. Consider this illustration. When I was born into the Loveless family, I became a Loveless. It doesn’t make any difference if I am a good Loveless or a bad Loveless; my behavior doesn’t change my identity as a Loveless. In the same way, your identity in Christ remains unchanged by your behavior.

Let’s look at some examples:

#1 - Even though you may choose fleshly behavior and commit an unrighteous act of being critical or judgmental, it does not change the truth that in your new identity in Christ you are righteous.

#2 - Your sinful behavior may lead you to an unforgiving attitude toward your spouse who has offended you. This does not change the truth that since you are a forgiving person in Christ, you can and should forgive your spouse.

“The Line” and Your True Identity

As we walk by faith we will find ourselves living more and more from our true identity in the Spirit and less from our fleshly behaviors below “the Line.” The next diagram illustrates this.

Walking In Your True Identity Versus Your Fleshly Behaviors

| | | | | |
|---------------|--------------------|------------|-----------|----------------------------------|
| | Unconditional Love | Righteous | Humble | |
| | Secure | Acceptable | Patient | |
| | Forgiving | Fearless | Complete | |
| | Compassionate | Discerning | Wise | |
| | Adequate | Thankful | Confident | |
| | Sacrificial | Sufficient | Selfless | |
| | Free | Victorious | Strong | |
| | Joyful | Peaceful | Good | |
| SPIRIT | | | | |
| <hr/> | | | | |
| FLESH | | | | |
| | | | | F A I T H |

Anxious, angry, unworthy, self-confident, impatient, demanding, unforgiving, self-sufficient, defensive, inadequate, critical, judgemental, self-righteous, controlling, arrogant, rejecting, insecure, selfish

*As you take steps of faith, the SPIRIT will move you from living from
your fleshly behaviors **BELOW** “the Line” and move you to live **ABOVE**
“the Line” from your true identity.*

DAY FIVE

Does the fact that your fleshly behavior does not determine your identity give you license to live from your fleshly behavior? Of course not! God is never pleased with your sin in any form. However, it is essential to understand that because of what God has done in giving you a new identity, you have the choice to no longer live from your sinful behavior.

Questions: If you are evaluating your spouse based upon his/her sinful behaviors, how is it negatively impacting your marriage?

Meditate: on the truth that your fleshly behavior does not determine your true identity.

Just the same as with any area of our unbelief, we must ask God to renew our minds and persuade us of His truth. As you begin to believe the truth, your behavior will change to line up with your true identity. While this will take time, you will eventually experience new behaviors that fall in line with God's truth. We will see some steps of faith later in the next section of this lesson that will help you better understand God's process.

In the transformation process, God will renew your mind to the truth of your true Identity, and as He does, your behavior will LINE UP with your true identity.

2. Your False Beliefs And Feelings Do NOT Determine Your Identity In Christ.

Your false beliefs or feelings about yourself or your spouse don't change the truth of who you are in Christ. In other words, how you feel or what you believe about the truth does not change the fact that IT IS TRUE!

Let's look at some examples:

False Belief Or Feeling

You feel rejected.

You believe that you are self-sufficient.

You don't feel like forgiving.

You don't feel unconditionally loved.

The Truth Of Your New Identity In Christ

You are accepted and are acceptable in Christ.
(Romans 15:7)

Your sufficiency can only be found in Christ.
(2 Corinthians 9:8)

You are a forgiving person in Christ.
(Ephesians 4:32)

God unconditionally loves you. (1 John 4:16)

You don't believe that you are righteous. You are righteous in Christ. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

Perhaps up until now your false beliefs and feelings have subjectively been “truth” to you. But now, at least intellectually, you understand God has given you a new identity. He wants you to believe His truth as opposed to what your negative feelings and false beliefs are telling you. As a result, you must begin asking God to persuade you that your false beliefs and feelings don't determine your identity.

In the beginning, you are going to have to consciously choose to believe God and His truth about your new identity even when you are getting messages to the contrary from your old wounded fleshly feelings, others around you, the culture, and Satan (all of them strong sources and reinforcers of your lying beliefs).

Engaging God: Begin asking God to persuade you that your feelings and your false beliefs do not determine your true identity. Seek God to deal with any wounded feelings attached to your false beliefs because at the beginning such feelings can sometimes “scream louder” than the truth and try to drown it out. Lean heavily on the Lord because the enemy is determined to keep you emotionally shackled to the lies you have believed.

***Your sinful behavior, false beliefs, or negative feelings
do NOT determine your true identity.
What God says is true of you is your TRUE identity.***

Steps Of Faith To Understand and Experience Your True Identity

As you go through this part of the study, please refer to the characteristics of your true identity on page 137-138.

Example #1: Let's assume that you are struggling with believing that some of the characteristics of your true identity are really true. Let's look at some steps of faith that God will use to move you from unbelief to belief.

Step of faith: “Lord, I don't believe that I am worthy. I am asking You to replace the lie with the truth that I am totally worthy in Christ.”

Step of faith: “Lord, I am struggling with believing that I am more than a conqueror because I feel like a failure. I am trusting You to renew and transform my mind so that I will believe that it is true.”

Example #2: Let's assume that your false belief is that you are selfish rather than in Christ you are selfless. As a result of your selfishness you exhibit fleshly behaviors such as trying to be in control or being manipulative. Look at some steps of faith in engaging God to set you free from your selfish behavior.

Step of faith: “I realize that I am controlling and manipulative because of my selfishness. Lord, I am asking You to renew my mind to the truth that I am a selfless person in Christ and to transform my fleshly behavior into Godly behavior.”

Step of faith: “I am really struggling with my willingness to let You move me from being selfish to being selfless. I am asking You to change my will so that I will be willing to let You change me.”

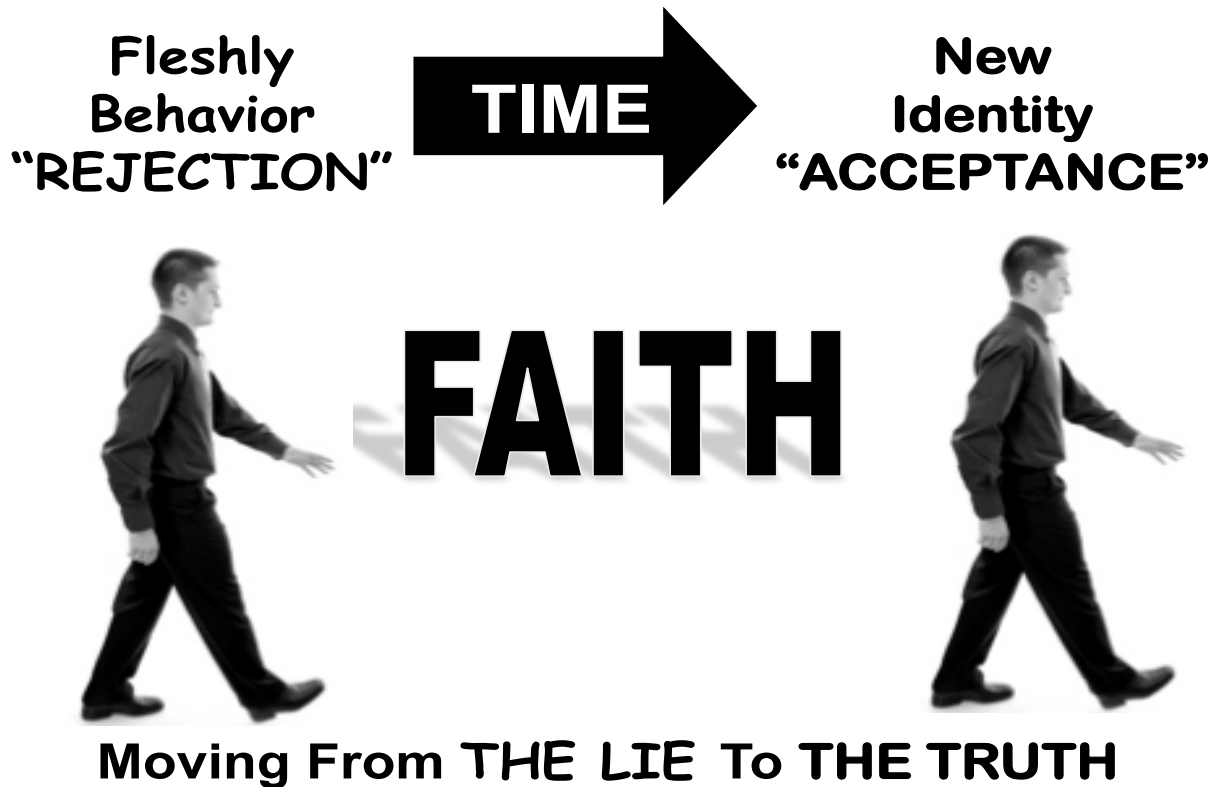
Engaging God: Begin taking steps of faith for God to transform you to believe and live from your true identity. This is a supernatural process that usually happens over time (much more slowly than we would like). If you get discouraged, ask Him to encourage you by revealing the changes He is making in your attitudes and actions and the positive changes that is making in your marriage.

Exercise: Begin right now taking steps of faith by filling in the blanks below concerning the characteristics you struggle with believing. Repeat and persevere with each step to give God time to build your faith, renew your thinking and heal your emotions. He is deepening your relationship with Him, as well as healing your heart and your marriage.

Step of faith: “Lord, I really don’t believe that I am _____. I am asking You to replace my lie with the truth that I am _____ in Christ.”

1. Depending on how entrenched your false beliefs are, it may take some TIME before the Lord renews your mind and brings it to a place where you begin to BELIEVE the truth of your true identity in Christ.
2. I will continually remind you that transformation is a PROCESS. As much as we want to experience our true identity now, it is crucial to continue taking steps of faith in order to experience it.
3. EARLY ON in seeking God to renew your mind to the truth of your true identity, you will DEFAULT to the fleshly behaviors associated with your FALSE beliefs. When you do, confess and repent of your fleshly behavior then continue on.
4. As you begin to walk in your true identity, you will find yourself moving into CHRIST-LIKE behaviors and moving away from FLESHLY behaviors.

The following diagram illustrates the process of moving from a fleshly behavior to a Christ-like characteristic of your true identity. The big unknown is how long it will take you to experience your new identity. So continue “faithing” it until you experience it. You will face opposition but don’t give up. Just keep walking by faith.



Results in Your Marriage of Living From Your True Identity

1. You will see each other as God sees you in your true identity.
2. You will no longer evaluate and judge each other based on your respective fleshly behaviors.
3. You will see past your spouse's fleshly behavior and discern his/her true identity.
4. As the Spirit renews your mind to the truth, your behavior will begin to line up with the truth.
5. As the Spirit transforms you to believe your true identity, you will eventually experience changes in your thinking, feelings, and the choices that you make.
6. Living from your true identity will bring greater harmony and oneness to your marriage.

The Lie Versus The Truth Concerning Your Identity

I want to use "The Line" analogy in a little different way than I have so far. In this "Line" analogy I will illustrate your true identity versus your fleshly behavior. Below "The Line" are the fleshly behaviors that flow from your false beliefs about yourself, and above "The Line" is the truth of your true identity. God's desire is to transform you and your spouse so that you are both living from your true identity in Christ.

Your TRUE Identity Versus Your False Beliefs

| | | | |
|--|--------------------|----------------|-------------------|
| TRUE IDENTITY (The Truth) | Unconditional Love | Righteous | Humble |
| | Secure | Acceptable | Patient |
| | Forgiving | Fearless | Complete |
| | Compassionate | Discerning | Wise |
| | Adequate | Thankful | Confident |
| | Sacrificial | Sufficient | Selfless |
| | Free | Victorious | Strong |
| | Joyful | Peaceful | Good |
| | <hr/> | | |
| False Beliefs (The Lie) | Unworthy | Secure in self | Unacceptable |
| | Self-confident | Rejected | Self-sufficient |
| | A failure | Successful | Anxious |
| | Self-reliant | Inadequate | In control |
| | Weak | Defeated | Competent in self |
| | Insecure | Fearless | Strong in self |

As God TRANSFORMS you and your spouse, He is bringing each of you to live above “The Line” from your true identity in Christ.

Question: How do you think that it might positively impact your marriage if you were both living from your true identities?

Engaging God: Ask God to begin renewing your mind to the above-the-line truths of the characteristics of your true identity.

Summary

One final key truth to remember as you seek Christ concerning your true identity.

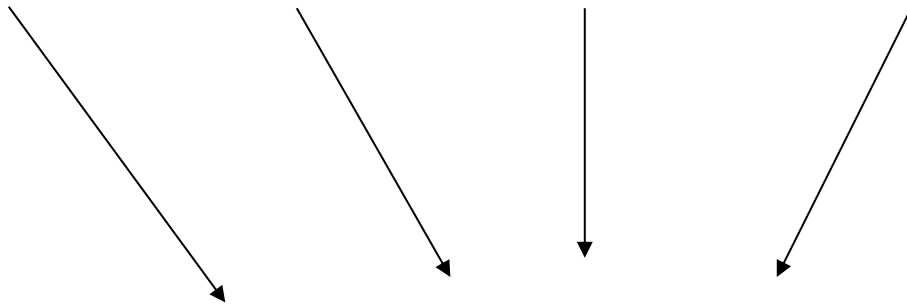
You are not BECOMING a new creation.

Instead, you are DISCOVERING who you already are as a new creation.

NOTE: I have done a complete study on your true identity called *Do You Know Your True Identity?* If you would like to go through that study, it is available on video and in written form on our website: www.christislifeministries.com Once you are on the Home page, click on the Discipleship tab to locate the identity study.]

MESSAGES ABOUT MYSELF THAT I RECEIVED:

| | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| | | | |
|--|--|--|--|



**Have made me feel and think
this way about myself:**

FALSE BELIEFS

I FEEL or BELIEVE I AM:



The fleshly behaviors that result from my lying beliefs:

Let's Compare A Self-Focused Marriage Versus A Christ-Focused Marriage

Now that we have looked at all five obstacles to a Christ-centered marriage I would like to finish this lesson by comparing a self-focused marriage to a Christ-focused marriage.

Self-Focused Marriage (Living From The Flesh)

Self As The Source

Taking God's truth along with your own ability, intellect, and willpower to try to produce a Christ-centered marriage

Performance-Driven Marriage

Dependence upon formulas to follow, tips and techniques, or steps to take to produce a Christ-centered marriage through your own ability.

Self-Transformation w/God's Help

Using God's truth plus God's help for you to be the cause and effect for transformation in your and your spouse.

Conflict Resolution In Self

Using human solutions, methods, formulas, and self-effort to resolve marital conflict.

Unmet Needs Met In Self

Trying to get your God-given needs met from your spouse or others.

Fleshly Rights and Expectations

Justifying your fleshly rights and unrealistic expectations in your marriage.

Fleshly Behavior Determines Identity

Believing that your fleshly behavior determines your identity and your spouse's identity.

Christ-Focused Marriage (Living From Christ)

God As Source

Living from God's truth, ability, and power as the one true Source to produce a Christ-centered marriage John 14:6; 1 Corinthians 1:30

Faith-Dependent Life

Trusting God by faith/dependence for Him to produce a Christ-centered marriage. John 15:5

God As The Cause & Effect of Transformation

Trusting God to be the cause and effect of His transforming work in you and your spouse. Philippians 1:6

Conflict Resolution In Christ

Engaging God's truth and power as the solution to marital conflict. John 8:32; Ephesians 1:19, 20

Unmet Needs Met In Christ

Drawing upon Christ to meet your God-given needs. Philippians 4:19

Rights/Expectations In Christ

Dying to your fleshly rights and unrealistic expectations. 2 Corinthians 4:11

Your True Identity In Christ

Living from who you really are in your true identity in Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:17

A Self-Focused Marriage Results In:

Unmet needs
Coping with each other's flesh
An unchanged marriage
Unresolved marital conflict
Emotional separation and/or divorce

A Christ-Focused Marriage Results In:

A marriage living from Christ as the Source
Living out of your true identity in Christ
Christ-like behavior instead of fleshly behavior
Couple functioning in their God-given roles
Increasing harmony, intimacy, oneness

Lesson Six

Satan's Tactics To Destroy Your Marriage and Experiencing An "In Christ" Marriage

DAY ONE

Introduction

There are two topics I would like to discuss as the study comes to a close. The first one is understanding some of the tactics Satan uses to try to destroy our marriages. Second, I want to talk about what it looks like to have an "in Christ" marriage in the following areas:

- **Conflict resolution IN CHRIST**
- **Being a part of your spouse's transformation IN CHRIST**
- **Praying with your spouse IN CHRIST**
- **Communication – speaking and listening IN CHRIST**
- **Raising Children IN CHRIST**
- **Sexual intimacy IN CHRIST**
- **Circumstances (Finances, health, etc.) IN CHRIST**

[**Note:** When I use the term "Satan" I am also including the demons he employs in his evil work.]

Part One: Satan's Tactics to Destroy Your Marriage

Let's begin with looking at how Satan is strategizing to destroy your marriage. (I will also use the word "enemy" to mean Satan).

Satan Want To Destroy Your Marriage.

*"The thief comes only to **steal** and **kill** and **destroy**..." John 10:10a*

I hope that you have figured it out by now that there is a non-stop battle going on in your personal life as well as in your marriage. We know that one battle is between your flesh and the Spirit as we talked about in Lesson 3. However, there are other forces at work to destroy your marriage as well. Those forces are Satan and his demons.

***Satan and his demonic forces are working NON-STOP to
STEAL, KILL, and DESTROY your marriage.***

Consequently, I feel that it is important for us to understand what their objectives are and what it looks like to engage God to do battle with these forces. Let's begin by looking at Satan's objectives concerning your marriage.

1. Satan's OBJECTIVES In Your Marriage

*"Be careful! Watch out for attacks from the **Devil, your great enemy**. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for some victim to **devour**." 1 Peter 5:8*

I must be honest with you. Early on in my Christian life in my church we did not talk much about Satan. We spent even less time talking about demonic forces. However, in my personal Christian walk and in our marriage, I have come to discover Satan and his demonic forces are very real, and they truly want to derail your marriage. Here are the four main objectives of Satan concerning you and your marriage:

Satan has four objectives concerning you and your spouse



Satan wants to:

- Keep you from being saved;
- Prevent you from knowing and walking in "THE" Life;
- Keep you from experiencing a Christ-centered marriage; and
- Deceive you about how he is working to destroy both your personal Christian walk and your marriage.

2. WHY Are These The Objectives of Satan?

***Satan KNOWS God's truth, and they KNOW what will be the results* in you
and in your marriage if you walk in God's truth.***

****(i.e., Freedom, healing, transformation, Christ-centered marriage)***

Satan's greatest fear is God's truth. He knows only too well how the power of God's truth can set you free, give you victory, heal your woundedness, and transform your life and marriage. That is why Satan and his demonic forces will do everything in their power to keep you and your spouse from knowing, believing, and walking in God's truth.

3. Satan's Tactics To Come Against You and Your Spouse

We saw the overall objectives of Satan above. Now let's look at some specific ways or tactics that they use to steal, kill, and destroy your walk and your marriage.

We saw the overall objectives of Satan above. Now let's look at some specific tactics he uses to steal, kill, and destroy your walk and your marriage.

Satan's Anti-Marriage Tactics

- **Satan works through your FLESH to create short-term or long-term conflict.**

The enemy knows your fleshly tendencies and behaviors very well. He has been fostering them and documenting them since your birth. He knows very well your fleshly weaknesses. Accordingly, Satan will work non-stop in tempting you and/or your spouse to live from the flesh in order to create and perpetuate short and long-term marital conflict. One tactic I see most often is Satan's influencing your spouse's flesh to incite you to respond in the flesh. (We know even if there were no Satan, we could still go to our flesh at any time).

- **Satan persuades you that your SPOUSE is the problem.**

The enemy will continue to try to persuade you that if you could get your spouse "fixed," you would be okay. Therefore, he will tempt you to keep your focus on your spouse as the problem.

- **Satan keeps you both in BONDAGE to your fleshly behaviors.**

It goes without saying that Satan wants to do whatever he can to keep you in bondage or imprisoned to your fleshly behavior. If he can accomplish that, then there is little hope of your experiencing a Christ-centered marriage.

- **Satan keeps you focused on YOURSELVES as the source to try to solve your marital problems.**

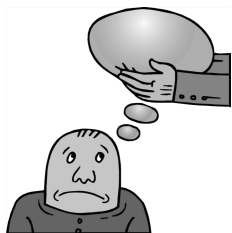
I think ultimately the enemy wants you and your spouse to keep focused on yourselves (i.e., your own intellect, ability, experience, willpower, etc.) in dealing with every area of your marriage. If Satan can do that, you won't seek God to resolve the issues, to transform you, or to set you free.

The enemy will stop at NOTHING to keep you from living from God's truth.

4. Satan Accomplishes These Tactics Through Your Thoughts.

The primary weapon Satan uses to destroy your marriage is to influence your thought life. Here is a key truth concerning the enemy and your thought life:

Satan/demons insert thoughts that are in FIRST person (I, me, myself, etc.) and that sound like you.



The enemy is smart enough not to insert a thought using second person like, "**You** are a failure." Rather, he inserts a thought in first person that says, "**I** am a failure." If you are not aware of this tactic, you may be tempted to take ownership of these thoughts and act upon them.

The following are some types of thoughts that the enemy uses:

1. **Lying thoughts** – Thoughts that reinforce the false beliefs you have about yourself, God, and your marriage such as, “I am a rejected person.” “God is not going to come through for us.” “I need to get out of this marriage.”
2. **Fleshly thoughts** – Any thought that is focused on the flesh such as, “I have the right to reject back.” “I have the right not to forgive or repent.” “It’s not my fault.”
3. **Condemning thoughts** – When you go to the flesh, the enemy will insert such thoughts as, “Look at me. I have failed by going to the flesh again.” “I will never measure up to my expectations of being a godly husband/wife.”
4. **Discouraging thoughts** – Thoughts that discourage you from seeking Christ as your Source such as, “I keep going back to my anger. I will never be set free from it.” “I can’t seem to be consistent in my walk with Christ.”
5. **Tempting thoughts** – Any thought to tempt you to take ownership of your flesh such as, “I don’t need God to solve this problem for us.” “This isn’t working.”

***Satan will use your THOUGHT life to TEMPT, LIE, CONDEMN,
and DISCOURAGE you and your spouse.***

Questions: Do you have recurring lying, discouraging, or condemning thoughts? Is it possible that Satan or his demonic forces could be inserting those thoughts into your mind?

Engaging God: Ask the Lord to reveal where Satan is infiltrating your thought life. Seek Him to give you discernment to recognize these lying thoughts before you take ownership of them and react to them with negative emotions and actions.

5. Satan’s Greatest Tool Is DECEPTION.

*“No wonder, for even Satan **disguises himself** as an angel of light.” 2 Corinthians 11:14*

*“And it was not Adam who was **deceived by Satan**. The woman was **deceived**, and sin was the result.” 1 Timothy 2:14*

This is another key strategy of the enemy. Satan never wants you to discover that he is the source for the tempting, condemning or discouraging thoughts you and your spouse are having. He want you to think YOU are the source for those thoughts. As long as the enemy can deceive you and your spouse, you both will believe and act on the thoughts he inserts into your minds.

Engaging God: Ask the Lord to reveal where Satan is working to deceive you and your spouse. Seek Him to give you discernment to recognize the origin of conflicts and tensions between you and to enable you to reject Satan’s condemning thoughts before you take ownership of them.

6. As A Couple Be SPIRITUALLY VIGILANT.



*“Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.”
1 Peter 5:8*

*“Put on **the full armor of God** so that you will be able **to stand firm** against the schemes of the devil.” Ephesians 6:11*

Another key truth to understand as a Christ-centered couple is:

***Part of the OVERFLOW that results from experiencing a
Christ-centered marriage is that you and your spouse will
experience a greater spiritual VIGILANCE toward Satan/demons.***

The key to restricting Satan’s influence in your marriage is spiritual vigilance. Like 1 Peter 5:8 says, “Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil.” As shepherds scan the horizon for wolves who may attack their sheep, you, too, as a couple need to be vigilant to spot exactly where the enemy is working to destroy your marriage. The best way to do this is to ask the Spirit to reveal to you where the enemy is working, especially in the areas of marital conflict.

Here are some questions you may ask one another when there is conflict:

- Is it possible Satan is working in this conflict?
- Are the thoughts you and I are experiencing coming from Satan?

Step of faith: “Lord, my spouse and I are asking You to expose where the enemy may be working to cause conflict in our marriage. Please intervene on our behalf to defeat the schemes of the enemy.”

7. Engaging The POWER of God To Repel The Enemy

*“that through death **He (Jesus) might render powerless him (Satan)** who had the power of death, that is, the devil.” Hebrews 2:14 (Parentheses mine)*

*“You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because **greater is He (Christ) who is in you than he (Satan) who is in the world.**” 1 John 4:4 (Parenthesis mine)*

*“We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we (through Christ’s power) are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.”
2 Corinthians 10:5 (Parenthesis mine)*

Here is a key truth to remember when doing battle with Satan:

Your intellect, ability, and willpower are NO match for the power of Satan.

The bottom line is that unless you engage God's power to defeat Satan, you will consistently be defeated. This is another reason that God put the fullness of Himself and His power in you. He knows that only in His power will you be able to repel the enemy. Therefore, let's look at an example of what it looks like to engage God's power to repel the enemy.



figure out how to (APART from God) get ourselves out of this mess.”

Example #1: Let's assume that you and your spouse are struggling with finances. Your spiritual desire is to trust God to provide the necessary finances, but after several steps of faith, your financial situation has not changed. Satan enters the picture and insert thoughts such as, “We have given God a week to solve this problem, and He hasn't done anything to solve it. He probably isn't really concerned with our problem, so we better

Remember: When Satan insert thoughts into your mind, they will always come in the form of first person (I, me, myself, etc.) and will sound like your voice.

If you and/or your spouse take ownership of those thoughts, then the enemy's strategy has worked and he has successfully turned you back to yourself (the flesh) and away from God as your source. However, you can choose to engage God in the fight of faith to defeat Satan. Here is an example of what that may look like:

Step of faith: “Lord, we know that the enemy is tempting us to give up on You and Your ability to resolve our financial problems. We are trusting in Your power over this temptation. Continue to remind us that You are in control and that You have a solution to this problem.”

Example #2: You are continually defeated by your anger. When you fall prey to your anger, Satan/demons insert thoughts into your mind such as, “I call myself a Christian spouse, but look at how angry I get at my spouse. I feel so condemned about my anger. I might as well give up on ever having victory over it.”

It is important to know God's truth because of what Romans 8:1 says, “*There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*” Therefore, since God no longer condemns you, you no longer have to condemn yourself by taking ownership of those Satanically-induced condemning thoughts. So, what would the fight of faith look like using this example?

Step of faith: “Lord, the truth according to Romans 8:1 is I do not have to condemn myself. Therefore, I am trusting in Your power to prevail over these condemning thoughts and to persuade me I truly no longer have to take ownership of them.”

Engaging God: Begin asking God to give you discernment concerning the origin of your thoughts. When you feel like you are being tempted by the enemy, ask God in His power to take those thoughts captive and keep you from taking ownership of or giving in to those thoughts.

8. Truths To Remember In The Walk of Faith In Dealing With Satan

1. Satan's greatest strategy is that he is a DECEIVER. When he inserts thoughts into your or your spouse's mind, he wants to deceive you both by making you think those are YOUR thoughts.
2. Early on in your walk of faith, you both will CONTINUE to take ownership of thoughts Satan inserts into your minds because your discernment is NOT that strong.
3. However, as you both continue to walk by faith, your DISCERNMENT will GROW, and you will develop a greater sensitivity as to the origin of those Satanic thoughts and will not take ownership of them

Part Two: Experiencing Your Marriage Through an "In Christ" Lens

Introduction

*"But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear."
Matthew 13:16*

*"My children I labor again with you until Christ (Christ-likeness) is formed in you."
Galatians 4:19*

In Galatians 4:19, Paul is saying that as you walk dependently on Christ, His Christ-likeness will be formed in you. As a result, you will increasingly see yourself, your spouse, and your marriage through what I call an "in Christ" lens. In Part Two, we are going to see what it looks like to live "in Christ" in the following areas of your marriage:

- **Conflict resolution;**
- **Being a part of your spouse's transformation;**
- **Praying with your spouse;**
- **Communication – speaking and listening;**
- **Raising Children;**
- **Sexual intimacy; and**
- **Life circumstances (finances, health, etc.)**

Let's begin by defining an "in Christ" lens.

What Is An "In Christ" Lens?

"... in Christ all will be made alive." 1 Corinthians 15:22

Let me first explain what I mean by a Christ-like lens:

An IN CHRIST “LENS” means that you and your spouse will see every area of your marriage through the EYES of God’s truth.

You have a choice to look at your marriage through the lens of false beliefs and the flesh or through the “lens” of “in Christ (i.e., God’s truth).” Let’s now look at some areas of marriage through an “in Christ” lens:

#1. CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN CHRIST

*“No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide **THE WAY of escape** also, so that you will be able to endure it.” 1 Corinthians 10:13*

The truth is that God has offered us THE WAY of escape from living from the flesh and THE WAY to resolve and reduce conflict. That WAY is Christ. We know this from John 14:6:

*“I am **THE WAY**, the truth, and the life.”*



I wish that I could give you a formula that would prevent any more conflict in your marriage. Conflict will always be a part of our marriages. Why do I say that? It is because our flesh is never going to improve (it can even get worse), and it is never going away. It will be with us until death. However, the good news is that living from Christ will reduce (and in many cases resolve) your marital conflict. Let’s begin by looking at what God will accomplish in the midst of your conflict whether it is momentary or long-term conflict.

a. What Is The DIVINE GOOD Concerning Marital Conflict?

*“And we know that **God causes all things to work together for good** to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” Romans 8:28*

God, in His great sufficiency, will even use your conflict for His divine purposes in you and your spouse. Here are some “divine good” purposes God will reveal to you through your conflict:

1. God will show you the “DEATH” that your flesh is creating in the midst of conflict.

*“What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Don’t they come **from evil desires** at war within you?” James 4:1*

Conflict is a great opportunity for the Lord to expose the “death” that your flesh is causing your marriage. As we studied in Lesson Four, hopefully we will turn away from being in the flesh once we realize the death that it is causing in our marriage.

Engaging God: As we have mentioned before, ask God to expose the death your flesh is causing to your marriage. Seek Him also to reveal how He is using your conflict to bring you to the end of your trying to make your marriage work in the flesh. When you finally reach the truth of, “I can’t,” and give up trying in the flesh to fix your marriage, God can and will heal your marriage as you turn to Him and depend on His power.

2. God will expose your need for Christ as LIFE and your need for the Spirit’s POWER.

a. Your NEED to DEPEND on Christ as THE LIFE.

We saw in Lesson One that God created us for dependence on Him. In our Western culture, the idea of being “dependent” is too often associated with being “needy” or “weak.” Early on in your walk of faith, you will tend to forget your neediness. Remember, if you don’t recognize your need for Christ, you will not experience His life and power.

One of the ways the Lord reminds you of your need for Him is through conflict. Any time you go to the flesh, the resulting misery automatically enhances your need for God. Consequently, when you are in a struggle with your spouse, the Spirit is revealing your need for such things as Christ’s patience, Christ’s discernment, and Christ’s love. God is taking you to the place where you recognize your desperate need for Christ every moment. Jesus really meant it when He said apart from Him we could do nothing (John 15:5).

DAY TWO

b. Your NEED for the Spirit's POWER

God uses conflict to reveal your need for the Spirit's power. Why do you need the Spirit's power in the midst of conflict?

1. To OVERPOWER the flesh

Conflict will expose your need for a power greater than your own willpower to overcome the conflict. Remember, your willpower is no match for your flesh. If you don't engage the Spirit's power, then you will always give in to the flesh.

2. To TRANSFORM your fleshly behavior into Christ-like behavior

Remember, your spiritual destiny is to be transformed into Christ-likeness. Therefore, God will use your conflict not only to move you from your fleshly behavior, but He will also use it to transform your fleshly behavior into Christ-like behavior.

3. To RESIST the temptation to get into conflict

As you log more time walking in the Spirit, you will be less tempted to get into conflict; but, when you do, you will experience the Spirit's power resisting that temptation. As we discussed earlier, you will initially fail many times by giving in to the flesh. But as you grow in Christ, you will incrementally experience the Spirit's power to stop you from getting into conflict in the first place.

***Ultimately, God uses your marital conflict to expose your
NEED to depend on God moment by moment.***

c. As God Knocks Down The Obstacles To A Christ-Centered Marriage, the Conflict Will Be REDUCED.

Let's review the obstacles to a Christ-centered marriage:

1. Living from fleshly behaviors
2. Unmet God-given needs
3. Unmet realistic and unrealistic expectations
4. Fleshly rights
5. Unforgiveness and unrepentance
6. Not knowing your true identity

As you walk more in dependence upon Christ, and He begins removing the obstacles that prevent you from experiencing a Christ-centered marriage, the overflow will be reduced conflict.

What does that look like?

- As you allow the Spirit to transform your and your spouse's fleshly behaviors into **CHRIST-LIKE** behaviors, you will find your conflict lessens.
- As you get your God-given needs met **IN CHRIST**, you will **NO** longer be trying to get your needs met from each other. So, then there is no need to go to the flesh.
- As you begin to **DIE** to your **FLESHLY** rights, your conflict will be reduced.
- As you **MOVE AWAY** from going to your flesh when your unrealistic or realistic expectations are not met, conflict will be reduced.
- As you allow the Spirit to produce in you an attitude of **FORGIVENESS** and **REPENTANCE**, you will move to forgiveness and/or repentance quicker whenever conflict occurs.
- As you begin to see and live from your **TRUE IDENTITY** in Christ, you will no longer evaluate each other by your respective fleshly behaviors. It will be easier to give grace when you know one another's true identities in Christ.

c. Summary

Let me summarize this section with this illustration:



3. Dealing With “Momentary” Conflict

I have observed and personally experienced that most momentary conflict revolves around our wanting to get our OWN way or wanting to be IN CONTROL.

I use the term “momentary” conflict to distinguish it from “long-term” conflict. We will always have momentary conflict. The question is, “How do we deal with it when it flairs up?” Ultimately God is trying to reduce your conflict as we discussed above. However, when we do fall into momentary conflict, here are some key truths we need to know that will put out the fire.

DURING the conflict the Spirit is speaking to you both.



Know that during any marital conflict the Spirit will be speaking truth to you. He will be convicting you that you are in the flesh. He will also be telling you that your flesh is producing death and that your fleshly behavior will never produce resolution to the conflict. The Spirit may ask you these questions if you are reacting in the flesh: “How is this working for you?” “Is winning this fight important enough to your pride to risk damaging your marriage relationship?”

The problem is when our flesh is in control, we have a hard time hearing the Spirit’s voice. But as you grow in your walk with Christ, you will find your “spiritual” hearing will improve even in the midst of your conflict. The key is not only to hear the Spirit but also to choose to respond to what He is telling you. This is even more difficult because in the heat of the battle your flesh is wanting its own way and is in rebellion against the Spirit. However, as you continue to walk in Christ, you will find yourself not only listening to the Spirit but also responding to what He wants you to do. Jesus called this response “obedience” and told us it is our way of showing we love Him.

Jesus replied, “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. John 14:23

AFTER the conflict

When the argument or conflict is over, know that the Spirit is:

- **Convicting you to CONFESS and REPENT of your sinful behavior toward Him.**
- **Convicting you of your NEED to forgive or repent to your spouse.**
- **Wanting you to seek RECONCILIATION.**
- **Wanting you to seek Him to TRANSFORM you so that you won’t enter into the conflict in the first place.**

Here, again, the Spirit is speaking to you and your spouse after the conflict. The question is, “Are you listening?” God wants us to learn from our conflict. He wants to teach and transform us as a result of our conflict. Often it is human pride (the flesh) that keeps us caught up in conflict and unwilling to heed the counsel of the Holy Spirit (the flesh warring against the Spirit).

Where there is strife, there is pride, but wisdom is

found in those who take advice. Proverbs 13:10

After your next conflict, set aside your pride and need to “win.” Ask the Spirit to tell you what He wants you to do then follow His advice. *“Humble yourself under His mighty hand and in due time, He will lift you up.” (James 4:10).*

Question: Is there some momentary conflict going on in your marriage right now where the Spirit may be prompting you to confess, forgive, repent, seek reconciliation, or be transformed? Are you willing to respond to the Spirit in those areas? If not, then why not?

Engaging God: Both of you should, either individually or together, seek God to show you if any of the four things listed above apply to a recent conflict you have experienced. Ask Him to guide you in what you need to do to resolve the conflict and then to give you His power to do what He shows you.

DAY THREE

The Spirit Will Set You Free From Long-Term Conflict.

1. Where Long-Term Conflict Will LEAD You and Your Spouse

Long term conflict is much more difficult to resolve because of the length of time that it has been going on, the entrenchment of your flesh as a result of the conflict, and the depth of your unwillingness to seek the Spirit to resolve the conflict.

In Lesson Two, we discussed where ongoing conflict could lead you and your spouse:

- **Coping** – going along to get along;
- **Self-protection or insulation** from the other spouse's flesh;
- **Emotional separation** while still living together; and
- **Physical separation and divorce.**

Let me give you an analogy of where long-term conflict will lead you and your spouse.

2. Moving TOWARD Or AWAY FROM The Edge Of The Cliff

The analogy I use when I am discipling couples is what I call the “cliff” analogy. As a couple continues in unresolved conflict, they are moving closer and closer to the edge of the cliff. If their conflict remains unresolved, their next step will cause them to fall into the “canyon” of emotional or physical separation or divorce. (It may take 10, 20, or 30 years to get there, but at some point they will walk off the edge of the cliff.)

If you find yourselves as a couple moving to the edge of the cliff or you find yourselves standing on the edge, know that what the Spirit wants is for both of you to start backing away from the edge of the cliff one step at a time.

Backing away from the cliff's edge begins with your knowing the truth concerning your problem. The second step backwards is to begin engaging God: (1) to renew your minds to the truth, and (2) to set you and your spouse free from your false beliefs and fleshly behaviors. As you and your spouse continue to walk in dependence on God, the two of you will move further and further away from the edge of the cliff.

The choice is very clear: (1) either continue to live from the flesh and move toward the edge of the cliff of separation and divorce or (2) choose to allow Christ to renew your minds to the truth and move you away from the cliff and toward greater intimacy, harmony, and oneness in the marriage.

***The key to moving back from the edge of the cliff is to first KNOW the truth
and secondly, to ENGAGE the Spirit to make His truths an
EXPERIENTIAL reality in your marriage.***

3. Key Truths In Engaging God To Set You Free From Long-Term Conflict

- Ask the Spirit to show you the “DEATH” your conflict is creating in your marriage.
- Ask the Spirit to REVEAL the lies, false beliefs, and/or fleshly behaviors that are causing the conflict.
- Use the truths you have learned in this study that apply to your conflict, asking the Lord to RENEW your mind to believe the truth which will set you FREE.
- If you are UNWILLING to allow the Spirit to work in your life, ask Him to give you that WILLINGNESS.

Depending on the depth and length of time you have been in conflict about a certain issue or situation, it may take some time before you see any change in your attitudes toward the conflict. Nonetheless, continue to pursue God until that change takes place. Don’t give up!

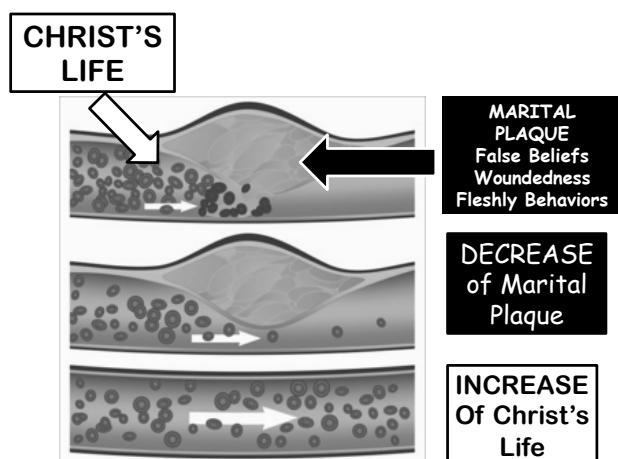
Engaging God: Ask the Lord if your marriage is moving toward the edge of the cliff. If He says that it is, begin seeking the Lord to apply the truths you have been learning to your understanding and make you willing to act on what you have learned so He can move you further and further away from the edge of the cliff.

Note About Counseling: If you feel you are moving toward the edge of the cliff, then you may need counseling. If so, my advice is for you to look for a Christ-centered counselor because not all “Christian” counselors are Christ-centered. By Christ-centered I mean a counselor who is going to point you back to Christ for the solution rather than giving you tips and techniques for you and your spouse to attempt to apply to resolve your conflict in your own strength (which we know won’t work).

[Note: If your marriage is on the edge of the cliff enough so that one or both of you are contemplating divorce, then think about this for a moment. You will be taking your false beliefs and your fleshly behaviors into the next marriage(s). Please seek Christ-centered counseling to move you away from the edge of the cliff.]

#2. BEING A PART OF YOUR SPOUSE’S TRANSFORMATION IN CHRIST

You have a vital part to play in your spouse’s transformation. Let’s see what that looks like in your marriage:



a. Simply ABIDING In Christ Can Draw Your Spouse To Christ.

*“But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and **manifests through us the fragrant aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place.**” 2 Corinthians 2:14*

The more that you abide in Christ, the more of His life flows through you. Let's use plaque build-up in an artery as an example. Assume that the marital "plaque" build-up in your "spiritual" arteries are the false beliefs, woundedness, fleshly behaviors, etc. that you bring in to your marriage. Early on this "marital" plaque restricts the flow of Christ's life in you AND through you.

However, as you learn the truth, choose to depend on Christ, and continue to allow Christ to live THE LIFE in you, there will be a decrease of marital plaque and an increase in the flow of Christ's life in and through you. Not only will you experience more of Christ's life flowing in you, but there is more of His life (love, acceptance, selflessness, joy, etc.) flowing through you to your spouse.

This life flowing through you is the "fragrant aroma" referred to in 2 Corinthians 2:14. As you are being transformed, you will put off a fragrant aroma of Christ's life flowing through you.

CONCLUSION:

As you continue to ABIDE in Christ as THE LIFE, more of Christ's love, peace, forgiveness, acceptance, etc. will flow THROUGH you to TRANSFORM your and your spouse's lives.

Question: If the LIFE and POWER of Christ is flowing through you as you abide in Him, do you necessarily have to say anything to your spouse for him/her to experience the aroma of Christ?

Answer: If you are abiding in Christ, whether you say anything or not, His life and power is flowing through you to draw your spouse to Christ. That process is supernatural.

Engaging God: Ask the Lord to give you a willingness to be more intentional in your abiding in Christ so that the fragrance of His life will flow through you.

b. You Can Be Part Of Your Spouse's Transformation When He/She Is UNWILLING To Live From Christ As The Source.

Many times I am asked this question: "How can we have a Christ-centered marriage if my spouse is not walking dependently upon Christ?" The short answer is that you can't. However, the Lord can and will use you as part of the solution in bringing your spouse to Christ in order to experience a Christ-centered marriage. What are some ways that He will do that?

1. Through your transformation the Spirit will show your spouse the "DEATH" of his/her flesh.

Let's assume that you are willing to live dependently upon Christ, but your spouse is not. The more that you are living in Christ, the less you go to the flesh. As your desire to walk in the flesh decreases and you walk more in the life of Christ, this will result in exposing your spouse's flesh. Let me give you an example to explain.

Let's assume you and your spouse have a problem with rejecting each other. As you allow Christ to live His life in you, He will replace your fleshly behavior of rejection with His unconditional acceptance. He will also be persuading you that in your true identity you are an accepting person.

As Christ replaces your rejection with His acceptance, you will be rejecting your spouse less. As you do, your growing acceptance of your spouse will expose the “death” of his/her continued rejection of you. As you walk in the Spirit (but your spouse isn’t), know with confidence that the Holy Spirit is convicting him/her of the death of his/her flesh.

Continue living from Christ as your Source, and He will work THROUGH you to expose the “DEATH” of your spouse’s flesh.

Question: What are some areas of your flesh that are creating ongoing conflict? Are you willing to ask Christ to transform you in those areas even though your spouse may be unwilling to seek Christ?

2. DRAW upon your spouse to see their NEED to seek Christ.

As you grow into Christ-likeness but your spouse doesn’t, the Spirit will use your transformation to supernaturally reveal to your spouse what transformation looks like which will, hopefully, create a need in your spouse to seek Christ as life. The more you grow in Christ, the more your life will be a “magnet” to draw your spouse to experience the same transformation you are experiencing.

Engaging God: Ask the Lord to reveal your spouse’s need for Christ through you in order to draw your spouse to Himself.

3. Help bring your spouse to BROKENNESS.

“For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death (BROKENNESS) for Jesus’ sake, so that THE LIFE of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.”

2 Corinthians 4:11 (Emphasis mine)

If your spouse is unwilling to seek Christ, the Lord can work through you in a number of ways to help “break” your spouse. You may struggle with the word “brokenness” because we tend to associate that word with pain or suffering, but it is a word that we should all embrace. Why should we embrace brokenness?

BROKENNESS

is the Spirit’s process of turning us AWAY from our flesh and turning us BACK to Christ as our Source.

You see brokenness occurs any time we break free from living in the flesh and turn to Christ as life. We see that in 2 Corinthians 4:11, above. Brokenness may include pain and suffering, but pain and suffering are not the only way. Any time you move from the death of your flesh to life in Christ, that is brokenness. You can be broken by simply reading scripture and the Spirit’s moving you from believing a lie to believing the truth.

Here are some ways that you can be used of the Lord for “brokenness” in your spouse:

- a. Your **walk in Christ** can be used by the Spirit to bring your spouse to brokenness. As we talked about previously, if you walk in Christ and allow Christ’s life to flow through you, that can be used by the Spirit to “break” your spouse by turning him/her away from his/her flesh.
- b. You can **pray** for brokenness for your spouse. This may sound a little harsh, but intercessory prayer in love is vital to one another’s growth (I will talk more about that later in this lesson). Accordingly, to pray for your spouse’s brokenness with an attitude of love can be used by the Lord to produce brokenness in your spouse.

Engaging God: If your spouse continues to be resistant to the Holy Spirit, pray (in love) that the Spirit would break down his/her resistance.

#3. PRAYER IN CHRIST

Prayer is an invaluable tool to help transform your marriage. God may release great power when a couple comes before God together in prayer. Therefore, I want to share some reasons why prayer is crucial to experiencing a Christ-centered marriage.

1. Praying TOGETHER

“Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” Hebrews 4:16

For some couples praying together is easy. For others it may be difficult. But as you both grow in Christ, the Spirit will increase the desire in each of you to pray with one another. This may be difficult for a spouse that is uncomfortable praying out loud. That is okay. It is no problem if only one spouse is doing the praying. The point is you are seeking God together.

However, if you are the spouse who struggles with praying out loud, ask the Spirit to give you the words to pray and the courage to pray out loud. As you continue to do that, I know that the Lord will give you the willingness and the courage to pray.

Praying together as a couple is a **STRONG** sign that your marriage is moving toward a **GREATER** intimacy, harmony, and oneness.

Engaging God: If you struggle with praying with your spouse, ask the Spirit to give you a greater willingness to do so. If you both struggle with praying with one another, ask the Lord to give you both the willingness to do so.

2. INTERCESSORY Prayer For Your Spouse

“Bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.” Galatians 6:2

Another part of the overflow of Christ living in each spouse is an increasing desire to pray for one another.

I believe that there is NO greater act of SELFLESSNESS or LOVE in marriage than to pray for your spouse.

To intercede on his/her behalf is a wonderful sign of your love for your spouse. For example, I pray for my wife's struggles, transformation, greater revelation of God's truth, and a greater thirst to follow Christ (among other things). While some things to pray for your spouse may be obvious, I would also ask the Spirit to show you how you can pray for your spouse. The Spirit will show you what your spouse needs prayer for.

Question: What is one thing that you can begin praying for your spouse? Are you willing to do that?

Engaging God: If you struggle with praying for your spouse, ask the Spirit to move you to a place where you are willing to pray for him/her.

DAY FOUR

#4. COMMUNICATION IN CHRIST

A. Key Truths Concerning Overall COMMUNICATION

1. LIFE Versus DEATH Communication

“Let no unwholesome (fleshly) word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.” Ephesians 4:29 (Parenthesis mine)

*“The mind set on the flesh is DEATH, but the mind set on the Spirit is LIFE and PEACE.”
Romans 8:6*

You have two ways that you will communicate:

You will communicate either LIFE or DEATH!

Communication “in Christ” means that you will, like it says in Ephesians 4:29, not be speaking words of flesh, but you will be speaking words that edify (build-up) and words that will give grace.

If you live in the flesh, the overflow to your spouse will be “death” or misery. The opposite is true for communicating with your spouse in Christ. If you are living dependently on Christ, you will speak words of life and grace from the Spirit. Early on you may be speaking more death than life, but as you grow in Christ, you will increasingly be speaking words that will build up your spouse and draw him/her to Christ.

Engaging God: Ask the Lord to reveal to you when you speak words of “death” rather than life. Seek Him to transform you so you will increasingly be speaking words of “life” to your spouse. As you grow in dependency on the Lord and allow His life to flow through you in words and actions, you will be imparting His Life to others, especially to your spouse.

2. WALLS can be created by “fleshly” communication.

If a couple does not learn how to communicate “in Christ,” then through ongoing fleshly communication a “wall” can begin to be built up between them.

***Walls that result from fleshly communication will EVENTUALLY create a
greater separation between you and your spouse.***

Engaging God: Ask the Spirit to expose any walls that are being built between you through the way you and your spouse communicate with one another.

3. If you are more a TALKER than a LISTENER, ask the Lord to teach you to listen more and vice versa.

When it comes to communication, we tend to categorize spouses into primarily two categories: talkers or listeners. While this is not necessarily a bad thing, I believe those who do most of the talking need to develop a listening ear, and the listeners need to develop more of a desire to talk. So, whether you are a talker or a listener, ask the Spirit to give you a greater desire to develop the opposite attribute.

In our marriage, I am a talker and Paige is a listener. Over the course of the years, the Spirit has persuaded me I need to listen more because Paige has many valuable things to say. She was content to be quiet and listen. Early on it was hard for me to listen without talking, but the result of my learning to listen has encouraged Paige to speak more. The spiritual benefit for me is that the Lord has encouraged, edified, and spurred me on in my walk in Christ through her words.

Engaging God: Ask God to give you the willingness to talk less and to listen more or to listen less and to talk more. The Lord can and will use your spouse, who is walking in the Spirit, to speak His truth to you.

4. More HONEST and TRANSPARENT communication

Another part of the “overflow” of God’s transformation is you will communicate with each other more honestly. In the past, you have been tempted to hide things from your spouse, but now you are more willing to be honest and transparent in what you share. One of the reasons you will be willing to be more honest and transparent is the Lord has transformed your spouse to a point that you trust your spouse not to reject you.

[**Note:** If your spouse struggles with being honest and transparent but then he/she begins opening up, it is key to be sensitive and affirming to him/her to encourage more transparent communication. As a couple grows in walking in the Spirit, more open communication will result.]

Engaging God: If you find yourself wanting to be more honest and transparent in your communication, but you struggle with this, ask the Lord to give you a willingness to be more honest and transparent. Seek the Lord to speak His truth through you to your spouse with both honesty and compassion.

5. More SPIRITUAL conversation

As a couple, if you have not yet found yourself talking about spiritual things, expect more of your conversation to be centered on Christ, as the Spirit transforms your hearts. You will find yourselves sharing more about the truth you are learning and what the Spirit is revealing to you. What will be the result of having more spiritual conversations?

***The results of more spiritual conversations will be an ACCELERATION of
your marriage becoming Christ-centered.***

Spiritual conversation, more than anything else in our marriage, has brought Paige and me into a deeper oneness with each other. There is nothing more satisfying than a husband’s and wife’s

sharing God's truth with one another and encouraging each other in the application of His truth to their lives.

Engaging God: Continue to ask the Lord to give you a greater desire to share spiritual truth with your spouse. Seek Him to improve your sensitivity to the Spirit's prompting when He shows you the best time to introduce spiritual topics. Ask Him to go ahead of you to prepare your spouse's heart and make it receptive.

4. You Will Become A SAFE Spouse.

What do I mean by "safe?" I define "safe" as a spouse who is transformed to the point where the other spouse is willing to freely share his/her struggles, heartaches, and innermost thoughts knowing the safe spouse will be listening with a discerning ear and responding with Christ's lovingkindness. When you become a "safe spouse" then your spouse will share with you because he/she can trust that when you speak, you will not condemn or react in the flesh. Instead, your responses will be loving, caring, compassionate, and encouraging. I hope one of your greatest desires in your marriage is to become a safe spouse.

Engaging God: Ask the Spirit to make you a "safe" spouse so your spouse will feel secure about sharing whatever he/she needs to with you..

B. Key Truths Concerning SPEAKING To Your Spouse

*"My dear brothers, take note of this: **Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.**" James 1:19*

When I disciple couples with marital problems, I have found that communication is always a source of conflict. The words we say, the attitude with which we say them, and the tone in which we communicate, will either move us toward a deeper oneness or toward conflict. It all starts with "words."

1. WORDS

*"Let **no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification** according to the need of the moment, so that **it will give grace to those who hear.**" Ephesians 4:29*

*"**Retain the standard of sound words** which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus." 2 Timothy 1:13*

What we said earlier about communication also applies the same way to the words that we use. We can speak words to enhance, uplift, and edify, or we can speak words to tear down, humiliate, or reject. Let's look at some words that bring life to your marriage.

a. Encouragement

Look for ways that you can encourage your spouse. Encouraging words are the most uplifting words that we can share, especially when our spouses are struggling or feel like they have been failing in some area of their life.

b. Affirmation

Words of affirmation are crucial to developing harmony and oneness in marriage. Use words such as “I so appreciate you,” “I love the way God made you,” or “You are special.” We all need affirmation, and using it will draw both of you into a deeper desire for one another.

c. Love

You can’t say, “I love you” too much. A spouse will never tire of hearing that you love him/her. In addition, anything you have to say to your spouse, say it with an attitude of Christ’s love.

d. Grace

We talked about “giving grace” in a previous lesson. This occurs when you speak words of grace. Words of grace are any loving, affirming, or encouraging words that are spoken when your wife or husband does not meet your expectations or has failed you in some way.

The Lord recently told me to remind my wife that she is a “masterpiece.” As He leads me, I tell her that, and I always enjoy the look on her face when she hears me say it to her.

Engaging God: Ask God to reveal to you what words to say to your spouse to express your love, encouragement, or praise.

2. TONE

Think about the tone in which you say what you say. Tone determines whether what you are saying is said in love or in the flesh. But you still may say something in the Spirit that has the wrong tone. Accordingly, check yourself out or ask your spouse if you are speaking with any tones that may be received by him/her in the wrong way.

Engaging God: Ask God to reveal to you any tone that is not edifying or loving and to transform the tone of your speech to match your words and intent.

3. SPEAKING about or REMINDING your spouse of God’s Truth

*“Instead, **speaking the truth in love**, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.” Ephesians 4:15*

When your spouse is hurting in some way (not caused by you), the Lord may lead you to speak or to remind your spouse of God’s truth that pertains to his/her struggle. The key is to speak the truth in love. Here again, it must be the Spirit’s prompting and leading you. If we speak God’s truth without the Spirit’s leading, it usually is out of self-righteousness and will most likely not be received well by your spouse.

4. Speaking Words of WISDOM and DISCERNMENT THAT The Spirit Reveals To You

As you are listening to your spouse, you may get words of discernment or wisdom from the Spirit that will benefit your spouse. Or the Spirit may give you an answer to something you both have been praying about.

***In whatever you SAY to minister to your spouse, be certain
that you are being LED by the Spirit to do so.***

Engaging God: Ask the Spirit to reveal to you His wisdom and discernment that you will need in order to know what the right words are to say to your spouse and when to speak them.

5. Key Truths Concerning LISTENING To Your Spouse

a. Listening With Christ's Discernment to UNDERSTAND Your Spouse's Struggle (or what is behind his/her struggle)

Listening is a very important part of ministering to your spouse. However, it takes more than just listening. It is listening with Christ's discernment that is the key. Remember you have access to all of Christ's discernment within you. When you are listening with Christ's discernment, you are asking the Lord to give you insight into what your spouse is saying, or into what is behind what he/she is saying, while your spouse is still talking, Spiritual discernment allows you to hear the Spirit telling you what may be the real source of your spouse's problem.

For example, let's assume your spouse is telling you his/her problem about struggling with a co-worker. As they are talking, ask the Spirit if He has a response through you for your spouse concerning this situation.

Engaging God: As you listen to your spouse, especially when he/she is struggling, ask the Lord to BE your discernment and to give you the words to say.

b. Listening With Discernment About When TO Speak and When NOT to Speak

I believe the major key to listening is determining whether or not to respond to your spouse when he/she is finished talking. Sometimes your spouse just needs to verbalize his/her struggles without a response from you. The key is to have God's discernment about whether you need to respond verbally. Sometimes your spouse may just need a hug rather than words.

Generally speaking, a husband is wired to try to fix his wife's problems. It is part of his makeup. But many times the wife only wants to verbalize the problem and be validated by her husband; she is not looking for a specific solution. Because this can be confusing for a husband, it is very important for him to listen to the Holy Spirit and discern whether He wants the husband to speak or just listen to his wife. But he is not aware of it. The wife reacts in the flesh and confronts him about his controlling. Even though she did it in the flesh, the Spirit may use what she said to convict him that he was controlling. The Holy Spirit will still convict the wife who is in the flesh to confess and repent, but He might say to the husband something such as, "Even though your wife confronted you in the flesh, the truth is that you are controlling."

Therefore, be attentive to what the Spirit is saying in addition to what your spouse is saying.

Engaging God: Ask the Spirit to give you a greater willingness to listen to your spouse through Christ's wisdom and discernment, even when your spouse is acting out of the flesh.

#5. PARENTING IN CHRIST

A. STEWARDS Not OWNERS

I want to start with sharing this key truth:

***You are the STEWARDS and not the OWNERS of your kids.
They BELONG to God, and He wants
to raise your kids THROUGH you.***

God has put your kids in your hands for you to be “stewards” and not owners. Even though your kids belong to God, He is entrusting them to your spiritual care. Spiritual care means that as you become more Christ-like, He will work through you to show them what walking in Christ-likeness looks like. That being said, let’s look at some key truths about how God wants to accomplish this.

B. Highest Priority: MODEL “Christ-Likeness” to Your Kids.

As you are being transformed into Christ-likeness, the overflow from that is your kids will see firsthand what Christ-likeness looks like. If you love each other with Christ’s unconditional love, your kids will observe what unconditional love looks like in a marriage relationship. If they are observing you both being selfless, they will learn what selflessness looks like.

Engaging God: Ask God to give you the willingness to follow Christ so your kids will learn what living dependently on Christ produces. Seek Him to show you what security your kids will experience in a Christ-centered marriage versus a household in conflict.

C. Meeting Your Kids’ GOD-GIVEN Needs Through Christ

Just like you and your spouse have God-given needs, your kids have them as well. So, as both of you depend on Christ to meet your God-given needs, the overflow of your experiencing Christ-likeness includes His being able to meet your kid’s God-given needs (for unconditional love, acceptance, security, value/worth, and respect) through you.

D. TEACHING Your Kids the Christ-Life Truths You Are Learning

As you grow in the Christ-life truths that you are learning, begin sharing them with your kids. The truth about living from Christ as the Source is the second greatest gift you can give your kids, following their salvation experience. However, you don’t have to wait until they are saved to start sharing God’s truth. Begin affirming who they are in their true identity even though they are not saved. It is crucial you model and teach your kids the truth because there is someone else (i.e., Satan) who has a very destructive agenda for your kids.

Engaging God: Ask the Lord to show you how to incorporate teaching your kids about living THE Life in their everyday routines.

E. SATAN And Your Kids

I don't want to alarm you, but I believe it is critical you understand that Satan doesn't want your kids to learn, or even hear about Christ-life truths. Author David Seamands once wrote, "Children are the best recorders but the worst interpreters." In other words, they are recording what you are saying and doing, but they can't process or interpret it. Satan is more than happy to "help" your kids by misinterpreting events for them to their detriment.

As an example, I once disciplined a man who enjoyed engaging in conflict with his wife. I asked him why he did that, and he answered, "That is what my parents did, so I thought being in conflict was normal." I don't know exactly what the enemy did in his case, but I can certainly imagine Satan inserting thoughts into his child mind to convince him conflict was normal for a marriage relationship.

Accordingly, it is crucial for both spouses to teach their kids the truth about Christ as their Source, living dependently on Him and who they are in their true identity in order to offset the lying thoughts the enemy is using to "help" them negatively interpret what they are recording.

Engaging God: As a couple, continuously ask the Holy Spirit's protection for your kids against Satan and the demonic forces.

F. Engaging God When It Comes To Making DECISIONS About Your Kids

1. In Raising Your Kids

Raising children is a constant decision-making process. This can create tension between a couple when they don't agree on a course of action. The key truth to remember is God knows the best decision and choice for every area of your child's life. He knows both the makeup of your child's heart and also any fleshly behaviors that your child is developing. Therefore, it is crucial that, as a couple, you seek Christ to be your wisdom and discernment on how to raise your kids.

The real struggle comes when, as parents, you depend solely on your own intellect and experience, or worldly advice from others (including books, TV, friends or social media) to help make your decisions. When this occurs, there can be disagreement between spouses and eventually conflict in the decisions you make. God can certainly work through all these sources, but rather than trying to make decisions independently of Christ, seek Him to be your wisdom, discernment, and guidance in each decision.

Step of faith: "Lord, we are asking for You to be our wisdom and discernment concerning _____ . Give us ears to hear Your voice and act on (obey) your counsel."

Key Point #1: The key component in knowing God's will is a growing sensitivity to the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is always talking to us. The problem is not the Spirit's speaking; rather, it is our "spiritual" hearing. In my experience, as you grow in your dependence on God, you will find your spiritual hearing gets better.

Another key point to remember is God will give you answers through your mind, other people, books, etc. It is important to subject all of these to the Lord for Him to use or not use any of these things to convey His will. Be alert and quick to determine whether any advice you are receiving contradicts scripture or God's character.

Key Point #2: You may ask God for an answer, but He may not necessarily give you one. In my experience, He does that to see if we are depending upon Him as we make that decision. Here is an example of what that might look like:

Step of faith: “Lord, we have not heard from You concerning this decision. We believe that this decision is the one that we should make. However, we are depending upon You to tell us otherwise.”

2. About DISCIPLINING Your Kids

Discipline decisions are arrived at primarily based on how a husband or wife was disciplined when he/she was a child. This can create conflict if one spouse wants to discipline more or less than the other spouse. The mediator in all your decisions should be the Holy Spirit. Therefore, come together in prayer and ask God how He wants you to discipline.

[**Note:** God can certainly use books, videos, etc. about discipline, but the final authority should be the Holy Spirit.]

Step of faith: “Lord, my spouse and I disagree on how to discipline our children. We are asking you to reveal to us Your will in how we should do that.”

While one spouse may be unwilling to discipline, the Bible is very clear that discipline is an essential part of child development. If you are facing this situation, either individually or as a couple, seek God to persuade you that discipline is part of His plan and what type of discipline is appropriate for each of your children at the time they need it.

Step of faith: “Lord, we are asking You to persuade us that even though we don’t like the idea of discipline that it is part of Your plan. Move us from unwillingness to willingness to discipline.”

Engaging God: If you and your spouse disagree on how to discipline your kids, ask the Lord together until you are of one mind about how to discipline.

3. There may arise a need for CHRIST-CENTERED counseling for your kids.

I have disciplined many couples who have very troubled kids that they as parents couldn’t seem to handle. If that is the situation with any of your children, seek the Spirit’s leading whether or not He wants you to take them to counseling. If so, be sure the counselor is Christ-centered.

4. Your Spiritual INVESTMENT In Your Kids Will Pay ETERNAL DIVIDENDS.

There is no greater selfless motivation in living from Christ as your source than being able to pour these truths into your kids. Can you imagine what your life would be like if your parents had modeled and taught you these truths? How would it make you feel if your kids could learn these truths you are learning? Now imagine how much heartache you have experienced that you can save your kids from by making “spiritual” deposits or investments into their lives.

***If you ALLOW God to raise your kids through you, then
He will FOREVER change their DESTINIES.***

#6. SEXUAL INTIMACY IN CHRIST

*“God saw ALL that He had made, and behold, it was **very good**.” Genesis 1:31*

a. Why We Struggle Connecting SEX With CHRIST

Is it a struggle for you to say these words, “sexual intimacy in Christ?” Why? Is it possibly because you see sex as only a physical act and not necessarily as a spiritual one? Or is it because you have in some way bought into the world’s (Satan’s) lies and/or distortions about sexual intimacy. FYI – **God created sex!** He designed it not only for procreation, but more importantly He wants you and your spouse to have wonderful, marvelous pleasure in it. Think about this! God is very pleased when you both have a wonderful sexual experience. Is that hard to believe?

How can I say this? Look at the above scripture in Genesis 1:31. If all that God created is “very good,” is it possible this includes a husband and wife experiencing sexual pleasure? However, don't we have a difficult time connecting such words as “intercourse” and “orgasms” with God and His desires for our lives? You may struggle with these concepts. They may even offend some of you because I believe that we, as Christians, struggle with connecting sex and God.

To make my point, take a few moments and read through Chapter 7 of The Song of Solomon (husbands, you may even consider reading this chapter to your wives). I hope this chapter (along with the rest of The Song of Solomon) will convince you God wants you as husband or wife to have a wonderful, sensual, sexual experience.

In his book called “Sacred Marriage,” Gary Thomas says, “Believe it or not, we glorify God by cultivating a sexual desire for our husbands and welcoming their sexual desire for us.”

b. Physical AND Spiritual Experience

God’s design is not just for sexual intimacy to bring physical pleasure, but, also, to bring greater spiritual oneness to the marriage. This is a question I often ask couples concerning sexual intimacy: “Do you look at sexual intimacy as being a spiritual experience as much as you do a physical or emotional experience?” For the most part, couples don’t understand what it means that engaging in sex is also a spiritual experience.

1. Can God TRANSFORM your marriage in the area of sexual intimacy?

If God is the God of transformation, could that possibly include your sexual relationship, as well? I have no doubt that one of the results of God’s transforming your life will be a more fulfilling sexual relationship.

2. Fulfilling your spouse as your HIGHEST priority

What separates sex from being a strictly physical experience versus being a spiritual one is that in a physical experience, each spouse’s focus is primarily on self-satisfaction. In contrast, when intimacy is a spiritual experience, the desire of each spouse is, first and foremost, for the other spouse to have a full and satisfying experience.

3. Having a SPIRITUAL attraction for your spouse includes seeing past just the physical to knowing his/her heart

I trust one of the things that led you to marry was your finding your spouse to be physically attractive. Early on that attraction certainly was part of your desire to be with your spouse sexually. But if that attraction was the only basis for intimacy, at some point it would fall short because as we age our physical attractiveness tends to fade. However, what if you looked beyond the physical and saw your spouse in his/her true identity in Christ?

Remember, in Lesson Five, one of the ways the Bible describes your true identity in Christ is your having a new heart. Even when you find your spouse to still be physically attractive to you, God's desire is for you to look beyond just the physical and see the "heart" God has given your spouse. If you could see your spouse as the "masterpiece" (Ephesians 2:10) he/she is, then it won't make any difference whether your spouse is 20 or 60 years old, your focus will be on his/her heart.

I certainly find this to be true in our marriage since Paige and I are no longer "spring chickens." As we have focused on each other's hearts, our attraction to one another is now much more spiritual than physical. Good news: even though the physical may get less attractive, the spiritual attraction, including the sexual experience, only gets better and better.

Step of Faith: "Lord, we want our sexual intimacy to be a spiritual experience as much as it is a physical one. Therefore, we are depending on You to make it truly a spiritual experience."

(If you seek Him in this area, I promise that He will take your sexual intimacy to a whole new level.)

Engaging God: For men, sexual intimacy tends to be more of a physical experience than for women. For women it is as much an emotional experience as a physical experience. Therefore, ask Christ to move both of you to a place where intimacy is more of a spiritual experience than a physical or an emotional one.

c. Sexual intimacy and PRAYER – Inviting Christ into your intimate moments

"Christ IN you, the hope of glory." Colossians 1:27

Remember from Lesson Two, that the two of you have Christ living in you. So, where is He when you are having sexual intimacy? You may not have thought about this before, but He is with you both during your sexual relations. Since this is true, why don't you consciously invite Him in to those intimate moments.

How do we do that? One way is to pray before having intimacy. You may have never thought about that before. A simple prayer may look something like: "Lord, we are inviting You in to these intimate moments. We are asking You to give us an enjoyment of each other as You intended." Another prayer could be a prayer of thanksgiving after intimate relations. "Lord, thank You for allowing us to experience such pleasure together."

Why do you think it is important to pray these prayers? It is because the more you bring God into your bedroom, the more you will see this as both a spiritual experience as well as a sexual one. You see, a married couple who are non-Christians can only have a physical and/or emotional experience. They cannot have a sexual-spiritual experience. However, Christians having a sexual intimacy in Christ can have a wonderful spiritual experience, as well as a physical one.

In light of what I just shared,

***It is likely that if you INVITE Christ in to your intimate moments,
He will give you a GREATER pleasure during intimacy than if you hadn't?***

I don't have any biblical proof for the statement above (except for the passionate images in Song of Solomon), but let me just tell you from experience, I know this is true!

d. Sexual Intimacy, SATAN, and CONFLICT

“Be angry, but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger.” Ephesians 4:26

If you need a reason to resolve conflict, then why not do it to have a better sex life in your marriage. Don't you think your odds of sexual intimacy increase if you are not in conflict with your spouse? Remember, the enemy will use anything he can to destroy your marriage. One of the enemy's strategies includes using your flesh to create conflict to drive a wedge between you and your spouse sexually. When this happens, you are setting each other up for a possible affair. There is danger in delaying resolution of conflict that interrupts sexual intimacy in your marriage. Engage the Spirit of God to resolve it so there is no avenue for the enemy to impede or restrict your sex life.

e. Are You a “Giver” or a “TAKER” When It Comes to Intimacy?

Another reason for you to continue growing spiritually is God will move you from being a “taker” to becoming a “giver” when it comes to your sexual relationship. If you are a “taker,” then intimacy will be about getting your own physical needs met. But if you allow God to transform you into being a “giver,” then your primary focus will be on your spouse getting his/her physical needs met and both spouses' satisfaction levels will increase.

***How do you think that it might IMPROVE your sexual experience if
both of you were seeking to be GIVERS instead of TAKERS?***

f. Giving grace when your spouse is or is NOT in the MOMENT

We know when it comes to the “moment,” that it may not be the same “moment” for both spouses. Let's assume that your spouse has had an exhausting day. You are experiencing a strong desire for intimacy, but he/she is not. There are two options when you come to this place. Instead of manipulating or demanding sex, you can, in Christ, give grace and not pursue it. On the other hand, the spouse who is not in the moment can ask the Lord to give him/her the willingness to engage. You will find that as you bring the Holy Spirit into play in moments like this that you may be pleasantly surprised at the outcome.

g. Bringing God into sexual STRUGGLES

Another reason to bring God into the area of intimacy is when one or both of you are struggling in this area. What do I mean?

1. Losing an interest in sex

As you get older there is a tendency for one spouse to lose interest in having sex. Is it possible that asking God to “rekindle” the fire is a way of bringing His power to bear in your lack of desire for intimacy?

2. Physical struggles

If one of you is struggling with some physical issue that is temporarily preventing sexual relations, then why not ask God in prayer to resolve this issue. He can do ALL things, can’t He?

3. If you and your spouse are not on the SAME PAGE sexually

We, as couples, may not be on the same page on many issues including our sexual relationship. You may have one spouse who has sexual needs that need to be satisfied on a more frequent basis than the other spouse. If those needs are not met, it can create potential problems in the relationship. So, whether you have a greater or lesser need for sexual fulfillment ask the Spirit to give you a willingness for greater or lesser sexual need. Here are some examples of steps of faith that you might take concerning this issue.

Step of faith: “Lord, my spouse has a greater need than I do for sex. I am asking You to give me a willing heart to satisfy that need in my spouse.”

Step of faith: “Lord, my spouse’s need for sex is less than mine. I am asking You to give me a lesser need for sexual intimacy.”

Question: Has the Spirit convinced you in a greater way that sexual intimacy in Christ is as much a spiritual experience as it is a physical one?

Engaging God: Ask the Spirit to give you a willingness to invite Him into your moments of sexual intimacy. If bringing this up with your spouse seems like a challenge, ask God to give you courage to speak, wisdom about the timing, and the right words to say. Pray, also, that He gives your spouse a receptive heart to hear.

Summary

Needless to say there are many books written on this subject, so it is impossible to cover all the issues concerning sexual intimacy in Christ. But I hope this limited overview at least gives you a clearer understanding that God wants to be a part of your sexual experience and He wants, as well, for you to experience maximum pleasure in that experience.

#7. DECISION MAKING IN CHRIST

In every marriage there are many decisions to be made. It is in the decision-making process that a couple learns how much “in Christ” they are living. If one spouse insists on making a decision alone, then he/she is excluding the other spouse from the process. In contrast, God intends decision-making in marriage to be done in unity.

For example, say there is an important financial decision that needs to be made about purchasing a home. In Christ, a couple seeks the Lord in prayer together concerning His will in that decision. If the husband and wife disagree on that decision, they have one of two spiritual options. They can defer to one spouse's decision, or they can continue praying together until they have heard the Lord's will in that decision.

Satan can use the decision-making process to create great disunity and division in a marriage that may result in unforgiveness and eventually bitterness. To avoid that disunity, I believe jointly seeking the Lord's will in decision-making in a marriage in Christ will produce a greater harmony and unity in the marriage.

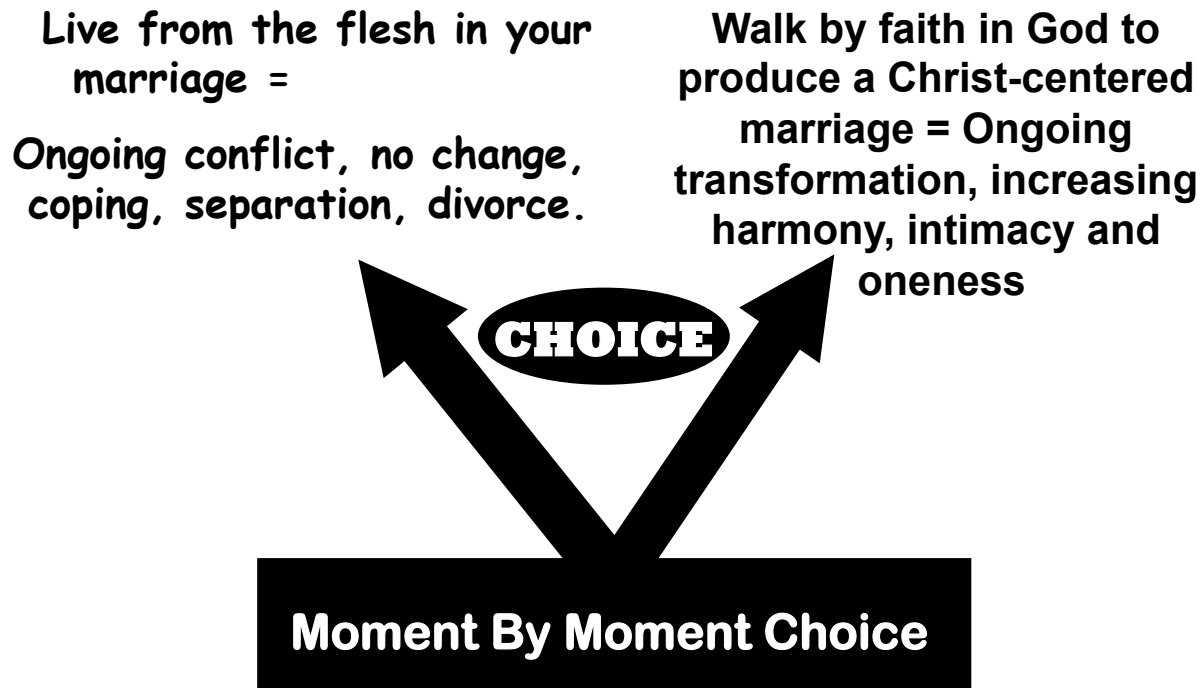
DAY FIVE

SUMMARY

1. I Trust That You and Your Spouse Have Made The Choice To Live THE LIFE.

Whether you are aware of it or not, every moment you are making a conscious or an unconscious choice to either live from your flesh or to walk by faith in God in your marriage.

Now that you know the consequences of each choice, I trust the Lord is giving you a greater desire to live THE LIFE which is found in Christ alone.



What Choice Will You Make?

It is important to understand that during God's transforming process you will be tempted to turn back to the flesh when:

- You doubt God's ability and willingness to transform your life and your marriage.
- God is not meeting your timetable for transformation.
- Your spouse is not changing or not changing fast enough.

However, don't let any of these things deter you and your spouse from:

Continuing to take ANOTHER step of faith.

When everything within you says, “Turn back; it is not working,” take another step of faith. You will want answers from God, and when you don’t get them, take another step of faith. When you are perplexed, confused, and bewildered about what is or is not going on in your marriage, take another step of faith.

2. Remember That The Transformation of Your Marriage To Be Christ-Centered Is A LIFETIME Process.

I wish I could tell you there is a finish line where you will have “arrived” at a Christ-centered marriage. The truth is it is a lifelong process that will increasingly produce a richer Christ-centered marriage. That is what Paige and I love about living THE Life. Our marriage moves up from one level of Christ-centeredness to another. Intimacy, harmony, and oneness continue to grow. That is why I strongly agree with Paul when he says these words in the first part of Philippians 3:14:

“PRESS ON!”

Press on in seeking Christ as THE LIFE. **Press on** in seeking God to transform your marriage. Finally, **press on** so that you and your spouse can enjoy all that the Lord has for you as He produces a Christ-centered marriage.

3. Let’s Take One More Look At A SELF-FOCUSED Versus A CHRIST-FOCUSED Marriage.

I would like for you to take one more look at the difference between a self-focused marriage versus a Christ-focused marriage. I hope that as a result of this study that you have a greater understanding of the differences between the two and have a growing desire to experience a Christ-centered marriage.

Christian or Troubled Marriage (Self-Focused)

Self As The Source

Taking God's truth along with your own ability, intellect, and willpower to try to produce a Christ-centered marriage

Performance-Driven Marriage

Dependence upon formulas to follow, tips and techniques, or steps to take to try to produce a Christ-centered marriage through your own ability.

Self-Transformation w/God's Help

Using God's truth plus God's help for you to be the cause and effect for transformation in you and your spouse

Christ-Centered Marriage (Christ-Focused)

Christ As Source

Living from God's truth, ability, and power as the one true Source to produce a Christ-centered marriage John 14:6; 1 Corinthians 1:30

Faith-Dependent Life

Trusting God by faith/dependence for Him to produce a Christ-centered marriage John 15:5

God As The Cause & Effect of Transformation

Trusting God to be the cause and effect of His transforming work in you and your spouse Philippians 1:6

Conflict Resolution In Self

Using human solutions, methods, formulas, and self-effort to resolve marital conflict

Unmet Needs Met In Self

Trying to get your God-given needs met from your spouse or others.

Fleshly Rights and Expectations

Justifying your fleshly rights and unrealistic expectations in your marriage

Fleshly Behavior Determines Identity

Believing that your fleshly behavior determines your identity and your spouse's identity.

A Self-Focused Marriage Results In:

Unmet needs
Coping with each other's flesh
An unchanged marriage
Unresolved marital conflict
Emotional separation and/or divorce

Conflict Resolution In Christ

Engaging God's truth and power as the solution to marital conflict John 8:32; Ephesians 1:19, 20

Unmet Needs Met In Christ

Drawing upon Christ to meet your God-given needs Philippians 4:19

Rights/Expectations In Christ

Dying to your fleshly rights and unrealistic Expectations 2 Corinthians 4:11

Your True Identity In Christ

Living from who you really are in your true identity in Christ 2 Corinthians 5:17

A Christ-Focused Marriage Results In:

A marriage living from Christ as the Source
Living out of your true identity in Christ
Christ-like behavior instead of fleshly behavior
Couple functioning in their God-given roles
Increasing harmony, intimacy, oneness

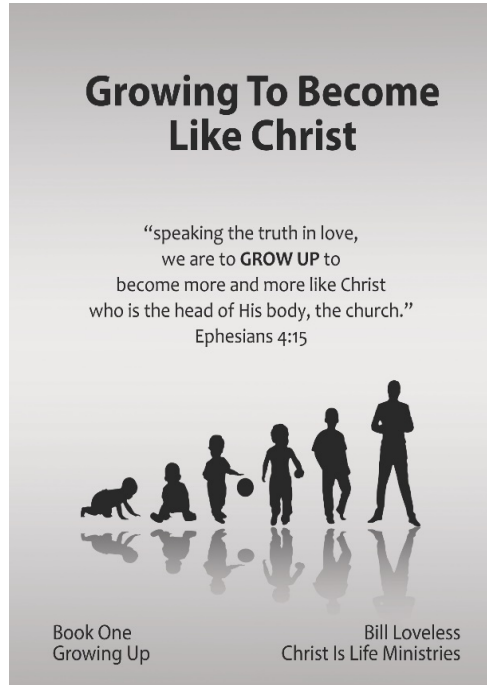
Final Word

I trust you have learned by now that the key to experiencing a Christ-centered marriage is to depend on God to produce it. This is why Jesus says, "I am THE Way." There is **no other way** to experience a Christ-centered marriage other than through Christ. Therefore, my prayer for you is you will be willing to engage God by faith and then watch Him take your marriage to places you never thought were possible. In fact, I hope you will eventually come to the place where you will say with Paul concerning your marriage:

***"He is able to do exceedingly abundantly beyond all we could ask or think according to the power that works within us."
Ephesians 3:20***

Where Do I Go From Here?

At our website listed below, we encourage you to check out our four-part discipleship series called ***Growing Up – Growing Out – Growing Deep*** designed to teach Christians how to fulfill their purpose and calling. The first book in the series is called ***Growing to Become Like Christ***.



Book One covers the following topics:

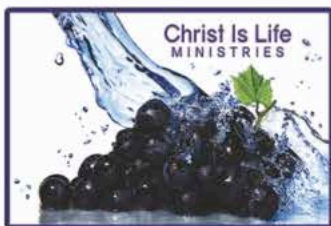
- What it means to grow up spiritually to become like Christ.
- The difference between living “A” Christian life versus living “THE” Christian life.
- What it looks like practically to grow to become like Christ.
- What are some of the hindrances to spiritual growth and how we overcome them.
- How becoming like Christ transforms every area of our lives.

CILM DISCIPLESHIP MATERIALS

CILM has this series and many other studies, booklets and videos at our website listed below. To purchase ready-to-use copies from **Amazon or download for free** and do your own printing, copying and binding, please go to the **Discipleship** tab of our website. We hope you will take advantage of these materials.

Christ Is Life Ministries (CILM)
Website: www.christislifeministries.com
Email: cilm@christislifeministries.com

(2025-07-01)



www.christislifeministries.com