
Attentive to the Lord
in your Marriage
By: Anthony Martin

GCM Resource Center
grace-christian.org

Dedication

*We want to dedicate the efforts of this Writing to the ONE who loves us, forgave us,
and gave his life for us. It is our privilege to further his cause in our day.*

--Galatians 2:20

Grace Christian Ministries

Introduction

It is important that married couples in the Lord understand the blinding effects that carnality can have on their relationship. We live in a secular culture that encourages certain types of behaviors that are not compatible with the Word of God. In *(Romans chapter 8, verse 5)* it states, *For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit.* This passage distinguishes a person who lives more by a carnal appetite from one who is attentive to what belongs to the Lord.

Our position in Christ should be a practice of continual and progressive attentiveness to God's Word. This creates a discipline whereby we train our minds to agree and collaborate with Him on matters that pertain to both life and godliness (*II Peter 1:3*). As believers and followers of Jesus Christ, our

relationship with Him is paramount. We have entered the most sacred and fulfilling emotional place that we could ever imagine. While the experience we have in marriage and family is awesome, the passion we have in our hearts for the Lord is breathtaking!

The Heart is your Personal Sanctuary

We have a special place in our hearts for the Lord, our spouses, children, parents, and many other special people. Therefore, it is crucial, above all that we attempt to protect and insure, that we do not neglect our hearts. In (*Proverbs chapter 4, verse 23*) it states, *Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.* The word, “keep” means to protect, guard, or to set a watch over. As married couples, it is urgent that we understand the function of the heart. In biblical terms the heart refers to the core or spirit of a person. It is the sanctuary where

God dwells and the most sacred of His institutions. It was not created to house bitter emotions, hatred, or un-forgiveness. It was intended to be a repository of God's love and peace whereby it may be expressed within a mutually loving relationship. Sadly, the sin nature has severely affected and impaired the world's ability to comprehend His love. Therefore, those in the world go about establishing philosophical, secular, and pluralistic reasoning for their views. This is where their attention is and as a result, it blinds them to the power of transformational living that is only available through God's Son, Jesus Christ.

Considerations

Do you know that God is always extending His hand of grace, whereby He can change any moral or emotional challenge into a beautiful spiritual experience? No matter what

you are facing in your marriage, *“God is able to do exceeding, abundantly, above all you could ever ask or think; according to the power that is working in you” (Ephesians 3:20)*. Do you know that His power (might or ability) is already at work in your heart? It is His desire to take your marriage to its furthest good (*Jeremiah 29:11*). However, He needs your cooperation in submitting to the presence of the Holy Spirit, who is abiding in your heart.

The Holy Spirit is always attempting to lead you in the fruit and character of Jesus Christ at all times. In (*John chapter 16, verse 13*) it states, *“Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.”* The Holy Spirit wants to lead you to a place of wholeness and well-being in your marriage. However, this is only possible if you and your spouse are willing to place your

marriage under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Notice in the passage it says, “*He (the Holy Spirit) will lead and guide you into all truth.*” He will lead by effecting change in your heart, which will bring spiritual perspectives that will guide your marriage toward the fruit (character) of Jesus Christ (*See Galatians 5:22-23*).

There are a few important questions we must ask ourselves. What does the Word of God specify as it relates to marriage? What are his instructions for the husband and wife? What are the boundaries he has established? How important is submission and obedience to his Word? Do we spend quality time together in studying and learning God’s Word? Do we have a strong connection with God or are we just attending church? All of the above questions are relevant because it will address the commitment that was made to God and one another on the day where you both said, “I do.”

Are you Alert to God's Instructions for Marriage?

In order to get a working understanding of what can happen when a husband and wife turn away from God's instructions to pursue the cravings of the flesh, you might want to see what happened to the very first married couple, as documented in the Holy Bible. In Genesis chapter three, the man and his wife made an unhealthy and unadvised decision that severely affected their marriage. In short, they both opened their heart and mind to an influence that was contrary to God's Word. They had one command given to them, which was not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (*Genesis 2:15-17*). Yet, they chose to "*mind the things of the flesh,*" (*Romans 8:5*) which invited carnality (a worldly, secular, and self-centered attitude) into their marriage. When carnality develops in a Christian marriage, it can really cause the couple to be cold and

insensitive toward the leading of the Lord. Furthermore, it opens the door to a wide range of emotional challenges.

We cannot take anything for granted these days. Just because we are born of God's Spirit does not mean carnal thinking or unhealthy emotional appetites cannot form within us. We live in a demonically infested world and evil is extremely cunning in how it appeals to the minds of human beings. It goes after God's people, seeking to destroy our witness for Jesus Christ. Therefore, it is important to pay close attention to one another and how you are both progressing in Christ. Try not to become so romantically, socially, and materially consumed that you neglect coming together concerning your spiritual lives.

This is a common mistake that many Christian marriages make as they set out to build their lives together. Remember, it

is the foundation of Jesus Christ that you must build upon. Take a look at (*I Corinthians chapter 3, verses 11-12*), *For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble.* This passage provides a contrast of good structures and poor ones.

The building materials of gold, silver, and precious stones reflect the quality of how you go about constructing your lives on the foundation of Jesus Christ; however, the resources of wood, hay, and stubble are not sufficient or stable enough to place your lives and emotions on them (*I Corinthians 3:12*).

The marriages whose foundations are built on wood, hay, and stubble spend very little time involving God or leave Him out totally. These are the types of marriages that evil forces go after first, because they know the couple has not invested the

time to develop a healthy foundation. As a result, they will find it difficult to remain steady for Christ when faced with life's challenges. While loving one another fervently and passionately is great, the foundation of Jesus Christ must be in place to ensure your marriage experiences godly fruit.

Genesis chapter three reveals how things can turn sour very quickly when attentiveness to God and His words are missing from the equation. It reveals how the first recorded marriage in the bible fell prey to an alternate voice of influence, (Satan, in the form of a serpent) shaped their thinking, which ultimately led to unhealthy behaviors.

Avoid Self-Centered Thinking

He (Satan, our adversary) is using the same tactics in our day to encourage us to take a substitute route that appeals to self-centered desires. *Genesis chapter 3, verses 4-5* reveals how he

attempted to plant ungodly seeds in their minds. Take a look at what he said. *And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.* This statement was deceptive, manipulative, and untrue; yet, in the very next verse we see that both the husband and his wife embraced and acted upon those words, which led to a host of problems that would follow. It is very important to research the Scriptures to learn how your adversary goes after your emotions by attempting to focus your desires on the wrong things.

Look into the account written from God concerning the first marriage and you will get an idea of what can happen when self-centered thinking takes place. Their relationship hit the ground running in *Genesis 2:18-25*; however, in *Genesis chapter*

3:1-6, the question of desire entered and the focus shifted from God's command to self-centered gratification. This is typically how things can crumble very quickly in marriage. Those who are alienated to the life that is in Jesus Christ attribute this to their own ideas, feelings, and perspectives. However, we know as believers, there is a fallen spiritual world that wars against Jesus Christ and His followers.

It is very important to stay away from gratifying the flesh because it can make you numb or insensitive to the promptings of God. Sit down with your spouse and really pay attention to the details in *Romans chapter 8, verses 5-8*. This passage is direct and precise as to what can happen when attention to unhealthy desires begins to harvest from our behaviors. Abiding in the flesh can really put a strain on the marriage and hurt your spouse tremendously. It is important that you both understand

that marriage is too challenging to neglect the spiritual maintenance that is needed to help it thrive.

The institution of marriage represents the purest form of sacrificial and unconditional love that two human beings can experience. It captures a love relationship between a man and a woman, which embodies the love they both have for God. However, there is always a “serpent” lurking, who is waiting to divide the marriage (Genesis 3:1). This is where the couple must be careful to evaluate where they are spending their time and, most of all, to not allow ungodly influences that work through this secular culture, to corner them individually.

As you examine the entire third chapter of Genesis, you will notice how the serpent spoke his lies to the woman and she conversed with him on her own (*Genesis 3:1-6*). Unhealthy views can grow in the mind if the husband and wife are not good

stewards over their thoughts. Once this happens, it can negatively affect their marital flow for Christ. The idea of the serpent is to discredit what God has spoken and encourage the couple to act on their own accord through self-centered thinking. In *Genesis chapter 3 verses 4-5* he sought to put the focus on self to allure the woman into an autonomous frame of mind, causing her to ignore what God had spoken in *Genesis 2:15-17*.

When self-centeredness is alive in any type of setting where there is a need for teamwork and unity, it will destroy and rip apart any chance for progress. In the case with the man and his wife, it caused a split between them and God. It was a tragic and devastating thing to read; however, this did not have to take place provided they kept their marriage centered on God and his words.

Evaluate Your Position

A husband and wife who are both Christians must understand the covenant they had made with God. They must evaluate their lifestyle as a married couple, concerning what they are involved in and how they are spending their time.

Let's take an objective evaluation:

1. How much time do you spend studying God's Word with your spouse?

- This is a fantastic practice that will help train the mind with God's answers, insights, and perspectives for your marriage.

2. How much time is spent in prayer in your marriage?

- One sure way to improve the communication flow between you and your spouse is when you both spend time communicating with God together.

3. Do you spend time in praise and worship together?

This entails singing, clapping, and lifting your hands before the Lord? This may seem odd if you have never tried it but it is actually a good form of release for you both. The stresses and cares of life can really take a toll on your minds; therefore, spending at least one day a week dedicated to praise and worship together at home can make a tremendous difference on your emotions. After all, Sunday service at church is not the only place where praise & worship can happen.

4. Are you both participating in the work of the ministry at your local church?

- There is nothing like devoting yourselves to God's cause. It provides perspective and builds appreciation for

the Lord Jesus. You offer something back into His work and partner with Him in moving His church forward.

5. Do you have strong spiritual connections with other married couples in the Lord?

- Healthy partnership with married couples who are sincere and fervent for Christ can really strengthen your marriage. It will stimulate a motivation and reaffirm your commitment for the Lord.

6. Have you noticed any kinds of thoughts and behaviors coming from you that concern you?

- This is a good evaluation because it calls attention to your actions and behaviors. Has there been anything unusual that has tried to spring into your mind? Have you noticed any kinds of irritations or character challenges lately? Have you noticed any new distractions attempting

to pull at you? Take this time to dig as deeply as you need to because it will help keep you temperate and alert. In addition, solicit your spouse's perspective. Ask your spouse for an objective and honest assessment? Now, be ready for the answer and listen. Try not to take it personally because you want an objective point of view.

7. What kinds of television programming, movies, and Internet sites do you frequent? (words and images can have a strong affect on the mind)

- We live in a secular culture that thrives and capitalizes on displaying images. Think about all of the sensual advertisements, provocative reality shows, and explicit Internet material that are put in front of us. It is important to protect our hearts and minds because there are images all around us and it is impossible to avoid

them all. Careful monitoring of what you are taking in can really help with guarding your mind against ungodly enticements.

8. What are your habits on a daily or weekly basis as a married couple?

- We are to be good managers over our time and dedicate it accordingly. Do you schedule time for one another? That is, do you dedicate and plan time to enjoy your relationship?

9. Do you find yourself spending more time entertaining self-centered desires over spiritual ones?

- This is a question of balance? God should not be last on our list of priorities. There is nothing wrong with being driven and ambitious; however, it is critical that we do not neglect our time with the Lord because it is from

those moments with him that we become centered, focused, and keep life in its proper perspective.

We must remember the suggestions of the serpent and his ultimate goal of self-centered thinking. In *John chapter 10, verse 10*, Jesus stated, *The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly*. As stated earlier, it is critical to “keep or guard your heart because out of it are all the issues of life” (*Proverbs 4:23*).

One of the main reasons for so much marital discord and bitter behaviors is neglecting time with the Lord. Let’s face it, without those closely devoted moments with the Lord, our characters can become severely affected. It is in those moments of studying our bibles, praying, singing praise and worship songs, and fasting, that we become refined for the progression

of our marriages. Furthermore, it will prepare us for the many devices employed by our adversary (*II Corinthians 2:11*).

The serpent (Satan) wants to divide you and your spouse through misunderstandings formed through unhealthy thoughts and misguided thinking. He is always looking for ways to gain access and enter your marriage. Therefore, it is important that you both recognize where your attack is coming from. Ephesians chapter 6, verse 12 states, *“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood; but against principalities, powers, rulers of the darkness of this world, and spiritual wickedness in high places.”* This is a very powerful yet liberating verse because if there is any kind of emotional distance, discord, and deterioration in the marriage it helps you to understand what is at the root. If you notice there are 4 categories of evil that are wrestling against you and your spouse, which are: “Principalities, Powers, Rulers of the

Darkness of this World, and Spiritual Wickedness in High Places” (*Ephesians 6:12*). We are to be mindful that these forces are relentless and will stop at nothing in attempting to destroy marriages.

In conclusion, be careful to recognize that the serpent (Satan) will attempt the same thing on your marriage as he did with the man and his wife in Genesis chapter three. The idea is to allure the husband and wife into the flesh through overindulgence, coveting, and too much attention with secular living. Once this happens, an unhealthy bond will take place, which will create an affinity for unhealthy pleasures.

Be very careful to not develop a carnal appetite because this will invite many unhealthy desires that will be difficult to extinguish from your marriage. One note of caution: carnal thinking can be very subtle and often goes undetected for a

long time. It is not in the obvious things, but in those small habit-forming practices, which build over an extended period. A married couple can still attend church and go through the motions long before anything is ever recognized.

One way to determine if this is beginning to happen to you and your spouse is to evaluate how much time you both are dedicating to your personal growth in Christ, as stated earlier. While attending church and bible study are good practices, it is application through your daily devotion with the Lord that will make a tremendous difference in the success of your marriage.

May God's Peace and Joy fill your marriage for many years to come, and that you both abound in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Reference

The Holy Bible: King James Version. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan
Publishing, 1999.
