

ANCHORING YOUR MARRIAGE

Renewing the Sacred Covenant of Marriage



*This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast....
Hebrews 6:19*

*For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be
joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.
Genesis 2:24*

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Anchors of God Publications

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What is mine is yours. Pass it on to others as though it was theirs. All is for the glory of God.

And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them. (Ac 4:32)

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

When I completed writing and publishing a four-book discipleship series titled, “The Disciple’s Journey,” I decided that would be my last writing project. The whole task of writing, and then finding people to design, edit, format and print an on-demand book had become too much for an old man in his late seventies. The problem was that I had not consulted God on that decision. Not a good idea! One morning during my appointment with God, I was writing in my journal when this message was impressed on my heart: “I want you to write a book on marriage.”

My initial reaction was, “What?” Writing another book was the furthest thing on my mind. I had no interest in doing a book on marriage, but the message was clear, and I knew I had to obey what I believe God had impressed on my heart. That was five years ago. There have been many delays and revisions for a variety of reasons, but I have never doubted this was God’s will and that He would enable me to complete writing and publishing *Anchoring Your Marriage*. During this time, a passage of Scripture in the book of Chronicles has been my anchor. I memorized it and have meditated on it hundreds of times. David, king of Israel, wrote the following to his son Solomon who was to replace him as king and had the daunting task of building a temple for the Lord.

David also said to Solomon his son, "Be strong and courageous, and do the work. Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord God, my God, is with you. He will not fail you or forsake you until all the work for the service of the temple of the Lord is finished. The divisions of the priests and Levites are ready for all the work on the temple of God, and every willing man skilled in any craft will help you in all the work.... (1 Ch 28:20-21, NIV)

First, I want to acknowledge that it was only through the wisdom and power of God and His provisions that this book has been created. My goal has been to bring glory to God by doing my best to present the truth of His word about marriage. My prayer is that what I added in my own words is aligned with God’s truth. It is God’s word that is the only true authority for the sacred covenant of marriage.

Next, I want to acknowledge “every willing man (and woman) skilled in any craft that helped me in all the work” (My translation!). First, my bride of 58 years, Janet, for her devotion and patience in once again editing one of my messy manuscripts. Then there are our faithful friends, Mark and Mary Smith, who after distinguished careers in military and government service, retired at just the right time to give godly counsel and help edit, format and prepare this book for publishing. I would also like to thank our talented grandson Jeremy Cohn for his original art design for the cover of the book.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Copyright	ii
Acknowledgments	iii
Table of Contents	iv
PREPARING TO ANCHOR YOUR MARRIAGE	1
Day 1: Welcome to Your Faith Journey	2
Day 2: Anchoring Your Marriage	5
Day 3: Daily Study of the Word	8
Day 4: Daily Appointment with God—Time in Prayer	11
Day 5: Daily Appointment with God—Time in the Word	15
SECTION 1: FOUR FOUNDATIONAL ANCHORS	19
Week 1: Anchored on the Sovereignty of God	20
Day 1: The Sovereign God Created the Universe	21
Day 2: The Sovereign God Created Mankind in His Own Image	26
Day 3: God Instituted the Sacred Covenant of Marriage	30
Day 4: The New Testament and the Covenant of Marriage	35
Day 5: How the Sacred Covenant of Marriage Is Broken	40
Week 2: Anchored in the Word of God	46
Day 1: The Inspiration of the Bible	47
Day 2: The Authority of the Bible	52
Day 3: The Practice of Memorization and Meditation	56
Day 4: Delighting in God’s Word	62
Day 5: Scripture Praying	65
Week 3: Anchored on the Cornerstone of Christ: Our Hope, Our Identity	70
Day 1: The Cornerstone of Hope	71
Day 2: The Cornerstone of Identity	76
Day 3: The Cornerstone Anchors Our Soul	83
Day 4: Hope That Overcomes Disappointment	88
Day 5: Hope and the Half Full Glass	92
Week 4: Anchored in the Glory of God: His Presence and Our Purpose	99
Day 1: Abiding and the Garden of God	100
Day 2: Abiding Through Prayer	106
Day 3: The Fruit of Love	112
Day 4: The Fruit of Obedience	118
Day 5: Our Purpose—Glorifying God by Bearing Fruit That Will Last	125
SECTION 2: STRATEGIC ANCHORS	131
Week 5: Be One	132
Day 1: Becoming One: Together Times	133
Day 2: Becoming One in Mind	137
Day 3: Becoming One in Love	141

Day 4: Becoming One in Spirit	145
Day 5: Becoming One in Purpose	150
Week 6: Be Selfless	154
Day 1: Be Selfless—Beware of Donkey Dang	155
Day 2: Be Selfless—Focus on Your Spouse’s Interests	159
Day 3: Five Languages of Selfless Love	163
Day 4: Discover Your Love language	167
Day 5: Prepare for Your Together Time	170
Week 7: Be Humble	172
Day 1: Beware of Donkey Dang—The Proudful One	173
Day 2: Develop a Humble Attitude	177
Day 3: Understanding Differences in the Way Men and Women Communicate	182
Day 4: The Biblical Model for a Christ-Centered Marriage	188
Day 5: Resolving Male-Female Differences—Love and Respect	193
Week 8: Be A Servant—The Key to Resolving Conflict	199
Day 1: The Attitude of a Servant	200
Day 2: Be Quick to Listen	205
Day 3: Be Slow to Speak	211
Day 4: Be Slow to Become Angry	217
Day 5: The Servant’s Way of Resolving Conflict	224
SECTION 3: PROTECTION AND RENEWAL	231
Week 9: Guard Your Marriage	232
Day 1: Breaking Faith—Ten Steps That Lead to an Affair	233
Day 2: The King’s Affair	239
Day 3: Guard Yourself in Your Spirit	245
Day 4: Build a Wall of Prayer Around Your Marriage	251
Day 5: Pray on the Armor of God	258
Week 10: Your Covenant Renewal	265
Appendix A: Action Journal	I
Appendix B: Leader’s Guide	VIII
Appendix C: Sustainable Growth	XIV
Appendix D: Appointment with God	XX

PREPARING TO ANCHOR YOUR MARRIAGE

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this introductory week is to help prepare you for this study and understand its organization. We will be laying the foundation for the study and discussing what will be expected of you and other participants. Below are the topics that will be discussed each day this week.

DAILY TOPICS

Day 1: Welcome to Your Faith Journey

Day 2: Anchoring Your Marriage

Day 3: Daily Study of the Word

Day 4: Daily Appointment with God—Time in Prayer

Day 5: Daily Appointment with God—Time in the Word

DAY 1: WELCOME TO YOUR FAITH JOURNEY

This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast.... (Heb 6:19)

Thank you for your desire to strengthen your marriage. Anyone who has been married for a while knows that there are difficult times in marriage. That is not surprising given that two sinners, with different habits, expectations and backgrounds are working to live together in harmony. The Bible tells us that we are all sinners (Ro 3:23), which guarantees some trouble in marriage. But, if you have confessed your sin to God (1 Jn 1:9), repented of (i.e., turned from) your sin (Mt 4:17) and decided to put your faith in Jesus and follow Him (Lk 9:23, 62; 2 Co 5:15), you not only have eternal life (Ro 6:23), but you also have the Holy Spirit, a helper in this life (Jn 15:26). God, the creator of marriage, has graciously revealed His wisdom and plan for marriage in the Bible, but as a disciple of Christ, you also have the Holy Spirit who will:

- Help you understand scripture (Jn 16:13-15; 1 Co 2:10-16),
- Lead you (Ro 8:14),
- Help you in prayer (Ro 8:26; Eph 6:18) and
- Perform the work of progressive sanctification in your life (2 Co 3:18; Ga 5:22-25).

If you have not made the decision to turn from your sin and follow Jesus, I encourage you to review The Navigators' "Bridge to Life" illustration that you can find at <https://AnchorsofGod.com/the-gospel>. It will explain that while we were still sinners, Christ paid the penalty for our sins so that we might have eternal life. If you have made the decision to follow Christ, then you are on a journey as one of His disciples.

Welcome to this phase of your journey as a disciple. This week you will be preparing for a "faith journey" to renew your sacred covenant of marriage to be one. This book was not written for engaged couples or newlyweds (although they could benefit), but it is primarily targeted to those who are past the "honeymoon phase" and want to strengthen and renew the marriage covenant. You will join with other couples in a group for this joint adventure. I refer to this as a journey rather than a course because courses have an end, but our faith journey is not complete until we exchange this earthly life for eternal life. The biblical anchors, spiritual disciplines and principles of marriage you learn are just one leg of this journey. It is my prayer that this faith journey will become a lifestyle that lasts a lifetime. You will learn spiritual principles and disciplines that you can use for your devotional times in the word and prayer after you have completed this study. One of the main goals is not only to help you anchor your marriage, but to help you establish a pattern of sustainable spiritual growth.

Jesus called His disciples to join Him on a journey, not to complete a course or study. He spent three years loving them, teaching them, rebuking them and then releasing them to carry on His work. He was with them day and night and taught them to live in the word and in prayer, glorifying God in all things. He launched them on a faith journey that became a lifestyle and sustained them until they joined Him in heaven.

And He was saying to them all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me." (Lk 9:23)

The goal of this resource is to bring you into the presence of God so you can be transformed through the word, by the power of the Holy Spirit, and become fully devoted, fully mature, lifelong disciples, glorifying God in your life and marriage.

The promise we need to hold on to is that Jesus has promised to be with us every step of our journey! We go in His presence with His authority and by His power (Mt 28:18-20).

RENEWING THE SACRED COVENANT OF MARRIAGE

A covenant is an iron-clad promise, a sort of guaranteed contract. The Bible discusses several covenants God made with a specific person, a group of people (Israel, for example), or all mankind. In this study, we will be discussing the covenant you entered into when you got married and said, “until death do us part.” Learning how to anchor your marriage will give you a firm foundation to renew and honor the sacred covenant of marriage to be one. This covenant was first made by God with Adam and Eve in the book of Genesis and then affirmed by Jesus and the Apostle Paul. When asked about the permanence of marriage by a group of religious leaders, Jesus refers to the original marriage covenant in Genesis 2:24.

And He answered and said, “Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE, and said, ‘FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH’? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.” (Mt 19:4–6)

In our marriages we enter a covenant to be one with our spouse. The term “one flesh” refers primarily to the intimate sexual union between a man and a woman, but it has a wider meaning that includes oneness in all areas of life, as you will learn in this study. We become one with our spouse through the Spirit of God. As you anchor your marriage, you will learn how to become one in practice as well as by God’s pronouncement. During the last week of this study, you will prepare to renew your covenant. You will experience this covenant renewal time with the other couples in your group.

ANCHORING YOUR MARRIAGE

The anchors you learn during the next ten weeks will give you a firm foundation for becoming one as you renew the sacred covenant of marriage. These anchors involve the truth of God’s word and your response in action by doing God’s word. As you learn, God’s power will enable you to renew your mind and transform your marriage as you are anchored on the rock! Jesus summed up His teaching on the mountain by stressing,

Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall. (Mt 7:24–27)

RAISING THE BAR

As you probably already suspect and soon will see, anchoring your marriage is going to involve a significant amount of time each week and some hard work. You will learn a new anchor each week for nine of the next ten weeks. There are five days of study each week that will take approximately forty-five minutes each day to complete. You will be expected to have done all the work and come prepared to participate in the group discussion. If you already have a regular practice of spending time with God (many call this quiet time), each day’s study can integrate with that time, and you will find that the study itself takes less than the forty-five minutes I mentioned.

THE BI-WEEKLY OPTION

There are some groups who may choose to meet bi-weekly rather than weekly. The rationale is to give participants more time to complete the weekly study and their Appointments with God (we'll discuss Appointments with God more on days 4 and 5). If your group chooses this option, I encourage you to keep your five day a week schedule including your daily Appointment with God. One of the primary goals of this study is to help you develop a pattern for sustainable spiritual growth. Each of the five days spend some time in the study and have your Appointment with God. As you will see, there is only one Appointment with God worksheet for each day, but you can still use it the second week.

Most of you will already have full if not overloaded schedules so I'm quite sure you are wondering where you will find the time each week to complete this study. Most have little margin in their lives. If you try to find time each week you probably will not find it. If you decide to set aside dedicated time each week to do the work and have the discipline to follow through, you will successfully complete Anchoring your Marriage and see long-lasting change.

I am challenging you to commit to being "all in" for all ten weeks of this study. Your marriage is worth it! We make time for what we truly value. Think of what things you can eliminate. Discover areas of your life where you are doing things you like to do, but really do not have eternal significance. Most of us have activities we enjoy that take up a significant amount of time but do not count for much. Carving out dedicated time for preparation will require some sacrifice, but it will be worth it. Some couples may have to readjust their schedules before joining a group. We all have our unique, difficult situations. I challenge you to raise the bar for ten weeks for what the Apostle Paul refers to as "strict training."

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.
(1 Co 9:24-25, NIV)

DAY 2: ANCHORING YOUR MARRIAGE

This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil.... (Heb 6:19)

The term “anchor” in this verse is used to describe the rock-solid foundation we possess when we put our hope in Christ alone. Anchors have long been used to depict stability, something that we can count on that is firm, secure, unchanging. They are the “main thing.” TV news has its anchors. Malls often have a main store that is called their anchor. People sometimes refer to some special person in their life who is their anchor. Anchors keep ships firm and safe during storms. We all need our lives to be anchored on something that we can count on, something that does not change. Biblical anchors give us an authoritative standard for all we say and do. They keep us safe during the storms of our life. We need this rock-solid foundation for our marriages.

This study will help you use the great and powerful anchors that God has already made available for you through His word. It is through these anchors that your soul and therefore your marriage will be anchored. All truths in the Bible are anchors but, in this study, we will define them two ways:

FOUNDATIONAL ANCHORS

A foundational anchor is a **core biblical doctrine that is an essential foundation for all we think and do.**

These are the main, comprehensive themes of the Bible. They are foundational because they make up the foundation of our faith. They are based on four of the great doctrines of the Bible. The foundational anchors that we will focus on in this study are:

- The Sovereignty of God
- The Word of God
- The Cornerstone of Christ
- The Glory of God

As you go through the first section of this book, covering these foundational anchors, you may say to yourself, “I thought this was a marriage book; it seems like much of the focus is on my spiritual growth.” If you think that, you are absolutely right. You will find that one of the best things you can do for your horizontal marriage relationship is improve your vertical spiritual relationship. After the foundational anchors, we will increase our focus on practical marriage topics as we apply strategic anchors.

STRATEGIC ANCHORS

A strategic anchor is a **core biblical truth that requires specific actions.**

The strategic anchors that you will learn in this study are based on Philippians 2:1-11. There are four biblical truths that will equip you with a strategy for renewing the sacred covenant of marriage by being “one” with your spouse. These strategic anchors are:

- Be One
- Be Selfless
- Be Humble
- Be a Servant

PREPARE TO ANCHOR

At the beginning of each week there is an introduction page that will help you prepare a study aid to assist you as you study the anchor for that week. You will need nine index cards for this (11 in total when including two additional exercises). Or, if you are more electronically inclined, you can use a notes program that allows you to take notes on individual pages, such as OneNote, Evernote, or Simplenote. The first thing you will do each week is fill out an Anchor Card that will be a key tool for anchoring your marriage. It will consist of the following:

ANCHOR FOR THE WEEK:

At the top of your Anchor Card, write the Anchor for the week. This is the anchor listed in the title for the week.

ANCHOR SCRIPTURE

Next write the Anchor Scripture for the week under the weekly Anchor title. Your assignment is to memorize, meditate and review this scripture each day of the week during your Appointment with God. The translation that I use most is the New American Standard Bible (NASB). You may want to use your preferred translation to write on your card and memorize.

ANCHOR PRAYER

There is also an Anchor Prayer for the Week. Write this below the scripture on the same side of the card. You will pray it each day during your Appointment with God.

PERSONAL ANCHOR POINT

At the conclusion of your Appointment with God on day five of each week, you will choose a Personal Anchor Point for the week and write it on the back of the Anchor Card. A Personal Anchor Point is a specific practice you personally choose to implement in your daily walk to strengthen your connection to the anchor discussed that week. It includes the key point you learned and the action you will take in response. To develop your Personal Anchor Point, first review and reflect on what you have learned that week and what God may have laid on your heart as the week progressed. Pray for God's direction in developing the Personal Anchor Point. You will learn to listen to God as He impresses on your heart what He wants you to do. Write your Personal Anchor Point on the back of your anchor card or in your electronic notes. Add any other scriptures or things you want to remember. Commit yourself to this Personal Anchor Point and review it daily during your Appointments with God.

THE VALUE OF CONSTANT USE

You might be thinking, "What is so important about memorizing, meditating on, and reviewing scripture?" First, this is not just my idea. Constant use of scripture in these and other ways is a dominant theme in the Bible. I have personally found this to be the most important part of sustainable spiritual growth in my life, and I hope you will as well. The writer of Hebrews stressed,

*But solid food is for the mature, who by **constant use** have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. (Heb 5:14, NIV)*

By "constant use," the Anchor Scriptures and Personal Anchor Points will become a permanent part of your thinking. They will become habits of the heart. They will enable you to consistently make godly choices. They are the "solid food" of the word of God. They will give you a strategy for renewing your

mind, transforming your actions and enable you to become one in your marriage. Review all Personal Anchor Points each day during your Appointment with God.

CHECK IT OUT!

Review the Table of Contents to see the topics for each day of each week’s study. Go to page 20 to see the first Anchor Card assignment (you do not need to complete the Anchor Card assignment until you begin week 1).

DAY 3: DAILY STUDY OF THE WORD

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth. (2 Ti 2:15)

There are two major parts to each day that will help you learn to anchor your marriage and prepare for your group time. First is the daily study, and the second is your “Appointment with God.” I believe you will find that forty-five minutes can usually be equally divided between the two. The first part is more focused on content and study while the second part is more focused on prayer, reflection, meditation and application. The primary reason I structured Anchoring your Marriage in this way is to give you a broad exposure and practice on how sustainable spiritual and marriage growth occurs. As you work through this study, you may find yourself adapting your time with God compared with the pattern to be outlined in the next couple of days. This is okay. My main objective here is simply to get you started into a routine pattern of time with God, in His word and in prayer. I am outlining this biblical model to help you structure this time.

DAILY STUDY

To “*accurately [handle] the word of truth*” we need to develop some skills and spend time studying the word of God. Study of Scripture involves an in depth, careful examination of a passage, verse, or topic. Much of the Bible is clear and relatively easy to understand and apply, but some verses and passages require more careful study. This is because the Bible was written over a period of 1500 years in thirteen countries on three continents. There were forty different authors from diverse backgrounds, languages, and cultures, yet the Holy Spirit has ensured we received a unified and consistent message throughout the Bible.

The daily study will help you develop some skills that are useful for careful examination of scriptures. I would also recommend that you purchase a Study Bible to have available for your daily study. Study Bibles give background information to all the books of the Bible as well as some interpretation of specific verses and other useful information. If you want more help on how to study the Bible, you can find some in “Week 4” of *Spiritual Bootcamp*, which you can download for free from <https://AnchorsofGod.com/free-downloads>. This will introduce you to the three commonly used principles of Bible study: Observation, Interpretation and Application.

We make permanent changes in our lives when our minds are renewed, and our actions transformed by God’s word. Therefore, the primary focus of this study is to let God speak to your hearts through His Spirit empowered word. The focus of each day will be to bring you into the heavenly Father’s presence so you can be transformed into the likeness of Jesus through the word by the power of the Holy Spirit.

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (Ro 12:2)

It is not my words that will transform you. At best I can only help you understand and apply God’s word to your lives. It is only God’s word that has the power to renew your minds and transform you. As you read each day’s content, you will study and apply the word in the following way:

Read the Daily Study

Each session will begin by reading several pages of content which will include scripture with some of my own clarification and insights to help you understand and apply the Anchor for the Week. When you read a verse or passage of scripture, slow down and read it carefully and thoughtfully. It would be helpful to read it several times. You may want to underline some of the key words.

SEARCH THE WORD

On most days you will be asked to Search the Word by doing a brief study of a key passage of Scripture. This will help you learn some of the Bible study skills of “Observation”—What does it say? “Interpretation”—What does it mean? and “Application”—How can I apply this to my life?

REFLECT AND RESPOND

On some days there will be a reflect and respond section. This will often involve questions about the day’s topic or some principles that apply to your marriage.

SCRIPTURE PRAYER

There are various methods for studying scripture, but on day four of week two you will learn a method that combines prayer and the word called “scripture praying.” This is a simple but powerful way of using the actual words of God in prayer. It is a prayerful way of coming into God’s presence through reading a passage of scripture, observing what it says, and meditating. Scripture praying will help you learn to hear and to do what God is saying to you.

ACTION JOURNAL

At Appendix A you will find what I am calling an “Action Journal.” It is a place for you to consolidate the key insights God reveals to you and any decisions you make to take specific actions as you participate in this study and spend time with God. When you come to a place in the study where there will likely be a key insight or you have been asked to commit to a specific action, you will see the pen and notepad icon above. This is a reminder to record your answer in the Action Journal. You should also record your Personal Anchor Points there. Of course, you can use it in whatever way best suits your needs, but I have made space for specific topics, as indicated by the icon. The Action Journal will be a consolidated place you can later review to remind yourself of those things and reflect on how God is working in your life. After the study is complete, you may wish to remove the Action Journal from the book and place it somewhere for you to easily reference from time to time.

MEMORIZE AND MEDITATE

Each day there will be a reminder to work on memorizing and meditating on that week’s and the prior week’s memory verses and your Personal Anchor Points. Based on what works best for you, this may be something you wish to do at the beginning of each day or incorporate into your daily Appointment with God, which we will cover during the last two days of this week. Try not to be intimidated by memorization and meditation. You will learn as you practice. If you need some extra help as you start this study, you can go to Week Two, Day 3 and find some helpful material on learning to memorize and meditate on scripture. Here are some of the basics to get you started.

Repeat, Repeat, Repeat—The Key to Memorization

Remember that the key to memorization is simply repetition. The more you repeat a verse the more it will become part of the structure of your mind. Read the scripture several times as you start to memorize. Then memorize a phrase at a time. Repeat a phrase at a time until you can quote it from memory. You might also consider writing the verse down in some of the extra space at the end of each day. Use some time each day rather than trying to memorize the scripture in one or two sittings. Consistent repetition during the week will help you be successful. If you have a smart phone, I encourage you to also consider using an application like Remember Me (available on several phone and other platforms at www.remember.me). This app has several study methods to help you memorize scripture, and since you likely always have your phone with you, you can take time to memorize and review your verses while sitting in a waiting room, standing in line, or eating lunch.

Review, Review, Review—The Key to Retention

Once you have memorized the scripture consistent review is essential. The mistake most people make is memorizing a scripture and then failing to review it consistently. The goal is to retain the Anchor Scriptures for the rest of your life. That is why you are asked to review your Anchor Cards each day. The Remember Me app can also help you retain verses you have already memorized for the long term by regularly reminding you to review them.

Meditate, Meditate, Meditate—The Key to Transformation

It is important to remember that the memorization and review of Bible verses transforms us when it penetrates our souls (our mind, will and emotions). This is the function of meditation or rumination. The book of Psalms begins by stressing the importance of meditation

*How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers.
(Ps 1:1–3)*

Meditation is reflection on a portion of Scripture, pondering key words and phrases repeatedly while gleaning every ounce of spiritual nutrition from those verses. While the primary emphasis on memorizing Scripture is the ability to quote portions from memory, the goal of meditation is to gain a deeper meaning and personal application of the verses you have memorized. After you spend some time repeating the verse(s), spend a few more minutes pondering or reflecting on each key word or phrase. Think about what it means. Think about how it applies to you. You will find additional help on meditation in Week Two, when you learn to start practicing Scripture Praying, which includes meditation.

CHECK IT OUT!

Flip through pages 21-24 to familiarize yourself with this part of each day's assignment.

DAY 4: DAILY APPOINTMENT WITH GOD—TIME IN PRAYER

The second part of each day is your daily Appointment with God. I decided to call these daily times “Appointments with God” rather than the more traditional “devotions” or “quiet times” because an appointment requires commitment and responsibility. When we make an appointment, we put it on our calendar because it is important to us. When we make an appointment, we make a promise to be there, and we make every effort to be there on time. Our times with God should be even more important than a work meeting or lunch with a friend. We need to designate a time and place and keep our Appointments with God. If you do not already have a designated time for prayer and the word, this resource will help you establish one. I believe you will discover your Appointments with God will be essential for sustainable spiritual and marriage growth.

Jesus made a priority of solitary times with His Father. Several times the Gospels talk about Jesus’ custom of getting up early in the morning, leaving the house, and spending time communicating with His Father. It was these intimate times of fellowship that sustained Jesus on His difficult journey. He kept His appointments with His heavenly Father.

In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there. (Mk 1:35)

Your Appointment with God is a personal time alone with God when you enter His presence in prayer and the word. Making these times a regular practice will help you establish a rhythm for sustainable spiritual growth for the rest of your life. Within this time we will also incorporate the practice of journaling, which some of you may already do. At the end of each day, you will find a section titled, “Appointment with God,” which lays out a basic structure for your daily appointments as well as some writing space and prompts for journaling. For some of you, the space provided to journal will be too small, for others, more space than you need. You don’t have to follow a rigid framework or write a lot, just note whatever God is revealing to you that day and maybe how you have seen Him moving in your daily life. As you go through this study, you will find that the study time I discussed in the previous session will tend to meld into, and is actually part of, your Appointment with God. However, I wanted to provide a structure for this time that you can carry into the future, long after you finish this book.

There are three components of your Appointments with God during this study: Come, Hear and Act.

COME, HEAR AND ACT (PART I)

Jesus gave three components for spiritual growth when He taught the disciples on a mountainside. He summed up this lengthy teaching session with these words:

*Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say? Everyone who **comes** to Me and **hears** My words and **acts** on them, I will show you whom he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation on the rock; and when a flood occurred, the torrent burst against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who has heard and has not acted accordingly, is like a man who built a house on the ground without any foundation; and the torrent burst against it and immediately it collapsed, and the ruin of that house was great. (Lk 6:46–49)*

Whenever you have an Appointment with God during this study, I want you to practice the following four components of sustainable spiritual growth. They are come, hear, practice and follow.

COME

*Everyone who **comes** to Me.... (Lk 6:47)*

In the Bible, God persistently invites us to “*come*” into His presence to spend time with Him (Mt 11:28, John 6:37, John 7:37-38). Think of it. The sovereign, creator and sustainer of the universe wants to spend personal time with us. He wants to talk to us, listen to us, guide us and most of all, confirm His unfailing love for us as His deeply loved sons and daughters. He invites us into His presence primarily through the word, prayer and service.

The first component in your Appointment with God will be entering His presence through prayer. We will use the simple but effective acronym **A C T S** as a guide. It follows a pattern much like the one Jesus used when He taught His disciples to pray.

Read Matthew 6:9-13.

Adoration

Enter God’s presence in prayer:

...Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. (Mt 6:9)

Our Father in Heaven

When we start our solitary time with God by coming into his presence with adoration, we immediately set our hearts and minds on Him and not our own selfish interests. We make our prayer time about Him and His will for our life. This sets the tone for the rest of our Appointment with God. Adoration is praise and worship of God for who He is. First and foremost, God invites us into His presence as Abba-Father. He has adopted us into His family. The Apostle Paul gives us an example of how we should praise Him as our Father in his letter to the believers in Ephesus.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will.... (Eph 1:3–5)

His love for us is greater than we can imagine, far greater than our love for our own children. His love for us is perfect. We are blessed, chosen, and made holy and blameless, because of the incomprehensible, unfailing love He has lavished on us. Our heavenly Father has adopted us into His family with all rights and privileges. Not because of duty, but because of His pleasure and will. Each day as you begin your appointment with God, I suggest that you review this scripture and spend a few minutes reflecting on how much God loves you and praise Him for His unfailing love.

Hallowed be Your Name

Adoration is acknowledging that God is holy, perfect in every way. It is honoring His name. We are to praise God for all that He is and all He does for us. If you want help learning how to praise God, just go to the Psalms. In the book of Psalms, God has given us a treasure house of ways to praise Him. Psalm 100 is just one example:

Shout joyfully to the LORD, all the earth. Serve the LORD with gladness; Come before Him with joyful singing. Know that the LORD Himself is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; We are His people and the sheep of His pasture. Enter His gates with thanksgiving And His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him, bless His name. For the LORD is good; His lovingkindness is everlasting And His faithfulness to all generations. (Ps 100:1–5)

You will learn to praise God as you praise Him in worship each day during your Appointment with God. You will find additional help on how to praise God in weeks three and four of this study.

Confession

And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. (Mt 6:12)

When we confess our sins to God and ask for forgiveness, we experience His cleansing power in our lives. We all sin and God wants us to acknowledge and repent of that sin. The regular confession of sin is not for salvation, which occurred once and for all when you first confessed your sin and repented, deciding to follow Jesus (Ac 2:38, Rom 10:9-10, Rom 8:1), but this confession is for spiritual cleansing.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 Jn 1:9)

I usually begin confession by praying the following verses. God never fails to reveal to me sinful areas of my life that need His forgiveness.

Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way. (Ps 139:23–24)

Jesus also reminds us that it is important to forgive “our debtors,” those who “sin against us” (Mt 6:12). It is extremely important in our marriages to consistently forgive our spouse of anything we might be holding against him or her.

Thanksgiving

*Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, **and overflowing with gratitude.** (Col 2:6–7)*

Adoration and thanksgiving are intrinsically linked together. Adoration is praise that focuses on who God is. Thanksgiving is expressing thankfulness for not only who God is but what He does for us. We enter His presence with praise and thanksgiving (Ps 100:4). This a time in your prayer when you remember and thank God for what He has done in the past and what He is doing in the present, even what He will do in the future. You may want to write down any answered prayers or other key items for which you are thankful as a reminder of God’s faithfulness. I like to start my time of thanksgiving by praying this prayer from the Psalms and then thanking God for specific things.

Oh give thanks to the LORD, call upon His name; Make known His deeds among the peoples. Sing to Him, sing praises to Him; Speak of all His wonders. Glory in His holy name; Let the heart of those who seek the LORD be glad. Seek the LORD and His strength; Seek His face continually. Remember His wonders which He has done, His marvels and the judgments uttered by His mouth, (Ps 105:1–5)

We are to overflow with thankfulness. It is to be part of our spiritual DNA. We are to thank God for everything. That includes things that bring pain as well as pleasure. Paul exhorts the believers to,

Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. (1 Th 5:16–18) (See also James 1:2-4).

One of the keys to a successful marriage is being thankful for our spouse. We will look more closely at this biblical principle in week three. For now, just remember to thank God for your spouse when you pray.

Supplication

Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. (Mt 6:10–11)

Supplication is when we ask God for something. It is to intercede for someone else, ourselves or some situation. God's word encourages us to,

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. (Php 4:6)

An important type of supplication is to intercede on behalf of others. It is to be one of our highest priorities when we pray.

I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men. (1 Ti 2:1, KJV)

Make a list of people and situations that God puts on your heart to pray for. Be specific as you intercede for your spouse, marriage and others. Jesus encourages you to pray for your own needs as well. Especially important is to pray for spiritual growth for yourself, your spouse and others. I have included prayers from the Bible that will help you learn to effectively intercede for others. The goal of all prayer is to bring glory to God. We are to pray, *"Your kingdom come, your will be done"* (Mt 6:10).

You may wish to jot down any specific prayer topics the Holy Spirit may have laid on your heart.

DAY 5: DAILY APPOINTMENT WITH GOD—TIME IN THE WORD

COME, HEAR AND ACT (PART II)

Your daily Appointment with God is all about fellowship with Him. When Jesus came into His Father's presence, He expressed what was on His heart, and He listened to what was on His Father's heart. That is what intimate communication is all about. Jesus gave us an insight into this type of intimate communication when He prayed to His Father in the presence of His disciples. He had just predicted His death and said,

Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name." Then a voice came out of heaven: "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again. (Jn 12:27–28)

While on earth Jesus gave us many such examples of what it means to come into the Father's presence, hear Him and then, out of love, respond in action.

HEAR AND ACT

*Everyone who comes to Me and **hears** My words and **acts** on them.... (Lk 6:47)*

Last session we discussed coming into His presence when we have our daily Appointment with God, but following Jesus means we also "hear" His words and then "act" on them.

HEAR

When we come into God's presence in our solitary times, a primary goal is to hear from Him. We can learn to hear what He has to say through His Spirit empowered word. It is through reading the word, studying the word, scripture praying, and memorization and meditation of the word that we will be able to hear God's eternal truths and wisdom. This is what you were accomplishing during the daily study of the word that we talked about on Day 3. Now you can take some time to reflect on the scriptures covered in the study. You might want to review your Search the Word and Reflect and Respond answers for the week and any other scriptures that spoke to you. Listen closely for what God is saying to you through His word.

We need to remember that this is an intimate time in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit's presence when we talk to Him, and He listens and guides us. God desires this intimate communication with us. The Lord says,

Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me. (Re 3:20)

There is space for you to make additional notes on things you have learned or what God is saying to you through His word and prayer.

ACT

Jesus says that we not only need to hear what He says, but we need to act based on His words. It is only then that we will have a solid foundation, anchored on the rock of God's word. James writes,

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. (Jas 1:22, NIV)

When you get to this time in your Appointment with God, you will have done your study, praying, memorization and meditation. It is now time to think about what you heard from God and answer the questions:

How should I respond? What does God want me to do?

Based on what the Spirit revealed to you through your time in the word and prayer, write down what you believe God would have you do. You will likely find that at least part of what God is laying on your heart was revealed as you went through the day's study and was made even more clear as you meditated on His word and prayed.

FOLLOW

...If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. (Lk 9:23)

It is important to remember that being a Christian is a lifelong journey. Jesus said, "follow me," and He stressed that whoever wanted to be with Him should know that it would be a journey requiring faith and sacrifice. It would not be a walk in the park! As disciples and followers of Jesus, they would be required to deny their own selfish desires. The journey would be full of love, hope and joy but also sacrifice and service. To follow Him is a call to be fully devoted, fully mature disciples, glorifying Him in all we say and do. Glorifying God is our purpose in life, and Jesus calls us to be on a mission with Him. When we follow Him, we can be assured that He will give us His light and guidance for our journey.

Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life." (Jn 8:12)

There are many times that the Bible documents God's people remembering their former condition or how God worked in their lives (Ex 13:3; Num 15:37-40; Luke 22:19; 1 Cor 6:9-11). Journaling is one way to help you do this. So, in addition to writing down what you have learned and your response, there is also space where you can write down other significant aspects of your journey with Jesus.

Some ideas of things you might jot down are:

- Ways you have seen God working in your life;
- What you are learning about God, yourself and your spouse;
- Insights into your marriage relationship;
- Ways you are growing in your marriage; and
- Areas in which you are struggling in your spiritual life or marriage.

PREPARE TO CONNECT

Spiritual and marital growth is not just about your time in daily study and your daily Appointment with God. It is about connecting with our spouse and others in the family of God. It is about community or "fellowship" as it was called in the 1st Century Church (Ac 2:42-47). It was about growing together in the word and prayer,

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. (Ac 2:42)

Believers were devoted to God and His word and to one another. They grew together as they encouraged, confronted, accepted, and loved one another. These intimate connections are an essential part of spiritual growth and this resource. You will be connecting in two important ways:

GROUP TIME

As you meet in your weekly or bi-weekly group and as you share what you have learned about yourselves and your marriage, you will receive encouragement. You will discover that you are not alone in your struggles. You will be gathering with imperfect people who, just like you, are wanting to grow spiritually and in their marriages. Your leader will assure that this will be a safe place to share. For example, the following are some of the guidelines that will guide the group:

- Confidentiality: Anything personal disclosed with the group is not to be shared outside the group.
- Non-Judgmental/Non-Accusatorial: Always be quick to hear and slow to speak and always speak in love.

You can share your struggles, but the focus will be on what God is saying to you about your own life, what changes God wants you to make, not the changes you want your spouse to make. It is about what God's word has to say about spiritual and marriage growth. You will learn and be supported by others as others learn and are supported by you.

Group time will be discussion oriented, with the leader asking the group to volunteer what they have learned during their Study and Appointment with God times. That is why it is important to complete all the work and write answers for all the questions.

The first week of group time will be devoted to getting to know one another and discussing what you have read about preparing for group sessions. You will be able to ask any questions or concerns you might have.

COUPLE TALK AND TOGETHER TIME

Each week, before meeting with your group, you will be asked to spend some time with your spouse discussing what you learned during the previous week. I call this Couple Talk. On Day 5 of the first four weeks there will be a space for Couple Talk with suggestions of things you might want to discuss. These are just suggestions, so feel free to discuss whatever you think is important. Agree on a time to meet so that you assure that you complete this important assignment. To start this off, **set aside a time this week with your spouse to discuss your thoughts, feelings and questions about participating in this study before meeting with the group.**

Starting with Week 5, you will change from Couple Talk to Together Time. Together Time is simply an expansion of Couple Talk. This time together is still about communication, but it will include four areas based on Scripture and the admonition to "be one" in Philippians 2:2. On Day 1 of Week 5, there will be instructions concerning these Together Times.

DRINKING FROM A FIRE HOSE

While Janet and I were visiting our grandson Colby at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (M.I.T.), he took us on a tour of the prestigious university. One of the most interesting things we saw was a water fountain that had a fire hose attached to it. The sign above it said, "Getting an education at M.I.T. is like drinking from a firehose." M.I.T. is noted for its high standards and rigorous curriculum.

I don't mean to compare this study to the lofty standards of M.I.T., but in the beginning, some of you might feel like you're drinking from a firehose because of what is required and the amount of content in each day's study. This could be especially true if you are a new believer or don't have much of a background in the Bible. To help you not feel like you're drowning, I offer this advice:

- Others are going to feel the same way. Do not think you are alone or will be singled out.

- Keep in mind that it is common to feel overwhelmed when you first start a new study. I almost always felt anxiety in college and Seminary when I read the requirements for a course. After several weeks I began to settle in and see that what was required was manageable.
- It is true that this study contains a lot of content and application, but don't think that you must remember it all or do it all perfectly. This is a not just a group study but a resource which you can refer to and review. This is a journey! There is a lot that you won't retain the first trip through, but you will remember some important things that can renew your thinking and transform your life and marriage.
- You will be responsible for 9 Anchor Cards, an Identity Card, and a Marriage Renewal Card.
- Appendix C has numerous ideas for sustainable spiritual and marriage growth to help you continue your faith journey.

CHECK IT OUT!

Go to page 24 to see the outline for the first Daily Appointment with God.

SECTION 1: FOUR FOUNDATIONAL ANCHORS

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Section 1 of *Anchoring Your Marriage*. We will be spending the next four weeks focusing on what I call “foundational anchors.” As discussed during the introductory week, I define a foundational anchor as a **core biblical doctrine that is an essential foundation for all we think and do**. Foundational anchors are not principles focused on our marriage but are eternal truths focused on God, His unchanging attributes, and our individual relationship to the Creator of the universe. They impact your entire life, including your marriage. If we want to build a strong marriage or strengthen one that may have listed (tilted) to port or starboard, it is essential that we are anchored with a firm foundation because on that is where we will build our marriage.

WEEKLY TOPICS

Week 1: Anchored on the Sovereignty of God

Week 2: Anchored in the Word of God

Week 3: Anchored on the Cornerstone of Christ: Our Hope, Our Identity

Week 4: Anchored in the Glory of God: His Presence and Our Purpose

WEEK 1: ANCHORED ON THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

ANCHOR CARD

This week we will study how to be anchored on the sovereignty of God. Begin by creating your anchor card for the week. As described on page 6, write the Anchor for this week at the top of an index card or in your electronic notes program, followed by the Anchor Scripture and Anchor Prayer.

ANCHOR SCRIPTURE

For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. (Ge 2:24)

ANCHOR PRAYER

Lord, I acknowledge that You are the sovereign, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, holy, Creator and Sustainer of the universe. I know that nothing happens in heaven and on earth without Your initiative or permission. Therefore, I will praise, trust, and obey You in all things, including to honor my marriage covenant to be one with my spouse for Your glory.

DAILY TOPICS

Day 1: The Sovereign God Created the Universe

Day 2: The Sovereign God Created Mankind in His Own Image

Day 3: God Instituted the Sacred Covenant of Marriage

Day 4: The New Testament and the Covenant of Marriage

Day 5: How the Sacred Covenant of Marriage Is Broken

DAY 1: THE SOVEREIGN GOD CREATED THE UNIVERSE

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (Ge 1:1)

The Bible is a love story. It is the story of God's love for you, me and every person ever born. The first five words of the Bible set the foundation for understanding the sovereignty of God. The Bible opens with this profound statement: *"In the beginning, God created."*

IN THE BEGINNING GOD CREATED

These words are first, and they are of first importance. If we do not understand and believe in an all-powerful, sovereign creator of the universe who, with loving hands, created us in His image and has a purpose for our lives, we will struggle in our relationships.

These first five words are important because they form the first of four foundational anchors that are the basis of a biblical worldview. A worldview is a set of core beliefs and values through which we view the world and make choices. These core beliefs serve as anchors that determine how we live our lives. They constitute our moral compass, how we decide what is right or wrong. Every choice we make, every thought and action, is based on these anchors.

SEARCH THE WORD

Read Genesis 1:1-24.

1. *What do these verses tell us about God?*

2. *What do these verses indicate about God's power?*

3. *Based on this beginning account of the creation what can we assume about God's rule over everything that exists.*

IN THE BEGINNING

These three words introduce us to the creation of the world and a sovereign eternal God who has always existed. Our finite minds cannot fully comprehend an eternal God who has always been, who has no beginning or end. Because God is eternal, our story begins before the creation of the world.

Before the Creation, There was Love

The Bible says, “*God is love*” (1 Jn.4:8). Love is God’s distinguishing attribute. It is who He is and all He does. As mind boggling as this may seem, God knew us and loved us before we were born. The Apostle Paul wrote to the believers in Ephesus,

...just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will.... (Eph 1:4–5)

You and I were chosen by God to be His sons and daughters, even before He created the world. This was done out of love so we could enjoy an intimate relationship with Him as our heavenly Father. Everything God does is motivated by His everlasting love.

God shows His love in His creation. He is not only the all-powerful sovereign creator God, but He is the all-loving Father God. Think of it. God created this world for us to enjoy and to see His Glory. He placed man in a beautiful garden and supplied him with everything he would ever need. He wanted His children to know how much they were loved. Everything we enjoy today, our homes, our beaches, the mountains, streams and oceans, sunsets, forests, and so much more are His loving gifts to us.

IN THE BEGINNING GOD

The book of Genesis introduces us to the God of creation who is omnipotent (all powerful), omniscient (all knowing), omnipresent (always present everywhere), all loving and holy. He is the creator and sustainer of the universe and nothing happens in heaven or on earth without His initiative or permission. God says through the Prophet Isaiah,

“To whom then will you liken Me That I would be his equal?” says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high And see who has created these stars, The One who leads forth their host by number, He calls them all by name; Because of the greatness of His might and the strength of His power, Not one of them is missing. (Is 40:25–26)

IN THE BEGINNING GOD CREATED

“*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*” God in His infinite wisdom and power created from nothing the universe and everything in it. He spoke into existence the physical universe.

By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, And by the breath of His mouth all their host. (Ps 33:6)

The vast universe, with too many stars to count, moves in predetermined precision. Our planet, which is like none other, sustains life. There is a precise balance of nature. God—as master, creator, designer, and sustainer of the universe—created the perfect environment for His deeply loved children to live in a personal relationship with Him.

GOD RULES THE UNIVERSE WITH ABSOLUTE POWER AND AUTHORITY

To say that God is sovereign is to say that He has supreme power, rank and authority over all else. God rules over His creation. The Prophet Jeremiah says,

Ah Lord GOD! Behold, "You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and by Your outstretched arm! Nothing is too difficult for You...." (Je 32:17)

From the beginning of time, God made His sovereign power perfectly clear for everyone to see through His creation. One of the Hebrew language names for God was "El Shaddai," which is most often translated "God Almighty." The word means literally "God the mountain one," highlighting His invincible power.

God demonstrated that rule and power when Judah was about to be attacked by three invading armies. King Jehoshaphat, prayed,

...O LORD, the God of our fathers, are You not God in the heavens? And are You not ruler over all the kingdoms of the nations? Power and might are in Your hand so that no one can stand against You. (2 Ch 20:6)

The all-powerful, sovereign God of the universe intervened and miraculously defeated the invading armies as the armies of Judah watched in awe without lifting a sword.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING ANCHORED IN THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

Belief in God's sovereign rule has huge implications for how we live our lives. If we are not anchored in the belief of a sovereign, all-powerful creator and sustainer of the universe, life becomes random and out of control. We will believe that we must control people, events, and even our own destiny. For those of us who have "been there and done that," we say, "good luck." Ultimately, we control next to nothing on our own. We need to trust that God is in control. Belief in the sovereignty of God allows us to have absolute faith in the strong hand of God in our lives. There is nothing He cannot do.

No Excuse

There is absolutely no excuse for man not to see that God is the all-powerful, sovereign Lord of the universe. To be convinced of the incomparable power of God Almighty, a person needs only to look at creation. The Apostle Paul says,

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. (Ro 1:20)

The Bible often points us to His creation so that we will believe in the sovereign God and can have faith in Him. God persistently says, "Look at the universe. How do you think all this came into being? Only I, the all-powerful God of the universe, could do this. What you see speaks clearly of me. I am in control, and I want you to trust me in all things." King David also wrote about how creation declares God:

The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. Day to day pours forth speech, And night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; Their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth, And their utterances to the end of the world. (Ps 19:1-4)

BEING ANCHORED IN THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD AFFECTS ALL WE THINK AND DO


When I finished writing this first session on the sovereignty of God I asked myself, “Will the Scripture verses I have chosen and the words I have written accomplish the goal of this study which is: To bring persons into the presence of God so they can experience the Father in intimate fellowship and be transformed into the likeness of Christ through the word by the power of the Holy Spirit?” (Ro 2:1,2; Eph. 4:11-13).

As I pondered this question, I asked myself, “How has my belief in the sovereignty of God impacted my life? In what ways has my mind been renewed and my actions transformed by the word through the power of the Holy Spirit?” As I reflected on the specific ways that trust in the sovereign power and rule of God has impacted my life, I was amazed at just how much this core belief affects just about everything I think and do. Below are some of the verses I have memorized and review regularly to illustrate how I have instilled this anchor in my daily actions and thought life.

Belief in the sovereignty of God:

- reminds me that God is in control of everything and I cannot control or change people or circumstance. I can trust Him to do what I cannot do. (Ps 33:10, 11; Da 4:34-35; Je 10:23)
- keeps me humble, reminding me that whatever abilities He has given me, and the things I accomplish for Him, are a direct result of His power. (2 Co 3:4, 4:7; Eph 2:10)
- reminds me that He is working behind the scenes, in the supernatural world, to achieve His purposes and plans for my life. Even when I become discouraged because my prayers seem to be going unanswered, and I don't see God's hand in my life, things will happen in His way and according to His timing. (2 Ch 20:15; Is 46: 9-11; Hab 2:3)
- reminds me that my God has promised that His sovereign, loving hand will bring me through any trial, quiet my soul, and strengthen me when fear and anxiety overcome me. (Hab 3:16-19; Is 41:10; Ps 42:5; Ps 46:10-11; Php 4:4-7; 1 Pe 5:6)
- reminds me that I can overcome the disappointments of life by putting my hope in God alone rather than people or circumstances. (La 3:21-25; Is 40:25-31; Ro 5:5)
- reminds me that I can do all things because of His mighty power working in me and through me. (Php 4:13; Mk 11:22-24; Jn 14:1)

REFLECT AND RESPOND

*Can you say that you have absolute faith in the sovereignty of God, or do you need to grow in this area? Review the six beliefs above and **choose one** in which you need to grow. Read the specific scriptures associated with that belief and write how you would like to grow in that area. *

MEMORIZE AND MEDITATE

Review your anchor cards. Memorize and meditate on the memory scriptures and your Personal Anchor Points.

APPOINTMENT WITH GOD

COME IN PRAYER (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication)

HEAR AND ACT (What is God saying? What have I learned? How should I respond?)

FOLLOW (What is God doing in my life and marriage?)

COUPLE TALK

Get with your spouse and set a time later this week (after you will have each completed this week's study) to discuss what you have learned. At the end of Day 5, you will be reminded to meet and be given some guidance for your discussion. While you will be reminded on Day 1 of each week to do this, I recommend you set a regular day and time to meet each week.

DAY 2: THE SOVEREIGN GOD CREATED MANKIND IN HIS OWN IMAGE

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness...." (Ge 1:26)

GOD'S SOVEREIGN DESIGN FOR MANKIND

After creating the universe, God moved on to the crowning glory: His creation of man. God prepared the perfect environment for man and woman to enjoy and to experience intimacy with Him and with one another. God in His infinite wisdom created us in His own image, in His likeness, so we could have fellowship with Him and with one another, glorifying Him in all we say and do. His desire for us was to have joy, peace, and love in His presence.

Let's search for what the Bible tells us in the story of God creating the first man and woman.

SEARCH THE WORD

Read Genesis 1:26-31.

1. *In what ways are we made in God's image? What do you think God's purpose was for creating us in His image? (For additional clues see Ps 57:2; Jn 11:25-26; 1 Thess 5:23-24; 1 Jn 4:11-12; Gen 2:18)*

2. *Genesis 1:27 describes God creating biological gender for His image bearers. Why are the differences between male and female essential to creating families as the building block of society? In verse 28, what does it mean to "be fruitful and increase in number?"*

3. *According to Genesis 1:26 and 28-30 what responsibilities for His creation does God give to man?*

GOD CREATED MAN AND WOMAN IN HIS OWN IMAGE

Both male and female bear God's image, and together in marriage, they are blessed as husband and wife by the Creator.

SPIRIT, SOUL, AND BODY

When God created man and woman, He created them with a spirit, soul and body. Scripture says,

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Th 5:23)

We will discuss this in greater detail in week 3, but I wanted to briefly cover the topic here.

Spirit

Unlike any other earthly creatures that God created, He gave us a spirit so we can relate to Him. When we place our faith in Jesus, we also receive His Spirit and become His children, perfectly suited for fellowship with Him as our heavenly Father (Ga 4:4-7).

Soul

Our soul is interconnected with our spirit and consists of our **mind, will** and **emotions**. God gave us a mind with the ability to think, to reason, and to understand who He is and His purpose for our lives. God gave us free will to choose between good and evil, which we do with our soul. God also gave us emotions that enable us to have a large range of feelings. God has given us the ability to understand and experience His love and to love Him in return. He also made His love available to flow through us so that we can love others with the same love He loves us. It is that supernatural love that anchors our marriage.

Body

With our bodies we can relate to the physical world around us through senses such as sight, taste, smell, touch, and hearing. Our bodies are nothing short of a miracle, created by an all knowing, all powerful sovereign God.

GOD'S SOVEREIGN DESIGN—MALE AND FEMALE

God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. (Ge 1:27)

God's word makes it clear that His design for the differences in men and women were not a random act but part of His perfect plan for the building blocks of society. God designed men and women to be different, but complimentary, both physically and emotionally. Todd Wilson in his excellent book, *Mere Sexuality*, says,

In the first chapter of the Bible we read 'male and female [God] created them' (Genesis 1:27). Immediately, then, we're confronted with both the canonical and theological priority of sexual differences in Christian thinking. It is essential to who we are, not accidental or peripheral, flexible or negotiable. Sexual difference is part of our nature as creatures. It is not something we create, like iPhones or automobiles. God has woven sexual difference into the fabric of creation. And because of this, our being male and female is integral to our calling as image bearers, not least in that most basic of all human communities—one known as marriage. As a result, we can't ignore the fact of our being either male or female without undermining our ability to flourish and find fulfillment. (p 35-36)

The secular world, and in many cases those who call themselves Christians, no longer recognizes that marriage (which was established by God) is a union between a man and a woman. This normalization and even celebration of same-sex relationships and same-sex "marriage" has opened Pandora's Box. It has now become increasingly popular to believe that the Genesis account of how God created man and woman with biological sexual differences is inconsequential and that our biological sex is optional and not fixed. Our secular culture is promoting that we may be anatomically male or female, but it doesn't matter as

much as whether we feel that we are male or female, or as Miley Cyrus claims, “I am pan-sexual.” This belief says people can customize and change their sexual identity at will, with multiple options available. Parents are even being warned about the dangers of stereotyping their children as male or female instead of allowing them to choose their gender, and public school teachers are required to support every child’s chosen gender identity, hiding this fact from the parents, regardless of the child’s age. Some teens are even reporting that there is peer pressure in school to at least experiment with their gender and sexual preference.

To resist this cultural drift, we must be anchored firmly in the sovereignty of God and the authority of His word. Genesis is clear that He is the all-powerful creator and sustainer of the universe. When Scripture says, “*Male and female He created them,*” it is said with the authority of the sovereign creator of the universe and not up for debate among those He created. His divine design cannot be modified, no matter what people think is best or how they feel. The first chapter of Genesis provides a foundation for understanding who God is, who we are as His creation and how we are to relate to Him. When this is disregarded and people think they can put themselves above God in deciding such issues, the consequences will be chaos and confusion and a decline in moral absolutes. Morality then comes from the whims of man, not from God.

GOD BLESSED THEM AND SAID...FILL...SUBDUE...RULE

God blessed them; and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” (Ge 1:28)

GOD BLESSED THEM

These are the first recorded words that God spoke to His newly created children. Before giving any instructions, He blessed them. We might consider this the opening statement of the first wedding ceremony, officiated by God. Imagine the Creator of the universe giving His blessing to the union of the first two people on earth, the crowning glory of His creation.

Blessings throughout the Bible are a promise of a loving heavenly Father’s spiritual, emotional, and physical provisions. God is bestowing on man and woman His approval and favor according to His divine will for marriage. To receive this blessing, men and women must live in a covenant relationship with their creator following His blueprint for marriage and family. We will discuss this covenant in day 3.

FILL

After God’s blessing to Adam and Eve, He gave them some vital instructions. He gives them the responsibility of building a godly marriage and family. It was through His plan of procreation that the world became populated. He gave man and woman the joy that comes with having children. Through physical intimacy, they are to fill or populate the earth. God made families the building block of society. God’s purpose for His creation and the stability of civilization would depend on complete obedience to His divine plan: What God designs, He also defines.

SUBDUE AND RULE

From the beginning, God’s sovereign plan for creation was to appoint mankind to be His representatives to govern the earth. All that He created was to be subdued and ruled by man. God created it all and owns it all, but God made men trustees of it all. Mankind was given the responsibility to invest it all for Him. Think

of it. The beauty and vastness of all that God has made, He gave to us to rule and enjoy. We are to be trustworthy stewards and accountable to Him for His creation.

 **REFLECT AND RESPOND**

Conclude today's study by reading Psalm 8. This Psalm reveals the majesty of God and how He has entrusted us with His creation to bring glory to Him. It reminds us of how God cares for us and all that He has created. Respond by taking a few moments to praise God for His creation as part of the "adoration" portion of Come in Prayer.

 **MEMORIZE AND MEDITATE**

Review your anchor cards. Memorize and meditate on the memory scriptures and your Personal Anchor Points.

APPOINTMENT WITH GOD

COME IN PRAYER (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication)

HEAR AND ACT (What is God saying? What have I learned? How should I respond?)

FOLLOW (What is God doing in my life and marriage?)

DAY 3: GOD INSTITUTED THE SACRED COVENANT OF MARRIAGE

For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. (Ge 2:24)

On day two of this session we saw how God created male and female in His image to have an intimate relationship with Him. We were able to witness God blessing them and assigning them their purpose on earth. As husband and wife, they were to glorify Him by bearing children and managing the wonderful garden He created for their pleasure and His purpose. Today we see in the second chapter of Genesis that God expands on the creation of Adam and Eve and His purpose for marriage. This is not a second creation account but a continuation of the creation account and a closer look at how God instituted the sacred covenant of marriage. You will see that it is a binding agreement between you, your spouse, and God.

Genesis 2:24 is the defining verse for the sacred covenant of marriage. In just a few words God gives His divine definition and intention for marriage. He says,

For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. (Ge 2:24)

While this verse does not specifically refer to marriage as a covenant relationship, the book of Malachi does (we will cover this in day 5). It speaks in depth about marriage being a sacred covenant and what that means. In the New Testament, Jesus quotes Genesis 2:24 once, and the Apostle Paul quotes it twice.

SEARCH THE WORD

Read Genesis 2:18-24.

1. *In verse 18, what does God say about man being alone, and what is His solution?*

2. *What would you say is the reason that it is not good for man to be alone? What would you be missing if you were totally alone?*

3. *How did God create woman to be the perfect helper for Adam? What was Adam's response?*

4. Reflect on verse 24: In your own words, what is the reason for a man to leave his mother and father?

5. What does it mean to be “one flesh”? (Also read Malachi 2:15; Matt. 19:4-6; Eph 5:30-33; 1 Cor. 11:11, 12)

WHY IT IS NOT GOOD FOR MAN TO BE ALONE

Before giving the defining statement of the sacred covenant of marriage, God explained that man is incomplete without woman.

Then the LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.” (Ge 2:18)

MAN IS INCOMPLETE WITHOUT WOMAN

Adam was incomplete without Eve. He needed a helpmate. God in His infinite wisdom created man and woman to be **complete as one** in the sacred covenant of marriage. After quoting the sacred covenant of marriage from Genesis, Jesus added, “So they are no longer two, but one flesh” (Mt 19:6). The two would become one in a complementary way, fulfilling God’s purpose for marriage and family.

MAN NEEDS A SUITABLE HELPER

God created Eve so that together they would be complete and could enjoy intimacy with God, one another, and be His image bearers to the world. The account goes on to explain how God made a helper suitable for Adam. He made woman from Adam’s rib and brought her to Him. Adam responds with enthusiasm.

The man said, “This is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man.” (Ge 2:23)

God concludes the marriage ceremony with a binding covenant.

THE SACRED COVENANT OF MARRIAGE

For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. (Ge 2:24–25)

FOR THIS REASON

The reason that God created a helpmate for Adam was to unite them in the sacred covenant of marriage, making them “one flesh.” On day two we witnessed God blessing the couple and then giving them instructions to have children and be trustees of His creation. Now God concludes the wedding ceremony by entering into this sacred covenant with Adam and Eve:

A MAN WILL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER

A person must leave the protective custody and nurture of a mother and father to establish a new family unit. Marriage is an **exclusive** relationship and is to avoid other attachments that would weaken or harm the marriage. It is not meant to exclude family or other healthy relationships that support the marriage; however, the marriage must remain the highest priority after one’s relationship with God.

BE JOINED

It is important to note that the sovereign God of the universe performs the first marriage ceremony. It is He who joins man and woman to one another in marriage. The divine intention for a husband and wife is monogamy—one man and one woman for one lifetime. It is to be, as traditional marriage ceremonies state, “till death do us part.” It is an **exclusive** relationship, and it is a **life-long** relationship. Jesus emphasized this when he quoted the sacred covenant of marriage and then added, “*What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate*” (Mt 19:6).

AND THE TWO WILL BECOME ONE FLESH

This is the heart of the covenant. God unites man and woman by pronouncing them “*one flesh*.” God makes them one. They are no longer two but one. This is an inseparable union and bond instituted by God and is never to be broken by man (Mt. 19:6). The term “*one flesh*” refers primarily to the intimate sexual union between a man and a woman but has a wider meaning that includes oneness in all of life.

One flesh is not only an exclusive and life-long union, but also a **comprehensive** union. It is comprehensive because God has created us to be one in body, soul and spirit. Our bodies are meant to be exclusively for one another, and sex is a sacred component of the marriage covenant. Our souls are to be one as well. As discussed, our souls consist of our minds, will, and emotions. Most important, we are to be one spiritually and share a mutual love and devotion to God. We are to work towards intimacy in each of these areas as we share our bodies, thoughts, wills, and emotions with one another. While God has pronounced us one in marriage, we must work towards being one on a practical level as we learn to love, understand, and accept one another’s differences.

This may seem a daunting task, but as we progress together through this study, you will see how anchoring your marriage on the four foundational anchors, with a biblical worldview, will help you both become one as God has declared you one. In later chapters, you will learn the four strategic anchors found in Philippians 2:1-11 and gain practical steps to becoming one.

REFLECT AND RESPOND

Reflect on what was discussed in this chapter, particularly the sacred covenant of marriage.

1. *When you got married, to what degree did you understand the sacred covenant of marriage and its implications for your life and marriage?*

2. *How would you currently assess your marriage about honoring the sacred covenant of marriage to be one?*

3. *In what areas of the sacred covenant of marriage do you think your marriage has room to grow?*



A PRAYER FOR THE SACRED COVENANT OF MARRIAGE

This prayer for the sacred covenant of marriage is a summary of what you will learn in this study. Pray this prayer as a promise to always honor this covenant in your marriage.

Lord, I covenant with you to make every effort to be one with you, and one with my wife/husband. By your power I will honor this sacred covenant by being a humble, selfless, and obedient servant by laying down my life for my wife/husband. I pray that our marriage will bring glory to you, and that others may come to know you by seeing you in our relationship. In Jesus name, Amen.



MEMORIZE AND MEDITATE

Review your anchor cards. Memorize and meditate on the memory scriptures and your Personal Anchor Points.

APPOINTMENT WITH GOD

COME IN PRAYER (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication)

HEAR AND ACT (What is God saying? What have I learned? How should I respond?)

FOLLOW (What is God doing in my life and marriage?)

DAY 4: THE NEW TESTAMENT AND THE COVENANT OF MARRIAGE

And He answered and said, "Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE, and said, 'FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate." (Mt 19:4–6)

During the first three days of this study we saw how God instituted the sacred covenant of marriage at the beginning of creation. God established this covenant in the first book of the Old Testament and the prophet Malachi reminds the Israelites of the importance of restoring that covenant in the last book of the Old Testament (Mal 2:13-17). Today we look at how the New Testament gives new insights into the meaning of the covenant of marriage.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE OLD AND NEW COVENANTS

The Bible is divided into the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament tells of God's law and describes a covenant (known as the old covenant) between God and man that provided atonement for the sins of the people (the breaking of God's law) through animal sacrifices. Every year on the Day of Atonement, the high priest went into the "Most Holy Place" in the Tabernacle or Temple and offered a sacrifice of the blood of bulls and goats, which atoned for the sins of the people. This was not for the forgiveness of sins, but temporarily covered the people's sins for the past year, and atonement would have to be offered again the next year. The Old Testament also predicted a Messiah (or Christ) who would come.

Jesus is that Messiah, and Jesus ushered in the New Covenant, which is documented for us in the New Testament. Under the New Covenant, Jesus fulfilled God's law by offering Himself as the perfect sacrifice that provided permanent forgiveness of sin, and no further sacrifice is needed. The writer of Hebrews speaking of Jesus as our High Priest said,

He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. (Heb 9:12, NIV)

When Jesus died on the cross, He died to pay the penalty for our sins; He became sin for us. Therefore, when we trust Jesus for our salvation and decide to follow Him, our sins are permanently covered by Jesus's shed blood, and we are made perfect in God's eyes. This is not because of anything we have done, but because of what Jesus did for us through the grace of His perfect sacrifice.

...by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. (Heb 10:14, NIV)

Our **position** of being holy in God's sight is perfect; however, in our **practice**, we are being made holy day by day. We progressively become more like Jesus as we respond to God's sanctifying work in our life. Now the laws of God are not on tablets of stone, but God has written them on our hearts through the Holy Spirit—a fulfillment of His Covenant. (Je 31:31-33; Heb 8:7-13)

JESUS AND THE SACRED COVENANT OF MARRIAGE

With this rich background, we will now study what the New Testament has to say about the covenant of marriage. We will trace the common thread that will tie all these accounts of the marriage covenant together. God **made us one**, and we are **to become one**, and now Jesus gives an extended perspective of

the marriage covenant. He does this in response to a question that some Pharisees asked Him about divorce.

SEARCH THE WORD

Read Matthew 19:3-9.

1. *When asked about reasons for divorce, what authority did Jesus refer them to? What did He challenge them to remember? (v. 4-5)*
2. *Why do you think Jesus thought it was important to quote Genesis 2:24? The Pharisees were certainly familiar with this verse on marriage. (v. 5)*
3. *What does Jesus add to the sacred marriage covenant? Why do you think Jesus added this statement? (v. 6)*
4. *What reason does Jesus give for the cause of divorce? Under what circumstances is divorce permitted? (v. 7-9)*

THE ONLY ONE

Jesus answers the Pharisees in a clear and direct way. He goes beyond just stating that God pronounced them as one. God **made us one**, we are **to become one**, and then Jesus continued by adding something that should be obvious: our marriage partner is to be **the only one**. Since it is God who has joined husband and wife together, their relationship is permanent—there is to be no other one! We dare not separate what God has put together! Above all, we are to honor the sacred covenant of marriage.

And He answered and said, "Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE, and said, 'FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate." (Mt 19:4–6)

Have You Not Read...

The authority of the word. Jesus begins answering their question by reminding them of something that as teachers of the law they should already know. God has already spoken. When God speaks, they are to listen. God's word is the sole authority and only standard for truth. We need to embrace this as well. Not matter what our popular culture says about marriage, it is what God says that is our authority. As followers of Jesus we have no other truth or authority.

From the Beginning...

The unchanging nature of God. Jesus immediately takes the teachers of the law back to creation and the reason for God's design of man and woman and the purpose of marriage. What God intended for man and woman in the beginning never changes. The Pharisees wanted to be their own authority. They twisted God's word to justify their own sinful desires. But the sovereign creator of the universe never changes.

Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. (Jas 1:17)

He Who Created them...Made Them Male and Female

The ultimate authority is the sovereign God. Jesus invokes the ultimate authority and sovereignty of God. It was the all-powerful, sovereign creator and sustainer of the universe who created man and woman to be His image bearers in their marriages and families. It is for this reason that they are to honor the sacred covenant of marriage ordained by God at the beginning.

For This Reason...

God created us to live in a covenant relationship with God and one another. Jesus quotes the sacred covenant of marriage and reemphasizes the essential nature of being one by adding, "*so they are no longer two but one flesh.*" But He does not stop there. He knows that the Pharisees are trying to justify breaking the marriage covenant. Based on the authority of the word and sovereignty of the Creator, He sums up what He has been saying with this warning,

...What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate. (Mt 19:6)

When the Pharisees question Jesus about why Moses permitted divorce, he clearly said that from the very beginning of creation divorce was never part of God's plan. The basic reason for divorce was hard hearts. The only exception Jesus gave for divorce was marital unfaithfulness (and Paul adds abandonment in 1 Co 7:15).

PAUL AND THE SACRED COVENANT OF MARRIAGE

With the coming of the New Covenant, marriage takes on an even deeper meaning. The Old Covenant of law has been fulfilled through the New Covenant of grace. Obedience out of duty to receive blessings from God is replaced by obeying because we are chosen and dearly loved children of the heavenly Father. We are motivated to love Him because of how much He loves us. All this is because we are new creations in Christ: "the old things passed away; behold, new things have come" (2 Co 5:17).

THE GRACE MODEL: LIKE CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

The sacred covenant of marriage is not replaced. It is as it was from the beginning, and it is now illuminated by grace. When we placed our faith in Jesus, we were saved by His grace and became members of His body, the Church. We now have a new model for how to love our spouses. How Christ loves His body, the church, and how the church is to relate to Him is now a model for marriage. Husbands are told to “*love [their] wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her*” (Eph 5:25). Wives are told to submit to their husbands “*as the church is subject to Christ*” (Eph 5:24) and to respect them (Eph. 5:33).

THE PROFOUND MYSTERY

Paul summarized his teaching on marriage by quoting the sacred covenant of marriage from Genesis. He then related it to Christ’s love for His bride, the Church, and our responsibility to model our marriages after his example. He referred to this as “*the profound mystery.*”

FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church. Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband. (Eph 5:31–33)

The profound mystery Paul speaks about is the union of Christ and His bride, the church. Our commitment to the sacred covenant of marriage is to reflect Christ’s marriage to His bride.

How can husbands and wives live out these principles in their marriages? To know how to honor the sacred covenant of marriage in practical ways we need only to see how Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her. As members of His body we need only to observe how God lovingly feeds and cares for His body to see how we are to love, feed, and care for one another. We are members of His body. Only by following that example can we become one in our marriage, be humble, selfless, servants to one another and, in turn, fully honor the sacred covenant of marriage (Php 2:2-8). In later chapters, you will learn how four strategic anchors found in Philippians can enable you to do this in practical ways. These anchors can help us:

...be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma. (Eph 5:1–2)

YOU AND THE SACRED COVENANT OF MARRIAGE

On our wedding day, whether we were aware of it or not, we entered a sacred covenant with God. The Hebrew word for covenant is “berith,” which means “fetter” or “bond.” Two people tied or united together in a binding agreement. God promises to be tied to us, and we are tied to Him. It is a personal relationship. God chooses to be our friend in this binding relationship. We choose to love God and be obedient to the covenant. We promise to live in a covenant relationship with Him. It is out of a deep appreciation of God’s grace in our life that we willingly honor the sacred covenant of marriage. The covenant relationship that God has entered into with us can be summed up with the first words of Nehemiah’s prayer for Israel,

I said, “I beseech You, O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who preserves the covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments....” (Ne 1:5)

Our great and awesome God promises to be faithful in His covenant of love for us and we are to love Him and be obedient to His word. Out of our love for God we are to faithfully honor the sacred covenant of marriage to be one.



MEMORIZE AND MEDITATE

Review your anchor cards. Memorize and meditate on the memory scriptures and your Personal Anchor Points.

APPOINTMENT WITH GOD

COME IN PRAYER (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication)

HEAR AND ACT (What is God saying? What have I learned? How should I respond?)

FOLLOW (What is God doing in my life and marriage?)

DAY 5: HOW THE SACRED COVENANT OF MARRIAGE IS BROKEN

“This is another thing you do: you cover the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping and with groaning, because He no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. Yet you say, ‘For what reason?’ Because the LORD has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. But not one has done so who has a remnant of the Spirit. And what did that one do while he was seeking a godly offspring? Take heed then to your spirit, and let no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth. For I hate divorce,” says the LORD, the God of Israel, “and him who covers his garment with wrong,” says the LORD of hosts. “So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously.” (Mal 2:13–16)

We will end this first week’s study by looking at a passage on the covenant of marriage found in the last book of the Old Testament. The prophet Malachi specifically addresses how marriage covenants are broken and the tragic consequences, but he also shows how the sacred covenant of marriage can be renewed or restored. Israel had a history of mingling with foreign cultures, forsaking God, breaking covenants, and suffering the consequences.

But they mingled with the nations And learned their practices, And served their idols, Which became a snare to them. (Ps 106:35–36)

Malachi first admonishes the Priests because they were not honoring their Levitical (priestly) covenant by failing to faithfully teach God’s truth to Israel.

“But as for you, you have turned aside from the way; you have caused many to stumble by the instruction; you have corrupted the covenant of Levi,” says the LORD of hosts. (Mal 2:8)

The leaders were neglecting to teach the truth of God’s word and hold people accountable. They began to use their freedom after being released from captivity to break the covenant of Moses but also the covenant of marriage. They divorced their Hebrew wives and married foreign wives who worshiped foreign gods. Those actions, Malachi said, were “detestable” to God and had serious consequences for the nation.

When it comes to the authority of Scripture and marriage, Christians have “mingled” with popular culture and taken on its customs. As we will see in today’s study, the sacred covenant of marriage is being broken in many ways. While this passage took place in an ancient culture, we will see there are some issues about marriage that never change, and there are biblical principles that we can apply to our marriages today.

HOW THE COVENANT OF MARRIAGE IS BROKEN

Read Malachi 2:8-16.

As Malachi addresses the critical issue of breaking the sacred covenant of marriage, he immediately refers to Genesis chapters two and three as his authority. He reminds the people that there is one sovereign God and Father who created them in His image. They were to live in a covenant relationship by being faithful to God and to one another.

Do we not all have one father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously each against his brother so as to profane the covenant of our fathers? (Mal 2:10)

The covenant here not only refers to the Mosaic covenant, which included laws pertaining to marriage, but also the original marriage covenant which was established back at creation (Ge 2:23-24). The people were breaking faith with one another by marrying outside their faith and by divorcing their wives, and this was

deeply grieving God. To profane (v10) means to treat that which is holy with great disrespect. In traditional marriage ceremonies, the phrase “holy matrimony” is sometimes used. The word holy means to be set apart by God for His glory. Breaking faith in marriage disrespects God and His holy purpose for marriage.

THE PEOPLE BROKE FAITH BY MARRYING OUTSIDE THEIR FAITH

*Judah has dealt treacherously, and an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the LORD which He loves and has **married the daughter of a foreign god.** (Mal 2:11)*

In this passage the covenant is profaned when the men divorced their Hebrew wives and married foreign women who worshiped foreign gods. This indicates how the people of Judah had neglected their relationship with God and mingled with the idol worshiping nations around them. This would not have happened if they had honored the covenant to love and obey God.

THE PEOPLE BROKE THE MARRIAGE COVENANT BY BEING UNFAITHFUL TO THEIR SPOUSES

Yet you say, ‘For what reason?’ Because the LORD has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. But not one has done so who has a remnant of the Spirit. And what did that one do while he was seeking a godly offspring? Take heed then to your spirit and let no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth. For “I hate divorce,” says the LORD, the God of Israel.... (Mal 2:14–16)

Malachi reminds the people that it is God who has made them one. It is God who joined them together in the sacred covenant of marriage. This is a sobering thought. We also need to remember God was present at our marriage ceremony as the key witness. It was God who pronounced us husband and wife. It was a sacred, holy ceremony that set us apart and is meant to reflect God’s image in our marriage. God hates divorce because it not only breaks His holy covenant and His purpose for marriage but causes great pain in many people’s lives. Because of this, Jesus clarified the sacred covenant of marriage by adding, “*What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.*” (Mt 19:6).

CONSEQUENCES OF BREAKING THE MARRIAGE COVENANT

There are always consequences when we disobey God. God has given us His word to follow so we can live out His purpose for our lives. When we live out His purpose for us, we experience joy, peace, and love in our relationship with Him and with others. When we disobey His word, He allows us to suffer the consequences so we will realize our need for Him, repent, and return to Him.

THE SANCTUARY OF THE LORD IS DESECRATED

*Judah has dealt treacherously, and an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for **Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the LORD** which He loves and has married the daughter of a foreign god. (Mal 2:11)*

The first consequence of breaking faith in our marriage is that in doing so we profane the sanctuary that God loves. When we break faith in our marriage and do not honor the sacred covenant of marriage, we break faith with God. To the people of Judah, the sanctuary of the Lord, which was the temple, represented the dwelling place of God. They went to the temple to enter God’s presence through worship and by bringing offerings. It was here that they were close to God and received the temporary forgiveness of sins through the sacrifice of animals. God loved His sanctuary because He loved His people, and it was a place where people could experience His love.

This first consequence has application for us today. Under the New Covenant of grace, we are now God's temple, His dwelling place. Christ lives in us and we abide in Him. We, together with others, are God's dwelling place. In marriage and in the body of Christ, we are joined together to be God's holy temple where He dwells in us. When we break our marriage covenant, we break faith with God

...Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit. (Eph 2:20–22)

OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH OUR SPOUSE AND OTHERS IS BROKEN

As for the man who [marries the daughter of a foreign god], whoever he may be, may the Lord cut him off from the tents of Jacob—even though he brings offerings to the Lord Almighty. ... Has not the Lord made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth. (Mal 2:12,15, NIV)

The consequence of breaking the sacred covenant of marriage is that faith is broken, not only with the spouse, but with other people in our family and of the faith community. The “*tents of Jacob*” is a figurative expression that refers to that community. When the sacred covenant of marriage is broken the consequences go far beyond the separating partners. Starting with the immediate family, especially the children, the pain and grief spreads to other family members and friends. The suffering spreads like cancer. I have seen this firsthand in my own family. The pain, even with adult children, is intense. Breaking faith can affect generations as children lose faith in adults whom they have trusted, and sometimes they lose faith in God.

OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD IS BROKEN

This is another thing you do: you cover the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping and with groaning, because He no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. Yet you say, ‘For what reason?’ Because the LORD has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. (Mal 2:13–14)

The most serious of all consequences is that when we break faith with our spouse, we break faith with God. Because Judah broke faith with God by breaking the sacred covenant of marriage, the people no longer had the favor of God or His blessings that they so desperately wanted. Their desperation had not led to repentance. It was not that God had forsaken them, but they had broken the covenant and forsaken Him. It was not that God had distanced Himself from them, but they had distanced themselves from the presence and favor of God by their sin and rebellion. Isaiah reminded God's chosen people,

But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, And your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear. (Is 59:2)

When we break the sacred covenant of marriage, we distance ourselves from God because of our disobedience. We lose the blessing of God and the joy of His intimate presence in our lives. We do not lose our salvation, for that is by grace alone through faith alone. What we lose is intimate fellowship with God that gives us joy, peace and love. This is restored through true repentance.

RESTORING THE SACRED COVENANT OF MARRIAGE

The purpose of this rebuke by Malachi was not to condemn the people of Judah but to remind them that they are a people created by God for the very special purpose of honoring Him by carrying out His plan for marriage and family. God allowed the people to suffer so they would repent and their relationship with Him could be restored. This would only happen if they would love and obey God and honor the sacred covenant of marriage to be one. He shows them three practical ways for this to happen. These are biblical truths that apply to us today.

LIVE BY THE TRUTH THAT YOU HAVE ONE SOVEREIGN GOD AND FATHER WHO CREATED YOU

Do we not all have one father? Has not one God created us? (Mal 2:10)

We are to build our marriage on the foundation of the sovereignty of God. Hold to the truth that we have a Father God Almighty who has adopted us and that we are His deeply loved sons and daughters. Never forget that He is the sovereign God of the universe and the ultimate authority for all we think and do.

LIVE BY THE TRUTH THAT GOD WAS A WITNESS TO YOUR MARRIAGE AND HE MADE YOU ONE WITH YOUR SPOUSE

...the Lord is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth.... Has not the Lord made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. (Mal 2:14-15, NIV)

When you married, you made a covenant with God to be one with your spouse. He made you one in the most sacred relationship of marriage. Now your responsibility is to live by that covenant. Your purpose is to glorify God by honoring that covenant to be one.

GUARD YOURSELF IN YOUR MARRIAGE AND DON'T BREAK FAITH

So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith.... (Mal 2:15b, NIV)

Malachi concludes his rebuke by giving the key to not breaking the sacred covenant of marriage: “*guard yourself in your spirit.*” To guard one’s spirit or soul is to stand guard over any thought or action that could lead to breaking the covenant of marriage to be one. The Apostle Paul refers to this principle when he says,

Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. (2 Co 7:1)

Guarding your marriage is so important that Week 9 of this study is devoted to that topic. I know today’s study was difficult for those of you who have been affected by the consequences of a broken marriage covenant. Some suffered the consequences of parents who divorced. Some feel the guilt of initiating a divorce without a clear scriptural justification to do so. Many more, including myself and my family, have been deeply affected by another couple’s divorce. Some may not have divorced but broke the covenant by sexual immorality or inappropriate relationships outside of marriage. Others feel the devastation caused by a spouse who broke the covenant of marriage either by adultery or divorce. Many others have suffered the consequences of such actions.

The remainder of this book is for the purpose of strengthening your marriage and renewing the sacred covenant of marriage no matter what your circumstances might be. The good news is that God is a God of truth and grace. He is a God of fresh starts and new beginnings. He delights in making us stronger in the broken places. God wants to restore and strengthen the sacred covenant of all marriages. God has said,

Do not call to mind the former things, Or ponder things of the past. Behold, I will do something new, Now it will spring forth; Will you not be aware of it? I will even make a roadway in the wilderness, Rivers in the desert.... The people whom I formed for Myself Will declare My praise. (Is 43:18–19,21)



MEMORIZE AND MEDITATE

Review your anchor cards. Memorize and meditate on the memory scriptures and your Personal Anchor Points.


APPOINTMENT WITH GOD

COME IN PRAYER (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication)

HEAR AND ACT (What is God saying? What have I learned? How should I respond?)

FOLLOW (What is God doing in my life and marriage?)

PERSONAL ANCHOR POINT

You should now develop your Personal Anchor Point. Review and reflect on what you have learned this week and what God may have laid on your heart as the week progressed. Pray for God's direction in developing your Personal Anchor Point. As a reminder, your Personal Anchor Point is a specific practice you will implement in your daily walk to strengthen your connection to this week's anchor. It includes the key point you learned and the action you will take in response. See page 6 for more information. 

COUPLE TALK

You should have established a time to meet with your spouse before the next group meeting. When you sit down with your spouse, *discuss what you have learned during the week and what God has said to you about your life and your marriage. How does what you believe about the sovereignty of God and the sacred covenant of marriage affect your marriage? How can you honor the sacred covenant of marriage?* Make some notes in the space provided below.

Notes:

WEEK 2: ANCHORED IN THE WORD OF GOD

ANCHOR CARD

This week we will study how to be anchored in the word of God. Begin by creating your anchor card for the week. As described on page 6, write the Anchor for this week at the top of an index card or in your electronic notes program, followed by the Anchor Scripture and Anchor Prayer.

ANCHOR SCRIPTURE

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. (2 Ti 3:16–17)

ANCHOR PRAYER

I know that through Your Holy Spirit You spoke through men You chose to record exactly what You wanted to say. I promise that Your inspired, perfect word will be my sole authority and only standard for truth, and I am committed to always obeying Your word.

DAILY TOPICS

Day 1: The Inspiration of the Bible

Day 2: The Authority of the Bible

Day 3: The Practice of Memorization and Meditation

Day 4: Delighting in God's

Day 5: Scripture Praying

DAY 1: THE INSPIRATION OF THE BIBLE

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. (2 Ti 3:16–17)

Builders know that if a building is going to have structural integrity it must have a solid foundation. Foundations always come first and then the building. Every building relies on the strength of that foundation. Jesus made it clear that to follow Him, our foundation must be on the solid rock of His word.

Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall. (Mt 7:24-27)

Similarly, root systems are the foundations of healthy plants and trees. The root system digs deep into the earth where a tree can receive nourishment, grow and produce delicious fruit.

How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers. (Ps 1:1–3)

To withstand the storms of life that will inevitably come, our marriages must be built with a solid foundation on the sovereignty of God and the rock of God's word. Then, for our marriages to grow and strengthen, they must have deep roots in the streams of living water from Scripture, and then we will not only hear what God says, we will also do what He says. That is what it means to be anchored in the word of God.

Although most of the world does not recognize it, God's word is the supreme source of authority, period! The sovereign God of the universe has spoken through the Bible. It is His authoritative communication to all His creation. There is no other true source of authority and morality. Whatever local authority exists on earth, be it in government or business, is derived from God, as outlined in His word. What is alarming is that although most of America claims it to be a "Christian nation" built on the foundation of the Bible, only fifteen percent of Americans believe that the Bible is the infallible word of God. The Barna Research Group also found that only 34 percent of adults believe that there is any absolute moral truth. (*U TURN*, George Barna and David Burton, pp. 31, 38)

As we saw in last week's study, the sovereign God of the universe spoke the world into existence. Nine times in Genesis chapter one the Bible says, "*and God said.*" The Bible claims to have come from God. Without reservation or apology, the Bible claims to be God's very words. Over three thousand times the Bible uses phrases such as "*and God said,*" "*The Sovereign Lord says*" or "*Listen to what God says.*" The Bible claims to be a record of what God has said and done. Just prior to the day of Pentecost when the Church was founded, Peter said,

Brethren, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit foretold by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. (Ac 1:16)

Therefore, it is important that we understand how we received the Bible, and that we can rely on it as the infallible word of God.

HOW THE BIBLE WAS WRITTEN

The Bible claims that it is the word of God, but how was it written? The questions are, “How did God do this? How did the Bible become the very words of God in print? How can we know that these words are accurate? Are these really God’s words and not someone putting words into His mouth?” The answer is twofold:

GOD BREATHED IT

First, we need to know that it was through divine inspiration that God “breathed” or revealed who He is and His will and instruction for His creation. The Scripture says,

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; (2 Ti 3:16)

The Greek word for inspiration is “*theupnevatus*,” which means “*God breathed*.” We might say that God breathed His words to be written down in the Bible. The Apostle Peter gives us a glimpse of how God “*breathed*” the Bible into existence.

SEARCH THE WORD

Read 2 Peter 1:20-21.

1. *Why is it important for us to understand where Scripture came from and why was it written?*

2. *What was the origin of Scripture? How were men able to write Scripture? What should our response be to how the Bible was written?*

MEN WROTE IT

But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. (2 Pe 1:20–21)

The Greek word for “*moved*” is a nautical term, describing a ship that has lost its sail and rudder, and the current determines the ship’s direction as it is “*moved*” or carried along. The meaning is clear. The Holy Spirit carried along, or divinely directed, men to write what God revealed.

It was God's breath that dictated what the authors He chose would write. It was the Spirit that directed their writing. God, however, did not treat the authors as robots. He allowed each person to write in his own style, but God always controlled the content. What was written in the Bible is exactly what God wanted it to say.

When the Jews wanted to stone Jesus for claiming He was the Son of God, Jesus referred them to the Old Testament and said, *"the Scripture cannot be broken"* (Jn 10:35). Jesus was reminding the Jews about the total reliability and unity of the Old Testament. The Old and New Testaments tell one comprehensive and cohesive story. As we will see, this writing project was impossible for man to do on his own. It was truly a divine project directed by the hand of the Almighty. Here are some of the things that made the writing of the Bible humanly impossible.

A 1500 HUNDRED YEAR PROJECT

The author of the Bible ensured total consistency. Even though the Bible was written over a period of 1500 years, there is not a single contradiction! What was said hundreds of years before was in complete agreement with what Jesus said on that day to the skeptical Jews.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF FORTY DIFFERENT AUTHORS

Not only was the Bible written over a period of 1500 years, but there were forty different authors who had a hand in writing it. These authors came from diverse backgrounds. There was Moses, adopted son of royalty who wrote the first five books of the Bible, called the Law. There was David, a shepherd who became a king, and wrote the book of Psalms. There was Amos, who was a sheep breeder and fruit caretaker. Daniel and Nehemiah had high positions in foreign governments. Peter and John were fisherman, while Matthew was a tax collector, and Luke was a medical doctor. Who would ever think to choose such a diverse group of people to write a book together?

MANY DIFFERENT KINDS OF BOOKS

Even a casual reader of the Bible will notice the extremely diverse kinds of writings. The Bible contains history, poetry, proverbs, preaching, prophecy, biography and letters.

MANY DIFFERENT COUNTRIES AND CONTINENTS

The Bible was composed in thirteen countries on three continents.

"IMPOSSIBLE" UNITY

Think about it for a minute. Consider the impossibility of a writing project that spans more than fifteen hundred years, written in thirteen countries by forty different authors with the goal of having a common theme with no contradictions. The story line must be carried through from beginning to end with complete unity. Would you take on such a project? Who would be crazy enough to be the editor of that kind of volume? Oh, and by the way, there are to be **no mistakes**.

YOU TRY IT!

Would you attempt to coordinate such a project? We will make the editor's job a little simpler and see if you would be willing to take on the task. Let's say you were given the opportunity to go to your hometown to edit a book on a topic to be assigned. You are given the freedom to find forty different authors to contribute to this book. You ask these authors to write about a controversial subject without collaborating with the others. At the conclusion of the project they must be willing to stake their lives on the accuracy and unity of the book.

Would you accept the project? If so, what do you think would be the outcome? How much agreement would you have between the forty authors? You might get agreement on a few points but overall, you would have great diversity. You would have at least as many different ideas as you had authors. Contradictions would abound. Because of the authors' different backgrounds, experiences, values, and thought patterns, you would find greatly varying points of view on the subject.

SUPERNATURAL UNITY

Now think back to the humanly impossible task of writing the Bible. How could forty different authors who lived in different eras, with different languages and cultures, **not** reflect the distinctiveness of their cultures? How were they able to maintain an essential unity of thought and principles throughout the hundreds of years? The only answer is that they were inspired by God. God "*breathed*" unity of principles and thought into their minds and souls. God supernaturally gave them the ability to record exactly what He wanted in the Bible. From Genesis to Revelation the theme never changes. The theme of God's love for man can be read from cover to cover. There are 1500 years of supernatural consistency.

OTHER EVIDENCE FOR THE INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE

There is other evidence to support that the Bible is the inspired, perfect word of God. Thousands of manuscripts have been preserved, and archeology supports the history of the Biblical account. There are hundreds of documented prophecies that have been fulfilled. The Bible has survived thousands of years while men have tried to destroy it or discredit it and it stands today as the bestselling book ever. There is a preponderance of evidence that the Bible is the word of the sovereign God of the universe.

THE GREATEST EVIDENCE FOR THE INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE

It is obvious that we do not have to believe that the Bible is the perfect, authoritative word of God by blind faith, but historical evidence is not the most important thing. God created in mankind a soul and a spirit by which they can be connected to His Spirit. It is a God shaped vacuum that can only be filled by God. God placed it there so that all who desire to seek Him can find him. God speaks to all who seek Him through His word.

I experienced this before I came a believer. I considered myself to be an agnostic. I did not believe that God existed, nor did I believe that He did not exist. When I considered the evidence, I always ended up frustrated and unable to come to any conclusion. I was unhappy with the direction of (or lack of direction in) my life. I decided on a different approach. I got up early the next morning, got out a Bible and prayed, "God, if you are really there, you are going to have to reveal yourself to me. I cannot figure this out on my own." I opened the Bible and read the first chapter of the book of John. The next day I prayed the same prayer and read the second chapter. Then on the third day God answered my prayer. After reading the third chapter of John, God spoke to my spirit. I knew in my heart that He was real. All doubt had been removed. I had come to Him and sought Him on His terms, and He had answered me through His Spirit empowered word. From that moment on, all doubt was removed.

God not only speaks to our spirits through His word so that we believe, but He continues to speak to us through His word as His deeply loved children. The Apostle Paul assured the believers in Rome,

For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God. (Ro 8:15–16)

Throughout this resource you will be encouraged to learn to listen to God through His word. God will impress on your heart things He wants you to know and do. It is the Holy Spirit speaking to your spirit (Heb 4:12). This may seem difficult at first, but you will learn by doing the assignments in this study. Learning to hear God is like learning a new language. First you must learn a new vocabulary. That vocabulary is the very words of God in the Bible. As you practice listening to God you will learn to hear what He says to you. Memorizing, meditating on and praying scripture will be a great help in learning the language of God.



MEMORIZE AND MEDITATE

Review your anchor cards. Memorize and meditate on the memory scriptures and your Personal Anchor Points.

APPOINTMENT WITH GOD

COME IN PRAYER (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication)

HEAR AND ACT (What is God saying? What have I learned? How should I respond?)

FOLLOW (What is God doing in my life and marriage?)

COUPLE TALK

If you have not already done so, get with your spouse and set a time later this week (after you will have each completed this week's study) to discuss what you have learned. At the end of Day 5, you will be reminded to meet and be given some guidance for your discussion.

DAY 2: THE AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE

But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. (2 Pe 1:20–21)

All people make decisions based on some source of authority. Everyone needs some source of authority as a reference point to distinguish between right and wrong. Moral choices are not made in a vacuum. In today's culture of political correctness and the modern "tolerance," there is tremendous pressure to accept one source of authority as equal to all others. According to many, there is not just one truth that serves as a source of authority, but many equally reliable sources. Each person has their own truth.

FOUR SOURCES OF AUTHORITY

I believe there are only four basic sources of authority people use to make moral choices. To help you remember these sources of authority I will use the acronym **TIES**, because our source of authority is what ties us to our morals. According to the Bible the first three sources of authority we will look at are inadequate. The final source is the only true and adequate source of authority.

TRADITION

Some people and religions use tradition as their primary source of authority. A tradition is a human pattern of thought or action that is handed down through the generations. Usually, people put great importance on a belief or practice and through the generations it becomes increasingly important until it ultimately becomes a source of authority that no one dares challenge. While traditions have their place in culture and faiths, they should never serve as a source of authority. The Apostle Paul warned against such traditions.

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. (Col 2:8)

INTELLECT

Many people use their own intellect or reason as their source of authority. People determine their own truth based upon what they think is right and wrong. How many times have you heard someone say things like, "A good God would never allow that to happen" or "I think religion is a crutch" or "I believe there are many paths to God." All these conclusions are based solely on the authority of one's own intellect. The problem with this source of authority is that right and wrong become the subjective judgment of each person based on what he/she believes. To me this is a very scary thought because my reasoning is often faulty and self-serving. And so is yours! We need only to look at history to see that the tendency of mankind is to make poor choices. That is why the Apostle Paul said,

[For] the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. (1 Co 1:25)

EMOTION/EXPERIENCE

Some people depend on what they have experienced or what they feel as their primary source of authority. Emotions become the basis for choosing right or wrong. It is how they feel about a decision that

determines what they will do. That opens Pandora's Box with some scary consequences. Feelings and experiences can be very misleading and make a poor and sometimes dangerous source of authority. What feels good can often be morally wrong.

Since the beginning of time people have used experiences, and particular emotional experiences, as the foundation for what they believe, even going so far as to rely on the experiences of others. Major religions have been based solely on someone's reported experience and subsequent teachings. For example, Islam is based on the reported experience of a single person, Mohammed. He claims that the angel Gabriel spoke to him in a cave on Mount Hira. The Prophet Mohammed claims he was given the Koran engraved in Arabic on tablets of stone. He claims this "eternal" book is in the seventh heaven. This experience of one person and his writings are the authority upon which Muslims base their moral choices and their eternal destiny, even though nobody has ever seen these tablets. Mormonism is based primarily on the reported experience of Joseph Smith. He also claims to have had a visitation by an angel whom he said gave him tablets of gold from which the Book of Mormon was translated. Again, no one has ever seen those tablets, and we don't know where they are. This is in contrast to the Bible, which was written by 40 different authors over 1500 years, yet there is a singularly coherent message throughout, and the events and teachings were witnessed and documented by many. Think about it—have you ever been misled by your emotions or a single experience? Let's take a look at Paul's warning in Colossians against using experiences as our source of authority.

SEARCH THE WORD

Read Colossians 2:18-19.

1. *What warning does this scripture give about listening to people who base their authority on experience or emotions? What are some of the characteristics of these people?*

2. *What are the consequences of basing authority on experience or emotions?*

SCRIPTURE

The fourth and only adequate source of authority is Scripture. The only objective basis for making moral choices is God Himself and what He says in the Bible. The evidence we have looked at is overwhelming. There is only one source of truth. If there is to be unity in a marriage, it is essential that both husband and wife base their moral choices on the truth of God.

WHICH VERSION OF “TIES” WOULD YOU STAKE YOUR LIFE ON?

The questions each person must answer is, “What will be my source of authority? What am I willing to stake my life on?” Most people simply float through life without really thinking about what constitutes their source of authority. Take a moment to review the acronym **TIES** and the options that we have.

***T**RADITION*

Living life and making moral choices based on the authority of **man-made patterns** of thoughts and actions.

***I**NTELLECT*

Living life and making moral choices based on **personal reason** and what a person **thinks** is right or wrong.

***E**MOTION/EXPERIENCE*

Living life and making moral choices based on **experiences** and what a person **feels** is right or wrong.

***S**CRIPTURE*

Living life and making moral choices based on the **Bible**, a book of **absolutes** that claims to **speak for God** and is given to man by the sovereign Lord of the universe.

The choice seems clear. If the Bible can be proved reliable, why would a person trust any other source of authority? As you will continue to see this week, the evidence is reliable. You do not have to go on blind faith.

AUTHORITY AND OBEDIENCE

If the sovereign creator of the universe who is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-loving, knows what is best for us and has given us His word to guide our lives, it only makes sense that we would be eager to obey Him and His word.

Our tendency, however, is to want to be our own authority, to rely on ourselves, not obey God fully and do what we want. We are willing to obey God if it does not conflict with our selfish desires. Most of us want to pick and choose the areas in which we will allow God to be the authority in our lives.

God wants us to trust Him and His word enough to obey Him in all things. His word is perfect and thus a perfect guide for our life. If we are willing to obey God, we will experience great joy and peace and love in our lives. We will be fulfilled and content.

AUTHORITY OF THE WORD AND MARRIAGE

It should be clear that if we do not hold to a biblical worldview and the authority of God’s word, we will not have a rock-solid foundation upon which to build our marriage. When we are anchored in the belief that God’s word is our sole authority and only standard for right and wrong, then we will be willing to obey all that God’s word has to say about marriage and the biblical principles that apply to marriage. It is essential that our marriages be founded on the rock of God’s word.

MEMORIZE AND MEDITATE

Review your anchor cards. Memorize and meditate on the memory scriptures and your Personal Anchor Points.

APPOINTMENT WITH GOD

COME IN PRAYER (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication)

HEAR AND ACT (What is God saying? What have I learned? How should I respond?)

FOLLOW (What is God doing in my life and marriage?)

DAY 3: THE PRACTICE OF MEMORIZATION AND MEDITATION

This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success. (Jos 1:8)

On day two of this week's study, we saw that for us to build a godly marriage we must build it on the foundation of the rock of God's word. His word must be our sole authority and absolute standard for all we think and do. Today we will look at how memorization and meditation can help establish that foundation and anchor your marriage.

MEMORIZATION AND MEDITATION

An essential part of being anchored on the foundation of the word is memorization and meditation. The repetition of the basics is one of the most important principles for building a strong foundation in any area of life. Strategies and skills must be repeated thousands of times until they become instant and automatic. It is the same with memorization and meditation.

It is interesting how God has designed the brain to fulfill the ability of instant recognition and reaction. Repetition builds long-term memory and causes a structural change in the brain. That contrasts with short-term memory that causes no such change. If the focus of repetition is on the truth of God, the structural change is a renewal of our minds. Renewal is a new or renewed way of thinking that results in new actions and a transformed life.

Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (Ro 12:1-2)

However, if repetition is based on the lies of the evil one, the structural change will result in a lie-based life which will result in a failure to follow God's truth. In this study you are asked to commit to a training plan that involves repetition. It involves memorization and meditation of Anchor Scriptures and Personal Anchor Points. This strategy comes from Scripture (Ps 1:1-3; Jos 1:7-8) and is essential if you are to learn to "drop anchor" in the word of God to prevent yourself from being carried away by the currents of the world. Below are some keys to successful memorization and meditation:

THE KEY TO MEMORIZATION: REPEAT-REPEAT-REPEAT

Remember that the key to memorization is simply repetition. The more you repeat a verse, by both speaking and writing it, the more it will become part of the structure of your mind. Repeat the verse (or phrase) several times each day rather than trying to memorize the scripture in one or two sittings. Consistent repetition during the week will help you be successful. Repeat a phrase at a time. Go over that phrase at least ten times. When you can repeat that phrase from memory go on to the next phrase. Writing it out by hand each day can also aid the initial process of memorizing. If you have a smart phone, I encourage you to also consider using an application like Remember Me (available on several phone and other platforms at www.remember.me). This app has several study methods to help you memorize scripture, and since you likely always have your phone with you, you can take time to memorize and review your verses while sitting in a waiting room, standing in line, or eating lunch.

Some people memorize more quickly than others, but everyone can memorize. You just need to repeat the verse or passage until you can quote it from memory.

THE KEY TO RETENTION: REVIEW-REVIEW-REVIEW

Once you have memorized the scripture, consistent review is essential. The mistake most people make is memorizing a scripture and then failing to review it consistently for the rest of their life. Anchoring is about doing just that. Anchoring will only be effective if your training plan includes time to review the scriptures you have memorized. When you are first memorizing some new scripture verses, it is best to review the verses every day, but at a minimum, do your best to review all previous scriptures on your Anchor Cards on each of your five days of study. You might also consider asking your spouse to test your ability to recall some of the scriptures from time to time. Once you have solidly memorized a verse (either from this study or additional verses you later choose to memorize), you may not need to review it every day in the future, but it is important to periodically review it to retain it. The Remember Me app can help remind you to periodically review verses you previously memorized.

THE KEY TO TRANSFORMATION: MEDITATE-MEDITATE-MEDITATE

It is important to remember that the memorization and review of Scripture transforms us when it penetrates our souls (our mind, will and emotions). This is the function of meditation. Joshua was told to meditate on the Law day and night when he was preparing to take Israel into the Promised Land.

Be strong and courageous, for you shall give this people possession of the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success. (Jos 1:6–8)

Meditation is reflection on Scripture, pondering key words and phrases repeatedly while gleaning every ounce of spiritual nutrition from those verses. While my emphasis on memorizing scripture is the ability to recall them instantaneously, the goal of meditation is to gain a deeper meaning and personal application of that scripture.

Meditation goes a step beyond memorization because the energy does not have to go into remembering the verse or passage but into a prayerful consideration of what the Holy Spirit is saying to us. The best word to describe meditation is ruminating. This word is the synonym for meditation given most often in dictionaries. The story behind this rather obscure word may turn the stomach a bit, but it will add depth to our understanding of meditation.

There is a class of animals such as cattle, sheep and goats that have stomachs with four compartments. The first stomach is called the rumens. These animals have a remarkably interesting digestive process. A cow for example, will start the day early in the morning with its head down devouring all the grass it can find. It rarely lifts its head as it concentrates on consuming as much food as is available. Then, about mid-morning, the cow will bring up the food out of the first stomach and chew it again. Then when the food is thoroughly chewed, the cow will send it to the second stomach. This process is repeated until the food goes through each stomach and is thoroughly digested and absorbed into the animal's blood stream, becoming an empowering part of its life. This is referred to as the cow "chewing its cud." When the last bit of nutrition has been squeezed from this cud, all that is left is the hard block of the cud.

When we meditate, we follow a similar process. We could compare the first part of the process of devouring everything in sight as it is digested in the first stomach as memorization. The meditation begins when we start to "chew" on the meaning of each word and phrase. Just as a cow methodically grinds her

teeth down on the cud time and time again, so we reflect deeply and repeatedly on each morsel of God's word. Each time we meditate on a precept, promise, or attribute of God we receive a new flow of spiritual energy and insight into our spiritual bloodstream. It is through this process of digesting the word of God that we stay intimately connected to the life of Christ. An essential part of meditation is application. Always ask yourself the question, "What does God want me to **do**? How can I apply this scripture to my life in a practical way?"

SEARCH THE WORD

Read Joshua 1:6-9.

1. *What did the Lord tell Joshua to depend on to successfully lead the people into the Promised Land?*
2. *What do you think it means to meditate on the Law day and night? In what ways is this possible?*
3. *How does meditating on God's word enable us to be careful to do all that is written?*
4. *What are we promised if we meditate day and night?*

MEMORIZATION AND MEDITATION AND PERSONAL ANCHOR POINTS

Once you have memorized and meditated on some anchor scriptures, you will have many opportunities to choose to put God's word into practice. There are many examples of those who relied on biblical anchors and Personal Anchor Points when they faced adversity or temptation, as did the Psalmist.

I have chosen the faithful way; I have placed Your ordinances before me. I cling to Your testimonies; O LORD, do not put me to shame! I shall run the way of Your commandments, For You will enlarge my heart. (Ps 119:30–32)

EXAMPLES OF THOSE WHO FACED ADVERSITY OR TEMPTATION

The Bible is filled with stories of people who faced adversity or temptation and relied on biblical Anchors and Personal Anchor Points. They trusted God's word as their sole and absolute authority for all their thoughts and actions. They were prepared to make choices based on the bedrock of God's promises and character in times of trials.

David and Goliath

When David faced Goliath, the giant Philistine whom the armies of Israel feared, he faced adversity and answered Goliath's taunts by the Personal Anchor Point of the power of God's name. David said to the Philistine, *"You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted"* (1 Sa 17:45).

Shadrack, Meshach and Abednego

After Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, three young Israelite captives in Babylon, disobeyed the King's edict, they were about to be executed in a blazing furnace. They were captives in a foreign land and now faced death, but they relied on their Personal Anchor Point of a belief in God's protection and faith in the power of God to deliver them from certain execution.

*If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.
(Da 3:17-18)*

The three young men must have been incredibly well prepared. They obviously knew Scripture and trusted in God. God miraculously saved them from burning to death in the furnace.

Jesus and Satan

When Jesus launched His ministry on earth, it was evident that He had been well trained in the Scripture. We know that He had many scriptures memorized because of His ability to immediately recall them in times of temptation and stress. Before Jesus launched His public ministry, He was severely tested. After fasting for forty days and forty nights in the wilderness, Jesus was hungry and physically weak. The devil was permitted to test Jesus' resolve to keep the commands of God. It was in this weakened condition that Jesus faced Satan's three great temptations.

SATAN'S THREE GREAT TEMPTATIONS

For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. (1 Jn 2:16)

LUST OF THE FLESH

The first temptation of Satan was the temptation to give in to desires of the flesh.

And the tempter came and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." (Mt 4:3)

Jesus' Personal Anchor Point was a direct quote of God's own words. He chose to obey God's word by not giving in to the temptation. Jesus' trusted His Father to meet His needs and supply the real bread of life.

But He answered and said, "It is written, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.'" (Mt 4:4)

PRIDE OF LIFE

The second temptation was to give in to the temptation of pride—using God’s power for self-promotion.

Then the devil took Him into the holy city and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written, 'HE WILL COMMAND HIS ANGELS CONCERNING YOU'; and 'ON their HANDS THEY WILL BEAR YOU UP, SO THAT YOU WILL NOT STRIKE YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE.'" (Mt 4:5–6)

Jesus again answers Satan by quoting God’s own words from Deuteronomy 6:16. He chooses to obey by not giving in to the temptation of self-promotion and pride.

Jesus said to him, "On the other hand, it is written, 'YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST.'" (Mt 4:7)

LUST OF THE EYES

The third temptation was to give in to materialism, desiring “all this” stuff.

Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; and he said to Him, "All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me." (Mt 4:8–9)

For the third time Jesus’ Personal Anchor Point was to use God’s own words in replying to Satan’s temptation. He quotes from *Deuteronomy 6:13* and chooses to worship the only true God, not the poor substitute of materialism.

Then Jesus said to him, "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND SERVE HIM ONLY.'" (Mt 4:10)

With each attack Jesus was ready with the truth and action of A Personal Anchor Point. He quoted a specific scripture He had memorized and acted on it. Jesus spoke the truth and obeyed the truth. Notice that He did it immediately. There was no hesitation. He was in the response mode.

Jesus’ response was not just because He was the Son of God and therefore all-knowing. Jesus took on the limitations of man and therefore prepared like each of us must prepare. As a young Jewish male, the memorization of key scriptures from the Septuagint Bible would have been an essential part of Jesus’ religious training. Because there would have been few written copies of Scripture in any form, memorization was emphasized. It was no accident that Jesus was able to answer each temptation immediately with specific scriptures from the Books of the Law. Even though He was the Son of God, Jesus must have taken seriously the discipline of memorizing and meditating on Scripture.

CONSTANT USE OF PERSONAL ANCHOR POINTS

When we choose to practice Personal Anchor Points, we renew our mind so that we can discern good from evil. But this spiritual skill takes practice. The Scripture says,

*For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who **because of practice** have their senses trained to discern good and evil. (Heb 5:13–14)*

Constant use or practice of Anchors and Personal Anchor Points is essential if we are to live our lives founded on the rock of God's word. That is why a regular discipline of memorization and meditation and review is so important. After regular practice of these Anchors and Personal Anchor Points, they will become an automatic response to issues and temptations you face. They will become spiritual habits. It is my hope that you will not limit yourself to the scriptures in this study but will continue the discipline of memorization and meditation of Scripture for the rest of your life. In doing so, you will build a foundation of biblical anchors that will enable you to discern good from evil and respond in faith and obedience to all trials and temptations that you will face in your lives and marriages.



MEMORIZE AND MEDITATE

Review your anchor cards. Memorize and meditate on the memory scriptures and your Personal Anchor Points.

APPOINTMENT WITH GOD

COME IN PRAYER (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication)

HEAR AND ACT (What is God saying? What have I learned? How should I respond?)

FOLLOW (What is God doing in my life and marriage?)

DAY 4: DELIGHTING IN GOD'S WORD

I shall delight in Your statutes; I shall not forget Your word. (Ps 119:16)

Our loving heavenly Father speaks to His children through His word and Spirit. The Bible is God's way of revealing Himself to us. He communicates to us not only who He is, what He has done and His promises but how much He loves and cares for us. As dearly loved children, we are part of His story. While the pages of the Bible do not mention us by name, they include us. The Bible is a living word through which God tells us how to live life to the fullest (Jn 10:10). He wants to shape our character so we can enjoy our relationship with Him, our spouse and others and accomplish His purpose for our lives. He wants us to experience His love, joy, peace, and purpose for our lives. For this to happen, we must learn to delight in His word and live by His word.

DUTY OR DELIGHT?

It is tempting to see the spiritual disciplines required in this study as just another duty that adds one more thing to an already busy schedule—something to endure. It is true that memorizing, meditating, and studying God's word can be hard work and does take time, but the rewards of an intimate relationship with God, our spouse and others are many. With privilege comes responsibility. We are privileged to be the heavenly Father's adopted children. We are privileged that He speaks to us through His word and Spirit. Our responsibility is to respond by making sure our schedules include time to hear His voice and obey Him as we delight in His word. You have committed to spending significant time in the word and prayer during this study. That is good, but does that reflect your normal pattern? Does your lifestyle demonstrate that you delight in God's word? Have you made a lifelong commitment to let, *"the word of Christ richly dwell within you"* (Col 3:16).

LEARNING TO DELIGHT IN THE WORD OF GOD

Today we will gain insight in how to delight in the word of God from a person who truly delighted in God's word. You will learn how studying the Bible is a delight rather than a duty. The Israelite who wrote this Psalm was passionately devoted to God and His word. It was probably written after the exile and is in the form of a prayer. Most of the Psalms were sung as part of worship, but this Psalm was to be read. It is the longest chapter of the Bible and is devoted to praising God for His eternal word, helping people learn to value the word of God and delight in obeying it. Scripture was to be their absolute authority and sole standard for truth. Today you will learn directly from the word of God about how to delight in the word of God.

First, pray that God will give you a heart to delight in His word. It is God who opens our hearts to His riches, but it is up to us to respond to the prompting of His Spirit.

SEARCH THE WORD

Today we will look at Psalm 119. The author recounts the many ways he is blessed by the word of God, and he praises God and affirms his commitment to delight in and live by God's word. This is the longest chapter in the Bible, so you have a real challenge today. As you read this Psalm you will discover verses that stress key words and phrases that reveal how and why we can delight in God's word. Words such as "delight, love, rejoice, joy, praise and hope" will help you learn how to treasure God's word. Your task today is to read this chapter and choose five key verses that have words that speak to you about how to delight in God's word. Write the key verses in the spaces provided. Then, write your response to that verse. Your response can be a prayer or whatever God puts on your heart.

To help you get started, I will share with you one of my responses to this assignment:

Key Verse: v24—Your statutes are my delight. They are my counselors.

My Response: Lord, I want to make your word my delight so that I always rely on your counsel and not my own.

Read Psalm 119. 

1. *Key verse:*

My Response:

2. *Key verse:*

My Response:

3. *Key verse:*

My Response:

4. *Key verse:*

My Response:

5. *Key verse:*

My Response:

PSALMISTS DELIGHT

Did you recognize how many times the psalmist indicated he delighted in and loved God's word? Did you notice the many reasons he gave? As you spend regular time in God's word, seek how to apply His eternal truths to your life and rely on the wisdom of God for your daily walk, you will see what a wonderful gift God has given us in the Scriptures and will also delight in His word.



MEMORIZE AND MEDITATE

Review your anchor cards. Memorize and meditate on the memory scriptures and your Personal Anchor Points.

APPOINTMENT WITH GOD

COME IN PRAYER (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication)

HEAR AND ACT (What is God saying? What have I learned? How should I respond?)

FOLLOW (What is God doing in my life and marriage?)

DAY 5: SCRIPTURE PRAYING

If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. (Jn 15:7)

Prayer and God's word are both essential parts of our communication with our heavenly Father. God speaks to us through His Spirit empowered word. As we study, memorize and meditate on God's word, we learn the nature and will of God—His language, so to speak. We can also learn to speak to Him using His words in prayer. The more we love, know and obey the word of God, the more fluent we become in the language of God and the deeper our relationship will be with Him. The word enhances our prayer and our prayer embeds the word deep within our hearts.

FOUR STEPS FOR SCRIPTURE PRAYING

There are various methods for studying Scripture, but here you will learn a method of combining prayer and the word called Scripture Praying. Scripture Praying involves some of the basic methods of Bible study such as observation, interpretation and application but is more focused on a devotional, meditative approach that leads to action.

This is a simple but powerful way of using the actual words of God in prayer. It is a prayerful way of coming into God's presence as you read a passage of Scripture, observing what it says and learning to listen to what God says to you. After you have read a passage you will think or meditate on key words or phrases, letting God's word sink deeply into your soul.

Next you will allow the words and phrases that you just read and meditated on to form the basis for your prayer. You will pray, using His words, as well as your own, to express what God has said to you in the passage. You will be communicating with God using His language. The final step in Scripture Praying is to do what the verses say. There are many ways to respond. An important component is to write down what you learned and what you will do. Scripture praying always starts by asking God to speak to you through His word. Pray that you will have listening ears to hear what He has to say. I believe we can claim the following promise of God:

Call to Me and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know. (Je 33:3)

For the LORD gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding. (Pr 2:6)

READ IT

We begin scripture praying by selecting a passage of Scripture and reading it. Reading the scripture gives us a solid foundation for our spiritual growth. God speaks to us from His word, and through His Spirit, He empowers us to listen, understand and respond to His message. The book of Revelation says:

Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near. (Re 1:3)

As you read the passage, **observe** what it says about God, His promises, His warnings, His counsel, or anything that applies to your specific situation. Read it several times and underline key words or phrases. Remember that observing also involves **listening**. God is speaking to you through His word. The Holy Spirit will illuminate His word and impress certain things on your heart. You will learn to be attentive to God's voice. Through time spent with God in the word and prayer, we develop intimate fellowship with Him as

we learn to hear His voice. Jesus said, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me” (Jn 10:27).

THINK IT

After you have read the passage and noted key words and phrases that speak to you about who God is, His will and His ways, the next step is to think or **meditate** on it. This involves thinking in depth about what the passages says about God, His ways and will and discovering how you should apply that scripture to your life and circumstances. You have already learned some key principles about meditation. Remember that meditation is thinking deeply or pondering God’s word, focusing on words, phrases or themes from a verse or passage of Scripture. The book of Psalms begins with stressing the benefits of meditating on God’s word.

How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers. (Ps 1:1–3)

How to “Think It”

We will use John 10:27 as a simple example of how to meditate. First look up this scripture in your Bible and read it. Let’s say that during this step that you noted and underlined “My sheep”, “listen”, “know”, and “follow.” As you meditate you might ask the following questions: “What does it mean for me to be a sheep?” “Do I really listen to the voice of God?” “How important to my walk with God is listening?” “How does the fact that God knows me enable me to listen to His voice?” “How does listening to the voice of God enable me to ‘follow’ Him?” “What does God want me to learn from this scripture?”

Questions such as these help you personalize Scripture. God is a personal God who speaks personally to you. In asking these questions you are responding to what He has to say. As you personalize Scripture through meditation, you will find that God’s word is a “plumb line” to evaluate your soul (your mind, will and emotions). It will help you evaluate your thoughts and attitudes. The book of Hebrews says,

For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (Heb 4:12)

PRAY IT

Prayer unites finite people with an infinite sovereign God in an intimate father-child relationship. When we intentionally set aside time to come into His presence, amazing things happen. Besides knowing God more intimately, He empowers us to do what is humanly impossible. The Kendrick bothers in their excellent book, “The Battle Plan for Prayer,” summarize the purpose for prayer in this way: Prayer is about:

- Intimately knowing, loving and worshiping God;
- Conforming our lives to His will, power, and ways; and
- Accessing and advancing His kingdom, power and glory. (pp. 103)

These three purposes involve interaction with God through time with Him in the word and prayer. Prayer is our personal dialogue with God. This is what Scripture Praying is all about. Time in the word prepares us for prayer. As the Psalmist says,

Let my lips utter praise, For You teach me Your statutes. (Ps 119:171)

How to “Pray It”

After we have read the passage of Scripture and meditated on it, we are now ready to pray it. Mentally formulate a prayer based on what you have heard from the word during the first two steps. Use key words and phrases from the passage to help form your own unique prayer to God. There is no prescribed formula for this. It is your own unique communication with God. Do it in your own way. You will become more comfortable with scripture praying as you practice it.

Using John 10:27 as an example, a prayer might look like this:

Lord, I know that I am one of your sheep, and you know and love me intimately. Help me learn to listen to and obey your voice. Help me to follow you, trusting that you will lead me to experience the joy of your presence.

Do It

When we come to know God intimately by dwelling in His presence through time in the word and prayer, we will be motivated by His overflowing love to do His will. His love for us “compels us” to love Him and others with the love He has for us. Paul said,

*For Christ's love **compels us**, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. (2 Co 5:14–15, NIV)*

In His last days on earth Jesus taught His disciples the importance of obedience that comes from knowing and loving God. He said,

He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him. (Jn 14:21)

We demonstrate that we truly know God when we surrender to His will and obey Him. Therefore, the essential and final principle of Scripture Praying is to “Do It.”

How to “Do It”

During the steps of reading, meditation and prayer, God will impress on your heart certain things He wants you to know or do. There are times you might be convicted of wrong attitudes or sin or personal weakness. There may be people or situations for whom to pray. Other times you might respond with thanksgiving or praise. As you listen closely to His voice you will find ways to apply scripture in a practical way. Begin this step by praying, “Lord show me what you would have me know or do to renew my mind and transform my life.” I find that God always answers this prayer; however it does take time and practice to develop a “listening ear.” He always wants to shape our character and align us with His sovereign will. For personal accountability, you should write down what God wants you to do and how you will do it.

Using John 10:27 as an example, “Do It” might look like this:

Lord Jesus, help me learn to listen to your voice so that I can come to know you, and obey what you ask me to do.

PRACTICE SCRIPTURE PRAYING

It is now time to practice Scripture praying. Use what you have learned about each step. Jot down any notes you think will be helpful in the space provided.

PRAY PSALM 1:1-3

1. *Read It*

2. *Think It*

3. *Pray It*

4. *Do It*



MEMORIZE AND MEDITATE

Review your anchor cards. Memorize and meditate on the memory scriptures and your Personal Anchor Points.


APPOINTMENT WITH GOD

COME IN PRAYER (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication)

HEAR AND ACT (What is God saying? What have I learned? How should I respond?)

FOLLOW (What is God doing in my life and marriage?)

PERSONAL ANCHOR POINT

You should now develop your Personal Anchor Point. Review and reflect on what you have learned this week and what God may have laid on your heart as the week progressed. Pray for God's direction in developing your Personal Anchor Point. As a reminder, your Personal Anchor Point is a specific practice you will implement in your daily walk to strengthen your connection to this week's anchor. It includes the key point you learned and the action you will take in response. See page 6 for more information. 

COUPLE TALK

You should have established a time to meet with your spouse before the next group meeting. When you sit down with your spouse, *discuss what you have learned during the week and what God has said to you about the word of God, your life and your marriage. What can you do to make God's word the sole authority and only standard for all you think and do?* Make some notes in the space provided below.

Notes:

WEEK 3: ANCHORED ON THE CORNERSTONE OF CHRIST: OUR HOPE, OUR IDENTITY

ANCHOR CARD

This week we will study how to be anchored on the cornerstone of Christ, and how in this, we find our hope and our identity. Begin by creating your anchor card for the week. As described on page 6, write the Anchor for this week at the top of an index card or in your electronic notes program, followed by the Anchor Scripture and Anchor Prayer.

ANCHOR SCRIPTURE

Therefore thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone, a costly cornerstone for the foundation, firmly placed...." (Is 28:16)

This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast.... (Heb 6:19)

ANCHOR PRAYER

Jesus, You are my cornerstone, my anchor and my hope. I thank you that my hope lies in You alone because You died on the cross for my sins. My identity is in You alone as Your deeply loved, adopted child. I pray that You will empower me to be true to the identity and inheritance You have given me and live a life that glorifies You.

DAILY TOPICS

Day 1: The Cornerstone of Hope

Day 2: The Cornerstone of Identity

Day 3: The Cornerstone Anchors Our Soul

Day 4: Hope That Overcomes Disappointment

Day 5: Hope and the Half Full Glass

DAY 1: THE CORNERSTONE OF HOPE

Therefore thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone, A costly cornerstone for the foundation, firmly placed. He who believes in it will not be disturbed. (Is 28:16)

In Week 1 we saw how marriage is anchored in the foundation of the sovereignty of God and His covenants. Week 2 focused on how marriages must be founded on God's word. This week's foundational anchor is about building our marriages with the Cornerstone of Christ. The coming of Christ as the cornerstone was foretold by the prophet Isaiah in the first Anchor Scripture for this week.

THE PRECIOUS CORNERSTONE OF CHRIST

Without the precious cornerstone of Jesus, the foundation for our marriage would be incomplete. In ancient times, builders were always careful to lay a cornerstone to anchor a building's foundation. This was so the building would be built to plumb. The integrity of the building depended on exact alignment with the cornerstone. Without the cornerstone of Christ, we would be without hope. The Psalmist was referring to when Jesus would fulfill prophecy and make His appearance on earth when he wrote,

*The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief **cornerstone**. This is the LORD'S doing; It is marvelous in our eyes. (Ps 118:22–23)*

PROPHECY FULFILLED

This prophecy was fulfilled when Jesus left heaven, emptied himself, and took on the form of man so that He could die on the cross for our sins. The Apostle John said of Jesus,

And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. (Jn 1:14)

Jesus referred to Himself as that cornerstone when religious leaders questioned His authority. Using these words, He asked them,

Have you not even read this Scripture: 'THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE CHIEF CORNERSTONE; THIS CAME ABOUT FROM THE LORD, AND IT IS MARVELOUS IN OUR EYES'?" (Mk 12:10–11)

Peter and John also quoted this scripture when the rulers, elders and teachers of the law confronted them about proclaiming that Jesus was raised from the dead. When asked by what "power and authority" they had healed a man who could not walk, Peter answered,

Let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by this name this man stands here before you in good health. He is the STONE WHICH WAS REJECTED by you, THE BUILDERS, but WHICH BECAME THE CHIEF CORNESTONE. And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved. (Ac 4:10–12)

THE CORNERSTONE OF HOPE

If Jesus had not come to earth to be the Cornerstone of our foundation, we would be lost in our sin and without hope. It is only through Jesus Christ, the chief cornerstone, that we are saved and anchored in hope. The writer of Hebrews paints a beautiful picture of how Jesus atoned for our sins by His death on the

cross. The barrier of our sin that separated us from the presence of God was torn down, and it was at that very moment when true hope became available to all mankind.

This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. (Heb 6:19–20)

When Jesus died on the cross for the forgiveness of sins, the curtain that blocked the entrance to the Holy of Holies in the Temple, the barrier that separated the people from the presence of God, was supernaturally torn from the top to the bottom (Mt 27:51). It was torn from top to bottom to show that it was not done by man or accidentally. Jesus had atoned for our sin, and the barrier between man and God was removed. We now have complete access to God through the blood of Christ. We are now saved by grace through faith and our relationship with God has been restored.

HOPE ANCHORS OUR SOUL

The hope that we now have anchors our soul and is the grace that God has offered to us by the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Jesus said,

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. (Jn 3:16)

Simply put, grace is the gift of Jesus. It is the love of God in action as He offered His Son on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins so that we might be forgiven. It is important to remember that grace is a free gift to us. Paul says,

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Ro 6:23)

Grace is free. We do not deserve it, and we can't earn it. Paul made this clear when He said,

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.... (Eph 2:8)

We receive the gift of grace through faith. Faith is to trust in Jesus alone for our salvation. That faith is not just an intellectual assent to facts about Jesus. It is a faith that is willing to make Jesus Lord and Savior of our lives. It involves becoming a disciple and following Him always. God's word says,

...If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.... (Ro 10:9)

When you receive Jesus, it is the result of believing in your heart that Jesus is God's Son and that He died and rose again, purchasing your salvation through the shedding of His blood. It is also about declaring that "Jesus is Lord" of your life, loving Him with all your heart and willingly obeying His commands (Ro 10:9-13). There is a saying that says if Jesus is not Lord of all, He is not Lord at all (Mt 7:21-23).

LIVING STONES

When we put our trust in Christ alone for our salvation and receive Him as Lord, He becomes our Chief Cornerstone. At that very moment, He also makes us His "living stones." The Apostle Peter explains:

And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For this is contained in Scripture: "BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A CHOICE STONE, A PRECIOUS CORNER stone, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." (1 Pe 2:4–6)

We derive our lives from Christ who is the original living stone. He is the life-giving Spirit of every believer, who is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Each of us represents a living stone, aligned with the precious chief cornerstone of Christ. We are being built into the spiritual house of Christ, His Church. As living stones, God has united us and made us one with other believers. As adopted children of God we are a family. We are made one through no effort of our own but through the work of the Holy Spirit who has been given to each of us at the time of our rebirth (Ac 2:4-8). We are to demonstrate that we are one by living together in unity, and that takes work on our part.

JOINED TOGETHER

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit. (Eph 2:19–22)

Paul addresses the separation that had existed between Jews and Gentiles before they were united through the blood of Christ. These people came from every social class in the ancient world. There were Jews and Gentiles who had animosity toward one another. There were men and women, slaves and their masters. All these diverse groups traditionally had little in common and had little to do with one another. But now they were all members of God's household, the Church.

In the book of Ephesians Paul lays out the ideal for the church—for the people to be living stones, joined together in unity. Paul also understood the difficulties of making this a reality. Old identities shaped their outlook and made experiencing unity difficult. How were they to resolve these differences in the life of the Church? How were they to practice unity? The first three chapters of Ephesians lay out the ideal, the foundations, and the final three chapters give practical principles on how to experience unity with one another.


HOW LIVING STONES BECOME ONE

In Ephesians 2:19-22 we see the process God uses for spiritual growth to take place. A supernatural transaction has taken place. In Christ, the chief cornerstone, we have been built into a holy temple in which God's Spirit lives. It is a one-time event. God has united us with one another in the same way God united us through our marriage covenant. But transformation (often referred to as progressive sanctification) is the process, empowered by the Spirit, that enables us to live as one in unity as God's holy temple.

In chapters four through six, Paul gives practical guidelines for how the reality of unity can be experienced. Today we will look at his opening instructions that immediately promote unity and intimacy. These are great principles to learn and practice in our relationship with our spouses and others. Paul first urges believers to *"walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called"* (Eph 4:1). He reminds all believers that they have been called into fellowship with God and one another as a community through grace. They are to glorify God by following that calling in some specific ways.

SEARCH THE WORD

Take a few minutes to read and reflect on Ephesians 4:1-6, then answer the questions that follow.

1. *In verse 2, what specific actions is Paul asking the believers to do to build unity with one another? How do these actions fit together to build unity?*
2. *What do you believe it means to be “diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace?”*
3. *How many times does Paul use the word “one” in verses four through six? Why do you think Paul makes this emphasis? What is the common theme he wants believers to grasp?*
4. *What key principle can you take from this passage that will help you be “one” with your spouse and other believers as a “living stone”? *

To “walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called” is a call to be transformed in our relationships with one another. We are to “be diligent” to be one because it does take desire and effort. Because the unity of the Spirit is a gift from God, empowered by the Holy Spirit, God has given us everything we need to live as one with one another in our marriage and all our relationships. Our responsibility is to rely on that power and respond by obeying God’s word.

BECOMING ONE IN THE SACRED COVENANT OF MARRIAGE

The theme of this study and the goal of the sacred covenant of marriage is to become one in our marriages. As we have seen, God has made us one in our **position**, but we have the responsibility of becoming one in our **practice**. Our lifelong goal is to be united with our spouse as one flesh. We are empowered by the Spirit, but we must respond to that power by being obedient to God’s word. This

resource is about how to do that in a practical way. The strategic anchors you will learn to use in weeks five through eight, based on Philippians 2:1-11, will help you become one with your spouse in a practical way.



MEMORIZE AND MEDITATE

Review your anchor cards. Memorize and meditate on the memory scriptures and your Personal Anchor Points.

APPOINTMENT WITH GOD

COME IN PRAYER (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication)

HEAR AND ACT (What is God saying? What have I learned? How should I respond?)

FOLLOW (What is God doing in my life and marriage?)

COUPLE TALK

If you have not already done so, get with your spouse and set a time later this week (after you will have each completed this week's study) to discuss what you have learned. At the end of Day 5, you will be reminded to meet and be given some guidance for your discussion.

DAY 2: THE CORNERSTONE OF IDENTITY

How we define ourselves is a core issue of our identity. What we believe about ourselves, who we are, our value and our significance are core beliefs that will determine our values, attitudes, and actions. Our relationship with God and others depends on what we believe about God, ourselves, and others. Our identity is a key to anchoring our marriage.

We discover our identity by knowing and affirming who God says we are. There are many other sources that can influence who we think we are. Our popular culture tries to tell us who we are and what we should value. Parents, teachers and friends can all influence our image. And then we have our own thoughts. Ultimately, we take all this and other input and form a picture in our mind of who we are, our worth, and our significance. The question we need to ask ourselves is “Who or what is going to determine my identity? To whom will I listen? Who will be my source of authority?”

If we do not allow God to anchor our identity, we will be like a ship without an anchor in a storm, blown here and there by the wind and waves. We will be at the mercy of our own vacillating feelings, others’ unreliable opinions of us, and the values of a godless culture. To be solidly anchored in who we are, our value and significance, we have only one perfect anchor. Only God, who created us in His perfect love, wisdom and authority, is qualified to determine who we really are. Our identity must be based on these biblical truths about identity. Consider these core truths that are essential to defining who we are.

- God is who He says He is.
- We are who God says we are.
- Others are who God says they are.

It is God who gives us our identity. We can be secure in who we are when we believe what God has to say about us. We are created to be God’s children. Because He made us, we are His, and we bear His image. Adam and Eve lost their true identity as God’s children when they decided to listen to Satan’s lies about who they really were. They were not satisfied with who they were and thought they could become like God. They became separated from their heavenly Father, lost and confused about who they really were. Because of Adam’s and Eve’s sin, all of us sin and lose our true identity. God, in His unfailing love, made a way for His lost children to return home to Him and to recover their true identity. There are three questions that we all ask ourselves when trying to determine our identity:

- Who am I?
- What am I worth?
- Do I really matter?

How we answer these questions determines whether our identity is built on solid rock or shifting sand (Mt 7:24-27).

MY IDENTITY: *WHO AM I?*

When the apostle Paul wrote to the believers in Ephesus, he began his letter by addressing who they were. They had a new identity in Christ Jesus, but it was in name only. They had yet to be anchored in that identity and learn to live as the heavenly Father’s deeply loved sons and daughters. The entire letter is about how to be anchored in and live out our identity in Christ. He begins his letter by answering this question—by defining who we are.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons [and daughters] through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will.... (Eph 1:3–5)

I AM ADOPTED BY THE FATHER

*In love He predestined us to **adoption as sons [and daughters]**....*

Our true identity begins when the heavenly Father adopts us. At the very moment we receive Jesus, we are adopted into the heavenly Father's family. God's eye has been on us from "before the foundation of the world," just waiting for us to respond to His love. He has never stopped calling us home.

Our heavenly Father visited our earthly orphanage and chose us. He signed the papers and paid the cost for our adoption. Adoption during the time of Roman rule meant the legal transfer of a child to another person or family. Adoption ended all previous obligations and the adopted child received all the privileges and responsibilities of a legal member in the new family. God wants His children to have a clear picture of their new identity with the blessings and privileges in His family.

THROUGH CHRIST JESUS

*...adoption as sons [and daughters] through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the **kind intention of His will**....*

We are not an accident. We are not a burden to our heavenly Father. It was through Christ Jesus, and by the "intention of His will," that He chose us. We were wanted and on the day of our adoption, He was delighted in us. We did not have to earn that love, and we didn't have to be good enough. Through the covering of Christ's blood, He made us "holy and blameless before Him" (Eph 1:4). As our Father looks at us, He does not see our sins, but the righteousness of Jesus, purchased for us by His death on the cross.

[God] made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Co 5:21)

I remember clearly how delighted Janet and I were when we had our first child. Little can surpass the joy we felt when we held Heidi in our arms for the first time. I am sure those of you who have children can identify with those feelings of awe, delight and joy. As delighted as we are, our delight pales when compared to how the Father delights in His adopted children. There is a wonderful scripture that paints a picture of just how much the Father delights in us. The prophet Zephaniah says,

The LORD your God is in your midst, A victorious warrior. He will exult over you with joy, He will be quiet in His love, He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy. (Zep 3:17)

And as adopted children, we also share in an inheritance from God. What is that inheritance? It is "every spiritual blessing...in Christ" (Eph 1:3). Best of all, our adoption and inheritance are guaranteed by the seal of the Holy Spirit. We are God's possessions and we have been blessed with His provisions, all for His glory. Paul explains how we can be secure in who we are in Christ.

In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory. (Eph 1:13–14)

No wonder the Apostle Paul tells us to "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!" (Php 4:4)

Matt Redmond, who struggled with His own identity because of a fatherless upbringing, wrote “The Father’s Song” based on this scripture. It begins with these words:

I have heard so many songs,
Listened to a thousand tongues,
But there is one that sounds above them all;
The Father’s song, the Father’s love—
You sung it over me, and for eternity
It is written on my heart.
Heaven’s perfect melody.

MY VALUE: WHAT AM I WORTH?

We all have a deep need within our soul to know that we are valued—that we are loved unconditionally. We need to know our value is not based on how good we are, what we do for others or what we achieve because we know that we are flawed. We need to know that we are valued because of who we are. Our heavenly Father wants us to know in our hearts as well as our heads that we are loved and valued beyond what we can comprehend. There are two stories that Jesus told to help us understand how much He loves and values us.

I AM PRICELESS

Because of the cost paid for my adoption, I am priceless. Think of it. Would you consider under any conditions giving up your child for anything or anyone? What if someone offered you a million dollars for your child? What if they upped the ante and offered you a billion dollars? Would you accept? I’m sure you cannot even conceive of giving up your child for any price. Why? Because you value your child above everything else. Your child is priceless.

But God did something that showed, beyond any doubt, the extent of how much we are valued—just how much He loves us. He considers us priceless because of the price He paid for our adoption. He gave up His only Son so we could be His priceless, deeply loved sons and daughters and could be with Him for eternity. Jesus made this clear.

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. (Jn 3:16)

I AM IRREPLACEABLE

We are valuable to God beyond measure because we are irreplaceable. Think of your own children for a moment. Are they not irreplaceable? Your child is unique, one of a kind, treasured and cannot be replaced. People who have lost a child will attest the child still exists in their heart. They may have other children, but their child cannot be replaced. I know that I don’t have to convince you that this is true, but most of us struggle with believing that the sovereign God of the universe, who has billions of children, still values us to the extent that He considers us irreplaceable. But God indeed loves us more than we love our own children. That we are more precious and irreplaceable to Him than our own children are to us is difficult to imagine, even though our Father has made it clear to us in His word.

See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. (1 Jn 3:1)

Jesus tells three stories to help us understand our lost condition and the lengths He will go to adopt us into His family as highly valued, irreplaceable children. In Luke chapter fifteen He tells the story of the lost

sheep, the lost coin and the lost son. I want you to take a few moments now to read the story of the lost son, commonly referred to as the prodigal son.

SEARCH THE WORD

Read Luke 15:11-31.

1. *What do you think was lacking in the son's identity that could have caused him to seek his own happiness? (v. 11-16)*

2. *What caused the son to come to his senses? What can we learn from his experience about the importance of having God define who we are?*

The father never gave up on the son even though his son did nothing to deserve His love. His love was unending and his son irreplaceable. When the son finally came to his senses and returned, the father ran to meet him and welcomed him with open arms and heart, followed by an extravagant celebration. What a wonderful picture Jesus has given us of our heavenly Father's extravagant love for us.

In his book titled *The Unquenchable Worshiper*, Matt Redmond gives a unique perspective of our value. He was struggling with a medical condition that prevented him from leading worship or doing much of anything for seven weeks. Stripped of his ability, he did a lot of soul searching and questioning of his value, significance and future. He came to a point where he saw God working in his life and teaching him an important lesson that I believe we all can apply. Matt wrote,

He started speaking to me. Servants come and go, and God can choose any of us to do any job in His kingdom...But as a son and child of God I was indispensable, there would never be another me. A child is irreplaceable. I started to get a better perspective on how to live my life.

Thank you, Matt Redmond. We all need that perspective. To remind me of my value to God, I chose to memorize this quote and review it during my appointments with God.

MY SIGNIFICANCE: DO I REALLY MATTER?

God has created us with a need to feel like our lives matter, that we are here on earth for a purpose. Do I make a difference? Satan attacked Adam's and Eve's identity and God's truthfulness in the Garden when he questioned God's faithfulness with the lie that they could have greater value and significance apart from God. They were robbed of their true self-worth and significance when they valued Satan's opinion rather than the truth of God. We also are tempted to pursue the dead-end search for value and significance through our own success and accomplishments and the approval of others.

We matter because we matter to God. We are significant because God has a purpose for our life and it is only through Him that our purpose is accomplished. Our significance will not be because of our works or accomplishments, but because it is God accomplishing His work through us.

for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. (Php 2:13)

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. (Eph 2:10)

We are significant because we are uniquely gifted from birth to carry out our heavenly Father's work as deeply loved obedient children.

OUR PURPOSE

God's good purpose for our lives is that we glorify Him in all we do and say. We are chosen for the purpose of declaring God's praises and glory through the way we live our lives.

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. (1 Pe 2:9, 12, NIV)

The more we are secure in our identity, the more we will be secure in our relationships. The more we are confident of our value and significance to God and His provisions, the less we expect our spouses and other significant people to meet our needs. Our hope will be in God and not others.

LIVING BY OUR IDENTITY

Our Father defines our identity in Him, and that identity determines our purpose to glorify God. It is our responsibility to live by that identity. We have no ability to glorify God on our own. It is only through God's glory flowing through us that we can glorify Him in every aspect of our lives. We can live out this life because Christ lives in us.

I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. (Ga 2:20)

His life becomes our life.

...for in Him we live and move and exist...For we also are His children. (Ac 17:27-28)

Because Christ is in us and we are in Christ, the more we embrace our identity, the more His character will become our character. Jesus will dwell in us and His love, hope, joy and servanthood will be our love, hope, joy and servanthood in our marriages and every other aspect of our lives. Our identity is to be lived out as we interact with those around us so that they might come to know Christ and share in the same provision and inheritance that we possess.

YOUR IDENTITY CARD

How are we to live according to our identity as we day by day? Like everything else in life, it takes focus and practice. It only comes with taking God at His word, what we choose to believe about ourselves and the choices we make. It happens when we anchor ourselves in the truth of how God defines us. It comes through "constant use" of God's word and prayer (Heb 5:14, NIV; Jn 15:7-8).

To help put your identity into practice, prepare an “Identity Card.” This will be another index card (or electronic note) that you can include with your other anchor cards and review when you have your Appointment with God. On one side, write the following Identity, Value and Significance scriptures:

MY IDENTITY

Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will.... (Eph 1:4–5)

MY VALUE

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. (Jn 3:16)

MY SIGNIFICANCE

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. (Eph 2:10)

On the other side of the card, write a prayer affirming your identity and asking God to empower you to embrace and live out that identity. Below is an example of the prayer that I have been praying for the last twenty plus years as a part of my Appointments with God.

MY IDENTITY PRAYER

Lord, my identity, value and significance are in you alone as a son by adoption, a disciple by calling and a servant by choosing. Empower me to know in my heart as well as my head that I have intimacy with you and that you will meet all my needs.

You can also include any other thoughts or scriptures that you believe are important on this side of the card. Review the scriptures on this card when you have your appointment with God. I do this in the Adoration part of my prayer time. Jesus taught His disciple to enter His presence by affirming their identity as children. “Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name” (Mt 6:9).



MEMORIZE AND MEDITATE

Review your anchor cards. Memorize and meditate on the memory scriptures and your Personal Anchor Points.

APPOINTMENT WITH GOD

COME IN PRAYER (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication)

HEAR AND ACT (What is God saying? What have I learned? How should I respond?)

FOLLOW (What is God doing in my life and marriage?)

DAY 3: THE CORNERSTONE ANCHORS OUR SOUL

We have seen how God anchors our souls in grace. He has given us eternal life through the sacrifice of His Son. Our names are written in the Lamb's book of life. Our souls are secure. We will be with God in heaven for eternity. We now have an eternal perspective that anchors our souls. We also have the task of living as God's children in this life. We have eternal hope, but there is also earthly hope. How does the cornerstone of Christ anchor us in hope in the here and now? How does that hope anchor us in our daily lives and in our marriages? God's word gives us the answer.

Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Ro 15:13)

It is the God of hope that fills our souls with hope. What does it require of us? We are to trust in God and make Him our eternal and earthly hope. Then the God of hope will fill us with all joy, peace and love by the power of the Holy Spirit.

OUR SPIRIT, SOUL AND BODY

As we look at how God fills our souls, we will first expound on the Week One discussion about our "spirit," "soul," and "body." Then we will look at the ways God anchors our souls in hope so that we can flourish on earth. God not only saves our souls but gives us hope in this world as an anchor for the soul. Christ promises to sanctify each of us and keep our whole spirit, soul and body blameless on this earth.

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it. (1 Th 5:23-24, NIV)

What is meant by our "whole" spirit, soul and body? In the Scriptures, soul is often synonymous with "spirit" (Ec, 12:7; Lk. 1:46-47), "heart" (Ps. 19:7-8; 84:2), "life" (Ps. 26:9) and "whole being" (Ps. 35: 9-10). We see similar language in Mt 22:37 where Jesus says you should love God with "all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." Both these verses are referring to your whole being, all that you are. Essentially, each person is a spirit (our identity) who has a soul (distinctive character) and lives in a physical body.

SPIRIT

God has given humans a spirit that gives them the capacity to relate to Him. This is what makes us distinctly different from animals. When a person receives Christ, he becomes God's adopted child and receives the Holy Spirit so that he can have a personal relationship with the Father. The Spirit provides illumination for our souls, enabling us to know God and His truth, and empowers us to do His will.

SOUL/HEART

Our soul or heart is interconnected with our Spirit and consists of our mind, will and emotions.

Mind

With our mind, we can think, reason and understand God, ourselves and others. With our mind, we develop a worldview that shapes our decisions and actions. While we may be tempted to think of our mind as our physical brain, this is not how the Bible uses the term. While our brains are clearly used to think and control our physical bodies, a close look at both the old and new testaments' use of words translated as "mind" is clearly focused on the immaterial aspects of who we are in our "inner being" and how that

shapes our decisions and actions. With our mind, God gave us the ability to communicate with Him and with one another.

Will

With the will we can make decisions based on what we believe and what we value. God has given us the freedom to choose between right and wrong. We can obey His word or disobey His word.

Emotions

With the soul we also express emotions such as peace, love, joy, anger, grief, bitterness and depression. Our emotions are most often a result of our beliefs, desires, and how we perceive our circumstances.

BODY

God created each of us with a physical body that allows us to relate to the physical world by our senses such as sight, taste, smell, touch, and hearing.

GOD ANCHORS THE SOUL—SOUL TRANSFORMATION

This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil.... (Heb 6:19)

The word of God promises that hope is an anchor for the soul. This is a great promise, but what does it mean? How exactly does hope anchor the soul? God wants to anchor your soul by “*sanctify[ing] you entirely*” (1 Th 5:23). There are two parts to sanctification. We are made holy and we are becoming holy. At the time of our salvation, we were adopted as the Father’s sons and daughters. We were also sanctified, which means “set apart” by God, that we would be “*holy and blameless before him*” (or “*holy and blameless in His sight*”) (Eph 1:3-6). But there is a difference between our position in Christ that makes us perfectly holy in God’s sight and our practice of holiness which is not perfect. We are sanctified and being sanctified as God continues to transform us through renewing our minds and transforming us through His Spirit empowered word. Hope anchors our souls when God renews our minds, transforms our wills and heals our emotions.

THROUGH HOPE GOD RENEWS OUR MINDS

Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (Ro 12:1–2)

We live in a culture that is bent on renewing our minds with the lies of this world. The great lie of Satan is that everything that the world has to offer will fulfill us. If we just have enough money or possessions, if we are able to accomplish enough, if our desires for the “*lust of the flesh*” are fulfilled, then we will finally be happy—then we will find joy, peace and love. Those of us who have “been there and done that” know that what the world has to offer will never fulfill us. God’s word warns,

Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever. (1 Jn 2:15–17)

We are anchored in hope when we are anchored in God's word. When we continually spend time in memorization and meditation and prayer, we will not be conformed to this world, but will be transformed into the likeness of Christ, the precious cornerstone.

THROUGH HOPE GOD TRANSFORMS OUR WILLS

It is with the will that we make decisions based on what we see as our authority and standard for truth. For God to shape our wills so that our attitudes and actions are transformed, our minds must be prepared by God's word for action. That is what anchoring is all about. It is about always being prepared to "drop anchor." Scripture says,

Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY." (1 Pe 1:13–16)

When our minds are prepared for action and our hope fixed completely on God's grace, we will not be conformed to our former lusts, but transformed and holy in our behavior.

THROUGH HOPE GOD HEALS OUR EMOTIONS

When we face the inevitable issues of life, when trouble comes, when our situations seem beyond our control, our circumstances and emotions often overpower us. We become swallowed up in feelings of anger, frustration, anxiety, depression and loss. We can be overwhelmed and feel hopeless. At such times, our emotions can paralyze us, keeping us in a constant cycle of despair. We can become driven by emotions with our focus on our circumstances and how we feel rather than on the hope that anchors our soul. This was the situation of the author of Psalm 42. Although he was distressed and depressed, he still had hope. As he lifted up his soul in praise, he was able to shift his focus from his circumstances to the God of hope.

Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him For the help of His presence. O my God, my soul is in despair within me; Therefore I remember You from the land of the Jordan And the peaks of Hermon, from Mount Mizar. (Ps 42:5–6)

I have been in this situation numerous times over the years, as I am sure many of you have. It is part of the human condition. Even Jesus was overwhelmed with emotions when He faced death on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins, knowing he would be taking on the sins of the world.

Then He said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me." And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will." (Mt 26:38–39)

Jesus faced His emotions. He acknowledged His overwhelming sorrow and trouble. But Jesus did not allow His emotions to control Him. His solution was what ultimately must be our solution in times of trouble. Jesus changed His focus from how He was feeling to His Father, Jehovah Raffa, the healer. He put His hope in the will of His Father whom He knew would never abandon Him.

LIFT UP YOUR SOUL TO GOD

Psalms is a poetic book that teaches us not to allow our emotions to control us or defeat us in times of distress. The authors of many of the Psalms experienced some of the emotions I have described. They show how to express and acknowledge emotions, but not be controlled by them. They teach us how to shift our focus from ourselves to the Lord. Things only get worse until we lift our souls to God, redirect our thoughts to Him and trust in Him to bring us through our trials. A Psalm of David says,

*To You, O LORD, I lift up my soul. Indeed, none of those who wait for You will be ashamed;
Those who deal treacherously without cause will be ashamed. (Ps 25:1,3)*

Psalm 77 gives us a wonderful example of how shifting our focus to God and lifting up our souls to Him heals our emotions and gives us a new perspective on our circumstances.

SEARCH THE WORD

Read Psalm 77.

1. *What were the indications that the Psalmist was self-absorbed? What pronoun dominated his thinking?*
2. *What emotions was the Psalmist expressing?*
3. *What were his thoughts about the circumstances that were causing the troubling emotions?*
4. *How did the Psalmist's thinking change? List some of his significant new thoughts as he turned from himself to God.*

5. *What indications do you find that his renewed focus on God and different way of thinking healed His emotions?*

6. *What have you learned from this Psalm?*

We learn from the Psalms that it is the way we think about circumstances that causes troubling emotions, not the circumstances alone. If you want to change your emotions, you must change the way you think. It is through the renewing of the mind that our emotions are healed. They will never be healed by focusing on the emotions themselves. Feelings are a gift from God and can serve a positive purpose in our lives. When our emotions become unruly, we must let God have the last word. We need to correct ourselves and let His word dictate what is true.

We can never feel our way into a better way of feeling. We can think our way into a better way of feeling through the word. We can pray our way into a better way of feeling by lifting our souls up to God in praise and prayer. We can act our way into a better way of feeling by being obedient to God.



MEMORIZE AND MEDITATE

Review your anchor cards. Memorize and meditate on the memory scriptures and your Personal Anchor Points.

APPOINTMENT WITH GOD

COME IN PRAYER (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication)

HEAR AND ACT (What is God saying? What have I learned? How should I respond?)

FOLLOW (What is God doing in my life and marriage?)

DAY 4: HOPE THAT OVERCOMES DISAPPOINTMENT

...hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (Ro 5:5)

There is hope for your marriage, but for a marriage to glorify God, it must be biblical hope. If we hope that marriage will fulfill us, we will be disappointed. If we expect our husband or wife to bring us significance, value and “happiness” then we will have a long wait. Our spouses can never be the source of our value but can only affirm the value and significance that God has bestowed on us. The object of our hope must have the ability to meet our expectations. Only God can do that. If we expect a spouse to give us only what God can provide, then we make him or her big and God small.

Certainly, marriage can be a source of great joy in our lives. Marriage can be very fulfilling. We can experience love and the intimacy that God intends for marriage if we put our hope in Him first. When our hope for fulfillment is in God, we can enjoy our marriage relationship, but first we need to avoid the stumbling block of unrealistic expectations that causes disappointment.

OUR CULTURE OF GREAT EXPECTATIONS

In America we live in a culture that promotes unrealistic expectations. While our founding fathers envisioned a land that would give all the opportunity for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, our current culture has taken these great visions to an extreme. Happiness is no longer seen as an opportunity but an entitlement. We have been led to believe that we deserve to be happy. There are endless businesses assuring us that they have the latest and best product that will make us happy. We are convinced that these goods, experiences, and ideas will guarantee we can be or have everything we desire. We assume that these things will bring us feelings of personal value and significance. It seems that even our churches have bought into the great American dream. We offer the latest in programming, technology, goods and services that will satisfy every customer’s desires. It is no wonder that people go “church shopping” to look for a church that will meet their wishes and wants as well as their needs.

Our culture of great expectations has impacted marriages. We have come to believe that marriage should bring us the happiness we desire on our terms. We feel entitled to pursue our own vision of fulfillment in marriage, having our needs, wishes and desires met by our spouses. We are products of several “me first” generations. Following are some great lies that are common about our expectations. These expectations plant the seeds of disappointment and discontent in many marriages.

OUR GREAT EXPECTATIONS

- We expect our spouse to know, anticipate, and meet our needs without being told what they are.
- We believe it is a spouse’s responsibility to make us happy.
- We expect a spouse to think, feel and act as we do.
- We expect a spouse to know what is important to us and to act accordingly.
- We believe it is our God-given right to change our spouse into our vision of whom they should become.
- We believe if our spouse would change, our marriage would improve, and we would be happier.
- We expect our spouse to be the primary source of our value and significance.
- We expect we can be all, have it all, do it all and still be one with our spouse.

Those are just few of the lies and expectations we believe that cause us to be disappointed in our spouse and in our marriage. At the root of these lies is the great lie that someone other than God can be the source of our hope.

REFLECT AND RESPOND

Review the above expectations, beliefs and lies we believe. Underline any that are true of you. In the space below write how any of these beliefs or expectations might be affecting your marriage.

DISAPPOINTMENT

One of the greatest stumbling blocks to loving one's spouse as Christ loves the Church is our expectations. We put our hope in a spouse rather than God to meet our needs. We expect our spouse to be there for us in a certain way and when he/she is not, we are disappointed. If not dealt with, that disappointment often will be followed by growing resentment and criticism. Because our spouse is not living up to our expectations, we begin to not only criticize our spouse's actions but his or her character as well. We believe that since our spouse is not doing what we expect that he/she doesn't really care about us. Criticism can grow into a root of bitterness, and if allowed to grow, it can become a deep seated anger and result in a cold heart and disengagement—it can shut a spouse out of our life. The writer of Hebrews warns,

See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled. (Heb 12:15)

Over many years of counseling and observing the rise and fall of marriages, I have seen too many marriages fall into the trap of false hope and disappointment and end in detachment and often divorce.

FROM ROMANCE TO REALITY

We all come into our marriages with a list of expectations whether we aware of them or not. It doesn't take long for us to begin realizing that our spouses are not the knights in shining armor or the princesses we thought they were. As the romance phase of marriage fades, the reality phase emerges with disappointments. Some disappointments from unmet expectations are more important to us than others. It is how we resolve those disappointments that will largely determine the success of our marriages.

For example, a major disappointment in our marriage was when Janet realized I was not a handyman and rarely ever tried to fix anything. Her dad was pretty handy, so she was used to the "man of the family" doing his duty, and she expected me to do the same. I, on the other hand, simply ignored most things that needed to be maintained because I felt so inadequate in attempting the simplest of repairs. Obviously, there was a lot of deferred maintenance in our household. This was a major disappointment for Janet because she thought household repairs and maintenance were important. She interpreted my lack of interest and neglect as a sign that I did not care about what was important to her, which meant I did not value her. After a lot of early conflict, we were able to work things out. We started communicating and resolving the issue rather than just reacting. She realized that what she thought was my disregard for her feelings was more about being clueless and feeling incompetent. She was able to set aside some of those

expectations. Instead of ignoring maintenance issues, hoping they would resolve themselves, I started to take responsibility for getting things done, even if I wasn't the one to do it.

One of the main tasks of marriage is to resolve the expectations and disappointments that are inevitable in marriage. They occur because of the differences we bring into marriage. Our backgrounds, personalities, weaknesses, strengths, divergent needs and desires can make this a difficult task. It is made even more difficult given our sinful nature. It usually takes hard work and more than a bit of compromise. There are several things that are essential for this task. First is to put our hope in God and always seek Him as the ultimate source of all our needs. It is only He who never disappoints. As God's word assures us,

...hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (Ro 5:5)

Next, we must acknowledge our own imperfections and not see our spouse's imperfections as more numerous and greater than our own. We are all flawed, just in different ways. We are all insecure and needy in our own way. A third essential is to take personal responsibility for our own needs and desires and not expect our spouse to resolve them. It is certainly legitimate to try to resolve them together, but if we see that is not going to happen, then it is our responsibility to find appropriate ways of dealing with our own needs, expectations and disappointments. While all this is difficult, it is possible because we have at our disposal the power of the Spirit-empowered word of God and prayer, which together can renew our minds and transform our actions (Ro 12:1-3).

DEFEATING DISAPPOINTMENT WITH HOPE

The answers to unmet expectation and disappointment is to defeat disappointment with hope. We must learn to put our hope in God alone. When our focus is on God to meet our needs and to be our joy, we will rely less on our spouse to be our source of joy. God's word promises us,

My God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. (Php 4:19)

Our souls are anchored on the cornerstone of Christ. He is our hope and the answer to our disappointments (Heb 6:19). God's great promise in the book of Isaiah assures us,

...The LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth Does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable. He gives strength to the weary, and to him who lacks might He increases power. Though youths grow weary and tired, and vigorous young men stumble badly, yet those who wait for the LORD Will gain new strength; They will mount up with wings like eagles, They will run and not get tired, They will walk and not become weary. (Is 40:28-31)


The greatest preparation for disappointment is to put your hope in God alone. There are eight great truths that counter the lies and expectations we discussed earlier and can help prepare you for disappointment. Let's take a look at how these truths can be the weapons of our warfare to destroy the eight lies and expectations by renewing our minds with the word of God and transforming our actions.

SEARCH THE WORD.

Read the following eight statements and look up the scripture listed with each. Make a check mark by each statement that you want to live by in your marriage. Choose one of these to work on this week. In the space following these statements, write a key scripture associated with how you will think and act differently.

- I can look to God to fill my needs rather than become resentful when my needs or expectations are not met by my spouse. (Php 4:10-13, 19)

- I can't expect my spouse to always think, act or feel in the way I want him/her to. I cannot control his/her behavior, but with God's help I can control my thoughts and reactions. (Ga 5:16, 22-23)
- I will never depend on my spouse or any other things or persons to be the source of my significance and value, but I will put my hope in God alone. (Eph 1:3-8; Ps 62:1-2)
- I can be understanding when my spouse disappoints me because I realize that I am not perfect and disappoint him/her at times. (Ps 103:14-15; Ro 2:1)
- I can modify my expectations of my spouse and thus change the way I feel and act toward him/her. I can change the way I think and interpret my spouse's actions differently. (Ga 6:1-2)
- Rather than trying to change my spouse, I will, through the power of the Holy Spirit, change my own attitudes and actions and offer these as a gift to my spouse. (Col 3:12-14)
- I will seek God first and strive to improve my marriage by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Mt. 6:31-34; Eph 3:14-21)
- I will accept my spouse with his/her imperfections just as Christ has accepted me and my imperfections. (Ro, 15:7; Eph. 5:1)

Key statement, scripture, and your response. 

MEMORIZE AND MEDITATE

Review your anchor cards. Memorize and meditate on the memory scriptures and your Personal Anchor Points.

APPOINTMENT WITH GOD

COME IN PRAYER (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication)

HEAR AND ACT (What is God saying? What have I learned? How should I respond?)

FOLLOW (What is God doing in my life and marriage?)

DAY 5: HOPE AND THE HALF FULL GLASS

Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Ro 15:13)

God's word makes it clear that we are to have a joyful and thankful heart. Not just sometimes but at all times. We are to be joyful and thankful no matter what the circumstances. Experiencing that joy and expressing it with a thankful heart is essential if our relationship with God and our spouse is to flourish.

HOPE AND JOY

Romans 5:5 tells us the truth about hope and joy. Real hope and joy fills us when it flows to us from God and is only because of His presence in our lives.

...hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (Ro 5:5)

To have that hope we must trust God to meet all our physical, spiritual and emotional needs. If our hope is in God alone, we will be filled with joy and peace that will overflow with joyful praise and thanksgiving to God. It will also overflow into our relationship with our spouse and others.

Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. (Ro 12:12, NIV)

GOD IS THE SOURCE OF OUR JOY

You have filled my heart with greater joy than when their grain and new wine abound. (Ps 4:7)

Biblical joy is a special kind of joy because the source is supernatural and comes only through a personal relationship with God. God wants to fill us with His joy and our responsibility is to be in a position to receive it. It comes when we stay in His presence through the word, prayer and service. The Palmist was aware of this condition:

You will make known to me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; In Your right hand there are pleasures forever. (Ps 16:11)

When God fills us with joy, we can experience His joy in everything no matter what our situation because joy is not conditioned on our circumstances. We can have joy in every relationship because God, not someone else, is the source of our joy.

JOY IS THE SOURCE OF OUR STRENGTH

Nehemiah reminded the people that after suffering in exile for 70 years, the time for grieving was over, and it was time to experience the joy of the Lord who was their strength.

...the joy of the LORD is your strength. (Ne 8:10)

The Prophet Habakkuk who prophesied in Judah before the exile made the mistake of taking his focus off God and fretting about his circumstances. Like Jeremiah, he had lost his faith, joy and hope. Judah was unfaithful and was going to be taken captive by the evil nation of Babylon. Habakkuk took his eyes off God and was consumed with his circumstances. He frets until God finally has enough and says,

But the LORD is in His holy temple. Let all the earth be silent before Him. (Hab 2:20)

In other words, "Be still Habakkuk. Stop fretting. Change your focus from your circumstances to me." Habakkuk obeys and there is a dramatic change. Listen to His prayer.

*I heard and my inward parts trembled, At the sound my lips quivered. Decay enters my bones, and in my place I tremble. Because I must wait quietly for the day of distress, For the people to arise who will invade us. Though the fig tree should not blossom and there be no fruit on the vines, Though the yield of the olive should fail and the fields produce no food, though the flock should be cut off from the fold And there be no cattle in the stalls, **Yet I will exult in the LORD, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation. The Lord GOD is my strength, And He has made my feet like hinds' feet, and makes me walk on my high places.** (Hab 3:16–19)*

Notice that Habakkuk's circumstances did not change. The coming disaster did not go away. What changed was his focus. He chose to focus on God and be still before Him. When this happened, Habakkuk experienced a miraculous transformation. His faith was restored. His joy was restored. He now relied on the Lord's strength and not his own. His hope was restored, and his spirit soared.

JOY IS NOT BASED ON CIRCUMSTANCES

We can experience the Lord's joy, no matter what the circumstances, if our faith and joy are in Him—even while enduring frustration and pain. When we feel powerless to change the situation, we can live beyond ourselves and experience the Sovereign Lord's strength to face our circumstances. We can be assured that *"the battle is the Lord's."*

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN JOY AND HAPPINESS

Sometimes we confuse joy with happiness. Happiness is a feeling based on our current circumstances. If things are going well for us, we are happy. If things are not going according to our expectations, we have feelings of disappointment, anger or frustration. In our North American culture, we have been led to believe that we deserve to be happy all the time, but as we know, life is not like that. Life disappoints!

Biblical joy is different from happiness. It often includes happy feelings, but not always. It is a condition of the heart, not circumstances. It is based on a state of being. That state of being is that we have a relationship with God who is always with us, always loving and always faithful. We can trust all His promises. How can we experience joy in all circumstances? The writer of Hebrews gives us the key. It is to keep our eyes on Jesus, following His example.

[Let us fix] our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. (Heb 12:2–3)

When Jesus endured the excruciating pain and humiliation of the cross, He did not experience happy feelings. When Jesus faced death on the cross, He *"began to be grieved and distressed"* (Mt 26:37).

He said to Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, *"My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me"* (Mt 26:38). Yet, as Scripture says, *"who for the joy set before Him endured the cross"* (Heb 12:2). The joy set before Him was not happy feelings, but the joy of laying down His life for us. It was the joy of being obedient to the will and mission of His heavenly Father despite great physical and emotional pain.

The source of our joy is our hope in God alone. Our hope is in all God is and all He does. It is anchored in His glory, which is the sum of His attributes. The Bible discloses God's love and faithfulness in His relationship with us. This hope fills us with His joy and gives us His strength. Through this hope we can have confidence that He will meet all our needs and bring us through every trial we may face.

CHOOSE TO BE JOYFUL

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (Jas 1:2–4)

James teaches that even when we experience many kinds of trials; even when our circumstances are not bringing us happy feelings, we can “consider” our trials pure joy. Even when we experience serious loss, we can still have joy in the Lord, because our hope is still in Him. When we step back and consider our trial, we can be assured that God will never leave us or forsake us and that He will bring us through the trial and heal our wounded emotions. It requires faith in Him. It means looking beyond our current trial and considering what God is going to do in us and through us because of this trial. Our joy is in our confidence in God. He is with us every step of the way, so we can have joy in his presence (Ps 21:6).

To rejoice is our response to the hope and joy that God has placed in our hearts. It is our expression of praise and thanksgiving for who He is and what He has done for us. Paul exhorts the believers in Philippi,

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Php 4:4–7)

START

To make sure the believers got the importance of the message, Paul says it twice. “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again rejoice.” God’s word reminds us that it is essential in every situation, no matter how stressful it might be or how anxious we might become, to rejoice and give thanks to the Lord in prayer. We are to depend on God to guard our souls and give us peace in the midst of all circumstances.

How can we choose to be joyful always? When we express our joy to God in all circumstances, we receive His joy and can be joyful. God’s joy flows from Him to us and through us. It is supernatural joy.

MARRIAGE AND THE JOYFUL HEART

Instead of wanting a happy marriage, we need to desire a joyful heart and marriage. This is not just a play on words but an essential biblical principle that applies to marriage. If we focus on being happy, we actually focus on what will result in disappointment and frustration. If we focus on being joyful, we will find joy in our marriage because our joy is in the Lord and not in our spouse. We need to pray for a joyful heart rather than a happy marriage.

THE THANKFUL HEART

The thankful heart is one that experiences joy and expresses that joy with praise and thanksgiving. Joy, thanksgiving and praise flow together to glorify God. There is no scripture that illustrates this better than the following Psalm. This is a Psalm I pray daily to help me continue to have a thankful heart.

Oh give thanks to the LORD, call upon His name; Make known His deeds among the peoples. Sing to Him, sing praises to Him; Speak of all His wonders. Glory in His holy name; Let the heart of those who seek the LORD be glad. Seek the LORD and His strength; Seek His face continually. Remember His wonders which He has done, His marvels and the judgments uttered by His mouth, (Ps 105:1–5)

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE THANKFUL HEART

Psalm 100 shows us how and why we should express our joy and thanksgiving, but how does one develop such a heart for God? What are the characteristics that enable a person's heart to be filled with joy, praise and thanksgiving on a continual basis? A brief review of this week's study will answer that question. It is the firm belief and the practice of these biblical principles:

- Hope in God is the answer for disappointment
- The joy of the Lord is the answer for trials
- Praise and Thanksgiving is the key to a thankful heart

The key scripture that captures the truth and practice of a thankful heart is this:

Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. (1 Th 5:16–18)

This one short scripture sums it all up. These characteristics and practices are developed when we remain in the presence of God through prayer, study and obedience to His word. God shapes our hearts so we are able to be joyful and give thanks in all circumstances because he enables us to see things through His eyes—the eyes of faith.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:16-18.

This reference is not about our natural vision, but supernatural vision given to us by God. It was this kind of vision that Paul prayed for the believers in Ephesus.

[I keep asking] that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places.... (Eph 1:17–20)

How do we develop this supernatural vision? We do not wait until we feel thankful to give thanks—we give thanks so we will be thankful. The act of giving thanks opens our eyes to see our spouse and our circumstances through God's eyes. We act our way into a better way of feeling. We receive a thankful heart from God

CHOOSE TO BE THANKFUL

The vision for which Paul prayed starts with the hope we have because God has called us to be His children. It continues with the riches of the glorious inheritance we have as being His deeply loved children. It concludes with the promise of the very power of God which raised Christ from the dead.

When we view people through eyes that are not enlightened in this way, we tend to see people through our own filters of self-centeredness, pride, and judgment. The views of our spouse and others can become distorted and we see only what we want to see. When expectations are not met and we are disappointed and begin to fret, our vision becomes blurred and we begin to see our spouse's glass as half empty rather than half full.

THE HALF EMPTY/HALF FULL GLASS

The example of the half empty/half full glass is a visual I have come to rely on when it comes to viewing people and situations through the eyes of God. When I combine Scripture with this easy to visualize concept, I am able to change my view of a person or situation from negative to positive, from fretting to the joy of the Lord and thanksgiving.



The question “Is the glass half empty or half full?” is part of a proverb that has become a common expression to indicate that a particular situation or person can be seen with either an optimistic or pessimistic view. What does the half empty/half full glass have to do with the joyful, thankful heart and marriage? We have a choice of how we view our “marriage glass.” We make a choice as to whether we view it as half full or half empty. We choose whether we are going to focus on the positive strengths of our spouse or on his/her weaknesses. This choice is based on whether we view our spouse with the “enlightened” “eyes of [our] heart[s]” that come from God, or our natural vision distorted by our own self-centered expectations and pride. We choose the lenses or filters that will shape our view.

CHOOSE TO VIEW THE GLASS AS HALF FULL

Paul, after telling the believers to “rejoice in the Lord always” and pray with “thanksgiving,” sums up his admonition with this:

Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. (Php 4:8–9)

Paul understood how a person’s thoughts influence his/her life. He knew that what people allow to occupy their minds will determine their actions. Paul knew if people were willing to see what their spouse pours into the “marriage glass,” if they would focus on what was “praiseworthy” in one another’s lives, they would experience peace and joy in their relationships. We all have the choice of whether we view our “marriage glass” as half full or half empty. Our first step is to simply **choose** to view our “marriage glass” as half full.

THANK GOD FOR YOUR SPOUSE


After his greeting in his letter to the believers in Philippi, Paul says,

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all.... (Php 1:3–4)

Paul thanked God for his brothers and sisters, not because they were perfect but because of their partnership in a united purpose. He accepted them with all their flaws as Christ accepted him with his (Ro 15:7). We should do no less for our spouses. Think of the difference it would make in your relationship with your spouse if each day you remembered to thank God for him/her with joy? What if instead of focusing on your spouse’s weaknesses or things that irritate you, you made a list of his or her strengths and thanked God for your spouse every day? Think of what impact this could have on your “marriage glass.” Here is how I suggest you make that happen:

🧠 REFLECT AND RESPOND

Take some time to investigate your own heart. Can you say that you have a joyful and thankful heart at all times and in all circumstances?

1. *Would you say you are a half full or half empty type of person? What about when it comes to your spouse? Are there some things you need to change about your vision?*
2. *Which one of the scriptures in today's study speaks to you? What are you willing to do to practice that scripture in your marriage?* 
3. *Decide to focus on your spouse's positives and see your "marriage glass" as half full. Start a list of positive things about your spouse for which you can be thankful. Take time right now to thank God for your spouse and whenever you pray "ACTS" in your time with God.*



MEMORIZE AND MEDITATE

Review your anchor cards. Memorize and meditate on the memory scriptures and your Personal Anchor Points.


APPOINTMENT WITH GOD

COME IN PRAYER (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication)

HEAR AND ACT (What is God saying? What have I learned? How should I respond?)

FOLLOW (What is God doing in my life and marriage?)

PERSONAL ANCHOR POINT

You should now develop your Personal Anchor Point. Review and reflect on what you have learned this week and what God may have laid on your heart as the week progressed. Pray for God's direction in developing your Personal Anchor Point. As a reminder, your Personal Anchor Point is a specific practice you will implement in your daily walk to strengthen your connection to this week's anchor. It includes the key point you learned and the action you will take in response. See page 6 for more information. 

COUPLE TALK

You should have established a time to meet with your spouse before the next group meeting. When you sit down with your spouse, *discuss what you have learned during the week and what God has said to you about the cornerstone of Christ and our hope. How can true hope help you overcome disappointments in your marriage? What scripture verses spoke to you? How would you rate yourself in being thankful and seeing the glass as half full?* Make some notes in the space provided below.

Notes:

WEEK 4: ANCHORED IN THE GLORY OF GOD: HIS PRESENCE AND OUR PURPOSE

ANCHOR CARD

This week we will study how to be anchored in the glory of God, and how we can abide in His presence and know our purpose. Begin by creating your anchor card for the week. As described on page 6, write the Anchor for this week at the top of an index card or in your electronic notes program, followed by the Anchor Scripture and Anchor Prayer.

ANCHOR SCRIPTURE

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.... My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. (Jn 15:5, 8)

ANCHOR PRAYER

Lord I want to faithfully abide in Your presence through prayer and the word so that I can glorify You in all I say and do. I pray that I will bear the fruit of love and obedience that will last so that my marriage glorifies You.

DAILY TOPICS

Day 1: Abiding and the Garden of God

Day 2: Abiding Through Prayer

Day 3: The Fruit of Love

Day 4: The Fruit of Obedience

Day 5: Our Purpose—Glorifying God by Bearing Fruit That Will Last

DAY 1: ABIDING AND THE GARDEN OF GOD

*I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 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. My Father is **glorified** by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. (Jn 15:1, 5, 8)*

To be anchored in the glory of God means our ultimate purpose on earth is to declare His glory so that others can know Him. We were chosen for the very purpose of declaring that glory of God to a lost world living in darkness. We are to declare the glory of God to others through our lips, our lives, our character and our marriages. God's word makes His purpose for us clear.

But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.... (1 Pe 2:9)

You may think, "How is such a daunting task as declaring God's glory in our lives possible?" It may seem that God is asking too much of us. How is it possible for us to reflect the great attributes of God—His love, faithfulness, compassion, integrity, and holiness? How can our hearts be shaped to be like God? If we already struggle in our marriages, how can we be an example of love, compassion, faithfulness and forgiveness? How is it possible to glorify God in all we do and say?

BEARING MUCH FRUIT FOR GOD'S GLORY

All this would be impossible if it were up to us to declare God's glory by our own power, but it is possible with God's power in us and through us. In John 15:1-8, Jesus tells us how we are able to glorify God by bearing **much fruit**. It is not by our own effort, but by learning to abide.

SEARCH THE WORD

Read John 15:1-8.

1. *In verses 1-5, what figures of speech does Jesus use for Himself, his Father and the disciples?*

2. *Count how many times the words "abide" and "fruit" occur. What do these numbers tell us about the connection between abiding and producing fruit?*

3. *What does Jesus say that is impossible to do on our own?*

4. *What do you see as the main point of what Jesus is wanting his disciples to understand?*

THE TRUE VINE

I am the true vine.... (Jn 15:1a)

Jesus first introduces Himself as the true vine. All the resources of the Godhead (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) flow into our lives through Him so we are nourished. Abiding means that He lives in us, and we live in Him. Apart from Him, Scripture says, we can do nothing.

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. (Jn 15:5)

It is through the gift of grace that Christ abides in us and we in Him. His death on the cross paid the penalty for our sins and allows us to abide in Him. God's word says,

I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. (Ga 2:20)

THE GARDENER

...My Father is the vinedresser. (Jn 15:1b)

Next, Jesus introduces his Father as the Vinedresser. A vinedresser is a gardener who cares for grape vines. God loves gardens and gardening. When God created us, we were to live and flourish in His beautiful, perfect Garden of Eden. It was there that man would enjoy the beauty of His creation and fellowship with Him (Ge 2:8-17). In John 15, the Gardener and garden represents God's presence in our lives when we abide in Him and He in us. It is a garden designed for our joy in fruit-bearing. It is the perfect environment in which to grow and flourish. It is where the Gardener nourishes us so that we will bear fruit that will glory Him (Jn 15:8). Because He loves us, He placed us in an environment where we could enjoy His fellowship, grow and produce beautiful, delicious fruit.

THE BRANCHES

We are the branches, and our primary responsibility is to abide in Jesus, the vine. It is when we remain united with Jesus by walking with Him in God's garden and talking with Him through prayer and the word that we are empowered to produce God-glorifying fruit. We need a daily infusion of God's resources. We are like a battery-operated car. If we don't plug it in to the power source to recharge, it will not operate. It

has no power of its own. Abiding allows us to continually “plug in” to God’s spiritual resources so that we are renewed each day for our walk with Him. We have no power of our own to glorify God. Daily, intentional abiding through prayer and the word empowers us to bear much fruit. It is only through being connected to God’s power that we can glorify God through our marriages.

ABIDING

*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. (Jn 15:5)*

The Greek word for abide in the New American Standard Bible translation can also be translated, “remain,” “dwell” or “reside.” It is a picture of God taking up residence in our hearts. When we become believers, the Holy Spirit enters our hearts. But Jesus wants to be more than a guest. He wants to make His home with us. He says,

...If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. (Jn 14:23)

TO ABIDE MEANS TO GIVE FULL ACCESS TO GOD

God wants us to be completely filled with His Spirit. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit want full access to every “room” in our hearts at all times. Nothing is to be off limits. Only intimate openness and fellowship will suffice. God wants only the best for His children, and His best will only come through being filled with His Spirit.

We give the Spirit access when we abide, and abiding includes intentionally setting aside time in God’s word and prayer to fellowship with Him. We walk and talk with Him in His garden during our quiet time and throughout the day. He shapes our character as we spend time with Him. It is here that He tells us about Himself and how much He loves us.

BEARING FRUIT

*My Father is glorified by this, that you **bear much fruit**, and so prove to be My disciples. (Jn 15:8)*

Jesus makes it clear that the purpose of abiding in Him is so that we will bear much fruit. It is by fruit-bearing that we prove that we are true disciples. It is through fruit-bearing that we accomplish our purpose on earth, which is to glorify God. It is an indication that we are connected to the Vine in intimate fellowship. The fruit that we bear is the fruit of character, transformed lives, and the fruit of reaching out to others with the Gospel. We are God’s ambassadors, demonstrating the love of God through our transformed lives. Jesus concludes his teaching on abiding with this appeal:

You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you. This I command you, that you love one another. (Jn 15:16–17)

WHY WORKS DON’T WORK

Abiding prepares us to glorify God by bearing fruit in our lives. The fast-paced, overloaded, and distracted environment of our culture does not lend itself to abiding as described by Jesus. Our culture works in opposition to the biblical principle of abiding and bearing fruit. The American way is to work harder, depend on one’s self and to improve one’s self. We have bought into the American Dream.

In his book *Radical*, David Platt describes the “American dream” that has permeated our culture and has distracted our faith communities.

In this book I want to show you that, with the best of intentions, we have actually turned away from Jesus. We have in many areas blindly and unknowingly embraced values and ideas that are common in our culture but are antithetical to the gospel he taught. Here we stand amid an American dream dominated by self-advancement, self-esteem, and self-sufficiency, by individualism, materialism, and universalism. (*Radical*, pp. 19)

Jesus introduces us to a vastly different kind of culture. He reminds us in His last supper teachings that we are “*not of the world*” (Jn 17:14). When we abide with God in His word, prayer and service, we see that the things our culture offers us matter little in comparison to the riches of our heavenly Father. The fruit, character and service we demonstrate are totally dependent on us abiding in Him and He in us. It is God who produces His fruit in us. It has little to do with our abilities, competency or hard work. In this teaching on fruit-bearing, Jesus clearly says that we are not to trust in ourselves (Jn 15:4; 23-28).

This should be a great relief to us as most of us have already tried the “do it yourself” approach to change in our lives and marriages. We have discovered that on our own, we do a lousy job of self-improvement. God is not interested in our self-improvement efforts but wants us to abide in Him in the garden so He can transform us into the likeness of Christ. Our effort is important, but it must be motivated by God’s love and dependent on His power as we respond to the Holy Spirit’s prompting. (Eph. 4:11-13; 3:14-21; Ro 12:1-2)

GROWING IN THE GARDEN

When Jesus refers to the heavenly Father as “the Vinedresser,” He goes on to describe the environment of a garden where we can abide and grow and flourish. It is in abiding in the garden with God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, that we experience spiritual growth. This is a beautiful picture of our fellowship with God. It is here that our relationship with the Gardener grows and He does His miraculous work of transformation in our lives.

The gardener is constantly at work in His garden. He loves to fellowship with His children. Unlike our earthly fathers, He is the perfect Father, so His love for us is perfect. He accepts us for who we are but loves us too much to leave us in that condition. Therefore, through His word and Spirit He is always at work, shaping us into His image. Our responsibility is to abide, staying connected to the vine.

My wife is a gardener. Janet loves working in her garden. I observe her tirelessly working the soil, watering, tenderly spending time enjoying and nourishing her “children.” She never neglects them and gets very frustrated when she is away and those whom she has asked to care for the garden don’t care for the plants as she would.

Some of you who love gardening can identify with my wife. Others, like me, are lousy gardeners. Under my care, the garden would be overcome with weeds. The plants and trees would die because of neglect. Our Heavenly Father is the perfect Gardener because He is perfectly loving and faithful. He never neglects us. Under His care we will always flourish if we only will abide in Him.

Janet is constantly pruning, cutting off branches. The plant often looks ugly when she is finished, but she knows that if it is to flourish, it must be pruned. Pruning involves the select removal of parts of a plant such as buds, branches, or roots, especially dead or unproductive growth. This is all so the plant will have room to produce good fruit. The Gardener is always at work carefully pruning His Garden. Jesus said,

...and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. (Jn 15:2)

The Gardener loves us so much that He is willing to allow us the pain of pruning so He can shape us into productive branches. He wants us to experience the joy of bearing much fruit and glorifying Him. That will only happen if we abide in Him and obediently cooperate with His shaping of our character so that we are transformed into the likeness of Jesus in all we think, say and do. When we abide in Him, we also will abide in His word. The Spirit-empowered word renews our minds and transforms our character so we will bear much fruit (Jn 15:5-6; 7; Ro 12:1-2).

I conclude today's study with a great old hymn that was sung often in our church when I was young. I believe this hymn captures the joy of abiding in the garden of God. It was written by C Austin Miles in 1912, on a cold, dreary day in a leaky basement in Pitman, New Jersey, that didn't have a window much less a garden. The name of this revered hymn is "In the Garden."

IN THE GARDEN

I come to the garden alone,
While the dew is still on the roses;
And the voice I hear, falling on my ear,
The Son of God discloses.

Refrain: And He walks with me, and He talks with me,
And He tells me I am His own,
And the joy we share as we tarry there,
None other has ever known.

He speaks, and the sound of His voice
Is so sweet the birds hush their singing;
And the melody that He gave to me
Within my heart is ringing.

Refrain: I'd stay in the garden with Him
Tho' the night around me be falling;
But He bids me go; thro' the voice of woe,
His voice to me is calling.



MEMORIZE AND MEDITATE

Review your anchor cards. Memorize and meditate on the memory scriptures and your Personal Anchor Points.

APPOINTMENT WITH GOD

COME IN PRAYER (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication)

HEAR AND ACT (What is God saying? What have I learned? How should I respond?)

FOLLOW (What is God doing in my life and marriage?)

COUPLE TALK

If you have not already done so, get with your spouse and set a time later this week (after you will have each completed this week's study) to discuss what you have learned. At the end of Day 5, you will be reminded to meet and be given some guidance for your discussion.

DAY 2: ABIDING THROUGH PRAYER

*If you **abide in Me**, and **My words abide in you**, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. (Jn 15:7–8)*

When we abide, we prioritize spending intentional time in God's presence in the word, prayer and fruit-bearing, accomplishing His mission to declare His glory.

JESUS AND INTENTIONAL ABIDING

If you abide in Me... (Jn 15:7a)

One of our highest priorities to abide in Jesus is simply to be in his presence. Several times the Gospels mention Jesus' priority of rising before daybreak and spending solitary time with His Father. Mark recorded,

In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there. Simon and his companions searched for Him; they found Him, and said to Him, "Everyone is looking for You." He said to them, "Let us go somewhere else to the towns nearby, so that I may preach there also; for that is what I came for." (Mk 1:35–38)

Jesus' solitary time with His Father was **intentional abiding**. It was not arbitrary, but a planned, essential discipline. After Jesus spent time in fellowship with His Father, He was then ready to serve others. His presence **with** the Father preceded His service **for** the Father. His calling and service were dependent on His presence with His Father. This time in intimate conversation was Jesus' highest priority, rising early and staying up late to pray. He regularly prayed before he began the daily journey with His disciples, preaching, teaching, healing the sick and driving out demons.

It was in those solitary times away from His disciples that He talked to the Father and the Father spoke to the Son. It was in this intimate time that Jesus listened to His Father so He could carry out the Father's work and will. When we observe Jesus in prayer, we can see that He was completely dependent on the Father. When challenged by disbelieving Jews who persecuted Him for healing on the Sabbath, He gave them this answer:

...Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.... I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. (Jn 5:19, 30)

Jesus often demonstrated that He listened to the Father's words and responded to him in prayer. He obediently responded to His Father's requests. Jesus's calling and ministry were completely dependent on intimate conversations in His Father's presence. Jesus made sure that His disciples learned this important principle. He told them,

He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me. (Jn 14:24)

Jesus's words and actions were not from His own wisdom or initiative. Jesus' deep, intimate fellowship with the Father resulted in a perfect knowledge of the Father's will. He then obeyed the Father's words and will and completed His mission.

ABIDING THROUGH PRAYER

We have covered much on the importance of God's word, but today we will focus on prayer. Jesus modeled for us intentional, abiding prayer and calls us to be intentional in our solitary times as well. During this study you have been using the **Scripture Praying** and **ACTS** methods for prayer. The ACTS method is an effective, simplified version of the Lord's Prayer (Mt 6:9-14) and includes most of the prayer's principles. While you have already been praying this way at the end of each day's study, I would like to give some additional helps. You can use today's study as a quick review and resource to refer to as you pray using **ACTS** during your appointments with God.

Read Matthew 6:9-14.

Jesus taught His disciples to first enter the presence of God as Abba/Father and praise His name. Next, they were to intercede, praying for His Kingdom and will in the world and in their lives and petition Him for personal needs (Supplication). They were taught to pray for spiritual cleansing, confessing their sins and forgiving others. They were to ask the Lord for spiritual protection. I do not believe these were rigid, step by step requirements, but a structure they could follow for comprehensive, effective prayer.

A DORATION

It is important to enter God's presence first with adoration. When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He instructed them first to acknowledge God as Abba/Father and hallow or praise His name. That is why in the ACTS approach to prayer Adoration comes first. It is of first importance.

Our Father Who is in Heaven

Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.' (Mt 6:9)

When we enter God's presence in adoration, we immediately stop focusing on ourselves and our issues and focus on Him. This allows us to see the majesty, glory, love and power of God. We begin to see life through His perspective and not our own self-absorbed view. We can then pray for His glory in our lives and not our own.

Because prayer is primarily a loving conversation with God, Jesus teaches us to approach our heavenly Father as a deeply loved child. We are to approach God by praying "Our Father in heaven." Focusing on this intimate relationship touches our minds, wills and our emotions. This enables us to enter the Father's presence with joy, confidence and anticipation because we know how much He loves us and wants us to be with Him. It enables us to hear His voice and respond to His word. The following are some scriptures that describe our heavenly Father's love for us as sons and daughters: Eph 1:3-14; Ro 8:15-17; 1 Jn 3:1; Ga 4:4-7; Is 9:6; Ps 103:11-14.

Our Identity in Christ

In this resource we have stressed the importance of knowing and living by our identity in Christ (see week 3). Keep your Identity Anchor Card (or electronic note) handy when you have your Appointment with God and use it as a guide to envision God's presence as your Abba Father.

Hallowed Be Your Name

Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.' (Mt 6:9)

We are to continue our adoration of God by hallowing or praising His name. The Greek word for hallowed that Jesus used here is "hagiozo," meaning to revere or sanctify. Embodied in God's name is everything He

is and everything He does. When we hallow God’s name, we are revering who He is and setting apart His name from all other names. To hallow the name of God means to praise the name of God. Praise means that we prize or value Him above all else. Praise is the verbal expression of our adoration of God. The Psalms show us many ways to hallow God’s name.

O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. (Ps 8:1, NIV)

Praise the Lord, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, O my soul.... (Ps 103:1–2, NIV)

Following are some names for God that can assist us in praising the name of God

Forgiving God	My Hiding Place	God My Maker
Source of my strength	Lord of Lords	My Helper
Refuge	Eternal King	King of Kings
God is my Rock	Almighty God	Light of the World
Holy One	Most High	Sovereign Lord
Our Redeemer	Creator of Heaven & Earth	Wonderful Counselor
All Loving	The Majestic One	Everlasting Father
Savior	Lord	Prince of Peace
My Fortress	King of Glory	Emmanuel

A Praise-Oriented Life

I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands. (Ps 63:4, NIV)

Our purpose in life is to be anchored in the glory of God. If we get this right, everything else of importance—our identity, value, significance and relationships—will be right. For this to happen, we need to focus on living a “praise-oriented life.” Nothing is more important because this focuses our mind on He who is worthy of glory and honor, not on ourselves. When facing His death on the cross, the worst time in His life, Jesus prayed:

“Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, ‘Father, save Me from this hour’? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name.” Then a voice came out of heaven: “I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.” (Jn 12:27–28)

The Undivided Heart

Jesus led a praise-oriented life no matter what the situation. Everything He said and did was to bring glory to His Father (Jn 17:4). Jesus had an undivided heart. His purpose on earth was to bring glory to His Father. That is our purpose as well (1 Pe 1:9). We can pray the following prayer regularly for God to give us undivided hearts.

Teach me your way, O Lord, and I will walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name. I will praise you, O Lord my God, with all my heart; I will glorify your name forever. (Ps 86:11–12)

Praising God with Our Lips and Lives

An undivided heart means we are to praise God not only with our lips but with our whole lives. We praise Him with all our heart: our mind, will and emotions. Our actions are to reflect what our words express in praise. Following is a list of praise scriptures that you can pray during this time of Adoration

Ps 16:7-8; Ps 18:1-3, Ps 30-33; Ps 19:1-6; Ps 23 Ps 24 Ps 33; Ps 40:1-5; Ps 42; Ps 46; Ps 63; Ps 67; Ps 77; Ps 93; Ps 95: 6-7; Ps 96; Ps 121: Ps 119: 169-176; Ps 131; Ps 146; Ps 147

Entering God's presence in our solitary times with adoration enables us to see people and situations through God's eyes and not our own. With enlightened eyes we are convicted to confess our sins and be thankful in all situations. Adoration prepares us to pray in accordance with God's will and His kingdom. Aligning our prayers with His will brings glory to God.

CONFESSION

Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation. (Lk 11:4, NIV)

Confession is an essential component of the prayer Jesus taught his disciples. They were to ask forgiveness for their sins and at the same time they were to forgive **everyone** who sinned against them. When we spend time in the presence of God, praising Him, we focus on His holiness and are reminded of our sins. When the prophet Isaiah entered God's presence, he saw a spectacular display of the Lord's holiness and cried out,

Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts. (Is 6:5)

When I come to this part of my prayer time after entering the presence of God in adoration, I almost always have something to confess. Confession is acknowledging where we fall short of God's perfect standards. It is agreeing with God that we need to repent of our sins and experience His cleansing. Our position in Christ has already made us pure in God's sight, but in practice we still sin and need to confess (2 Co 5:21; Ja 5:16; 1 Jn 1:9). Our time in confession keeps us humble as we remember how flawed we are. That humility enables us to forgive our spouse and others for any flaws we might see in them. They are imperfect as we are imperfect and in need of God's grace. Here are some scriptures from the Psalms you can pray as you confess your sins:

Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way. (Ps 139:23–24)

Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. (Ps 51:10)

Who can discern his errors? Acquit me of hidden faults. Also keep back Your servant from presumptuous sins; Let them not rule over me; Then I will be blameless, And I shall be acquitted of great transgression. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my rock and my Redeemer. (Ps 19:12–14)

THANKSGIVING

Enter His gates with thanksgiving And His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him, bless His name. For the LORD is good; His lovingkindness is everlasting And His faithfulness to all generations. (Ps 100:4–5)

Adoration is praising God for who He is. Thanksgiving is a part of adoration, thanking God not only for who He is but for His multiple blessing in our lives. Psalm 100 tells us that we are to "Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise." This includes being thankful for things that bring stress and hurt into our lives because these things build endurance and remind us that we are not in control and how much we need God (Jas 1:2-4). Always take time to pause and thank God for all His blessings. As we

discussed in last week's study, this includes thanking God for your spouse. Some helpful scriptures to give us direction in thanking God are: Php 1:3; Col 3:15-17; Heb 12:28; Ps 105:1-5; 1 Th 5:18; Php 4:6.

SUPPLICATION

Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. (Mt 6:10–11)

Our loving heavenly Father wants to supply our needs. He wants us to ask him for what we need. The ACTS model of prayer refers to this aspect of prayer as supplication. Supplication is a broad term that includes everything we ask of God. It was only after entering God's presence in adoration that the disciples were told to pray for God's kingdom, His will and their personal needs. Having entered Abba-Father's presence with praise and thanksgiving, we are now prepared to pray for His kingdom and His will. With our focus on God, His will and His desires become our desires. We each align our will with His. We are prepared to pray for what He wants in the world, and in our lives. Paul appeals to believers,

First of all, then, I urge that [supplications] and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, (1 Ti 2:1)

Supplication (also translated as requests or entreaties) is not just praying for our own needs but includes interceding for others' needs. Supplication is when we ask God to provide something specific for ourselves, or for others, always in accordance with His kingdom and will. It is our abiding time in adoration, confession and thanksgiving and our knowledge of His word that prepares us to pray in accordance with His will. It is these solitary times in His presence, abiding in Him, that enable us to pray for the things that bring Him the most glory.

SPIRITUAL PROTECTION

And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.... (Mt 6:13)

The ACTS model that you have been using does not specifically identify this component of the Lord's Prayer, but because spiritual protection is a need of yours, you may consider it an important part of supplication. Because the evil one has strategies to deceive us and lead us astray, it is important to include prayer for spiritual protection during your appointment with God. Jesus concluded his instructions on prayer by specifically teaching us to pray for spiritual protection. We especially need to pray that God will protect our marriages. Week nine on "Guard your Marriage" is devoted to equipping you to be a "watchman on the wall" and to protect yourself and your marriage from the temptations of the evil one.

PRAYING FOR YOUR SPOUSE AND YOUR MARRIAGE

And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. (Php 1:9–11)

There is nothing each of us can do that is more important than praying in faith for our marriage and our spouse. You should first pray:

- that your "love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight" for your spouse.
- that you will be "pure and blameless."
- for God to protect your marriage so that you will be one with your spouse, always honoring the sacred covenant of marriage.

Then, when you pray for your spouse, first begin by thanking God for her/him as the Apostle Paul always did for his brothers and sisters in Christ. Before praying the prayer in Philippians 1:9-11, he first said,

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all.... (Php 1:3-4)

During your appointment with God today, take time to thank God for your spouse and pray for him or her. Use Philippians 1:9-11 to guide you in your prayer.



MEMORIZE AND MEDITATE

Review your anchor cards. Memorize and meditate on the memory scriptures and your Personal Anchor Points.

APPOINTMENT WITH GOD

COME IN PRAYER (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication)

HEAR AND ACT (What is God saying? What have I learned? How should I respond?)

FOLLOW (What is God doing in my life and marriage?)

DAY 3: THE FRUIT OF LOVE

Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me.... Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. (Jn 15:4, 9)

In this passage, Jesus teaches that all the resources of God flow through the vine to us, the branches, and that we can bear fruit that will glorify God. Today we will look at the first of what we will call the “twin fruits” of love and obedience. They are twin fruits because in John 15 and the rest of the Bible, love and obedience are presented as inseparable. You can’t have one without the other. Today we will focus on love.

It is the fruit of love that defines all other fruit that the Father produces in His vineyard when we abide. Jesus said to His disciples,

Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love. (Jn 15:9–10)

Read John 15:9-13.

THE SOURCE OF LOVE

The source of our love is from God. “*We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love*” (1 Jn 4:16). The love of God flows to us from the Father through the vine of Jesus, and then through us to others. The fruit of obedience is produced in us through the Spirit by our response to the Father and Son’s love for us. Without love and obedience, it would not be possible to glorify God by bearing “much fruit” (Jn 15:5). Obedience is the result of the fruit of love that enable us to be one with our spouses and maintain or renew the sacred covenant of marriage.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FRUIT OF LOVE

Jesus demonstrated His love for His disciples by His commitment to them. They experienced His love and understood it when He died on the cross for their sins. He taught them about the heavenly Father’s love for them as well. What kind of love did the disciples experience as they followed Jesus? What were the characteristics of that love? Jesus modeled that love for not only His disciples but for all to see. The full extent of that love would only be known after Jesus paid the ultimate sacrifice for our sins by laying down His life for us. Below are ten characteristics of the love that His disciples would have experienced when following Him. Because God’s love “*surpasses knowledge*,” this list is just a glimpse of the incomprehensible love God has for His children (Eph 3:19). There are many verses that support these characteristics of love, but because of time and space I will give only one key verse for each.

SEARCH THE WORD

Below are ten characteristics of love. Reflect on each verse as you read it. How do you practice that act of love in your marriage? Write “strength” or “weakness” by each characteristic. Choose one weakness to pray about and act on this week. Write what you will do differently.

1. **Sacrificial**

We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. (1 Jn 3:16)

2. **Practical**

But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. (1 Jn 3:17–18)

3. **Unfailing**

bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails... (1 Co 13:7-8a)

4. **Selfless**

Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves. Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification. For even Christ did not please Himself.... (Ro 15:1–3a)

5. **Forgiving**

...bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. (Col 3:13)

6. **Humble**

...[walk] with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love.... (Eph 4:2)

7. **Compassionate**

Just as a father has compassion on his children, So the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him. For He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust. (Ps 103:13–14)

8. **Accepting**

Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God. (Ro 15:7)

9. **Obedient**

He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him. (Jn 14:21)

10. **Priority**

But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love. (1 Co 13:13)



Which is the weakness you will pray about this week? What will you do differently?

THE PRIORITY OF THE FRUIT OF LOVE

From beginning to end, the Bible is a story of God's great love for us and His desire for us to love Him and others in the way that He loves us. This is the fruit that brings Him the greatest glory. Jesus concludes His teaching on abiding and fruit-bearing by saying, *"This I command you, that you love one another"* (Jn 15:17). When asked by the doubting religious leaders which was the greatest commandment in the law, Jesus answered:

And He said to him, " 'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.' This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets." (Mt 22:37–40)

The Apostle Paul puts an explanation point on the priority of love when he reminds the believers in Galatia,

...The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. (Gal 5:6, NIV)

This brings us to the priority of the fruit of love in marriage. I believe that the Bible teaches clear priorities for life. Our number one priority is our relationship with God. We are to love God with all our hearts, souls and minds. Our second highest priority, I believe, is sacrificial love for our spouse. Paul instructed husbands,

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.... (Eph 5:25)

In this teaching on marriage, husbands are reminded of the sacrifice made by Jesus for his bride, the church, and this is how a husband is to love his wife. In this same section of scripture, wives are told to express their love for their husbands by submitting to them "as to the Lord" and showing respect for them (Eph 5:22-24; 33). In verse 31 believers are reminded of the sacred covenant of marriage in Genesis 3:24. Marriage is to be such a high priority that it imitates Christ's relationship with His bride, the church. When we follow the priority of loving God first and our spouses second, we can be confident that we will have a solid foundation for godly marriages that will glorify God and be an example of Christ's sacrificial love to a watching world. We will look in depth at how this standard in marriage can be practiced as we study the four strategic anchors in weeks five through eight.

We cannot help but be overwhelmed when we read God's standard for loving one another and our spouses. Just the short list of the ten characteristics of love is enough to cause us to wonder, "How can I ever live up to this standard of love in my marriage?" It is humanly impossible to consistently love in this way. We need to remember Paul's prayer for the believers in Ephesus where he explains how love that is humanly impossible is possible through God's supernatural power (see Eph 3:14-21).

THE FLOW OF GOD'S LOVE THROUGH US

The good news is that we do not have to depend on ourselves to love others as God loves us. Scripture teaches that our love must be supernatural and has its source in the endless reservoir of God's love. This love flows to and through us as we remain connected to the source by abiding in Christ. It is through His love that we can faithfully love our spouses and others.

THE FLOWING SPRING OF LIVING WATERS

Jesus referred to himself as the source of "living water" when he asked a Samaritan woman at a well for a drink.

...If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water. (Jn 4:10)

The Greek word for "gift" used here refers to God's love demonstrated through Christ's sacrifice on the cross. "Living water" is a reference to the promise of the Holy Spirit which was given to believers on the Day of Pentecost (Ac 2:38-39). Jesus said,

He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.' (Jn 7:38)

In the broadest sense, water in Scripture is a picture of God's loving resources flowing to and through those who trust in him. Isaiah prophesied,

And the LORD will continually guide you, And satisfy your desire in scorched places, And give strength to your bones; And you will be like a watered garden, And like a spring of water whose waters do not fail. (Is 58:11)

THE OVERFLOW

God pours His love into our hearts.

...and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (Ro 5:5)

God's unfailing love flows to us and is designed to overflow into the lives of others like a reservoir with springs of living water.

When we abide in God, when we are strengthened by his glorious riches in our inner being, when our lives are connected to God's springs of living water, His love overflows to others. It is His love, not ours. It is supernatural, not natural. It overflows through the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul prayed for the believers in Thessalonica,

...may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also do for you. (1 Th 3:12)

A LOVE NOT OF THE WORLD.

Through God we experience a love that is not of this world. In Jesus's prayer for His disciples, He asked His Father to protect them from the evil one because they were "not of the world" (Jn 17:15-16). The Bible's definition of love is vastly different from the popular culture we live in. Countless people, even many believers, have been influenced, if not deceived by the lies of Satan concerning the true meaning of love. The Apostle John defines and illustrates the profound difference between the world's view of love and a love "not of this world."

We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. (1 Jn 3:16–18)

The core definition of love in a word is **sacrifice**—laying down our lives for others. The clear example is Jesus sacrificing His life for us on the cross (v. 16). Love is never about us, but about the needs of others. Love is demonstrated in a practical way by meeting the needs of others first (v. 17). Love is not primarily about feelings but is a decision we make to love others as Christ loves us. It is unconditional and unailing. It is based on the truth of God's word, not on our own definition of truth or what we want or feel. It is a love "not of the world" that enables us to be one with our spouses. It is this kind of love that "never fails" and honors the sacred covenant of marriage (1 Co 13:8).

OUR RESPONSIBILITY

While it is God's love that flows to us and overflows from us, it is our responsibility to abide—to stay connected to the spring of living water through the word, prayer and obedience. It requires action on our part. God does His part and asks us to do our part. We are to immerse ourselves in His love, loving others as he loves us. We conclude this session with Paul's prayer for the believers in Colossae.

So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. (Col 3:12–14)



MEMORIZE AND MEDITATE

Review your anchor cards. Memorize and meditate on the memory scriptures and your Personal Anchor Points.

APPOINTMENT WITH GOD

COME IN PRAYER (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication)

HEAR AND ACT (What is God saying? What have I learned? How should I respond?)

FOLLOW (What is God doing in my life and marriage?)

DAY 4: THE FRUIT OF OBEDIENCE

If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. (Jn 15:10)

Bill Bright was the founder and longtime director of the largest nonprofit mission organization in the world. He founded Campus Crusade with a vision of reaching students on college campuses with the Gospel. This great man of God is now deceased, but Campus Crusade for Christ (now called CRU) still thrives. Every year Bill Bright would address the new group of recruits who would be missionaries to various campuses in the U.S. and throughout the world. He would begin his addresses with this profound admonition:

All you have to do from the time you get up until the time you go to bed at night is to **love** the Lord with all your heart, **trust** His promises, and **obey** His commands. Everything else flows from this.

I can't think of a better way of summing up the essence of abiding than the above statement. I have made it a practice of reviewing it several times a week to remind me to keep this simple but essential focus. If we truly love God with all of our heart and trust him, then we will want to obey Him. By following these three biblical principles, God's reservoir of spiritual resources will flow into our lives and overflow into the lives of others.

LOVE THE LORD WITH ALL YOUR HEART

We are to obey God, but obedience is preceded by loving God with all our hearts and trusting His promises. For this to happen we must first know and experience God's unfailing love. God's word says, "We love because He first loved us" (1 Jn 4:19). Similarly, we will obey because we love Him (Jn 14:15). Having just concluded a full day focusing on love, let us now move on to the importance of trusting God's promises, as revealed in His word, and then obeying Him. But first pray the following prayer from the Psalms that includes love, trust and a desire to obey.

Let me hear Your lovingkindness in the morning; For I trust in You; Teach me the way in which I should walk; For to You I lift up my soul. (Ps 143:8)

In John 15:10-13 Jesus explains how love and obedience are connected. Let's take some time to look more closely at these verses.

SEARCH THE WORD

Read John 15:10-13.

1. *How do we remain in Jesus's love?*

2. *What example does Jesus give? How should this example motivate us?*

3. *Why does Jesus say He is telling His disciples to obey?*

4. *What does Jesus say is the essential command to obey? What does this passage say to you about obedience?*

TRUST HIS WORD

Satan's ultimate strategy from the beginning of time is to tempt us to doubt God's truth, love and faithfulness and to trust ourselves instead. In the first recorded temptation, Satan said to Eve, *"did God really say, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?'"* (Ge 3:1). He went on to further undermine God's truth and faithfulness:

The serpent said to the woman, "You surely will not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." (Ge 3:4–5)

Satan's deception was clear. "You can't trust God; Trust yourself. Be your own authority. Live by what you think is true. You can meet your own needs. You don't need God." Satan's deception persists today. The evil one still wants us to doubt God's perfect, unfailing love and create our own reservoir of resources which can never satisfy. The Israelites failed to trust in the faithfulness of God. They believed the lie that they could forsake God and rely on themselves. God rebuked them saying,

For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, The fountain of living waters, To hew for themselves cisterns, Broken cisterns That can hold no water. (Je 2:13)

When we believe the "great lie" and stop trusting in God's faithfulness to satisfy our needs, we turn to ourselves and our own reservoir of polluted resources. They are *"broken cisterns that cannot hold water."* We pay the consequences by denying ourselves the complete joy God wants us to experience.

From Genesis to Revelation, God's word stresses His unfailing love and perfect faithfulness. Consider just a few of the many promises in scripture that assure us of God's love and faithfulness.

Not to us, O LORD, not to us, But to Your name give glory Because of Your lovingkindness, because of Your truth. (Ps 115:1)

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; (Heb 10:23)

If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself. (2 Ti 2:13)

To be fully obedient to God we need to consistently renew our minds with the truth of His unfailing love and great faithfulness. The Prophet Jeremiah began to doubt God's faithfulness because Israel had rebelled and forsaken God. He became depressed and had no hope. He recovered from His depression and despair only when he recalled God's great love and faithfulness.

This I recall to my mind, Therefore I have hope. The LORD'S lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, For His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness. (La 3:21–23)

ABIDING AND THE FRUIT OF OBEDIENCE

As we have seen, Jesus' priority was to abide with His Father in intimate fellowship. Without this first step, the path to obedience will not be followed. Abiding connects us to the reservoir of God's resources. Through the word and prayer, we not only see the path of obedience, but we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to follow it. To obey we must know what the word says. That is why learning to anchor our lives in the word is so important. When we memorize and meditate on God's word, it prepares us to "drop anchor" when tempted. It prepares our minds for action. Peter urged,

*Therefore, **prepare your minds for action**, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY." (1 Pe 1:13–16)*

Jesus was prepared when tempted by Satan in the desert. He memorized scripture, so He was able to answer Satan when tempted. We cannot recall what we do not know. It is only through constant use that we can discern good from evil and consistently obey God's word. The writer of Hebrews reminded the believers,

*But solid food is for the mature, who by **constant use** have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. (Heb 5:14, NIV)*

HOW WE CAN OBEY

As we abide in Christ and spend time in God's presence, our relationship with God will become more intimate, and we will become more fully aware of his wonderful attributes. There are three attributes of God that can help us learn to obey His word in everything we do and say.

GOD'S LOVE MOTIVATES US TO OBEY

Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me. (Jn 14:23–24)

We love, because He first loved us. (1 Jn 4:19)

God is love (1 Jn 4:8), and Jesus makes it clear here and in John 15 that the only true motivation for obedience is love, and our love for God originates from the Father's love for us. Our response to His love is

to love and obey Him. When God's love invades our souls (mind, will and emotions) and we experience His powerful love, we will want to obey Him. Paul explains this motivation to the believers in Corinth:

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. (2 Co 5:14–15)

It is because of Christ's sacrificial love that we are "compelled" not to live for ourselves, doing only what we want, but our lives will now be for Christ and will be conformed to His will.

GOD'S FAITHFULNESS GIVES US THE CONFIDENCE TO TRUST AND OBEY

But the Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil one. (2 Th 3:3)

Did you ever think about why we disobey? Isn't it because we don't trust God to meet our needs? We try to dig our own cisterns and fill our lives with our own resources. Every sin is in some way a sin not to trust God to supply our needs, but throughout the Bible, we are reminded that God is faithful. If we fail to trust in God's faithfulness, we will always be prone to trust in ourselves instead of trusting and obeying God. In the New Testament, Abraham and Sarah are featured in outstanding examples of trusting in the faithfulness of God, no matter how impossible the circumstances seemed. The writer of Hebrews gave these examples:

By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. (Heb 11:8)

By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised. (Heb 11:11)

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son.... (Heb 11:17)

Abraham demonstrated his faith by obeying God no matter what the circumstances. If we have total confidence in the faithfulness of God, our faith will express itself in obedience no matter how tempted we are to trust in ourselves.

GOD'S DIVINE POWER GIVES US THE STRENGTH TO OBEY

We don't have the power within ourselves to totally and consistently obey God. It's just not possible. Our sinful nature no longer controls us, but it also has not vanished.

...and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. (Ro 8:8–9)

The good news is that God is omnipotent (all powerful) and has promised us the power to overcome evil desires and obey Him. There is a wonderful passage of Scripture that I would like you to pray. This scripture gives us the assurance that God will give us the power to obey.

...His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. (2 Pe 1:3–4)

Peter goes on to say that for this reason we are to “*make every effort to add to your faith*” (2 Pe 1:5, NIV). He lists eight characteristics that it is our responsibility, through faith, to develop (2 Pe 1:3-9). God supplies the power, but he expects us to make every effort to obey. This will only happen if we abide in his presence, connected to his power source.

The Apostle Paul prayed that the believers in Ephesus would be strengthened by the power of God in their inner beings so that Christ would “*dwell*” or abide in their hearts by faith. This is a prayer I pray for myself at the beginning of every day.

Read Ephesians 3:14-21.

It is only through the power of the Holy Spirit that our “*inner being*” is strengthened so that Christ can “*dwell*” or abide in our hearts through faith. It is only then that we can be “*rooted and established in love.*” When Christ dwells in our hearts we can “*grasp*” or imitate the love of Christ. It is through this process that we become mature, “*filled to the measure of all the fulness of God.*” It is only through the word, prayer and the Spirit’s empowerment that this is possible.

When we spend priority time abiding with the Father in His word and prayer, we produce much fruit that will last. The proof of abiding in the word and prayer will be shown in the fruit of Love (Jn 15:9-13, 17). When we produce the fruit of Christ’s love in our lives, we will glorify God (Jn 15:8; Eph 3:20, 21). All of this will be because of God’s power abiding in us and will be for His ultimate glory. Paul ends His prayer by saying,

Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen. (Eph 3:20–21)

GOD DESIRES TOTAL OBEDIENCE

Scripture consistently condemns disobedience and calls us to total obedience. We are not to “*pick and choose*” from Scripture what we will obey based on our desires. Total obedience does not mean perfect obedience. Obviously, that would be impossible. Total obedience does mean surrender to Jesus and total commitment to obey. Jesus concluded His teaching on the mountain by warning,

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. (Mt 7:21)

Jesus is referring to people who claim to have put their faith in him but produce no fruit in their lives. Fruit demonstrates that they are true believers. Only Jesus knows the hearts of man and decides who is saved. He is not teaching that it is our works or our obedience that saves us. Scripture clearly and consistently teaches that it is not by works that we are saved, but by the grace of God alone (Eph 2:8-9). In the Apostle Paul’s letter to the believers in Rome he says,

...if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. (Ro 10:9–10)

Obedience shows that we have opened our hearts to Jesus and have repented of our sin and trust in Him alone for salvation. It shows that we love, trust, and obey God.

BEST FRIENDS WITH JESUS

One of the great joys of abiding with Jesus is that we have the privilege of becoming best friends with Him. Jesus assures His disciples with this promise before reminding them of their calling to “*go and bear fruit*” (Jn 15:16).

Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you. (Jn 15:13–15)

Jesus assured his disciples, and us as well, that if we abide in him, loving Him with all our heart, trusting His promises and obeying his commands, he will call us His friends. He will become “best friends” with us because He is the only perfect friend we will ever have. He is perfectly loving, and perfectly faithful. Jesus offers us the deepest of intimacy with him, as well as his love, his wisdom and his protection. A revered old hymn sums up the friendship we have with Jesus:

WHAT A FRIEND WE HAVE IN JESUS

What a friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer!
Oh, what peace we often forfeit,
Oh, what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer!

Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged—
Take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a friend so faithful,
Who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness;
Take it to the Lord in prayer.

MEMORIZE AND MEDITATE

Review your anchor cards. Memorize and meditate on the memory scriptures and your Personal Anchor Points.

APPOINTMENT WITH GOD

COME IN PRAYER (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication)

HEAR AND ACT (What is God saying? What have I learned? How should I respond?)

FOLLOW (What is God doing in my life and marriage?)

DAY 5: OUR PURPOSE—GLORIFYING GOD BY BEARING FRUIT THAT WILL LAST

You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you. This I command you, that you love one another. (Jn 15:16–17)

We conclude this section on foundational anchors with a focus on our purpose in life. We are called to glorify God as we enjoy the fellowship of abiding with Him. Jesus stresses that the purpose of abiding (mentioned 10 times) and fruit-bearing (mentioned 9 times) is to glorify God. We will see as we abide in the Garden of God, learning to glorifying Him, we will “*bear much fruit,*” proving we are Jesus’ disciples.

My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. (Jn 15:8)

THE GLORY OF ABIDING: SOLITARY TIMES

Our heavenly Father invites us to experience His glory as we spend time with him in the garden of life that He has prepared for us. As we have discussed, we do this by intentionally spending time with him in prayer and the word. The purpose of spiritual disciplines is to align us with God’s will for our lives. Spiritual disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God, listen to His voice and respond in obedience. They enable us to interact with God in a personal way as we communicate with Him. Jesus is our friend. As we open up our souls, he does his work in our lives.

TRANSFORMED BY GOD’S GLORY: THE FRUIT OF CHARACTER

Something miraculous happens to us when we spend time in God’s presence. His glory transforms our character, not through our work but by His work in us, as we give Him access to our souls. Paul explains how this happens.

But whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit. (2 Co 3:16–18)

Paul reminds believers that they are not like Moses whose face shone with fading glory after each meeting with God (2 Co 3:7-11). When Moses returned after being in the presence of God, He would put a veil over his face because the Israelites, under the Old Covenant, were not ready to see God’s glory. Under the New Covenant, the veil has been removed by Jesus’s sacrifice for our sins and we now have complete access to see God’s glory more fully.

For God, who said, “Light shall shine out of darkness,” is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. (2 Co 4:6)

When we come into God’s presence and glorify Him, He is like a brilliant mirror as He reflects the glory of his character on us. God is constantly shaping us into the image of His Son. Paul refers to the mirrors of ancient times that were made of burnished material. These mirrors reflected images with great brilliancy and distinctness. God is most glorified when our lives reflect His glory. The more time we spend with Him, the more we grow in His likeness. Our character is being transformed into His likeness with “*ever-increasing glory which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*” It is the Spirit who does the work of transforming us, so it is critical we be filled with the spirit, but it also requires our effort to spend time in

God's presence and respond to His will for our lives. His character is reflected onto our character. His thoughts, attitudes, and actions become our thoughts, attitudes and actions. We are molded into His likeness by being in his presence and responding to the work and prompting of the Holy Spirit. It is through God's glory reflected onto us that we glorify Him.

WE ARE CHOSEN

You did not choose Me but I chose you (Jn 15:16a)

Jesus concludes this teaching by reminding His disciples of their mission and purpose as disciples. He has spent three years with them, loving them, training them, preparing them to continue His mission of bearing fruit as they share the gospel with the lost. In just a few weeks, Jesus will be leaving them. They will soon be without the physical presence of their mentor and friend.

When the Church was launched on the day of Pentecost, believers were first called disciples; later they were referred to as Christians. The definition of a disciple is a follower of Jesus and a learner. We are called and chosen to follow Jesus for the purpose of glorifying Him, declaring His praises with our lips, our lives and our marriages.

But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE for God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.... (1 Pe 2:9)

God has chosen us to be light to a world that lives in darkness. It is through the light of God shining through our character that people can see the love of God in tangible ways. Jesus said,

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven. (Mt 5:14–16)

WE ARE APPOINTED

...and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit.... (Jn 15:16b)

Jesus knew it was important to remind His disciples that they were appointed to bear fruit. He would remind them again in His last recorded words before He ascended to heaven. In "The Great Commission" Jesus said,

All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. (Mt 28:18–20)

The disciples were appointed or commissioned to "go and make disciples of all the nations." They were to introduce people to Jesus so they could first be learners and eventually followers. They were to continue by "baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" bringing them to faith in Christ. Finally, the disciples were to teach them to obey all that Christ had commanded them. This produces fully devoted, fully mature disciples who become reproducers.

We have been appointed to reproduce ourselves in others. We are not only to become learners and followers of Jesus but are to reproduce by becoming disciple makers. The Great Commission is for all

believers. Just like the disciples, we are to produce fruit and have been personally appointed and empowered by Jesus to *“go and make disciple of all the nations.”*

JUST OPEN THE DOOR: “LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF”

When Jesus was asked, “which is the greatest commandment?” He replied, *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’”* (Mt 22:37-39).

I believe our greatest mission field is in our neighborhoods. We have great opportunities to display God’s light where we live, work, and play. We can start our outreach to the lost in a simple but highly effective way. **Just open the door.** While people in our culture have never been so distant, the need for community has never been so great. Janet and I experienced this when God put a passion in our hearts for our neighbors. We live in a diverse neighborhood comprised of Indian, Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Hispanic and Caucasian people. On our block are Hindus, Buddhists, a few believers and a majority of non-believers. The nations have come to us!

Janet and I decided to make our home a *“house of prayer”* (Mt 21:13). We started by fasting on Thursday mornings and going on a prayer walk in our neighborhood, stopping to pray for each house. We realized we only knew the names of a few of our neighbors. We decided to host a neighborhood BBQ for our block. We were pleasantly surprised when 25 of our neighbors showed up and most stayed for two hours getting acquainted with one another. Many expressed how pleased they were to get to know their neighbors for the first time. I think we have come to believe the lie that people do not want or need community anymore. God has placed in the hearts of everyone a need for community. We just need to “open the door” and invite people into our homes. Hospitality has largely become a lost art in our culture.

Since that initial gathering, we have opened our door for several other events. We had a Christmas open house, an Easter breakfast and egg hunt, and another BBQ. At the most recent BBQ, 35 people came, including 14 new people. The gathering consisted of Protestant, Catholic (the minority), Buddhists, Hindus and other non-believers. As you can see, truly a mission field. Again, most people stayed for at least two hours. Our goal has been to provide a place where we could reflect God’s light as we *“love our neighbors as ourselves”* and our neighbors can experience community with one another. We have seen some fruit as a result of just opening the door. A neighborhood couple now have a personal relationship with Christ. The husband was baptized, and they both are part of a faith community. They are being disciplined by Peyt and Mary Steiner, who have been partners with us in our neighborhood outreach.

I have shared our testimony with you so that you will be encouraged to glorify God with bearing “much fruit” by loving your neighbors as yourself. I am not suggesting you need to follow our pattern of outreach, but that you will pray to find a way to “just open the door.” The goal is that whether your “neighborhood” is your block, your apartment complex, your work place or anywhere you have an opportunity to build relationships, that you will pray for opportunities to be light and declare God’s glory.

WE ARE TO GO AND BEAR FRUIT THAT WILL LAST

...and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain
(Jn 15:16)

True discipleship bears fruit that remains or lasts. Discipleship is a journey and not a destination. It is ongoing abiding in God’s presence and bearing the fruit in our character. The primary goal of this resource is to help you become fully devoted, fully mature, lifelong disciples who will glorify God with your lips, lives

and marriages. I structured this study in such a way that it could help prepare you for intentional, sustainable, spiritual and marriage growth.

Discipleship, however, is not merely a study like this, or a series of studies. It is a lifelong commitment to follow Jesus and reproduce other disciples. This can happen in a variety of ways. One of the ways is to form a marriage group of your own using this resource. Because you have been “discipled” by going through this study, I challenge you to step out in faith and invite people into your home to experience spiritual and marriage growth together. Through God’s power you can do this!

GO TOGETHER

While solitary times of abiding in the word and prayer are important, equally important is abiding with other believers. Jesus discipled a group of men so they could learn together and serve together. They were to continue Jesus’s mission of glorifying God by reaching the lost **together**. Our spiritual growth should include committed groups that are devoted to the word, prayer and fellowship with one another. I hope you are experiencing this as you meet together in this group. I believe you will experience the spiritual growth that happens when you are encouraged, learn from and are held accountable by others. The disciple’s journey was never meant to be traveled alone. We can see this in the early days of the church as believers met together.

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Ac 2:42–47)

I developed a four-book series titled “**The Disciple’s Journey**” that I suggest you consider using to continue your faith journey. These manuals are based on the process that Jesus used as He led His disciples through five stages of training. Each stage requires a higher level of commitment. There is a total of 52 one-week sessions, like the ones you are experiencing in this study. I recommend you consider forming a Disciple’s Journey group and invite others to join you on the journey. The books can be downloaded free of charge or you can order copies at a very reasonable price. You can find additional information about these resources on my website at AnchorsofGod.com.

SCRIPTURE PRAYER

Pray John 15:16-17.

1. *Read It*

2. *Think It*

3. *Pray It*

4. *Do It*



MEMORIZE AND MEDITATE

Review your anchor cards. Memorize and meditate on the memory scriptures and your Personal Anchor Points.


APPOINTMENT WITH GOD

COME IN PRAYER (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication)

HEAR AND ACT (What is God saying? What have I learned? How should I respond?)

FOLLOW (What is God doing in my life and marriage?)

PERSONAL ANCHOR POINT

You should now develop your Personal Anchor Point. Review and reflect on what you have learned this week and what God may have laid on your heart as the week progressed. Pray for God's direction in developing your Personal Anchor Point. As a reminder, your Personal Anchor Point is a specific practice you will implement in your daily walk to strengthen your connection to this week's anchor. It includes the key point you learned and the action you will take in response. See page 6 for more information. 

COUPLE TALK

You should have established a time to meet with your spouse before the next group meeting. When you sit down with your spouse, *discuss what you have learned during the week and what God has said to you about abiding and how it can help both your spiritual growth and your marriage. Were there any particular scripture verses that spoke to you?* Make some notes in the space provided below.

Notes:

SECTION 2: STRATEGIC ANCHORS

INTRODUCTION

Now that you have learned to secure yourself with the foundational anchors of the sovereignty of God, the word of God, the cornerstone of Christ and the glory of God, you are prepared to deploy what I call “strategic anchors.” As we discussed in the introduction, I define a strategic anchor as “a core biblical truth that requires specific actions.”

These strategic anchors are similar in purpose to drogues, also called sea anchors. Drogues are devices sometimes dragged behind yachts or other small boats. These drogues are deployed to steady a boat in high seas, enabling the helmsmen to maintain course and prevent the boat from hitting a large wave sideways and capsizing. We can deploy our drogues, these strategic anchors, to stabilize us and keep our marriages on course as we go through inevitable storms and high seas. The strategic anchors are based on Philippians 2:1-11. In these verses there are four powerful biblical truths that will give you a strategy for being “one” with your spouse. We will cover one truth each week.

Additionally, during week 5, you will learn how to have weekly time together with your spouse to focus on “being one.” During these Together Times (which will replace Couple Talk) you will have an opportunity to share with one another what God is teaching you and any changes you are committed to making. These Together Times will also give you a chance to talk about your relationship, pray and make plans together. It is my prayer that you will make these Together Times a permanent part of your marriage as Janet and I have for the last 45 years. Enjoy this next stage of your journey!

WEEKLY TOPICS

Week 5: Be One

Week 6: Be Selfless

Week 7: Be Humble

Week 8: Be A Servant—The Key to Resolving Conflict

WEEK 5: BE ONE

ANCHOR CARD

This week we will study how, as a couple, you can be one in mind, love, spirit and purpose. Begin by creating your anchor card for the week. As described on page 6, write the Anchor for this week at the top of an index card or in your electronic notes program, followed by the Anchor Scripture and Anchor Prayer.

ANCHOR SCRIPTURE

...make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. (Php 2:2)

ANCHOR PRAYER

Lord, I want to glorify You by honoring the sacred covenant of marriage to become one with my spouse. I pray that You will empower us through the Holy Spirit to be one in mind, love, spirit and purpose.

DAILY TOPICS

Day 1: Becoming One: Together Times

Day 2: Becoming One in Mind

Day 3: Becoming One in Love

Day 4: Becoming One in Spirit

Day 5: Becoming One in Purpose

DAY 1: BECOMING ONE: TOGETHER TIMES

... make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. (Php 2:2)

Where Janet and I are in our marriage today is a far cry from where we were in those first years. We went into our marriage in the romance stage, thinking we knew everything about marriage and one another. We were soulmates. Then, as the romance stage began to deteriorate, the reality stage began. We started to see one another's flaws and were not at all sure how to resolve the issues that began to emerge.

After five years of marriage, I became a true believer and God began to renew my mind and transform me. Things started looking up, but we still had a lot of baggage we brought into marriage and had a long way to go. We had three little girls to take care of, and I was in college and then graduate school, so finances were also an issue. Janet suffered from chronic depression, and I am sure some of it was because she was married to me. While my ministry was going well, my marriage was not. I made some unwise career decisions, so the family moved a lot. I abruptly left a good ministry and family situation at First Christian Church in Napa, California, to pursue my vision to write books and speak on family issues, which was a passion of mine.

We moved to Seattle where we still owned a house. I was "successful" and began getting books published on marriage and family. I was also becoming well known and received invitations to hold seminars and retreats for churches and organizations around the country. I began to travel a lot, and my wife was stuck at home in rainy Seattle with three small children. This did not help her depression. The book and speaking revenue did not provide an adequate income for us to live on, and we were again "dirt poor."

I was helping other people with their marriages and families but not doing so well with my own. I could not understand why my wife seemed to be unhappy with me. She would say that she did not feel she was a priority. She would say that my ministry and the children were more important to me than she was. I would argue, thinking it was just her. I remember speaking at a conference on marriage and family in the Midwest when the Lord spoke loud and clear to me about my priorities. The message I heard was "Wayne, make a priority of Janet and your marriage." "But Lord," I argued, "she is a priority." The Lord answered, "No she isn't. You only think she is. Go home and make her your number one priority."

TOGETHER TIME

I left that conference with a deep conviction that I was to go back home and ask my wife for forgiveness and do everything I could to make her my number one priority after my relationship with God. When I returned, I confessed my sin and asked for her forgiveness. I could see the doubt in her eyes and knew that I had to put my words into action in a way that she could believe. I knew that she always wanted quality time together where we could talk about issues and make family plans. I suggested we start a weekly Together Time when we would work on our marriage issues, share scripture together, pray, look at our calendars and plan our week. Our decision to have these weekly husband/wife Together Times was the best thing we ever did for our marriage. We have continued to do this faithfully for over forty years.

We decided our priorities would be sharing something from Scripture, discussing our relationship, planning our calendar and praying together. When we started, we had a lot of relationship issues to resolve, so we each wrote a list and began to work on them one at a time. This provided us a neutral setting when we were not frustrated or angry with one another and could discuss things in a more rational way. Eventually, we worked through our lists of urgent issues and then just took up relationship issues as they occurred.

Sharing from Scripture has taken a lot of different forms over the years. We have gone through dozens of studies and books together. Some of the studies were like this resource. We would read the material answer the questions and discuss what we had learned. We still do this occasionally, but now our times are a little less structured and we will often just informally discuss what we are learning in our separate appointments with God.

One of the things my wife valued most was the time we spent planning our calendars. Some of our conflicts were because we were not on the same page with our schedules. For example, we would have different expectations of what needed to be done around the house and the yard. I would think we could just relax and do nothing on the weekend, and Janet would assume we would get some of the things done she had mentioned during the week. Once we started going over our calendars and planning together, we eliminated most of those kinds of conflicts. We both had our separate calendars, so we were able to check with each other and make sure we wrote down the same things. We made sure we had all activities (church, personal, children) recorded.

Another advantage of planning together was we could discuss our priorities and how we would spend our time and other resources. We could see when we were becoming over booked and make the appropriate adjustments. This enabled us to maintain better margin in our lives. Today our children are grown, we are retired, and life is less complicated, but we still faithfully have our Together Times and plan our week together. The most important thing for us when looking at our calendars is to make sure that we are using our resources—our time, talent and treasure—for God’s glory. Periodically, this time included discussing our budget and finances. We want our calendars and budget to reflect our purpose in life to glorify God. We always end our Together Times in prayer, praising God and being thankful. We pray for our neighbors, family and friends and other needs that we become aware of. We pray for one another and thank God for one another.

TOGETHER TIME FORMAT

Today as we launch into “Be One,” I am adding the assignment of having a once a week Together Time with your spouse for the next five weeks. Together Time will replace Couple Talk from Section 1. You will need to set aside a half hour for this time together. As with couple talk, make sure you schedule this time before the group meeting, but late enough in the week so you will be able to complete the five days of study before you meet. Below is the format you will follow for your Together Time. This format is based on the four principles outlined in Philippians 2:2, which we will be studying the remainder of this week.

SHARING SCRIPTURE TOGETHER (ONE IN MIND)

Share with one another what you learned from the week’s study, the previous sermon from your church, and any time you have spent in God’s word and prayer. What scriptures spoke to you? What is the most important thing for you to put into practice? Share some highlights from what you have written in your journal as you completed the “Follow” portion of your daily Appointment with God.

DISCUSSING OUR RELATIONSHIP (ONE IN LOVE)

Share and discuss what you are learning about relationships. Share your “Personal Anchor Points” and any other relationship issues that you feel are important in your marriage.

PLANNING OUR CALENDAR (ONE IN PURPOSE)

Go over your calendars for the following week, scheduling when you will have your next Together Time. Make sure you both have calendars so you can schedule together. If you each use an electronic calendar,

a day and time for this week's Together Time later in the week, after you have finished the five days of study.



MEMORIZE AND MEDITATE

Review your anchor cards. Memorize and meditate on the memory scriptures and your Personal Anchor Points.

APPOINTMENT WITH GOD

COME IN PRAYER (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication)

HEAR AND ACT (What is God saying? What have I learned? How should I respond?)

FOLLOW (What is God doing in my life and marriage?)

DAY 2: BECOMING ONE IN MIND

*...make my joy complete by **being of the same mind**, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. (Php 2:2)*

We know that in the sacred covenant of marriage, God made us one. He created us to be helpmates for one another. At its core, marriage is complementary. God made us to fit perfectly together in body, soul and spirit (Ge 2:18-23). God designed us to complete one another and become the foundation of the family unit together. Created in the likeness of God, we were endowed with differing gifts that, used together, enable us to relate to one another spiritually, emotionally, intellectually and physically. As we saw when we looked at the book of Malachi, God instituted the sacred covenant of marriage and made us one for these essential purposes.

As discussed yesterday, Philippians 2:2 shows how we are to make a priority of becoming one and gives us four principles that enable us to do this. Before launching into today's study, let's look at the beginning of Philippians 2.

Read Philippians 2:1–11.

BE OF THE SAME MIND AS CHRIST

As we begin this study to “Be One, Be Selfless, Be Humble and Be a Servant,” we are immediately reminded by Paul of the importance of “*being of the same mind*” (Php 2:2). All our attempts to improve our marriages must be grounded in the word of God. It is only through a mind renewed by Scripture that our actions are transformed (Ro 12:1-2). Only through the wisdom of God are we able to gain the knowledge that transforms our marriages and makes us one.

Paul understood that unity was only possible through God's wisdom and power. Believers could be one and have the same mind only if they had the mind of Christ. He reminded them that they already had the key to being one, “*the mind of Christ.*”

For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM? But we have the mind of Christ. (1 Co 2:16)

THE IMPORTANCE OF ABIDING

To be of the same mind as Christ and experience the unifying power of His wisdom, we must continue to abide in Jesus. It is the key to producing the fruit of love in our marriages. I can't emphasize enough the importance of sustaining the spiritual discipline of scheduled, daily times in the word and prayer. When you grow in your solitary times, you also lay the foundation to grow in one mind with your spouse. As you grow separately, you can also grow together as you share together in the word and prayer during your weekly Together Times. God's word says,

Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. (Col 3:16)

The word of Christ refers to the things that Jesus taught and were recorded by the apostles in the Gospels. In the early days of the Church, the Gospels had not been written, so the word of Christ was transmitted orally, primarily by the apostles. We know from Luke's account of the early Church that the new believers who gathered in small groups “*devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching*” (Ac 2:42). This along with fellowship, prayer, communion and outreach were the basic functions of the church. They became “one in

THE ATTITUDE OF BEING OF ONE MIND

For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Ro 15:4–6)

This scripture describes the kind of attitude it takes to be of one mind with our spouses. It is a kind of checklist that you can use to evaluate where you are in your attitude of mind and set goals as to where you need to grow.

BEAR WITH THE FAILINGS OF THE WEAK

We are all weak to some degree. We all have our failings, simply different kinds of failings. We all need to have our spouse bear with our failings, so we should have the attitude to bear with our spouse's failings. (v. 1)

DO NOT PLEASE YOURSELF

Even Christ did not please or defend Himself when He was insulted. We are to have the attitude of Christ and follow His example. Be aware of what kind of things please your spouse. (v. 2)

PLEASE YOUR SPOUSE FOR HIS/HER GOOD AND TO BUILD HIM/HER UP

Do things that encourage rather than discourage your spouse when she/he is weak, frustrated, cranky, etc. We all need tolerance and some words of encouragement even [especially] when we are in a bad mood and not pleasant to be around. (v. 2-3)

HAVE CHRIST'S ATTITUDE OF MIND TOWARDS ONE ANOTHER

When we have the mind of Christ, we will have the attitude of Christ. While this is impossible on our own strength, it is possible through the "endurance and encouragement of Scriptures." It is our only hope and the reason we need to abide in Christ through the word and prayer. (v. 4-5)

WITH YOUR HEART AND MOUTH GLORIFY GOD

When we have the mind of Christ and the attitude of Christ, we can be of the same mind as our spouse. In this way we glorify God. (v. 5-6)

ACCEPT ONE ANOTHER AS CHRIST ACCEPTED YOU TO BRING PRAISE TO GOD

Paul sums up his teaching about being one by having the attitude of Christ by this simple but powerful command, "Accept one another as Christ accepts you" (v. 7). And how did Christ accept us? It was not because we deserved His acceptance. It was not because we were good enough. He accepted us with all our flaws, failings and bad attitudes. He accepts us because He chooses to accept us as we are. In doing so He gives us an example of how we are to accept others. While God accepts as we are, He loves us too much to leave us as we are. He gives us His example, the presence and power of His Spirit and His word, to renew our minds and transform us into His likeness so that we can become one with one another (Ro 12:1-2).

SCRIPTURE PRAYER

Pray Romans 15:1-7.

1. *Read It*

2. *Think It*

3. *Pray It*

4. *Do It*

MEMORIZE AND MEDITATE

Review your anchor cards. Memorize and meditate on the memory scriptures and your Personal Anchor Points.

APPOINTMENT WITH GOD

COME IN PRAYER (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication)

HEAR AND ACT (What is God saying? What have I learned? How should I respond?)

FOLLOW (What is God doing in my life and marriage?)

DAY 3: BECOMING ONE IN LOVE

*...make my joy complete by being of the same mind, **maintaining the same love**, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. (Php 2:2)*

As you observed in last week's session, love is the core of God's character and His defining attribute. All other character qualities flow from God's unfailing love for us, and then His love overflows through us to others. This is the fruit that is produced when we abide in Him. A primary way that love is demonstrated is through our unity with one another. Unity is the essential component of a marriage. That is why God invoked the sacred covenant of marriage in the first marriage ceremony. When we demonstrate our love by being one in our marriages, we glorify God and demonstrate His love to a watching world. The Apostle Peter encouraged believers to,

Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation. (1 Pe 2:12)

The love life demonstrated by our good deeds and in our marriage is only possible by abiding in God's presence so that the Holy Spirit produces in us the fruit of love. Paul explains,

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.... But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. (Ga 5:16, 22–23)

The longest recorded prayer of Jesus was the prayer He prayed for His disciples to be one. We find this prayer in John 17. He prayed that not only His disciples, but that all of us will experience unity with one another patterned after His relationship with His Father, a relationship sustained by love. He concludes His prayer by praying for His disciples and us as well. He prayed to the Father that we:

*...may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me...and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.”
(Jn 17:23, 26)*

Jesus's disciples were listening to this prayer. The love and unity for which He prayed was essential for the establishment and success of the Church. God's only plan for the world to know of and experience His sacrificial love was the love that flowed through believers to others. God wants that same love to flow through us to our spouses and others. Paul encouraged believers,

...and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also do for you.... (1 Th 3:12)

MAINTAINING THE SAME LOVE

To maintain the same love that Jesus had for His disciples, and to be one in love in our marriages, we need a practical example of what that looks like. The Apostle John gives us that example:

We know love by this, that [Christ Jesus] laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. (1 Jn 3:16–18)

Let's break these verses down to see what it looks like to maintain the same love as Jesus:

IT MUST BE SACRIFICIAL

[Christ Jesus] laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

Biblical love is sacrificial love. Jesus laid down His life for us by dying on the cross for our sins (Jn 3:16-17; 1 Peter 2:24). We each need to develop that same sacrificial love for our spouse.

REFLECT AND RESPOND

Ask yourself, "Is my love sacrificial? Do I lay down my life for my spouse in practical ways that she/he can understand? If not, what can I do differently?"

IT IS MOTIVATED BY COMPASSION

But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?

Jesus' love was not merely out of duty but motivated by compassion. When a leper came to Jesus and begged for healing, Jesus healed him out of compassion.

Moved with compassion, Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, "I am willing; be cleansed." (Mk 1:41)

To maintain the same love of Jesus for our spouse we need to develop compassion for his/her needs and be willing to meet those needs to the best of our ability. We need to do this even if we do not understand our spouse's needs!

REFLECT AND RESPOND

Ask yourself, "How compassionate am I when my spouse expresses a need? How aware am I of my spouse's needs, spoken or unspoken? What can I do differently?"

WE MUST PRACTICE ACTION IN TRUTH

Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. (1 Jn 3:18)

The Apostle John gave us a definition of love: *"[Jesus Christ] He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren"* (1 Jn 3:16). To do this is to follow Jesus' example by meeting one another's needs. When we do this, we practice love in action and in truth. Our love is shown in deeds, not just in words or tongue.

To love in words or tongue is merely to talk about meeting a spouse's needs without a sincere commitment or plan to meet those needs. You might think that because you have discussed a need or even prayed about it with your spouse that you have done your duty. For example, your spouse might say she would really like for you to fix the broken fence. You agree to do it, but four weeks later, nothing has been done. She reminds you, but you still put it off. Your love is only words with no action, which is not love at all. Love in action requires faithful follow through. To love in truth is to love another person sincerely from the heart, not just with words.

REFLECT AND RESPOND

Ask yourself, "How consistent am I in loving my spouse with action and in truth? In what areas could I improve?"

WE MUST FORGIVE

Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. (Eph 4:32)

Jesus demonstrated His love by laying down his life and forgiving our sins (1 Jn 3:16). We maintain the same love only when we are willing to forgive as Christ forgave us. Even though we know it is a supernatural love and can only be accomplished by the work of the Holy Spirit, we are to extend the grace and forgiveness that Christ gave us to our spouses. Jesus laid down His life for us so we could be forgiven of our sins. In this action of sacrifice, we can understand His grace and know just how much He loves us. We must not fall short of that grace.

See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled.... (Heb 12:15)

Jesus made it clear that we are to forgive others in the same way we have been forgiven. He taught His disciples to pray saying,

Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation. (Lk 11:4, NIV)

Sometimes we equate forgiveness with only the "big things" like betrayal, an affair, abuse, or deceit. But often it is the "little things," like not following through on a promise, unrealistic expectations or a hurt feeling that can cause a bitter root to grow up and harm a marriage. We need to forgive **all** grievances we have against our spouse or we fall short of the grace of God. Jesus has forgiven all our sins, both "great" and "small." He has completely canceled every debt.

REFLECT AND RESPOND

Ask yourself, "Do I extend that grace to my spouse by forgiving him/her as Christ has forgiven me? Do I forgive the "little things" as well as the "big things?" Am I careful to not let a bitter root grow up and cause trouble?"

SCRIPTURE PRAYER

Pray 1 John 3:16-18.

1. *Read It*

2. *Think It*

3. *Pray It*

4. *Do It*

MEMORIZE AND MEDITATE

Review your anchor cards. Memorize and meditate on the memory scriptures and your Personal Anchor Points.

APPOINTMENT WITH GOD

COME IN PRAYER (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication)

HEAR AND ACT (What is God saying? What have I learned? How should I respond?)

FOLLOW (What is God doing in my life and marriage?)

DAY 4: BECOMING ONE IN SPIRIT

*...make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, **united in spirit**, intent on one purpose. (Php 2:2)*

Paul tells us that we are to be “*united in spirit*.” What does that mean? The Greek word used here for spirit occurs only once in the Bible. It is also translated in some versions as “one accord.” In the context of Philippians 2:2-12, it means living in harmony with one another. In the broadest sense, it is being united in our souls, minds, wills and emotions. It is unity that comes from the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit indwells us at the moment we become believers. We have the Holy Spirit’s presence and power, but we are urged to “*be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*” (Eph 4:3).

LIVE A LIFE WORTHY OF OUR CALLING

The Apostle Paul wrote a lengthy letter to the believers in Ephesus stressing the importance of unity. The theme of the letter is “One in the Body of Christ.” Paul teaches believers that in the Body of Christ God brings together diverse people and unites them as one. The Jews and Gentiles to whom Paul wrote had vast differences and a long history of hostility. Those differences were overcome by the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, making believers one through the power of the Holy Spirit. The first three chapters of Ephesians focus on the doctrine of unity. Doctrine always comes first and the practice, or doing, of doctrine second. Without the foundation of doctrine, our efforts will always fall short of God’s will. Central to all doctrine is God: who He is, His will and His ways.

After laying the foundations of unity, Paul focuses on the practice of unity in the last three chapters of his letter. Paul emphasized the **position** of being one as well as the **practice** of being one. He shows them how the practice of living a life “*worthy of our calling*” enables them to be “*united in spirit*.”

Read Ephesians 4:1-6.

Paul reminds the believers of their calling and gives them practical ways of being worthy of that calling. All believers have been called into a loving relationship with God. We have not only been saved by the sacrifice of Christ for our sins, but we are called to live a life worthy of that calling by living in unity with others in the Body of Christ. At the heart of that calling is to love God with all our hearts and to love others as He has loved us. Paul gives five practical ways we are to live out our calling. Learning to live by these five principles will help us to become “*united in spirit*” through the power of the Holy Spirit, with our spouse.

WE ARE TO BE COMPLETELY HUMBLE

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. (Eph 4:2, NIV)

The best way to define complete humility is to look at how Jesus lived and died. In Philippians 2:1-11, Paul tells us we are to have the attitude of Jesus (v. 6-8). Even though He was God, He chose to empty himself, becoming a servant. He “*humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross*” (Php 2:8). We follow His example in our marriages by choosing to empty ourselves of our pride and self-centeredness in order to serve our spouse and others. Our focus is not on our rights or needs but on the needs of others.

REFLECT AND RESPOND

To what degree are you “completely humble” in your marriage?”

WE ARE TO BE COMPLETELY GENTLE

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.

It is the example of Jesus that shows us what it means to be gentle. Jesus says of Himself,

Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light. (Mt 11:28–30)

Jesus is probably referring to the harsh, heavy loads the Pharisees placed on people’s shoulders to follow the legalistic burdens of the law. These burdens had little to do with the Law of Moses, but were extra, unrealistic expectations set up by man that weighed people down and discouraged them. We also need to be careful of placing unrealistic expectations on others. The application to us in our marriages is to not burden our spouses by expecting them to be exactly who we think they ought to be or always do what we want them to do.

REFLECT AND RESPOND

To what degree are you “completely gentle” in your marriage?”

WE ARE TO BE PATIENT

*Be completely humble and gentle; **be patient**, bearing with one another in love.*

We are in a culture that conditions us to expect immediate gratification. If our computer does not respond immediately, we become impatient. If we wait more than a few minutes in a line at a store, we complain. Whatever we want, we want now! We believe it is our right.

I believe this cultural mindset affects our relationships, especially our marriages. We want our spouses to change now rather than later. We seldom place those same expectations on ourselves. For us to be “*diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*” (Eph 4:3), we need to develop patience with one another (Eph 4:3 NIV). Paul said to the believers in Thessalonica,

*We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, **be patient with everyone.** (1 Th 5:14)*

We all need our spouses to be patient with us, so we ought to have that same patience for them.

 **REFLECT AND RESPOND**

To what degree are you “patient” in your marriage?”

WE ARE TO BEAR WITH ONE ANOTHER IN LOVE

*Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, **bearing with one another in love.***

The meaning of bearing with one another in love in this passage is literally “to put up with one another.” I freely admit that my wife is faced with putting up with some of my attitudes and actions. In the same way, I have learned to put up with some of her attitudes and actions. We are all imperfect, just in different ways. We all have weakness that can and will irritate others. The question is how we will handle these imperfections. Will we “bear” (put up) with one another in love or “be a bear,” focusing on these irritations? Paul gives the solution to this problem when he says,

...bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. (Col 3:13)

 **REFLECT AND RESPOND**

To what degree are you “bear with” your spouse in your marriage?”

WE ARE TO “MAKE EVERY EFFORT” TO BE ONE IN SPIRIT

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. (Eph 4:3, NIV)

Becoming one in spirit with one another is important for relationships in the body of Christ and our marriages. Paul sums up his teaching on unity by urging believers to “make every effort” to be one in spirit. Paul knows how difficult this is because of our differences and wanting others to be like us. Paul makes this appeal for believers to make a total, committed effort to live out the unity that the Spirit empowers by bonding with one another in peace. Paul also reminded the believers in Rome of this essential principle:

*So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.
(Ro 14:19)*

Paul consistently urges believers to intentionally practice the kind of attitudes and actions that bring peace and edification, building one another up.

 **REFLECT AND RESPOND**

Can you say that you “make every effort” to keep the unity of the Spirit in your marriage?”

Conclude your time today by praying these passages.

 **SCRIPTURE PRAYER**

Pray Ephesians 4:1-6.

1. *Read It*

2. *Think It*

3. *Pray It*

4. *Do It*

 **MEMORIZE AND MEDITATE**

Review your anchor cards. Memorize and meditate on the memory scriptures and your Personal Anchor Points.

APPOINTMENT WITH GOD

COME IN PRAYER (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication)

HEAR AND ACT (What is God saying? What have I learned? How should I respond?)

FOLLOW (What is God doing in my life and marriage?)

DAY 5: BECOMING ONE IN PURPOSE

...make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. (Php 2:2)

On day five of last week's study, we looked at what it means for us to be on a mission for God. Today we will see how following Paul's encouragement to become "*intent on one purpose*" is a powerful force to help us be on a mission together with our spouses and others in the Body of Christ.

What did Paul mean when he instructed the believers in Philippi to be "*intent on one purpose*?" What is the one single purpose that unites us? It is clearly to declare God's glory. That is our purpose in life. It is why we were created. The Prophet Isaiah wrote, "*Thus says the LORD, ...The people whom I formed for Myself Will declare My praise*" (Is 43:21). The Apostle Paul said that those who put their hope in Christ do so for "*the praise of His glory*" (Eph 1:12). Peter also makes our purpose on earth clear. We are here for one primary reason:

But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.... (1 Pe 2:9)

The reason we are given that wonderful light, Jesus said, is so others can see that light in us and glorify God.

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven. (Mt 5:14–16)

INTENT ON ONE PURPOSE

The meaning of "intent" here is to have a clearly formulated or planned intention to accomplish a purpose. It involves a concentrated focus on accomplishing that purpose. The overall purpose of our lives and our marriages is to glorify God. We do that by bearing fruit—not only the fruit of character but also the fruit of service (Col 1:10). In our marriages we can formulate a plan to accomplish well-defined ways to grow together and serve together. When that purpose is shared between a husband and wife it builds unity in the marriage, glorifies God and builds His kingdom.

Janet and I have learned over the years to bring our different and unique gifts together to be a strong team. At times, I take the lead and Janet has a supportive role. At other times, Janet takes the lead, and I am in a supportive role. An example is when we cooked and served brunch to a group of ladies at My Safe Harbor, a Christian organization whose purpose is to help women in Anaheim, California, build strong families. Janet did most of the prep work and cooking, but I fried three pounds of bacon. We served it and cleaned up together. Over the years we have organized and led dozens of marriage retreats, led small groups together and organized numerous events. Often, I am the upfront person as Janet prefers to be behind the scenes. When it comes to hospitality, she takes the lead, and I support. I believe the purpose of serving together in various ways is one of the primary ways we have built a strong marriage.

We are tempted to go our separate ways when it comes to serving. There are certainly times to serve independent of one another, but I encourage you to find ways to be "*intent on one purpose*" in your marriage. Your Together Times provide a great opportunity to discuss and plan how you can do this. You

can experience the power of shared purpose in your marriage. From the beginning God created us to be partners in marriage to fulfil His purposes.

The Apostle Paul was aware of the power shared purpose has in building unity in believers. He began his letter to the Philippians with this heartfelt prayer for them.

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now. For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. (Php 1:3–6)

Most of our closest friends are those we have served with or are serving with now. We still keep in contact with some of the people we served with years ago. We are still united in spirit with them. There is nothing more fulfilling than serving God together. A few sentences later, Paul prayed another prayer for his beloved fellow workers in Philippi. Pray this prayer for your marriage as you prepare for your first Together Time.

SCRIPTURE PRAYER

Pray Philippians 1:9-11.

1. *Read It*

2. *Think It*

3. *Pray It*

4. *Do It*

MEMORIZE AND MEDITATE

Review your anchor cards. Memorize and meditate on the memory scriptures and your Personal Anchor Points.


APPOINTMENT WITH GOD

COME IN PRAYER (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication)

HEAR AND ACT (What is God saying? What have I learned? How should I respond?)

FOLLOW (What is God doing in my life and marriage?)

PERSONAL ANCHOR POINT

You should now develop your Personal Anchor Point. Review and reflect on what you have learned this week and what God may have laid on your heart as the week progressed. Pray for God's direction in developing your Personal Anchor Point. As a reminder, your Personal Anchor Point is a specific practice you will implement in your daily walk to strengthen your connection to this week's anchor. It includes the key point you learned and the action you will take in response. See page 6 for more information. 

TOGETHER TIME

Use the following outline to prepare for and guide your Together Time.

SHARING SCRIPTURE TOGETHER (One in Mind)

Share with one another what you learned from this week's study. What scriptures spoke to you? What is most important for you to put into practice? Share some highlights from your Appointment with God journal.

DISCUSSING OUR RELATIONSHIP (One in Love)

*Share and discuss your Personal Anchor Point and any other issues that you feel are important in your relationship. **In what area of becoming one do you believe you need to focus most? What specific things can you do to grow closer to truly being one?***

PLANNING OUR CALENDAR (One in Purpose)

*Go over your calendars for the following week. Schedule when you will have your next Together Time. Make sure you both have calendars so you can schedule together. Discuss, “does our calendar demonstrate our purpose in life to glorify God?” **What are some ways you can serve together or support each other in service?***

PRAYING TOGETHER (One in Spirit)

Praise God and give thanks to Him. Pray for one another. Ask, “How can I pray for you?” Always remember to thank God for your spouse. Pray for any personal needs. Pray that God will be glorified in your marriage.

WEEK 6: BE SELFLESS

ANCHOR CARD

This week we will study how to put off the old self, put on the new self and be selfless. Begin by creating your anchor card for the week. As described on page 6, write the Anchor for this week at the top of an index card or in your electronic notes program, followed by the Anchor Scripture and Anchor Prayer.

ANCHOR SCRIPTURE

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. (Php 2:3–4)

ANCHOR PRAYER

Lord, I want to glorify You and honor the sacred covenant of marriage by becoming selfless. I pray that You will empower me through the Holy Spirit to glorify You by being selfless with my spouse in all I say and do.

DAILY TOPICS

Day 1: Be Selfless—Beware of Donkey Dang

Day 2: Be Selfless—Focus on Your Spouse's Interests

Day 3: Five Languages of Selfless Love

Day 4: Discover Your Love language

Day 5: Prepare for Your Together Time

DAY 1: BE SELFLESS—BEWARE OF DONKEY DANG

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires.... (Eph 4:22, NIV)

DONKEY DANG



A father was reading a story to his young son about Jesus riding a donkey into Jerusalem. In the story a large crowd spread their cloaks on the side of the road while others cut branches from trees and spread them on the ground. The crowds going ahead of Jesus were shouting, “*Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!*” (Mt 21:6-11). The Bible story book from which the father was reading had a colorful picture of Jesus riding the donkey and the people worshipping Him. The little boy said to his father, “I have Jesus in my heart, but where’s the donkey?”

I can relate. I have Jesus in my heart, but unlike the little boy, I know where the donkey is. It is my old self, my old nature that still hangs around, seeing what trouble it can instigate. It is not a cute little donkey as in the picture. It is self-seeking, arrogant, and ready to cause havoc. It should be locked up in its stall, but it sometimes escapes. While it is true that the old nature has been put to death and no longer has control of me, it still exists. It still has a voice that’s only language is deceit and lies. This self-centered, arrogant old nature exploits every weakness in me and opposes the good that I know is right and want to do.

DONKEY DANG STILL EXISTS

When I first became a Christian, I had a lot of thoughts and actions that were not according to God’s word and will. I also had new direction for my life and wanted to live for God and conform to His will. I realized that, although I was a new creation, the old nature still existed. Some of the long-standing patterns of thoughts and actions were deeply ingrained. A lot of things changed, but I was still self-centered and full of pride in many areas. I still had fleshly desires that I would sometimes give in to. Donkey Dang was alive and well. Those attitudes and actions affected my marriage. They stubbornly resisted change. I often wondered if I would ever get it right. The Apostle Paul was very aware of the power of the old nature in his own life. He confessed,

For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. (Ro 7:19–21)

I believe every Christian struggles, suffers setbacks and faces discouragement. Mature Christians know they must continue to grow in spiritual maturity until the day they die. The struggle will never be over because our old nature is always waiting to exert its evil influence and cause us to sin and become discouraged. Donkey Dang is an ever-present danger. The donkey is always looking for a way to get out of its stall and create trouble.

DONKEY DANG HAS BEEN PUT TO DEATH

The good news is that the old nature does not have to control us. We are not slaves to our old self. According to Scripture, when we place our faith in Christ alone and become followers of Him, our old self is crucified. We are set free from the penalty and power of sin. Paul says,

For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin. (Ro 6:5–7)

Our position in Christ is secure. We are saved by God’s grace, not by our own works or righteousness. We have the righteousness of Christ and a pure heart in God’s sight (Eph 2:8-9; 1:3-8; 2 Co 5:21). While our position is secure, our attitudes and action (our practice of righteousness) can be influenced by our old natures. The only control our old nature has on us is the control we give it.

DONKEY DANG SAYS...


Hee Haw, It’s all about me.

The strategic anchor to “Be Selfless” in your marriage and other relationships is a tall order because we all have in our old nature a default to be self-centered and proud. These twin sins of the flesh have been causing marriages and other relationships serious trouble since the time sin entered the world in the Garden of Eden. Scripture calls these “*the deeds of the flesh*” (Ga 5:19).

REFLECT AND RESPOND

Read Galatians 5:19-21.

Paul lists fifteen different behaviors that are sinful acts of our old natures. In this comprehensive list, he tries to cover just about every self-centered, proud thought or action. Read this passage and think about these “deeds of the flesh” and see if you find any that apply to you. If you don’t find any of your self-centered thoughts or actions listed, no problem. Paul opens the door for more when he says, “*and things like these.*” What are those “like” things for you? Some may not be so obvious as the list above, but you are probably aware of them. When your Donkey gets out of the stall what happens?

Write what you discover about yourself and record the results in the space provided. Add to the list any other self-centered thoughts or actions that are unique to you. Be alert for any patterns of the flesh that are impacting your marriage. 

Donkey Dang gives a voice to these sinful, self-centered beliefs and actions. Donkey Dang says “Do it. You deserve to be happy. Everyone sins. You have a right to be angry. You have a right to some pleasures of the flesh. You need to take care of yourself because no one else will. You’re not angry, just hurt. That’s the only way you can get his/her attention.”

THE SPIRIT SAYS...

Live by the Spirit

If our old nature is so powerful, so pervasive, how are we to be selfless in our marriage? How can we act and think in such a way that the anchor to “be selfless” becomes a reality in our life? How are we to overcome the desires of our old nature to be self-centered? Paul again gave us the key to controlling the donkey and living a selfless life.

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.... Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another. (Ga 5:16, 24–26)

SCRIPTURE PRAYER

Pray Galatians 5:22-26.

1. *Read It*
2. *Think It*
3. *Pray It*
4. *Do It*

KEEP DONKEY DANG IN THE STALL

We may not be victims under Satan's control, but we can be volunteers! If the old nature has been defeated, and we have been set free, then why do we live as slaves? **The only control Donkey Dang has over us is the control we give him by not keeping him locked up in his stall.**

You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. (Ro 8:9, NIV)

Just remember, when the donkey gets out of the stall, he always makes a mess of things. It is a mess that someone will have to clean up. We must learn to recognize the signs that the donkey is trying to escape and prevent the trouble that always follows. The Spirit of God does live in us, but we must exercise self-control by being controlled by the Holy Spirit and keeping the Donkey locked up. We must continually be vigilant to *"put off your old self."*

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires.... (Eph 4:22, NIV)

WATCH AND PRAY

In order not to be controlled by our old natures and to keep Donkey Dang in the stall, we must be on the alert. We must recognize the signs that indicate when the donkey is getting restless or worse, actually gets out of the stall. Jesus reminded His disciples to “watch and pray.”

And He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, “So, you men could not keep watch with Me for one hour? Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” (Mt 26:40–41)

If we are not mindful of our old nature, we will be oblivious when Donkey Dang is out of the stall. We must know ourselves and our weaknesses. We have certain patterns of the old nature that keep reoccurring. I am pretty well aware of mine. I know the donkey is out when I become impatient with my wife or other people. I know the donkey is out when I get angry. I know the donkey is out when I criticize someone for not living up to my expectations. I know the donkey is out when I put my needs and my desires before my wife’s or others. I know the donkey is out when I judge others for their weakness but excuse my own. I could go on, but I think you get the point.

To be selfless in our marriage, we must “watch” for signs that the donkey is getting restless or has gotten out of its stall. We must pray for self-control and that God will give us strength to overcome those patterns of the old nature. We must claim the promise of power that God has made. End your time in prayer by claiming this promise and resolving to keep Donkey Dang in the stall.

...seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. (2 Pe 1:3)



MEMORIZE AND MEDITATE

Review your anchor cards. Memorize and meditate on the memory scriptures and your Personal Anchor Points.

APPOINTMENT WITH GOD

COME IN PRAYER (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication)

HEAR AND ACT (What is God saying? What have I learned? How should I respond?)

FOLLOW (What is God doing in my life and marriage?)

DAY 2: BE SELFLESS—FOCUS ON YOUR SPOUSE’S INTERESTS

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. (Php 2:3–4)

Now that you have made a commitment to put off your old self and keep Donkey Dang securely in the stall, it is time to focus on being selfless in your marriage. We all have a default toward wanting things to be our own way. It is difficult to consistently follow Paul’s admonitions.

Today we will look at three biblical principles that enable significant growth in becoming selfless in marriage. The Apostle Paul included these principles in his letter to the believers in Ephesus:

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires.... (Eph 4:22, NIV)

PUT OFF THE OLD SELF

The first thing the Apostle Paul did was encourage them to put off the old self. Believers had been taught to put off the old self with its deceitful desires, but Paul reminds us again how important it is. Donkey Dang, the selfish one, is also stubborn. There may be desires from our former way of life that prevent us from being selfless in our marriage.

REFLECT AND RESPOND

Take a few minutes as we begin today’s study to think about your marriage. Reflect on your relationship with your spouse, and ask yourself, “do I have any selfish attitudes or actions that I need to put off? Is there something my spouse would really like me to do that I have been resisting? Can I say that I am more focused on my spouse’s wishes, wants and needs than my own?”

Pray the following prayer before you start to search your soul:

Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way. (Ps 139:23–24)

After you have spent time in prayer and reflection, write down any selfish attitude or action that came to mind.

HAVE A NEW ATTITUDE OF MIND

...be made new in the attitude of your minds.... (Eph 4:23, NIV)

Paul reminds the believers to be made new in the attitude of their minds. Transformation is not just about changing an action. If we don’t change the attitudes of our minds, we will revert back to the actions of our former way of life. We need to change the way we think, and then change the way we act. Paul explains this important principle.

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (Ro 12:2)

Our old patterns of thinking will continue until our minds are renewed by the power of the Holy Spirit through the word of God. That is why memorization, meditation and scripture praying are so important. As you memorize and meditate on Philippians 2:2-8, the Spirit will renew your mind so that your actions will be transformed. Then you will have true transformation in your marriage and know and practice God's will. To be selfless and focus on our spouse's interests, we must take steps to renew our minds by changing selfish thoughts and making them obedient to Christ (2 Co 10:3-5).

HOW'S YOUR ATTITUDE OF MIND?

REFLECT AND RESPOND

Following are some attitudes of the mind that will help you evaluate how selfless you are in your marriage. The questions help you discern if you are really putting your spouse's interests before your own. Read the corresponding scripture for each statement on attitudes and rate yourself on a scale from 1 (seldom) to 4 (always).

Do I have an attitude that:

- ___ desires to please God rather than myself? (Jn 5:30)
- ___ values pleasing my spouse for his/her good rather than my own? (Ro 15:1-4)
- ___ puts my spouse's interests before my own? (Php 2:3-4)
- ___ seeks to encourage my spouse and build her/him up? (1 Th 5:11)
- ___ imitates God's love by being willing to give myself up for my spouse as Christ gave himself up for me? (Eph 5:1)

Choose one attitude from above with a lower score that you are willing to work on in your marriage. Write down how you will think or what you will do differently.

PUT ON THE NEW SELF

...put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. (Eph 4:24, NIV)

The "new self" happens when our minds are renewed, and our actions are transformed by God's word. God provides the clothes for that new self. We only need to take off the old clothes of the old self and put on the new clothes of selflessness.

Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature. (Ro 13:14, NIV)

The clothes represent the actions of godliness and holiness that are only possible by the supernatural power of the Spirit in our lives. The clothes that we are to put on display **outwardly** what God is doing **inwardly** in us. When we clothe ourselves with Christ, we take on attitudes and actions of selflessness.

WHAT ACTIONS CAN I TAKE

Below are questions designed to help you identify actions to help you live in a selfless way with your spouse. Write what you can do in the space that follows each question. To help prepare your heart, first read Colossians 3:12-14, where you will find Paul's list of selfless clothes for believers to put on.


Ask yourself:

What are the specific needs of my spouse?

What are some interests of my spouse?

Is there something I am doing that conflicts with the needs and interests of my spouse?

Pray: "Lord, help me be a servant to my spouse today."

Choose one thing that you can do for your spouse that you know she/he would greatly appreciate, write it below, and do it regularly. 



MEMORIZE AND MEDITATE

Review your anchor cards. Memorize and meditate on the memory scriptures and your Personal Anchor Points.

APPOINTMENT WITH GOD

COME IN PRAYER (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication)

HEAR AND ACT (What is God saying? What have I learned? How should I respond?)

FOLLOW (What is God doing in my life and marriage?)

DAY 3: FIVE LANGUAGES OF SELFLESS LOVE

Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. (1 Jn 3:18)

PUTTING OUR LOVE INTO ACTION: LOVE LANGUAGES

Gary Chapman wrote a book titled *The 5 Love Languages: The Secret to Love That Lasts* that became a New York Times bestseller. It is a practical way to understand the unique differences in the ways you and your spouse give and receive love. The point of the book is that we all have different ways in which we feel loved by our spouses and how they feel loved by us. Learning these love languages and practicing them in our marriages is a way to love as Jesus loved. It is a way of putting truth into action by meeting our spouse's needs in a way she or he can understand. What I share in today's study is a brief summary of these languages. If you want more information, I suggest you read Chapman's book, published by Northfield Publishing, or visit his website at www.5lovelanguages.com. As you read the following information on these love languages, focus on what you think is your spouse's primary love language. Also, begin thinking about what might be your primary love language.

WORDS OF AFFIRMATION

*Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.
(1 Th 5:11)*

Some spouses feel loved most when their partner verbally expresses words of affirmation. This could include words of encouragement, appreciation, compliments or just saying "I love you." Words of affirmation might be things like: "You look nice;" "I appreciate you for _____;" "Thanks for all your _____;" "I have confidence in you" and "You are special."

GIVING AND RECEIVING GIFTS

Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. (Jas 1:17)

God is, above all, a giving God—that is who He is and what He does. He gave His Son for us. He bestows gifts on us. He blesses us with "every spiritual blessing...in Christ" (Eph 1:3). He meets "all [our] needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Php 4:19). God loves to give gifts to His children.

We know that Jesus, the example for our love, is the ultimate giver of gifts. Gifts are often symbols of love, a demonstration that we love someone. God gives us gifts, both spiritual and physical, to demonstrate His love for us in tangible ways.

PHYSICAL TOUCH

And a leper came to Jesus, beseeching Him and falling on his knees before Him, and saying, "If You are willing, You can make me clean." Moved with compassion, Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, "I am willing; be cleansed." (Mk 1:40–41)

It was not uncommon for Jesus to use the gift of touch to heal someone. He didn't need to touch them—in some cases, He just spoke, and they were healed. He touched people because He knew they needed that expression of love. No one ever touched lepers because they were thought to be unclean and were outcasts from society. It is well known that there is healing power in human touch.

For some people, physical touching is a powerful way of communicating love. They communicate love by touch and feel loved and valued when their spouse is aware of how much their touch means. People also

like to be touched in certain ways. There are hugs, kisses, holding hands, massage, sexual touching, or just sitting together. All touches are not equal, so if you discover your spouse's primary love language is touching, you should ask what kind of touches she or he likes most.

QUALITY TIME

...[God] has said, "I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU...." (He 13:5)

God expressed His love for us by promising that He is always with us. He is in us and we in Him. We need to look no further than our relationship with our heavenly Father to recognize the importance of quality time in an intimate relationship.

Some spouses feel especially loved when their partner spends quality time with them. That is my primary love language. I feel loved when my wife spends quality time with me. Quality time can be doing things together, or just sitting and talking without distractions. Because quality time is my love language, I also tend to express love with quality time (more on this in a minute).

ACTS OF SERVICE

If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. (Jn 13:14-15)

One of the primary ways Jesus showed His love was to humbly serve others, and He calls us to do the same. In John 13:1-16, we find an astounding example of service that Jesus gave his disciples shortly before He gave His life on the cross. Jesus washed His disciple's feet. In that culture, washing another's feet was a menial task usually performed by a servant. Jesus performed this task because he wanted to show them *"the full extent of His love"* (v.1). This was a lesson in humility and an example of selfless service.

While we are all called to serve others, there are people whose primary love language is acts of service, and they tend to express love by serving others. That would be my wife. She expresses her love for me by doing all kinds of things for me. She likes to help me. I had to learn that she also feels loved when I help her. This does not come natural to me. I do not have the gift of service, and as I mentioned, I tend to express love with quality time (my love language). I have learned, however, to express love in a language that she understands by helping her. I don't do a lot, but when I see her doing something such as unloading the dishwasher, I stop what I am doing and help her unload it. Sometimes when I see her performing some task, I ask if she needs help. I am still not great at serving, but I know she appreciates my feeble attempts.

It is important for each of us to understand our spouse's love language. Once we know our spouse's language, we can make specific efforts to express love in the language preferred by our spouse. Additionally, when our spouse shows love in his/her preferred language, we can recognize it as the expression of love that it really is.

LEARNING THE LANGUAGES OF LOVE IN YOUR MARRIAGE

If the concept of these love languages is new to you, then it may take some time to discover your spouse's primary love language as well as your own. If that is the case for you, today is a time to become familiar with the concept of the five different love languages. In addition to what was covered in the session today, you can read more about the five languages on Gary Chapman's website at www.5lovelanguages.com.

During the next session, you will have the opportunity to work on discovering your own love language. Then, during your Together Time this week, you can discuss the love languages, and you can discuss what

each of you think is the other's love language. This is a process that can take some time. There is no hurry. It takes time to process these kinds of concepts but understanding this can help you express love to and recognize expressions of love from your spouse.

Review the love languages and take some time thinking about what you think your spouse's love language might be. Ask yourself, "What is it that makes my spouse feel most loved?" Based on your knowledge of your spouse, write in the space below what you believe are his or her primary and secondary love languages. Be ready to discuss this during your Together Time.

I think my spouse's primary love language is _____

I think my spouse's secondary love language is _____

SCRIPTURE PRAYER

Pray 1 Corinthians 13:4-7.

1. *Read It*

2. *Think It*

3. *Pray It*

4. *Do It*

MEMORIZE AND MEDITATE

Review your anchor cards. Memorize and meditate on the memory scriptures and your Personal Anchor Points.

APPOINTMENT WITH GOD

COME IN PRAYER (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication)

HEAR AND ACT (What is God saying? What have I learned? How should I respond?)

FOLLOW (What is God doing in my life and marriage?)

DAY 4: DISCOVER YOUR LOVE LANGUAGE

And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment.... (Php 1:9)

REVIEW THE FIVE LANGUAGES OF LOVE

By now you may have an idea of your primary love languages. Today will continue your discovery process, so try not to be frustrated if you are not sure or it takes you more time. Remember, you can use your Together Time to discuss this with your spouse.

Begin today with a review of the five different love languages from Day 3. Next, complete a short assessment to help you identify your primary love language. You can do this in one of two ways:

- Visit www.5lovelanguages.com, and look for a link that says “Learn Your Love Language” or something similar. Then choose and take the couple quiz. This assessment is more detailed than the one I put together and will give you a nicely formatted report that you can share with your spouse.
- Read the following statements related to each love language and circle the number/word that represents when you feel most loved. Give examples for those that you rate as a 3 or 4.

LOVE LANGUAGES ASSESSMENT

WORDS OF AFFIRMATION

“I feel most loved when my spouse speaks words of affirmation to me.”

1-NEVER 2-SOMETIMES 3-OFTEN 4-ALWAYS

Explain—give an example if your number is 3 or 4.

QUALITY TIME

“I feel most loved when my spouse spends quality time with me.”

1-NEVER 2-SOMETIMES 3-OFTEN 4-ALWAYS

Explain—give an example if your number is 3 or 4.

RECEIVING GIFTS

“I feel most loved when I receive gifts from my spouse.”

1-NEVER 2-SOMETIMES 3-OFTEN 4-ALWAYS

Explain—give an example if your number is 3 or 4.

ACTS OF SERVICE

“I feel most loved when my spouse helps me in some way.”

1-NEVER 2-SOMETIMES 3-OFTEN 4-ALWAYS

Explain—give an example if your number is 3 or 4.

PHYSICAL TOUCH


“I feel most loved when my spouse touches me in certain ways.”

1-NEVER 2-SOMETIMES 3-OFTEN 4-ALWAYS

Explain—give an example if your number is 3 or 4.

PRIMARY LANGUAGES OF LOVE

Based on your online assessment or how you rated the statements above, what did you discover about your primary and secondary love languages? Which languages scored highest? In the space below write what you believe are your primary and secondary love languages at this point in the discovery process:

My primary love language _____ 

My secondary love language _____ 

SCRIPTURE PRAYER

Pray 1 Thessalonians 3:12-13.

1. *Read It*

2. *Think It*

3. *Pray It*

4. *Do It*

MEMORIZE AND MEDITATE

Review your anchor cards. Memorize and meditate on the memory scriptures and your Personal Anchor Points.

APPOINTMENT WITH GOD

COME IN PRAYER (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication)

HEAR AND ACT (What is God saying? What have I learned? How should I respond?)

FOLLOW (What is God doing in my life and marriage?)

DAY 5: PREPARE FOR YOUR TOGETHER TIME

Today there is no new material so that you can use the time to review this week's study and prepare for your Together Time. There will be a lot of things you could discuss, but the major focus is on love languages. When you meet, take some time to share what you have discovered. Ask your spouse how you can speak her or his love language more effectively.



MEMORIZE AND MEDITATE

Review your anchor cards. Memorize and meditate on the memory scriptures and your Personal Anchor Points.

APPOINTMENT WITH GOD

COME IN PRAYER (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication)

HEAR AND ACT (What is God saying? What have I learned? How should I respond?)

FOLLOW (What is God doing in my life and marriage?)

PERSONAL ANCHOR POINT

You should now develop your Personal Anchor Point. Review and reflect on what you have learned this week and what God may have laid on your heart as the week progressed. Pray for God's direction in developing your Personal Anchor Point. As a reminder, your Personal Anchor Point is a specific practice you will implement in your daily walk to strengthen your connection to this week's anchor. It includes the key point you learned and the action you will take in response. See page 6 for more information.


TOGETHER TIME

Use the following outline to prepare for and guide your Together Time.

SHARING SCRIPTURE TOGETHER (One in Mind)

Share with one another what you learned from this week's study. What scriptures spoke to you? What is most important for you to put into practice? Share some highlights from your Appointment with God journal.

DISCUSSING OUR RELATIONSHIP (One in Love)

*Share and discuss your Personal Anchor Point and any other issues that you feel are important in your relationship. **Take time here to discuss each other's primary love languages. Be sure to include some examples of when your spouse's actions helped you feel loved, and ask your spouse how you can more effectively speak his or her love language*** 

PLANNING OUR CALENDAR (One in Purpose)

Go over your calendars for the following week. Schedule when you will have your next Together Time. Make sure you both have calendars so you can schedule together. Discuss, "does our calendar demonstrate our purpose in life to glorify God?"

PRAYING TOGETHER (One in Spirit)

Praise God and give thanks to Him. Pray for one another. Ask, "How can I pray for you?" Always remember to thank God for your spouse. Pray for any personal needs. Pray that God will be glorified in your marriage.

WEEK 7: BE HUMBLE

ANCHOR CARD

This week we will study the biblical direction to be humble and a biblical model for a Christ-centered marriage. Begin by creating your anchor card for the week. As described on page 6, write the Anchor for this week at the top of an index card or in your electronic notes program, followed by the Anchor Scripture and Anchor Prayer.

ANCHOR SCRIPTURE

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped.... (Php 2:5–6)

ANCHOR PRAYER

Lord, I want to glorify You and honor the sacred covenant of marriage by being humble. I pray You will empower me through the Holy Spirit to glorify You by being humble with my spouse in all I say and do.

DAILY TOPICS

Day1: Beware of Donkey Dang—The Prideful One

Day 2: Develop a Humble Attitude

Day 3: Understanding Differences in the Way Men and Women Communicate

Day 4: The Biblical Model for a Christ-Centered Marriage

Day 5: Resolving Male-Female Differences—Love and Respect

DAY1: BEWARE OF DONKEY DANG—THE PRIDEFUL ONE

...GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE. (1 Pe 5:5)

THE OLD NATURE OF PRIDE



Here we go again, revisiting the stall where Donkey Dang hangs out. He is not only selfish but has a stubborn streak of pride. Let him out of the stall and this attitude raises its ugly head. Donkey Dang has a lot of ways of saying, “Hee haw! Hey everybody, look at me. I’m more important than you.”

SATAN, PRIDE, AND THE FALL

We can trace the origin of pride and its destructive nature to the Garden of Eden. The temptation to be more important than anyone, even God, has been with mankind since the beginning of time. “You will be like God,” Satan lied. Adam and Eve took the bait, believed the lie and suffered the consequences (Ge 3:1-5). Donkey Dang was introduced into the world that day and became part of everyone’s “old nature.”

JESUS AND THE TEMPTATION OF PRIDE

Jesus was not immune to the temptation of pride, but He did not give in and sin. Before His ministry began, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil. The Bible records for us three specific temptations Jesus faced after he was physically weak from fasting for 40 days. The second temptation in Matthew’s account was centered on the temptation to give in to pride and presume upon God the Father’s power for self-promotion.

Then the devil took Him into the holy city and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written, ‘HE WILL COMMAND HIS ANGELS CONCERNING YOU’; and ‘ON their HANDS THEY WILL BEAR YOU UP, SO THAT YOU WILL NOT STRIKE YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE.’ ” (Mt 4:5–6)

Although Jesus was fully divine, he was also fully human. Because of this, he faced every temptation that we face, yet He never gave in. He was without sin. Jesus answered the temptation using Scripture, giving us an example of how we can overcome every temptation we face in the same way.

Jesus said to him, “On the other hand, it is written, ‘YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST.’ ” (Mt 4:7)

Even though he faced many temptations from Satan, Jesus defeated Satan with “*the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*” (Eph 6:17). He met all three documented temptations with scripture from the book of Deuteronomy. The best way we can silence the lies that tempt us and keep Donkey Dang in the stall is to answer each temptation with Scripture, remembering God’s truth and His promises. There is no substitute for memorizing scripture and being able to “drop anchor” when we are tempted.

THE SOURCE OF PRIDE

There are two kinds of pride. All pride is not condemned in the Bible. For example, Paul mentions that his pride in the believers in Corinth was because of their love. The source of pride in the Bible is always God’s work in the lives of his children. It is Him working in us and through us to accomplish His will.

The kind of pride that the Bible condemns is a self-centered pride. This kind of pride promotes self and personal accomplishments. That is an attitude of self-importance. A person with this kind of pride tends to compare himself or herself to others and always comes out on top. This person's ideas, conclusions, or decisions are always the correct ones, at least in his or her own eyes, and believes there is little reason to consider another's differing viewpoint. This person, often in subtle ways says, "I am better and more important than you."

The ultimate source of pride emerges when we take our eyes off God and focus on ourselves. We lose sight of who we are in God's eyes and exalt our own false sense of importance. At the same time, we diminish the importance of others. Our self-importance blinds us and we fail to *"regard one another as more important than yourselves"* (Php 2:3).

CONSEQUENCES OF PRIDE

God condemns pride because of its destructive consequences. When we lose sight of who God is, we are robbed of an intimate relationship with Him. We become so focused on ourselves and our own self-importance that we trust in ourselves and lose the joy that comes from trusting God and seeing His hand in our lives.

We Forfeit Godly Wisdom

When we are proud and depend on our own thinking, we forfeit the supernatural wisdom that comes with humility. The book of Proverbs warns us that *"When pride comes, then comes dishonor, But with the humble is wisdom"* (Pr 11:2). God wants to guide us, but that can't happen when we are proud and depend on our own wisdom. *"He leads the humble in justice, And He teaches the humble His way"* (Ps 25:9).

We Invite Quarrels

One of the most destructive things pride does to marriages is that it invites quarrels. Proverbs warns, *"Pride only breeds quarrels, but wisdom is found in those who take advice"* (Pr 13:10, NIV). When I think about the quarrels in my own marriage, pride in one or both of us has been at the root of how we caused and handled conflict.

Donkey Dang raises his ugly, stubborn, arrogant head and insists that his way is the only right way. He insists on getting his own way. As I look back on our marriage, it seems like most of our quarrels were about differences in the way to handle the children. I clearly remember the day when Janet said, "Why do you always have to be right when it comes to the children? Why can't I be right some of the time?" I thought about her statement and perhaps for the first time thought, "She's right. Why does it always have to be my way?" I began trying to be less rigid and empty myself of some of the conceit I had stored up over the years.

We Forfeit God's Grace/Favor

When we are proud and depend on our own wisdom, we forfeit God's grace in our lives. This does not refer to saving grace, but to God's favor that comes when we are humble. That favor includes the benefits of seeing circumstances, ourselves, and others as God sees them. God's favor empowers us to respond in a godly way. God's word says that *"GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE"* (1 Pe 5:5). When we are humble, we will respond to others with God's grace and His wisdom.

MARRIAGE PRIDE CHECKLIST

I realize that most of us seldom, if ever, spend much time thinking about whether we have attitudes and actions of pride in our marriages. We may resist the thought, but all of us have areas of pride that affect our marriages at times. Following is a marriage pride checklist. Think about the following questions and make a check mark by any that may be true about you.

- Are there any ways in which I think or act superior to my spouse?
- Are there any ways in which I communicate that my way of thinking or doing things is better than my spouse's way?
- Do I always (or most of the time) need to be right?
- Do I fail to accept my spouse just the way he/she is?
- Do I resent male/female and personality differences and want to change my spouse rather than honoring them as gifts from God to enhance my marriage?

KEEP DONKEY DANG IN THE STALL

The key to keeping Donkey Dang, the prideful one, in the stall is to become aware of our own signs of pride. Most of us have attitudes that we do not recognize as prideful. The only way we will recognize areas of pride in our lives and our marriages is to have Godly wisdom. Scripture teaches us that humility comes from the wisdom of God. James says,

Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. (Jas 3:13)

The proof that we have humility in our marriages comes from the humble deeds that proceed from Godly wisdom. Those humble attitudes and deeds, as we will see in tomorrow's study, are in direct opposition to what James refers to as "earthly, unspiritual, demonic." James goes on to clarify the signs of pride and how it destroys relationships:

But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. (Jas 3:14-16)

Pride in marriage will always lead to disorder and harmful actions. Pride makes it difficult to resolve issues. It produces competition rather than completion. It invites quarrels when one or both try to control or insist on their own way. The Scripture Prayer for today is the passage on the consequences of pride that we have just reviewed. As you pray this scripture, ask God to show you any signs of pride in your marriage.

SCRIPTURE PRAYER

Pray James 3:13-16.

1. *Read It*

2. *Think It*

3. *Pray It*

4. *Do It*



MEMORIZE AND MEDITATE

Review your anchor cards. Memorize and meditate on the memory scriptures and your Personal Anchor Points.

APPOINTMENT WITH GOD

COME IN PRAYER (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication)

HEAR AND ACT (What is God saying? What have I learned? How should I respond?)

FOLLOW (What is God doing in my life and marriage?)

DAY 2: DEVELOP A HUMBLE ATTITUDE

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. (Php 2:3–4)

Yesterday we looked at pride, its origins, its sources, and some of the consequences in our marriage relationships. Today we will look at what Scripture says we can do to keep Donkey Dang in the stall by developing a humble attitude. Paul set a high standard for having a humble attitude toward one another: “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit.” That goal will only be accomplished if we continue to abide in the Vine. It is only through the Spirit empowered word of God that our minds can be renewed and our actions transformed (Ro 12:1-2). The antidote to pride is humility, and God’s word says humility and humble actions come from the wisdom of God.

HUMILITY COMES FROM WISDOM

But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. (Jas 3:17)

We will never learn to become humble by trying to be humble on our own. We will learn to be humble when we become filled with the wisdom from above. God Himself is the source of all wisdom. The Psalmist reminds us that,

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; A good understanding have all those who do His commandments; His praise endures forever. (Ps 111:10)

Wise King Solomon was aware that the wisdom he possessed was given to Him by God. He wrote,

For the LORD gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding. (Pr 2:6)

When we are anchored by the sovereignty of God and the word of God, we are filled with humble wisdom from above. When our thoughts and actions reflect that we acknowledge that God is the all-powerful sovereign creator and sustainer of the universe, that nothing in heaven or on earth happens without His initiative or permission, we will trust in His authority for all we think and do. When we believe that all Scripture is “God breathed” and is our only standard for truth, we will see circumstances, ourselves and others through the eyes of God. With the humble wisdom that comes from the sovereignty of God and the word of God also comes God’s favor. God says through the Prophet Isaiah,

“For My hand made all these things, Thus all these things came into being,” declares the LORD. “But to this one I will look [with favor], To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.” (Is 66:2)

When we acknowledge the sovereignty of God, we are humbled. When we are humbled by His word God renews our minds and favors us with the spiritual benefits and blessings of humble wisdom. Humble wisdom enables us to build godly relationships with our spouses and others.

CLOTHE YOURSELF WITH HUMBLE WISDOM

God has provided us with an awesome wardrobe of clothes that will enable us to have humble wisdom in our marriages. Our responsibility is to take the clothes he provided and wear them. The Apostle Peter impressed upon believers the importance of clothing themselves with humility in their relationships.

*You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, **clothe yourselves with humility** toward one another, for **GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE**. Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you. Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. (1 Pe 5:5–8)*

Notice that when we humble ourselves, it is **God who exalts us**. This is an important principle because we often try to exalt ourselves. We think we must lift up our own self-importance in the eyes of others. When we humble ourselves, He lifts us up, not in human pride but in godly significance. We are significant in His eyes and that is all that matters. Other people's opinions are insignificant in comparison to God's view of us.

There is a very practical side to humility. We are to practice humility with one another. We are to put off pride. We first must humble ourselves before God and submit to Him. He will lift us up and enable us to clothe ourselves with humble attitudes and actions.

HOW TO CLOTHE YOURSELF

We will again use the three-step process that the apostle Paul gives for putting off the old self and putting on the new self with new garments of humility.

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. (Eph 4:22-24, NIV)

Put Off the Old Self

To clothe ourselves with humility, we must first get rid of the old clothes and accessories that come with pride. We must be willing to put off our "old self." The clothes of the old self are our selfish, prideful desires. It is the old nature; it is Donkey Dang in action.

Put On a New Attitude

We must put on a whole new attitude that only happens with a renewed mind. You renew your mind by immersing yourself in the word of God (Ro 12:1-2). This is not new to you because you have already been doing it as you have memorized and meditated on Scripture and prayed the word of God.

Put On New Action

New attitudes lead to new actions that come from a renewed mind. It is "truth and action" (1 Jn 3:16-18). It is the proof that we have submitted to God and have a renewed mind. It means we have been and are being transformed by the Holy Spirit. Remember, if you have repented of your sin and turned to Jesus' completed work on the cross for your salvation, you are a new creation (2 Co 5:17), so act like the new person you already are—an adopted child of God.

THE NEW WARDROBE

The wardrobe of humble wisdom includes eight pieces of virtuous clothing that we find in the book of James.

But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. (Jas 3:17–18)

Following is a list of these eight attitudes and actions of humble wisdom. For each there is a brief definition with additional scriptures for you to look up and reflect on. Then, based on each virtue and scripture, you will look in a “mirror” and ask yourself, “Is there any prideful attitude or action of the old self that I need to **put off**?” “Is there a new attitude and action I need to **put on**?”

Pure

To be pure means to be free from any inferior or contaminating substance or material. The word in Greek from which pure is translated is “*Katharos*.” The biblical meaning is to be unstained by sin, holy in thoughts and actions. **Read Matthew 5:8; Philippians 4:8.**

Peaceable

In marriage to be peaceable means a right relationship with your spouse and being motivated to avoid conflict. It is to live in harmony with one another without division or aggression. It is to be one in soul and spirit. God is the source of our peace and our motivation for peace with others. To be peaceable is to pursue peace in love. **Read 2 Corinthians 13:11; Romans 14:19.**

Gentle

To be gentle in this context means to show kind awareness or regard for one another’s feeling, circumstances and thoughts. **Read 1 Peter 3:7; Titus 3:2.**

Persuadable/Submissive

The Greek word that was translated as “reasonable” is “*ēupēithēs*,” and you will find it is translated as “open to reason” or “submissive” in other Bible translations. It means to be teachable, persuadable and compliant and refers to one who willingly and reasonably submits to another. We are to submit to one another out of reverence to Christ (Eph 5:21). This means that all of us are to voluntarily lay down or yield our rights to others for their good. Our example is Jesus himself in Philippians 2:5-8. In practical terms it means being a humble servant to one another. **Read Ephesians 5:21; Philippians 2:5-8.**

Full of Mercy and Good Fruits

To be full of mercy is to show the “good fruit” of compassion shown in acts of kindness toward those we do not believe deserve it. Scripture says that God’s great love is shown by being “*rich in mercy*” as demonstrated through his grace. He raised us up with Christ when we were dead in our sins (Eph 2:4-6). Because of his rich mercy we are to be full of mercy towards everyone. Jesus said, “*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy*” (Mt 5:7). **Read Ephesians 2:4; Mark 1:40-41.**

Unwavering/Impartial

The Greek word translated “unwavering” is used only once in the Bible, and in the context of “without hypocrisy,” is better translated as “impartial.” To be impartial means to be unbiased and not one sided. It is the ability to view things apart from one’s own beliefs, feelings and desires. It is a sincere attempt to see something from another’s point of view. It is being objective and seeing the whole picture. **Read Romans 2:1; Matthew 6: 1-5.**

Without Hypocrisy


To be without hypocrisy means to be true, honest and not hypocritical. It means saying what you mean, meaning what you say and not saying it mean. It requires telling the truth in love (Eph 4:15). Our love for

one another must be sincere, not false or in pretense. **Read Ephesians 4:14-16; Romans 12: 9-10; 1 Peter 1:22; 2:1.**

Make Peace

One of the Greek words used in James 3 has the same root word for the term Jesus used in the Sermon on the Mount when he called us to be “*peacemakers*” and promised that we would be called “*sons of God*” (Mt 5:9). The word translated “*peacemakers*” refers to ambassadors or arbitrators sent to make peace. The term denotes energy, focus and action to carry out God’s mission of peace that He initiated. We are to actively seek to reconcile conflict with one another. Peacemaking never happens by chance. It involves a decision and commitment. **Read Matthew 5:9, 23-24; Romans 14:19.**

 **REFLECT AND RESPOND**

Choose one or two from the list above that you believe are most important for your marriage, and write what you will do to put off the old self and put on a new attitude and action of humility. 

Put off the old self

Put on new attitudes

Put on new actions

Put off the old self

Put on new attitudes

Put on new actions



MEMORIZE AND MEDITATE

Review your anchor cards. Memorize and meditate on the memory scriptures and your Personal Anchor Points.

APPOINTMENT WITH GOD

COME IN PRAYER (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication)

HEAR AND ACT (What is God saying? What have I learned? How should I respond?)

FOLLOW (What is God doing in my life and marriage?)

DAY 3: UNDERSTANDING DIFFERENCES IN THE WAY MEN AND WOMEN COMMUNICATE

For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.... (Col 1:9)

CREATED WITH DIFFERENCES

A sovereign, all-knowing God created us with differences in our marriages for a purpose. In His infinite wisdom, He created male and female with important biological differences. Both are created in the image of God but designed for different roles and functions. This includes not only how our bodies function differently, but how our minds and emotions are different. This is not unimportant or an accident of nature. Remember that God created us to be “helpers” for one another. We were created to be complementary. We were designed to complete one another in humility, not to compete with one another in pride. To have successful, godly marriages, we must learn to respect, understand and embrace these differences. Differences have the potential to either divide or unite, depending on how we view these differences and respond to them. The key is to respond in humble wisdom.

DIFFERENT WAYS MEN AND WOMEN COMMUNICATE

There are major differences in the way men and women think and communicate. God created male and female to process things in vastly different ways. You do not have to be married very long to know this is true. More than a few conflicts in marriage happen because we do not understand how our spouses think or feel. This becomes clear in the ways men and women communicate.

MEN GENERALLY PREFER TO THINK THINGS OUT. WOMEN GENERALLY PREFER TO TALK THINGS OUT

It is not that men don't talk or that women don't think, but there is a difference in the process. Women generally feel a need to talk things out with their husbands. They want to express thoughts, feelings, and needs and doing so helps them gain clarity and sort things out. That is why they want to discuss things with their husbands. You know what puts fear into a man's heart? When his wife says, “Can we talk for a few minutes?”

Men usually need time to think things out before they discuss them. If they feel pressured, they will often retreat to their “man caves,” wherever that may be. The wife will often interpret her husband's distance and resistance to talking things out as an indication that he does not care about her or her needs.

Many years ago, there was a situation that came up with one of our grown daughters. Janet and I were both under a lot of stress because we believed our daughter was in danger and we had lost contact with her. We had a lot of discussions about the situation. On one occasion Janet wanted to talk about the situation, and I was on overload and needed some time out from the discussions. When I told Janet I didn't want to talk about it right then, she responded by saying that I didn't care. Donkey Dang came out of his stall with a vengeance. I responded in anger by saying, “How dare you say I don't care? I care deeply and think about it all the time. I just don't want to talk about it right now.”

It took some time for us to get our donkeys back in the stall and discuss the issue rationally, but I think we learned some things about how to respond to our differences. I was able to explain how difficult it was for me at times to keep talking about the situation and she shared her need to talk things out. Over time we have learned to deal with these differences, but it has not been easy. If Janet needs to talk, I try to hang in

there even when it becomes uncomfortable. She is good at not taking it personally and giving me space when I say I am on overload.

MEN USE COMMUNICATION PRIMARILY TO EXPRESS IDEAS AND SOLVE PROBLEMS. WOMEN USE COMMUNICATION PRIMARILY TO EXPRESS FEELINGS AND BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

When a wife expresses feelings, a man will almost always feel compelled to fix the problem rather than just listen and affirm his wife's feelings. He also feels stressed and overwhelmed because He does not understand or know how to respond to his wife's feelings. This difference is often a source of conflict and sometimes prevents issues from being resolved. The wife may see the husband's reluctance to respond as a sign that he does not care about her feelings.

It took Janet and me many years to learn how these male/female differences affect a marriage and how to communicate effectively. In the early years of our marriage, I had very little awareness of my own feelings, let alone the ability to understand and respond appropriately to hers. I had to learn to just listen and be there when she needed to express or vent feelings. It was difficult for me not to try to fix the problem. However, I did learn, and you men can learn as well. One of the things that helped me was to just ask, "Do you just need me to listen or do you want help solving the problem?" I still do that at times and Janet has learned to express clearly what she needs. Sometimes she answers by saying, "Just listen" and at other times, "I need you to listen, but I also want help solving the problem."

I think it is hard for a wife to understand the difficulty her husband has understanding her feelings. When I see that my wife is upset, I immediately feel stress and wonder what I have done to upset her. I think most men are like that. We fear our wife's feelings because we either do not recognize or do not understand them. I have learned to ask, "Are you OK?" or "What's going on?" She used to say, "Nothing" when I knew or suspected something was wrong. I learned that answer usually meant "a lot of things," or "I am not sure," or "I'm not ready to talk about it right now." Just as I learned to respond to Janet differently, she learned to respond to me differently by becoming aware that understanding and responding to her feelings was difficult for me. She tries not to take things personally or attribute my inadequacies to a lack of concern or caring. She also learned to be more direct in expressing what was going on with her, so I don't have to guess. We men are notoriously inept at figuring out our wives.

WOMEN USUALLY CONNECT ISSUES TOGETHER AND WANT TO TALK ABOUT EVERYTHING. MEN USUALLY ISOLATE ISSUES AND ONLY WANT TO TALK ABOUT THE "MAIN ISSUE"

One of my greatest frustrations when trying to resolve an issue with Janet was that she would not stick to the main issue but would bring up a lot of what I considered "side issues." One thing always led to another in her mind. It wasn't just about the faucet that I neglected to fix but about other things that did not seem to be a priority to me. The list always seemed to expand. She wanted to connect things together, and I could not see the connections. At the core of what was happening was our differences in needs and goals. Janet not only wanted to solve the issue but also to work on our relationship. I only wanted to solve the problem and get out of there!

Which needs and goals were most important? Both! There was no right or wrong, just male and female differences. What was wrong was our attitudes. Over time we both learned to understand these differences and compromise. I learned that Janet doesn't just connect things together when resolving conflict, but she connects them in almost every area of her life. We still laugh about it. When she buys a picture for our house, I know that it means redecorating. When she purchases a blouse, it means connecting it together with shoes, skirt, accessories, etc. This is foreign to me and to most men. I learned

to listen to the connecting issues and try not to get frustrated. She learned to limit the things she connected and became more aware when it was time to resolve “the main issue.”

RESOLVING DIFFERENCES—WHAT CAN THE HUSBAND DO?

Learn to see through your spouse’s eyes and try to understand how she communicates. I know, it’s like learning a foreign language. Though we may never completely understand one another, we can learn to relate to one another in an understanding way. Following are some things husbands can do to communicate more effectively with their wives.

LEARN TO TALK THINGS OUT

Be willing to talk

Talk when your wife wants to talk things out. This requires a change in attitude. Willingness will go a long way in strengthening your relationship. It shows you care.

Make every effort to stay engaged

Try to stay engaged in the conversation. Stay connected and participate. Work at not being defensive when issues are discussed. Don’t abort and head for your man cave to hibernate. If you are feeling overwhelmed and need a time out, just say so in a non-defensive way. And remember this: if you ask your wife what is wrong and she says, “Nothing,” don’t say “good” and run. The only thing you know for sure is that nothing always means “something.” Hang in there.

LEARN TO EXPRESS FEELINGS AND BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

Just listen

Listening is an art that can be learned. Most men are not natural born listeners. In next week’s study, there will be time devoted to learning active listening skills. What we men need to learn is that sometimes just being there and engaged in the conversation is what our wives want more than anything else.

Think and feel

Most men feel more comfortable with what they think than how they feel. However, just as in the art of listening, we can learn to express our feelings as well. Next week you will learn some ways to become aware of your feelings and express them.

LEARN TO LISTEN TO ALL OF YOUR WIFE’S ISSUES

Understand her need to connect issues


Women’s feelings are sometimes like waves. They just keep coming. We need to respect this unique female difference. When you begin to feel like you are drowning in the wave of your wife’s feelings and want to escape, hang in there! This is your wife’s way of processing her thoughts and feelings.

Remember her issues are not all about you

Your wife’s issues are not all about you, but it may seem like you are being blamed for everything. Remember, connecting things together and putting everything on the table is her way of resolving issues. Try not to take everything personally.

REFLECT AND RESPOND FOR HUSBANDS

Reflect on these differences.

Which of these male/female differences in communication has affected your marriage? Where do you see yourself in this picture? Consider what you are willing to do. 

SCRIPTURE PRAYER FOR HUSBANDS

Read 1 Peter 3:1-7. Pray 1 Peter 3:7.

1. *Read It*

2. *Think It*

3. *Pray It*

4. *Do It*

RESOLVING DIFFERENCES—WHAT CAN THE WIFE DO?

Learn to see through your husband's eyes and try to understand how he communicates. Following are some ways to connect and communicate with your husband in his unique way.

UNDERSTAND YOUR HUSBAND NEEDS TO THINK THINGS OUT

Give your husband time to think.

If your husband does not want to talk or is not responding as you would like, it may be that he is processing things in his mind before he is ready to talk about the issue. Give him time to think. Don't pressure him to share his feelings. He may tell you what he thinks rather than how he feels. He may need time to sort things out. Ask him to let you know when he is ready to talk. Be patient. Explain your need to talk without pressuring or blaming.

Don't take your husband's silence personally.

The fact that your husband does not want to talk or even vanishes to his man cave does not mean that he doesn't care about you or resolving the issue. When your husband becomes quiet or has a difficult time participating in the conversation, remember how difficult this is for him.

DON'T EXPECT YOUR HUSBAND TO KNOW HOW YOU ARE FEELING

Don't make your husband guess how you are feeling.

I will admit, we men are clueless when it comes to figuring out what our wives are feeling. It is not an indication that your husband loves you more if he can figure out how you are feeling. It is probably a lucky guess! Avoid saying "nothing" if he asks what is wrong. Make a clear statement about what you are feeling, or if you really don't know, just say so.

Learn to express both how you feel and what you think.

In the same way your husband needs to learn how to express and listen to his feelings, wives also need to learn to balance thinking and feeling when discussing issues.

LEARN TO LIMIT THE NUMBER OF ISSUES YOU CONNECT TOGETHER

Remember your husband can become overwhelmed when you express multiple issues.


When multiple issues and feelings are brought up while discussing an issue with your husband, he can feel overwhelmed and frustrated and become defensive. Being aware of this and limiting the amount of "side issues" (a male view) will help your husband stay involved in the discussion.

Remember your husband's goal is to solve the problem.

Your husband is hard wired to show he cares by solving the problem. Recognizing this and letting your husband know that you also want to solve the issue will help. And finally, don't forget that your husband might feel blamed and unappreciated when you express multiple issues. Letting him know that you appreciate him and his effort to solve the problem is important.

REFLECT AND RESPOND FOR WIVES

Reflect on these differences.

Which of these male/female differences in communication has affected your marriage? Where do you see yourself in this picture? Consider what you are willing to do. 

SCRIPTURE PRAYER FOR WIVES

Pray 1 Peter 3:3-4.

1. *Read It*

2. *Think It*

3. *Pray It*

4. *Do It*



MEMORIZE AND MEDITATE

Review your anchor cards. Memorize and meditate on the memory scriptures and your Personal Anchor Points.

APPOINTMENT WITH GOD

COME IN PRAYER (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication)

HEAR AND ACT (What is God saying? What have I learned? How should I respond?)

FOLLOW (What is God doing in my life and marriage?)

THE BIBLICAL MODEL FOR A CHRIST-CENTERED MARRIAGE

In Ephesians Chapter 5, Paul gives five essential principles for husbands and wives to learn about the centrality of Christ as a foundation and model for a godly marriage.

1. CHRIST AND MUTUAL SUBMISSION

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. (Eph 5:21, NIV)

Before launching into his teaching on marriage, Paul immediately laid the groundwork for wives to submit to and respect their husbands and for husbands to love their wives like Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her. Both are instructed to lay down their lives for one another out of reverence for Christ. Christ's life was an example of the attitude of submission, and we are to have that same attitude toward one another.

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. (Php 2:5-7)

To submit means to surrender our rights for the good of another. Christ did this for His bride, the Church. Even though He was God, He surrendered that right out of love for us and to bring honor and glory to the Father. He emptied himself by taking on the form of a servant. He asks us to do the same. In our marriages we are to surrender our rights and become servants to one another.

2. THE SUBMISSION OF WIVES TO THEIR HUSBANDS

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. (Eph 5:22-24, NIV)

I am aware that this is a controversial verse. Submission has taken on an extremely negative meaning in our culture. But, as we have seen, submission or surrender is voluntarily laying down our lives for others as Christ laid down His life for us. It is a universal command. The main point of this passage is not about hierarchy, but rather how to lay aside our own rights in selfless, humble, servanthood to meet the unique needs of our spouse. We are to submit to one another out of reverence to Christ.

Headship is not primarily about position or who is in charge. Janet and I never need to have that conversation. We function in our marriage as equals. We make decisions together. If one is not ready to make a decision, we have learned to be patient and wait for one another. We believe when we pray, God will speak to both of us. That does not mean I disregard my role as head of the family. I believe strongly that this verse clearly says that we men have a responsibility to our wives and families as spiritual leaders; it is clear that men are to carry out that responsibility as servant leaders in total submission to, and out of reverence for, Christ.

The concept of mutual submission in a marriage may seem idealistic or unrealistic. To be honest, we struggled to come to this place in our marriage. It took years of maturing in the faith by submitting to God and hard work to come to a place where we can submit to one another as to the Lord. We had to learn to become servants to one another.

Wives Are to Submit to Their Husbands as to the Lord

The focus here is for wives to keep their eyes on Jesus rather than their husbands. When a wife sees submission as reverence to Christ, honoring Him, then voluntary submission to her husband becomes

positive rather than negative. In summing up his teaching on marriage Paul uses the term “respect” rather than submit. That is because for a wife, submission means respecting her husband.

Wives Are to Submit to Their Husbands as the Church Submits to Christ In Everything

Paul challenges the wives to be “all in,” just as the church is to be “all in” for Christ. We do not select what areas we are to submit to Christ. We are to take up our cross daily and follow Him. We are to lay down our lives for others (1 Jn 3:16-18). We can conclude that Paul urges women to respect their husbands in all things, not just the things that they see as positive or agree with.

3. CHRIST AND THE SACRIFICIAL LOVE OF HUSBANDS FOR THEIR WIVES

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church.... (Eph 5:25–29)

It is interesting to observe that Paul gives twice the amount of instruction to husbands on their roles and responsibilities as he does to wives. I do not think that is because men are more important, but that it might be more difficult for men to be servant leaders and meet their wives’ unique need for love. That is just an opinion. Paul spells it out in detail for us so we will get it.

Husbands Are to Love Their Wives Like Christ Loved the Church

This is clear. Even I can get it. We men are to lay down our lives for our wives. We are to become servant leaders. Our example is how Christ loved His church and laid down his life for her. We need to pray, “Lord, how can I be a servant to my wife today? What do I need to lay down?”

Husbands Are to Love Their Wives as Their Own Bodies

Jesus laid down His life for His bride “to make her holy.” This passage goes on to instruct men how to apply this example of Christ’s servant leadership “to love their wives as their own bodies.” That means we need to feed and care for her. We need to learn to see into her heart and how to love her in a way that touches her heart. We can learn from her what her unique love needs are and do our best to feed and care for them. Spiritual leadership is being servant leaders to our wives in practical ways they can understand. It’s not about being more spiritual but, as a servant, being more humble and loving.

4. THE CONNECTION BETWEEN CHRIST AND HIS BODY (BRIDE) AND MARRIAGE

...because we are members of His body. FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church. (Eph 5:30–32)

The Example

There is no doubt that the message Paul wants to get across is that our model for a godly marriage is centered on Christ. Christ’s name is mentioned numerous times in these few verses. Our example of how to love one another is how Christ loves His bride, the church—us.

The Union

...for we are members of his body.

We are members of Christ's body, and therefore we are members of one another. We have unity because we belong to Christ and our union with Him connects us with others in His Body. With that unity comes the responsibility to love and care for one another as He loves and cares for us.

The Covenant

For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. (Ge 2:24)

Because we are united with Christ and members of His body, we are to honor the sacred covenant of marriage by being one in our marriages. We are to be one in the way we love one another like Christ loves His bride. This is an essential part of Paul's summary to husbands and wives. It is a reminder to always honor the sacred covenant of marriage by being one in practice as well as position. This is the fourth and final time that the sacred covenant of marriage is mentioned in the Bible. It is mentioned in the Creation Era in the book of Genesis. It is mentioned by the prophet Malachi at the end of the Prophetic Era. It is quoted by Jesus in the Gospel Era and again by Paul in the Church Era.

5. LOVE AND RESPECT


Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband. (Eph 5:33)

Paul sums up his teaching in a very succinct and practical way. He wants husbands to understand and act on this core teaching. Husbands are to love their wives in unique ways that touch their hearts. Wives are to respect their husbands in unique ways that meet their need for respect. There are significant differences in the way love and respect are expressed in marriage. In tomorrow's session you will see how to resolve those differences.

REFLECT AND RESPOND

Reflect on the centrality of Christ as the foundation and model for a godly marriage.

1. *Which of these five principles impacts you the most?*

2. *What can you take away from today's study that will help you model your marriage after Christ's example of how He loves His bride?* 

MEMORIZE AND MEDITATE

Review your anchor cards. Memorize and meditate on the memory scriptures and your Personal Anchor Points.

APPOINTMENT WITH GOD

COME IN PRAYER (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication)

HEAR AND ACT (What is God saying? What have I learned? How should I respond?)

FOLLOW (What is God doing in my life and marriage?)

DAY 5: RESOLVING MALE-FEMALE DIFFERENCES—LOVE AND RESPECT

Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband. (Eph 5:33)

DIFFERENCES IN LOVE AND RESPECT

We are not accidents of nature, nor have we evolved over millions of years to have vastly different but uniquely complementary bodies and souls. God, in His infinite wisdom and love, created us to be exactly what He wanted. Included in our divine design are different physical and emotional needs. We have also been given the responsibility to respond to those unique needs in our marriages. A husband “*must love his wife as he loves himself,*” and a wife “*must respect her husband.*” The Greek words used in Ephesians chapter 5 imply an imperative—this is not optional.

THE DIFFERENCE WITH WIVES

Why are wives **not** told to love their husbands in the same way their husbands are told to love them? It is because of God’s unique design for men and women and the importance of honoring our spouse’s unique needs. I believe one of the reasons is that God designed women with a “nurturing instinct.” They generally show love by nurture and nourishment. It is an essential component of a family. Just observe how a woman uses that gift of nurture to love and care for children and her husband. Because that kind of love is natural for them, wives expect that same kind of love to be shown to them by their husbands. However, this expression of love is only a part of what husbands need.

THE DIFFERENCE WITH HUSBANDS

Husbands are hardwired differently. We have an “independent instinct.” It is a part of our DNA. It is not that we don’t love, but we show our love in different ways. We demonstrate our love primarily through providing, protecting and problem solving. Often, we are not that good at nurturing. While we try to show love in our way, it is often not what our wives need and is not always understood or appreciated.

SHOWING LOVE FOR YOUR SPOUSE

This is why Paul instructs husbands to learn to love in a different way, a way that will care for and nurture their wives. Wives are not told to love their husbands in their innate nurturing way because they already know how to do that. Wives are told to show love in a very different way; they are to show love by respecting their husbands in a way that they understand. This is when things become complicated. If a wife does not feel love in a nurturing, intimate way, she has a difficult time showing respect for her husband. If a husband feels disrespected by his wife, he retreats and withholds his love from his wife. Thus, there can become a cycle of lack of love and respect in the marriage. Following are some suggestions for overcoming that cycle—a section for husbands and a separate section for wives.

FOR HUSBANDS: A WIFE’S GREATEST NEED FROM HER HUSBAND IS LOVE THAT TOUCHES HER HEART

*Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself...
(Eph 5:33)*

The love a wife needs is a certain kind of love that touches her heart. The following are three areas of need that I have observed.

A WIFE FEELS LOVED WHEN HER HUSBAND MAKES HER HIS HIGHEST PRIORITY.

Ephesian 5:25-27 indicates strongly that the Church, Jesus' bride, was a high priority. He loved the church and gave Himself up for her in selfless, humble love. Husbands are called to show that same high priority for their wives.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. (Eph 5:25–27)

🧠 REFLECT AND RESPOND FOR HUSBANDS

What specifically do you think you can do that would touch your wife's heart? What can you do that will let her know that she is a high priority? How can you serve and cherish her? 📖

A WIFE FEELS LOVED WHEN HER HUSBAND DEMONSTRATES A WILLINGNESS TO LIVE WITH HER IN AN "UNDERSTANDING WAY" BY STAYING ENGAGED AND MAKING AN EFFORT TO COMMUNICATE IN HER LANGUAGE.

In yesterday's study we examined the differences in the way men and women communicate and how that affects a marriage. We saw how God's word instructs men to live with their wives in an understanding way. This includes making a concerted effort to understand their wives' needs to communicate and stay engaged.

You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered. (1 Pe 3:7)

🧠 REFLECT AND RESPOND FOR HUSBANDS


What specifically do you think you can do to demonstrate to your wife that you want to understand her? In what ways can you stay engaged? 📖

A WIFE FEELS LOVED WHEN HER HUSBAND SHOWS APPRECIATION FOR HER NEED TO NURTURE AND BE THE HEART OF THE FAMILY.

Yesterday we saw how wives are called to develop an inner beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit and, in a very real sense, be the heart of the family (1 Pe 3:1-6). Sometimes that gentle and quiet spirit is tested when a husband does not understand her motives or show appreciation for her desire to help. Husbands can respond by not being defensive when she tries to help, recognizing that she is showing her love in her nurturing way.

To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit;
(1 Pe 3:8)

REFLECT AND RESPOND FOR HUSBANDS

What specifically can you do to show appreciation for your wife's desire to nurture and be the heart of the family rather than being defensive? 

FOR WIVES: A HUSBAND'S GREATEST NEED FROM HIS WIFE IS RESPECT

*...the wife must see to it that she **respects her husband**. (Eph 5:33)*


A husband feels loved and appreciated when his wife shows respect for him. Following are three areas of need that I have observed.

A HUSBAND FEELS RESPECTED BY HIS WIFE WHEN SHE ACCEPTS HIM AS HE IS AND DOES NOT TRY TO CHANGE HIM.

Women sometimes tend to use their gift of nurturing to help their husbands become the men they think they ought to be. Men generally have an "independent gene" that resists that help and sees it as pressure to change. They can feel disrespected because they believe their wives are not accepting them as they are. Trusting God to change your husband is a practical way of showing respect and submitting out of reverence to God.

Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God. (Ro 15:7)

REFLECT AND RESPOND FOR WIVES


What specifically can you do to respect your husband by trusting God to change him and accepting him as he is? 

A HUSBAND FEELS RESPECTED BY HIS WIFE WHEN SHE ACKNOWLEDGES AND APPRECIATES HIS EFFORTS TO SUPPORT, PROTECT AND LEAD.

Acknowledging your husband's efforts and verbally showing appreciations is a significant way to show respect for him. Look for ways to say, "I appreciate your help with...." "Thank you for being faithful." "Thank you for your hard work and the way you provide for the family." Look at the glass as half full rather than half empty.

*Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.
(1 Th 5:11)*

REFLECT AND RESPOND FOR WIVES

What specifically can you do to acknowledge and appreciate your husband's efforts to support, protect and lead the family? 

A husband feels respected by his wife when she is patient with his efforts to communicate and shows appreciation for his counsel and problem solving.

I think that Peter's admonition for wives to develop a gentle and quiet heart of beauty applies here. I'm not implying that a wife should not confront her husband, or express needs. Conflict is a part of marriage. It is how we handle differences and conflict that is important. We can confront by "*speaking the truth in love.*" This involves open and honest communication that also shows respect for the other person and their unique communication style. We will be focusing on communication in next week's session.

...but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. (Eph 4:15–16)

REFLECT AND RESPOND FOR WIVES

What specifically you can do to be patient with your husband's efforts to communicate and to show appreciation for his counsel and problem solving? In what ways can you "speak the truth in love"?

SCRIPTURE PRAYER

We conclude today's session with an especially important scripture prayer that is a summary of Paul's teaching on marriage for men to love their wives and wives to respect their husbands.

Pray Ephesians 5:30-33.

1. *Read It*

2. *Think It*

3. *Pray It*

4. Do It



MEMORIZE AND MEDITATE

Review your anchor cards. Memorize and meditate on the memory scriptures and your Personal Anchor Points.


APPOINTMENT WITH GOD

COME IN PRAYER (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication)

HEAR AND ACT (What is God saying? What have I learned? How should I respond?)

FOLLOW (What is God doing in my life and marriage?)

PERSONAL ANCHOR POINT

You should now develop your Personal Anchor Point. Review and reflect on what you have learned this week and what God may have laid on your heart as the week progressed. Pray for God's direction in developing your Personal Anchor Point. As a reminder, your Personal Anchor Point is a specific practice you will implement in your daily walk to strengthen your connection to this week's anchor. It includes the key point you learned and the action you will take in response. See page 6 for more information. 

TOGETHER TIME

Use the following outline to prepare for and guide your Together Time.

SHARING SCRIPTURE TOGETHER (One in Mind)

Share with one another what you learned from this week's study. What scriptures spoke to you? What is most important for you to put into practice? Share some highlights from your Appointment with God journal.

DISCUSSING OUR RELATIONSHIP (One in Love)

*Share and discuss your Personal Anchor Point and any other issues that you feel are important in your relationship. **As a husband, ask your wife what you can do to touch her heart so that she feels deeply loved? As a wife, ask your husband what you can do to show that you accept and respect him?***

PLANNING OUR CALENDAR (One in Purpose)

Go over your calendars for the following week. Schedule when you will have your next Together Time. Make sure you both have calendars so you can schedule together. Discuss, "does our calendar demonstrate our purpose in life to glorify God?"

PRAYING TOGETHER (One in Spirit)

Praise God and give thanks to Him. Pray for one another. Ask, "How can I pray for you?" Always remember to thank God for your spouse. Pray for any personal needs. Pray that God will be glorified in your marriage.

WEEK 8: BE A SERVANT—THE KEY TO RESOLVING CONFLICT

ANCHOR CARD

This week we will study the biblical direction to be a servant and how this is a key to resolving conflict. Begin by creating your anchor card for the week. As described on page 6, write the Anchor for this week at the top of an index card or in your electronic notes program, followed by the Anchor Scripture and Anchor Prayer.

ANCHOR SCRIPTURE

...[Christ] emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Php 2:7–8)

ANCHOR PRAYER

Lord, I want to glorify You and honor the sacred covenant of marriage by being a humble obedient servant to my spouse. I pray that You will help me to lay down my life for my spouse in truth and action.

DAILY TOPICS

Day 1: The Attitude of a Servant

Day 2: Be Quick to Listen

Day 3: Be Slow to Speak

Day 4: Be Slow to Become Angry

Day 5: The Servant's Way of Resolving Conflict

AUTHOR NOTE

This week could be a complete study on its own. Be sure not to procrastinate on this week's studies because each day will take time to complete, particularly day 4. You may feel overwhelmed with the content. Just remember to look at this week as a resource you can refer to and study further when needed.

DAY 1: THE ATTITUDE OF A SERVANT

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Php 2:5–11)

After his instructions to “be one, be selfless, and be humble,” Paul sums up his teaching on developing godly relationship with this admonition: Have the attitude of Christ Jesus. Be a servant. He goes on to describe how to develop that attitude. We are to empty ourselves, take the form of a bond-servant, humble ourselves, and become obedient, even if it means dying for our spouse. I believe this sums up what we can do, practically, to “become one” and renew the sacred covenant of marriage.

This week we will focus on resolving conflict, one of the major issues critical to maintaining the sacred covenant of marriage. We will see how to develop Jesus’ attitude of a sacrificial, obedient servant. As we will see, conflict in itself is not wrong. It is how we resolve conflict—our actions—that can be wrong, usually from a wrong attitude. At its root, conflict is just a difference in beliefs, values, desires or needs. There are differences in all marriages. We all must learn to resolve differences in a godly way to have a successful marriage. There are biblical attitudes and skills that will help resolve conflict in your marriage in a godly way. It all starts with having the attitude of Jesus and becoming a servant in your marriage. But first we must be aware of what happens when Donkey Dang gets out of the stall.

THE ATTITUDE OF DONKEY DANG

“Hee Haw. I am the greatest”



It was the heavyweight champion Muhammad Ali who made the boast, “I am the greatest.” He repeated this and other such outrageous boasts often during his years as the heavyweight boxing champion. People either loved him or hated him. A lot of his arrogant boasts were theater, but he very well may have been the greatest heavyweight champion of all time. Most of us would deny that we would ever claim to be the greatest, but we all act like it at times. This is especially true when we become involved in heated conflict with someone. We might not say we are the greatest, but our attitude reflects it. When we insist that we are right and demand that things be done our way, and we are unwilling to compromise, we have the attitude of that dang donkey!

What is it that prevents us from being humble, selfless, obedient, sacrificial servants when we have conflict with our spouse or anyone else? Why do we act like we are the greatest? It happens when Donkey Dang gets out of his stall and brays, “Hee Haw, I am the greatest.” There is an arrogant, oppositional attitude hidden deep within us. It is the attitude of the old nature that wants to be the greatest rather than having the attitude of Jesus. When the donkey gets out of the stall and demands his or her rights to be the greatest, harmful conflict is inevitable. During his last days on earth, Jesus dealt with this issue and explained to his disciples what it means to be the greatest.

Read Matthew 20:20-24 (observe the cause of this major conflict among the disciples).

The mother of James and John wanted her sons to be the greatest of the disciples. Neither the mother nor the disciples understood what it meant to be a humble servant. Although the disciples had been around Jesus for three years and observed what it meant to be a servant, they were still in competition to be the greatest. They were like a bunch of angry Donkey Dangs braying, "Hee Haw, I want to be the greatest." Jesus addressed the issue and, at the same time, gave the ultimate solution for resolving conflict in all relationships.

...whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many. (Mt 20:26–28)

Jesus demonstrated greatness by the way He lived His life. His attitude was this: "If you want to be great, then be a humble servant. Serve the needs of others. Put the needs of others above your own." Have this as your goal in relationships: serve and give your life as a ransom for many. This is the ultimate solution for resolving conflict in a marriage.

THE ATTITUDE OF JESUS

*...emptied Himself, taking the form of a **bond-servant**.... (Php 2:7)*

The ultimate attitude for a successful marriage can be summed up in the term, "*bond-servant*." Paul lays out in detail what it means to follow the example of Jesus to become a servant.

SEARCH THE WORD

Read Philippians 2:5-8.

1. *What do you think is the significance of Jesus' attitude of not regarding equality of God a thing to be grasped? What does it mean in this context to "grasp" something?*

2. *In what ways did Jesus empty himself?*

3. *In what ways could having the attitude of Jesus enable you to be a servant to your spouse?*

4. What makes the attitude of Jesus so difficult live out in your marriage?

Jesus, although He was God, emptied himself of all rights, took on the human form of a selfless, humble, obedient, sacrificial servant. Paul instructs all believers to have that same attitude. I believe if we have the attitude of a servant in truth and action, we will have godly marriages. They might not be perfect; we will struggle at times because we are all imperfect human beings. But, if we persevere, we will overcome all obstacles through the power of the Holy Spirit. Listen to this promise:

*Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, **fixing our eyes on Jesus**, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. (Heb 12:1–3)*

The key to perseverance and striving to strengthen our marriage is “*fixing our eyes on Jesus.*” At times we all become weary of the struggles and are vulnerable to losing heart. If we fix our eyes on Jesus and how He overcame His struggles, we can persevere in the race marked out for us in our marriage.

OUR ATTITUDE

The attitude of a servant starts with a core belief. Jesus, although He was God, did not believe that right was more important to grasp (hold on to firmly) than his mission on earth to glorify his heavenly Father. His mission was not “*to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many*” (Mt 20:28). That attitude anchored every decision he made and every action he took while he was on earth.

OUR ACTION

Attitude is not just a belief, it is the basis for our actions in various circumstances. An attitude is a way of thinking or feeling about something that is reflected in a person’s behavior. Jesus did not just say he believed His equality with God was a thing to be grasped. He **emptied himself** of that right and took on the form of a lowly **servant**. He **chose** to be a humble, selfless servant, serving others rather than grasping the right he deserved as God to be served. Jesus emptied Himself of his rights. During his last days on earth, Jesus explained to his disciples what it meant to empty himself. As he faced death on the cross, he said,

“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal. If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him. “Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, ‘Father, save Me from this hour’? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name.” Then a voice came out of heaven: “I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.” (Jn 12:24–28)

Jesus’ example of emptying himself is clear. As servants, we follow the example of a perfect servant. We are to die to ourselves and our desires in this world and follow Jesus in serving others no matter what

sacrifices it requires. We give up our rights that we so fiercely grasp. We do this to accomplish our purpose to glorify our heavenly Father just as Jesus did to glorify his Father.

A SERVANT’S APPROACH TO RESOLVING CONFLICT

*My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be **quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry**, for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. (Jas 1:19–20, NIV)*

The focus of the next four days will be learning practical, biblically based principles linked to the admonition in James 1:19-20. I will also give you practical skills to help you develop a servant’s approach to resolving conflict. Specifically, on day two this week you will learn four essential principles to help reduce anger and frustration and increase empathy and understanding. We’ll also cover a valuable active listening skill to help you learn to be “**quick to listen**.” On day three we will address being “**slow to speak**” with three principles, and I’ll give you another skill you can learn. On day four I’ll give you four things you can do to address your anger, and I’ll give you another skill to help you learn to be “**slow to become angry**.” We’ll conclude the week by discussing how to resolve conflict in a biblical way.

We conclude today’s session by scripture praying Jesus’ teaching on being a servant and how this attitude helps resolve conflict.

SCRIPTURE PRAYER

Pray Matthew 20:25-28.

1. *Read It*

2. *Think It*

3. *Pray It*

4. *Do It*

MEMORIZE AND MEDITATE

Review your anchor cards. Memorize and meditate on the memory scriptures and your Personal Anchor Points.

APPOINTMENT WITH GOD

COME IN PRAYER (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication)

HEAR AND ACT (What is God saying? What have I learned? How should I respond?)

FOLLOW (What is God doing in my life and marriage?)

Acknowledge Joy

Paul refers to a biblical principle that I call acknowledging joy. Sometimes when someone shares something with us, we see that it brings them joy. Acknowledging is responding in some way that lets them know that we are rejoicing with them. This can be done in a variety of ways such as saying,

“Wow, that’s great!”

“I’m happy for you.”

“That’s wonderful.”

Acknowledge Mourning

There are happy times, and there are sad times. There are times of rejoicing over positive events and issues, but there are also times when we mourn and weep. We will use the term “mourning” here in a broad sense to include all issues that bring us concern. These can involve major loses like death of a loved one or a major illness or disappointment. In marriage there are more common issues such as concern for our children, stress, unresolved issues in our marriage, and unmet expectations. These may not all rise to the level of “mourning,” but they are issues that impact us. These are all opportunities to respond by acknowledging our spouse’s thoughts, feelings, concerns and needs in some way. You can respond by checking out what you think might be going on with your spouse. It shows that you are listening, and their thoughts, feelings, concerns and needs are important to you. Following are some examples of acknowledging:

Acknowledging thoughts

“So you think _____.”

“What I hear you saying is that you believe _____.”

“Then your opinion is _____.”

Acknowledging feelings

“So you are feeling _____.”

“Are you feeling _____?”

“What are you feeling?”

Acknowledging concerns

“I hear you saying you are concerned that _____.”

“Is _____ troubling you?”

“It sounds like what you are really concerned about is _____?”

Acknowledging needs

“Am I hearing you correctly that you would like _____?”

“So you need _____?”

“Is _____ what you want? “



MEMORIZE AND MEDITATE

Review your anchor cards. Memorize and meditate on the memory scriptures and your Personal Anchor Points.

APPOINTMENT WITH GOD

COME IN PRAYER (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication)

HEAR AND ACT (What is God saying? What have I learned? How should I respond?)

FOLLOW (What is God doing in my life and marriage?)

DAY 3: BE SLOW TO SPEAK

*My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, **slow to speak** and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. (Jas 1:19–20, NIV)*

Why does God's word tell us that we should be slow to speak? What is so important about this biblical principle of communication, and how does it affect our marriages? What we say to one another and how we say it has enormous impact.

UNDERSTANDING THE POWER OF WORDS

The tongue has great power to breathe the life-giving spirit of encouragement into our lives or the life-threatening spirit of discouragement. A Proverb says,

Death and life are in the power of the tongue, And those who love it will eat its fruit. (Pr 18:21)

Most of us can remember circumstances when we were devastated by what someone said to us and times when our spirits were lifted by what someone said. The words we heard possessed the power to encourage us and lift our spirits or discourage us and crush our spirits.

I was in the Army stationed at Fort Lewis, Washington, when I decided to visit my aunt in Bellingham, Washington. She invited some of her lady friends for lunch, and they were having a lively discussion. I do not know what the discussion was about, but I do remember giving my opinion. My aunt looked at me and said, "You don't count." I was devastated. I did not hear that my opinion did not count, but instead, I heard that I did not count. It was a time in my life when I was separated from my family, and I was quite lonely and more than a little needy. I know my Aunt said that in jest and later apologized, but the damage was done. Her words had great power at that time in my life. I still feel some emotion when I recall her words.

It is extremely important for us to be aware of the power that words have in our marriages and that they can give life or death. With our tongues we communicate how much we value our spouses. Seldom do words carry more weight to either encourage us or discourage us than those of our spouses. The closer the relationship, the more impact the words have. We frequently underestimate how much power our words possess. The writer of Proverbs says,

The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life.... The lips of the righteous feed many, But fools die for lack of understanding. (Pr 10:11, 21)

Given the power of the tongue to build up or tear down, it is vital for our marriages that we are "slow to speak." The three biblical principles that follow will help you be "slow to speak," using the power of words to impart life giving encouragement to your spouse.

PRINCIPLE #1: TAME YOUR TONGUE

First, we must tame our tongues. This involves not only realizing the power of words in our marriage but a commitment to think about what we are going to say and how we are going to say it. The Psalmist showed this kind of commitment when he said,

I will guard my ways That I may not sin with my tongue; I will guard my mouth as with a muzzle While the wicked are in my presence. (Ps 39:1)

The book of James speaks of the power of the tongue and the difficulty of taming it.

For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race. But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison. (Jas 3:7–8)

The solution to this difficult task is to intentionally focus on what we say to our spouse. Will what we say build him/her up? Are we careful to eliminate angry, hurtful, or thoughtless comments from our speech? We should heed God’s word that says,

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. (Eph 4:29)

PRINCIPLE #2: USE ENCOURAGING WORDS 

Sometimes we neglect to show appreciation and encourage one another. Scripture emphasizes how important this is in our relationships. The Apostle Paul starts many of his letters to the churches by expressing appreciation for the people and encouraging them. In his letter to the believers in Thessalonica, he urges them to do the same.

Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing. (1 Th 5:11)

Encouraging one another is a major theme in the New Testament. The author of Hebrews writes about the importance of consistently encouraging one another. He says,

But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called “Today,” so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. (Heb 3:13)

How often do you show appreciation to your spouse and children? How often do you encourage them? We all need a healthy dose of positive reinforcement. I encourage you to be intentional in affirming/encouraging your spouse and children. Make a commitment to make at least one affirming/encouraging statement to your spouse and children sometime this week. Following is a list of words to help your get started.

Encouraging/Affirming Words

Pleasant words are a honeycomb, Sweet to the soul and healing to the bones. (Pr 16:24)

You’re special.	I’m proud of you.	Well done.
Nice work.	Super.	Good job.
You are incredible.	I appreciate you	You’re a winner
I love you.	Superb.	I trust you.
You are gifted	That’s the best	You’re responsible
You’re a treasure	You’re creative	You can do it
I respect your judgement	You’re making progress	I like you
Good for you	Thanks	I’m glad God gave you to me
Outstanding	Good	You make a difference
You’re improving	Terrific	You’re a joy
You did it	I’m glad you’re you	You’ll make it
You care	Fantastic job	Great idea
You are fun	You’re a joy	How smart
You are important	You’re growing	Nice try

You are special	You're kind	You mean a lot to me
Just be you	You're great	

PRINCIPLE #3: BE CLEAR AND SPECIFIC 

Being slow to speak includes being clear and specific in what we say. It is honest, straight forward conversation without subtle meanings and hidden agendas. There is a wise saying that could help us be clear and specific if we followed it:

Say what you mean, and mean what you say, but don't say it mean.

Sometimes we find it intimidating to be completely open, honest and direct because we do not want to hurt or offend our spouse. We are concerned about what their response might be, so we are less than clear and honest. We can be clear and honest and at the same time speak the truth in love. Paul exhorts,

Therefore, laying aside falsehood, SPEAK TRUTH EACH ONE of you WITH HIS NEIGHBOR, for we are members of one another. (Eph 4:25)

PRACTICAL COMMUNICATION SKILL

On Day 2, I introduced the first of four communication skills—acknowledging—to help you be “quick to listen.” Today I introduce the next communication skill to help you be “slow to speak.”

SKILL #2: CAREFRONTING—SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE.

There are times when we need to have a difficult talk with our spouse. It may be a “pay now or pay later” situation. If we do not lovingly confront our spouse when there is a serious issue, it seldom just goes away. It is never easy to address the hard things, but it is necessary if we are to live in peace and love. There is a positive way to do this, and it is called “carefronting.”

Carefronting is a practical way to talk about the hard things with our spouse. It entails speaking the truth in love. Paul uses this term when he writes to the believers in Ephesus about how to have unity in the Body of Christ. He says that they should no longer act as infants,

...but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. (Eph 4:15–16)

Speaking the truth in love is being “slow to speak” because you must intentionally set aside reactionary responses that may be critical and hurtful and instead speak truth in a way that is caring and encourages your spouse.

Carefronting is demonstrating love in the manner by which we confront the hard things with our spouse. It avoids statements like the accusatorial “Why did you...” or the demanding “When are you going to...” questions. It is being honest and at the same time demonstrating love in our attitude and speech. This is not easy when we have strong feelings about an issue.

The Sandwich Concept

There is an example in the book of Revelation that I call the “sandwich concept” and demonstrates how we can speak the truth in love.

 **SEARCH THE WORD**

Read Revelations 2:1-6.

Observe how Jesus carefronts the church in Ephesus in truth and love. See if you can discover the “sandwich concept.”

1. *In verses 2-3, what type of comments does Jesus make? Are they positive or negative?*

2. *In verses 6-7, does Jesus discuss positive or negative issues?*

3. *What is sandwiched in between in verses 4-5?*

4. *Overall, how many positive comments were there in comparison to negative comments?*

Jesus starts out “carefronting” by making seven encouraging statements. He first mentions the people’s positive traits—what he appreciates about them. This is the first “slice of bread” of the sandwich. It is only then that he carefronts them with the main issue. They have forsaken their first love. He is then very specific about what they need to do to resolve the issue (Jesus, of course, is Lord—I don’t recommend you direct your spouse how to resolve the problem in this way). That is the “meat” of the sandwich.

But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first.... (Re 2:4–5)

Jesus completes carefronting by telling the truth in love with one last statement of affirmation. This finishes the sandwich with the second piece of bread.

Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. (Re 2:6)

There is great wisdom in how Jesus carefronts. Often when we need to confront our spouse, we do so in anger only focusing on what we think they have done wrong. This usually results in hurt feelings and defensiveness from our spouse. He/she is unable to hear what we say because of feeling attacked and unappreciated. This may not be our intent, but it is the unintended consequence. The sandwich principle can change that scenario. When we start by affirming our spouses, mentioning the things we appreciate about them, it sets a positive tone for the hard things that come next, particularly if they are related to the issue you are about to address. You affirm that you value your spouse. The final piece of “bread” reminds them that you really are aware of their positive qualities and appreciate them.

The sandwich principle will help you be “*slow to speak*” as you prepare to approach the issue you need to talk about. **First**, think about something or some things you appreciate about your spouse. **Next**, share your concern and suggest how you think it can be resolved. **Finally**, complete the sandwich with another affirmation. This is not some magic formula that will take all the tension out of this kind of discussion, but it is a way for you to tell the truth in love and perhaps provide the best opportunity for the issue to be resolved.

Example: “I want to thank you for how hard you work and your commitment to the family. I am concerned, however, about the amount of time that you have been spending at your work lately. I would like to discuss how we could have more family time together. The children and I always appreciate and enjoy the time we all spend together.”

SCRIPTURE PRAYER

Review all of the scriptures in today’s session and choose one to pray for today.

Pray _____.

1. *Read It*

2. *Think It*

3. *Pray It*

4. *Do It*

MEMORIZE AND MEDITATE

Review your anchor cards. Memorize and meditate on the memory scriptures and your Personal Anchor Points.

APPOINTMENT WITH GOD

COME IN PRAYER (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication)

HEAR AND ACT (What is God saying? What have I learned? How should I respond?)

FOLLOW (What is God doing in my life and marriage?)

DAY 4: BE SLOW TO BECOME ANGRY

*My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and **slow to become angry**, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. (Jas 1:19–20, NIV)*



Donkey Dang has a problem with anger. He is not slow to become angry. He displays that anger in a variety of ways. Sometimes his anger is obvious: he kicks and bites and causes fear. Other times his anger is more subtle, and he denies it, but it still causes hurt feelings. Anger is part of our old nature, and for us to be humble, obedient, sacrificial servants in our marriages, we need to learn how to keep the donkey in the stall.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE TEACH ABOUT ANGER?

As I began to write today's session on anger I thought, "I'm not sure I am the one that should be telling others how to be slow to anger when I have so many issues with anger myself." Then I had a second thought. Maybe I am just the right person because while I do struggle with anger, through the power of the Holy Spirit and God's word, I am much slower to become angry than I was in the past. More importantly, it is not me who is telling you how to manage your anger, it is God. It is through the transforming power of God's word that changes occur in our lives.

ANGER IN ITSELF IS NOT WRONG

Anger is a strong emotion of displeasure that often threatens our well-being or the well-being of someone else. This displeasure can range from relatively mild feelings of frustration to out of control rage. Anger is a natural human emotion and is neither right nor wrong. Under some circumstances, it can be good, motivating us to correct injustice in our world. But more often, it is bad, motivating wrong actions that hurt people. Scripture reveals that God becomes angry, but that his anger is always in response to sin, and it is tempered by the fact that He is also holy and abounding in love. Nehemiah was angry for a good reason, but at the same time, he managed his anger by being slow to anger (Ne 5:6-7). On the other hand, Saul's anger burned and was evil (1 Sa 18:7-9).

MAN'S ANGER IS ALWAYS WRONG

While we can remain righteous when we become angry upon witnessing an affront to God, as humans our anger is more often focused on ourselves. Our anger frequently arises out of our own sinful pride. We also allow our angry feelings to turn into sinful actions, or we dwell on our anger and develop sinful attitudes and allow bitterness to develop, and that is wrong. This is what the Bible means when it talks about "man's anger" (i.e., human anger). There is a difference between experiencing the emotion of anger and developing an angry attitude or taking angry actions. God's word does not say that anger in itself is sin; it is the source of our anger and how we respond to that anger can make our action(s) sinful. If we hang on to the anger and do not resolve it, it becomes sin. Paul says,

"In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. (Eph 4:26–27, NIV)

Janet and I made a commitment years ago to settle any anger issues before the sun goes down. We had some late nights, but we never let our anger carry over to the next day. We also resolved to not carry grudges that could grow into bitterness.

 **SEARCH THE WORD**

The Bible makes it clear that “man’s anger” is always wrong. Look up the following scriptures and identify the wrong attitudes/actions or the proper response to anger. List them below by the scripture reference, as well as any consequences. Make a check mark by any attitudes or actions of anger that are true of you.

Proverbs 16:32

Proverbs 29:22

Proverbs 15:1

Proverbs 14:17

Matthew 5:22

Colossians 3:8

WHAT ABOUT YOUR ANGER?

Most, if not all of us, tend to deny our anger. We often will say, “I’m not angry; I’m just frustrated” or “I’m just upset or hurt.” The truth is that no matter what we choose to call our feelings of displeasure, it is still anger. While we all become angry at times, what causes us to become angry and how we express that anger differs greatly. If we are going to be “*slow to become angry*,” it is important to understand and acknowledge our anger.

THE THREE BURNERS OF ANGER

The three-burner stove example helps show three major differences in the way people deal with anger. Some have a hot burner, some a cold burner and still others a warm burner.

The Hot Burner

The “hot burner” is the one I personally know best. I am a hot burner person. I have improved significantly in this area, but I still fail at times. A biblical term for this burner is “quick tempered” (Pr 14:17). It is always regarded as sin. A hot burner person gets angry quickly, expresses it aggressively and sometimes gets over his anger quickly. The problem is that the target of the anger gets burned and often does not get over the effects quickly. This is especially true if the anger is expressed physically in any way or with words that are hurtful. Sometimes what looks like sudden anger has been fueled by suppressed feelings. The person has been pressing down or denying his or her feelings of anger, and the person eventually builds up pressure and explodes. This is especially true in cases of physical abuse when there is a “build up, blow up, make up” pattern in a relationship. This out-of-control anger often destroys a marriage. If this is true in your marriage, I encourage you to get competent help with a Christian counselor who is experienced in domestic violence.

The Cold Burner

“Cold burner” people are those who deny their anger. They do not explode or express anger in a clear, aggressive way. When they become angry, they don’t burn you up; they freeze you out. Their actions and attitudes are not expressed openly, but in subtle ways. This kind of anger is referred to as passive/aggressive behavior. A cold burner person might be hurt or upset about something and not say a word to his or her spouse. The anger is expressed in other ways, such as by distancing oneself from the other person. It might also be expressed by withholding affection, or by being silent. If not resolved, the issue can deepen into long term resentment or bitterness. Just as with the hot burner, a relationship can be damaged by the cold burner. (See Psalm 39:1-3.)

The Warm Burner

The warm burner is one who acknowledges his or her anger but manages it. This person has learned to be “*slow to become angry*” because he or she knows that man’s anger “*does not produce the righteous life that God desires*” for their marriage. They may be “hot burner” or “cold burner” people, or somewhere in between, but they are being transformed by the word and have learned to be slow to become angry, not only in their marriages but in all of their relationships.

REFLECT AND RESPOND

What do you think? Are you a hot, cold, or warm burner person?

HOW TO BECOME SLOW TO ANGER

What you have learned this week about communication is a good foundation for managing your anger. If you learn to be quick to listen and slow to speak, you will have developed skills and attitudes that will help you express your anger in appropriate ways. Following are some ways to become slow to anger.

THINK IT OUT

Renew Your Mind


God's word and prayer are two resources that provide the foundation for our strategic anchors. First, we need to think out our response to anger by renewing our minds on the word of God.

Memorize and meditate on specific scriptures that target anger.

Memorization and meditation have helped me become slower to become angry. I regularly review and meditate on anger-related scriptures that target specific weaknesses. These include James 1:19-20 and Psalm 37:1-6.

REFLECT AND RESPOND

Think about your weaknesses as they relate to anger, and then review the scriptures on anger in today's session.

Write down one or two scriptures that you believe will help you to be slow to become angry. 

Think About What is Behind Your Anger

Know your anger. What "burner" best describes you? What's behind your anger? What is the source? What usually triggers your anger? In my first ministry, there were several times I allowed my hot burner to explode. I knew that I had to change. I started thinking about why I became so angry in certain situations. I eventually recognized it happened when I thought someone was talking down to me. I interpreted what was being said and how it was said as a slight against my competency or intelligence. I came to realize that this was not the case. In reality, my low self-worth made it difficult to take criticism in any form. If anger is an issue with you, set aside some time to think about what might be behind the anger and how God wants you to deal with it.

Develop a Strategy

The strategy I developed was to start telling myself the biblical truth about the way I was dealing with criticism. I started to change my thinking and memorize related scriptures. This weakness did not disappear. I still do not like what I consider criticism, but over time, I have been able to deal with criticism in a more constructive way.

PRAY IT OUT

Give Your Anger to God.

We can give our anger to God. He understands our hurts, and our frustrations. He knows the pain of being misunderstood and ridiculed. Whatever the source of our anger, He wants to help. In Psalms, there is a wonderful passage that has an answer for our anger. Even if our anger is justified, fretting, which leads to angry actions is not. Psalms 37 says,

Rest in the LORD and wait patiently for Him; Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, Because of the man who carries out wicked schemes. Cease from anger and forsake wrath; Do not fret; it leads only to evildoing. (Ps 37:7–8)

When we are angry, we often fret, repeating the situation in our mind. This does not help. We become angrier as we rehearse the source of our anger. Our angry feelings become angry actions. The solution in this Psalm is to take our mind off the injustice we perceive and “*rest in the LORD,*” and wait patiently for Him. Talk to Him about what is bothering you. Ask Him for His guidance and to correct any misinterpretations you may have regarding the situation. Confess your anger to Him and ask for forgiveness. Trust Him to resolve the situation and to give you the power to forgive.

Prayer is the Answer to Anger and Disputing.

Prayer has the supernatural power to take our focus off ourselves and the source of our anger and heal relationships. When we pray, we enter God’s presence and receive his perspective and power. Paul said,

Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension. (1 Ti 2:8)

The emphasis of this verse is the attitude of the heart. When we lift up holy hands in prayer in God’s presence, He has a miraculous way of healing our wounds, calming our emotions and renewing our minds with His perspective. How is it possible to fret or be bitter against someone when we are praying for them? Prayer transforms us. That is why it is so important to pray for our spouse on a regular basis. Together Times are a wonderful opportunity to pray and thank God for our spouse on a regular basis. You will be amazed at what prayer for one another will do for any anger or resentment you might be having.

TALK IT OUT

Anger needs to be expressed appropriately. The skills you have been learning this week will help. We need to start by expressing our anger and frustrations to God. Acknowledging what is deep in our hearts helps us to gain clarity and respond to the issues that trouble us. (See Psalm 39:1-7)

Often it helps to talk to a godly friend who will listen but who is never afraid to give godly counsel or correction when we need it. When the anger involves conflict with our spouse, talk directly to him/her after you have had time to think and pray about the situation. Rather than bury the anger and hurt, where it can turn into resentment and grow into bitterness, talking it out, even when difficult, is necessary. Try to pick a time when your emotions have calmed down. A good time to do this is when you have your Together Times.

WORK IT OUT

I have found that I need physical exercise to maintain emotional stability. That is a primary way I release stress. Stress of any kind lowers our resistance to handle disappointments, frustrations and conflict. When we are tired and stressed out, the burners can start heating up. It can also help to “work it out” after you

have become angry. People do this in a variety of ways. Some do it by cleaning the house, doing a workout, walking, running, biking, or some other type of physical activity. This can help calm our emotions and give us a chance to think and pray. Talk it out **after** you have worked it out, when you are prepared to discuss things in a more reasonable manner.

PRACTICAL COMMUNICATION SKILL

You have already learned practical communication skills to help you be quick to listen and slow to speak. Today, I have a skill that will help you be slow to anger. Ironically, this communication skill is all about not communicating, at least for a short period of time, to prevent poor communications, such as an angry outburst.

SKILL #3: TAKE A TIMEOUT

Timeout is an age-old solution and is still one of the best options. Know your triggers—what tends to make you angry—recognize when the donkey is trying to get out of the stall, and count to 10. Take a timeout when you feel yourself becoming angry and you realize you might blow up or say or do something hurtful. When Nehemiah was leading the huge task of rebuilding the gate around Jerusalem after the exile, some of the “nobles and officials” were charging poor people extremely high interest for money they borrowed to pay their taxes. He used this skill when he became angry. Nehemiah wrote,

When I heard their outcry and these charges, I was very angry. I pondered them in my mind and then accused the nobles and officials. I told them, "You are exacting usury from your own countrymen!" So I called together a large meeting to deal with them and said: "As far as possible, we have bought back our Jewish brothers who were sold to the Gentiles. Now you are selling your brothers, only for them to be sold back to us!" They kept quiet, because they could find nothing to say. (Neh 5:6-8, NIV)

Nehemiah was “very angry” because of the injustice that was being forced on the poor. But even though his burner was hot, it was not “man’s anger.” It was righteous anger. Still, he did not allow his anger to turn into sinful angry actions, but he took time to “think it out,” and I’m quite sure “pray it out.” He “pondered” the situation in his mind, and when he was ready to confront the leaders, he acted. We need to take timeouts when we realize our burner is heating up. This does not mean storming out of the house or some other kind of angry exit. In some situations, it might mean saying to your spouse. “I’m becoming angry, and I need to take a timeout. I don’t want to try to talk now, but I’ll be back in _____.”

It is the concept of the timeout that is important, not exactly how you do it. The purpose is to prevent outbursts and give yourself time to calm down, think and pray before you speak. Practice counting to ten—or higher. Engage your mind by recognizing how your body is reacting to your anger and breathe slowly and evenly. Recall those scriptures that help you and reach out to your God in prayer. The timeout is an important skill in learning how to “be slow to become angry.”

SCRIPTURE PRAYER

Review the scriptures in each of the four principles of “be slow to become angry” and choose one to pray for today.

Pray _____.

1. *Read It*

2. *Think It*

3. *Pray It*

4. *Do It*



MEMORIZE AND MEDITATE

Review your anchor cards. Memorize and meditate on the memory scriptures and your Personal Anchor Points.

APPOINTMENT WITH GOD

COME IN PRAYER (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication)

HEAR AND ACT (What is God saying? What have I learned? How should I respond?)

FOLLOW (What is God doing in my life and marriage?)

DAY 5: THE SERVANT'S WAY OF RESOLVING CONFLICT

But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels. The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged.... (2 Ti 2:23–24)

When we hear the word conflict, we all have thoughts and images of what that means based on our experiences and beliefs. If you were raised in an emotionally or physically abusive home, your view of conflict will likely be negative. If you were raised in a home where differences and disagreements were worked out in a civil way, then your view of conflict would be more positive. Our diverse ways of viewing conflict are based on our past and present experiences. No matter what our view, conflict is a part of life, including marriages. Conflict is not wrong, but quarreling is. Quarreling is a heated argument or disagreement over an issue. Today we will look at some ways to resolve conflict in our marriages without quarreling.

UNDERSTANDING CONFLICT

The history and etymology of the word conflict comes from the fifteenth century. The original Latin definition of the word was the act of striking together. As long as there are differences in marriage there will be “striking together.” This striking together can be productive or destructive. We choose which one it will be.

CONFLICT IS NATURAL AND NEUTRAL

Conflict, in itself, is neither good nor bad, but natural and neutral. As with anger, it is the source of conflict and the attitudes and actions taken to resolve it that are good or bad. As Christians we let the Bible have the final word on what conflict is and the attitudes and actions we must take to resolve conflict in a godly, constructive way.

THERE ARE DIFFERENT LEVELS OF CONFLICT

As long as there are human beings on earth, there will be conflict. Conflict is a result of differences in how we think, what we believe, what we value, and what we expect or need. The level of conflict depends on how strongly we feel about a difference and how we resolve it. Conflict can be about anything, from minor differences and disagreements to arguments and quarrels that produce disunity or even fighting. As with anger, conflict in a marriage can be overt or covert, out in the open or hidden, but still destructive.

THERE ARE SOME SOURCES, ATTITUDES AND ACTIONS OF CONFLICT THAT ARE ALWAYS WRONG

When the Apostle Paul was giving his young disciple Timothy instructions, he stressed how a servant was to handle conflict in a godly way.

But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels. The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged.... (2 Ti 2:23–24)

Many of the arguments that Janet and I have had were relatively minor and more than a few were stupid and foolish. A lot could have been avoided by the counsel Paul gave Timothy. There are a lot of conflicts we can avoid by not letting Donkey Dang out of the stall. Think about how it would change things if we just avoided the foolish arguments and focused on being kind, teachable, and patient instead of being resentful.

SEARCH THE WORD

Following are some scriptures that demonstrate when the sources, attitudes and actions involved in conflict are always wrong. Look up each of the scriptures and list what makes each conflict wrong.

Galatians 5:19-21

Ephesians 4:31

James 4:1-3

Romans 12:17-19

THE SERVANT'S WAY OF RESOLVING CONFLICT

Married couples usually develop a distinctive pattern of resolving conflict. Some are able (usually by trial and error) to work out a pattern that works for them. If that is true of you and that pattern works, don't try to fix it! If you need to improve the way you resolve conflict, it is helpful to think about your pattern and what is working and what is not working. Then you can decide what needs to be changed and act on it. If you have proven over time that how you are trying to resolve conflict does not work, does it make sense to keep using the same pattern? But, that is what we often do. There is this saying that I heard years ago that sums up the fallacy of following patterns that we know don't work. The grammar is not great, but the wisdom is:

If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always got.

Following are five major areas of conflict resolution with biblical principles that can help you change the pattern of how you resolve conflict in your marriage. The first two are brief reminders of principles that you already learned. The last three contain some new ideas.

FOUR STRATEGIC ANCHORS

Keep reviewing Philippians 2:2-8 and the four Personal Anchor Points you highlighted on your weekly anchor cards.

Be One

You are a team working out a solution that will glorify God. You are completing one another not competing with one another. Bring your unique gifts to the table and work towards win/win.

Be Selfless

Remember to focus on your spouse’s interests not just your own.

Be Humble

Pride is one of the greatest hindrances to resolving conflict. When we are convinced we are right, it is difficult to listen to and value the other person’s point of view.

Be a Servant

Check your servant attitude. Ask yourself, “Have I emptied myself and am I truly an obedient servant, laying down my life for my spouse?”

FOUR BIBLICAL PRACTICES

Rate your skill level in the following four areas:

Be Quick to Listen

1-NEVER 2-SOMETIMES 3-OFTEN 4-ALWAYS

Be Slow to Speak

1-NEVER 2-SOMETIMES 3-OFTEN 4-ALWAYS

Be Slow to Become Angry

1-NEVER 2-SOMETIMES 3-OFTEN 4-ALWAYS

Resolve Conflict as a Servant

1-NEVER 2-SOMETIMES 3-OFTEN 4-ALWAYS

What biblical practice is most important for me to learn? _____

FOUR ATTITUDES

When we are resolving conflict with our spouse there are four attitudes that we need to project. These often get lost in the heat of the moment.

I Care About You

We show this by caring more about our spouse than resolving any issue. We also show this by “bearing with one another in love” (Eph 4:2).

I Respect You

Even when we strongly disagree with our spouse, we need to show respect for him/her. God’s word says “Honor everyone” (1 Pe 2:17). We do this by the way we talk and by focusing on the issue and not one another’s character.

I Value Your Opinion


Sometimes when we present our issues and differences, we project our opinions as superior. I used to do this a lot. I had to work on my arrogance and valuing Janet’s way of looking at things. When we devalue a person’s opinions it can seem that we are devaluing them. We need the following attitude of love:

Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered... (1 Co 13:4–5)

I Want What is Best for You

This attitude is important to develop because you should always want what is best for your spouse. I know that Janet wants what’s best for me. Janet knows I want what’s best for her. When we have strong disagreements, it helps immensely if we believe that our spouse has our back and wants what’s best for us. That trust helps us work through the hard things. It helps us to stop our self-seeking and seek the good of our spouse as well as ourselves.

Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification. For even Christ did not please Himself... (Ro 15:2–3)

Is there an attitude I need to work on? _____ 

FOUR ACTIONS

Set Aside Time to Resolve Issues

We often try to resolve issues at the wrong time, perhaps when we are frustrated or angry. While this is bound to happen at times, we should considering taking a time out and setting a neutral time to discuss the issue. As I have mentioned before, your Together Time is an excellent opportunity to work on the issue.

Define the Issue


Try to discuss one issue at a time. Work at discovering the core issue, not just symptoms. We often try to resolve issues when we haven’t agreed on what the real issue is. See if you can agree on what the core issue is and then move ahead with the discussion.

Focus on the Issue Rather Than Your Spouse

Avoid making statements that attack your spouse’s character or motives. Stay focused on the core issue. When you refer to behavior that you would like to see changed, do it in a respectful way.

Avoid Quarreling

As you observed from 2 Ti 2:23–24, quarreling (heated disagreement) is always wrong. It achieves nothing but hard feelings and resentment. When quarreling, the goal is not to resolve an issue but to win an argument. That is not exactly the servant’s way of resolving conflict!

Which of these actions do I need to develop in our marriage? _____ 

PRACTICAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS

During days 2 through 4 of this week, I gave you three very practical skills for good communications:

- Acknowledging
- Carefronting
- Taking a Timeout

Good communication skills are essential to resolving conflict the servant’s way and putting into practice the biblical principles learned in this session. So, now your task is to start using these communications skills while applying the principles covered this week. Conflict resolution is difficult, and it is learned over a period of time by trial and error. I realize that there has been a ton of stuff thrown at you this week, and some of you are probably feeling overwhelmed. Give yourself permission to learn these principles one step at a time at a reasonable pace. But know this: they will not become engrained in your daily life unless you intentionally practice them.



MEMORIZE AND MEDITATE

Review your anchor cards. Memorize and meditate on the memory scriptures and your Personal Anchor Points.


APPOINTMENT WITH GOD

COME IN PRAYER (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication)

HEAR AND ACT (What is God saying? What have I learned? How should I respond?)

FOLLOW (What is God doing in my life and marriage?)

PERSONAL ANCHOR POINT

You should now develop your Personal Anchor Point. Review and reflect on what you have learned this week and what God may have laid on your heart as the week progressed. Pray for God's direction in developing your Personal Anchor Point. As a reminder, your Personal Anchor Point is a specific practice you will implement in your daily walk to strengthen your connection to this week's anchor. It includes the key point you learned and the action you will take in response. See page 6 for more information. 

TOGETHER TIME

While you will use the following outline to prepare for and guide your Together Time, this week has a key addition. **Your assignment as a couple for this Together Time is to choose, and work to resolve, a conflict or issue.** Use several of the biblical principles in this week's study to help you resolve the issue. Remember that the servant's way is win/win, not win/lose. Foremost, it involves having the attitude of Jesus. It is becoming a servant and wanting what is best for your spouse as well as expressing your own thoughts, feelings and desires. It is learning to resolve your issues in a way that brings glory to God.

Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. (1 Co 10:31)

SHARING SCRIPTURE TOGETHER (One in Mind)

Share with one another what you learned from this week's study. What scriptures spoke to you? What is most important for you to put into practice? Share some highlights from your Appointment with God journal.

DISCUSSING OUR RELATIONSHIP (One in Love)

*Share and discuss your Personal Anchor Point and any other issues that you feel are important in your relationship. **As a couple, use this time to decide upon and work on resolving a conflict or issue.***

PLANNING OUR CALENDAR (One in Purpose)

Go over your calendars for the following week. Schedule when you will have your next Together Time. Make sure you both have calendars so you can schedule together. Discuss, “does our calendar demonstrate our purpose in life to glorify God?”

PRAYING TOGETHER (One in Spirit)

Praise God and give thanks to Him. Pray for one another. Ask, “How can I pray for you?” Always remember to thank God for your spouse. Pray for any personal needs. Pray that God will be glorified in your marriage.

SECTION 3: PROTECTION AND RENEWAL

INTRODUCTION

You have learned the foundational anchors you need to ground yourself in the Truth and be the God-glorifying husband or wife you are called to be:

- The Sovereignty of God
- The Word of God
- The Cornerstone of Christ
- The Glory of God

You have also learned the strategic anchors—core biblical truths that require specific actions—to help you stabilize your marriage and keep you on course.

- Be One
- Be Selfless
- Be Humble
- Be a Servant

We also discussed biblical practices, attitudes, and actions, plus practical communication skills to help you deploy those anchors. Just like learning to use a sea anchor appropriately, using these strategic anchors and employing the skills discussed will require intentional practice.

In this final section we will discuss practical ways to guard your marriage, and you will have an opportunity to renew your covenant with your spouse.

WEEKLY TOPICS

Week 9: Guard Your Marriage

Week 10: Your Covenant Renewal

WEEK 9: GUARD YOUR MARRIAGE

Unless the LORD builds the house, They labor in vain who build it; Unless the LORD guards the city, The watchman keeps awake in vain. (Ps 127:1)

ANCHOR CARD

Guarding your marriage is an essential component of being one. It is both a foundational and strategic anchor that protects your marriage from the evil one who would like nothing better than to destroy it. As I stressed throughout this study, we cannot build a godly marriage on our own strength. Unless the Lord builds our house, we will have labored in vain. This week you will learn a biblical strategy that you can use on a weekly basis to protect your marriage.

Begin by creating your anchor card for the week. As described on page 6, write the Anchor for this week at the top of an index card or in your electronic notes program, followed by the Anchor Scripture and Anchor Prayer.

ANCHOR SCRIPTURE

...So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth. "I hate divorce," says the Lord God of Israel.... (Mal 2:15-16, NIV)

ANCHOR PRAYER

Lord, I know that the evil one would like to destroy the oneness You have given me in my marriage. I pray that You will protect my marriage by Your mighty power. I will, by Your strength, guard my spirit and not break faith with my spouse, by putting on the full armor You have provided for me.

DAILY TOPICS

Day 1: Breaking Faith—Ten Steps That Lead to an Affair

Day 2: The King's Affair

Day 3: Guard Yourself in Your Spirit

Day 4: Build a Wall of Prayer Around Your Marriage

Day 5: Pray on the Armor of God

DAY 1: BREAKING FAITH—TEN STEPS THAT LEAD TO AN AFFAIR

...So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth. (Mal 2:15, NIV)

We begin this week's session with a short review of some information on the covenant of marriage that we covered in week one. The Prophet Malachi rebuked the priests and people for their unfaithfulness. They had turned away from God and had not set their hearts to honor God's name and His covenant (Mal 2:1-2). He asked them two piercing questions to remind them of the reason they should honor their covenant with God.

Do we not all have one father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously each against his brother so as to profane the covenant of our fathers? (Mal 2:10)

The spiritual leaders, and therefore the people, had forgotten their identity. They no longer knew or seemed to care who they were. They had forgotten that they had only one Father God and it was He who created them. God made a covenant with them. They were breaking faith with one another by breaking the sacred covenant of marriage to be one. They were profaning God by breaking that covenant.

GUARD YOUR MARRIAGE

Has not the Lord made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth. "I hate divorce," says the Lord God of Israel. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith. (Mal 2:15-16, NIV)

The clear message from God to His people is that we must do everything possible to guard our marriages from unfaithfulness. First, we must never forget our identity in Christ. It is God who has made us and given us the identity of His Son. We are His in flesh and Spirit. He is our Cornerstone. He has also made us one flesh in our marriages, and we are never to break that unity by being unfaithful in any way. Twice in this passage God's word says, "So guard yourself in your spirit and do not break faith."

BREAKING FAITH IN MARRIAGE

We break faith by disobeying God's covenant with us to be one in "flesh and spirit" (Mal 2:15, NIV). We are united in our flesh through physical intimacy. We are united in our spirit "by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose" (Php 2:2). We break faith when we do anything that destroys the one flesh and spirit that God intends for our marriages. Divorce and marrying outside the faith are specifically mentioned in this passage; however, there are other ways we can break faith.

Sexual immorality is specifically targeted by Paul in his letter to the Corinthians.

Read 1 Corinthians 6:12-19.

Any kind of sexual immorality breaks the sacred bond of one flesh in marriage. Sex is a gift from God and designed exclusively for marriage. God's word clearly says that any sex outside of marriage is sin.

Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge. (Heb 13:4)

HOW TO GUARD AGAINST AFFAIRS

In my thirty-some years of pastoral counseling in churches and in private practice, I have counseled dozens of couples whose marriages have been damaged or destroyed by affairs and adultery. I have seen a pattern that causes affairs. I want to share these “steps that lead to an affair” so that you can guard your heart against it happening in your marriage. Because most affairs occur from “sliding down the slippery slope” described in James 1:13-15, being alert to dangers can prevent you from taking that first step towards the edge.

Affairs are not the only way couples break faith with one another and divorce. Because affairs occur so often and because they cause so much damage, I want to give special attention to preventing them from happening. I know this will be an intense time for some and may bring up memories and feelings. I hope that dealing with this will give hope to everyone, no matter what the situation, as you learn to guard your marriage. There are many variations and sequences, but affairs often follow a pattern.

THE SLIPPERY SLOPE

There are relationships that might not be considered sexually immoral, but still are inappropriate and often can lead to an affair. A total break in faith seldom happens suddenly. Most often, an affair happens when a spouse does not guard his or her marriage and is not alert to temptation. A first compromise is made, and the slippery slope of sinful desire and temptation is set in motion. To see how this can happen, let's look at God's word.

SEARCH THE WORD

Read James 1:13-15.

Explain the slippery slope of temptation and desire in your own words. How does the danger start? How does it end?

TEN STEPS THAT LEAD TO AN AFFAIR

Affairs are all too common, even among believers. Unfortunately, the difference between believers and nonbelievers in the occurrences of affairs, divorce and sexual immorality of all kinds is minimal according to surveys (The Barna Group). We will look closely at the patterns of how affairs happen and more importantly, how to prevent them. An affair can happen in any marriage. No one is completely immune to attraction and temptation. It is not attraction alone that causes affairs, it is inappropriate action. It can be overcome by recognizing when you are attracted to someone and being prepared to make the right choices. It is a mistake to think that physical or sexual attraction is the only attraction that leads to intimacy and affairs. Men and women are attracted to one another in a variety of ways. Some are attracted to another person's intellect (how they think). Others are attracted because of mutual interests. Men and women can be attracted to one another spiritually. Any attraction, if not acknowledged and guarded against, can and often will grow into an emotional or physical affair.

DEFINITION OF AN AFFAIR: An affair is a relationship, whether emotional or physical, when one's focus turns from his/her spouse to another person.

Affairs are not limited to sexual immorality. The sacred covenant of marriage to be one flesh can be broken emotionally as well as sexually. Husbands and wives are one, and no interaction with those of the opposite sex should in any way threaten that sacred oneness. Other inappropriate intimacies such as spiritual or even social should be avoided. Paul said,

*But among you there must not be **even a hint** of sexual immorality, or of **any kind of impurity**, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. (Eph. 5:3)*

1. A PERSON IS NOT AT THE RIGHT PLACE WITH GOD

When a person is not at the right place with God, the person becomes vulnerable to all kinds of temptations, including the temptation to become involved in an affair. A major focus of this study has been on being at the right place with God. When we are not abiding, our essential needs for identity, value and significance are not well-defined, and we often look for these needs to be met by our spouse or some outside source or person. We can be dragged away and enticed by the desire to have someone fill that empty spot. I believe this is a root cause of most affairs. When a person is not at the right place with God, they are often not at the right place with their spouse. Spiritual intimacy with God and our spouse should go together. Husbands and wives must guard their marriages by making their relationship with God and one another a priority.

2. THERE IS AN ATTRACTION, AND A RELATIONSHIP IS INITIATED

Initial encounters that lead to attraction are often innocent. This can happen at such places as church, school, work, or a health club. As a relationship develops, a mutual attraction can develop.

3. THE INITIAL INTERACTIONS MEET UNRESOLVED NEEDS OR DESIRES. THE INTERACTIONS INCREASE IN FREQUENCY AND INTENSITY.

Because they enjoy one another, there is an illusion that they are having their needs for value and significance met by each other. The illusion is fed by the fact that they are together for only the good times, and they are being driven by high-octane feelings.

4. THERE IS FURTHER INTERACTION AND A FIRST COMPROMISE IS MADE

As the interaction continues the feelings for one another grow. They enjoy being around each other. At this point, one or both recognize that they are becoming more than just friends, and a first compromise occurs. When Christians who have had an affair are asked how it could happen, they will often refer to the "first compromise." That compromise opens the door to the slippery slope and further compromises follow until the sin is "full grown" and the person finds himself in bondage.

5. AT SOME POINT THERE IS USUALLY A DISCUSSION OF THE SPOUSE'S WEAKNESS AND THE OTHER PERSON'S STRENGTHS.

At this stage both begin to believe that they have finally found someone who will make them happy and fulfilled. "Finally," they think, "I have found someone who truly values me and who really listens." They think they have found their "soul mate." What these people forget is that they once thought the same thing about their own spouse during the romantic stage of their relationship. Now they merely have a different brand of rose-colored glasses that filter out the reality of their situation. It is called "spiritual blindness." Neither person is walking in the light but dwelling in darkness (1 Jn 1:5-7).

6. EMOTIONAL AND PHYSICAL DISTANCE WITH THE SPOUSE INCREASES

The unfaithful spouse's emotional focus cannot be in two places at the same time. When the emotional focus is directed towards someone else, there is little left behind for the spouse. The spouse usually senses something is wrong, but the unfaithful spouse will usually deny that there is anything wrong. When you are living a lie, telling a lie is not difficult. The unfaithful spouse may go through the motions, but there are no true emotions or commitment.

7. THE UNFAITHFUL SPOUSE USUALLY HAS CONFLICTING FEELINGS: GUILT, SADNESS, BUT ALSO EXCITEMENT AND IS "IN LOVE." HE/SHE CAN BE ANGRY TOWARDS SELF BUT EXPRESSES IT TOWARDS THE SPOUSE.

The person having the affair usually has a mix of ambivalent feelings. There is, of course, the excitement and passion that he or she feels towards the other person. But mixed in with these feelings is the anxiety over being caught, what might happen to the family, and a host of other consequences the person might allow himself/herself to consider. There is also some guilt over the actions that are an affront to God and a sin against the spouse and others. The person having the affair usually directs his or her anger at the spouse. To justify the affair, the person "demonizes" his or her spouse, claiming that there is no redeeming quality in him or her.

8. THE UNFAITHFUL SPOUSE LOSES "LOVE FEELINGS" TOWARDS HIS/HER MATE AND SAYS HE/SHE IS NO LONGER "IN LOVE" WITH THAT SPOUSE.

Now that the unfaithful spouse has broken faith by entering into an ungodly relationship with another person, his/her emotional focus has shifted from the spouse to the other person. The unfaithful spouse is now ruled by what he/she feels for the other person. The biblical definition of love is a decision and commitment, not just a feeling (1 Co 13), but the unfaithful spouse has rejected this, and the sacred covenant of marriage is dishonored. The person is truly walking in darkness.

9. A DECISION IS MADE AS TO WHETHER TO MAKE THE AFFAIR PHYSICAL.

It may not be a conscious decision, but it is a decision that has been in the making. If the affair becomes sexual, the power and darkness of illicit sex takes over, and there is usually no turning back unless the affair is exposed and there is true repentance. The unfaithful spouse continues to rationalize the affair by saying things like, "We were never really meant for each other;" "Surely God would not want me to continue in this kind of loveless relationship;" "He/she is not the person I married;" or even, "I know God brought this new person into my life."

10. A DECISION IS MADE TO SEPARATE, DIVORCE, OR CONTINUE THE MARRIAGE.

This is usually a difficult decision for the person to make. Even a person who walks in darkness can see some of the destructive consequences of a divorce. There are finances, children, possible alienation with family members and friends, and a long-term relationship with the spouse to consider. The person having the affair might vacillate at this point, driving his/her spouse crazy. Sometimes there is a separation because people having affairs often "need space" so they can "find themselves." Often this separation is merely one more step toward divorce.


THERE IS ALWAYS HOPE

I know that today's study has been difficult, but I want to leave you with this thought. There is always hope, no matter what your situation. It is through Christ that we are anchored in hope, not our circumstances. Remember that it is God who is working in and through you. As you progress through this week's study, you will learn how to guard your marriage.



REFLECT AND RESPOND

What thoughts do you have about this information? What questions?

What can you take away from today's study that will be helpful to you? 



SCRIPTURE PRAYER

Pray Malachi 2:15-16.

1. *Read It*

2. *Think It*

3. *Pray It*

4. *Do It*



MEMORIZE AND MEDITATE

Review your anchor cards. Memorize and meditate on the memory scriptures and your Personal Anchor Points.

APPOINTMENT WITH GOD

COME IN PRAYER (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication)

HEAR AND ACT (What is God saying? What have I learned? How should I respond?)

FOLLOW (What is God doing in my life and marriage?)

DAY 2: THE KING'S AFFAIR

Now when evening came David arose from his bed and walked around on the roof of the king's house, and from the roof he saw a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful in appearance. So David sent and inquired about the woman.... (2 Sa 11:2–3)

In order to guard against having affairs in our marriages or breaking faith in any way, we need a plan. Tomorrow, we will look at five ways you can guard your marriage from an affair. However, should you let down your guard, it is critical you recognize as early as possible when you are on those steps leading to an affair. Today, we will learn from the mistakes of David, King of Israel. He was one of the great heroes of the Bible. God's word refers to him as "a man after [God's] own heart" (1 Sa 13:14; Ac 13:22). He wrote many of the amazing Psalms that encourage us, console us and help us see the love and faithfulness of God. But David disregarded the dangers of the "slippery slope" and did not guard himself or his marriage and had an adulterous affair. He suffered tragic consequences, and we can learn from his mistakes and his eventual repentance and restoration.

THE KING'S FIVE MISTAKES

David made 5 key mistakes, which not only led him down the path of lust and adultery, but ultimately to murder.

MISTAKE #1: DAVID WAS VULNERABLE BECAUSE HE WAS NOT AT THE RIGHT PLACE WITH GOD

Then it happened in the spring, at the time when kings go out to battle...But David stayed at Jerusalem. (2 Sa 11:1)

The eleventh chapter of Samuel tells in brutal detail the account of David's sin. The story starts by saying that David was not at the right place. In the spring, roads became passable and food plentiful, so kings always went with their men to war. The reason for this is not given, but David was clearly not where he was supposed to be. This indicates that he was not at the right place (in battle) but also not at the right place with God. For whatever reason, David had neglected his relationship with God and his responsibility as commander of the army of Israel.

MISTAKE #2: DAVID MADE THE FIRST COMPROMISE BY NOT RESISTING TEMPTATION

Now when evening came David arose from his bed and walked around on the roof of the king's house, and from the roof he saw a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful in appearance. So David sent and inquired about the woman.... (2 Sa 11:2–3)

David allowed his slide on the "slippery slope" to begin when he made the first compromise. When he saw Bathsheba, he did not walk away. He was at the wrong place to begin with, and when tempted, did not resist the temptation and leave. He sent someone to ask about her. He allowed himself to lust after Bathsheba. He was "carried away and enticed by his own lust" (Jas 1:14) when he made the first compromise and took the first steps to pursue a relationship with her instead of fleeing as admonished in 1 Corinthians 6:18.

MISTAKE #3: DAVID MADE A DECISION TO SIN BY COMMITTING ADULTERY

...And one said, "Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" David sent messengers and took her, and when she came to him, he lay with her.... (2 Sa 11:3–4)

This is a very concise report, but obviously David not only felt entitled but had a total disregard for God's commands and for Uriah. This was a conscious decision to break a command that he would have known. David disregarded God's clear law and committed adultery. David's desire was "conceived" and it "[gave] birth to sin" (Jas 1:15).

MISTAKE # 4: DAVID'S HEART BECAME HARD AND HE TRIED TO COVER UP HIS SIN

Now in the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it by the hand of Uriah. He had written in the letter, saying, "Place Uriah in the front line of the fiercest battle and withdraw from him, so that he may be struck down and die." (2 Sa 11:14-15)

Bathsheba became pregnant, so David tried to cover up that sin with another. He called Uriah home from the battlefield so that he would have sex with his wife. David wanted Uriah to think that he was responsible for his wife's pregnancy. It did not work because Uriah refused to sleep with his wife while the other soldiers were out in the battlefield. David became desperate and conspired to send him to the front of the battlefield where he knew Uriah would be killed. This shows how far David had fallen. Not only had he committed adultery, but he then tried to cover it up with murder.

MISTAKE # 5: DAVID ALLOWED THE SIN TO BECOME A STRONGHOLD

Now when the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she mourned for her husband. When the time of mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house and she became his wife; then she bore him a son. But the thing that David had done was evil in the sight of the LORD. (2 Sa 11:26-27)

The fall from the slippery slope was complete. What began as natural desire or attraction turned into evil desire and lust when a first compromise was made. Once sin was conceived in the mind, the act of adultery was committed. The sin was "accomplished" and brought forth "[spiritual] death" (Jas 1:15). David's sin ended up being a "stronghold."

A stronghold is any sin that grows until it has control over us. It becomes an ongoing life and death struggle. The word "stronghold" is found in the Bible 50 times. Its original meaning was a fortress built for protection with difficult access (Jdg 6:2; 1 Sa 23:14). The term "stronghold" in the Bible is also used to picture a fortress of lies that a person can build to keep God out of their lives when they sin (2 Co 10:3-5). These lies and sinful attitudes keep us in bondage to Satan, the "father of lies" (Jn 8:42-47). We try to compartmentalize our lives so we can deny our sin and avoid guilt. We keep the sin locked away in our fortress, our stronghold. While we think we have freedom, we are deceived and have become slaves to our fortress of lies, and we live in bondage to our sin (Tt 3:3). What has promised us freedom keeps us in bondage. As the Apostle Peter warned,

They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity- -for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him. (2 Pe 2:19)

There is no doubt that David had a stronghold of lies that he believed. He compartmentalized his life, so he became oblivious to the horrendous sin he committed. He became a slave to sin and was in bondage as the rest of the story reveals.

David married Bathsheba and she bore him a son. The account says, "But the thing that David had done was evil in the sight of the LORD" (2 Sa 11:27). There is no indication at this point that David had any remorse about what he did. His sin caused his heart to become hard and his eyes blind to the damage he had done. Because of this, the Lord sent the prophet Nathan to David to confront him of his sin. Nathan told David a story.

Read Samuel 12:1-10.

This heartfelt story of the beloved lamb vividly illustrates the damage an affair causes to the spouse of the person who breaks faith. An affair steals the intimacy that is meant only for marriage. David is livid when he hears the story and does not recognize that the man in the story is him.

THE KING'S STRONGHOLD IS DESTROYED

Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." And Nathan said to David, "The LORD also has taken away your sin; you shall not die." (2 Sa 12:13)

David's stronghold of lies is finally destroyed by the truth. The truth finally penetrated David's fortress of lies when he heard the story and acknowledged and repented of his sin. The truth and his confession and true repentance set him free. The Apostle Paul explains the weapons that are available to every believer to destroy any stronghold in their life.

OUR SUPERNATURAL WEAPONS

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. (2 Co 10:3-5, NIV)

The weapons at our disposal are supernatural. They are not natural—not of this world. It is not about our power, but it does involve our will to use the power of God's weapons to destroy the stronghold. The primary weapon of our warfare is the divine power of God's Spirit-empowered word. When we embrace the truth, the truth destroys our fortress of lies and sets us free. It demolishes "*arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God.*" When these lies are destroyed, we are then able to repent and "*take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*" A stronghold is ultimately destroyed when we repent and obey the truth.

It was God's word spoken through Nathan that led to the destruction of David's stronghold. The word of God destroyed the fortress of lies that David had built into his thinking. He was finally able to "*take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*" He no longer denied his sinful behavior nor excused it.

TAKE EVERY THOUGHT CAPTIVE

To destroy a stronghold, we must do our part to take every thought captive and make it obedient to God's truth. A stronghold is built when we align our thoughts to support our evil desires. It is when we believe Satan's lies. The stronghold is destroyed when we realign our thoughts with God's desire for us. We do that by replacing the lie we believed with a truth from God's word. We make it our anchor as we memorize, meditate and obey that specific truth. Simply put, we destroy a stronghold when we change the way we think and the way we act (Ro 1:1-2). There are scriptures that can be the right weapon to destroy any stronghold in our life. Use the concordance of a study bible or other resource to discover the scriptures that will enable the power of God's word to destroy your stronghold.

Strongholds come in all shapes and sizes. They are not just about sexual immorality and adultery. One size does not fit all. A stronghold is whatever "masters" us. It is something that has such a strong hold on us that we will not, or believe we can't, give it up. We come to treasure it more than anything else, and it becomes our master. Jesus clearly said,

...for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth. (Mt 6:21, 24)

Strongholds can be things we do in excess that have a strong hold on us, such as sexual immorality of any kind, exercise, work, sports, TV, internet, pornography, hobbies, money, stuff, forgiveness, drugs, lying, occult activity, anger, and rebellion.

THE KING REPENTS

The good news is that God is a God of restoration and fresh starts when we truly repent, no matter how grievous the sin. We have a record of the true nature of David's repentance in Psalm 51. As David reflects on his adultery, he showed that he was deeply aware of the hardness of his heart and the greatness of God's mercy and forgiving grace. The following excerpts are from one of David's Psalms and illustrates what true repentance looks like:

Against You, You only, I have sinned And done what is evil in Your sight, So that You are justified when You speak And blameless when You judge.... Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me.... For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise. (Ps 51:4, 10, 16–17)

True repentance always carries with it deep godly sorrow for the sin, a renewed mind and a transformed life (2 Co 7:10: Ac 26:2).

CONSEQUENCES OF AN AFFAIR

David is forgiven, but he still faces severe consequences for his sin. David is devastated by the death of his infant son. Nathan says,

However, because by this deed you have given occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also that is born to you shall surely die. (2 Sa 12:14)

When experiencing the out-of-control emotions of an affair, people ignore the heartbreaking consequences. If they could somehow fast forward and see the consequences of their actions, I think that some, perhaps many, would at least consider ending the affair.

Affairs are devastating. They destroy trust. They are like a tornado that rages through a town. You can see a tornado's path of destruction as it levels buildings, uproots trees and injures and kills people. Affairs and divorces do the same thing. They leave a path of broken promises, broken hearts, feelings of abandonment, and of loss of trust, and this usually affects more than just the two married individuals. There are also severe consequences for those who break faith and desecrate the sacred covenant of marriage. Following are ten consequences of an affair that often occur:

Ten Consequences of an Affair

1. Your sin separates you from God which damages your relationship with Him.
2. Trust with your wife/husband is broken and reconciliation and restoration will take months, if not years to be restored.
3. Significant damage is done to your wife's/husband's emotions and sense of worth.
4. Your children will be severely disappointed and lose respect for you.
5. Your reputation will be damaged and your witness to unbelievers will be worthless.
6. Because of your example, your children may lose confidence in marriage and God.

7. Your marriage could end in divorce.
8. Friends and people you influenced will lose respect and confidence in you.
9. You will suffer the consequences of God's discipline in your life.
10. Friends may avoid you or break fellowship with you.

RESTORATION AND RECONCILIATION

That's the bad news. The good news is that God always gives the opportunity for repentance and a fresh start if there is true sorrow over the sin. On Day 3 you will learn how to "affair proof" your marriage.

SCRIPTURE PRAYER

Pray 2 Corinthians 10:3-5.

1. *Read It*

5. *Think It*

6. *Pray It*

7. *Do It*

MEMORIZE AND MEDITATE

Review your anchor cards. Memorize and meditate on the memory scriptures and your Personal Anchor Points.

APPOINTMENT WITH GOD

COME IN PRAYER (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication)

HEAR AND ACT (What is God saying? What have I learned? How should I respond?)

FOLLOW (What is God doing in my life and marriage?)

DAY 3: GUARD YOURSELF IN YOUR SPIRIT

...So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth. "I hate divorce," says the Lord God of Israel.... (Mal 2:15-16, NIV)

As I mentioned in the previous session, to guard against having affairs in our marriages or breaking faith in any way, we need a plan. It is one thing to know the steps that lead to an affair but another to know specific ways to guard against it. We are told in God's word, *"therefore prepare your minds for action"* and be self-controlled (1 Pe 1:13). Today we will discuss five ways to guard your marriage by preparing your mind for action and being self-controlled. Today's study will include a review of things we have already covered.

FIVE WAYS TO GUARD YOURSELF IN YOUR SPIRIT AND NOT BREAK FAITH

STAY CLOSE TO GOD

The first way to guard your marriage is by staying close to God by abiding. We are told to guard ourselves in our spirits or souls. A common theme in this resource is that to love and obey we must **abide/dwell** with God in intimate fellowship (Jn 15:1-17; Ga 5:16-26; Eph 3:14-21). If we stay close to God in intimate fellowship, we will have the solid foundation to stay close to our spouse. By being faithful in your appointments with God, in prayer and in the word, you will build a wall of protection around your marriage. This means that you must continue practicing the disciplines you have learned in this study. Nothing is more important than this. God's power provides the ability to sustain the changes you make. The Apostle Paul urged the believers in Corinth to not just start strong but to finish strong. Reflect and respond to the following scripture as to how you will guard your marriage:

REFLECT AND RESPOND

Read 1 Corinthians 9:24–27.

1. *What does this scripture indicate is the key to staying close to God?*

2. *What are you willing to do to sustain the consistent appointments with God that you have been doing? What could cause you to lose focus?*

The Christian life is a like a marathon, not a sprint. It takes discipline and perseverance. It takes hard work and sacrifice. It requires keeping our eyes on Jesus. No matter what life throws at you; no matter how difficult your marriage becomes the only answer is to *"fix our eyes on Jesus"* (He 12;1-3).

We must make every effort to avoid getting into compromising situations. These can include being in a place where you best not go or visiting a website you should not view. It can be a touch that you know is not entirely innocent. It can include a conversation that you are not completely comfortable with or allowing yourself to be around someone to whom you are attracted. It can include compromising thoughts about another person you are attracted to. There is never such a thing as an “innocent” compromise. We are not to have “*even a hint of sexual immorality*” (Eph 5:3-4, NIV).

As we discussed, almost every affair starts with a first compromise. It is ignoring a red flag warning that alerts you to danger, that something is not right, and you need to resist and desist. By not heeding the warning means that you have compromised, and the next compromise will be easier. King David did not stay out of a compromising situation. He was somewhere he probably should not have been. He was on a roof where he could see someone bathing. He made another compromise when he did not leave immediately and lusted after Bathsheba. And you know the rest of the story. Do not allow this to be the rest of your story.

Set Boundaries


You can stay out of compromising situations by setting up some personal boundaries. Boundaries are limits we voluntarily erect to protect our marriage from temptation and compromise. A boundary is like a protective fence we put around our marriage. A boundary is a commitment we make that will keep us from compromising situations and honor our spouses.


Some examples of boundaries are:


- I will not contact previous boyfriends/girlfriends.
- I will not talk to the opposite sex about my own or their marital problems.
- I have made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at or fantasize about the opposite sex.
- I will not do things alone with or be in places with the opposite sex other than work responsibilities.
- I will not flirt because I realize that there is no such thing as “innocent” flirting.
- I will be careful with physical touch with the opposite sex
- As a couple we will agree to warn one another about any compromising situations we might see.

REFLECT AND RESPOND

Read Ephesians 5:3-4.

1. *What are some ways that you can stay out of compromising situations?* 

2. *What do you need to guard against?* 

3. *What boundaries do you think you and your spouse could set that will guard against affairs in your marriage?* 

STAY ACCOUNTABLE

During the past year, two friends asked me to be their accountability partners. One came because his marriage was in deep trouble because he had an emotional affair and had been watching pornography. The other friend was in trouble because he was addicted to pornography and had just entered a treatment program and needed an accountability partner. Both had strongholds. Perhaps these situations would not have occurred if these men had already been in an accountable relationship. Accountability helps us to be honest with God, ourselves and others. It also strengthens and encourages us.

In a culture that seems to value individualism and independence above almost everything else, being highly accountable to someone can seem almost foreign. Scripture consistently calls on us to be mutually dependent on one another. As Paul says, we are to *“be subject to one another in the fear of Christ”* (Eph 5:21).


Accountability is choosing to submit your life to the scrutiny of a godly person or persons in order to gain spiritual strength, counsel, and encouragement. God’s word exhorts us to,

...encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called “Today,” so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. (Heb 3:13)

Accountability is a significant step in guarding our marriages. It keeps us humble and focused on God, glorifying Him in our lives and marriages. Through accountability we invite someone who cares deeply for us to help us in our weak areas. Paul says,

Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any [sin], you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ. (Ga 6:1–2)

Plan for Accountability

Think about how you can stay accountable for guarding your marriage. Consider these questions: 

- Is there someone to whom you could become mutually accountable? Is there perhaps someone in this marriage group you would like to meet with?
- What specifically are you willing to be held accountable for? Are you committed to share with an accountability partner concerning your struggles in this area?
- How often would you be willing to meet?

Discuss accountability with your spouse this week during your Together Time.

MEMORIZE AND MEDITATE

Review your anchor cards. Memorize and meditate on the memory scriptures and your Personal Anchor Points.

APPOINTMENT WITH GOD

COME IN PRAYER (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication)

HEAR AND ACT (What is God saying? What have I learned? How should I respond?)

FOLLOW (What is God doing in my life and marriage?)

DAY 4: BUILD A WALL OF PRAYER AROUND YOUR MARRIAGE

On your walls, O Jerusalem, I have appointed watchmen; All day and all night they will never keep silent. You who remind the LORD, take no rest for yourselves; And give Him no rest until He establishes And makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth. (Is 62:6–7)

THE WATCHMEN ON THE WALL

In Old Testament times, the watchmen played an important role in standing guard on walls that surrounded cities and overlooked fields. The role of the watchmen was critical to peace in the cities and protection of the harvest in the fields. The watchmen who were posted on the walls around the cities were vigilant and watched for enemies who were planning an attack. When a threat was spotted, they would blast a trumpet to warn the people and then close the gates to the city and alert the owners of the fields to the impending danger.

WE ARE CALLED TO BE SPIRITUAL WATCHMEN

In Scripture, God used the role of the watchman to illustrate the job of the prophets to intercede on behalf of the people and to warn them of the danger of mingling with the godless nations and adopting their customs. I believe God is calling us to be spiritual watchmen and to pray for our marriages, our families, our nation, and God's people everywhere. The Apostle Paul concludes his instructions to guard against the evil one by exhorting believers to be alert like watchmen on the wall.

With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints.... (Eph 6:18)

As God's watchmen we are uniquely equipped to have spiritual eyes to see danger and "sound the trumpet" to warn of Satan's attacks. God has given us spiritual eyes to see and ears to hear. He has prepared us to intervene in prayer for God's people. He has also given us tongues to speak and wills to act when needed.

REMEMBER THAT THE BATTLE IS THE LORD'S

Unless the LORD builds the house, They labor in vain who build it; Unless the LORD guards the city, The watchman keeps awake in vain. (Ps 127:1)

As watchmen we are to be alert and pray for our marriages, but we should also remember that "the battle is not yours but God's" (2 Ch 20:15). It is through His power, and not our own, that the enemy is defeated. God will fight for us. When God delivered the Israelites from the Egyptians who had enslaved them, they quickly lost faith when they saw that the Egyptian army was in hot pursuit of them. They were terrified, but Moses assured them that the Lord would fight for them.

But Moses said to the people, "Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the LORD which He will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever. The LORD will fight for you while you keep silent." (Ex 14:13–14)

God miraculously intervened and parted the waters of the Red Sea so the Israelites could go through the sea on dry land. When the Egyptian army tried to follow, the Lord made the waters flow back over them and not one survived.

Another great story to remind us that the battle is the Lord's is found in the book of 2 Chronicles. Jehoshaphat, King of Judah, is warned that a vast army of three nations is about to attack. He calls all the

people together for fasting and prayer, waiting on God to tell them what to do. The answer came through a man by the name of Jahaziel.

...and he said, "Listen, all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and King Jehoshaphat: thus says the LORD to you, 'Do not fear or be dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours but God's. 'Tomorrow go down against them. Behold, they will come up by the ascent of Ziz, and you will find them at the end of the valley in front of the wilderness of Jeruel. You need not fight in this battle; station yourselves, stand and see the salvation of the LORD on your behalf, O Judah and Jerusalem.' Do not fear or be dismayed; tomorrow go out to face them, for the LORD is with you." (2 Ch 20:15–17)

God miraculously intervened by setting ambushes which caused the three nations invading Judah to destroy each other. Judah only needed to have faith, stand firm and wait for God to act. They did not have to lift a sword. While our battles are not physical battles of war as they were in Old Testament times, we still face dangerous battles. These battles are still the Lord's, not ours. As watchmen we are to have faith, watch, listen, wait, pray and intervene when needed.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF SPIRITUAL WATCHMEN

On your walls, O Jerusalem, I have appointed watchmen.... (Is 62:6)

THE WATCHMAN WATCHES

Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. (1 Pe 5:8, NIV)

Be Spiritually Alert

The watchman's primary responsibility is to watch for danger. That means that he/she must be spiritually alert. We need to pray for "spiritual eyes" so that we can see the danger we might overlook with our natural vision. Spiritual eyes see what is invisible to the natural eye (1 Co 2:9-10). The Bible tells us that we are to pray for enlightened eyes (Eph 1:17-19). We are to watch for anything that might cause us or others to fall into temptation. Jesus gave the following warning to His disciples:

And He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "So, you men could not keep watch with Me for one hour? Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." (Mt 26:40–41)

Be Self Controlled

We are not only to be spiritually alert, but also self-controlled. This means being "God-controlled." We need to respond to danger by taking the appropriate action. We are to respond by praying for godly wisdom and obedience to the word of God.

Watch Out for the Following Dangers

- Distractions—anything that can cause us to lose our focus on the priority of our relationship with God or our spouse. (He 12:1-3)
- Unresolved anger or bitterness in our marriage which gives Satan a foothold. (Eph 4:27)
- Principles of this world. Our popular culture promotes godless lies and wants to make what is evil normal behavior. Even Christians can be deceived. (Co 2:8)
- Even a "hint" of sexual immorality in our thoughts or actions. (Eph 1:3)
- Compromise of any kind that can weaken or threaten our marriage. (2 Cor 6:14-7:1)

- Unconfessed sin. (Ja 5:16)

Satan masquerades as an “angel of light” so that he can deceive us (2 Co 11:14). We need to remember that Satan is a master of illusion and deceit—he is the “*father of lies*” (Jn 8:44). If we remain spiritually alert and self-controlled, we will not be deceived by Satan.

THE WATCHMAN LISTENS

Son of man, I have appointed you a watchman to the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from My mouth, warn them from Me. (Eze 3:17)

The watchman was to listen to the voice of God. God not only spoke to the prophets, but He speaks to us today. He speaks primarily through His spirit empowered word. We need to develop enlightened ears as well as enlightened eyes. That is why it is so important to be anchored in the word of God. Through reading the Bible, studying, meditating, and scripture praying, we can receive spiritual instruction from the Holy Spirit regarding our character and our marriage. God gave us His word to instruct us (2 Ti 3:16). God can warn us of all kinds of danger and will often impress things on our hearts. The Holy Spirit can convict each of us of sin or weakness in our life that is hurting our marriage. God promises us that when we pray for wisdom, we will receive it (Jas 1:5-7)

THE WATCHMAN PERSEVERES

*On your walls, O Jerusalem, I have appointed watchmen; All day and all night they will never keep silent. You who remind the LORD, **take no rest for yourselves**; And give Him no rest until He establishes And makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth. (Is 62:6–7)*

Perhaps the most difficult thing about being a watchman on the wall is being patient and waiting for God to answer. God does not work on our timetable, and most of us want our answers now if not yesterday. As Americans we have been conditioned to think we have a right to not wait for anything, including God’s promises. We pray for our marriage, and we want our spouse to be transformed today, not tomorrow. That is not how God works. God knows what is best for us. He is more interested in our character than our comfort.

The watchman on the wall was to “*take no rest*” and give “[God] *no rest*” until God made “*Jerusalem a praise in the earth.*” That would be many years later after the exile. If we are to be a watchman on the wall, we must learn to trust God’s timing and be patient and persevere. God’s timing is perfect. He is all-knowing and therefore knows what answer is best for us. He is faithful to His promises. We are to be patient and wait for His perfect timing and answers.

This also applies when we pray for our marriage but don’t see the results we hope for. We get discouraged and sometimes are tempted to give up and stop praying. Jesus gave his disciples a parable about this.

Read Luke 18:1-8.

He told them this parable to demonstrate that “*at all times they ought to pray and **not to lose heart***” (Lk 18:1). Jesus never wanted them to get discouraged and give up.

THE WATCHMAN PRAYS

*On your walls, O Jerusalem, I have appointed watchmen; **All day and all night they will never keep silent.** You who remind the LORD, take no rest for yourselves; And give Him no rest until He establishes And makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth. (Is 62:6–7)*

The watchmen pray. They are never silent. Watching, listening, and waiting are all part of the patient and persistent prayer of watchmen. Intercessory prayer is his primary duty. We are told to intercede for others in prayer. Paul said,

First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, (1 Ti 2:1)

When we intercede on behalf of others, we plead their case in the name of Jesus (Ac 3:6; Php 2:9-10). Paul also makes sure that we understand that Jesus is the one and only mediator between us and God.

For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, (1 Ti 2:5)

As a watchman on the wall we each have the critical responsibility of guarding our marriage through intercessory prayer. Paul stressed this at the conclusion of his teaching on the full armor of God.

With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints.... (Eph 6:18)

THE WATCHMAN INTERVENES

“Son of man, I have appointed you a watchman to the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from My mouth, warn them from Me. (Eze 3:17)

The watchman did more than just watch. The watchman intervened. He warned of danger by blowing the trumpet. He acted on behalf of God and the people by closing the gate to the city. To intervene is to step in to prevent or alter an outcome for the good of someone else. The prophet Isaiah emphasized the responsibility that God’s people had to intervene when they saw spiritual danger.

*Yes, truth is lacking; And he who turns aside from evil makes himself a prey. Now the LORD saw, And it was displeasing in His sight that there was no justice. And He saw that there was no man, And was astonished that there was no one to **intercede**; Then His own arm brought salvation to Him, And His righteousness upheld Him. (Is 59:15–16)*

Sometimes as watchmen on the wall, we might feel led by God to intervene on behalf of our marriage. When I was serving as a family pastor, my wife intervened on behalf of our marriage. She came into my office when I was on the phone with a lady in the church, and she asked who I was talking to. I replied, and she said, “You need to be very careful of that relationship. You have too much contact with her. She is constantly around you or phoning you.”

I was shocked because this was the first time in forty years of marriage Janet had ever warned me about a relationship. I considered myself discerning regarding relationships. As I began to review the frequency of contact I had with the lady, I realized that Janet was right. The woman attended every class that I taught no matter what the subject. She was often around me and quite often called for one reason or another. I did not have a clue anything was off because the conversations were about ministry. While I was not attracted to her, it became obvious to me as well as Janet that she was attracted to me and seemed to have ulterior motives in mind. I put some boundaries in place, and she soon stopped trying to be around me so frequently.

We have a responsibility to intervene when we sense there is some danger to our relationship. We might want to seek counsel from a godly friend before talking to our spouse to make sure we are seeing things correctly and have reason to be alarmed. When we do intervene, we need to do it in a way that our spouse does not feel blamed.

There are times we may be called to intervene on behalf of other believers. If we are concerned about the spiritual life of a brother or sister in Christ or their marriage, we first should consider how to respond. The danger must be obvious to us, and we need to proceed with caution, praying for wisdom and getting godly counsel.

BUILD A WALL OF PRAYER SURROUNDING YOUR MARRIAGE

BECOME A WATCHMAN FOR YOUR MARRIAGE

First, we need to guard our marriages by becoming a watchman on our own wall. We not only need to pray for our marriages and our spouses, but also for ourselves. We need to pray to be Christlike in our own walk, being “*self-controlled and alert*” (1 Pe 5:8, NIV). Pray first that God will protect your marriage by changing your heart to do His will. Following are some suggestions of how you might pray for yourself and your spouse. You should use some of these suggestions during your Appointment with God today.

Husbands *Pray for Your Wife and Yourself*

- Pray that you will live with your wife in an understanding way, treating her with respect. (1 Pe 3:7)
- Pray that you will love your wife like Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for Her. (Eph 5:25)
- Pray that you will be one with your wife as a selfless, humble, sacrificial servant. (Phil 2:3-8)
- Pray that your wife’s identity, value and significance will be in God alone as a deeply loved daughter of the heavenly Father.
- Thank God for your wife and the positive virtues she brings to your marriage (and remember to thank her in person).
- Pray that your wife will always love the Lord with all her heart, trust His promises and obey His commands.
- Pray for your wife’s spiritual and emotional strength, and remember to be “*quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry*” (Ja 1:19-20).
- Pray that your wife will not form any close relationships, male or female, that will be harmful in any way to her walk with Jesus or your marriage.
- Pray that you will always see your “wife’s glass” as “half full” (or more) and always be thankful for her.
- Pray that your wife will find her joy and hope in Christ alone and never in others [including yourself].

Wives, *Pray for Your Husband and Yourself*

- Pray that you will always show respect for your husband no matter what the circumstances. (Eph 5:33)
- Pray that you will be one with your husband as a selfless, humble, sacrificial servant. (Phil 2:3-8)
- Pray that your husband will always love the Lord with all his heart, trust His promises and obey His commands.
- Pray that your husband will not form any close relationships, male or female, that will be harmful in any way to his walk with Jesus or your marriage.
- Pray that your husband will become a strong spiritual leader of your family as a selfless, humble, wise, servant.
- Pray that your husband will be morally pure in mind and action, not having even a hint of sexual immorality.

- Pray that you will see your “husbands’ glass” as “half full” (or more) and always be thankful for him.
- Pray that your husband will find his value, identity and significance in God alone.
- Pray that any stronghold your husband might have will be acknowledged and destroyed.
- Pray that your husband will not be distracted by the things of this world and make your marriage and the family his greatest priority (after the priority of his relationship with God).

CHOOSE WATCHMEN FOR YOUR WALL

I want to challenge you to choose watchmen to join you on your wall to guard your marriage. Watchmen were carefully chosen for their mission of guarding a city. I suggest you and your spouse chose seven godly people who are willing to pray for you one designated day each week for one year. By doing this you will be assured that your marriage will be guarded by prayer every day for a full year. What a blessing to know that someone is thinking about and caring for you as they lift you up in prayer.

During your Together Time make a list of the people you would like to be your watchmen. Pray together that God will lead you to the right people. Write some specific ways they can pray for you and give each person a copy of the list.

SCRIPTURE PRAYER

Pray Isaiah 62:6-7.

1. *Read It*

2. *Think It*

3. *Pray It*

4. *Do It*

We close this session with a wonderful song by the McKameys that sums up the protection we can have for our marriages with a watchman on the wall.

A Wall of Prayer

There are walls made by men, built by frail and human hands that an enemy can scale and get to you. But there is one protecting me from my greatest enemy. It's a wall that Satan can't break through.

Sometimes a wall of grace, sometimes a wall of faith, other times its sweet mercy I need. But the one for which I long, it makes the others strong. I need a wall of prayer surrounding me.

Oh my brother when I'm weak would you stand instead for me? And pray a fortress round me strong that can't be moved. And I promise you today when I bow my knees to pray, I'll do the same for you.

Sweet hour of prayer, sweet hour of prayer that calls me from a world of care. But the one for which I long, it makes the other strong. I need a wall of prayer surrounding me.

I need a wall of prayer surrounding me.



MEMORIZE AND MEDITATE

Review your anchor cards. Memorize and meditate on the memory scriptures and your Personal Anchor Points.

APPOINTMENT WITH GOD

Today, be sure to incorporate a few of the suggested prayers for husbands or wives from earlier in the lesson.

COME IN PRAYER (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication)

HEAR AND ACT (What is God saying? What have I learned? How should I respond?)

FOLLOW (What is God doing in my life and marriage?)

DAY 5: PRAY ON THE ARMOR OF GOD

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. (Eph 6:10, NIV)

Several years ago, I started feeling dizzy when I would get up out of a chair. Initially I attributed it to aging but the dizziness continued to get worse. One evening as I stood up and took a few steps, I passed out. I came to quickly realize that my condition was serious, and I needed to see a doctor. The next day I called an advice nurse, and she asked me a series of questions. I was sure she would say that I just needed to see my primary care physician, but she cut the interview short by saying, "I want you to go to the emergency room now, and don't drive."

After checking my vitals, Janet and I were taken to a room to await the E.R. Doctor. He asked me some questions and they started giving me a series of tests. The doctor returned with the good news that all the tests turned out good. He said I was on too much blood pressure medication and immediately took me off one of the pills. He noticed that I had my trusty yellow pad on my lap and saw that I had been writing some things about marriage. He asked, "Are you writing a book about marriage?" I answered yes, and he said, "Do you mind if I tell you a story about my marriage?" I was surprised that a busy E.R. doctor was going to take time to tell me about something as personal as his marriage.

He said, "After I received my degree in emergency medicine and completed my residency, we moved to Southern California, and I began work as an E.R. doctor. My wife and I always dreamed of living close to the beach. We bought an older house in a coastal community that we could remodel. I worked long hours and started taking extra shifts so we would have enough money to keep working on the house. I would think, "If I took an extra shift, I could do this or that." My long hours started to take a toll on our marriage. It progressed to a point that we knew if we did not get help soon, our marriage would not survive. There was a Calvary Chapel Church in our area, so we decided to attend a service. We sought counseling from a pastor of the church and started realizing that our relationship with God was the answer. Over a period of time, our lives were transformed, and our marriage began to heal. Now, every day before I go to work, I hug my wife and pray on the Armor of God to protect our marriage."

Then he said, "Would you mind if I pray for you and your wife?" I thought, "What?" I was in shock. An E.R. doctor wants to pray over us. I said "No, I don't mind; please do," and the doctor prayed one of the most powerful prayers I have ever heard. He prayed for the book I was writing, and he prayed that God would give me seven more years of service (I was 77 at the time). Then he paused and said, "No Lord, give him 17 more years of service." Janet and I left that E.R. in awe of what we had just experienced. I looked at Janet, and I said, "Did that really happen?"

Over the five long years that I have worked on this book, I became discouraged more than once and wanted to quit. There have been a lot of starts and stops to this book for various reasons. One of the things that has gotten me through these times is the godly doctor's prayer. I saw it as an affirmation that I was to finish what I started. It is fitting that the last Anchor Point of this resource book is to guard your marriage by praying on the Armor of God.

BE STRONG IN THE LORD AND HIS MIGHTY POWER

Read Ephesians 6:10-18.

After Paul encouraged fellowship within the Christian community and for more intimate family relationships within the home, he concluded his letter with this critical appeal,

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. (Eph 6:10, NIV)

Paul knew that the changes he was asking the people to make would not happen unless they relied on the strength of the Lord and His mighty power. Paul knew that those changes would be attacked by Satan and his demonic schemes. Therefore, his final instructions focused on how to be strong in the Lord and His mighty power by putting on the “full armor of God.”

In the last session on becoming a watchman on the wall, we saw how the supernatural power of prayer can protect your marriage. Jesus relied on this power to protect His disciples from the power and schemes of Satan. The time had come for Jesus to die on the cross and leave this earth. He knew how vulnerable his disciples would be once He was gone. He prayed,

*I am no longer in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me, **that they may be one even as We are.** (Jn 17:11)*

The focus of Jesus’ prayer for protection of His disciples was so they would “be one.” That is because Satan’s primary goal is to destroy the unity between believers, thus destroying their witness to others. Satan does not want you to become one with your spouse. A primary goal of Satan is to destroy the sacred covenant of marriage. Jesus continued His prayer by acknowledging the power and danger of “the evil one.”

I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. (Jn 17:15)

Today we will see how to protect our marriages by praying on the armor of God so that we will be one with our spouse and other believers, as Jesus and his Father are one.”

TAKE YOUR STAND AGAINST THE DEVIL’S SCHEMES

Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. (Eph 6:11, NIV)

Before showing us how to put on the armor of God, Paul immediately warns us about the danger of the Devil’s schemes.

SATAN’S SCHEMES ARE PERSONAL

Satan’s schemes are personal and powerful. By personal I mean he has the ability to attack us personally, preying on our vulnerabilities. Scripture does not tell us exactly how he does this, only that he does. He schemes against us. He is aware of our weaknesses, and that is highly personal. The apostle John warns us of three ways that Satan schemes against us. These are the same three basic ways that he tempted Jesus in the wilderness (Mt 4:1-11).

Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever. (1 Jn 2:15–17)

Lust of the Flesh

Satan’s scheme is to prey upon our vulnerability, to crave some kind of physical satisfaction such as intimacy with someone other than our spouse, illicit sex of any kind, food, alcohol, drugs, or to be overly focused on our bodies. Any of these can prevent us from being one with our spouse.

Lust of the Eyes

Satan's scheme is to prey on our vulnerability to crave stuff. He wants us to believe that to be "happy," we must have material possessions, and that if we acquire enough stuff, we will be fulfilled. However, if we focus on stuff, we will not be able to focus on our relationship with God and our spouse. Jesus addressed the danger of this craving when he said,

No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other.... (Mt 6:24)

Boastful Pride of Life

Satan's scheme is to prey upon our vulnerability to search for our identity, values, and significance in all the wrong places. To feel good about ourselves, we are tempted to be overly focused on our reputation, our competence, our bodies, our looks, our success and a host of other ego enhancing devices. The search never ends and will distract us from our relationship with God and our spouse. And if you think you find something fulfilling, it won't last long.

We need to remember that Satan is a deceiver and a liar (Ge 3:13; Mt 8:43). That is his basic nature. Satan wants to deceive us in these three areas. His desire is for our minds to be led astray and believe his lies. Paul warned,

But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. (2 Co 11:3)

We are led astray by the evil one when we allow ourselves to believe that we can find happiness and fulfillment in anything or anyone other than Jesus. Only God can fill our souls and give true joy. God is the only anchor for our soul.

OUR STRUGGLE IS AGAINST THE SUPERNATURAL

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. (Eph 6:12, NIV)

Before Paul directed believers to put on the armor of God, he wanted them to realize that the battle cannot be fought on a human level. We are opposed by Satan who is called the "ruler of this world" and the "god of this world" (Jn12:31, 2 Co 4:4). Satan and his demons have been allowed limited, but supernatural power to personally attack believers. Paul warned about these "spiritual forces of evil" and stressed that we need supernatural protection. That supernatural protection comes primarily through the Spirit empowered word and prayer.

PRAY ON THE FULL ARMOR OF GOD

STAND YOUR GROUND

Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. (Eph 6:13, NIV)

The word "stand" is used four times in the first four verses of this passage. This is to remind us that the armor of God does not somehow magically appear on us by reading this passage of Scripture. The biblical meaning of "stand" here is a strong call to action. It means to get ready, be equipped and remain committed. We are promised that when we put on the armor of God, we will be able to withstand every attack of Satan. Our responsibility is to defeat Satan's attacks by being "strong in the Lord and in the

strength of His might” (Eph 6:10) and not to rely on our own power. We are to use the unlimited, supernatural power of God to stand firm and be unyielding to the attacks of Satan. To do so is to always be prepared. This happens through the power of the Holy Spirit as we put on the armor by praying on each part of the armor of God and using it faithfully. Pray on the full armor of God with the following prayers.

PRAY ON THE BELT OF TRUTH

Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist.... (Eph 6:14, NIV)

“Lord today I put on Your belt of truth. I claim Your word as my sole authority and only standard for truth. Empower me through the Holy Spirit to live a life of integrity, obeying You in all things. Protect me from listening to any lies of the evil one that might harm my marriage.”

So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, “If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” (Jn 8:31–32)

PRAY ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Stand firm then...with the breastplate of righteousness in place.... (Eph 6:14, NIV)

“Lord today I put on the breastplate of righteousness. Help me to always remember that You have given me your righteousness and that I am pure and blameless in your sight. I know that apart from You there is no righteousness. Empower me through the Holy Spirit to guard my marriage by being righteous in all I say and do.”

[God] made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Co 5:21)

PRAY ON THE SHOES OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE

Stand firm then...with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. (Eph 6:14-15, NIV)

“Lord today I prepare for battle by putting on the shoes that You have perfectly fitted for me. Give me the confidence that I can fearlessly and clearly share the good news of the gospel with others.”

How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, “HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS!” (Ro 10:15)

PRAY ON THE SHIELD OF FAITH

In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. (Eph 6:16, NIV)

Lord, today I take up the shield of faith in Your name and Your power so that every flaming arrow the devil aims at our marriage will be extinguished. I claim the promise of Your “mighty power” as the all-powerful, sovereign, creator and sustainer of the universe to protect our marriage so that we will be one.

I am no longer in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me, that they may be one even as We are. (Jn 17:11)

PRAY ON THE HELMET OF SALVATION

Take the helmet of salvation (Eph 6:17, NIV)

“Lord, today I pray on the helmet of salvation that You have given me. Help me to remember that no matter what the circumstances, I am Your deeply loved, adopted child. Lord protect me from any thoughts or desires that would tempt me to look for my identity, value and significance anywhere other than You. Empower me to trust that nothing can separate me from Your love for me in Christ Jesus my Lord.”

But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. 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, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Ro 8:37–39)

PRAY ON THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT

Take...the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (Eph 6:17, NIV)

“Lord, today I take up the sword of the Spirit which is Your perfect, powerful word. Empower me through the Holy Spirit to destroy any stronghold that would set itself up against me or our marriage. Help me to take captive every thought and action that would harm my marriage and make them obedient to Christ. I pray that the sword of the Spirit would judge the thoughts and attitudes of my heart.”

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete. (2 Co 10:3–6)

For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (Heb 4:12)

PRAY IN THE SPIRIT AT ALL TIMES

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. (Eph 6:18, NIV)

Paul concludes his teaching on the armor of God by urging believers to be alert and pray for all the Lord's people. This means that we should always pray for our self, our spouse and our marriage.

MEMORIZE AND MEDITATE

Review your anchor cards. Memorize and meditate on the memory scriptures and your Personal Anchor Points.


APPOINTMENT WITH GOD

COME IN PRAYER (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication)

HEAR AND ACT (What is God saying? What have I learned? How should I respond?)

FOLLOW (What is God doing in my life and marriage?)

PERSONAL ANCHOR POINT

You should now develop your Personal Anchor Point. Review and reflect on what you have learned this week and what God may have laid on your heart as the week progressed. Pray for God's direction in developing your Personal Anchor Point. As a reminder, your Personal Anchor Point is a specific practice you will implement in your daily walk to strengthen your connection to this week's anchor. It includes the key point you learned and the action you will take in response. See page 6 for more information. 

TOGETHER TIME

Use the following outline to prepare for and guide your Together Time.

SHARING SCRIPTURE TOGETHER (One in Mind)

Share with one another what you learned from this week's study. What scriptures spoke to you? What is most important for you to put into practice? Share some highlights from your Appointment with God journal.

DISCUSSING OUR RELATIONSHIP (One in Love)

*Share and discuss your Personal Anchor Point and any other issues that you feel are important in your relationship. **Take time to discuss accountability in your marriage as discussed on Day 3.***

PLANNING OUR CALENDAR (One in Purpose)

Go over your calendars for the following week. Schedule when you will have your next Together Time. Make sure you both have calendars so you can schedule together. Discuss, “does our calendar demonstrate our purpose in life to glorify God?”

PRAYING TOGETHER (One in Spirit)

*Praise God and give thanks to Him. Pray for one another. Ask, “How can I pray for you?” Always remember to thank God for your spouse. Pray for any personal needs. Pray that God will be glorified in your marriage. **Consider incorporating one or two of the suggested prayer items from Day 4.***

WEEK 10: YOUR COVENANT RENEWAL



And [Jesus] answered and said, “Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE, and said, ‘FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH’? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.” (Mt 19:4–6)

Well, you have finally arrived at this leg of your faith journey. This week you do not have daily studies; however, you should continue your daily Appointments with God (you can find a blank template you can copy at Appendix D). Instead of the normal daily study, you will do two things to prepare for your final group session.

First you will develop a covenant renewal for your marriage. It will be your personal vows to “be one” in your marriage. It will be a promise to God and your spouse of what you will do in a practical way to honor the sacred covenant of marriage. At your final group session, you will share these vows with the group. Before doing that, we will have a brief review of covenant renewals in both the Old and New Testaments.

The second thing I would like you to do is think about what’s next? Spend some time looking at Appendix C: Sustainable Growth. This appendix lists numerous ideas and tools to help you sustain spiritual/marriage growth. At Appendix D and E you will find Appointment with God and Together Time forms that you can copy and use in the future. During your Together Time this week, discuss continuing your weekly Together Times.

COVENANT RENEWAL IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Because the Jews, God’s chosen people, were unfaithful and refused to repent, God allowed them to be taken into exile by the evil Babylonian Empire. They were held captive for 70 years and then God allowed them to return to Judah. The book of Nehemiah tells the story of a colony of Jews who had been back in Jerusalem for 80 years. Nehemiah, a Jewish official in the Persian Empire, heard about the terrible conditions in his native land. He was heartbroken, so he fasted and prayed for his people.

When I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven. I said, “I beseech You, O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who preserves the covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments, (Ne 1:4–5)

Nehemiah defines what it means to be in a covenant relationship with God. The first part of the covenant is God’s part, and He is a great and awesome God who is faithful to keep His covenant of love with His people. The second part of the covenant is our part. We are to respond by loving and obeying Him. Nehemiah continued his prayer for covenant renewal by confessing Judah’s sin, including those of his own household. He confessed “*We have acted very corruptly against You and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses*” (Ne 1:7). One of Judah’s grievous sins was that they were unfaithful by breaking the sacred covenant of marriage by intermarriage with pagans. As a part of the renewal of their covenant with God, the people made a binding, written agreement with God and with one another that they would stop this practice (Ezr 10:1-8;

Ne 10:1-30). This agreement was part of an overall vow to love God and keep all His commands and committing to the practices they would start or stop.

COVENANT RENEWAL IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The word covenant is used thirty-three times in the New Testament. Half of these references refer to the Old Testament and half to the New Testament. Jesus used the word only once. Before His death He said to His disciples,

*And He said to them, "This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many."
(Mk 14:24)*

The apostle Paul referred to this quote using slightly different words. He stressed the importance of believers remembering the blood of the covenant which Jesus shed on the cross when he died for their sins.

In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. (1 Co 11:25–26)

These words are to remind us that we are bound together in a covenant relationship of love with God and with one another. We have been saved by grace, and not by our works to meet the old law, but by the new covenant of sacrificial love. We renew that covenant every time we partake of the cup and the bread that symbolize Jesus dying for our sins. We are to remember that sacrifice and, out of gratitude, promise to love and obey Him.

JESUS AND THE SACRED COVENANT OF MARRIAGE

And [Jesus] answered and said, "Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE, and said, 'FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate." (Mt 19:4–6)

Jesus expanded on the covenant of marriage in Genesis by stressing that because God the creator made Adam and Eve one flesh, they are no longer two but one. What God joined together in the sacred covenant of marriage, no one was to separate. Jesus' statement is the foundation for the vows you will make. As you pray about and write your vows, meditate on Jesus' words and ask yourself, "how can I make these words part of my vows?"

PAUL AND THE SACRED COVENANT OF MARRIAGE

I think it will be helpful to also review what Paul said about the sacred covenant of marriage before starting to write your vows. The following are some excerpts from week 1 of this study (page 38):

Paul summarized his teaching on marriage by quoting the sacred covenant of marriage from Genesis. He then related it to Christ's love for His bride, the Church, and our responsibility to model our marriages after his example. He referred to this as "*the profound mystery.*"

FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church. Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband. (Eph 5:31–33)

To renew the covenant in practical ways we need to see how Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her.

As members of His body we need only to observe how God lovingly feeds and cares for His body to see how we are to love, feed, and care for one another. We are members of His body. Only by following that example can we become one in our marriage, be humble, selfless, servants to one another and, in turn, fully honor the sacred covenant of marriage (Php 2:2-8).

RENEWING YOUR VOWS TO BE ONE

The sovereign God of the universe created covenants for His people. They are binding agreements that enable his people to experience the benefits of the covenant relationship.

The sacred covenant of marriage is a unique covenant. God blesses us and makes us one. What is required of us is to continue to be one? We do that by maintaining a complementary, exclusive, intimate and permanent relationship in obedience to God's word.

TRADITIONAL VOWS

Most of us exchanged vows at our wedding. Can you remember your vows? Some of you will have written your own vows and still have a copy, but most of us will remember exchanging vows but not be able to recall what we promised. Marriage ceremonies are usually an emotionally loaded blur. We just hope to get through the vow exchange without messing up or fainting. Some may have exchanged a traditional vow such as the following:

In the name of God, I, (groom/bride's name), take you, (groom/bride's name), to be my (husband/wife), to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, until we are parted by death. This is my solemn vow.

These vows have value. There are some good things in them such as cherishing one another and the permanence of marriage. But there is nothing specific about how to cherish, or what a person will do to stay in the marriage no matter how difficult things become. In addition, they are seldom reviewed or renewed and certainly are not a permanent guide to how each will fulfill their promise to "be one."

COVENANT VOWS

Before beginning the process of writing your vows, I would like to offer a perspective of wedding vows. We will refer to them as "covenant vows." Covenant vows will be your promise to God and your spouse on how you will fulfill the sacred covenant of marriage to "be one." They are a personal promise of specific actions. They define the terms of your covenant relationship. They spell out how you will live in a covenant relationship with your spouse.

VOWS IN THE BIBLE

Before writing your vows, there are some things you should seriously consider. The Scripture gives some warnings and instruction on the taking of vows. Ask yourself:

Have I carefully considered the vows, and am I willing to do everything that I will promise?

If a man makes a vow to the LORD, or takes an oath to bind himself with a binding obligation, he shall not violate his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth. (Nu 30:2)

You need to think about the serious nature of biblical vows. Your vows are first an oath to God and then to your spouse. We are to be faithful to **all** that we vow to do. Ask yourself:

Am I making these vows freely and not out of compulsion? Do they reflect my heart's desire to be the kind of spouse God's wants me to be?

Whatever your lips utter you must be sure to do, because you made your vow freely to the Lord your God with your own mouth. (Dt 23:23, NIV)

I want the creation of these vows to be much more than an assignment. They are to be **freely** made. Work at making these vows what you believe God is putting on your heart to say. Free yourselves from comparison or the expectations of others. Ask yourself:

Am I willing to faithfully fulfill and review my vows and use them as guide for how I will love my spouse and glorify God in my marriage?

When you make a vow to God, do not be late in paying it; for He takes no delight in fools. Pay what you vow! It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay. (Ec 5:4–5)

These are not “one and done” vows, which is the case in many marriages. The vow renewal ceremony that you will participate in will be a great start to faithfully **continue fulfilling** the renewed vows you make for the duration of your marriage. These vows will act as a “true north,” another anchor to keep your marriage on course.

CREATING YOUR VOWS

You have this entire week to create the vows you will make at the next group meeting. Following are some suggestions that will help you create vows that will last.

PRAY FIRST

Set aside time before you write your vows to pray, asking God to guide the decisions you will make. Listen to what God impresses on your heart.

REVIEW YOUR PERSONAL ANCHOR POINT

You have spent nine weeks in God's word and prayer, working on your marriage. Personal Anchor Points have been an important part of this process. Carefully review these choices as you decide what to include in your vows.

WRITE YOUR VOWS

There is a blank page provided at the end of this section you can use when drafting your vows. Below are some guidelines to help you develop your vows:

- Start by jotting down some things you think you might want to include in your vows. Review them for several days before you make your final decision. Continue to pray each day for God to guide you.
- Limit your vows to a few sentences or a short paragraph. Try not to over promise or under promise. Your vows are personal and intimate. They are a commitment between you and your spouse before God. They will be treasured by your spouse because they are coming from your heart.
- Remember that these vows are for a lifetime. They are what you are committing to do *‘till death do us part.’*

- When you are satisfied with your vows, **write them down** on an index card (or in your electronic notes). Select a verse or verses that will be the basis for your vows and write that in the same place. You may choose to put these in electronic notes, but I still recommend you write a card for your vows or print them out. There is also a place at the end of your Action Journal (Appendix A) where you can write your vows and verse(s) with all the personal notes you documented throughout the study.

REMEMBERING YOUR VOWS

Review your vows regularly when you review your other nine Anchor Cards. You want your vows to be backed by years of faithfulness, a lifestyle of being one with God and one in your marriage. Always ask yourself, “Am I faithfully fulfilling my vows to be one?” Also, remember to depend on God’s power to faithfully and fully fulfill your vows.

Paul followed up his teaching to be one, be selfless, be humble and be a servant by reminding the believers in Philippi that it was God who was at work in them. It was God’s work that would enable them to fulfill his good purpose in their lives to be shining stars. Above all, remember that this following promise is also for you. You can take it to the bank.

...for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. Do all things without grumbling or disputing; so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life.... (Php 2:13–16)

Pray that your marriage will glorify God by shining like the stars in a watching world as God works out His purpose in your life and as you faithfully fulfill your vows to “be one” in your marriage.

SCRIPTURE PRAYER

Pray Philippians 2:13-16.

1. *Read It*

2. *Think It*

3. *Pray It*

4. Do It



MEMORIZE AND MEDITATE

Review your anchor cards. Memorize and meditate on the memory scriptures and your Personal Anchor Points.

DRAFT YOUR VOWS

USE THE SPACE BELOW TO DRAFT YOUR VOWS, AND THEN WRITE YOUR FINAL VERSION IN APPENDIX A AND ON AN INDEX CARD (OR IN YOUR ELECTRONIC NOTES). YOU MAY ALSO WISH TO WRITE OUT A COPY TO GIVE TO YOUR SPOUSE.

TOGETHER TIME

Use the following outline to prepare for and guide your Together Time.

SHARING SCRIPTURE TOGETHER (One in Mind)

Share with one another what you learned from this week's study. What scriptures spoke to you? What is most important for you to put into practice? Share some highlights from your Appointment with God journal.

DISCUSSING OUR RELATIONSHIP (One in Love)

*There is no new Personal Anchor Point this week, but use this time to discuss any other issues that you feel are important in your relationship. **Do NOT discuss your specific vows at this time (you'll give them at the group meeting), but do discuss "what's next" (see the intro on page 265).***

PLANNING OUR CALENDAR (One in Purpose)

Go over your calendars for the following week. Schedule when you will have your next Together Time. Make sure you both have calendars so you can schedule together. Discuss, "does our calendar demonstrate our purpose in life to glorify God?"

PRAYING TOGETHER (One in Spirit)

Praise God and give thanks to Him. Pray for one another. Ask, "How can I pray for you?" Always remember to thank God for your spouse. Pray for any personal needs. Pray that God will be glorified in your marriage.

APPENDIX A: ACTION JOURNAL

This is a place for you to consolidate the key insights God reveals to you and any decisions you make to take specific actions as you participate in this study and spend time with God. This Action Journal will be a consolidated place you can later review to remind yourself of those things and reflect on how God is working in your life. After the study is complete, you may wish to remove the Action Journal from the book and place it somewhere for you to easily reference from time to time.

WEEK 1: ANCHORED ON THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

Anchor Scripture: Genesis 2:24

Your area for growth and associated scriptures (Faith in the sovereignty of God, page 24)

Your areas for growth in your marriage (Sacred covenant of marriage, page 33)

Your Personal Anchor Point on the sovereignty of God (page 44)

WEEK 2: ANCHORED IN THE WORD OF GOD

Anchor Scripture: 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Your five key verses about delighting in the word of God (Delighting in God's word, page 62)

Your Personal Anchor Point on the word of God (page 69)

WEEK 3: ANCHORED ON THE CORNERSTONE OF CHRIST: OUR HOPE, OUR IDENTITY

Anchor Scripture: Isaiah 28:16 and Hebrews 6:19

Your key principle from Ephesians 4:1-6 to help you be one (Being one with your spouse, page 74)

What do you want to work on regarding disappointment in your marriage; what verses most apply for you, and what is your response? (Defeating disappointment with hope, page 90)

To help you see your marriage glass as at least half full, what scripture speaks to you, and what are you willing to do to practice that scripture in your marriage? (Half Full Glass, page 96)

Your Personal Anchor Point on the cornerstone of Christ (page 98)

WEEK 4: ANCHORED IN THE GLORY OF GOD: HIS PRESENCE AND OUR PURPOSE

Anchor Scripture: John 15:5, 8

Model prayer: Adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication (Abiding through prayer, page 107)

Characteristics of Love: Sacrificial, Practical, Unfailing, Selfless, Forgiving, Humble, Compassionate, Accepting, Obedient, Priority (Characteristics of love, page 112)

Which characteristic did you mark as a weakness, and what will you do differently? (Characteristic of love for growth, page 115)

Your Personal Anchor Point on the glory of God (page 129)

WEEK 5: BE ONE

Anchor Scripture: Philippians 2:2

Your Personal Anchor Point on being one with your spouse (page 152)

WEEK 6: BE SELFLESS

Anchor Scripture: Philippians 2:3-4

What has God revealed to you about your old nature and new nature? (Donkey Dang, page 156)

Choose one thing that you can do for your spouse that you know she/he would greatly appreciate, write it below, and do it regularly. (Put on new self, page 161)

What are your and your spouse's primary and secondary love languages? (Love languages, pages 164, 168 & 171)

Your Personal Anchor Point on being selfless (page 170)

WEEK 7: BE HUMBLE

Anchor Scripture: Philippians 2:5–6

What one or two items from your new wardrobe of humble wisdom is most important to your marriage and what will you do to put off your old self and put on a new attitude and action of humility? (Page 180)

What are you willing to do to help address differences in communication in your marriage? (page 185 or 186)

How can you model your marriage after Christ's example of how He loves His bride? (page 191)

Husbands: How can you love your wife in a way that touches her heart? (pages 194-195)

Wives: How can you best show respect to your husband (pages 195-196)

Your Personal Anchor Point on being one with your spouse (page 197)

WEEK 8: BE A SERVANT—THE KEY TO RESOLVING CONFLICT

Anchor Scripture: Philippians 2:7-8

Three Communication Skills Acknowledging, Carefronting, and Taking a Time Out (pages 207, 213 and 222)

The Servant's Way of Resolving Conflict:

- **Four Strategic Anchors: Be one, be selfless, be humble, and be a servant** (page 226)
- **Four Biblical Practices: Be quick to listen, be slow to speak, be slow to become angry, resolve conflict as a servant** (page 226)
- **Four Attitudes: I care about you, I respect you, I value your opinion, and I want what is best for you** (page 226)
- **Four Actions: Set aside time to resolve issues, define the issue, focus on the issue rather than your spouse, avoid quarreling** (page 227)

What did God reveal to you concerning the principles of being quick to listen? (pages 205-207)

What are some quick to listen skills that need improvement for you? (page 209)

What did God reveal to you concerning the principles of being slow to speak? (pages 211-213)

What one or two scriptures do you believe can help you to be slow to become angry (page 220)

What attitude and do I need to work on, and what actions do I need to develop in my marriage? (page 227 and 228)

Your Personal Anchor Point on being a servant (page 229)

WEEK 9: GUARD YOUR MARRIAGE

Anchor Scripture: Malachi 2:15-16

What were you able to take away from studying the 10 steps that lead to an affair? (page 237)

What steps will you take to guard your marriage from an affair by recognizing and taking the appropriate action when you find yourself attracted to someone? (page 247)

What are some ways you can stay out of compromising situations, and what boundaries do you think you could put in place that will guard against affairs in your marriage? (page 248)

How can you plan for accountability? (page 249)

Your Personal Anchor Point on guarding your marriage (page 263)

WEEK 10: COVENANT RENEWAL

Your Vows (page 270)

APPENDIX B: LEADER'S GUIDE

GETTING STARTED.

If you have already completed an *Anchoring Your Marriage* study, you have seen an example of how to lead a group. That will be your best training, but this guide will provide you with some additional help. If *Anchoring Your Marriage* is new to you, I suggest you and your spouse first read and complete the assignments in the “Preparing to Anchor Your Marriage” week and Week 1. Then, come back to finish reading this Leader’s Guide.

PREPARING TO LAUNCH ANCHORING YOUR MARRIAGE

After you have a basic understanding of this study, your next step is to invite couples to become a part of an *Anchoring Your Marriage* group. I suggest that a husband and wife lead a group of three to four additional couples. More than ten people in a group will make it difficult for everyone to participate in group discussions. The purpose of your first meeting is twofold. First, it will give couples an overview and understanding of the requirements of the study. They can ask questions about the assignments and any other issues they might have. Second, the meeting will give people a chance to get acquainted with you and the other couples. Be sure to have nametags available to help everyone learn each other’s names.

You should also have a couple *Anchoring Your Marriage* books available for couples to look at before they decide to join. The printed version is very reasonably priced and can be ordered by going to <https://AnchorsofGod.com> (book orders will be processed by Lulu.com). Couples also have the option to download digital copies for free (each person will need his/her own book), but I strongly encourage each person to have a printed copy so they can easily complete the assignments in the book.

Be sure to discuss the commitment that will be necessary by those who choose to participate and point out that this is not a class where they listen to you teach, but it is a participatory study. The necessary commitment was discussed in the “Preparing to Anchor Your Marriage” week that you already read (five daily studies each week, memorization of scripture, regular attendance at the group sessions).

Set a date for your first regular group session and inform everyone that they need to complete the five daily studies of the “Preparing to Anchor Your Marriage” week before that first meeting. I suggest you schedule your group session for an hour and a half. There may be someone who decides not to join a group at this time, but don’t be disappointed if this happens.

LEADING A SUCCESSFUL MARRIAGE GROUP

FIVE KEYS TO LEADING A SUCCESSFUL GROUP

1. *Create a safe environment for couples.*

It is important for couples to know that what they share in the group stays in the group. Sharing details about a marriage is very personal. Couples will want to be sure that what they share is confidential. It will take time for couples to feel secure in the group. Confidentiality is essential. Explain, “What happens in the *Anchoring Your Marriage* group, must stay in *Anchoring Your Marriage* group.”

Part of creating a safe environment is modeling a spirit of acceptance. Accepting and validating a person does not always mean that we agree or completely understand what they have said. Even when we

disagree or need to correct false doctrine, we can do it a way that the person still feels valued and accepted. We should aim to encourage couples and be liberal in thanking them for their willingness to share with the group.

2. Emphasize that we are all imperfect, fallen individuals and that we all struggle in our marriages at times.

Remind couples that spiritual and marriage growth is a process. It is a process where imperfect people, who through the sacrifice of Jesus have been made holy in God's eyes, are still being made holy by the power of the Holy Spirit. We are all fellow strugglers in our journey of spiritual and marriage growth. Be willing to share your own imperfections and marriage struggles with the group. One of the benefits of a marriage group is that couples will see that other couples are struggling with the same kind of issues that they are facing.

3. Remind couples that we are all at different places in our spiritual and marriage journey.

For example, newly married couples are at different places on their marriage journey than couples who have just had their first child. We all will face various stresses and issues that will cause conflict in our marriage. Life is a journey of imperfect people who live in an imperfect world. The good news is we serve a God who is perfectly loving and faithful and wants to empower us to grow in the image of Christ in our marriages. He is there every step of the way. His love and power enable us to do what we cannot do on our own. During the study encourage couples to trust the journey.

4. Keep people focused on what God wants to do in their lives, not their spouse's life.

Couples often face two major obstacles in a marriage growth group. The first is unrealistic expectations. We all want things to be perfect in our marriages. How can imperfect, flawed people have perfect marriages? It's not going to happen! We want it to happen now, not later. That's not going to happen either. Growth is a process. It is a journey with obstacles. There are no shortcuts. It takes time and effort. It is hard to be patient, but patience and perseverance are essential aspect of a successful marriage.

The second major obstacle is the tendency is to focus on our spouse and his/her weakness rather than our own. Satan wants us to focus on what we think Jesus wants to do in our spouse's life. Often our spouse's flaws loom large in our eyes and our own not so much. During this study encourage people to look at what God wants to do in their lives, not their spouse's.

5. Emphasize the importance of sustainable, spiritual and marriage growth.

This resource is to help launch couples on a journey that will last a lifetime. While marriage retreats, courses and books are valuable, they often fall short of helping people sustain what they have learned. It is our vision that this resource will help couples make changes and sustain them by continuing to integrate the biblical knowledge and spiritual disciplines they have learned. The goal is to become fully devoted, fully mature, lifelong disciples, glorifying God in all we say and do. There are Appendixes at the end of this book with resources on sustaining spiritual and marriage growth as well as forms for Appointments with God and Together Time that couples can use long after this study is complete.

PREPARING FOR AND STRUCTURE OF THE GROUP MEETING

To prepare for the group time I suggest you prepare a simple outline of what you will cover. You will have to choose carefully what you want to discuss and do during that time. You will not have enough time for couples to discuss all they have written on their assignments, and it is not necessary to cover everything. Remember that couples have already covered the material and discussed it together, and the reason for

group time is to allow time for accountability, discussion, reinforcement and encouragement. It is important that couples share what God is doing in their lives and hear from one another. The following is a simple five step outline that you can use to help you stay on course during your time together.

Before the Meeting

If practical, open your home (or wherever you are meeting) at least 15 minutes before the start time for the group session, and let everyone know how early they can arrive. This will give everyone more time to fellowship and share what is happening in their lives in an impromptu way.

Open in Prayer (~5-10 Min)

It is important to come into God's presence at the beginning of each session by opening in prayer. You may want to add a short worship period, using song or prayer. This will help people understand that it is in God's presence and through His power that spiritual and marriage growth occurs.

Icebreaker (initial weeks only)

I suggest that during your first few sessions you use ice breakers to help people get to know one another and start to feel comfortable in sharing with the group. Ice breakers level the playing field. Following are a few you can choose from, or you can create your own.

- How did you meet? What was your first impression when you met your future spouse?
- Where did you go on your honeymoon? Any interesting experiences that you would like to share?
- What attracted you to your spouse? Is that attribute still attracting you?
- Were there any wedding day or ceremony incidents or surprises?
- What was the biggest surprise about your spouse in the first months of your marriage?

Review of Scripture and Memory Assignments (~10 Min)

Have everyone review the scripture memory assignments on the anchor cards for the week and review at least a couple of the previous weeks' memory assignments. You might want to put people into pairs to review their memory assignments. This may be less intimidating than reviewing in front of the entire group. Many people will have difficulty with memorization but recognize when they have put forth an honest effort and encourage them to keep working on the assignments.

Group Discussion (~60 Min)

Most of the time should be spent in group discussion. It is important to give people an opportunity to express what they have written on the assignments. People's thoughts, questions and interaction with one another are an important part of the learning process. You are there as a guide and facilitator.

To prepare for group discussions I suggest a simple five-day outline. Review each day's material and, through prayer, choose some of the assignments to discuss. This would include, but not be limited to, Search the Word, Reflect and Respond and Scripture praying. As mentioned earlier, do not try to cover everything. Make sure people have time to ask questions or express other thoughts about what they read or did.

It is also extremely important to set aside time for each person to share their Personal Anchor Point for the week with the group. Other things you may want to discuss are:

- How are your Appointments with God going? Is there something you can share with the group?
- How did your Couple Time/Together Time go?

- What do you believe God is saying about changes He wants you to make in your life or marriage?
- What growth are you seeing in yourself or your spouse?
- What are you struggling with right now? How can we pray for you?

Conclude with Prayer (~10-20 Min)

Prayer is an important part of your group sessions. Some people in your group may not be believers, others new Christians and some may find praying out loud in a group intimidating. There are several ways of handling this. You can ask for prayer requests from people and pray for them yourself. You also can ask if someone else in the group would be willing to pray for that person. You can suggest that some might want to just pray sentence prayers. You can also have a time of silent prayer. Your group will grow in this area as they become more comfortable with one another as you emphasize and practice prayer in your sessions.

OUTLINE FOR THE FIRST SESSION

The first session, covering the “Preparing to Anchor Your Marriage” week, is an introduction to the study more than a study itself. Therefore, I have given you an outline below (in the form of what I discussed above) that you may want to use:

PRAYER/ICEBREAKER (~20 MIN)

Start your time together with prayer. Next, because everyone is still new, have everyone introduce themselves, and tell a little about themselves, how long they have been married and how they met. You can then choose an icebreaker question for everyone to answer.

REVIEW OF SCRIPTURE AND MEMORY ASSIGNMENTS

There are no memory assignments in the introductory week, so you can skip this.

GROUP DISCUSSION

The couples will have already completed the five days of study for the week, but they will still have questions and need clarification on some of the assignments and expectations. I suggest that you go through each day’s study with a brief survey of the material and answer any questions they might have. Here is an outline of what you might choose to cover:

Day 1: Welcome to the Faith Journey (~10 min)

Read the Sacred Covenant of Marriage together and have a short discussion of its importance in marriages. Discuss the concept of “raising the bar” and the time they will need to commit for each day’s study. Emphasize that everyone will be expected to complete each day’s assignments.

Day 2: Anchoring your Marriage (~15 min)

Discuss the importance of foundational and strategic anchors in our marriages. Have some 4” x 6” index cards available and discuss the use of Anchor Cards (whether on the index cards or written in an electronic notes program). Have couples turn to page 20 (Week 1) and follow the instructions under “Anchor Card.” Discuss how they will create their Personal Anchor Point at the end of the next week and will write that on the back of the index card or in their electronic notes. This would also be a good time to suggest everyone with a smartphone download the RememberMe app, which can be a useful tool for many to help them memorize scripture.

Day 3: Daily Study of the Word (~15 min)

Have couples turn to pages 21-24 of Week 1 and review the assignment for the week. Answer any questions that couples may have about the assignments. Point out that Appendix A has an Action Journal that can be used to record some key insights or decisions for action they have made throughout the study, giving them a place to consolidate this information and where they can easily reference it in the future.

Days 4 and 5: Daily Appointments with God (~20 min)

These daily appointments will be a stretch for some who have never established regular devotional or quiet times with God. These Appointments with God are essential if couples are to sustain spiritual and marriage growth. Have couples turn to page 11 of week 1 and review Come, Hear and Act. Answer any questions couples might have about the Appointments with God. Share your own experience of having personal Appointments with God. Explain that it might take some time to feel comfortable with these times.

Closing in Prayer (~10 min)

Conclude your time together with prayer. Ask the group for any prayer requests they might have and pray for each person that responds. Emphasize the privilege and power of prayer. It is through God's power in their lives that all things are possible. This is not a "self-help," but "God-help" study.

WEEK 10: COVENANT RENEWAL

The final session is different than all others. In this session, couples renew their sacred marriage covenant by sharing personal covenants they prepared for one another during the last week of the study. Couples should share these covenants before the group, as witnesses to the covenants they are making. This will also be a time for couples to say goodbye. You can expect this to be an emotional time as you complete your times together. Below are some suggestions as to how to conduct this final session but feel to construct in a way that seems best to you.

SHARE COMMUNION TOGETHER

I suggest you begin this time by sharing communion together. Prepare some bread and juice for each couple. Before you partake of the elements, read the first part of the "Covenant Renewal in the New Testament" section on page 266. Next, ask couples to share a special memory of what Jesus means to them (be sure to give couples a brief time of meditation to think of what they would like to say). At the end of this time, read 1 Corinthians 11:25-26 again as you have them partake of the bread first and then the juice.

RENEW VOWS TOGETHER

Have each couple share their vows with one another in the presence of the group. (An interesting side note is that when Janet and I went through this study with some other couples, we found that the covenant renewals tended to be somewhat of a summary of what each of us believed that God was saying to us about our marriages and spiritual lives.)

FINAL THOUGHTS AND PRAYER

Before ending the session, give couples a chance to share any thoughts or comments they might have on what their time together and in God's word through this study has meant to them. Encourage everyone to continue the practice of regular Appointments with God and the memorization and meditation of

scripture. Conclude with a final time of prayer. Ask for prayer requests. Ask for volunteers to pray for those requests or any other prayers they might want to offer.

EPILOGUE

As may seem appropriate, you may want to suggest that some couples in your group consider leading this study with other couples. There may also be a desire for some couples to stay together in a group. Encourage those to begin a bible study and continue their spiritual growth together, or if you do not intend to lead another *Anchoring Your Marriage* study at this time, consider leading or participating in such a small group. There are many good bible study and discipleship materials out there, including some at <https://AnchorsofGod.com>.

APPENDIX C: SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

There are clear principles in the Bible on how to sustain spiritual growth, but there is no one specific pattern in the bible. The principles of discipleship and the devotion to the five functions of believers in the 1st century church (see page 137) gives us a solid foundation to follow. We can be flexible in the pattern we follow to become fully devoted, fully mature disciples. Below are many options for you to consider. There are many more that I have not covered. There is not one that is best for everyone for we all learn in unique ways.

Some of you already have a pattern of spiritual growth that works for you. If you are satisfied with the pattern you have established, just stick with it. Others might want to experiment with some of the options below and discover what works for them. You can combine some of the ideas and create your own unique way to *“become mature, attaining to the full measure of the likeness of Christ”* (Eph 4:13, NIV). I strongly recommend that you continue the discipline you have practiced in this study of five days a week with a minimum of 30 minutes a day.

DAILY APPOINTMENT WITH GOD

This is by far the most important thing you can do to help you sustain spiritual growth. The bible stresses that we are to abide in Christ, and we do that through time in the word and prayer. Be sure to spend regular time, at least 5 days a week, with God. At Appendix D, you will find the outline we used throughout this study. Feel free to copy it and use it as a resource to help you until you have a well-established pattern of time with God. Below are some things to consider incorporating into your appointment times.

SCRIPTURE PRAYING

Now that you have experience scripture praying, I would suggest that you consider making this method of combining God’s Word and prayer a permanent part of your Appointments with God. If you use it consistently, at some point it will become a natural response to your time in the word and prayer. I have used it consistently for many years so that it is pretty much all I do during my Appointment with God. I pray specific Scriptures during each component of ACTS. I use it when I am memorizing and meditating, reading or studying Scripture. I don’t always follow the exact structure of Read, Think, Pray, Do, in that order because it has become a natural part of my communication with God, using the very words of Scripture. I sometimes refer to this as learning to speak the language of God. Consider the following

- By Scripture praying we learn about the character of God, who He is, how He relates to us and how we are to relate to Him.
- By Scripture praying we can listen to the voice of God through the text and speak to Him in prayer inspired by the text.
- What better way of learning to pray than by praying the prayers of the Bible. We learn how to pray using divinely inspired models.
- Scripture praying involves our body, soul and spirit as we are invited into the deepest of emotions of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and the men who were used to record God’s words for us.
- Prayers of praise and thanksgiving in Psalms and throughout the Bible provide us with the topics, words and attitudes we are to have in our time of adoration. We can then personalize these prayers.

You can use scripture praying as a part of everything. It is the word and prayer all in one.

DAILY READING SCRIPTURE PLANS

There are various kinds of reading plans that many people have found helpful in sustaining their spiritual growth and can easily be incorporated into your Appointments with God. The benefit of these plans is that most help you to consistently stay in the word. There are at least two basic kinds of plans:

Daily Read Through the Bible Plans

Read through the Bible plans are popular with a lot of people. A strength is that by reading systematically through the Bible you get a comprehensive overall view of the story of God from Genesis to Revelation. The weakness, I believe, is that it requires so much time reading that it doesn't leave much time for deeper study, memorization and meditation, but you can adapt the plans some so that you do. Of course, God always speaks to us through His Word no matter what kind of a plan that we use. There are various approaches, and you can easily find a plan that you prefer by searching the Internet for "Bible Reading Plans."

Daily Devotional plans

Many people like to use daily devotional plans. These are usually comprised of brief, daily devotions that include a topic, scripture, or devotional thought. Sometimes there are suggestions of other scriptures to read. There are many books that you can order that give daily devotional plans for a year. Hobby Lobby stores often have a selection of these books at a very reasonable price.

The strength of these plans is that you always have a resource that helps you get into the word and prayers consistently. The weakness is that these devotional plans sometimes take just a few minutes and don't require much effort if that is all you do. If you have one of these plans that you like, you could always spend additional time reading through a book from the Bible or include such things as memorization, meditation and scripture praying.

One of the most popular and time-tested plans is *Our Daily Bread*. It is a small monthly booklet that many churches supply, or you can request they be mailed to you or download their mobile phone application. Their app is easy to use, and it offers monthly/daily reading plans that include Scriptures to look up and ideas on ways to apply God's word to your lives. It also includes topical reading plans as well as a yearly plan.

ANCHOR CARDS

You have already had a lot of experience with Anchor Cards as they have been a key component of *Anchoring Your Marriage*. I believe that if you keep using them, they can be a significant help to sustain your spiritual/marriage growth. Remember that our biblical anchors comprise our world view. You have a great start with the 10 Anchors and Anchor Cards you already have. I urge you to start adding to these as you spend time in the word. Over the years I have made it a goal to memorize a verse a week and review many consistently. I estimate that I have memorized over 1500 verses. About 300 of those make up my "go to" anchor scriptures that I review weekly, many daily. I continue to memorize new verses and passages. I consider this discipline along with prayer as the most important thing I personally do for sustaining spiritual growth. Following are some things to consider:

- Commit to memorizing and meditating on one new verse regularly (preferably one each week).
- Write your new verses on Anchor Cards or in your RememberMe app and review them regularly.
- These Anchors will become a permanent part of your thinking and actions. As they renew your mind and transform your actions, you will find them ready for use in all situations.

These Anchor Scriptures and Cards will not only keep you on a course of “true north” but will keep you anchored when you face frustrations or trials. With constant use, many will come to your mind automatically.

But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil. (Heb 5:14)

BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLES

To grow up into spiritual maturity it is important to learn some basic Bible study principles and skills. There are three principles of Bible study that will be of great value to you when you are reading and studying the bible and will help you memorize, meditate on, and pray the Scriptures. The principles of **observation** (what does it say?), interpretation (what does it mean?) and **application** (how can I apply this to my life?). If you want to do an in-depth study of a passage, chapter or book of the Bible, these principles will give you some structure and skills to “search the word” in a thorough and systematic way. We are told to,

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth. (2 Ti 2:15)

You can learn more about the principles of observation, interpretation, and application in “Week 4” of *Spiritual Bootcamp*, which you can download for free from <https://AnchorsofGod.com/free-downloads>.

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

To be one who “*accurately handl[es] the word of truth,*” we need to have some tools of the trade. Much of what we read in the Bible is clear and relatively easy to understand. However, because the Bible was written over a period of 1500 years, in three continents, with many authors, in various languages and cultures, we sometimes need some help interpreting passages. Below are key tools:

- Bible Commentary: a series of notes explaining the meaning of passages of Scripture.
- Bible Concordance: contains an alphabetical index of words used in the Bible and the main Bible references (locations) where the word occurs.
- Bible Dictionary: contains definitions of key words found in Scripture.
- Bible Handbook: a reference book that provides information on various aspects of the Bible. They provide answers for a variety of biblical questions with short commentaries, maps, photos, and outlines.
- Bible Atlas: a collection of maps focusing on the places that are referenced in the Bible.
- Study Bible: A bible with notes at the bottom of most pages explaining some concepts and may include some of the features described above. I highly recommend you get a good study Bible and read the instructions at the beginning to learn how to use the many features incorporated into it.
- Bible translations: There are many Bible translations that take different approaches to translating the Bible. Some focus on translating the original manuscripts as close to “word-for-word” as possible for accuracy, while others translate more loosely, using a “thought-for-thought” model for easier reading and understanding. When interpreting a difficult passage, consulting several translations may help you.
- Bible Websites and Apps: see below

Bible Websites and Apps

There are many websites and apps that contain different Bible translations and many of the tools I mentioned above. You can download the Bible Apps to your phone or tablet for free so that you can have

your Bible and study tools at your fingertips. A lot of you probably do this already, so I am preaching to the choir. Check with your friends to see what Apps they use. Here are some of the top-rated websites and Apps:

- Life.Church App: A customizable Bible app (known on Android as Youversion) with multiple translations and reading plans and enables you to study with a friend. They also have a Bible App for Kids.
- Bible.Is App: Has the Bible in more than 1300 languages and includes audio.
- Bible Gateway (www.biblegateway.com and an App): You can quickly switch between translations and can take and save notes. You can also quickly search for terms.
- Bible Hub (www.biblehub.com and App): The bible in numerous translations along with multiple resources including book summaries, outlines, timelines and concordance. You can also view a verse in multiple translations on the same screen.
- Blue Letter Bible (www.blueletterbible.org and App): Another website with numerous translations, study resources, and devotionals. They even have a tool to allow you to “mark-up” (e.g., highlight, make notes) the online Bible like you would a physical Bible.

CORPORATE WORSHIP AND STUDY

The Bible clearly teaches the principle of corporate worship and biblical fellowship with other believers (Heb 10:25; Ac 2:42,46; 1 Co 12:14-20). You should **actively** participate in a bible-based church, as this is where believers can use their spiritual gift(s) and practice the “one anothers” (e.g., Jn 13:34, Ro 15:14, Ga 5:13, Eph 5:19). Most churches have small group bible studies or classes that focus on the application of biblical principles. These can be a great way for iron to sharpen iron (Pr 27:17) and help you sustain your spiritual growth.

THE SACRED COVENANT OF MARRIAGE CHALLENGE

The sacred covenant of marriage challenge is to go back through Anchoring our Marriage, taking a week to study each day and then discussing what you have learned during your Together Time. I don’t need to convince you that there is plenty of content for each of the five days. The advantage of this challenge is that you will be able to drink from a fountain rather than a fire hose like you did the first time through. Instead of completing the study in 10 or 20 weeks, you will complete it in in a year.

- Continue to study five days a week and have five appointments with God. Now you will have more time to spend studying and meditating on the individual scriptures in each day’s study.
- Continue using the Appointment with God and Together Time forms in this resource.
- Choose a verse or passage for scripture praying during the week.
- Select a new verse each week on which to mediate and memorize. Create a new anchor card and choose a new Personal Anchor Point.
- Continue to review your all your anchor cards.

A modified option is not to go through the entire 10 weeks but instead select several weeks that you both think would be good to review and use the same pattern as above.

LEAD AN ANCHORING YOUR MARRIAGE GROUP

I know your first response might be, “Who? Us? What are you thinking? We barely made it through this study. What would qualify us to lead a group? We have so far to go in our own marriage that we could never be a help to other couple.” While such reservations are normal, we need to remember that God’s

works His miraculous powers through “normal” people. Of course, we are inadequate. This gives God the opportunity to display His power through us. The Apostle Paul knew this. He said,

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 Co 4:7).

We are merely God’s vessels and God does His work through us. We need to trust in Him and not our own abilities or experience. What qualifies you is that you are a willing vessel. You have gone through this resource, so you have experienced God’s work in your own life and marriage. You have seen how to lead people through the materials, so you have a model of how to lead. You can be a guide on this faith journey.

By leading a group through the material you will have the opportunity to review and reinforce what you have already learned. You will gain new insights, experiences and new growth in your marriage while helping others. You will be following Jesus’ instructions to reproduce yourself in others (Mt 28:18-20). You also have the leader’s guide at Appendix B which gives you step by step instruction on how to lead a group.

THE DISCIPLE’S JOURNEY

“The Disciples Journey” is a four-book series I wrote based on the process that Jesus used as He led His disciples through five stages of training. There are total of 51 group sessions like the study you just completed. Each week requires preparation, and each group session is designed for Bible study, discussion, accountability and prayer. The resources are as follows:

*Spiritual Bootcamp**: The Invitation Stage (Jn 1:15-42): A 9-week foundational Bible study. Perfect for new believers or others desiring to study or reinforce the basics of the faith, including putting off the old self (Eph 4:22-24).

*7 Great Doctrines of the Bible**: The Calling Stage (Mk 11:17-18): A 9-week study covering key doctrines of the Bible. This study is perfect for all believers to help build a solid grasp of biblical doctrine.

Anchoring: Living by the 7 Great Anchors of God: The Choosing and Sending Stages (Mk 3:13-15; Luke 6:12,13; 9:1-2): An intense 24-week study for those who had demonstrated they are faithful, available, and teachable and are committed to further intentional discipleship training, as well as reproducing themselves in others.

Footprints: The Commissioning Stage (Mt 28:18-20): A 9-week leadership book with a focus on developing new believers by taking them through the Disciple’s Journey.

*You could go through these two resources as a couple and make it the basis for your Together Times.

OTHER SUPPORTING RESOURCES

The Bible is our primary resource, but other books and studies that focus on various biblical themes can be useful as well. Over the last forty-plus years, Janet and I have used over a hundred of these resources for our Appointments with God and our Together Times. Our approach is to read specific sections of the resource during the week during our Appointments with God and then discuss what we have read during our Together Times. The best resources are ones that focus more on Scripture than the author and his views. You want to look for resources that bring you into God’s Word and His presence so that He can speak to you.

BOOKS

Following is a list of ten books that we have found helpful.

- *Defined: Who God Says You Are*, by Stephen and Alex Kendrick: This is a must read to help anchor our identity in Christ and works well for Together Times. There are discussion questions at end of the book.
- *The Code* series, by O. S. Hawkins: *The Daniel Code*, *The James Code*, *The Jesus Code* and *The Joshua Code* are excellent for study and discussion.
- *The Battle Plan for Prayer*, by Stephen and Alex Kendrick: An excellent resource on prayer, and it is very thorough and practical.
- *The Daniel Prayer*, by Anne Graham Lotz: Excellent book on prayer by one of our favorite authors.
- *The Hour That Changes the World*, by Dick Eastman. This classic book on prayer challenges you to spend an hour in prayer, praying a 12-step strategy. I found it very helpful in expanding and deepening my prayer life. I have read it multiple times.
- *What the Bible is All About*, by Henrietta Mears. This is a Bible handbook that not only is a great reference while studying the bible, but it is also broken into 51 easily read sections that give an excellent overview of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation.
- *The Invested Life*, by Joel C. Rosenberg and T. E. Koshy. The best book I have ever read on how to be a disciple.

BIBLE STUDIES

Inductive Bible studies for couple or small groups are also great resources to use for your Appointments with God and Together Times. Following are some suggestions as to where to find them:

- LifeWay (www.lifeway.com): The Southern Baptists publish a wide range of excellent Bible studies and other spiritual growth resources that work well for Appointments with God. Janet and I have used many of them over a period of years. Many of the studies are in five days a week workbook form that you have used in this study.
- Christianbook (www.christianbook.com): ChristianBook, formerly called Christian Book Distributors, is one of the oldest and largest book distributors in the business. They have discounted prices and reliable service.
- Thrift Books (www.thriftbooks.com): I use thrift all the time to order books that are out of print. They have a huge selection of used books at a reliable price, and they have cheap and reliable shipping. When you want a book that is out of print (and there are plenty of good ones out there), I suggest that you go on their website rather than Amazon.

YOUR OWN UNIQUE APPROACH

We are all unique in our approaches to how we learn; therefore, no one pattern fits all. That is why I attempted to suggest options and resources that will assist you in developing a plan that suits you. We just need to remember that planning on being in the word and prayer on a regular basis is more important than the plan we use. Sustainable spiritual/marriage growth is really a matter of having an “undivided heart.”

APPENDIX D: APPOINTMENT WITH GOD

APPOINTMENT WITH GOD

READ, STUDY AND MEDITATE ON SCRIPTURE (also review memory verses)

COME IN PRAYER (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication)

HEAR AND ACT (What is God saying? What have I learned? How should I respond?)

FOLLOW (What is God doing in my life and marriage?)

APPENDIX A: TOGETHER TIME

SHARING SCRIPTURE TOGETHER (One in Mind)

Share with one another what you learned from this week's study. What scriptures spoke to you? What is most important for you to put into practice? Share some highlights from your Appointment with God journal.

DISCUSSING OUR RELATIONSHIP (One in Love)

Share and discuss any issues that you feel are important in your relationship.

PLANNING OUR CALENDAR (One in Purpose)

Go over your calendars for the following week. Schedule when you will have your next Together Time. Make sure you both have calendars so you can schedule together. Discuss, "does our calendar demonstrate our purpose in life to glorify God?"

PRAYING TOGETHER (One in Spirit)

Praise God and give thanks to Him. Pray for one another. Ask, "How can I pray for you?" Always remember to thank God for your spouse. Pray for any personal needs. Pray that God will be glorified in your marriage.