

BIBLICAL MARRIAGE

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SESSION 1:

THE PRIORITY OF UNITY

[Audio Message](#)

Introduction

A. Overview.

B. Hope for those tempted with hopelessness. For those who are struggling in marriage, you can take great hope.

1. God's Word is sufficient to address all of our problems (Rom. 15:4; 2 Pet. 1:3; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17).

2. God's grace is sufficient for all our needs (Phil. 4:19; 2 Cor. 12:9). The believer's sin is solvable (Rom. 5:20). God's Spirit can produce growth and change.

C. This class is for you and not just for your spouse. Profiting from this class is dependent upon being a doer of the word and not a hearer only (Jas. 1:22-25; Mt. 7:24-27). It is easy to listen, nod, and go on without change. Strike while the iron is hot. Sit down and prayerfully go through these outlines with your spouse during the week.

I. The Foundation of Biblical Marriage

- A. Marriage is for the magnifying of God's glory (1 Cor. 10:31; Eph. 5:31-32). It sets before the world a model of Christ and the church, which displays the grace of God and defines marriage by the self-denying work of the cross. Many themes, such as sin, grace, forgiveness, God's wrath, unity, and love are central to understanding biblical marriage.
- B. Marriage is a temporary calling (Mt. 22:30; Mk. 12:25). It is one way to serve Christ and exalt his praise, but it is not guaranteed in this life, whether due to sickness, death, or celibacy (1 Cor. 7). As with all God's gifts, we must always hold it loosely. Christ in the gospel of grace is our greatest gift (2 Cor. 9:15).
- C. Marriage is a wonderful gift (Heb. 13:4; 1 Tim. 4:3; Prov. 5:18, 19).
- D. Marriage must not become a self-serving idol.
1. Love for Christ must surpass love for any spouse (Lk. 14:26; 18:29-30; 1 Cor. 7:29). You love your spouse best by loving Christ most.
 2. Whenever your spouse replaces Jesus, you forsake the fountain of living waters in exchange for a broken cistern (Jer. 2:13).
 3. This is a source of marital strife. When you put your spouse in the place of Christ and expect them to supply what only the Lord can supply, then you will be hyper-sensitive to fluctuations of their love and become easily provoked when your spouse does not meet your expectations. If your endless supply of satisfying waters flows from Christ, then you will rejoice when Christ uses your spouse to express

His love to you – without putting your spouse in Christ’s place. When your spouse hurts or disappoints you, and Christ is the object of your joy, then your source of happiness remains uninterrupted.

E. The condition of your marriage to Christ will directly influence the outworking of your marriage to your spouse.

1. If your relationship with Christ is not strong, your marriage will not be strong. It is a beautiful, Christ-magnifying display when both spouses are living faithful to their Lord.
2. Even if your spouse is unwilling to pursue Christ to the same degree as yourself, you can live an abundantly blessed life (full of love, joy, and peace) and bring glory to God, if your marriage to Christ is preeminent.

II. God’s Design for Marriage

A. Primary: Companionship (Gen. 2:18, 24; Prov. 2:17; Mal. 2:14).

B. Secondary

1. Procreation (Gen. 2:27-28).
 2. Propagation of covenant seed in the Church (Mal. 2:15; Ps. 127:3-5).
 3. Preventing lust and fornication (1 Cor. 7:2, 9).
- C. “Marriage was ordained for the mutual help of husband and wife; for the increase of mankind with a legitimate issue, and of the church with an holy seed; and for prevention of uncleanness.” (*Westminster Confession* 24.2)

III. *The First Priority of Marriage: Unity, Oneness, Togetherness*

- A. This is true of the supreme model of marriage – Christ and His bride, the Church (Eph. 5:30-32).
- B. It is specifically prescribed in Scripture (1 Pet. 3:7; Mal. 2:15-16; Eph. 5:22-33)
- C. It is illustrated physically in the consummating act of marriage (Gen. 2:24-25; Matt. 19:5-6).

IV. *Cultivating Unity*

- A. Unity → Trust → Openness.
 - 1. Wholehearted *trust* is the foundation of unity in every relationship
 - a. the believer's relationship with Christ – trust (i.e., faith) in Him.
 - b. common Christian friendships (e.g., David and Jonathan in 1 Sam. 18:1-4/19:1ff).
 - c. in marriage itself (Prov. 31:11).
 - 2. Trust is guarded in marriage by *openness* and *honesty*.
- B. Loving your spouse is required of both husbands (Eph. 5:25, 28, 33; Col. 3:19) and wives (Tit. 2:4).

1. Love does not assume evil or impute motives (1 Cor. 13:5, 7). If you assume anything, assume the best. Otherwise, ask. Countless problems could be avoided by simply recognizing that you did not know what your spouse was thinking or feeling (!), despite your persuasion to the contrary.
2. Love is not something you fall into. Love is a commitment to give one's life for another. Why are some people googy-eyed about the prospects of marriage? Is it so that they will be cherished, respected, and have the exclusive affection and attention of someone, or is it to give up their life in the service of someone else? Do we choose a spouse on the basis of who makes us feel good about ourselves or on the basis of godliness and a like-minded pursuit of God's glory together?

C. Lust is consumed with *getting*. Love is a commitment to *giving*, sometimes irrespective of feelings or emotions. Lust says, "I want for myself." Love says, "I will sacrifice for my spouse." To mortify lust we must dethrone self. We are to find our joy in bringing joy to our spouse.

1. Notice the relationship of love and giving in Scripture (e.g., Eph. 5:2, 25; Gal. 2:20; Jn. 3:16). Make it a habit to be constantly looking to "give" of yourself to one another (time, listening, words, gifts, physically, emotion, thought, serving, etc.).
2. Love does not seek one's own (1 Cor. 13:5). We should not love in order to be loved back. Imagine the marriage where each spouse is devoted 100% to doing everything in their power to bring joy to the other and 0% to watching out for themselves. That is the kind of self-denial to which God is calling you (Phil. 2:20-21). If both have this as a goal, it is heaven on earth.

3. It is also a majestic display of the glory of Christ and his gospel. Christ withheld nothing. He gave all for his Bride (Phil. 2:4ff). The Church is called upon to withhold nothing. We are to give all for our Heavenly Husband (2 Cor. 5:15; Rom. 14:8).

D. If the essence of love is “giving” to others, then we need to learn how to express love effectively. In other words, it is essential that you know how others like to receive love – not how you enjoy expressing it most yourself.

1. This is another form of self-denial and finding your joy by producing joy in the object of your love.
2. This is also an aspect of “knowing” your spouse.
3. Love can be expressed in *thousands* of ways, not all of which are equally meaningful to everyone. For example it can include:
 - a. Serving, helping, doing projects/tasks, etc.
 - b. Physical contact, snuggles, holding hands, etc.
 - c. Giving cards, gifts, surprises, notes, etc.
 - d. Verbal expression of appreciation, admiration, etc.
 - e. Spending time together, going places, just sitting, etc.
 - f. Loyalty and faithfulness.
 - g. Many others.

V. Maintaining Unity

A. Offenses will come whenever any two sinners are involved (Jas. 3:2; 4:1).

1. Two major threats to unity and the pursuit of love are selfishness (me first) and pride (me best).
2. The root problem in taking offense often stems from misplacing our ultimate source of joy. (See section I above.)
3. The motivation for biblically resolving conflicts cannot be self-serving (e.g., desire for personal peace, to get something we want, etc.). We must do what is right for the right reasons, namely, seeking God's glory and the good of our spouse.

B. Biblical Conflict Resolution.

1. Absolutely every single "spat", fight, disagreement, etc. must be biblically resolved to maintain oneness (Eph. 4:26-27). Sweeping a matter under the rug is never permitted. It is these kind of unresolved, back-logged conflicts that build up over time and destroy marriages.
2. There has to be a commitment to:
 - a. tell your spouse what they have done before and during a fight that was sinful and hurtful to you (Matt. 18:15)
 - b. admit to your spouse your own offense and sin – even before they tell you, if possible (Matt. 5:23-24; Jas. 5:16).

c. humility (1 Pet. 5:5-6; Jas. 4:6); self-denial (Lk. 9:23-24; Eph. 5:33) and a greater commitment to a godly marriage than to your “rights” and feelings.

3. It must always end with not only confession but granting biblical *forgiveness* to one another (1 Cor. 13:5; 1 Pet. 4:8). That means promising to bury the issue and to not bring up the forgiven sin to others, your spous or even to rehearse the offense in your own head.

a. We are to forgive in the way God forgives (Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13)

b. God forgives by “forgetting” (Isa. 43:25; 44:22; 38:17; Ps. 103:12; 51:9; etc.).

C. Overview of Dealing with a Sinful Offense

1. The recipient of the offense: being sinned against.

a. Process to pursue: Mt. 18:15-20.

b. Attitude in which to pursue it: Gal. 6:1.

2. The Perpetrator of the offense: sinning against.

a. Process to pursue: Mt. 5:23-24.

b. Attitude in which to pursue it: 1 Pet. 5:5.

(Matt. 18:15-20) → → → → X ↔ ↔ X ← ← ← ← (Matt. 5:23-24)

D. Patterns of Reconciliation.

1. If you can overlook an offense in love, do so (1 Pet. 4:8; Prov. 10:12).
The more you love your spouse, the more easily you will be able to bear patiently with him/her.
2. If the offense is of such a nature that you cannot overlook it, then gently confront your spouse with his/her sin (Mt. 18:15ff).
3. The person being confronted should humbly receive the admonition, and if it is true, repent of it and be reconciled to their spouse.

VI. *Serving Christ in Unity as “Co-heirs” 1 Pet. 3:7*

A. The husband must *know* and *understand* his wife (1 Pet. 3:7).

1. A wise husband will learn to know his wife well enough to utilize her fully as a help-meet – counsel, insight and gifts/abilities (Prov. 18:22).
2. This entails knowing what it means for her to be a “weaker vessel” and caring for her accordingly (1 Pet. 3:7). It means understanding her physical, emotional and spiritual limitations and sensibilities.
3. A godly husband will be devoted to giving honor to her (1 Pet. 3:7; Prov. 31:28). This involves supporting, encouraging, defending and praising her in front of others and privately.
4. He must cherish her by not being rude – an attribute of love (1 Cor. 13:5).

5. It is the husband's job to "cheer up" his wife (Deut. 24:5). Concentrate on being sensitive to her many needs.

B. A wife must *respect* and *honor* her husband (Eph. 5:22, 33).

1. A wise "help-meet" will strengthen, defend and assist her husband in his areas of weakness (Abigail: 1 Sam. 25:3ff; an imperfect but good example). Prudence will crown her decision-making (Prov. 19:14).
2. She will know and fulfill his wishes when able (1 Pet. 3:1-6; Tit. 2:5).
3. A virtuous wife is industrious and productive for her husband (Prov. 31).
4. She will honor him by going to him for spiritual instruction, counsel and help (1 Cor. 14: 35).
5. A godly woman will honor her husband by assisting him in lovingly raising their children in the ways of the Lord (Prov. 6:20-21; Col. 3:21; Eph. 6:4). She will be able to extend her family's ministry to teaching other ladies to do the same (Titus 2:3-5).

C. Harmony: What are our complementary strengths and weaknesses?

1. Spiritually (sins/graces/gifts, etc.).
2. Emotionally (levels/frequency of various emotions).
3. Physically (health/strength/energy/activity).
4. Interests (academic/recreational/hobby, etc.).
5. Gifts/Abilities.
6. Personality bent (temperament, task vs. people oriented, etc.).

VII. *The Bond of Unity: Vows*

A. Marriage is a covenant relationship.

1. The Bible uses the terminology “your wife by covenant” (Mal. 3:14).
2. It is sinful for a believer to be unequally yoked to an unbeliever (2 Cor. 6:14).
 - a. Being unequally yoked is a biblical picture of being bound or tied to another by covenant.
 - b. The description of marriage in the beginning was “cleaving” and becoming one flesh (Gen. 2:24).
3. God is ultimately joining the two in marriage together (Mt. 19:6).

B. The ones involved in the taking of vows.

1. Your marriage vow is first and foremost to God Himself (Deut. 23:21).
2. Your vow is secondly a pledge to one another (Mal. 2:14).
3. Those attending are responsible witnesses to your vows, who by their attendance are committing themselves to hold you to your promise (Josh. 24:22).

C. The Seriousness of taking vows.

1. Do not take them quickly or hastily (Eccl. 5:2).

2. Do not take them thoughtlessly (Eccl. 5:2).
3. Once a lawful vow is taken there is no return – no matter how much you regret it (Ps. 76:11; Eccl. 5:4, 6; Ps. 15:4b).
4. It is better not to vow, then to vow and not pay it (Eccl. 5:5).

Conclusion

- A. Please go over the outline and look up the passages of Scripture with your spouse. Discuss particular instances in your relationship where these principles should have been applied and other instances in which they were successfully implemented.
- B. Identify the specific areas which need to be changed. Formulate a concrete plan of how you are going to apply these biblical principles to the specifics of your situation. For example, if there is a back log of conflicts which have not been biblically resolved, start by addressing those.
- C. Water all of your study and discussions with much prayer together. “Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it . . .” (Ps. 127:1).

SESSION 2:

THE GODLY HUSBAND

[Audio Message](#)

Introduction

- A. Just because two professing Christians are married does not mean that they have a Christian marriage. We define how Christian our home is by how closely it conforms to biblical standards. It is not the label on the outside of the package, but the contents on the inside of the package that matters most.

- B. As the husband goes, so the family goes. The exercise of godly leadership will be largely determinative of the character of the home (cf., civil rulers, employers, elders). If the husband contributes to the character of the home, the wife often determines the atmosphere of the home.

- C. A word to wives (1 Pet. 3:1ff). I am not providing you with a stick for beating your husbands. And remember that next week the tables will be turned.

I. The Husband's Position: Headship

- A. The husband is the "head" of the wife.

1. This headship is a reflection of Christ's relationship to His Bride, the Church (Eph. 5:23; Rev. 21:2). This same motif has a precedent in the Old Testament (e.g., Isaiah, Ezekiel, Song of Solomon, Hosea, Psalms, etc.). The gospel is a marriage proposal.
2. This headship is inescapable. It is a matter of fact (indicative), not a command (imperative) in Ephesians 5:23. Paul does not say, "Husband, go be head of your wife." He says, "Husband, you are head of your wife." Therefore, you are always saying something through your life – either truthfully or erroneously – about the Gospel and the relationship of Christ and the Church.
3. The husband is a representative of God in the home (1 Cor. 11:3). Thus, he should accurately model the character of God to his wife and family.
4. A husband's first relationship is to his "Head", the Lord Jesus Christ. If his relationship with Christ is not flourishing, then the husband's relationship with his wife will suffer.
5. The husband is the overseer, the boss, and the ruler of the home.
6. In contrast to the tenets of evangelical feminism, this position of headship was given to the husband prior to the Fall, not as a result of the Fall (Gen. 2:18, 22, 23; 1 Tim. 2:11ff; 1 Cor. 11:3).

B. Headship is a Divine calling.

1. This is a calling and responsibility of a husband, but he is not more *inherently* deserving of this position than the wife. It is a position assigned by God, which must be upheld. All authority is *derived*.

2. Headship is not a right to abusive control or gross neglect. It is not a right at all, but rather a responsibility. It is the responsibility to love, lead, protect and serve like Christ.
3. A church officer is likewise given a calling and a role to fulfill before God, but he is not *inherently* more deserving of respect and obedience than those he serves (Heb. 13:17). It is his calling and position that determines such a response.
4. The difference in our perspective will be manifest when the wife fails to respect the husband's authority. Do we take legitimate offense for Christ and the shame brought to him, or do we take offense (in part or whole) for ourselves? A response of, "How dare you!" can be motivated by self-centeredness or having our pride wounded. Is venting our anger an expression of insecurity and an insistence that we deserve better treatment, or is the disturbance in our spirit driven by zeal for the glory of Christ, which is being undermined by the wife?
5. We all must learn to abide in the calling that God has given to us (1 Cor. 7:20).

II. The Husband's Pursuit: Love

- A. God's main exhortation to the husband is to love his wife (Eph. 5:25, 28, 33; Col. 3:19).

1. Men tend to be challenge-oriented. It can be tempting to pour everything into successfully securing a wife, then after marriage to re-direct our interests and energies into the next challenge.

2. We are to have abiding love. Men can be independent and not relationship oriented. They easily busy themselves with goals and do not feel the “need” for close relationships. But if they are to reflect Christ and the Church, then they must pursue constant union and communion (Jn. 15:1ff).
3. Love is giving (Eph. 5:25), sacrificing one’s own body (v. 28), and caring for another as oneself (v. 33). This is a call to perpetual pursuit. The husband should no sooner neglect his wife than his own body. He does not give to his body sporadically or hate his own flesh. This is a call to daily self-denial (1 Cor. 13:4-7).
4. Do not be bitter toward your wife (Col. 3:19). This is a pointed temptation aimed at undermining love. Why does Paul say be not bitter? Christ never complains to the Father, “The woman Thou gavest me”, nor does he wish he were with someone else. Christ’s love is manifest in repeatedly forgiving his people (Ps. 131)

B. The husband is to love his wife *even as* Christ loves the Church (Eph. 5:25).
How does this look? We have to first understand Christ’s love.

1. He “set his love” on us (Deut. 7:7; Ps. 91:14). This is a commitment to choose to love, not just “falling in love.”
2. He is the supreme model of loving the unlovable (Rom. 5:8; Ps. 40:1ff).
3. As Christ cherishes his Bride (Zeph. 3:17), so the husband his wife. This entails devoting time and our full attention to her (cf., Ps. 40:1; the Psalms are full of this language).

4. Christ's love makes us beautiful (Eph. 5:26-28). Our love produces loveliness in our wives. We are to draw out loveliness and cultivate greater beauty in her.
5. The husband is to praise his bride (Prov. 31:28; Ps. 45).
6. He is to support her. Will he as the stronger vessel dump stuff on the weaker vessel (1 Pet. 3:7)? It is often the opposite of the nature of men to be tender and compassionate, and yet Christ is our ultimate example. He looked upon the multitudes with compassion (without irritation and condescension) nine times in the Gospels. Notice that Paul says to fathers "*provoke not . . . but bring them up in the nurture . . .*" (Eph. 6:4).
7. Christ is never at blame for anything. Yet unlike Adam, he does not take up an accusatory posture toward his Bride.

C. Loving your wife involves being a life-time student of her (1 Pet. 3:7).

1. Husbands need to grow in understanding both our wife's verbal and non-verbal communication.
2. Watch and listen closely, but do NOT assume. If in doubt, ask. It takes skill to draw things out of our wives that they do not even see in themselves.
3. Areas to explore and discuss with your wife in order to better understand her: bible doctrine, the home, children, her responsibilities, her family, her friends, her areas of Christian service, her goals, her hopes, her dreams, ways you can be a better father and husband, what you do that is not edifying to her, her struggles, her feelings, etc. etc.

Even if you limit yourself to this brief list, you will be guaranteed hours of fascinating discussion . . . hopefully.

III. *The Husband's Role: Leadership*

A. Obstacles to Leadership.

1. Fear and insecurity. Leadership is vulnerable and can also foster a fear of failure. Courage is not the absence of fear. It is doing our duty despite our fears. The remedy for fear is love (2 Tim. 1:7; 1 Jn. 4:18). Wives can assist here by enabling the heart of their husbands to safely trust in them (Prov. 31:11, 12).
2. Laziness (Prov. 21:25-26; 10:4-5). Busyness is not the same as diligence. Are you motivated by what is right or what is fun (principle v. pleasure)? Laziness has no follow through (Prov. 12:27). It is full of excuses (Prov. 22:13). Being a leader is hard work (Prov. 6:6-11).
3. Selfishness and pride. Christ's leadership is seen in his initiative to save his Bride. We are to use our strength and resources to provide physically and spiritually for those entrusted to our care. Our leadership position is not for ourselves. It is for those being led by us.
4. Discouragement (Gal. 6:9).

B. Chief Servant. Christ serves his Bride (Jn. 13:4ff).

1. Authority is given by God as a position of protection and servanthood.

- a. For example: the civil magistrate is to be the servant, not the savior of the citizenship (Rom. 13:1-7).
 - b. The elders of the Church are to serve the members of the congregation, not lord over the people (1 Pet. 5:1ff; Heb. 13:17).
 - c. So, the husband is to serve his wife and family (Eph. 5:25, 28).
 - d. The difference between biblical authority and “authoritarianism” is that authoritarianism is:
 - i. self-serving, rather than focused on those under it (Mt. 20:25-28; 1 Pet. 5:2, 3).
 - ii. it reaches beyond the parameters prescribed for it in the Scriptures, taking responsibilities that God never gave to it.
 - e. The husband is himself a man under authority – God’s authority (1 Cor. 11:3).
2. The husband is the “manager” of his home. Leadership means that the “buck” stops with him. It used to be common to ask, “Is the man of the house at home?” Notice God’s words in the garden (Gen. 3:9).
- a. With rule comes responsibility. Any activity that takes place in his home is ultimately his responsibility (Josh 24:14-15).
 - b. All final decisions are ultimately his responsibility.

C. Spiritual Shepherds.

1. The husband is to “shepherd” his wife.
 - a. He is to be a teacher and spiritual mentor of his wife (1 Cor. 14:34-35). The husband himself must be a diligent student of God’s Word in order to instruct his wife (2 Tim. 2:15). This only comes with time and effort (less time on our hobbies and more time reading theology).
 - b. He is obligated to “know” his wife intimately, including her spiritual struggles, “besetting” sins, development in Christian maturity and other weaknesses (1 Pet. 3:7). This means being pro-active and taking the initiative to discover these things. What are her strongest graces? What sins plague her most? What areas of spiritual growth is she addressing at present? Are you ensuring that she has adequate time for communion with Christ (Lk. 10:38-42)?
 - c. The husband is to wash his wife with the water of the Word (Eph. 5:26). You can even memorize Scripture together.
 - d. The husband is to cherish his wife by protecting her from a multitude of dangers: erroneous theology, bad friends, assuming the wrong (or too many) responsibilities, unedifying habits, dangerous places, pressures from extended family, etc.
 - e. He is ultimately responsible for her obedient living as a wife as well. (Josh 24:14-15).

- f. You can catechize your wife and children, using the *Shorter Catechism*. This is a time-tested means of helping your wife and children learn discernment by mastering biblical doctrine. It will also protect them from being fooled by bad doctrine (Heb. 5:12-14).
 - g. Shepherding your wife and family at home is a pre-requisite for shepherding the Lord's people at Church (1 Tim. 3:4, 5).
2. Family worship is non-optional for a Christian home.
- a. The father is responsible to *diligently* instruct his family in the ways of the Lord (Deut. 6:6ff).
 - b. Since priorities are what you do, anchor family worship to something in your schedule that is unchangeable (i.e., early morning, breakfast, dinner, before bed, etc.). This should begin on the wedding night – not when children come along.
 - c. Practical suggestions for leading family worship:
 - Read a passage of Scripture. (It is good to have a system for reading through the Bible.) Reading the Bible together everyday with your wife and family is where they will learn to master the content of the Scriptures.
 - Make brief comments on the passage, explaining what it means.
 - Look for applications of the passage to your self, wife and geared to the children as well.

- Pray at the beginning and at the end. During one of the prayers list specific needs of the family and those you know. It will strengthen the children's faith to see God answering prayer.

 - Sing Psalm selections that will help the children become more familiar with the ones they will hear in church. You can also learn new ones as a family. These can then be sung from memory in the car on the way to church or on trips.

 - Adapt the way you conduct family worship to the needs of the family and the stages of the children.
3. The husband's constant example and speech are also training his wife and family either positively or negatively (by omission or commission). The classroom is all day long (Deut. 6:6ff), not just during family worship. Your actions will often speak louder than your words.
4. Christian education is non-optional for a Christian home (Deut. 6:6ff; 2 Cor. 10:4-5; Col. 2:8).

Conclusion

- A. “You don’t know my wife!!!”

- B. You don’t know my own struggles. When we are brought to see afresh our own bankruptcy and sin it should humble us in repentance and send us running again to Christ. In going to Christ we are quieted by his love for us, his Bride. This in itself further strengthens us in grace and enables us to love our own wives in mercy.

- C. The glory of Christ and the gospel in our homes.

SESSION 3:

THE GODLY WIFE

[Audio Message](#)

Introduction

A. Wives have a high calling in God's sight.

1. This privileged role, however, is constantly being undermined by a barrage of secular, egalitarian assaults.
2. Martin Luther affirmed, "What you do in your house is worth as much as if you did it up in heaven for our Lord God. We should accustom ourselves to think of our position and work as sacred and well pleasing to God, not on account of the position and work, but on account of the word and faith from which the obedience and work flow."
3. Being a wife and mother is a *hard* job. Thankfully, God gives direction to an overwhelmed heart (Ps. 61:2).

B. Different women will respond to these truths in various ways.

1. Some genuinely want to grow but will merely look for a list of duties to follow.
2. Some genuinely want to grow but will be easily overwhelmed and discouraged.
3. Some will be tempted to shut their ears in resentment and resistance.
4. Some will be tempted to indifference caused by hopelessness.
5. The best response is to be drawn to our Heavenly Husband, which will bear the fruit of a teachable spirit and willing obedience. This includes differentiating between man's expectations and God's expectations, as well as accepting our Providential limitations.

C. Please do not yield to the folly of comparison (2 Cor. 10:12).

1. It is tempting to look around at other people to see what the perfect marriage or family might look like. This is not wise.
2. A biblical marriage and family is going to look very, very different from house to house because we are different members of Christ's Body with different gifts, talents, interests, physical abilities, etc.
3. We must conform to the specifics of God's Law and Word, but there is much freedom for variety. There are no universal, model families.

4. Do not take your eyes off Christ. Comparison can result in the extremes of pride or debilitating discouragement. In every case, God says it is foolish.

D. A word to husbands about love that suffers long (1 Cor. 13:4ff; Eccl. 7:8-9). Remember the patient longsuffering that Christ exemplifies toward his Bride (Num. 14:18; Ps. 86:15; 103:8-10).

I. A Wife's Motivations

A. A Christ-centered perspective.

1. Look past your husband to Christ who stands behind him. "Wives, submit unto your own husbands, *as unto the Lord.*" (Eph. 5:22).
2. When your husband loves you, it should tangibly warm your heart to Christ's greater love (Eph. 5:25).
3. Your personal submission to Christ has a practical impact on your marriage because you submit to Christ by tangibly submitting to your husband who Christ has put over you. Christ is worthy of such devotion even when your husband is not.
4. Conversely, rebelling against your husband is rebellion against Christ, which is a heinous sin (1 Sam. 15:23).
5. This Christ-centered approach explains why the consequences of a wife's disobedience are so significant.

- a. It is not just the good name of the woman, but rather the Good Name of our Savior that is impugned. “. . . the young women . . . obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed” (Titus 2:4-5).
 - b. The Gospel is also distorted (Eph. 5:22-25).
6. Your submission to your husband illustrates for him and the world the Church’s submission to Christ.
 7. This Christ-centered perspective addresses one of the wives primary temptations: *fear*. Following your husband boils down to trusting God, and faith is the remedy for fear. Notice the connection between faith and fear in 1 Pet. 3:5-6.

B. A husband-oriented perspective.

1. Your husband is not your Jesus. The relationship with your husband is temporary and secondary.
2. Your earthly responsibility is to care for your husband and to please him (1 Cor. 7:34). A woman’s focus and goal is to please her husband, not herself. This is not the same as being a people-pleaser because the motivation is Christ-centered.
3. She must *learn* how to please him (his desires, goals, priorities, etc.).
4. She is to do her utmost to create a happy haven of rest to do him good and not evil, which includes cultivating a peaceful and loyal relationship where his heart can safely trust in her (Prov. 31:11-12).

5. The motivation for serving husband must not be self-serving (see Session One). It can be tempting to give in order to get.

II. The Wife's Role: A Help-meet

A. The woman was designed and created to be a help-meet to her husband (Gen. 2:18).

1. She was made out of man (1 Cor. 11:8).
2. She was made after man (1 Cor. 11:9).
3. She was made for man (1 Tim. 2:13).
4. She is more easily deceived (1 Tim. 2:14).
5. She is a bodily member, and her husband is her head (Eph. 5:23).

B. Regarding a person's *status*, women stand on equal ground with men before the Lord (Gal. 3:28).

1. As a Christian person, there is no distinction between the ability of a man and a woman when it comes to grace and gifts. Women can be equally godly, talented, and intelligent.
2. The biblical distinction pertains to the *role* assigned by God for expressing those gifts and grace.

C. Regarding a person's *role*, women are in subjection (1 Tim. 2:11-12).

1. To gladly assume the role that God assigns is to embrace God's design and wisdom, which always works best. The injunction to submit, far from being harsh, is beautiful in its godly expressions.
2. This marital subjection is unique. A wife is to submit to her *own* husband, not to all other men (Eph. 5:22; Col. 3:18).
3. The husband is the head who lovingly leads. The wife is the help-meet who submissively follows.
4. That entails deferring to his judgment, supporting his decisions, and promoting his priorities in the home (Tit. 2:5; 1 Pet. 3:1-6).

III. *A Wife's Pursuit: Submission*

A. The biblical injunction:

1. *Submit* to your husband (Eph. 5:22; Col. 3:18)
2. Be in *subjection* to your husband (Eph. 5:24; 1 Pet. 3:1, 5)
3. *Reverence* your husband (Eph. 5:33)
4. *Obey* your husband (Tit. 2:5; 1 Pet. 3:6)

B. The wife is to *submit* to her husband.

1. This submission is a reflection of the Church's (Christ's bride) relationship to Her Bridegroom, the Lord Jesus (Eph. 5:22-24, 33). The wife is to submit to her husband as to the Lord Jesus Christ (Col. 3:18).
2. Submission is not conditional on the husband doing his part to love as Christ loved his Church. You cannot say that if your husband loved you more, then you would be a more submissive wife. This is the precise idea that God refutes (1 Pet. 3:1ff). This submission is to be expressed even in undesirable circumstances. Even if the husband is an unbeliever (1 Cor. 7:13-17) or disobedient (1 Pet. 3:1-2) she is to be in subjection to him. Sarah proved that unlovable husbands are no excuse for lack of submission (1 Pet. 3:1-6). We are responsible before God our own behavior. Blame-shifting began immediately after the Fall and continues to the present (Gen. 3:12-13).
3. The reason this submission is not based on the husband's action or inaction is because your submission is directed ultimately to Christ who is always loving and faithful.
4. This submission is rooted all the way back in Creation (1 Tim. 2:13-14; 1 Cor. 11:3, 8) and in the Law (1 Cor. 14:34).
5. This submission is inescapable. You are always saying something through your life – either truthfully or erroneously – about the Gospel and relationship of Christ and the Church. (Eph. 5:24).
6. This kind of woman is priceless (Prov. 31:10-12; 28-29).

C. A wife is to *obey* her husband (Tit. 2:5; 1 Pet. 3:6).

1. This is rooted in the 5th commandment (Ex. 20:12). See *Larger Catechism* 123-133.
2. She is to obey him in all things (Eph. 5:24). Wives are as obligated to respect and obey their husbands as children are to respect and obey their parents. The same language employed for the relationship of children to parents is used for the relationship between the wife and the husband.
3. All human authority is derived authority with God ordained parameters. Consequently, she is not to submit to him if asked to sin because her first allegiance is to Christ (Acts 4:19).
4. From the time of the Fall it has been a constant temptation for a woman to rebel against her husband (Gen. 3:16/4:7). The entrance of sin at the Fall made it unnatural to desire submission (cf., the husband loving his wife). It is grace in the gospel that makes it desirable.
5. A contentious wife is a curse (Prov. 21:19; 27:15). A godly wife is a crown (Prov. 18:22; 19:14; 31:10-12; 28-29).
6. Obedience to the husband, like to Christ, is to be willingly, cheerfully, quickly, fully, and from the heart.
7. The motivation for obedience is not duty but love for the husband.
8. A wise woman builds up her house rather than tearing it down through nagging, criticizing, belittling, dashing dreams, neglecting, etc. (Prov.14:1).

IV. A Wife's Goals

A. A Wife's Chief Priorities.

1. A wife's number one priority is cultivating her fellowship and relationship with Christ. The more she is growing in intimacy with and obedience to Jesus, the more she will be growing in the depths of intimacy and obedience with her husband. She must first fear the Lord (Prov. 31:30). Without this first priority all else will fail.
2. Her first priority after the Lord is to be a helpmeet to her husband (Gen. 2:20ff). This means organizing her decisions throughout the day in terms of meeting her husband's goals and desires for the family (Prov. 31:10-31).
3. This priority also entails loving her husband first and then her children second before the rest of the world (Titus 2:4).
4. This is why the Bible says she is to be a "keeper (or worker) at home" (Titus 2:5). This text applies to all wives, with or without children. The passage is not talking about the impermissibility of women working or making money (Prov. 31). Rather, it is saying that a wife's world and priorities are to be centered in diligently fulfilling her responsibilities at home.
5. She is to be her husband's chief disciple (1 Cor. 14:34-35).

6. After a woman's priorities at home, her next priority is ministering to other women in the church (Titus 2:3-4). The empty nest is replaced with discipling and serving younger women. This involves taking the lessons that she has learned in applying the Scripture, and teaching that to other ladies.

B. A Woman's Godly Character and Demeanor.

1. She is industrious (Prov. 31:10ff).
 - a. Caring for her family's clothing (vv. 13, 21-22, 24)
 - b. Caring for her family's food (vv. 14-15)
 - c. She is generous to those in need (v. 20)
 - d. She supports and furthers her husband's success (v. 23)
 - e. She is financially prudent (v. 16)
 - f. She uses her tongue for wisdom and kindness (v. 26)
 - g. She is diligent (vv. 27, 31).
2. Respectful to her husband (Eph. 5:33; 1 Pet. 3:2). This is especially manifest in the way that she speaks to him and of him (1 Pet. 3:6).
3. She is not an idle busy-body (1 Tim. 5:13).
4. She is to exemplify chaste and reverent behavior (1 Pet. 3:2).
5. Her godliness is expressed in modest dress (1 Tim. 2:9; 1 Pet. 3:3).
6. She is to be sensible, pure and kind (Titus 2:5).
7. She is to adorn herself with, "a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price" (1 Pet. 3:4).
8. She is prudent (Prov. 19:14).
9. If she has children, she raises them in fear (Prov. 6:20-21).
10. The heart of her husband safely trusts in her (Prov. 31:11)
11. Above all, she fears God (Prov. 31:30).

Conclusion

- A. First things first. Relating to your earthly husband is just one more way of walking with your Heavenly Husband.

- B. Who is sufficient for these things? We are full of bankruptcy, neediness and dependence. We must be led to live upon Christ's love and grace. Hold fast to him and live for him.

- C. In all of the many distractions we must remember the "one thing needful." It is tempting to be an excellent Martha but a poor Mary.

- D. I have included the helpful anecdote below as a stimulus to wives who seek to walk in fellowship with Christ amidst very busy lives.

A STORY

THE DOMESTIC SERVANT'S PRACTICAL EXPOSITION

A number of ministers were assembled in the home of one of them for the discussion of difficult questions, and it was asked how the command to "PRAY WITHOUT CEASING" could be complied with. Various suppositions were stated; and at length one of the number was appointed to write an essay upon it to be read at the next meeting; which being overheard by a plain sensible servant girl exclaimed,

“What! a whole month waiting to tell the meaning of that text? It is one of the easiest and best texts in the Bible.”

“Well, well,” said an old minister. “Mary, what can you say about it? Let us know how you understand it. Can you pray all the time?”

“Oh, yes sir!”

“What, when you have so many things to do?”

“Why, sir, the more I have to do, the more I can pray”

“Indeed! Well, Mary, do let us know how it is; for most people think otherwise.”

“Why sir,” said the girl, “when I first open my eyes in the morning, I pray that the Lord open the eyes of my understanding; and while I am dressing I pray that I may be clothed with the robe of Christ’s righteousness; and when I have washed me, I pray for the washing of regeneration; and as I begin to work, I pray that I may have strength equal to my day; and when I begin to kindle the fire, I pray that God’s work may revive in my soul; and as I sweep out the house, I pray that my heart may be cleansed from all its impurities; and while preparing and partaking of my breakfast, I desire and pray to be fed with the hidden manna, and the sincere milk of the Word; and as I am busy with the little children, I look up to God as my reconciled Father in Christ, and pray for the Spirit of adoption that I may know myself more assuredly as His child; and so on all day; everything I do furnishes me with a thought for prayer.”

“Enough, enough!” exclaimed the old divine, “These things are revealed to babes, and often hid from the wise and prudent. Go on, Mary, pray without ceasing; and as for us, my brethren, let us bless the Lord, for this wonderful practical exposition, and remember that He has said, “The meek will he guide in judgment.” After this, the essay was considered unnecessary.

SESSION 4:

COMMON CHALLENGES TO UNITY

[Audio Message](#)

Introduction

- A. There are as many threats to marital unity as there are types of sin. In both our relationship with the Lord and in our relationships with others we see that sin *repels* and grace *draws*.

- B. In this last session we will cover four of the most common areas in which marital conflict arises. The purpose of this session is to illustrate how the principles we have previously laid down are applied to these specific challenges.

- C. Each of these areas need to be more thoroughly studied than we will have time and space to cover here. But these cursory points will assist you in the practical pursuit of oneness in marriage.

I. Marital Unity in Communication

A. The importance of communication to a godly marriage.

1. Breakdown in communication is one of the most common areas of marital dysfunction. The other areas in marriage will suffer from a lack of biblical communication (cf., Session One on conflict resolution).
2. God places importance on holy communication (Eph. 4:25, 29, 31).
3. The tongue is directly tied to the heart. What is in the heart comes out the mouth, and thus the mouth is a window to the soul (Mt. 12:34; 15:18).
4. Our speech is a test of our spirituality (Jas. 1:26).

B. Prerequisites to godly communication.

1. A desire to please Christ more than self or spouse (2 Cor. 5:9; 1 Cor. 10:23).
2. Growing humility. Pride is a primary root cause of breakdowns in communication (Eph. 4:1-3; Phil. 2:1-4; Jas. 4:6-7; 1Pet. 5:5-9).
3. A sense of accountability to the Lord for our words (Mt. 12:36).
4. A commitment to taking the time to communicate (Rom. 12:10-12).

C. Non-verbal communication.

1. We can say volumes without uttering a word. For example, people regularly communicate the following non-verbally: love, happiness, fear, sadness, indifference, apathy, anger, physical attraction, irritation, discouragement, doubt, guilt, boredom, etc.
2. Non-verbal communication includes: facial expressions, hand gestures, sighing, rolling the eyes, a look of amazement, a look of disgust, a wink, staring, smiles, frowns, a touch, a squeeze, giving a gift, listening attentively, notes, body posture, volume of voice, tone of voice, etc.
3. Think of the various ways you can say, “Could you please come here?” (e.g., with anger, desperation, sadness, love, cheerfulness, apathy, etc.).
4. Our actions also communicate. If you say that you want to spend some time with your spouse and you fiddle around on the computer all day, your actions will speak louder than your words. Keep your word and promises.

D. The first part of verbal communication: *Listening*.

1. Commit to listening *first* – before speaking (Jas. 1:19). We could avoid problems half of the time if we would stop and concentrate on what our spouse is saying (Prov. 10:19).
2. God says that jumping ahead to what we think our spouse is thinking before we hear what they say is utter folly (Prov. 18:13).

3. Practical commitments and guidelines:

- a. Concentrate on what they are saying.
- b. Do not interrupt. Wait until they are finished before speaking.
- c. Do not formulate your answer while the other person is talking.
- d. Give each other time to process information and respond.
- e. Ask questions to clarify.
- f. Most important: do not assume that you understand until you can restate what your spouse has said *to their satisfaction*. This is a big help!

E. The second part of verbal communication: *Speaking*.

1. Bridling the tongue comes with great difficulty (Jas. 3:2). Pray for help (Ps. 141:3).
2. Failure to bridle the tongue creates great havoc and damage (Jas. 3:5b-6). Conversely, guarding the mouth saves you from trouble (Prov. 21:23). This means that if you can discipline your tongue, then much marital grief will be avoided.
3. Be open and honest. Do not tell a partial truth or be evasive (Eph. 4:25). Be straight-forward in what you are saying (Mt. 5:37). See Session One on openness and trust. This has to be balanced with the next point (#4).

4. “A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger”
(Prov. 15:1). We need to know how to answer and how to ensure that our speech is gracious and seasoned with salt (Col. 4:6).
5. Guard *how* you say what you say (Prov. 16:32; Col. 4:6; Eph. 4:29-32).
This includes: sharp or harsh tone, outbursts, yelling, name-calling, belittling, which are better known as bitterness, anger, slander, malice, etc.
6. You are not to respond in like kind if your spouse is sinning with their tongue (Prov. 26:4-5).
7. Remember that the timing of what you say can have just as big of an impact as what you say. Ask yourself, “Is this the best time to say this?”
But do not needlessly delay (Eph. 4:26-27). Think about what to say before you say it (Prov. 15:28).
8. Some areas will be easier to talk about than others. Work on those areas that are most challenging. Examples include: spiritual walk, opinions, concerns, interests, emotions, goals, plans, expectations, finances, convictions, work, parenting, dreams, sex, friends, problems, failures, victories, current events, what you read, etc.
9. There are two opposite errors: blow-up and clam-up. Not speaking is also a sin. If you tend to clam-up, then you need to work on getting what is on the inside to the outside in a godly spirit.
10. We also need to be able to communicate reproof with a gentle spirit when needed (Gal. 6:1; Mt. 18:15ff; Prov. 25:12).

F. Cultivating spiritual conversation.

1. Just as we are to speak with our children all day about spiritual things (Deut. 6:6ff), so married couples should cultivate spiritual conversation (Mal. 3:16-18).
2. Spiritual-mindedness produces spiritual conversation (Rom. 8:5-6; Col. 3:1-4). What you think about most is what you will talk about most (Mt. 12:34; 15:18). Like an overflowing glass, if you continue to fill the mind with good things, it will eventually spill out the mouth.
3. We are to study one another so that we know how to best stir one another up to love and good works (Heb. 10:24). Self-consciously plan and employ your mouth to build up your spouse and minister grace to them (Eph. 5:29; Col. 4:6).

G. Further practical suggestions.

1. Be willing to admit you are part of the problem (Prov. 20:6) and be willing to change (Mt. 5:23-26).
2. Avoid using emotionally charged words. Be responsible for your own emotions, words, and actions without blaming your sin on your spouse (Gal. 6:5; Jas. 1:13-15).
3. Do not have reruns of old arguments (Eph. 4:26).
4. Deal with the present, not the past (see Session One).
5. Learn to communicate non-verbally.

6. Apply your mind to understanding why your spouse is saying what they are saying. If they say, “You don’t love me”, what is behind that? This is a big part of growing to know your spouse.
7. Remember the golden rule (Mt. 7:12).
8. Always be more angry about your own sin than you are about your spouse’s sin (Job 40:3-5; 42:6; Ezra 9:6).
9. Major on humbling yourself and admitting wrong. As noted above, pride is the primary culprit in communication breakdowns.
10. For more information, listen to Pastor [McCurley’s sermon series on the tongue](#).

II. Marital Unity in Child-Rearing

- A. It is likely that a significant portion of your life will be devoted to raising children. Young couples should not make the mistake of thinking that they have time before they need to think about this topic. It is better to have talked through how you will raise your children before they arrive. You must be unified in your perspective and plan.
- B. Biblical view of covenant children.
 1. Our children belong to the Lord (Gen. 17:7)
 2. Our goal is to raise up a godly seed for the Lord (Mal. 2:15)

3. Children are intended to be a blessing and reward from the Lord (Ps. 127:3-5).

4. Foolish, ungodly children are a curse to their parents (Prov. 10:1; 15:20; 17:25; 19:13; 21:20).

C. Parenting is a temporary stewardship (Eph. 6:4). The husband/wife relationship is characterized by oneness (Gen. 2:24-25), and the parent/child relationship is one of fruitfulness (Ps. 127:3). The former is the first priority and the latter is secondary.

D. Proactive Training.

1. First, discussion of spiritual matters in the home should be all day long. You should teach your children everywhere and all the time about God's Word (Deut. 6:6ff; 11:19ff).

2. Your own and your children's spiritual well-being is dependent on everyday exhortation (Heb. 3:13).

3. The goal is to see biblical faithfulness passed down past your children to your grandchildren and great-grandchildren after you (Ps. 78:5-6; Deut. 4:9).

4. Christian education is non-optional for a Christian home (Deut. 6:6ff; 2 Cor. 10:4-5; Col. 2:8).

5. Family worship is non-optional for a Christian home (See Session Two, III.C.2).

E. The Practice of Discipline.

1. Discipline is corrective not punitive (Heb. 12:9-11).

- a. It is to train and redirect the child rather than exact justice on them. We are to use chastening during childhood while there is hope (Prov. 19:18).
- b. Discipline is certainly not an excuse to satisfy the parent's unrighteous desires for control ("I'll show you who is bigger and better . . .") or vengeance ("You'll pay for that . . ."). We cannot use discipline to vent our sinful response to a child causing embarrassment, irritation, inconvenience, wasting our time, or accidentally damaging our possessions, etc.

2. Disciplining our children is a matter of our obedience to God.

- a. A failure to chasten them is rebellion against God (Prov. 23:13-14).
- b. A failure to chasten them is hateful to the child (Prov. 13:24; 19:18).
- c. A failure to chasten them is miserable for the parent (Prov. 29:15, 17).
- d. A failure to chasten is a means of honoring our children above God (1 Sam. 2:29, 3:13).

3. God ordained the use of the rod in the family (Prov. 26:3). The sword was given to the state (Rom. 13:4) and the keys were given to the church (Mt. 16:19).
 - a. We should follow the wisdom of God in using an implement (rod) for spanking. This requires faith in God's Word (Prov. 22:15).
 - b. The rod should be coupled with rebuke. The children need both instruction and chastening (Prov. 29:15).
 - c. The rod is necessary because children are foolish and devoid of understanding (Prov. 10:13; 22:15; 26:3).
 - d. The use of the rod is motivated by love (Prov. 13:24; Prov. 19:18).
 - e. The child will not die from the use of the rod, but it may be a means of saving his soul from eternal death (Prov. 23:13-14).
 - f. We are not restricted to the use of the rod as the only form of parental discipline.

4. Our discipline is to be a model of God's discipline of us (Heb. 12:9-11).
 - a. It is never enjoyable, but it is fruitful (Heb. 12:9-11).
 - b. Discipline is directed to the heart as well as actions. Therefore, parents must learn to discipline for attitude and not just actions.
 - c. Discipline promptly (Prov. 13:24). Consistency is the absolute, number one, most fundamentally crucial element in discipline. Without it, all will fail. With it, discipline will be more effective and less frequent.

Laziness, ignorance, self-centeredness, and sinful anger are all major deterrents to consistency.

- d. Discipline should not be in anger. Disciplining consistently and immediately will prevent built-up frustration.
- e. We are not to provoke our children (Eph. 6:4; Col. 3:21). Ways of provoking them to discouragement include:
 - i. Inconsistent discipline for the same kinds of offense.
 - ii. Disciplining out of selfish frustration.
 - iii. Misjudging their motives or falsely accusing them.
 - iv. Failing to admit our own wrongs and ask forgiveness.

III. Marital Unity in Finances

- A. This brief outline is not intended as a comprehensive treatment of this topic. Rather, it is intended to provide some basic points of discussion for couples.
 - 1. Your upbringing, personality and individual strengths and weaknesses will all have a role in determining your expectations about family finances.
 - 2. You must use finances as another means of pursuing unity. You should work together on the same team and contribute your respective strengths to tackling financial problems. You will

need to apply the other principles we have covered in these outlines to attain unity in finances.

B. Biblical View of Money and Stewardship

1. God and money

- a. All of our possessions belong to the Lord, and our ability to obtain wealth comes from the Lord (Ps. 24:1; 1 Chron. 29:11-12; 1 Cor. 4:7)
- b. Our trust is in the Lord not in riches (Mt. 6:25-34; 1 Tim. 6:17-19; Prov. 16:3).
- c. We must be faithful stewards of what God gives to us (1 Cor. 4:2).
- d. Wealth should never be an end in itself (Prov. 15:16; Eccl. 2:10-11).

2. Family and money

- a. The husband is responsible before God to provide for his family (1 Tim. 5:8; Eph. 5:29)
- b. God teaches us to work hard to meet our needs (Prov. 13:11; 1 Thes. 4:10-12).
- c. Contentment is a Christian virtue (1 Tim. 6:6-10; Phil. 4:11-13).

d. Generosity is a Christian virtue (Prov. 11:24-25; Eph. 4:28).

3. Priorities and money.

a. We are to give the Lord his portion of our finances first (Prov. 3:9-10; Mal. 3:8-12).

b. Wisdom teaches us to have a plan with our money (Lk. 14:28; Prov. 27:23-24).

c. Save (Prov. 6:6-8).

d. Beware of the problems with debt (Rom. 13:8; Prov. 22:7).

e. Get godly counsel in important financial decisions (Prov. 15:22; 19:22; 20:18).

C. Getting to the Root of the Matter

1. Root problems in financial tensions.

a. Pride (Prov. 18:12).

b. Selfishness (Phil. 2:3-4).

c. Idolatry (1 Jn. 5:21; 1 Tim. 6:10).

d. Laziness (Prov. 13:4).

e. Irresponsibility (Prov. 25:19).

f. Men-pleasing (Gal. 1:10).

2. Pursuing spiritual fruitfulness.

- a. Repentance (Ps. 139:23-24).
- b. Study the biblical principles of finance (Ps. 119:9-11; Rom. 12:2).
- c. Prayer (Phil. 4:6).
- d. Planning (Prov. 6:6-8; 27: 23-24).

D. Financial Planning

There are a plethora of Christian resources available for practical instruction in personal finances. Look for books by Larry Burkett and Dave Ramsey.

IV. Marital Unity in the Sexual Relationship

A. The Bible gives us frank and helpful instruction on this aspect of marriage.

- 1. Biblical discretion and prudence are needed in addressing this area publically within the Church.
 - a. Some are too crass and lack biblical dignity. Such discussions can be perverse and degrading, which is why Paul warns not to even speaking about evil done in secret (Eph. 5:12).
 - b. Some are too prudish and lack biblical fidelity. The whole Law, which contains material about intimate matters, was read before the whole congregation of men, women, and children. The same could be said about the rest of Scripture, including Paul's epistles.

2. Every generation needs everything that the Bible teaches. In the present day of extremes God's people need a clear grasp of the biblical perspective on the sexual relationship in marriage.
3. God's people will have different comfort levels about how much should be discussed in a setting like our class. Consequently, I have included the material below for your edification, but we are not going to cover it in class.

B. Sanctity of Marital Intimacy.

1. It is ordained and designed by God and glorifies and pleases him when maintained within his prescribed parameters (Gen. 2:24-25, Heb. 13:4). In fact, the view that forbids marital intimacy is a doctrine of demons (1 Tim. 4:1-3).
2. Everything connected to the sexual experience must be limited to the marriage relationship in thought, sight, word and action (Ex. 20:14; Matt. 5:27-30; Prov. 2:16-19; 5:1-14, 20-23; 6:20-7:27).
3. All forms of sexual perversion transgress God's design even within marriage and are unlawful.
4. Self-control is what characterizes the courting relationship prior to marriage. For example, Scripture indicates intimate caressing is clearly not lawful and should be limited to after marriage (Prov. 5:17ff).
5. Earthly marriage points to a heavenly marriage, and earthly consummation is merely a precursor to a heavenly consummation (Rev. 21:2ff). The

climax of pleasure expressed in the conjugal relationship is a tiny foretaste of the ecstasy of joy that awaits the believer in communion with God in heaven to come. The greatest delights in this world will pale in comparison to what the Lord has prepared for his people in glory.

6. The book of Song of Solomon, which is full of descriptions of conjugal love, further establishes the sanctity of marital intimacy while conveying the story about Christ and his Church.

C. Unity in the Sexual Relationship.

1. Sex should be a tangible expression of an inward reality – physical unity should be a manifestation of true, personal and spiritual unity in the marriage (Gen. 2:24-25).
2. When a couple engages in sexual relations without unity in their relationship they are in essence lying. Conversely, when true unity exists, then the sexual relationship has greater meaning and pleasure.
3. In practice this means a couple should resolve any outstanding conflicts before sex, rather than using sex as a means to cover up disunity.
4. Most problems in the sexual relationship, apart from potential physiological problems, are related to other areas of disunity within the marriage, rather than to sex itself.
5. When you are first married it is essential to establish patterns of open communication in this aspect of marriage – before, during, and after sexual relations. Discuss what is most meaningful to each other.

D. Blessings of the Sexual Relationship.

1. The sexual relationship is a gift of God that is intended to bring pleasure to the Christian couple (Prov. 5:18-19). The word “satisfy” in v. 19 means satiate.
2. Paul says that undue abstinence, except in special circumstances, should be avoided (1 Cor. 7:3-5).
 - a. Paul says that the gift of regular marital intimacy is a practical way of resisting the Devil. For those who are married, pent up, unsatisfied desires provide occasion for undue temptation.
 - b. Consequently, frequency is mutually determined by both husband and wife being willing to *give* to the other. At times this could involve Providentially determined instances of necessary abstinence. Under normal circumstances it will entail mutually agreed upon regularity because both spouses belong to each other. Note Paul’s explicit instructions in 1 Cor. 7:3-5.
 - c. It is never a matter of taking or withholding. It is a matter of seeking to outdo one another in giving what the other wants (Rom. 12:10).
3. The sexual relationship should not be one-sided or self-focused (Phil. 2:2-3). Paul specifies that it is intended to bring blessing to both the spouses (1 Cor. 7:3-5). This is a special way of “giving” of oneself to your spouse. In practice this means, for example, that a husband’s sacrificial love will be manifest by working to make sex equally pleasurable for his wife and ensuring that her needs are met in the process.

4. Men and women are created differently. Getting to know your spouse includes learning how those differences manifest themselves in the sexual relationship.

E. Further Study of the Sexual Relationship.

1. Ignorance and misguided feelings of “taboo” hinder rather than help growth in this aspect of marriage. It should be an area where openness and communication between spouses is pursued. It is a God-given, God glorifying aspect of Christian marriage.
2. *Intended For Pleasure* by Dr. Ed Wheat is a good resource on the sexual relationship from a Christian perspective, though you may not agree with everything he says. I recommend that couples buy this to take and read together on their honeymoon. It answers most of the questions and details related to the physical aspects of the sexual relationship.

Conclusion

- A. We will end where we began. There is hope for those tempted with hopelessness. For those who are struggling in marriage, you can take great hope.
1. God's Word is sufficient to address all of our problems (Rom. 15:4; 2 Pet. 1:3; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17).
 2. God's grace is sufficient all our needs (Phil. 4:19; 2 Cor. 12:9). The believer's sin is solvable (Rom. 5:20). God's Spirit can produce growth and change.
- B. I realize that we all live very busy lives. But God has established the marriage relationship as a priority for Christian couples. Since, a godly marriage has to be cultivated, and since priorities are what you do, then there has to be a self-conscious decision to devote time and effort to these matters (Jas. 1:22-25; Mt. 7:24-27).
- C. You have 55 pages of outlines filled with Scripture passages to review. Go through them with your spouse and discuss the ways in which these biblical principles need to be practically implemented to your specific marriage.
- D. Our ultimate goal is not happiness and bliss in marriage, though that is a precious by-product of gospel fruitfulness. The chief end of marriage is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. May Christ be the one who has all the preeminence in our marriages (Col. 1:18).