

ONE FLESH-ONE HEART

*Studies from God's Word
for Engaged and Married Couples*

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Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."

Genesis 2:18, NLTSE

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Before you begin...

If you are studying this course, it means that you are either married or you will be married soon. Congratulations! You are joining with the vast majority of humankind in all cultures around the world throughout all of time, in a custom that is as old as mankind. But what is it that you have joined? Where did the idea of marriage come from? Does it exist just to make life easier and more enjoyable for me, or is there a higher purpose?

Most men and women enter into marriage with great hope for what the future will hold for them. But the reality today is that many marriages fail. Other marriages stay together, but there is little joy or true love between the husband and wife. Why? What has happened to their dreams? Is it even possible to have a relationship that is deep and warm and full of life, that will last a lifetime?

The answer is...YES!! For those who seek to follow God's plan as found in the Bible, there is great hope for a richly rewarding marriage. This course is designed to help you discover the answers to the above questions and enter in to all of God's wonderful purposes for your marriage.

To get the full benefit of each session, here are a few suggestions:

- **If possible, don't do this course as one couple alone.** Find a believing couple, preferably who have been married for several years, who can walk through the studies with you as mentors. Or you may want to go through the course with a small group of couples, with one older couple serving as leaders. Also, it's very important that both husband and wife (or future husband and wife) participate together. Every study has material that is relevant to both men and women.
- **Do the journal assignments included with each session.** This is very important. Every person (not just every couple) needs to have some sort of journal or notebook they can write notes and assignments in. This does not need to be expensive, but should be a special book just for this course that you can keep for a long time. After each session, there is something for you to work on in the days that follow before the next session. **You will miss out on much of what this course has to offer if you do not do these!** It will take time to do them, but it will be worth the investment. Over the years, you will want to look back at things you have written, and you may also want to add new thoughts that you learn over time.

- **Bring your journal and a Bible (book or electronic) to every session.** In every session, you will be looking into the Word of God. It's best for *every person* to have a Bible of their own so they can look carefully at what is being discussed.. Also, you will frequently be asked to write notes about something in your journal. And at the beginning of each session, you will have a chance to discuss the assignment that you have worked on since your last study.

**MAY GOD BLESS THIS LAND WITH A NEW
GENERATION OF GODLY FAMILIES RAISING GODLY
CHILDREN FOR HIS GLORY!**

1. WHERE DID MARRIAGE COME FROM?

The Biblical Foundation for Marriage

Opening Discussion:

Think about the word “marriage.” What does it mean to you? What makes marriage different from every other relationship?

Introduction:

Marriage in some form is a part of every society on earth. But what is marriage? Where did it come from? This study will look at how the Bible answers these questions.

In Genesis 1 we read how God created the heavens and the earth, the sun, moon, and stars, and the plants and animals. Then in verse 26 we read about the crown of his creation.

Read Genesis 1:26-31.

1. Read verse 27 again. What two things do you notice in this verse about the creation of mankind?

What do you think it means that we are created in the image of God?

2. Look at verse 31. How did God feel about all that He had made?

Genesis 2 gives us more detail about the creation of the first man and woman.

Read Genesis 2:7 and 15-25.

3. Read verse 7 again. What is different about how God creates man and how He creates all of the other animals? (See also Genesis 1:20&24)
4. In Genesis 2:18, what does God say is not good? What does God say He will do?
5. Read again verses 21-22. Describe how God creates the helper for the man.

The Woman as a Helper

In verse 18, God says that He will make a “helper fit for” the man. Again in verse 20, it says that among the animals there was no “helper fit for him.” What is meant by the word “helper”? In the Hebrew (the original language of the Old Testament) the word that is used means a person who complements the one who is helped.

That is, they fill in or provide for those areas that are lacking in the other person. The helper is not inferior to the one being helped. They are equal in value, but they are different. Each one supplies something that the other one lacks.

It also says that the helper was “fit for” or “suitable for” the man. She was just what he needed! No animal could fill the place that she was uniquely created for. If every husband and wife understood these truths, how do you think it would change the atmosphere in the home?

6. Read again verse 23. How does the man describe the woman in this verse? Do you think he feels that she is a suitable helper for him? Explain your answer.

(Note: the Hebrew word for woman (*ishah*) is closely related to the Hebrew word for man (*ish*). Therefore, in Hebrew the words themselves show the relationship between the man and the woman.)

7. We now come to the very first description of marriage in the Bible. Read verse 24. How is marriage described? What three things constitute marriage according to this verse?
8. Obviously, Adam had no mother and father to leave, nevertheless, this would be the pattern for every generation that would follow. What do you think it means for a man to leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife? Why is this important?
9. Do you think it's possible for the husband to physically leave his parents, that is, to move to a different house, but still be living under their authority? How?
Why is it important for the husband to fully become the head of his own family?

God's Design for a New Family Unit

From the very beginning, we see that it was God's plan that when a man and a woman join together as husband and wife, they form a new family unit, separate from the home they grew up in. Nothing is said about the wife leaving her parents, probably because in those days it would have been assumed that she would leave to join

her husband. The husband, however, would often continue to live on the land belonging to his family. Therefore, he may be living very close to them physically. However, he was not to remain under their authority. When he married, he was to become the head of the new household. He would be responsible for their provision, protection, and instruction, teaching them to follow the Lord and his ways. Although the husband could still learn much from the wisdom and experience of his parents, he and his wife would now be a separate unit who must make their own decisions and be responsible for their own children. Discuss how this mindset could help strengthen families in your country.

If you are a couple who must live with parents for a time, what can you do to establish yourselves as a separate family, even while living in your parent's home?

10. Read verse 24 again. The original word in the Hebrew that refers to the man being joined to his wife means that he shall “hold fast to” or “follow hard (close) after” her. What does this say to you about the permanence of marriage?
11. In some societies today, some people are very confused about what marriage is. Some say that a man can marry another man or a woman can marry another woman. Some say that a man can marry more than one woman. What do you see from these verses in Genesis as God's design for marriage?
12. Look back at Genesis 1:28. What is the first command that God gives to mankind? What does God expect to be the fruit of marriage?

You will notice that the first part of this verse says that God blessed the first man and woman. An important part of that blessing was, “...be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth...” In this verse, we see another very important reason why God created marriage. How does God's design of a mother and a father committed to each other for life create a stable environment for our children?

The Marriage Celebration

In different societies around the world, the marriage celebration looks very different. Some cultures have elaborate rituals and feasts that last several days. Some societies have no celebration at all. In one primitive culture, the man simply goes to sleep in the woman's hammock, and they are expected to be faithful to each other for life. Look at Genesis 24:67. How did Isaac marry Rebekah, the wife his father's servant had found for him?

In both of these situations above, society recognized the couple as belonging only to each other, even though there was no ceremony or government document. This recognition is an important part of what it means to marry. Today, many governments require a document to acknowledge the marriage. This is important, especially for the protection of the children.

Over the centuries since Christ, believers have tried to find ways for the wedding ceremony to reflect the teachings of God's Word: that marriage is from God; that it is sacred; that it should last until the death of a spouse; and that it is a picture of our relationship to Christ. Today, in cultures where there are strong Christian roots, it is traditional for the bride and groom to exchange vows, that is, to make promises to each other in front of family and friends that they will love and care for each other for life. Since it is God who joins the man and woman together as husband and wife, why do you think it might be important to make a public statement of your commitment to each other? Take a few minutes to discuss how this might strengthen your marriage. (For an example of marriage vows, see Appendix A, p. 57.)

Prayer: Think about the wonderful gift of marriage that God has given to mankind. Pray now, thanking God for your fiance/spouse. Pray for God's grace to establish a life-long marriage that is full of Christ-like love for each other.

Before the next session...

...set aside some time to re-read and meditate on the verses you have studied today. Ask God for deeper insight into what marriage is.

- Write down in a journal or notebook what you have learned about marriage from these scriptures.
- Write down what you want your marriage to be like 20, 30, or 50 years from now.

Consider this quote: “Humans are never more like the covenant-keeping God than when they pledge themselves in covenant to one another.” (from The Reformation Study Bible, Genesis 2:24.)

- Write in your journal what you think this means.

Take time also to pray, asking God to prepare you to make this serious lifelong commitment—or if you are already married, ask Him to help you live out that commitment every day.

(Don't forget to bring your journal and a Bible with you to the next session.)

2. GOD'S DESIGN FOR A HAPPY HOME

“...let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.” Eph. 5:33

Before you begin this session:

Take a few minutes to discuss what you have written in your journal this past week about the verses you studied in Session 1, your desires for your marriage, and about the quote. (Try to keep this part to 5 minutes so you have time for the rest of the study.)

Opening Discussion:

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul gives some instructions to the believers about the kind of attitude they should have toward one another. Read Philippians 2:1-4. Take a few minutes to discuss the exhortations Paul gives to followers of Jesus in these verses.

How do you think the things found in these verses might be a good foundation for a happy home?

Let's look now at Paul's instructions to wives and husbands.

Read Ephesians 5:21-33.

1. Verse 21 tells us that everyone is to submit to each other out of reverence for Christ. Beginning with verse 22, Paul tells specifically what that means for husbands and wives so that there is harmony and happiness in the home.

Read again verse 22. What should the wife's attitude be toward her husband?

2. Read verses 23-24. According to v.23, why is she to have this attitude? What does Paul compare this husband/wife relationship to?

(Note: The word “church” here refers to all believers everywhere and in all generations. They are also referred to in these verses as Christ’s body.)

In verse 24, how does Paul describe this submission?

A question for wives: How do you think this kind of submission is possible?

3. Read verses 25-27 again. What is to be the husband's attitude toward his wife? What does Paul compare this to?

According to these verses, how did Christ show His love for the church?

What was Christ's purpose for the church in what He did? (verses 26-27)

4. Now read verses 28-30. In verse 28, what else does Paul say about how a husband should love his wife?

What do you think Paul means when he says, “He who loves his wife loves himself”?

In verses 25 and 29-30, Paul tells us how Christ has shown his love for us and how He continually shows that love in the way He nurtures and cares for us, his bride. And now Christ is calling husbands to have that same love for their wives.

A question for husbands: How do you feel when you think about this great responsibility God has given to you? What are some practical things you can begin to do now to show this sacrificial love for your wife in everyday life?

5. Read again verses 31-33. In verse 31 Paul quotes from Genesis 2:24, which we read in the last session. God had a plan from the very beginning—before sin entered the world—that marriage would carry a deep meaning.

In verse 32, what is the profound mystery that Paul is referring to? How does husband and wife becoming one give a picture of the relationship of us (the Church), with Christ?

Since this is true, what does it say about the importance of protecting the marriage relationship?

6. In verse 33, how does Paul sum up his instructions to husbands and wives?

Why do you think Paul gives different instructions to husbands than to wives?

Love and Respect in the Marriage

Modern research has shown that although both husband and wife desire to be both respected and loved, their deepest needs are different. For the husband, it is of greater importance to feel that he is respected. If he is not respected by the one person who is closest to him, he will feel a deep sense of shame and unworthiness. This is especially true if his wife dishonors him in front of other people, but it is also true for in the home. For the wife, it is more important to feel loved. If she does not feel loved by her own husband, she will feel a deep sense of shame and unworthiness. If she knows that she is loved, this will help her to feel secure and confident in who she is.

7. Now consider and discuss this: If the wife submits to her husband in the same way that the church submits to Christ, how will this encourage her husband to love her?

If the husband loves his wife in the same way that Christ loves the church, how will this help her to submit to him? How could these two things work together to create a happy and orderly home?

8. Think about your desires for your own home. What do you want to see changed in you in order for those desires to be fulfilled? As a woman, are you sometimes controlling and rebellious? As a man, are you sometimes harsh and demanding?

Making the Home a Refuge

A home that follows God's design will be a beautiful picture of what God's kingdom is like. Of course no one can do this perfectly! Therefore it's important that we also learn to humble ourselves and ask forgiveness when we have failed, and to be quick to forgive each other. Then the home will be a refuge of peace for us and the children that God gives. (This will be discussed in greater detail in Study 6.)

Prayer: Take some time now to pray and ask God to change you by his grace so that you can live according to his beautiful design. In your heart, commit to learn his ways. Then you will have peace and harmony in your home, even when difficult times come.

Before the next session...

... take some time to read again the verses you have just studied and think about them.

- Write down in your journal what you have learned from these verses about your role as a husband or wife.
- Write down also the things that you want to see changed in you to be the husband or wife that is pleasing to God.

Take time to pray about these things.

If you have time, it would be good to also read and think about 1 Peter 3:1-7.

(Don't forget to bring your journal and a Bible with you to the next session.)

3. MAKING JESUS LORD OF YOUR HOME

“...as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.” Joshua 24:15

Before you begin this session:

Take a few minutes to discuss what you have written in your journal about what you studied in Session 2. (5 minutes)

Opening Discussion:

In Joshua 24, Joshua is about to lead the nation of Israel to go in and take possession of the land God has promised them. In verse 15 he gives them a challenge: if they don't want to serve the living God, then they should choose what god they do want to serve. However, Joshua has already made his choice, and he makes this declaration, “But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord!”

Take a few minutes to discuss briefly what you think it would mean to serve the Lord together as a family.

Read Luke 6:46-49.

1. What question does Jesus ask in verse 46?
Do you see any conflict in calling someone “Lord” (or “Master”) and then not obeying what they say? Explain your answer.
2. Read verse 47 again. Jesus talks about people who do three things. What are those three things?
According to verse 48, to what does Jesus compare the person who does these things? Describe how this man builds his house and what happens to it.
3. Now read verse 49. What is the difference between the person (not the house) in this verse and the person in verse 47?
Describe this person’s house and what happens to it.
4. Think about these two houses. As you are starting a new family, which house do you want to establish? According to verses 46-47, how can you establish that kind of a house?

Let’s look now at several specific areas that are important to your life as a couple. You may have thought about these things as individuals, but now discuss what it will mean for you as a family to make Jesus Lord over each of these areas.

MONEY

5. Read the following verses.

“Who has first given to me, that I should repay him? Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine.” (God speaking to Job. Job 41:11)

Who has ever given to God, that God should repay them? For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen. (Romans 11:35-36)

Have you ever stopped to think that everything that you have has come from God and rightfully belongs to Him?

How do you think knowing this should affect how you use your money and other possessions?

6. Read the following three scripture passages about money.

Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine. (Prov. 3:9-10)

No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money. (Matt. 6:24)

So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (Matt. 6:31-33)

Now read the verses above again one at a time. After each one, tell why—according to those verses—you as a couple should make Jesus the Lord of your money.

Decisions about Money

Many of the arguments that married couples have are about money. Whether money is scarce or abundant in the home, everyone must make decisions about what they will use their money for. Sometimes husbands and wives do not agree on those decisions. Here are some important questions to think about:

- Are both of you willing to make Jesus the Lord of your money?
- Do you really believe that God cares about your needs and that He will provide for your family?
- If you pray together about how to use all that God gives you, how can this protect you from arguments over money?

DECISION-MAKING

7. Read the passages below.

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight. (Proverbs 3:5-6)

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? (Romans 11:33-34)

According to these verses, why do you think it is wise for you as a couple to look to God first when you face important decisions?

Now read the verse below from Luke.

“...saying, ‘Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.’” (Jesus, praying to His Father on the night of His betrayal, the night before his crucifixion. Luke 22:42)

How does Jesus’ prayer inspire you to choose God’s will over your own, in spite of the cost?

CAREER

8. Tell how the following passages encourage you to commit your decisions about a career to God, giving yourselves to Him for His purposes.

Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit’— yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.’ (James 4:13-15)

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:1-2)

9. After discussing the above verses, read the verses below.

Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. (Jesus, speaking of His return at the end of the age. Matt 24:45-46)

What tasks has God given to you as a family? How do the verses above encourage you to be busy about the work of the kingdom, using your time wisely?

What does it mean to be faithful and wise servants?

All of us as believers are called to be fulltime servants of God. This means we will serve God by serving our family or others in the home; we will serve Him as we work in the workplace; we will also serve Him in various other settings as God leads us, sharing the Word of God through our words and actions. We should not compare ourselves to others or try to copy the work that God has called them to. Every couple must determine what God has for them to do and be obedient to that call.

And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (Colossians 3:17)

10. Discuss together as a couple what you will do to seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness.

In which of these areas that we have discussed do you find it difficult to trust God and make Him Lord?

Prayer: Have you ever as a couple offered yourselves to God as living sacrifices, to do his will—whatever it may be? Read Romans 12:1-2 again. Paul says in these verses that it is by offering ourselves to God that we truly worship Him. Take some time to pray about this now.

Before the next session...

... take time alone to read again and think about each of the verses you have just studied. Where do you need God to help you grow as an individual in putting Him first?

- Write down in your journal your thoughts and your desires for growth.

Talk about how you will work together as a couple to put God first in each of the areas we discussed today. Be sure to include a discussion of the questions in the box above about money.

- Write down in your journal specific ways that you will make Jesus Lord in each of these areas.

Take time to pray together and ask God to show you any specific ways He has for your family to serve Him.

- Write down in your journal anything that God shows you in your times of prayer together.

(Don't forget to bring your journal and a Bible with you to the next session.)

4. INTIMACY IN MARRIAGE: GOD’S GOOD PLAN

(**Note:** Most people will find it easier to participate in this study if the men and women go through it separately—the groom-to-be with a mature husband, and the bride-to-be with a mature wife, or separate small groups of women and men.)

Before you begin this session:

Take a few minutes to discuss what you have written in your journal this past week from your study in Session 3 about making Jesus the Lord of your home.

Opening Discussion:

Every one loves a story where a man and woman fall in love, marry and are happy throughout their entire lives. Sadly, for many couples, this is not their story. They may stay together, but joy and intimacy die. What do you think a husband and wife can do to stay in love with each other for life?

Let’s look at what the Bible has to say about intimacy in marriage.

Read Genesis 1: 27-28.

1. What two things does verse 27 say about how God created mankind?

Have you ever thought about why God created mankind male and female? Why didn't He make us like amoebas (one-celled creatures) that have no sex but just split in two to multiply? Discuss your thoughts.

2. What was the first command given to mankind? (verse 28)

Read Genesis 2:24-25.

3. Verse 24 describes for us the essence of marriage. What 3 things does it involve?

The third part of this verse says, “...they shall become one flesh.” This is a description of the sexual relationship that husband and wife have within marriage. Think about this description. What does becoming “one flesh” say to you about the degree of closeness, the intimacy, that God desires to occur between husband and wife?

4. Read verse 25 again. At this time, the first man and woman had not yet sinned, and therefore, they felt no shame. When a man and woman marry, do you think that they, like Adam and Eve in this verse, receive once again this gift of having no shame before each other? Explain your answer.

Read Genesis 1:31.

5. From the verses that we have read so far, it is clear that the idea of sexual intimacy originated with God: He made them male and female; the two shall become one flesh; and out of this, they will give birth to children.

In verse 31, how does it say God felt about *everything* He had made? How do you think God feels about sex?

Some people think that all sex is dirty, or impure. If sex is a gift given by God to married couples, do you think it is pleasing to Him for them to think that way?

Read Genesis 4:1.

6. How do Eve's words in this verse show her understanding that as humans they were working in partnership with God in procreation?

Now let's turn to the New Testament and read what the Apostle Paul had to say to the people of Corinth about the sexual relationship in marriage.

Read 1 Cor. 7:1-5.

7. Read verse 1 again. You will notice that in part of this verse, Paul is quoting from a letter that the Corinthians had written to him. It seems they thought that since there was so much immorality, people who avoided sexual relations completely were more holy than those who did not. Therefore, they thought that maybe even within marriage, sexual relations should be avoided. How does Paul respond to this in verses 2-4?
8. Read again verses 3-4. What words does Paul use in verse 3 to describe the husband and wife's responsibility to each other? What does he say, even about their authority over their own bodies? (verse 4)
9. Read verse 4 again. Paul says the husband and wife have a responsibility to serve each other sexually. Therefore, is it right for either of them to withhold sex to hurt the other person? Is it right to use sex as a tool to manipulate their spouse and get what they want? Explain your answer.
10. In session 2 we read from another of Paul's letters about what the wife's attitude should be toward her husband and what the husband's attitude should be toward his wife. Read the verses below.

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. (Ephesians 5:22)
Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, (Eph. 5:25)

Now read 1 Cor. 7:2-4 again, and think about these verses together with the verses from Ephesians. Discuss the boxes below.

A note especially for women: If a wife respects her husband and submits to him from her heart, will she refuse to make herself available to him sexually?

It is often true that men have a greater desire and need for sex than women do, especially as they get older. A loving wife will seek to please her husband, even when she does not share that desire. Here is something important for women to remember: If your husband's sexual needs are being satisfied at home, he will be much less likely to be tempted to look for fulfillment elsewhere.

A note especially for men: Will a husband who loves his wife as Christ loves the church ever force himself on her? How will he treat her sexually, especially during those times when she is pregnant or not feeling well?

1 Peter 3:7 says, "Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel..." Gentleness and understanding are important in helping your wife to feel deeply loved. As Peter says, she is a "weaker vessel," therefore, treat her with gentleness. Sexual intercourse may be painful for her at times, especially at the beginning. Listen to her and consider her feelings. Your wife will be much more excited about offering herself to you if the experience is enjoyable for her as well as for you.

Both husband and wife have a wonderful opportunity to show unselfish love to each other as they each consider how to please their partner. How will this kind of mutual caring for each other help to keep love alive in their marriage?

11. Read 1 Corinthians 7:5 again. What advice does Paul give to them in this verse?

Why does Paul say they should make their agreement to abstain from sexual intimacy only for a short period of time?

Sometimes couples will decide to completely stop having sexual intimacy in their marriage because they're afraid of getting pregnant. According to these verses, do you think that's a good idea? Explain your thoughts.

God's Beautiful Purposes for Sexual Intimacy in Marriage

The sexual union was given as a gift to mankind so that within the protected bond of marriage, within the security of a lifelong commitment, husband and wife can know the deepest level of intimacy possible here on earth. In a limited way, it's a picture of the intimacy between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and also a picture of the intimacy between Christ and the Church, which is described as His Bride. Of course, those are not physical relationships; they are spiritual, but still very real. And it is out of this deepest level of intimacy that new life is created. God gives to us the indescribable privilege of participating in the creation of that which is most precious in all the world—a new living human being! And think of this: when the sperm of the father joins together with the egg of the mother, all of the genetic possibilities that reside in the father's DNA are now combined with all of the possibilities in the mother's DNA. Therefore, every baby born is a unique individual, unlike any other person who has ever lived. How wise our God is in His plan for us!

Because Satan understands the potential in sex for both intimacy and procreation, he works very hard to distort and destroy it. The same thing that has such power for life and creativity also has great potential for our destruction. That's why we are exhorted in Proverbs 4:23, "Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life." Pray often that God would keep you alert to Satan's schemes and make you strong in His strength to stand against them. And if you should find yourself struggling with sexual temptation, don't hesitate to seek out a mature brother or sister who can stand with you in the battle.

Prayer: Take a few minutes now to pray and thank God for the gift of sexual intimacy in marriage. Ask Him to help you understand what it means from His perspective and to enjoy it to the fullest.

Before the next session...

...take time to **read all of the Song of Solomon**. (If you are not already married, you should read this individually, rather than together.) In this book we see another purpose for the gift of sex—our pleasure! Notice how the bride and groom delight in physical love and how free they are in expressing it in words. Don't you think that God takes delight in married couples who enjoy to the fullest His gift to them of sexual union?

- Write down in your journal what impresses you most from the Song of Solomon.
- Write down in your journal your thoughts about God's purposes in giving us this gift.
- Write down also anything else you have learned from this lesson.

If you have thought of sex as dirty in the past, or if you have fears about it, take time to pray regularly, asking God to change your thinking so you see it as He does—a beautiful expression of the deepest level of intimacy!

(Don't forget to bring your journal and a Bible with you to the next session.)

5. VALUE AND PROTECT YOUR MARRIAGE

“...what God has joined together, let no one separate.” Matt. 19:6

Before you begin this session:

Take a few minutes to discuss what you have written in your journal this past week about what you studied in Session 4. Also, share anything you have written about the Song of Solomon that you are comfortable with sharing.

Opening Discussion:

One of the commands that God gave Moses was “Do not commit adultery.” How does adultery hurt families, children, and society in general?

Read Matthew 19:1-12.

1. The Pharisees were experts in the law that Moses gave to the Jewish people, but Jesus often accused them of hypocrisy. Here it says that they wanted to test Jesus. In other words, they wanted to trap Him into giving a wrong answer. What did they ask him? (verse 3)
2. You will remember that in Session 1 we looked at where marriage originated. In Session 4 we talked about the essence of marriage. Whose idea was it in the beginning to have two sexes? (Genesis 1:27) Where did the idea of marriage come from? (Genesis 2:24)
3. Read Matthew 19:4-6 again. In these verses Jesus quotes from the passages in Genesis shown above. He is now going to make it more clear that marriage is holy, valuable, and worth protecting. When a couple is married, who does Jesus say has joined them together? (verse 6)
4. Why do you think marriage is often referred to as a covenant? What do you think it means to be bound together by a covenant?
5. Look at Ephesians 5:31-32. What do you remember from Session 2 that we said was the “profound mystery” that Paul is speaking about?
6. In Matthew 19:6, what does Jesus mean when He says, “...let no man separate”? What does this say about divorce?

Take a few minutes to discuss why divorce is so serious in light of Jesus’ words in these verses.

Why is there so much pain for husband, wife, and children when a couple divorces? (Discuss this question, and then read the box below.)

The Pain of Divorce

Many people today think of divorce as an easy way to solve their problems if they are unhappy with their spouse. But what does God say? When two people marry, God's Word says they become "one flesh." In a mysterious, spiritual way, God joins them together. Although they are still two distinct individuals, in a very real sense they are now one unit. Just as you could not tear off one part of your body without leaving painful nerves exposed and experiencing great loss, you cannot separate a couple who has become one flesh without much pain and loss. Neither can you go against what God has done without suffering serious consequences.

7. The Pharisees knew that Jesus was saying that divorce was wrong. So they asked him another question. Read verse 7 again. What did they ask Jesus?
8. According to Jesus, why did Moses allow divorce? (verse 8) Is a hard heart pleasing to God? From verses 4-6 and verse 8, what is God's desire for those who are married?
9. Read verse 9 again. What does Jesus say is the one reason a man may divorce his wife? If he divorces her for any other reason and then marries another, what is he guilty of?
Jesus is speaking specifically to men here, but do you think this principle would also be true for women?
Why do you think sexual immorality would be a reason for divorce to be allowed? Take a minute to think about how adultery breaks the covenant of marriage.
What does this say to you about the importance of faithfulness in marriage?

Marriages can be healed.

Although Jesus said divorce was allowed if one partner had committed adultery, this does not mean that couples must always divorce if that should happen. Because of Jesus' death on the cross, God offers full forgiveness to all who truly repent and turn to Him. 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." There have been many instances where husbands or wives have

repented of their sin and their spouses have forgiven them. Although it has been a painful process that has taken time, God has healed their marriages. Through these difficulties, they have grown in their walk with God in spite of falling into sin. (Study 6 will discuss more about forgiveness.)

FAITHFULNESS IN MARRIAGE

10. Read each of the following verses and discuss what they have to say about faithfulness in marriage.

(Note: Sexual immorality refers to any sexual activity outside of marriage; this includes adultery.)

You shall not commit adultery. (This is one of the Ten Commandments God gave to Moses. Exodus 20:14)

Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. (1Corinthians 6:18-20)

“For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.” (1 Thessalonians 4:3-8)

According to the verses above, why is it so important that husband and wife remain faithful only to each other for their entire life?

FAITHFULNESS IN THE MIND

11. Jesus taught his followers that being faithful sexually is not just a matter of not doing the physical act. Unfaithfulness begins in the mind and heart. Read the following verses.

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. (Ephesians 5:3)

You have heard the commandment that says, 'You must not commit adultery.' But I say, anyone who even looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matthew 5:27-28)

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. (Philippians 4:8)

Tell what each of the above verses has to say about keeping your heart and mind pure.

12. What do you think these verses have to say about looking at pornography or sensuality in movies and television?
13. Satan is constantly trying to destroy marriages. Whether you are already married, or planning to be married soon, do you pray both together and separately for your marriage to be strong and protected from his evil strategies?

In 1 Peter 5:8-9, the Apostle Peter wrote these words:

Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

How can these verses help you to keep your marriage strong?

Prayer: Pray together now for your marriage. Ask God for His grace to resist the temptation to separate when conflicts arise in the marriage.

Before the next session...

... Read Proverbs 5. This chapter is directed specifically to men, but the principle of faithfulness in marriage certainly applies to women as well.

- Write in your journal several reasons that you see in this chapter why you should be faithful to your spouse.

Take some time to look back over the last 4 studies. Are there things that you've learned that could make your marriage strong against divorce?

- Write these things down in your journal.

Also, take some time to read again this passage from Matthew 19. Think about the seriousness of the commitment that you are making when you marry. When couples divorce, it causes deep pain to both the husband and the wife, and also to the children. Determine now that whatever difficulties you face, you will face them together.

Make a promise in your heart and to your fiance or spouse that with God's help, you will never use the word "divorce" with them as a suggestion of how to solve conflict in your marriage.

- Write your promise down in your journal.

Spend time praying together for your marriage.

(Don't forget to bring your journal and a Bible with you to the next session.)

6. FORGIVENESS: THE KEY TO A LONG AND HAPPY MARRIAGE

Before you begin this session:

Take a few minutes to discuss what you have written in your journal this past week about Proverbs 5 and about how you can make your marriage strong. (5 minutes)

Opening Discussion:

How do most people respond when someone offends or wrongs them? What do you think about this?

All of us at various times in our married life will find that we have wronged our spouse. At other times we will be the ones who have been wronged by them. In order for us to grow in our love for each other, we must learn how to ask for forgiveness and also how to forgive. Let's begin by looking at what Jesus said about the importance of forgiving.

Read Matthew 18:21– 35.

1. Read again verses 21-22. Do you think Jesus meant that we should keep count each time we forgive someone? What does Jesus mean?
2. When we keep count of the times we have forgiven someone, what does that reveal about our attitude? Do you think this shows true forgiveness from the heart?
3. Read verse 24 again. How much did the servant owe the king?
4. The king wanted to sell the man and his family in order to pay back the debt. What did the servant do? (Look at verse 26.)
Do you think he could ever pay it all back?
How did the king respond to his pleading? (verse 27)
5. Read again verses 28-30. What did the servant do after he was forgiven and released? (verse 28)
How much did his fellow servant owe him?
6. Read verses 32-34 again. When the king heard what happened, what did he do? Do you think the king's actions were right? Explain your answer.
7. Read verse 35. What did Jesus say at the end of this parable? Jesus makes a very serious statement here. In other places of the New Testament, Jesus teaches the same principle. **Read Matthew 6:14-15.** What do these verses teach us?

8. The heart of this parable is found in **Matthew 18:33**. Read it again. If we don't truly believe that God has forgiven our sins, it will be difficult for us to forgive others. Do you believe that God loves you and forgives your sins because of Jesus' death for you?
9. Look back at this parable again. How is our debt of sin before God like the debt the servant owed the king?
How is the king's forgiveness of the servant's debt like God's forgiveness of us?
What does God expect of us now that we have been forgiven?

Let's look now at how we can apply this teaching on forgiveness in our marriages.

Learning to forgive is something we all must do, but many times forgiving our spouse is very hard because we don't understand what forgiveness is.

What does it mean to forgive?

A. Forgiveness means that I am releasing the wrong and the hurt into God's hands. When I choose to forgive my spouse, I am not saying that what they did was not wrong, nor am I saying that they did not hurt me. If there is no hurt or wrong, there is no need to forgive. But I will not seek to hurt back. I am trusting God to work in the heart of my spouse.

Read Romans 12:19-21.

[19] Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written, 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord. [20] On the contrary: If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

- 1) Look again at verse 20. How does feeding your "enemy" and giving them something to drink show the fruit of true forgiveness? (Of course, your spouse is not really your "enemy," but sometimes it may feel that way if they have done something that hurt you!)
- 2) When you choose to forgive instead of looking for a way to hurt them back or holding resentment inside, how is this like the One who said from the cross, "Father forgive them; they don't know what they do"?

- 3) Think about this: Do you really believe that God is big enough to change your spouse's heart and to show them that what they have said or done is wrong? If you think that you can be the one to change your spouse's wrong attitudes or actions, most of the time you will be wrong.

B. Forgiveness means that I recognize that God has shown great mercy to me and therefore I will be merciful also. Think about what we have just studied in Matt. 18. Here we see a very serious truth. If we want God to forgive all of the great debt of sin that we have committed against Him, what attitude must we have toward others when they sin against us?

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.” (Matthew 5:7)

C. Forgiveness means that I am refusing to grow cold and bitter in my heart. Forgiveness is not just something I do for my spouse, it is also for my own sake. If I hold on to bitterness and anger, it will destroy *me*. They may never ask for my forgiveness. If they don't, then this is only between me and God. I go to God and tell Him that I am choosing to forgive my spouse and ask Him for His grace to help me to release it to Him.

[8]Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. [9]Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. (1 Peter 3:8-9)

- 1) How do you think the attitude found in these verses will enable you to keep a warm heart toward your spouse, even when they do wrong toward you? Is it possible to bless them and keep anger or hatred in your heart at the same time? Explain your answer.
- 2) What does verse 9 say that you will receive if you bless rather than repaying evil for evil?

Prayer: Pray together now and thank God for the complete forgiveness for all of your sin that you have received from Him. Ask Him to give you a tender and humble heart. Ask Him to teach you to bless and forgive each other, even when you have been treated wrongly.

Practical Application of Forgiveness

If it is possible now, read through **Asking For and Giving Forgiveness** in the next section of this lesson. Or, you may want to go through this as a group in a separate session. If you do not discuss this part together as a group, then husbands and wives or engaged couples should go through this together as a couple before the next session. **Do not skip over this section!** There is a lot of helpful information to be found here.

This practical section should also be kept somewhere handy so that you can refer to it at any time in the future when you may need to forgive or ask for forgiveness.

Before the next session...

... read the parable in Matthew 18:21-35 again. Then read through the rest of this lesson.

- Write down in your journal several reasons why it is important to forgive your spouse.

Whether or not you have as a group read through the section on **Asking For and Giving Forgiveness**, take time to read it again as a couple or individually.

- Write down in your journal several of the most important things that you have learned from these steps.
- Write down also what you find most difficult to do, and take some time to pray about it.

Whether you are already married or still engaged, are there things that you need to ask forgiveness for from you fiance or spouse? Will you do it this week?

Are there things that you are holding inside that you need to forgive them for? Will you do that also, even if they don't ask for forgiveness? These two steps will go a long way toward making your marriage strong against the attacks of the enemy!

(Don't forget to bring your journal and a Bible with you to the next session.)

Asking For and Giving Forgiveness

1. ASKING

The hardest words you will ever say may be these: “I was wrong; please forgive me.” But these are also the most valuable words if you want to keep love alive in your marriage. How can you do it? Here are four steps to asking forgiveness of your spouse.

A. HUMBLE YOURSELF. Be willing to admit to yourself and to God that you were wrong in what you said or did. We all have pride and we must break that pride if we want to follow God's way in our marriage. We cannot have a good relationship with our spouse as God wants for us if we will not humble ourselves when we're wrong and admit it—first to ourselves, then to God, and then to our spouse.

B. CONFESS IT TO GOD AND TO YOUR SPOUSE. When I confess to God, I need to believe that I have received His forgiveness. I John 1:9 says, “*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*” Do you believe this? Before you move on to the next step, make sure that you have trusted in Christ's complete forgiveness for all of your sin. Receive it by faith.

Then, I need to confess my wrong to my spouse, *naming my sin*. Here are some examples: “Today I spoke angrily; I hurt you with my words.” “I lied when I said _____.” “I was angry and I hit you. That was wrong.” “I did not show respect to you when I said those bad things about you in front of your relatives.” Or “I have not been faithful to you.” **Take full responsibility for your sin!** Don't be general... for example: “I'm a bad husband or wife!” They may agree with you, but this does not help you to find freedom from specific sin. Also, it does not help them to release bitterness and resentment over what you have said or done to them. It is important that you be specific about your sin.

Also, do not at this time talk about their sin. For example, don't say, “I know I was wrong to scream ugly curses at you, but you said the same things to me!” Let God deal with them regarding their wrong. You are only responsible for your words and actions. Often you will find that when you humble yourself and confess your sin, your spouse will be ashamed of what they have done and will ask you for forgiveness in return. Then a beautiful time of healing can take place in your relationship. But, even if they don't confess their fault, allow the Holy

Spirit to do His work in His own time. **You cannot change another person; you can only change yourself!**

A note of caution: If there is secret sin in your life that your spouse does not know about, your confession may come as a big shock to them. Their first reaction may be anger and deep hurt. For example, if you have committed adultery or if you are involved in pornography, this can be very painful news for a husband or wife. Yet it's important that you walk in the light. (See I John 1:5-7.) Pray for God's grace for your spouse before you go to them to ask forgiveness for something like this. Be gentle and be patient with them, as discussed in the next step.

C. ASK FOR FORGIVENESS. The best way to seek forgiveness from your partner is to say these words, "Will you forgive me?" This gives them something specific that they can respond to. Now the choice must be theirs—will they say "Yes," and forgive you, or will they not? It's important to realize that it may be very hard for your spouse to say, "Yes." This is especially true if you have done something very painful to them, such as committing adultery, or if you have asked their forgiveness many times for the same thing. If they cannot say "Yes" immediately, give them some time and pray that the Lord would help them. In the meantime, you must take seriously the next step.

D. CHANGE. Don't keep doing the same sin over and over again; "Bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance." (Matt. 3:8) Meditate on Galatians 5:16-25. God is not asking you to grit your teeth and change yourself. Instead, trust deeply in the sacrifice of Jesus to take away all your sin. Pray daily for God to fill you with the Holy Spirit and to produce the fruit of the Spirit in your life. Prove to your spouse that you are serious about changing the bad habits in your life.

With the help of God's Spirit, you *can* learn to control your anger and your tongue; you *can* learn to speak the truth; you *can* learn to be faithful—even in your thoughts; and you *can* learn to avoid the people and places that tempt you to participate in evil.

"Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace." (Romans 6:12-14)

From these verses, what is the active part we must play in getting rid of the evil in our lives?

How does it encourage you to know that sin is not your master and you are not under law, but under grace?

2. GIVING FORGIVENESS

When your spouse comes to you, confessing their sin and asking for forgiveness, you must realize that they are doing a very difficult thing. How you respond to them is very important. Let's consider some important things to remember in these situations.

A. LISTEN; GIVE THEM YOUR FULL ATTENTION! Don't just keep on with washing the dishes or whatever you're doing. Show them respect. Stop your work long enough to listen well. Keeping your relationship strong is much more important than any work you have to do. And **listen to their heart**, not just their words. Their words may not be perfect—they may be nervous, but what are they trying to say?

B. REMEMBER YOUR NEED FOR MERCY FROM GOD.

Resist a prideful attitude that thinks, "You are so bad and I am so good. I would never do what you did!" Think back for a minute to the parable we studied earlier about the servant who was forgiven a debt he could never repay. We are all in the place of that servant. (Read again Matt.18:32-33.) How can we refuse to show mercy to one another when God has forgiven us completely?

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. (Colossians 3:12-14)

C. SPEAK WORDS OF FORGIVENESS. A good thing to say would be, "Thank you for saying that. I forgive you. I love you."

DON'T SAY,

"Oh, it was nothing!" That's not true. If they are coming to you to ask forgiveness, that means that in their mind, it was something important.

OR

“Let’s not talk about it. Just forget it! That’s the past; don’t worry about it!” They need to talk about it. They need to be released from their guilt by your words of forgiveness, and you need to realize that the past will continue to affect you both until you release it to God through forgiveness.

OR

“May God forgive.” Of course we want God to forgive them, but Jesus also teaches US to forgive. If WE have been the one offended, WE must be the one who forgives.

THEY NEED TO HEAR YOUR WORDS OF FORGIVENESS!

D. ASK YOURSELF AND GOD, “WAS I PARTLY AT FAULT?” For example, if the husband screamed ugly, hurtful words at his wife, maybe it was not just because he has a bad temper. Maybe it was because she kept nagging and criticizing him. This doesn’t excuse what he did, but she needs to recognize that she is also wrong when she doesn't show respect to her husband. Perhaps there is something she needs to ask his forgiveness for also. Listen to God with a humble and open heart, ready to hear whatever He wants to say to you.

E. REMEMBER THAT FORGIVENESS MEANS 100% ACCEPTANCE! It may take time to feel that you can trust your spouse again, but when you forgive your spouse, you must also open your heart to them. Your mercy gives them room to grow. Your relationship needs to be built on grace, not law. Give them grace as Christ has given you grace. (See God's example for us in Psalm 103:8-12 and Romans 15:7)

The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. (Psalm 103:8-12)

Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. (Romans 15:7)

Once you have forgiven your spouse, you should not continue to talk about what they did wrong. Leave it in the past and leave it with God. Trust HIM to change your feelings as you continue to give the past to Him every time it comes to your mind.

F. PRAY TOGETHER for each other's weaknesses. Pray for your marriage—together! Do you believe God wants to hear and answer these prayers? He certainly does! BELIEVE. Pray often together, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

Remember, unforgiveness *destroys* marriages; forgiveness *heals* marriages—and brings God's love into our lives. It opens our eyes to God's ways.

7. CHOOSING TO LOVE WHEN YOU DON'T FEEL LIKE IT

Resolving Conflict in Marriage

Before you begin this session:

Take a few minutes to discuss what you have written in your journal this past week about why forgiveness is so important in marriage.

Opening Discussion:

What do you think are some of the characteristics of true love, the kind of love that will last a lifetime?

Introduction:

To many people today, love is primarily a feeling. Songs are sung and poems are written exalting the “fireworks” – those exciting romantic feelings that youth have when they “fall in love.” But the truth is that feelings come and go. In every marriage there are times when one or both spouses don't feel warm and loving toward each other. Does this mean that love has departed and you just need to go out and find someone new who will feel romantic toward you?

In 1 Corinthians chapter 13 Paul writes to the believers in Corinth giving them a beautiful picture of what true love is and how it behaves. He speaks of a love that goes much deeper than feelings, a love that requires selflessness. It's the kind of love that God has shown to us in Jesus Christ.

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7.

1. Read these 4 verses again. In your journal, make two lists. In the first list write down all of the positive things that it says love is or does. In the second list, write down all of the negative things that love is not or does not do.

Take a minute to look over the list of positive things that you have written. How will it affect your marriage if you grow in each of these ways?

2. Now take a minute to look over the negative things on the list. Are you guilty of any of these unloving characteristics?
3. Look back over the verses above. Do you see anything here about love being a romantic feeling?

Do you think it's possible to choose these loving attitudes even when you don't feel like it? Explain your answer.

4. Now read through verses 4-7 again, but this time, everywhere you see the word “love” read your name instead. For example, “(Mary/John) is patient and kind; (Mary/John) does not envy or boast, etc....” How does this sound to you?
5. In every marriage there are times when conflicts arise. Undoubtedly there will be times when you become angry with your spouse. Read the verses below.

“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.” (Ephesians 4:26-27)

How is it possible to be angry, and yet not sin? Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 again. How could applying these verses help you to not sin during times of conflict?

6. Why do you think it is good to get rid of your anger before going to bed at night? If you don’t, how might this give the devil a foothold?

(Note: Sometimes resolving a conflict will take time and you may not be able to come to a satisfactory conclusion before night. But even if the problem itself is not solved, you can forgive each other if needed, and you can give the problem to God together in prayer.)

7. Read the verses below.

[14] For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” [15] But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another. (Galatians 5:14-15)

How do couples sometimes “bite and devour one another”? What happens when they do this? What should they do instead? (verse 14)

Let’s look now at the role that the tongue plays in maintaining an atmosphere of love in the home.

8. Read the verses below.

A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. (Proverbs 15:1)

A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit. (Proverbs 15:4)

Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits. (Proverbs 18:21)

There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. (Proverbs 12:18)

She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue. (This verse is speaking of the “woman of excellence.” Proverbs 31:26)

Better to live in a desert than with a quarrelsome and nagging wife. (Proverbs 21:19)

Read through the verses above again. In your journal make two lists. In the first one, write down all of the positive effects that your words can have on your home. In the second list write down the negative impact they can have.

9. Now compare the two lists. Discuss what these verses tell us about what we say and how we say it.
10. Read the verses below.

My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. (James 1:19-20)

Read these verses again. What three things does James instruct us to do?

If every couple followed this advice when they have disagreements, how do you think this would help them to avoid bitter arguments?

11. Paul’s words to the Ephesians (below) are a good summary of how husband and wife should treat each other.

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. (Ephesians 4:31-32)

Prayer: Pray together now, asking God to help you to grow in practicing true, unselfish love in the way you treat each other—even when you disagree.

Before the next session....

... look back at the lists you wrote earlier from 1 Cor. 13 of what love is and what it is not. Pray and ask the Lord to show you where you need to grow in these characteristics. Of course we all will continue to grow in all of them throughout our lives, but are there one or two specific areas that God would bring to your attention at this time?

- Write down in your journal how you want God to help you change. Ask Him to help you grow in these areas.

Now look over the lists you made about the tongue. Is there something you need to change in the way you speak?

- Make a note in your journal also, of how you want to change your speech, and take time to pray about it.

Also, **read through the two examples that follow** in this lesson that show steps you can take to resolve conflict.

- Write in your journal any thoughts or questions you have about these examples and share them in the next session.

(Don't forget to bring your journal and a Bible with you to the next session.)

HOW CAN WE RESOLVE CONFLICT IN MARRIAGE?

If all of us lived out all of the characteristics of love found in 1 Corinthians 13 all of the time, we would never have conflict in our marriages! Unfortunately, no one is able to do that. Therefore, we can know that there will be times in our life together when we hurt each other, and there will be times that we disagree and don't know how to resolve our disagreement. What can we do when those things happen so that we don't destroy each other with hateful words or even physical abuse, or walk out of the marriage? Is there a way to share our feelings without exploding? Is there a way to speak the truth so that our relationship grows? Let's look at two examples of possible conflicts in the home and steps to resolve them.

EXAMPLE #1: How can couples handle hurt or angry feelings toward each other?

John and Mary are husband and wife. Mary tries to be a good wife, but she's not a very good cook and she knows it. Every time they go to his parents' home for dinner, he says things comparing her cooking to his mother's. He makes lots of little jokes and everyone laughs. But Mary is humiliated. She has told God that she forgives him, but then he does it again and she is deeply hurt. The last time he did it, she didn't speak to him for 3 days. As a follower of Jesus, she knows that isn't the right way to handle things, but she just doesn't know what to do with her feelings of hurt and anger. She decided silence was better than blowing up at him.

What should Mary do in this situation that happens frequently in her marriage? Here are the only two ways that Mary knows to deal with her negative feelings toward John when he compares her to his mother.

1. She can release her anger and explode. She can let him know with loud and hurtful words just how she feels about it. Will this help?
2. She can say nothing about how hurt she is and just pray about it. Sometimes this seems like the spiritual thing to do, but if he doesn't know how his words affect her, and if she says nothing, how can anything change? Something inside of her—and in their marriage—will begin to die. She will probably find herself beginning to disrespect, and maybe even despise him. Maybe they don't divorce; they continue to live in the same house, but their relationship grows cold.

Is there another road that leads to life and deep friendship in marriage?

YES! In a marriage where both spouses have agreed to learn to listen and grow together, there is great potential for a happy marriage. This third point will help you move away from either explosive anger or silent resentment.

3. Mary can learn to express her negative feelings in true love—not to try to force John to change, but to help him understand her needs and her feelings. She can speak the truth in love. How does she do this?

Let's look at some steps Mary can take to express the problem and that John can take to respond in a loving way.

1) FIND A GOOD TIME

Mary should try to find a time when she can talk with him alone. She should tell him that she wants to talk with him about something important to her. Preferably, it should be a time when they are not exhausted and also when the kids are not around. Maybe they can put the kids to bed early one night. This also should *not* be when she is angry and burning inside at him. She should find a time after she has cooled down.

2) MARY SPEAKS

Mary should tell John how she feels in an honest and straightforward way, and in a calm voice. (Proverbs 15:1&4) She should not accuse him of deliberately trying to be mean. She doesn't know what is in his heart. She should simply tell him how she is affected when he compares her skills with his mother's and makes jokes about it.

3) JOHN LISTENS

John should listen humbly to *everything* she has to say without interrupting to defend himself. (James 1:19-20) He may feel that he has done nothing wrong. Nevertheless, she is hurt. He needs to understand that if he wants to have a good marriage. As he listens, he should be asking God to show him where he has not behaved in a loving way toward his wife.

4) JOHN SPEAKS AND MARY LISTENS

After she has emptied her heart to him, Mary should give John a chance to speak in return. She must not interrupt him, but must allow him to respond completely to what she has said. He must also be careful to speak calmly and not accusingly. As she listens, it is her turn to ask God where she has been wrong. Maybe she is being too sensitive and needs to learn to laugh at herself.

5) DISCUSSION, FORGIVENESS, AND CHANGE

After both have had a chance to share their hearts honestly and in love, they can begin to discuss the situation back and forth. Again, they should remember to remain calm and not interrupt and not accuse the other person. (James 1:19) Both should be ready to ask forgiveness where they see they have been wrong, and to forgive each other. They should also be ready to change in any way that they need to.

6) PRAYER

They should end their time of discussion by praying together for each other and for their marriage. If they cannot solve the problem at this time, they should take some time to think and pray about it separately, and then come back and talk again in a few days. Both husband and wife should express their love for the other, even if they did not agree. (1 Corinthians 13:7)

Of course, at any time that John is angry or hurt by what Mary does, he should approach her in the same way she approached him above. Both John and Mary need to allow the other one to come and walk through these steps to resolving conflict.

As seen in this example, this process of resolving conflict can be used any time one partner needs to express hurt or frustration to the other. Similar steps can be taken when there are disagreements that they are having difficulty resolving. Let's look at another example.

EXAMPLE #2: How can couples resolve disagreements?

John and Mary have been talking about buying a car. Mary wants them to get the car right away, she's tired of riding the bus with two small children. The problem is that they don't have the money for a car right now. Mary thinks they should borrow the money from some friends or maybe from the bank. John agrees that they need a car, but he wants to wait until they have all of the money. He's concerned that they won't be able to pay it back and doesn't want to have to pay a lot of interest. This is becoming a subject that they argue about frequently. Mary feels that John is not thinking about her needs, and John feels that Mary is not being wise with their limited money. What steps can they take to avoid heated arguments and move forward in reaching an agreement that both of them are satisfied with?

1) FIND A GOOD TIME.

They should follow step 1 as above and **find a quiet, uninterrupted time** for discussion.

2) REMEMBER EPHESIANS 5:22&25.

When dealing with something they cannot agree on, both of them need to **remember Paul's instructions** in Ephesians 5:22 & 25.

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. (verse 22)

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, (verse 25)

What should each of their attitudes be as they enter into any discussion? If they both remember these instructions, how will it help them to work through this problem?

3) TAKE TURNS SPEAKING AND LISTENING.

As in Example #1, each should give the other a chance to express everything in their heart without interrupting. (This will take some discipline on the part of the listener!) They should each speak calmly, without accusing the other. (This will take discipline on the part of the speaker!)

4) PRAY.

They should **pray together** about the situation.

- If they have a need for something (a car, for example) they should ask for God's provision.

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him! (Matthew 7:7-11)

- If they have a decision that they can't agree on, they should ask God for wisdom.

"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him." (James 1:5)

In this situation, they have a physical need (a car) and a need for wisdom (should they borrow the money or should they wait?) In their prayers together, they should ask God for both. God could supernaturally provide a car for them. But He may also have valuable lessons He wants them to learn in being patient, waiting, and trusting.

Remember that God has said that the husband is the head of the family. (Ephesians 5:23) Therefore, if Mary is going to obey God's Word, she must submit to her husband and allow him to make the final decision. And she must trust God to work for her good through her husband, even if she disagrees with him. If she truly feels that he is not making a wise decision, she should take it to God in prayer and ask God to speak to her husband. Nagging is not an option that is given to wives in God's Word!

On John's part, if he is going to show Christ's love to Mary, he will listen to her and consider her needs in making a decision. And he will pray diligently for God's wisdom and provision for his family because he carries the responsibility for their welfare.

If both husband and wife seek to follow God's way, and if they pray together about everything that concerns them, conflicts that come will be resolved, and there will be peace and order in the family.

Remember: It is not easy to follow this process! Two key ingredients are **HUMILITY** and **RESPECTFUL LISTENING** to each other **and to God**. If you listen humbly to your spouse, you may find that the Lord is speaking to you through them. It is a beautiful thing to discover that the Lord wants to change you through the helpful words of your spouse.

In this atmosphere of respectful discussion, love and trust grow deep. As children join the family, they will learn also from your example. Though you may have many trials and problems outside the home, inside the walls of your home it will be safe and happy. As husband and wife, you will become each other's best friends, and God will be honored through your lives.

8. GROWING IN GOD TOGETHER

Before you begin this session:

Take a few minutes to discuss what you have written in your journal this past week about how you want to grow in Christ-like love. Also share any thoughts you have about how to resolve conflict. (5 minutes)

Opening Discussion:

Think of one or two couples who you think have a good marriage. What do you think makes their marriages good? What things that you see in their marriages would you like to see in yours?

Introduction:

Most of us have probably read books or heard teachings about the importance of believers having a personal time alone with God. We know we need that to feed our souls and find the encouragement and strength we need to live as followers of Jesus in a hostile world. If our personal relationship with God through Jesus is valuable to us, we will make time for it so we will flourish and grow in our love and service for Him.

But did you know that the relationship that you and your spouse together have with God can also offer rich rewards? From this time forward, you and your spouse will live together and share daily life together. What a unique opportunity you have to build each other up! Let's look together at some verses that will help you see how you might do this.

Read Colossians 3:16-17 and Ephesians 5:18-21. (These are two similar passages in Paul's letters.)

Colossians 3: [16] Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. [17] And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Ephesians 5: [18] And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, [19] addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, [20] giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, [21] submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

1. Discuss all of the different ways that Paul exhorts believers to encourage one another in their spiritual life. Make a list of these in your journal. Your list should include at least 5 or 6 different items.

How can you put these verses into practice in your home, first as a couple, and later including the children that God gives? Take a few minutes to discuss this together.

Moses' Exhortation to Israel

In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses gives serious instructions to the nation of Israel as they are about to take possession of the land that God has promised them. Moses knew that it would be very easy for the people to wander away from following the God who had delivered them from slavery. It is no different for us today. We, also, are very easily drawn away from our Savior who has delivered us from the slavery of sin. How can you as a couple help each other and the children who will come, to stay on the right path and avoid the deceptions of the enemy? And how can you help each other grow together to maturity in Christ? Let's look at Moses' words.

2. Read Deuteronomy 6:5-9.
Read verse 5 again. Describe the love that they are to have for God. (Jesus quotes this verse in Matthew, Mark, and Luke as the most important commandment.)
3. What are they to do with these instructions that Moses is giving them? (verse 6-8)
4. Look at verse 7 again. Name all of the various times they are to speak about God's words.
According to these verses, what is the parent's responsibility in passing truth on to the next generation?
5. Do you think Moses' instructions to Israel in these verses are still valid for us today? Take a few minutes to discuss how you could apply these verses in your family, both before and after you have children.
If you continually keep God's Word central in your family as suggested in these verses, how will that help your family to love God with all their hearts?

A Note about verse 8

Some Jews took this verse literally and made little boxes that they put written scripture verses in and tied on their hands or foreheads. This could be helpful if a person used it as a means to help them memorize and remember God's Word. But there is nothing magical about carrying Bible verses on your body! The important point here is verse 6—that the Word of God be on our hearts, and that it always be with us as an integral part of our daily lives.

6. How are Moses' instructions similar to Paul's instructions that we read in Colossians and Ephesians?

As believing families, in a sense you are a small body of Christ within the larger fellowship that you meet together with.

7. Read Hebrews 10:23-25.

[23] Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. [24] And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, [25] not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Read the verses from Hebrews 10 again, thinking about how they might apply within your family. With all couples, there are times when one person becomes discouraged or is weak in faith. According to these verses, how can we help each other in those times?

8. Read verse 24 again. God's Word speaks much about caring for the poor, showing hospitality, and helping those with various needs. Keeping your family's focus outward on the needs of others will help you and your children not to grow selfish. This is an important part of seeking first God's kingdom. Take a few minutes to discuss some "good works" (v. 24) that you as a family might be involved in.

Let's look now at how couples can grow in praying together.

9. Read the verses below.

Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them." (Matthew 18:19-20)

Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. (James 5:16)

How do these verses encourage you as husband and wife to take time often to pray together? What do they say will be the result of your prayers?

10. Read Philippians 4:6-7.

Do not be anxious about anything, 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 understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

If you apply these verses along with the verses above from Matt. 18 and James 5 (agreeing together in prayer and praying for one another), how will this help to create an atmosphere of security and peace in your home?

Prayer: Below are some suggestions of ways that you as a couple, and later with children, can keep the Word of God and the life of the Spirit continually before you. Read through the list now. Later you will take some time as a couple to talk specifically about this. Pray now and ask God to help you learn to build each other up and keep the Word of God central in your home.

Note: This is not a list of rules for Christian Families. These are only some ideas to help you start to think about how you can help each member of the family grow spiritually. Be flexible. In whatever you do, if it becomes just a legalistic routine, it will become wearisome. In order to give life, it must flow out of the life of Christ within you—out of a desire to know God and walk with Him each day.

Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.' Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive. (John 7:38-39)

Suggestions for applying the scriptures studied in this session:

- 1) Playing spiritual music in the home and car, etc.
- 2) Memorizing scriptures, posting them around the home
- 3) Setting aside a time for regular family worship and Bible reading or study
- 4) Reading scripture and praying together in the morning before going off to work/school/etc.

- 5) Stopping throughout the day for moments to thank God for specific answers to prayer
- 6) Stopping throughout the day to pray about problems or needs as they arise.
- 7) Taking a moment before meals to thank God for his provision.
- 8) Singing songs of praise and worship together
- 9) Reading inspiring books together
- 10) Playing audio scriptures in your home

After this last session...

... set aside some time to discuss together how you as a couple can encourage each other to grow spiritually. You may want to look again at the list above. You can probably think of other ideas that you would like to add to this list.

- In your journal, write down those things that you want to make a part of your family's life.

Is there a prayer in your heart regarding how you want to grow spiritually as a couple?

- Write down your prayer in your journal. You may want to look back at this from time to time and maybe even add to your prayer.
- In the weeks and months that follow, write down in your journal things that you are learning about marriage. Also write down things you are praying for in your marriage. Keep your journal as a special record that you can look back at often.

A final word:

All couples who follow Jesus Christ should take courage to know that He fights for your family. He knows your weaknesses. He knows the war that Satan fights against you. He knows the pressures of life that you face each day. But He is greater than all these things and He wants you to trust Him in the easy times and in the very hard times. As you commit to making Him Lord of your family, He will help you to do your part in bringing His life and truth into every day. Below is a scripture for each of you who pray and work for your family to be a Christian presence in this world:

Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. (1 Cor 15:58)

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO TRANSLATE THIS BOOK...

You will note that these studies have been written in simple English. It is our hope that speakers of many different languages will find them easy to translate into their own language. **It is not necessary to ask permission before translating them.** However, if you do translate them, we would like to know about it. Please contact us through our website. It may be possible for us to include your translation on our website (www.learnhisways.com) in the future.

We also ask that you follow a few guidelines in translating. These will help to make things clearly understood and to keep the studies as close as possible to the Scriptures and to the original design of the writer of the study.

1. About the use of pronouns he/she/him/her/they/them:

You will notice throughout these studies that many times the plural (they/them) is used, even though we are only talking about one person. For example: “Your spouse may tell you they love you, but you don’t believe them.” Obviously here, “they” and “them” is referring to one person, but it could be either the husband or the wife, so we don’t know whether it is “he” or “she”. Sometimes in English this is written this way: “Your spouse may tell you he/she loves you, but you don’t believe him/her.” But this is awkward! To avoid this awkwardness, the plural is sometimes used.

In translating, if your language uses only one pronoun in the third person for both male and female, please use the singular third person pronoun wherever it is talking about only one person, even if the plural is used in English. If your language uses different pronouns for male and female, please use what is most appropriate in your language where the pronoun could be referring to either husband or wife. Try to make it comfortable to read, but also as clear as possible.

2. Use of the word “complement” :

The word “complement” is used on the back cover and in the first box of Study #1. Please note that this is different from the word “compliment,” which means to praise someone for something. The meaning of this word (as explained in the box) is to complete, or to fill in what is lacking in the other. Men and women were not created to be just alike, but to complement--that is, to complete, each other.

3. Use of names:

Wherever names are used in these studies, please choose names that are common in your language, rather than using John or Mary.

4. Word to use for Lord in Study # 3:

The word you use for “Lord” in this study should probably be the same

as that used in the scripture passage in that study found in Luke 6. It should convey the idea of “master,” that is, someone who is to be obeyed without question, but it does not necessarily need to also carry the meaning of God.

5. Use actual words from the Bible for direct quotes.

Anytime there is anything in quotes, if it is taken from the Bible, please go to the Bible in your own language and copy directly what is there. Do not translate from the English quote. Also, as you are translating a study, keep the Bible in your language open to the passage being studied, and try to use the same terms that are used in that passage as much as possible. For example, in study 7, question 5 talks about not giving the devil a “foothold.” You should use the same word for “foothold” that is used in the scripture in Ephesians 4 in your language.

6. Words to use for “Bible,” “Christian,” “God,” and “Christ.”

In some countries (especially Muslim countries), using these words or some form of these words can cause unnecessary anger and offense. Some people still think about religious wars when they hear these words, and they associate them with their enemies. Therefore, in your translating please think carefully about the words that you use. For the word “Bible,” use words from your language for “Holy Book,” “The Word,” “God's Word,” or “Old or New Testament.” In many Muslim countries, “Injil” is a good word to use for “New Testament.” For the word “God,” you should choose the word that is most commonly used by believers in your country. Some Muslim countries use the word “Allah,” other countries have other words that they prefer.

For “Christ,” it's best to use the word in your language for “Messiah,” or “Anointed One.” This is the meaning of the word “Christ.” For “Christian,” use words from your language for “follower of Jesus the Messiah,” “follower of Jesus,” or “believer”-- or whatever words are most commonly used and accepted by believers in your country. If you are translating into a language with a Christian heritage, obviously you should use the words they are familiar with. In general, please try to choose words for these terms that are familiar, easily understood for their true meaning, and least likely to cause unnecessary offense.

7. Use simple language.

We have tried to use simple sentences in the English to make these Bible studies easy to understand for anyone, including those who have no knowledge of the Bible and those who have limited education. We want them to be a help to ALL people—not just those who already know a lot. Please keep this in mind in translating. Some languages commonly use very complex and formal language in writing. We would ask that these studies be translated into language that sounds just the way people talk in normal, everyday life. They have been written for group discussion, therefore, it is

important that everyone understand the questions and comments. Our goal is to help people understand the Bible, not to make them confused

8. Have someone check the translation.

To make these studies as accurate as possible in your native language, have a native speaker who is also fluent in English do the first translation from the English. Then, have a native English speaker who is also fluent in your language check the translation. In the final step, the original translator and the English checker should discuss any questions in the translation and come to an agreement on the best wording.

Remember... As you go through the translation process, if there is anything in the studies that is unclear, feel free to contact us through our website. (www.learnhisways.com) God bless you as you translate. We trust the Lord will use these studies to strengthen the Body of Christ in many different language groups around the world.

Appendix A

Marriage Vows

The box entitled “The Marriage Celebration,” in the first study talks about vows made between the groom and the bride. Giving vows to each other in front of friends and family is an old tradition that developed hundreds of years ago. These vows are based on the teaching of scripture that a husband and wife are to be faithful to each other and serve each other for life. The following is a common way that vows are said in Christian marriage ceremonies in some parts of the world. Usually the bride and the groom take turns repeating these promises to each other, with the groom speaking to the bride first, and then the bride saying the same thing to the groom.

I [name] take you [name] to be my [husband/wife].

I promise today, before God and our family and friends,

to be faithful to you in sickness and in health,

whether we are rich or whether we are poor;

in joy and in sorrow, in good times and in bad.

With God’s help, I promise to love you unconditionally,

to honor and respect you, and to hold you close to my heart

for as long as we both shall live.