

# The Spiritual Foundations of Marriage

The Path to a Uniquely Christian (and Satisfying) Marriage



Study Developed by John Hargrave  
[wisdomforeternity.com](http://wisdomforeternity.com)

# Participant Workbook

and

# Leader's Guide

(starting on Page 47)

Christian couples have the opportunity to discover a unique and satisfying marriage when founded on spiritual principles. Further, the truths of God's word guide couples in removing those "thorns" that damage and divide.

For His Glory,  
John Hargrave

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## The Path to a Uniquely Christian (and Satisfying) Marriage



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### The Challenge:

What makes Christian marriages unique? The answer is obvious. The man and the woman are both born into the family of God and are indwelt by His Spirit. Yet every couple knows that marriage is a challenge. Statistics reveal that Christian marriages have marital issues not greatly different from non-Christians.

The challenge is to establish a spiritual foundation for the marriage relationship that uniquely marks it out as distinct from non-Christian marriages, two people living out a uniquely spiritual life.

### The Condition of Christian Marriages

#### The Occurrence of Divorce

Divorce Among Adults Who Have Been Married  
(Base: 3792 adults)

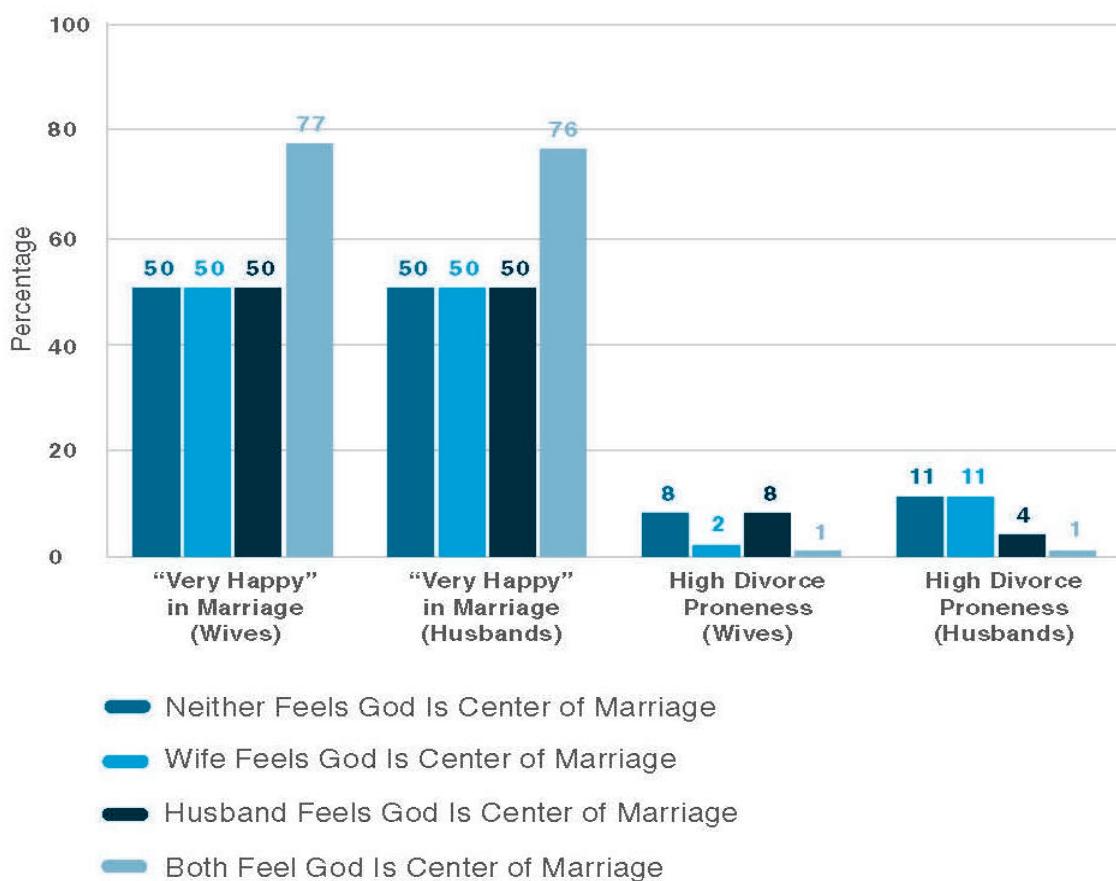
Population Segment	Have Been Divorced	No. of Interviews
All adults	33%	3792
Evangelical Christians	26%	339
Non-evangelical born again Christians	33%	1373
Notional Christians	33%	1488
Associated with non Christian faith	38%	197
Atheist or agnostic	30%	269
All born again Christians	32%	1712
All non born again Christians	33%	2080
Protestant	34%	1997
Catholic	28%	875
Upscale	22%	450
Downscale	39%	367
White	32%	2641
African-American	36%	464
Hispanic	31%	458
Asian	20%	128
Conservative	28%	1343
Moderate	33%	1720
Liberal	37%	474

(Source: The Barna Group, Ventura, CA)



## Marital Satisfaction

**FIGURE 13. MARITAL SATISFACTION AND DIVORCE PRONENESS, 18–46-YEAR-OLD MARRIED MOTHERS AND FATHERS, BY GOD CENTER OF MARRIAGE**



**NOTE:** Model adjusts for age, education, income, and race/ethnicity.

**SOURCE:** Survey of Marital Generosity, 2010–2011.

## The Context of Christian Marriages

Similarities with non-Christian marriages:

1. Christian marriages have the same internal issue – \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Christian marriages are faced with the same \_\_\_\_\_ issues.



Differences with non-Christian marriages:

1. Christian marriages have a three-fold relationship – \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Christian marriages are faced with a different struggle – an \_\_\_\_\_.

The critical contrast - **John 10:10**

*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy;*

vs.

*I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.*

3. Christian marriages have a different potential – a marriage by \_\_\_\_\_.

**KEY TRUTHS:**

- (1) God's plan for marriage is prefigured in the ideal He has planted in the hearts and minds of men and women.
- (2) The marriage relationship is a unique spiritual relationship which reflects Christ's relationship with the church and as such contains an element of mystery.
- (3) The marriage relationship, being the closest of human relationships, is the primary context in which we learn relational skills.
- (4) God's plan for marriage is essentially an attainable goal when formed on spiritual principles and when pursued by both spouses.
- (5) Without a spiritual foundation, God's design for marriage, with its inherent blessings, cannot be realized.

*At its heart, Christianity is about restoring relationships to what they should be.*



## OUR AGENDA

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### **Part 1: The Essential Spiritual Foundation**

#### Foundational Truth #1: God's Control

A practical understanding of the implications of God's sovereignty establishes a secure point of reference that does not shift.

#### Foundational Truth #2: God's Character

A practical understanding of who God is helps us understand what role he plays as the third party in our marriage.

#### Foundational Truth #3: God's Purpose

A practical understanding of God's purpose in your life and for your lives together establishes a basis for true oneness in the midst diversity.

#### Foundational Truth #4: God's Provision

A practical understanding of the resources God has provided for your success as a couple brings cohesiveness to a complicated life.

### **Part 2: The Essential Relational Foundation**

#### Relational Foundation #1:Accept one another.

The relational skill of acceptance overcomes the obstacle of diversity and establishes a grace relationship.

#### Relational Foundation #2:Love one another.

The relational skill of love overcomes the obstacle of self-centeredness and establishes a grace relationship.

#### Relational Foundation #3:Forgive one another.

The relational skill of forgiveness overcomes the obstacle of sinfulness and establishes a grace relationship.

### **Part 3: On Pulling Thorns**

#### The Thorn of Anger

Anger is a human emotion and is valid in its place. Yet anger can also be a thorn that pricks and festers.

#### The Thorn of Conflict

Conflict is inevitable in the marriage relationship. Yet God uses conflict for his purposes.

#### The Thorn of Baggage

Every person brings baggage from the past into the marriage that affects the relationship. God works in our lives to remove those harmful aspects from our past.

#### The Thorn of Money

God provides money for our needs. Yet money can also be a major source of tension, conflict, and discontent in marriage.



## FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH #1

### GOD IS IN CONTROL

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The first step of understanding marriage is to understand the context of our lives apart from the marriage relationship. That context starts with an understanding of who God is and his ongoing engagement with the world. As Christians, we declare that our God is sovereign. What does that mean and what difference does it make in the marriage relationship?

**PREMISE:** God's sovereignty makes godly relationships possible in spite of human weaknesses, mistakes, difficulties, and sinfulness. A practical understanding of the implications of his sovereignty establishes a secure point of reference that does not shift.

#### Biblical Affirmation

Affirmation 1: God does whatever He desires within the constraints of His own character - Ps. 135:6

Affirmation 2: God exercises control over "random" or "chance" events – Prov.rbs 16:33

Affirmation 3: God exercises control over demonic forces - Job 1:12; Matt. 8:28-34

Affirmation 4: God knows with absolute certainty the actual and possible actions and choices of men from eternity past – 1 Sam. 23:11-13; Matt. 11:21-23

Affirmation 5: God brings about His purposes through the willing and sinful choices of men while holding men morally accountable for their actions – Genesis 50:20; Acts 4:27-28

Affirmation 6: God freely intervenes as necessary to absolutely determine certain actions of men - Exodus 7-12; Exodus 12:36; Daniel 5:5

#### Marriage Corollary

Corollary 1: God is not constrained in meeting any need you have in your life and in your marriage.

Corollary 2: God exercises control of what seems to be random events in your life – accidents, chance encounters, etc.

Corollary 3: God exercises control over demonic forces that would destroy your marriage.

Corollary 4: God knows with absolute certainty your future and the future of your family.

Corollary 5: God brings about his purposes in spite of the sinful choices of your spouse.

Corollary 6: God intervenes in your marriage to accomplish his purposes.



Affirmation 7: God controls every aspects of the life of the believer so that *all things* work together for good -  
Romans 8:28

Corollary 7: God controls all things that happen in your marriage so that *all things* work for good.



### God Is In Control Our Response

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Our response to God's control over our lives should be that of \_\_\_\_\_.

No English word sufficiently conveys the biblical concept of meekness. "Gentleness" is used by most translators, but conveys an emphasis on one's actions rather than a disposition of the mind or heart.

Meekness is:

- Not merely a natural virtue, but an \_\_\_\_\_ of the Spirit; it is one of the "fruits of the Spirit" (Galatians 5:23).
- An unflappable disposition of the spirit springing from a recognition that God is in complete and absolute control of the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ that surround us.
- A response, first of all toward God that \_\_\_\_\_ the circumstances around us as good and with purpose (although sometimes beyond understanding), without fighting against, resisting, disputing, or complaining.
- A gentleness toward those around us whose actions, even evil actions directed against us, are \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ by God for the purpose of bringing Him glory and advancing His purposes in the lives of His servants.

**Result:** "The fruit of the Spirit is... gentleness [meekness]...." Gal. 5:22

*The meek are happy, for they have the most comfortable, undisturbed enjoyment of themselves, their friends, and their God. They are fit for any relationship, any event, any circumstance. Meekness carries with it, in a special manner, the promise of life as God intended it on this earth. It tends to promote our health, wealth, comfort, and safety, even in this world. The meek and quiet are observed to live the most stable lives, compared with those who fight against their circumstances and the people who surround them. (adapted from Matthew Henry Commentary)*



God's sovereignty and our meekness enables us to love our spouse like God loves.

*Love is patient, love is kind, it is not jealous; love does not brag, it is not arrogant. It does not act disgracefully, it does not seek its own benefit; it is not provoked, does not keep an account of a wrong suffered, it does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; it keeps every confidence, it believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 1 Corinthians 13:4-7*

**APPLICATION QUESTIONS:**

What difference does it make in how you handle things in your marriage if God is absolutely and completely in control?

What would you stop doing if you lived consistent with the truth that God is in complete control?

If God is in control, why does He allow difficult things to happen in your life and in your married life?

How does meekness enable you to respond with love to a difficult person or situation (ref. 1 Cor. 13:4-7)?



## FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH #2

### GOD IS OUR FATHER

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A practical understanding of who God is helps us to understand what role He plays as the third party in our relationship.

**Question:** What was your father like, and how has that shaped your view of your Heavenly Father?

What your Heavenly Father is like:

1 Your Father is “\_\_\_\_\_” to the both of you.

*Romans 8:15*

*For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."*

2 Your Father will never \_\_\_\_\_ you or let you down.

*Heb 13:5b-6*

*"Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"*

3 Your Father will take care of your \_\_\_\_\_.

*Matt 6:31-32*

*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.*

4 Your Father knows you and your circumstances \_\_\_\_\_.

*Psalms 139:1-6*

*O Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O Lord.*

5 Your Father is \_\_\_\_\_ and ready to ease your burden when life gets tough.

*Matthew 11:28-30*

*"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."*



6 Your Father is compassionate and understanding when you face \_\_\_\_\_.

*2 Corinthians 1:3-4*

*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles...*

7 Your Father takes \_\_\_\_\_ in giving good gifts to you.

*Matthew 7:9-11*

*"Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!"*

8 Your Father has great things \_\_\_\_\_ for you.

*1 Corinthians 2:9b*

*"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him"*

9 Your Father \_\_\_\_\_ you through circumstances and hardship to help you grow in spiritual maturity.

*Hebrews 12:5-7*

*And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons.*

10 Your Father will not allow you to face a temptation or test that is \_\_\_\_\_ your ability to bear.

*1 Corinthians 10:13*

*No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.*

11 Your Father is at work to accomplish his good \_\_\_\_\_ in you.

*Philippians 2:12-13*

*... work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.*



12 Your Father \_\_\_\_\_ a close relationship with you.

*James 4:8*

*Come near to God and he will come near to you.*

13 Your Father \_\_\_\_\_ you when you mess up.

*1 John 1:9-10*

*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*



### God is Our Father Our Response

#### **Implications for your Marriage**

If God is our Father, then you and your spouse are also \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

If God is our Father, then He is \_\_\_\_\_ us as His children.

What we know about our heavenly “Dad”:

- Dad is intimately \_\_\_\_\_ with his (two) children.
- Dad can be absolutely \_\_\_\_\_ because of His perfect love.
- Dad will \_\_\_\_\_ his children to help them grow up.
- Dad will take care of everything if we \_\_\_\_\_ Him.
- Dad understands the \_\_\_\_\_ of life.

#### **Your Appropriate Response**

The Bible calls the appropriate response to God as “the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Lord.”

Scripture says that the *fear of the Lord* is the beginning of \_\_\_\_\_. (Proverbs 9:10)

*Having your relationship with your Heavenly Father as the center of your reality enables you to navigate life's complications and challenges with wisdom.*



**APPLICATION QUESTIONS:**

How would you summarize what your Heavenly Father is like?

Pick out one way in which your Heavenly Father is different than your earthly father. How has this affected your relationship to God?

What are the implications of the Father/brother/sister relationship for your marriage, and how does that affect the way you live out your married life?

What is God's goal in our married life? How do you think He is going about accomplishing that goal?

In what ways did you respect your earthly father? In what ways did you fear him?

After the pattern of respect for your earthly father, what does it mean to "fear the Lord"?



## FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH #3

### YOUR LIFE HAS PURPOSE

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Life is not a collection of random events, but rather a tapestry designed and controlled by a loving Father. God's purpose for you as a couple and as individuals is the track on which your life should proceed.

**Question:** What might a person's life look like who has no purpose in life?

What would you say is the "default" purpose of most couples?

#### What is God's purpose for you?

- God \_\_\_\_\_ you and \_\_\_\_\_ you for a PURPOSE.

*You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit — fruit that will last. John 15:16*

- You have a life \_\_\_\_\_ prepared for you.

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

- God describes your life path as a \_\_\_\_\_ specifically marked out for you.

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Hebrews 12:1*

#### The Challenge: A 6:33 Marriage

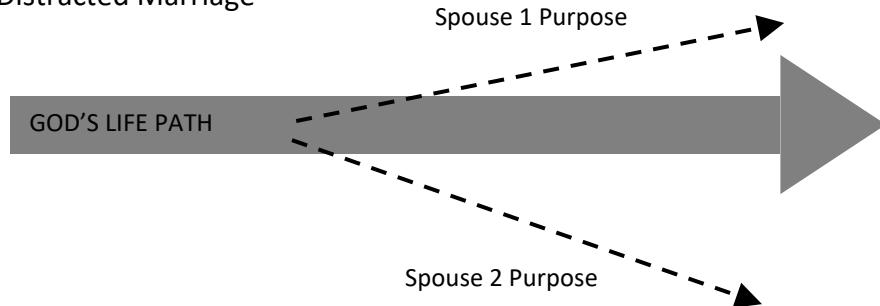
*But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Matthew 6:33*

God is a god of meaning and purpose; and when He calls you to follow Him, He gives you a \_\_\_\_\_ around which everything else in life evolves, and by which everything else in life makes sense.

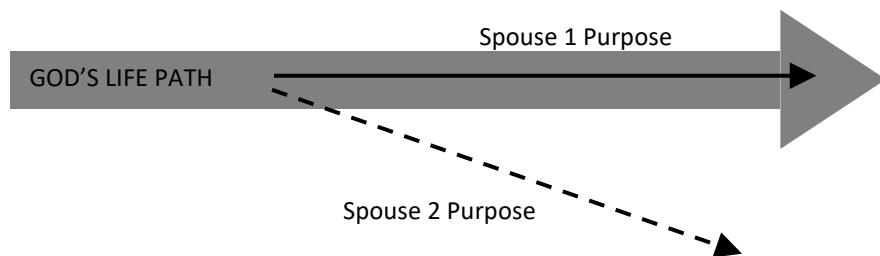


Three Types of Marriages:

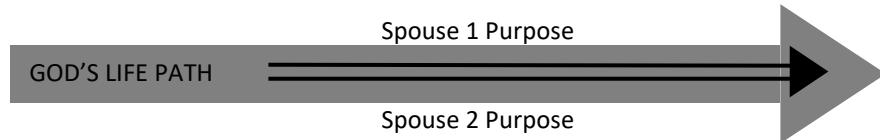
1. The Distracted Marriage



2. The Dissonant Marriage



3. The Kingdom Marriage



*A 6:33 marriage is committed to pursuing the advancement of the kingdom in their married life.*



Your Life Has Purpose

Our Response

If God has a purpose designed just for you, you should live a life of \_\_\_\_\_ focus.

*Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

*Philippians 3:12-14*



**APPLICATION QUESTIONS:**

From these verses, what does living a life of purpose require?

What would change in your life if you have one common and singular core purpose around which everything else evolves?

Why is it hard to stay focused on your purpose?

Describe the 6:33 life in the contexts of work, family, and ministry.

How would you describe the uniqueness of the 6:33 marriage?



## FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH #4

### YOU HAVE ALL YOU NEED TO SUCCEED

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As His child, your Heavenly Father has provided you with all you need to successfully navigate life and know the joys of an *abundant life* (John 10:10), including a successful marriage. As 2 Peter 1:3 promises:

*His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.*

#### 1. Your Father meets your need for \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

Larry Crabb, in his book *The Marriage Builder* suggests:

*I understand the Scriptures to teach that relationship offers two elements which are absolutely essential if we are to live as God intended: (1) The security of being truly loved and accepted, and (2) the significance of making a substantial, lasting, positive impact on another person.*

#### Our Security in God

- We are secure in our \_\_\_\_\_.

*You formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb.  
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Psalm 139:15*

- We are secure in our \_\_\_\_\_.

*Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them. Psalm 139:15*

- We are secure in the \_\_\_\_\_ done against us.

*You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good. Genesis 50:20*

- We are secure in the \_\_\_\_\_ circumstances of life.

*We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. Rom. 8:28*

- We are secure in his \_\_\_\_\_.

*I will never leave you nor forsake you. Heb. 13:5*

Question: In what other things might one search for security?



### Our Significance in God

- We are significant because we are \_\_\_\_\_ as his children.

*He chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship in through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will. Eph. 1:4-5*

- We are significant because we are greatly \_\_\_\_\_.

*Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.*

*Matt. 10:29-31*

- We are significant because we are \_\_\_\_\_ to produce lasting fruit.

*You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. John 15:16*

### 2. The Holy Spirit meets your need for \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

*The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, **he will teach you all things** and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. John 14:26 emphasis added*

Your home is where the greatest joys and treasures of life are found. Your home is also where relationships are the closest, weaknesses are the most pronounced, conflicts are the most intense, and wounds are the deepest. It is in this context of the fundamental building block of society that God trains us into the spiritual maturity that produces a good marriage.

The Holy Spirit is our constant companion, working in your life to reveal truth and falsehood, teach you, remind you, convict you, and empower you to live godly and productively. He speaks to you through Scripture, prayer, and in the context of daily circumstances. As the Holy Spirit works in your life to conform you into Christ's image, you will move closer to God's ideal for your marriage relationship.

How to cooperate with the work of the Spirit in your life:

- a. Engage \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ with God's Word and in prayer.

*Do not conform any longer 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 12:2 NIV*



b. \_\_\_\_\_ the circumstances you encounter. What is God wanting to teach you through the happenings around you. Particularly listen to the corrections and rebukes of your spouse and others. Is God using these comments to mold you and change you?

*Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. Hebrews 12:7-11*

**KEY POINT:** God's discipline is \_\_\_\_\_, not \_\_\_\_\_, meant to help you grow individually and thereby as a couple.

- From the discipline of difficult times, we learn to trust.
- From the discipline of daily irritants, we learn to be patient.
- From the discipline of conflicts, we learn to respond godly.
- From the discipline of rebukes from others, we learn about ourselves.

Every uncomfortable and painful event in your personal and family life is allowed by God for the purpose of taking you further down the road toward a godly life that underpins a godly marriage.



### You Have All You Need Our Response

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Let's look at the rest of 2 Peter 1:3:

*His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. 2 Peter 1:3-4 NIV*

1. Escape the corruption of your marriage by maintaining a \_\_\_\_\_ relationship with Christ through bible reading, prayer, and involvement in a local church.



2. Escape the corruption of your marriage with an \_\_\_\_\_ belief in God's promises.

E.g.:

*And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. Rom. 8:28.*

3. Escaping the corruption of your marriage by \_\_\_\_\_ your words spoken to your spouse within the boundaries of the commands of Scripture.

Colossians 3:9

*Do not lie to one another...*

Ephesians 4:29

*Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.*

1 Peter 3:9-10

*Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. For, "Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech.*



James 5:9

*Do not complain, brethren, against one another, so that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door.*

Colossians 3:8

*But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth.*

Ephesians 5:4

*...and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.*



**APPLICATION QUESTIONS:**

What creates security and significance in your marriage relationship? What threatens security and significance?

Where do non-Christians look for the security and significance they crave?

What is the danger of looking to marriage alone to meet these spirit-level needs?

The opposite of security and significance is insecurity and insignificance. What are some common insecurities that people struggle with? How do insecurities affect one's marriage?

How can our words damage our spouse's spirit? How can our words threaten our spouse's security and significance?

How can we reinforce and amplify our spouse's security and significance?



## RELATIONAL FOUNDATION #1

### ACCEPT ONE ANOTHER

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God's design for marriage is established on the basis of a brother and a sister in Christ living in a spiritual relationship, with God as their Father. For your marriage relationships to be a spiritual marriage; to be a marriage that reflects God's design, there are 3 primary obstacles that have to be overcome:

- The two of you are \_\_\_\_\_.
- The two of you can be \_\_\_\_\_.
- The two of you are \_\_\_\_\_.

**THE PROBLEM:** We must learn how to have spiritual relationships. We learn how to have spiritual relationships by imitating the spiritual relationship that Christ has with us. His relationship with you is the pattern by which you pattern your relationship with your spouse. And when that pattern is in your marriage relationship, the obstacles that all marriages face can be overcome.

**OBSTACLE:** The two of you are *different*.

**RELATIONAL SKILL:** You must learn to \_\_\_\_\_ your spouse as Christ \_\_\_\_\_ you.

*Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God. Romans 15:7*

Acceptance overcomes the obstacle of \_\_\_\_\_.

Potential effects of diversity:

- An attitude of \_\_\_\_\_.
- \_\_\_\_\_ toward others opinions or actions.
- \_\_\_\_\_. An inability to reconcile differences.



How does Christ accept you?

1. Apart from merit in the \_\_\_\_\_.

*But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Rom. 5:8*

He accepts you with your \_\_\_\_\_.

...with your tendency to be grumpy.

...with your insensitivity to the feelings of others.

...with your weaknesses and blind spots

He never says, I'm not going to accept you until you stop...

Likewise, you should accept your spouse where they are, work to grow together, and lean on God's grace to be patient with their shortcomings.

2. Apart from merit in the \_\_\_\_\_.

*Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. Romans 5:1-2*

His acceptance is based on \_\_\_\_\_, not \_\_\_\_\_.

The Christian marriage is a grace relationship; that is, the favor you grant your spouse is not dependent upon their performance; rather it is likened unto the favor that God grants us in spite of our rebellion, sin, shortcomings, etc.

3. Apart from merit in the \_\_\_\_\_.

*If we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself.  
2 Tim 2:13*

To accept is to not base future acceptance on \_\_\_\_\_ to your standard.

Acceptance means that we remain committed, even when change does not take place. It means that we obey God no matter what our spouse does or doesn't do. Our first commitment is to be faithful to God, and if that means being faithful and accepting of a difficult spouse, God's grace provides.



What does acceptance look like?

- To accept is to respect and value \_\_\_\_\_.
- To accept is to appreciate strengths and \_\_\_\_\_ for weaknesses.
- To accept is to respect and value differences of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
- To accept is to value the relationship above being \_\_\_\_\_.

What is not acceptance: How to deal with shortcomings and sin in your spouse's life:

- (1) Grow together as you work through your differences.
- (2) Convey to your spouse in love (not anger) that his/her actions are sin according to the Bible - we don't let the sin be excused away - yet we do it in love, we do it without anger, at an appropriate time, and we do it without withholding our favor toward them.
- (3) Pray for their heavenly father to change the both of you to reflect his image.

*The two of you are different. The relational skill of accepting your spouse overcomes the obstacle of diversity and establishes a grace relationship.*

**APPLICATION QUESTIONS:**

How does the patterns and activities of your parent of the sex as your spouse create expectations of your spouse? What is the danger of those expectations?

In what ways does your spouse's strengths and personality complement you?



## RELATIONAL FOUNDATION #2

### LOVE ONE ANOTHER

---

**OBSTACLE:** The two of you can be ***self-centered***.

**RELATIONAL SKILL:** You must learn to \_\_\_\_\_ your spouse as Christ \_\_\_\_\_ you.

*"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another." John 13:34*

To love is a skill, not a feeling. Your marriage is God's training ground for learning how to love with Christ's love. The more you understand and appreciate how Christ loves you, the more you are able to love your spouse.

What does Christ's love for you look like?

- It is based on \_\_\_\_\_, not \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_.

*Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. Eph. 1:4 NLT*

- It takes great \_\_\_\_\_ in you – Psalm 147:11

*For the LORD takes delight in his people; he crowns the humble with victory. Ps. 149:4*

- It has \_\_\_\_\_ written all over it.

*For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Rom. 8:38–39*

Our marriages should say "commitment", "unending love", in spite of every difficulty.

- It includes the elements of both \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14*

Love \_\_\_\_\_ – the "grace" side of love

*Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.  
1 Peter 4:8*



Love covers - it absorbs those offenses without retribution; it bears up under the impact the sin has on you personally. This is the “grace” side of love, i.e., the “tender” side of love - granting favor even when not deserved.

Love \_\_\_\_\_ – the “truth” side of love

*For I wrote you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you...*

*The reason I wrote you was to see if you would stand the test and be obedient in everything.*

*2 Cor 2:4, 9*

This side of love actually reveals truth for the purpose of correction and the progress of the one loved. It is the “hard” side of love – bringing sin to light - exposing that which is false, and revealing that which is true - in order to help that person grow in Christlikeness.

Love appears to have two sides, but in reality they merge together into a love that seeks the best for the one you love. The home is the context for God teaching us to love with *agape* love.

*The two of you can be self-centered. The relational skill of loving your spouse overcomes the obstacle of self-centeredness and establishes a grace relationship.*

#### **APPLICATION QUESTIONS:**

What contrasts are there between *agape* love (true love) and the brand of love that binds non-Christian couples together?

Do you naturally tend toward the grace or the truth side of love? How does that show up in your marriage relationship?



## RELATIONAL FOUNDATION #3

### FORGIVE ONE ANOTHER

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**OBSTACLE:** The two of you are *imperfect*.

**RELATIONAL SKILL:** You must learn to \_\_\_\_\_ your spouse as Christ \_\_\_\_\_ you.

*Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. Ephesians 4:32*

What is Forgiveness?

Forgiveness => canceling the debt owed to you because of a wrong done to you.

Forgiveness does not negate justice - God is the just judge. Leave justice up to him.

*Vengeance is mine, I will repay. Rom. 12:19*

The more you understand and appreciate how Christ forgives you, the more you are able to forgive your spouse.

What does Christ's forgiveness look like?

- Christ's forgiveness has no residual \_\_\_\_\_. His forgiveness doesn't bring it against you later.
- Christ's forgiveness has no residual \_\_\_\_\_. Our sin does not change his love and commitment to us.

How do you know if you have forgiven in this way?

- If you feel and convey to them genuine kindness and a tender heart toward them (see verse above) rather than a coldness, aloofness, harshness, or criticalness.
- If your heart is compassionate to them - (e.g. the prodigal's father) compassion that goes out if its way to encourage them and build them up.

*The two of you are sinful beings and make mistakes. The relational skill of forgiving your spouse overcomes the obstacle of sinfulness and establishes a grace relationship.*



**APPLICATION QUESTIONS:**

What is the long term effect of a lack of full and complete forgiveness for your spouses sins against you?

Was acceptance, love, and forgiveness a pattern in your home life growing up? If not, which one(s) do you need to give special attention to?

*A marriage based on grace is when two individuals treat each other with respect, commitment, patience, and forgiveness.*



## PULLING THORNS THE BOTHERSOME THORN OF ANGER

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We all deal with the emotion of anger, and therefore anger is a part of the marriage relationship. How are we as Christians to respond to this emotion? What place does it have in our married lives? In order to get a better understanding of anger, we are going to go back to the first instance of anger in the Bible - the record of Cain and Abel in Genesis 4.

### BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE ON ANGER

- Anger is not always \_\_\_\_\_.

*Be angry, and yet do not sin. Ephesians 4:26*

- Anger is rooted in \_\_\_\_\_.

*Arise, O Lord, in your anger; rise up against the rage of my enemies.  
Awake, my God; decree justice. Psalm 7:6*

*Anger is a divinely implanted emotion. Closely allied to our instinct for right, it is designed to be used for constructive spiritual purposes. The person who cannot feel anger at evil is a person who lacks enthusiasm for good. If you cannot hate wrong, it's very questionable whether you really love righteousness.* Dr. David Seamands

### THE SECOND FALL – Genesis 4:3-12

1. (Sinful) Anger is rooted in a self-centered view of \_\_\_\_\_ . verses 4-5

*The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.*

The problem is that because of our fallen nature and our limited perspective, we often self-centered and incomplete view of justice vs. injustice.

*The anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. James 1:20*

**FIRST INDICATOR of Sinful Anger:** If your anger is a result of a supposed wrong done toward you.

- (Sinful) Anger has a surprising \_\_\_\_\_. *What had Abel done?*
- (Sinful) Anger has a surprising \_\_\_\_\_. *Cain's face was "downcast."*

**SECOND INDICATOR of Sinful Anger:** If your whole perspective on life sours (you become a bear to be around).



**We all get angry.** What are we to do with it? In verses 6-7, God leads us to the resolution of our anger by asking a series of questions.

2. (Sinful) Anger is resolved by God's \_\_\_\_\_. *verses 6-7a*

*Then the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?*

Three questions that will resolve your anger without sinning.

▪ Question 1: *Why are you angry?*

Is there a valid \_\_\_\_\_ for your anger?

▪ Question 2: *Why is your face downcast?*

Is the \_\_\_\_\_ of your anger valid?

▪ Question 3: *If you do what is right, will you not be accepted (countenance be lifted up)?*

There is a valid \_\_\_\_\_ from anger.

3. (Sinful) Anger is exploited by \_\_\_\_\_. *verse 7b*

*But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.*

Sin is looking to \_\_\_\_\_ you, and anger is its agent to gain control.

4. (Sinful) Anger results in damaging \_\_\_\_\_. *verses 8-9,11*

*While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. Then the LORD said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?” “I don’t know,” he replied. “Am I my brother’s keeper?”*

*Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground...*

(Sinful) Anger results in broken \_\_\_\_\_ and other damaging consequences.

## DOING RIGHT vs NOT DOING RIGHT with your anger

1. NOT DOING RIGHT – 3 forms of anger



- \_\_\_\_\_ anger – BLOWING UP

*An angry man stirs up strife, And a hot-tempered man abounds in transgression. Proverbs 29:20-22*

One with explosive anger has no \_\_\_\_\_ against sinning.

*"The idea of allowing anger to break out in an undisciplined manner by saying or doing whatever comes into mind without weighing the consequences, without counting to ten, without holding it back and quieting it, without hearing the whole story, is totally wrong." Jay Adams*

- \_\_\_\_\_ anger - RESENTMENT

*BE ANGRY, AND YET DO NOT SIN; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity. Ephesians 4:26-27*

Resentment is a persistent feeling of ill will toward someone as a result of a perceived wrong, insult, or hurt. Resentment results in an ongoing tension so that you are never completely relaxed in your relationship with that person, and one resentment may turn into more.

Anger must be dealt with \_\_\_\_\_, or it has the danger of turning into resentment.

- \_\_\_\_\_ anger - BITTERNESS

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

Bitterness is intense animosity toward someone that may or may not be expressed. Bitterness is hate directed at someone who has hurt you, a parent, a former spouse, or someone you love who has hurt you deeply. Bitterness is a sickness of the soul.

- Rooted anger results from anger that is \_\_\_\_\_.
- Rooted anger (a root of bitterness) \_\_\_\_\_ many people around you.
  - rooted anger defiles \_\_\_\_\_ – your life is deprived of the joy of your relationship with God and others.



- rooted anger defiles your \_\_\_\_\_ - internalized anger divides you from your spouse and removes the possibility of enjoying the full blessings of your marriage.
- rooted anger defiles your \_\_\_\_\_ - angry people produce angry children

**2. DOING RIGHT– Resolving your anger in God**

- Let anger be a \_\_\_\_\_ for examining the reasons for your emotion.
- Respond to the appearance of anger with \_\_\_\_\_.

Much of our anger is simply born out of frustration with life and the people around us. A response of meekness accepts circumstances as under God's control and for his purposes.

*“We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” Romans 8:28*

- Reply with truth and grace, without \_\_\_\_\_.

**3. DOING RIGHT– Acting on righteous anger.**

Righteous anger is expressed in a way that is consistent with God's character and will. It is a call for action, getting involved with a cause, correcting a wrong attitude or action, assisting those who are suffering, or simply praying when you are unable to personally effect change.



**APPLICATION QUESTIONS:**

What was the pattern of anger in your home while growing up? Was it predominantly explosive, standing, or rooted anger? Or were there expressions of righteous anger? How has that affected you with your emotion of anger?

Describe what righteous anger would look like in the context of your marriage, your children, your work life, or the world around you. How should that anger be expressed?

*Removing the thorn of anger requires seeking God's purposes behind your emotional response, and rejecting self-centered anger by a response of meekness.*



## PULLING THORNS

### THE INEVITABLE THORN OF CONFLICT

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Conflict is a part of the marriage relationship. When two people with differing personalities, backgrounds, and strengths and weaknesses live together, conflict is inevitable. While conflict can strengthen the relationship when handled correctly, it can also be damaging and even destructive. How can the thorn of conflict be removed so that those conflicts can prove beneficial?

#### The Sources of Conflict

- Legitimate differences that need to be worked through.
- Your own desires.

*What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? James 4:1.*

#### 5 responses to conflict:

- \_\_\_\_\_ - emotional distance
- \_\_\_\_\_ - have to prove you are right, whether you are or not
- \_\_\_\_\_ - not worth the battle
- \_\_\_\_\_ - find middle ground
- \_\_\_\_\_ – constructive resolution

#### How does God use conflict?

- God uses conflict to teach us about \_\_\_\_\_.  
Conflict brings to the surface our fleshly responses. Conflict reveals our own need for growth in Christlikeness. Conflict can be used by God to discipline us into maturity.
- God uses conflict to teach us about \_\_\_\_\_.  
Conflict teaches us how to love another person, in spite of their sin and shortcomings [just like Christ loves us].
- God uses conflict to teach us about \_\_\_\_\_.  
Conflict may result in sharing in Christ's sufferings for righteousness sake. Jesus experienced ridicule, rejection, betrayal, mock justice, and suffering.



**Pulling the Conflict Thorn out of your marriage.**

1. Stop using your \_\_\_\_\_ responses:

The use of manipulating methods are the primary reason why there are long-term conflicts that seem to never go away or be resolved.

- Ditch the silent treatment. clam up - "I'm not talking to you."
- Cancel the historical record. "Here we go again..." To forgive means to not bring it against them again.
- Stop the character assassinations. "You don't know what you are taking about." "That's stupid."
- Put down the deflective guards. (anger, threats, tears, etc.) Sometimes lashing out in anger is not because you are driven by anger, but it is a ploy to either deflect from your guilt or gain an advantage in the conflict. Sometimes tears are to deflect your guilt or gain an advantage.
- Drop the threats – to leave, retaliate, or divorce.
- Quit the redirect ploy. "You're just like your mother/father." "Some things you do are worse than that."
- End the generalizations and exaggerations. "You always...", "You never..."

2. Continually \_\_\_\_\_ the enemy.

Who is the enemy? What is his goal? How will he do it?

3. Learn from the conflict. Is God teaching you how to give or receive a \_\_\_\_\_?

If you don't know how to give and receive a rebuke, you will never know the intimacy God wants you to have in your marriage.



How to Give a Rebuke	How to Receive a Rebuke
<p><b>1. Search your heart.</b></p> <p>Is the reason for the rebuke valid, or is it coming from your self-centered perspective?</p>	<p><b>1. Remove the wrapper.</b></p> <p>The rebuke may have been delivered in anger, attacking you, not in a constructive way.</p>
<p><b>2. Search your life.</b></p> <p>Are you a part of the problem, or are you even guilty yourself of the offense?</p>	<p><b>2. Listen to the message.</b></p> <p>See past the wrapper to evaluate the root of the rebuke.</p>
<p><b>3. Speak the truth in a gracious way.</b></p> <p>Be sure the package in which you deliver the rebuke is not laced with sinful language.</p>	<p><b>3. Don't respond by attacking.</b></p> <p>Control your response and give the rebuke your consideration as to whether it has validity.</p>
<p><b>4. _____ the conflict.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="279 1142 1421 1216">▪ _____ if you are wrong. Often there needs to be admitting of wrong from both. Forgiveness clears the air to press on to the future.</li><li data-bbox="279 1248 1339 1322">▪ Seek an understanding of the _____ perspectives that caused the conflict in the first place. Compromise may result.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="425 1343 882 1374">▪ One is a spender, one is a saver</li><li data-bbox="425 1381 964 1412">▪ One likes some space, one likes people</li><li data-bbox="425 1419 882 1450">▪ One likes it hot, one likes it cold</li><li data-bbox="425 1457 850 1488">▪ One is logical, one is intuitive</li></ul></li></ul> <p><b>5. _____ where you are and move forward.</b></p> <p>The source of the conflict may not be fully resolved and may be revisited until its resolution in the future.</p>	

#### What does it mean to "resolve" a conflict?

To resolve a conflict means to understand the perspective of your spouse, to decide upon and act upon a righteous course of action.

Removing the thorn of conflict is a commitment born out of love, acceptance, and forgiveness.



**APPLICATION QUESTIONS:**

What pattern of conflict resolution (or lack thereof) did you see exhibited in your parents?

Where would you place yourself on the conflict resolution scale? I tend toward:

- Withdrawal emotionally
- Win the argument
- Yield to avoid the conflict
- Seek a compromise
- Committed to a long-term resolution

What has God revealed to you through this study about your ability to manage conflict productively?

*Removing the thorn of conflict requires a commitment to learn how to manage conflict in such a way to learn and grow as a person and as a couple.*



## PULLING THORNS

### THE LINGERING EFFECTS OF BAGGAGE

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Every person has “baggage”. Your baggage may be your preconceived ideas, beliefs, patterns, or practices retained from previous life experiences that negatively affect your marriage. Examples of baggage include:

- Patterns that you learned from your parents or home life
- Traumatic experiences
- Unresolved wounds and offenses
- Insecurities from past experiences

Unfortunately, your baggage shapes how you respond in the present. Your baggage is a thorn in your life that must be pulled. It is a self-limiting factor that is keeping you from a normal, healthy, productive Christian life with your spouse.

It may be helpful to work through an inventory of potential baggage. Consider:

#### Traumatic or Hurtful Experience Inventory

- An inability to forgive someone
- An inability to trust God with the experience
- An inability to trust your spouse
- Insecurities about yourself resulting from past experiences
- What are others that you would add?*

#### Family Heritage Inventory:

- A pattern of arguments, anger, upheaval and conflict
- Men - passivity in family leadership
- Women – controlling, manipulative spirit
- An inability to communicate
- Household management (who performs chores, cooking, and maintenance)
- An inability to express affection
- Values in life that create expectations for your spouse (use of money, education, political, social involvement, vocational goals, etc.)
- What are others that you would add?*

What is God’s answer to removing the damaging effects of your baggage? Scripture provides several insights into how God works in your life to break down the effects of your baggage.



1. God works through \_\_\_\_\_ to bring your baggage to light. Your baggage may be hidden in blind spots, areas of your life, both conscious and unconscious, where we are unaware or unwilling to admit detrimental patterns from the past.
  - God may use conflict to reveal the presence and effects of baggage you have brought into the marriage.
  - God uses the words and remarks of others to expose your baggage.
  - God uses uncomfortable circumstances to help you face up to your baggage.
2. God works through His Word to \_\_\_\_\_ your character into Christlikeness by revealing blind spots.

*Do not conform any longer 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 12:2 NIV*

That transformation takes place when we approach God's word with a humble desire to be like Christ, letting his truths and commands penetrate our hearts as authoritative in our lives. For example, your parents may have spoken ungodly things to each other, or had a habit of complaining. But Scripture would say, "*Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs*" and "*Do all things without complaining or arguments.*" Take these commands as authoritative in your life and expect God to bring about circumstances that will test your obedience.

#### **Considerations for dealing with baggage:**

- Evaluate undesirable patterns from your parents and family life and work to break those patterns. God may be calling you to be a mold breaker in your family history.

*Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Phil. 2:12-13*

- Listen to your spouse as they point out your inherited patterns, insecurities, and unresolved conflicts.

*Faithful are the wounds of a friend. Prov. 27:6*

- Let the word of God in Scripture penetrate those blind spots and accept the commands of Scripture as your authoritative boundary.



*Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law. Ps. 119:18*

- Revisit your ability to trust in God for your past, your present, and your future. Release the fears and wounds to his loving sovereignty.

*Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. Prov. 3:5-6*

Your life is in the hands of an all-loving, all-powerful, all-wise Father who can be trusted “with all your heart.”

*You have encircled me behind and in front,  
And placed Your hand upon me. Psalm 139:5*

- Assume that God will engage you with circumstances that will give you the opportunity to change the pattern. Work to change your pattern when the opportunity arises.

#### **APPLICATION QUESTIONS:**

What are some examples of conscious family patterns that are embedded into the lives of children from their parents? unconscious family patterns?

What impediments do these patterns do to your relationships and your walk with God?

What are some examples of past experiences that mold our patterns and influence our lives?

What impediments do these patterns do to your relationships and your walk with God?

*Removing the thorn of baggage requires a wide-ranging trust in God’s loving control over all of your life and responding to his work in your life to remove detrimental elements from your life.*



## PULLING THORNS

### THE DIVISIVE ISSUE OF MONEY

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Of all the problems that cause marital difficulties and divorce, money and finances are always near the top of the list. One study suggested that 57% of divorced couples in the United States cited financial problems as the primary reason for the demise of their marriage. It may be pressure from the lack of money, or differences on how the money is spent, but a great deal of pressure is put on our marriages from money issues. How can the sting of money issues be removed from a Christian marriage?

The answer starts with how you view money and possessions. If you think of money in a biblical framework, the way you handle your money will follow. Following are seven adjustments to the way you view money drawn from Scripture that will pull the thorn of money out of your marriage.

#### **1** Adjustment #1

##### Understand the role of money in your spiritual life.

Money is a \_\_\_\_\_ competing for your trust and commitment.

*No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.*

*Luke 16:13.*

Money is a test of our \_\_\_\_\_.

*One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? Luke 16:10–11.*

#### **2** Adjustment #2

##### Do your work for God, not for money.

Money is not the \_\_\_\_\_ of your work, but rather the \_\_\_\_\_ of faithful service as God's means of providing for you.

*Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward.*

*Col. 3:23–24*



## **3** Adjustment #3

### Match your lifestyle with your income.

Learn \_\_\_\_\_ within the level of income God provides.

*Be content with your wages. Luke 3:14*

*I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with little, and I also know how to live in prosperity. Phil. 4:11-12*

Chasing the lifestyle of others creates a great \_\_\_\_\_.

*But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. 1 Tim. 6:8-10*

Limit your consumption to less than your income to provide room for:

- \_\_\_\_\_ in God's work
- \_\_\_\_\_ funds
- \_\_\_\_\_ for future needs and purchases

## **4** Adjustment #4

### View limitations as placed there by God for His purposes.

God is working in you to produce spiritual \_\_\_\_\_ in your financial lives just as in every other area of life.

*It is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose. Phil. 2:13.*

Ways God uses limitations:

- To learn to trust him.
- To display His ability to provide and to build our faith.



- To parent us toward spiritual maturity.
- God may direct by withholding as well as providing.

## 5 Adjustment #5

### Establish giving as an opportunity for spiritual impact in the world.

Establish giving as the \_\_\_\_\_ priority of your financial management.

*Honor the LORD with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine.*  
*Prov. 3:9-10*

God provides your income both for \_\_\_\_\_ in the kingdom and for \_\_\_\_\_ for your needs, with kingdom investment as a priority.

*Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food...2 Cor. 9:10a*

Expect \_\_\_\_\_ to increase your giving.

*... will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. 2 Cor. 9:10b-11*

## 6 Adjustment #6

### Control the use of debt.

Debt means you are working for someone else.

*The rich rules over the poor,  
and the borrower is the slave of the lender. Prov. 22:7*

Debt may be a sign of:

- A heart problem of \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ with God's provision
- A need for better \_\_\_\_\_
- Making unwise \_\_\_\_\_ on the future.



Making a decision about borrowing:

- Seek God's wisdom on why the need is in your life.
  - (1) Consider waiting and doing without until God provides.
  - (2) Consider an alternative that would meet the need without incurring debt.
  - (3) Consider whether the limitation is God's guidance for not making the purchase.
- Know your motives. Need? Want? Greed? Pride? Haste?
- Know your situation.
  - (1) What presumptions are you making on the future?
  - (2) What is the range of possibilities for meeting the need?
    - Upper - How much can you reasonably afford?
    - Lower - What is the least you can get by on?
  - (3) What affect might the debt have in view of your long-term plans or goals?

## 7 Adjustment #7

Plan your lifestyle.

Planning leads to financial \_\_\_\_\_.

*The plans of the diligent certainly lead to advantage,  
But everyone who is in a hurry certainly comes to poverty. Prov. 21:5*

4 simple principles of biblical planning:

- Give regularly to God's work as a priority.
- Plan your family finances and follow it.
- Spend on a cash basis as much as possible and work toward being debt free.
- Save consistently for future needs.



**APPLICATION QUESTIONS:**

How would you describe the pressures on marriage revolving around finances?

What might be some signs of serving the false god of money?

How would you rate yourself on each of the financial adjustments based on the following?

- 1 This is a new concept to me and I need to make a lifestyle adjustment.
- 2 I need to work on this adjustment.
- 3 I am comfortable with my lifestyle in this area.

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Doing your work for God and not for money?	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
Matching your lifestyle with your income?	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
Viewing financial limitations as from God?	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
Giving established as a first priority?	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
Controlling the use of debt?	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
Managing your finances with a plan?	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>

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*Removing the thorn of money requires a biblical reorientation of the source, the use, and the dangers of money.*



## FINAL THOUGHTS

### KEY TRUTHS OF A SPIRITUAL MARRIAGE

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A marriage between two Christians has the opportunity to enjoy the blessings of God's plan for marriage as they live together in a spiritual relationship. Here are some final thoughts in summary:

#### **Final Thoughts on the Key Truths of a spiritual marriage:**

- (1) God's plan for marriage is prefigured in the ideal He has planted in the hearts and minds of men and women.
- (2) The institution of marriage is a unique spiritual relationship which reflects Christ's relationship with the church and as such contains an element of mystery.
- (3) God's plan for marriage is essentially an attainable goal when formed on spiritual principles and when pursued by both spouses.
- (4) Without a spiritual foundation, God's design for marriage, with its inherent blessings, cannot be realized.
- (5) No marriage is beyond repair as together a couple seeks God's plan.
- (6) A good marriage is worth all the work you put into it.

#### **Final Thoughts on Pulling Thorns out of your marriage:**

**Cooperate with God.** God is on your side. He wants you to have a close, fulfilling, and spiritually productive marriage. He will bless and empower your efforts to pull thorns out of your marriage.

**Fight the enemy.** Don't just sit passively by while Satan steals the joy that rightfully belongs to you as one of His children. Satan's desire is to steal, kill, and destroy. Steal the joy of a healthy and good marriage, kill the love you have for each other, and destroy your family.

**Work hard at pulling your thorns.** Passivity will never result in a spiritual marriage.

*At its heart, Christianity is about restoring relationships to what God intends. As you live together in spiritual relationship, you will learn about yourself, your life as a couple, and you will find the enjoyment and blessings that God intends for your marriage.*

# The Spiritual Foundations of Marriage

The Path to a Uniquely Christian (and Satisfying) Marriage



Study Developed by John Hargrave  
[wisdomforeternity.com](http://wisdomforeternity.com)

## Leader's Guide

# The Spiritual Foundations of Marriage

## The Path to a Uniquely Christian (and Satisfying) Marriage



Study Developed by John Hargrave  
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### The Challenge:

What makes Christian marriages unique? The answer is obvious. The man and the woman are both born into the family of God and are indwelt by His Spirit. Yet every couple knows that marriage is a challenge. Statistics reveal that Christian marriages have marital issues not greatly different from non-Christians.

The challenge is to establish a spiritual foundation for the marriage relationship that uniquely marks it out as distinct from non-Christian marriages, two people living out a uniquely spiritual life.

### The Condition of Christian Marriages

#### The Occurrence of Divorce

Divorce Among Adults Who Have Been Married  
(Base: 3792 adults)

Population Segment	Have Been Divorced	No. of Interviews
All adults	33%	3792
Evangelical Christians	26%	339
Non-evangelical born again Christians	33%	1373
Notional Christians	33%	1488
Associated with non Christian faith	38%	197
Atheist or agnostic	30%	269
All born again Christians	32%	1712
All non born again Christians	33%	2080
Protestant	34%	1997
Catholic	28%	875
Upscale	22%	450
Downscale	39%	367
White	32%	2641
African-American	36%	464
Hispanic	31%	458
Asian	20%	128
Conservative	28%	1343
Moderate	33%	1720
Liberal	37%	474

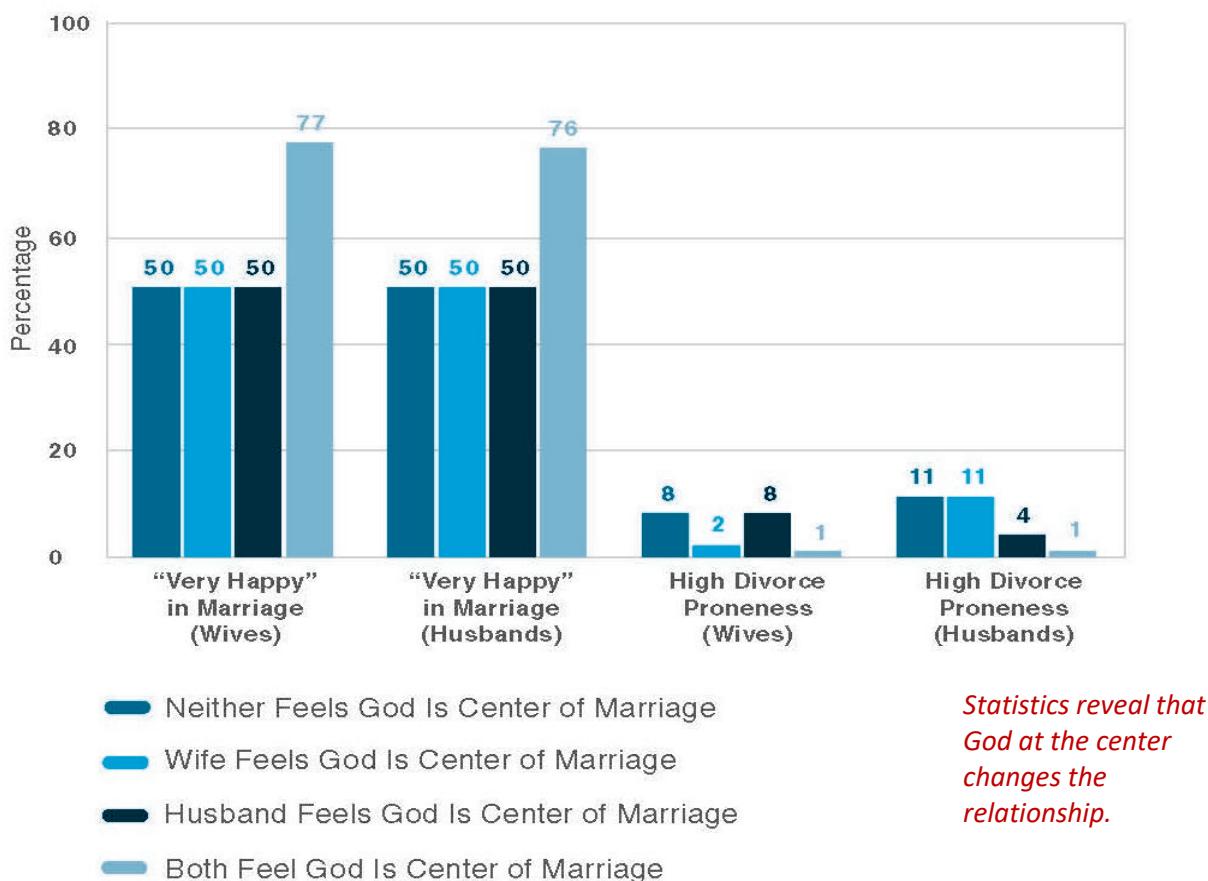
*Question: Why do you think there is not a greater difference?*

(Source: The Barna Group, Ventura, CA)



## Marital Satisfaction

**FIGURE 13. MARITAL SATISFACTION AND DIVORCE PRONENESS, 18–46-YEAR-OLD MARRIED MOTHERS AND FATHERS, BY GOD CENTER OF MARRIAGE**



**NOTE:** Model adjusts for age, education, income, and race/ethnicity.

**SOURCE:** Survey of Marital Generosity, 2010–2011.

## The Context of Christian Marriages

Similarities with non-Christian marriages:

1. Christian marriages have the same internal issue – self-centeredness. (or sin nature)
2. Christian marriages are faced with the same external issues.

*Financial pressures, conflict, stress, in-laws, job pressures*



Differences with non-Christian marriages:

1. Christian marriages have a three-fold relationship – husband, wife, and God.
2. Christian marriages are faced with a different struggle – an enemy.

The critical contrast - **John 10:10**

*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy;*

*vs.*

*I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.*

*Question: If Satan were to set out to destroy your marriage, how would he go about it?*

*Question: What would an abundant marriage look like?*

*His strategy is lies and deception (ref. Jn 8:44 When [Satan] lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.). All destruction starts with some form of a lie. What is true. What life is all about. What fulfills.*

3. Christian marriages have a different potential – a marriage by design.

#### KEY TRUTHS:

- (1) God's plan for marriage is prefigured in the ideal He has planted in the hearts and minds of men and women.
- (2) The marriage relationship is a unique spiritual relationship which reflects Christ's relationship with the church and as such contains an element of mystery.
- (3) The marriage relationship, being the closest of human relationships, is the primary context in which we learn relational skills.
- (4) God's plan for marriage is essentially an attainable goal when formed on spiritual principles and when pursued by both spouses.
- (5) Without a spiritual foundation, God's design for marriage, with its inherent blessings, cannot be realized.

*At its heart, Christianity is about restoring relationships to what God intended.*



## OUR AGENDA

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### Part 1: The Essential Spiritual Foundation

Foundational Truth #1: God's Control

A practical understanding of the implications of God's sovereignty establishes a secure point of reference that does not shift.

Foundational Truth #2: God's Character

A practical understanding of who God is helps us understand what role he plays as the third party in our marriage.

Foundational Truth #3: God's Purpose

A practical understanding of God's purpose in your life and for your lives together establishes a basis for true oneness in the midst of diversity.

Foundational Truth #4: God's Provision

A practical understanding of the resources God has provided for your success as a couple brings cohesiveness to a complicated life.

### Part 2: The Essential Relational Foundation

Relational Foundation #1: Accept one another.

The relational skill of acceptance overcomes the obstacle of diversity and establishes a grace relationship.

Relational Foundation #2: Love one another.

The relational skill of love overcomes the obstacle of self-centeredness and establishes a grace relationship.

Relational Foundation #3: Forgive one another.

The relational skill of forgiveness overcomes the obstacle of sinfulness and establishes a grace relationship.

### Part 3: On Pulling Thorns

The Thorn of Anger

Anger is a human emotion and is valid in its place. Yet anger can also be a thorn that pricks and festers.

The Thorn of Conflict

Conflict is inevitable in the marriage relationship. Yet God uses conflict for his purposes.

The Thorn of Baggage

Every person brings baggage from the past into the marriage that affects the relationship. God works in our lives to remove those harmful aspects from our past.

The Thorn of Money

God provides money for our needs. Yet money can also be a major source of tension, conflict, and discontent in marriage.



## FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH #1

### GOD IS IN CONTROL

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The first step of understanding marriage is to understand the context of our lives apart from the marriage relationship. That context starts with an understanding of who God is and his ongoing engagement with the world. As Christians, we declare that our God is sovereign. What does that mean and what difference does it make in the marriage relationship?

**PREMISE:** God's sovereignty makes godly relationships possible in spite of human weaknesses, mistakes, difficulties, and sinfulness. A practical understanding of the implications of his sovereignty establishes a secure point of reference that does not shift.

#### Biblical Affirmation

Affirmation 1: God does whatever He desires within the constraints of His own character - Ps. 135:6

Affirmation 2: God exercises control over "random" or "chance" events - Proverbs 16:33

Affirmation 3: God exercises control over demonic forces - Job 1:12; Matt. 8:28-34

Affirmation 4: God knows with absolute certainty the actual and possible actions and choices of men from eternity past – 1 Sam. 23:11-13; Matt. 11:21-23

Affirmation 5: God brings about His purposes through the willing and sinful choices of men while holding men morally accountable for their actions – Genesis 50:20; Acts 4:27-28

Affirmation 6: God freely intervenes as necessary to absolutely determine certain actions of men - Exodus 7-12; Exodus 12:36; Daniel 5:5

#### Marriage Corollary

Corollary 1: God is not constrained in meeting any need you have in your life and in your marriage.

Corollary 2: God exercises control of what seems to be random events in your life – accidents, chance encounters, etc.

Corollary 3: God exercises control over demonic forces that would destroy your marriage.

Corollary 4: God knows with absolute certainty your future and the future of your family.

Corollary 5: God brings about his purposes in spite of the sinful choices of your spouse.

Corollary 6: God intervenes in your marriage to accomplish his purposes.



Affirmation 7: God controls every aspects of the life of the believer so that *all things* work together for good -  
Romans 8:28

Corollary 7: God controls all things that happen in your marriage so that *all things* work for good.



### God Is In Control Our Response

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Our response to God's control over our lives should be that of meekness.

No English word sufficiently conveys the biblical concept of meekness. "Gentleness" is used by most translators, but conveys an emphasis on one's actions rather than a disposition of the mind or heart.

Meekness is:

- Not merely a natural virtue, but an enablement of the Spirit; it is one of the "fruits of the Spirit" (Galatians 5:23).
- An unflappable disposition of the spirit springing from a recognition that God is in complete and absolute control of the events and circumstances that surround us.
- A response, first of all toward God that accepts the circumstances around us as good and with purpose (although sometimes beyond understanding), without fighting against, resisting, disputing, or complaining.
- A gentleness toward those around us whose actions, even evil actions directed against us, are permitted and employed by God for the purpose of bringing Him glory and advancing His purposes in the lives of His servants.

**Result:** "The fruit of the Spirit is... gentleness [meekness] ...." Gal. 5:22

*The meek are happy, for they have the most comfortable, undisturbed enjoyment of themselves, their friends, and their God. They are fit for any relationship, any event, any circumstance. Meekness carries with it, in a special manner, the promise of life as God intended it on this earth. It tends to promote our health, wealth, comfort, and safety, even in this world. The meek and quiet are observed to live the most stable lives, compared with those who fight against their circumstances and the people who surround them. (adapted from Matthew Henry Commentary)*



God's sovereignty and our meekness enables us to love our spouse like God loves.

*Love is patient, love is kind, it is not jealous; love does not brag, it is not arrogant. It does not act disgracefully, it does not seek its own benefit; it is not provoked, does not keep an account of a wrong suffered, it does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; it keeps every confidence, it believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 1 Corinthians 13:4-7*

**APPLICATION QUESTIONS:**

What difference does it make in how you handle things in your marriage if God is absolutely and completely in control?

What would you stop doing if you lived consistent with the truth that God is in complete control?

If God is in control, why does He allow difficult things to happen in your life and in your married life?

How does meekness enable you to respond with love to a difficult person or situation (ref. 1 Cor. 13:4-7)?



## FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH #2

### GOD IS OUR FATHER

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A practical understanding of who God is helps us to understand what role He plays as the third party in our relationship.

**Question:** What was your father like, and how has that shaped your view of your Heavenly Father?

What your Heavenly Father is like:

1 Your Father is “daddy” to the both of you.

*Romans 8:15*

*For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."*

2 Your Father will never abandon you or let you down.

*Heb 13:5b-6*

*"Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"*

3 Your Father will take care of your needs.

*Matt 6:31-32*

*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.*

4 Your Father knows you and your circumstances intimately.

*Psalms 139:1-6*

*O Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O Lord.*

5 Your Father is gentle and ready to ease your burden when life gets tough.

*Matthew 11:28-30*

*"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."*



6 Your Father is compassionate and understanding when you face difficulties.

*2 Corinthians 1:3-4*

*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles...*

7 Your Father takes pleasure in giving good gifts to you.

*Matthew 7:9-11*

*"Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!"*

8 Your Father has great things planned for you.

*1 Corinthians 2:9b*

*"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him"*

9 Your Father disciplines you through circumstances and hardship to help you grow in spiritual maturity.

*Hebrews 12:5-7*

*And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons.*

10 Your Father will not allow you to face a temptation or test that is beyond your ability to bear.

*1 Corinthians 10:13*

*No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.*

11 Your Father is at work to accomplish his good purpose in you.

*Philippians 2:12-13*

*... work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.*



12 Your Father desires a close relationship with you.

*James 4:8*

*Come near to God and he will come near to you.*

13 Your Father restores you when you mess up.

*1 John 1:9-10*

*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*



## God is Our Father Our Response

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### Implications for your Marriage

If God is our Father, then you and your spouse are also brother and sister.

If God is our Father, then He is parenting us as His children.

What we know about our heavenly “Dad”:

- Dad is intimately involved with his (two) children.
- Dad can be absolutely trusted because of His perfect love.
- Dad will discipline his children to help them grow up.
- Dad will take care of everything if we seek Him.
- Dad understands the difficulties of life.

### Your Appropriate Response

The Bible calls the appropriate response to God as “the fear of the Lord.”

*Ref. Exodus 20:18-20 as a contrast between “fear” as an emotion and “fear of the Lord.”*

Scripture says that the *fear of the Lord* is the beginning of wisdom. (Proverbs 9:10)



**APPLICATION QUESTIONS:**

How would you summarize what your Heavenly Father is like?

Pick out one way in which your Heavenly Father is different than your earthly father. How has this affected your relationship to God?

What are the implications of the Father/brother/sister relationship for your marriage, and how does that affect the way you live out your married life?

What is God's goal in our married life? How do you think He is going about accomplishing that goal?

In what ways did you respect your earthly father? In what ways did you fear him?

*Respected his opinion  
Wanted to please him  
Fear of loss of approval  
Fear of discipline*

After the pattern of respect for your earthly father, what does it mean to "fear the Lord"?

*Having your relationship with your Heavenly Father as the center of your reality enables you to navigate life's complications and challenges with wisdom.*



## FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH #3

### YOUR LIFE HAS PURPOSE

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Life is not a collection of random events, but rather a tapestry designed and controlled by a loving Father. God's purpose for you as a couple and as individuals is the track on which your life should proceed.

**Question:** What might a person's life look like who has no purpose in life?

What would you say is the "default" purpose of most couples?

#### What is God's purpose for you?

- God chose you and appointed you for a PURPOSE.

*You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit — fruit that will last. John 15:16*

- You have a life path prepared for you.

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

- God describes your life path as a race specifically market out for you.

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Hebrews 12:1*

- *God's eternal plan is made up of individually-sized plans, of which a micro plan belongs to you.*
- *Marriage is two purposes that complement each other.*

#### The Challenge: A 6:33 Marriage

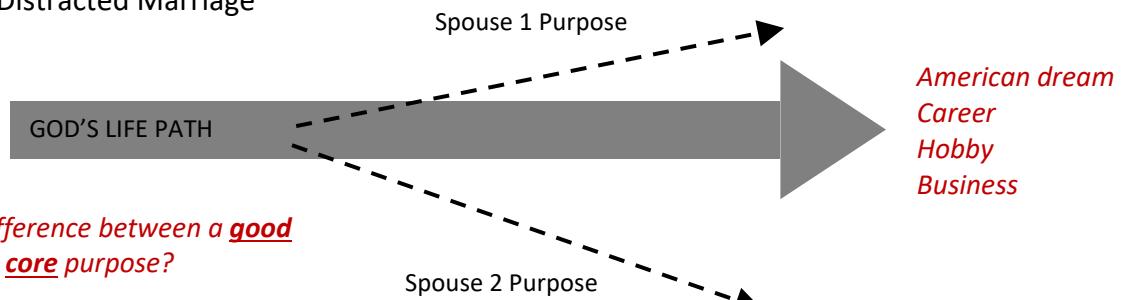
*But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Matthew 6:33*

God is a god of meaning and purpose; and when He calls you to follow Him, He gives you a core purpose around which everything else in life evolves, and by which everything else in life makes sense.

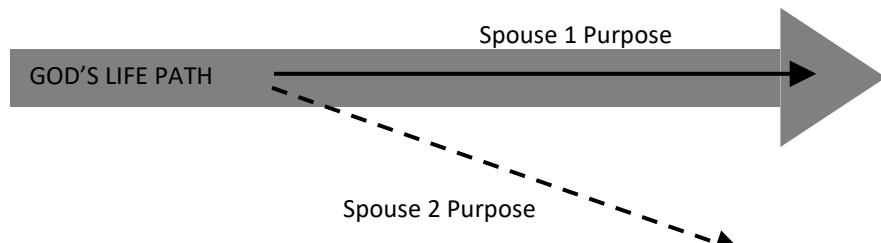


Three Types of Marriages:

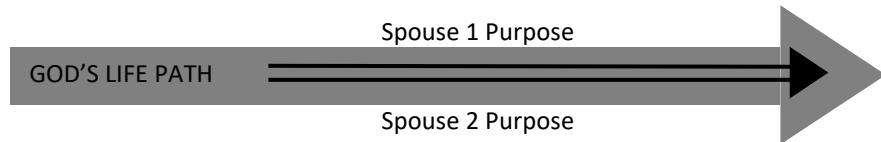
1. The Distracted Marriage



2. The Dissonant Marriage



3. The Kingdom Marriage



*A 6:33 marriage is committed to pursuing the advancement of the kingdom in their married life.*



Your Life Has Purpose  
Our Response

If God has a purpose designed just for you, you should live a life of intentional focus.

*Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. Philippians 3:12-14*



**APPLICATION QUESTIONS:**

From these verses, what does living a life of purpose require?

*PAUL'S GOAL SHOULD BE OURS: I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful. And now the prize awaits me—the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on the day of his return. 2 Tim. 4:7-8*

What would change in your life if you had one common and singular core purpose around which everything else evolves?

Why is it hard to stay focused on your purpose?

Describe the 6:33 life in the contexts of work, family, and ministry.

*There are many purposes in life, but the overarching purpose is to advance the cause of the kingdom of God in your family, in your work, and in your personal ministry.*

How would you describe the uniqueness of the 6:33 marriage?



## FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH #4

### YOU HAVE ALL YOU NEED TO SUCCEED

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As His children, your Heavenly Father has provided you with all you need to successfully navigate life and know the joys of an *abundant life* (John 10:10), including a fulfilling marriage. As a couple, you can face life together with confidence, not in yourselves, but in that third cord of the three strands. 2 Peter 1:3 promises:

*His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.*

#### God's Provisions for a Spiritual Marriage

1. Your Father meets your need for security and significance.

Larry Crabb, in his book *The Marriage Builder* suggests:

*I understand the Scriptures to teach that relationship offers two elements which are absolutely essential if we are to live as God intended: (1) The security of being truly loved and accepted, and (2) the significance of making a substantial, lasting, positive impact on another person.*

Each spouse should work to provide the security and significance that binds the relationship. Yet our deepest needs for security (being loved for who we are) and significance (finding meaning in our lives) are met in God.

#### Our Security in God

- We are secure in our person.

*You formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb.  
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Psalm 139:15*

- We are secure in our life path.

*Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them. Psalm 139:15*

- We are secure in the evil done against us.

*You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good. Genesis 50:20*

- We are secure in the perplexing circumstances of life.

*We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. Rom. 8:28*



- We are secure in his commitment.

*I will never leave you nor forsake you. Heb. 13:5*

Question: In what other things might one search for security?

### Our Significance in God

- We are significant because we are chosen as his children.

*He chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship in through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will. Eph. 1:4-5*

- We are significant because we are greatly valued.

*Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.*  
*Matt. 10:29-31*

- We are significant because we are appointed to produce lasting fruit.

*You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. John 15:16*

## **2. The Holy Spirit meets your need for guidance and spiritual growth.**

*The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, **he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance** all that I have said to you.*  
*John 14:26 emphasis added*

Your home is where the greatest joys and treasures of life are found. Your home is also where relationships are the closest, weaknesses are the most pronounced, conflicts are the most intense, and wounds are the deepest. It is in this context of the fundamental building block of society that God trains us into the spiritual maturity that produces a good marriage.

The Holy Spirit is our constant companion, working in your life to reveal truth and falsehood, teach you, remind you, convict you, and empower you to live godly and productively. He speaks to you through Scripture, prayer, and in the context of daily circumstances. As the Holy Spirit works in your life to conform you into Christ's image, you will move closer to God's ideal for your marriage relationship.

How to cooperate with the work of the Spirit in your life:

1. Engage personally and consistently with God's Word and in prayer.



*Do not conform any longer 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 12:2 NIV*

2. **Evaluate** the circumstances you encounter. What is God wanting to teach you through the happenings around you. Particularly listen to the corrections and rebukes of your spouse and others. Is God using these comments to mold you and change you?

*Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. Hebrews 12:7-11*

**KEY POINT:** God's discipline is instructive, not retributive, meant to help you grow individually and thereby as a couple.

- From the discipline of difficult times, we learn to trust.
- From the discipline of daily irritants, we learn to be patient.
- From the discipline of conflicts, we learn to respond godly.
- From the discipline of rebukes from others, we learn about ourselves.

Every uncomfortable and painful event in your personal and family life is allowed by God for the purpose of taking you further down the road toward a godly life that underpins a godly marriage.



### You Have All You Need Our Response

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Let's look at the rest of 2 Peter 1:3:

*His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. 2 Peter 1:3-4 NIV*



1. Escape the corruption of your marriage by maintaining a **fresh** relationship with Christ through bible reading, prayer, and involvement in a local church.
2. Escape the corruption of your marriage with an **unwavering** belief in God's promises.

E.g.:

*And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. Rom. 8:28.*

3. Escaping the corruption of your marriage by **restricting** your words spoken to your spouse within the boundaries of the commands of Scripture.

Colossians 3:9

*Do not lie to one another...*

Ephesians 4:29

*Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.*

1 Peter 3:9-10

*Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. For, "Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech.*



James 5:9

*Do not complain, brethren, against one another, so that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door.*

Colossians 3:8

*But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth.*

Ephesians 5:4

*...and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.*



**APPLICATION QUESTIONS:**

What creates security and significance in your marriage relationship? What threatens security and significance?

Where do non-Christians look for the security and significance they crave?

What is the danger of looking to marriage alone to meet these spirit-level needs?

The opposite of security and significance is insecurity and insignificance. What are some common insecurities that people struggle with? How do insecurities affect one's marriage?

How can our words damage our spouse's spirit? How can our words threaten our spouse's security and significance?

How can we reinforce and amplify our spouse's security and significance?



## RELATIONAL FOUNDATIONS

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God's design for marriage is established on the basis of a brother and a sister in Christ living in a spiritual relationship, with God as their Father. For your marriage relationships to be a spiritual marriage; to be a marriage that reflects God's design, there are 3 primary obstacles that have to be overcome:

- The two of you are different.
- The two of you can be self-centered.
- The two of you are imperfect.

**THE PROBLEM:** We must learn how to have spiritual relationships. We learn how by imitating the spiritual relationship that Christ has with us. His relationship with you is the pattern by which you pattern your relationship with your spouse. And when that pattern is in your marriage relationship, the obstacles that all marriages face can be overcome.



### RELATIONAL FOUNDATION #1 ACCEPT ONE ANOTHER

**OBSTACLE:** The two of you are ***different***.

**RELATIONAL SKILL:** You must learn to accept your spouse as Christ accepts you.

*Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God. Romans 15:7*

Acceptance overcomes the obstacle of diversity.

Potential effects of diversity:

- An attitude of superiority.
- Distrust toward others opinions or actions.
- Division. An inability to reconcile differences.



How does Christ accept you? *The more you understand and appreciate how Christ has accepted you, the more you are able to accept your spouse.*

1. Apart from merit in the past.

*But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Rom. 5:8*

He accepts you with your blemishes.

...with your tendency to be grumpy.

...with your insensitivity to the feelings of others.

...with your weaknesses and blind spots

He never says, I'm not going to accept you until you stop...

Likewise, you should accept your spouse where they are, work to grow together, and lean on God's grace to be patient with their shortcomings.

2. Apart from merit in the present.

*Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. Romans 5:1-2*

His acceptance is based on grace, not performance.

The Christian marriage is a grace relationship; that is, the favor you grant your spouse is not dependent upon their performance; rather it is likened unto the favor that God grants us in spite of our rebellion, sin, shortcomings, etc.

3. Apart from merit in the future.

*If we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself.  
2 Tim 2:13*

To accept is to not base future acceptance on conformity to your standard. *"I will love you if..."*

Acceptance means that we remain committed, even when change does not take place. It means that we obey God no matter what our spouse does or doesn't do. Our first



commitment is to be faithful to God, and if that means being faithful and accepting of a difficult spouse, God's grace provides.

What does acceptance look like?

- To accept is to respect and value diversity. *Let them be themselves.*
- To accept is to appreciate strengths and compensate for weaknesses.
- To accept is to respect and value differences of opinion and judgment.
- To accept is to value the relationship above being right.

What is not acceptance: How to deal with shortcomings and sin in your spouse's life:

*Does that mean that you don't confront sin and deal with shortcomings? Not at all, Jesus labors to change us into something different than we are. The key factor is: we confront sin, but without withholding our favor if they don't conform in the way we want them to.*

- (1) Grow together as you work through your differences.
- (2) Convey to your spouse in love (not anger) that his/her actions are sin according to the Bible - we don't let the sin be excused away - yet we do it in love, we do it without anger, at an appropriate time, and we do it without withholding our favor toward them.
- (3) Pray for their heavenly father to change the both of you to reflect his image.

*The two of you are different. The relational skill of accepting your spouse overcomes the obstacle of diversity and establishes a grace relationship.*

#### APPLICATION QUESTIONS:

How does the patterns and activities of your parent of the sex as your spouse create expectations of your spouse? What is the danger of those expectations?

In what ways does your spouse's strengths and personality complement you?



## RELATIONAL FOUNDATION #2

### LOVE ONE ANOTHER

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**OBSTACLE:** The two of you can be ***self-centered***.

**RELATIONAL SKILL:** You must learn to **love** your spouse as Christ **loves** you.

*"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another." John 13:34*

To love is a skill, not a feeling. Your marriage is God's training ground for learning how to love with Christ's love. The more you understand and appreciate how Christ loves you, the more you are able to love your spouse.

What does Christ's love for you look like?

- It is based on **choice**, not **performance** or **emotions**.

*Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. Eph. 1:4 NLT*

- It takes great **delight** in you – Psalm 147:11

*For the LORD takes delight in his people; he crowns the humble with victory. Ps. 149:4*

- It has **commitment** written all over it.

*For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Rom. 8:38–39*

Our marriages should say "commitment", "unending love", in spite of every difficulty.

*In order to fix the commitment problem of our generation, we must go back to the basics: The goal of marriage is not happiness; rather happiness is the by-product. The goal is honoring God and glorifying Him in whatever situation you find yourself in. You must choose pleasing Christ as your goal rather than your own happiness, and work at your marriage to make it reflect God's design.*

- It includes the elements of both **grace** and **truth**.

*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of **grace** and **truth**. John 1:14*



Love covers – the “grace” side of love

*Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.  
1 Peter 4:8*

Love covers - it absorbs those offenses without retribution; it bears up under the impact the sin has on you personally. This is the “grace” side of love, i.e., the “tender” side of love - granting favor even when not deserved.

Love corrects – the “truth” side of love

*For I wrote you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you... 9 The reason I wrote you was to see if you would stand the test and be obedient in everything.  
2 Cor 2:4, 9*

This side of love actually reveals truth for the purpose of correction and the progress of the one loved. It is the “hard” side of love – bringing sin to light - exposing that which is false, and revealing that which is true - in order to help that person grow in Christlikeness.

*Jesus met each situation with the perfect response – sometime giving unmerited favor, and sometimes exposing the truth – both aspects of his perfect love. Our love is imperfect - most people tend toward one end of the spectrum, and struggle to act on the other end of the spectrum. Some are very patient and accepting of people, but they have a hard time confronting, a hard time telling people what they think, a hard time telling someone that they are wrong. Others don't have a problem at all with telling others what they think, and that they are wrong. But they struggle with giving others grace.*

*Each of us must work toward a spirit-sensitive balance of grace and truth, and according to the need of the moment, extend the appropriate response. How do you know what to do in a given situation? The Holy Spirit within us will lead us to that sensitivity as we grow in Christlikeness.*

Love appears to have two sides, but in reality they merge together into a love that seeks the best for the one you love. The home is the context for God teaching us to love with *agape* love.

*The two of you can be self-centered. The relational skill of loving your spouse overcomes the obstacle of self-centeredness and establishes a grace relationship.*



**APPLICATION QUESTIONS:**

What contrasts are there between *agape* love (true love) and the brand of love that binds non-Christian couples together?

Do you naturally tend toward the grace or the truth side of love? How does that show up in your marriage relationship?



## RELATIONAL FOUNDATION #3

### FORGIVE ONE ANOTHER

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**OBSTACLE:** The two of you are *imperfect*.

**RELATIONAL SKILL:** You must learn to **forgive** your spouse as Christ **forgives** you.

*Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. Ephesians 4:32*

What is Forgiveness?

Forgiveness => canceling the debt owed to you because of a wrong done to you.

Forgiveness does not negate justice - God is the just judge. Leave justice up to him.

*Vengeance is mine, I will repay. Rom. 12:19*

The more you understand and appreciate how Christ forgives you, the more you are able to forgive your spouse.

What does Christ's forgiveness look like?

- Christ's forgiveness has no residual **ammunition**. His forgiveness doesn't bring it against you later.
- Christ's forgiveness has no residual **resentment**. Our sin does not change his love and commitment to us.

*You must show them your favor - as if they had never done what they did. It does not erase it from your memory, but it does erase the debt that was owed.*

How do you know if you have forgiven in this way?

- If you feel and convey to them genuine kindness and a tender heart toward them (see verse above) rather than a coldness, aloofness, harshness, or criticalness.
- If your heart is compassionate to them - (e.g. the prodigal's father) compassion that goes out if its way to encourage them and build them up.

*The two of you are sinful beings and make mistakes. The relational skill of forgiving your spouse overcomes the obstacle of sinfulness and establishes a grace relationship.*



**APPLICATION QUESTIONS:**

What is the long term effect of a lack of full and complete forgiveness for your spouses sins against you?

Was acceptance, love, and forgiveness a pattern in your home life growing up? If not, which one(s) do you need to give special attention to?

*A marriage based on grace is when two individuals treat each other with respect, commitment, patience, and forgiveness.*



## PULLING THORNS THE BOTHERSOME THORN OF ANGER

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We all deal with the emotion of anger, and therefore anger is a part of the marriage relationship. How are we as Christians to respond to this emotion? What place does it have in our married lives? In order to get a better understanding of anger, we are going to go back to the first instance of anger in the Bible - the record of Cain and Abel in Genesis 4.

### BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE ON ANGER

- Anger is not always sin.

*Be angry, and yet do not sin. Ephesians 4:26*

- Anger is rooted in injustice.

*Arise, O Lord, in your anger; rise up against the rage of my enemies.*

*Awake, my God; decree justice. Psalm 7:6*

*Anger is a divinely implanted emotion. Closely allied to our instinct for right, it is designed to be used for constructive spiritual purposes. The person who cannot feel anger at evil is a person who lacks enthusiasm for good. If you cannot hate wrong, it's very questionable whether you really love righteousness.* Dr. David Seamands

*God gets angry. He gets angry about injustice and sin. Jesus displayed righteous anger when he tied cords together and drove the unrighteous elements out of the temple. We can also exhibit righteous anger.*

### THE SECOND FALL – Genesis 4:3-12 *What can we learn from the first instance of anger?*

1. (Sinful) Anger is rooted in a self-centered view of justice. verses 4-5

*The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.*

*Question: Why was Cain angry?*

*Therefore, Cain took offense at God's rejection of his offering. Cain took it that he had been done wrong, when in fact, he was the wrongdoer.*

The problem is that because of our fallen nature and our limited perspective, we often self-centered and incomplete view of justice vs. injustice.

*A clear contrast set up in scripture between righteous anger, and the anger of man. Righteous anger leads to righteous action; the anger of man leads to unrighteousness.*

*The anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. James 1:20*



**EVERY TIME** you get angry, you must consider whether it is a **POINTER TO A PROBLEM WITH YOUR HEART**.

*How can you tell whether your anger is appropriate or sinful?*

**FIRST INDICATOR of Sinful Anger:** If your anger is a result of a supposed wrong done toward you.

- (Sinful) Anger has a surprising target. *What had Abel done?*
- (Sinful) Anger has a surprising effect. *Cain's face was "downcast."*

*"Downcast" was more than just a long face. Some commentators suggest that this should be translated, "became depressed". His whole demeanor and perspective on life changed. When you are angry, you are a dark cloud that clouds up everyone's life.*

**SECOND INDICATOR of Sinful Anger:** If your whole perspective on life sours (you become a bear to be around).

**We all get angry.** What are we to do with it? In verses 6-7, God leads us to the resolution of our anger by asking a series of questions.

2. (Sinful) Anger is resolved by God's questions. *verses 6-7a*

*Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?"*

Three questions that will resolve your anger without sinning.

- Question 1: *Why are you angry?*  
Is there a valid reason for your anger? *Maybe because you are acting selfishly, frustrated with life, you are offended or hurt?*
- Question 2: *Why is your face downcast?*  
Is the effect of your anger valid? *Like a light switch, your view of life changed. Has God lost control of the circumstance? Is he instructing you by your response?*
- Question 3: *If you do well, will you not be accepted ("countenance be lifted up")?*  
There is a valid recovery from anger. *If you respond rightly, will not the favor of God result in good?*



3. (Sinful) Anger is exploited by sin. verse 7b

*But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.*

Sin is looking to control you, and anger is its agent to gain control.

4. (Sinful) Anger results in damaging consequences. verses 8-9,11

*While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. Then the LORD said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?” “I don’t know,” he replied. “Am I my brother’s keeper?” Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground...*

(Sinful) Anger results in broken relationships and other damaging consequences.

### DOING RIGHT vs. NOT DOING RIGHT with your anger

1. NOT DOING RIGHT – 3 forms of anger

- Explosive anger – BLOWING UP

*An angry man stirs up strife, And a hot-tempered man abounds in transgression. Proverbs 29:20-22*

One with explosive anger has no defenses against sinning.

*“The idea of allowing anger to break out in an undisciplined manner by saying or doing whatever comes into mind without weighing the consequences, without counting to ten, without holding it back and quieting it, without hearing the whole story, is totally wrong.” Jay Adams*

*Explosive anger is sin taking immediate control leaving a path of destruction behind it. Venting is wrong. You may feel better afterwards, but you have just damaged the people around you, you have sinned against God, and you will suffer a break in your relationship with God until you have confessed it as sin.*

*You are commanded by Scripture to check your anger. Don’t tell me that you are just that way. You like your anger. It gives you a feeling of being in control, a feeling of strength. But it is wrong. You love yourself more than you love pleasing God. Don’t kid yourself and don’t make your lame excuses.*



- Standing anger - RESENTMENT

*BE ANGRY, AND YET DO NOT SIN; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity. Ephesians 4:26-27*

Resentment is a persistent feeling of ill will toward someone as a result of a perceived wrong, insult, or hurt. Resentment results in an ongoing tension so that you are never completely relaxed in your relationship with that person, and one resentment may turn into more.

Anger must be dealt with promptly, or it has the danger of turning into resentment.

- Rooted anger - BITTERNESS

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

Bitterness is intense animosity toward someone that may or may not be expressed. Bitterness is hate directed at someone who has hurt you, a parent, a former spouse, or someone you love who has hurt you deeply. Bitterness is a sickness of the soul.

- Rooted anger results from anger that is unresolved. *E.g. Cain*
- Rooted anger (a root of bitterness) defiles many people around you.
  - rooted anger defiles yourself – your life is deprived of the joy of your relationship with God and others.
  - rooted anger defiles your spouse - internalized anger divides you from your spouse and removes the possibility of enjoying the full blessings of your marriage.
  - rooted anger defiles your children - angry people produce angry children

## 2. DOING RIGHT– Resolving your anger in God

- Let anger be a red flag for examining the reasons for your emotion.

Is it prompted by a desire to correct an injustice, stop a sinful action, or restore what is right? Or is it a response arising from a wounded pride, a desire for revenge, or simply frustrations from the circumstances of life?



- Respond to the appearance of anger with meekness.

God is sovereign over every aspect of your daily life. Let your response be one of meekness that accepts circumstances as under God's control and for his purposes. Release your anger to his purposes if it is rooted in the interests of self.

- Reply with truth and grace, without retaliation.

Much of our anger is simply born out of frustration with life and the people around us. A response of meekness accepts circumstances as under God's control and for his purposes.

*“We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” Romans 8:28*

### 3. DOING RIGHT– Acting on righteous anger.

Righteous anger is expressed in a way that is consistent with God's character and will. It is a call for action, getting involved with a cause, correcting a wrong attitude or action, assisting those who are suffering, or simply praying when you are unable to personally effect change.

#### APPLICATION QUESTIONS:

What was the pattern of anger in your home while growing up? Was it predominantly explosive, standing, or rooted anger? Or were there expressions of righteous anger? How has that affected you with your emotion of anger?

Describe what righteous anger would look like in the context of your marriage, your children, your work life, or the world around you. How should that anger be expressed?

*Removing the thorn of anger requires seeking God's purposes behind your emotional response, and rejecting self-centered anger by a response of meekness.*



## PULLING THORNS

### THE INEVITABLE THORN OF CONFLICT

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Conflict is a part of the marriage relationship. When two people with differing personalities, backgrounds, and strengths and weaknesses live together, conflict is inevitable. While conflict can strengthen the relationship when handled correctly, it can also be damaging and even destructive. How can the thorn of conflict be removed so that those conflicts can prove beneficial?

#### The Sources of Conflict

- Legitimate differences that need to be worked through.
- Your own desires.

*What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? James 4:1.*

#### 5 responses to conflict:

- Withdrawal - emotional distance
- Win - have to prove you are right, whether you are or not
- Yield - not worth the battle
- Compromise - find middle ground
- Resolve – constructive resolution

#### How does God use conflict?

- God uses conflict to teach us about ourselves.

Conflict brings to the surface our fleshly responses. Conflict reveals our own need for growth in Christlikeness. Conflict can be used by God to discipline us into maturity.

e.g. Mission Impossible mask - sometimes we act Christian, but under the surface we are someone else - Conflict peels off the mask and reveals our raw flesh

- God uses conflict to teach us about others.

Conflict teaches us how to love another person, in spite of their sin and shortcomings [just like Christ loves us].

- God uses conflict to teach us about Christ.

Conflict may result in sharing in Christ's sufferings for righteousness sake. Jesus experienced ridicule, rejection, betrayal, mock justice, and suffering.



### **Pulling the Conflict Thorn out of your marriage.**

#### **1. Stop using your manipulating responses:**

The use of manipulating methods are the primary reason why there are long-term conflicts that seem to never go away or be resolved.

- Ditch the silent treatment. clam up - "I'm not talking to you."
- Cancel the historical record. "Here we go again..." To forgive means to not bring it against them again.
- Stop the character assassinations. "You don't know what you are taking about." "That's stupid."
- Put down the deflective guards. (anger, threats, tears, etc.) Sometimes lashing out in anger is not because you are driven by anger, but it is a ploy to either deflect from your guilt or gain an advantage in the conflict. Sometimes tears are to deflect your guilt or gain an advantage.
- Drop the threats – to leave, retaliate, or divorce.
- Quit the redirect ploy. "You're just like your mother/father." "Some things you do are worse than that."
- End the generalizations and exaggerations. "You always...", "You never..."

#### **2. Continually redefine the enemy.**

Who is the enemy? What is his goal? How will he do it?

#### **3. Learn from the conflict. Is God teaching you how to give or receive a rebuke?**

If you don't know how to give and receive a rebuke, you will never know the intimacy God wants you to have in your marriage.



How to Give a Rebuke	How to Receive a Rebuke
<p><b>1. Search your heart.</b> Is the reason for the rebuke valid, or is it coming from your self-centered perspective?</p> <p><b>2. Search your life.</b> Are you a part of the problem, or are you even guilty yourself of the offense?</p> <p><b>3. Speak the truth in a gracious way.</b> Be sure the package in which you deliver the rebuke is not laced with sinful language.</p> <p><b>4. <u>Resolve</u> the conflict.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ <u>Admit</u> if you are wrong. Often there needs to be admitting of wrong from both. Forgiveness clears the air to press on to the future.</li><li>▪ Seek an understanding of the <u>differing</u> perspectives that caused the conflict in the first place. Compromise may result.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ One is a spender, one is a saver</li><li>▪ One likes some space, one likes people</li><li>▪ One likes it hot, one likes it cold</li><li>▪ One is logical, one is intuitive</li></ul></li></ul> <p><b>5. <u>Accept</u> where you are and move forward.</b> The source of the conflict may not be fully resolved and may be revisited until its resolution in the future.</p>	<p><b>1. Remove the wrapper.</b> The rebuke may have been delivered in anger, attacking you, not in a constructive way.</p> <p><b>2. Listen to the message.</b> See past the wrapper to evaluate the root of the rebuke.</p> <p><b>3. Don't respond by attacking.</b> Control your response and give the rebuke your consideration as to whether it has validity.</p>

### What does it mean to "resolve" a conflict?

To resolve a conflict means to understand the perspective of your spouse, to decide upon and act upon a righteous course of action.

Removing the thorn of conflict is a commitment born out of love, acceptance, and forgiveness.



**APPLICATION QUESTIONS:**

What pattern of conflict resolution (or lack thereof) did you see exhibited in your parents?

Where would you place yourself on the conflict resolution scale? I tend toward:

- Withdrawal emotionally
- Win the argument
- Yield to avoid the conflict
- Seek a compromise
- Committed to a long-term resolution

What has God revealed to you through this study about your ability to manage conflict productively?

*Removing the thorn of conflict requires a commitment to learn how to manage conflict in such a way to learn and grow as a person and as a couple.*



## PULLING THORNS

### THE LINGERING EFFECTS OF BAGGAGE

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Every person has “baggage”. Your baggage may be your preconceived ideas, beliefs, patterns, or practices retained from previous life experiences that negatively affect your marriage. Examples of baggage include:

- Patterns that you learned from your parents or home life
- Traumatic experiences
- Unresolved wounds and offenses
- Insecurities from past experiences

Unfortunately, your baggage shapes how you respond in the present. Your baggage is a thorn in your life that must be pulled. It is a self-limiting factor that is keeping you from a normal, healthy, productive Christian life with your spouse.

It may be helpful to work through an inventory of potential baggage. Consider:

#### Traumatic or Hurtful Experience Inventory

- An inability to forgive someone
- An inability to trust God with the experience
- An inability to trust your spouse
- Insecurities about yourself resulting from past experiences
- What are others that you would add?*

#### Family Heritage Inventory:

- A pattern of arguments, anger, upheaval and conflict
- Men - passivity in family leadership
- Women – controlling, manipulative spirit
- An inability to communicate
- Household management (who performs chores, cooking, and maintenance)
- An inability to express affection
- Values in life that create expectations for your spouse (use of money, education, political, social involvement, vocational goals, etc.)
- What are others that you would add?*

What is God’s answer to removing the damaging effects of your baggage? Scripture provides several insights into how God works in your life to break down the effects of your baggage.



1. God works through circumstances to bring your baggage to light. Your baggage may be hidden in blind spots, areas of your life, both conscious and unconscious, where we are unaware or unwilling to admit detrimental patterns from the past.
  - God may use conflict to reveal the presence and effects of baggage you have brought into the marriage.
  - God uses the words and remarks of others to expose your baggage.
  - God uses uncomfortable circumstances to help you face up to your baggage.
2. God works through His Word to transform your character into Christlikeness by revealing blind spots.

*Do not conform any longer 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 12:2 NIV*

That transformation takes place when we approach God's word with a humble desire to be like Christ, letting his truths and commands penetrate our hearts as authoritative in our lives. For example, your parents may have spoken ungodly things to each other, or had a habit of complaining. But Scripture would say, "*Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs*" and "*Do all things without complaining or arguments.*" Take these commands as authoritative in your life and expect God to bring about circumstances that will test your obedience.

#### **Considerations for dealing with baggage:**

- Evaluate undesirable patterns from your parents and family life and work to break those patterns. God may be calling you to be a mold breaker in your family history.

*Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Phil. 2:12-13*

- Listen to your spouse as they point out your inherited patterns, insecurities, and unresolved conflicts.  
*Faithful are the wounds of a friend. Prov. 27:6*
- Let the word of God in Scripture penetrate those blind spots and accept the commands of Scripture as your authoritative boundary.

*Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law. Ps. 119:18*



- Revisit your ability to trust in God for your past, your present, and your future. Release the fears and wounds to his loving sovereignty.

*Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. Prov. 3:5-6*

Your life is in the hands of an all-loving, all-powerful, all-wise Father who can be trusted “with all your heart.”

*You have encircled me behind and in front,  
And placed Your hand upon me. Psalm 139:5*

He had you encircled in the past when those hurtful things happened, and can protect you from any debilitating impact those experiences have on your life now. He will go before you as you face your future, protecting you from the fears of the unknown that try to crowd into your mind. And in the present, he has his hand upon you, ensuring that all the circumstances you experience are under his purposeful control.

- Assume that God will engage you with circumstances that will give you the opportunity to change the pattern. Work to change your pattern when the opportunity arises.

#### **APPLICATION QUESTIONS:**

What are some examples of conscious family patterns that are embedded into the lives of children from their parents? unconscious family patterns?

What impediments do these patterns do to your relationships and your walk with God?

What are some examples of past experiences that mold our patterns and influence our lives?

What impediments do these patterns do to your relationships and your walk with God?

*Removing the thorn of baggage requires a wide-ranging trust in God’s loving control over all of your life and responding to his work in your life to remove detrimental elements from your life.*



## PULLING THORNS

### THE DIVISIVE ISSUE OF MONEY

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Of all the problems that cause marital difficulties and divorce, money and finances are always near the top of the list. One study suggested that 57% of divorced couples in the United States cited financial problems as the primary reason for the demise of their marriage. It may be pressure from the lack of money, or differences on how the money is spent, but a great deal of pressure is put on our marriages from money issues. How can the sting of money issues be removed from a Christian marriage?

The answer starts with how you view money and possessions. If you think of money in a biblical framework, the way you handle your money will follow. Following are seven adjustments to the way you view money drawn from Scripture that will pull the thorn of money out of your marriage.

#### **1** Adjustment #1

**Understand the role of money in your spiritual life.**

Money is a false god competing for your trust and commitment.

*No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.*

*Luke 16:13.*

Money is a test of our faithfulness.

*One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? Luke 16:10–11.*

#### **2** Adjustment #2

**Do your work for God, not for money.**

Money is not the goal of your work, but rather the by-product of faithful service as God's means of providing for you.

*Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward.*

*Col. 3:23–24*



## 3 Adjustment #3

### Match your lifestyle with your income.

Learn contentment within the level of income God provides.

*Be content with your wages. Luke 3:14*

*I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with little, and I also know how to live in prosperity. Phil. 4:11–12*

Chasing the lifestyle of others creates a great danger.

*But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. 1 Tim. 6:8-10*

Limit your consumption to less than your income to provide room for:

- Investment in God's work
- Emergency funds
- Savings for future needs and purchases

## 4 Adjustment #4

### View limitations as placed there by God for His purposes.

God is working in you to produce spiritual maturity in your financial lives just as in every other area of life.

*It is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.  
Phil. 2:13.*

Ways God uses limitations:

- To learn to trust him.
- To display His ability to provide and to build our faith.
- To parent us toward spiritual maturity.



- God may direct by withholding as well as providing.

## 5 Adjustment #5

Establish giving as an opportunity for spiritual impact in the world.

Establish giving as the first priority of your financial management.

*Honor the LORD with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine.*

*Prov. 3:9-10*

God provides your income both for investing in the kingdom and for providing for your needs, with kingdom investment as a priority.

*Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food...2 Cor. 9:10a*

Expect opportunities to increase your giving.

*... will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. 2 Cor. 9:10b-11*

## 6 Adjustment #6

Control the use of debt.

Debt means you are working for someone else.

*The rich rules over the poor,  
and the borrower is the slave of the lender. Prov. 22:7*

Debt may be a sign of:

- A heart problem of covetousness
- Discontent with God's provision
- A need for better planning
- Making unwise assumptions on the future.

Making a decision about borrowing:

- Seek God's wisdom on why the need is in your life.  
(1) Consider waiting and doing without until God provides.



- (2) Consider an alternative that would meet the need without incurring debt.
- (3) Consider whether the limitation is God's guidance for not making the purchase.
  - Know your motives. Need? Want? Greed? Pride? Haste?
  - Know your situation.
    - (1) What presumptions are you making on the future?
    - (2) What is the range of possibilities for meeting the need?
      - Upper - How much can you reasonably afford?
      - Lower - What is the least you can get by on?
    - (3) What affect might the debt have in view of your long-term plans or goals?

## 7 Adjustment #7

### Plan your lifestyle.

Planning leads to financial advantage.

*The plans of the diligent certainly lead to advantage,  
But everyone who is in a hurry certainly comes to poverty. Prov. 21:5*

4 simple principles of biblical planning:

- Give regularly to God's work as a priority.
- Plan your family finances and follow it.
- Spend on a cash basis as much as possible and work toward being debt free.
- Save consistently for future needs.

### APPLICATION QUESTIONS:

How would you describe the pressures on marriage revolving around finances?

What might be some signs of serving the false god of money?



How would you rate yourself on each of the financial adjustments based on the following?

- 1 This is a new concept to me and I need to make a lifestyle adjustment.
- 2 I need to work on this adjustment.
- 3 I am comfortable with my lifestyle in this area.

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Doing your work for God and not for money?	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
Matching your lifestyle with your income?	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
Viewing financial limitations as from God?	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
Giving established as a first priority?	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
Controlling the use of debt?	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
Managing your finances with a plan?	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>

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*Removing the thorn of money requires a biblical reorientation of the source, the use, and the dangers of money.*



## FINAL THOUGHTS

### KEY TRUTHS OF A SPIRITUAL MARRIAGE

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A marriage between two Christians has the opportunity to enjoy the blessings of God's plan for marriage as they live together in a spiritual relationship. Here are some final thoughts in summary:

#### **Final Thoughts on the Key Truths of a spiritual marriage:**

- (1) God's plan for marriage is prefigured in the ideal He has planted in the hearts and minds of men and women.
- (2) The institution of marriage is a unique spiritual relationship which reflects Christ's relationship with the church and as such contains an element of mystery.
- (3) God's plan for marriage is essentially an attainable goal when formed on spiritual principles and when pursued by both spouses.
- (4) Without a spiritual foundation, God's design for marriage, with its inherent blessings, cannot be realized.
- (5) No marriage is beyond repair as together a couple seeks God's plan.
- (6) A good marriage is worth all the work you put into it.

#### **Final Thoughts on Pulling Thorns out of your marriage:**

**Cooperate with God.** God is on your side. He wants you to have a close, fulfilling, and spiritually productive marriage. He will bless and empower your efforts to pull thorns out of your marriage.

**Fight the enemy.** Don't just sit passively by while Satan steals the joy that rightfully belongs to you as one of His children. Satan's desire is to steal, kill, and destroy. Steal the joy of a healthy and good marriage, kill the love you have for each other, and destroy your family.

**Work hard at pulling your thorns.** Passivity will never result in a spiritual marriage.

*At its heart, Christianity is about restoring relationships to what God intends. As you live together in spiritual relationship, you will learn about yourself, your life as a couple, and you will find the enjoyment and blessings that God intends for your marriage.*