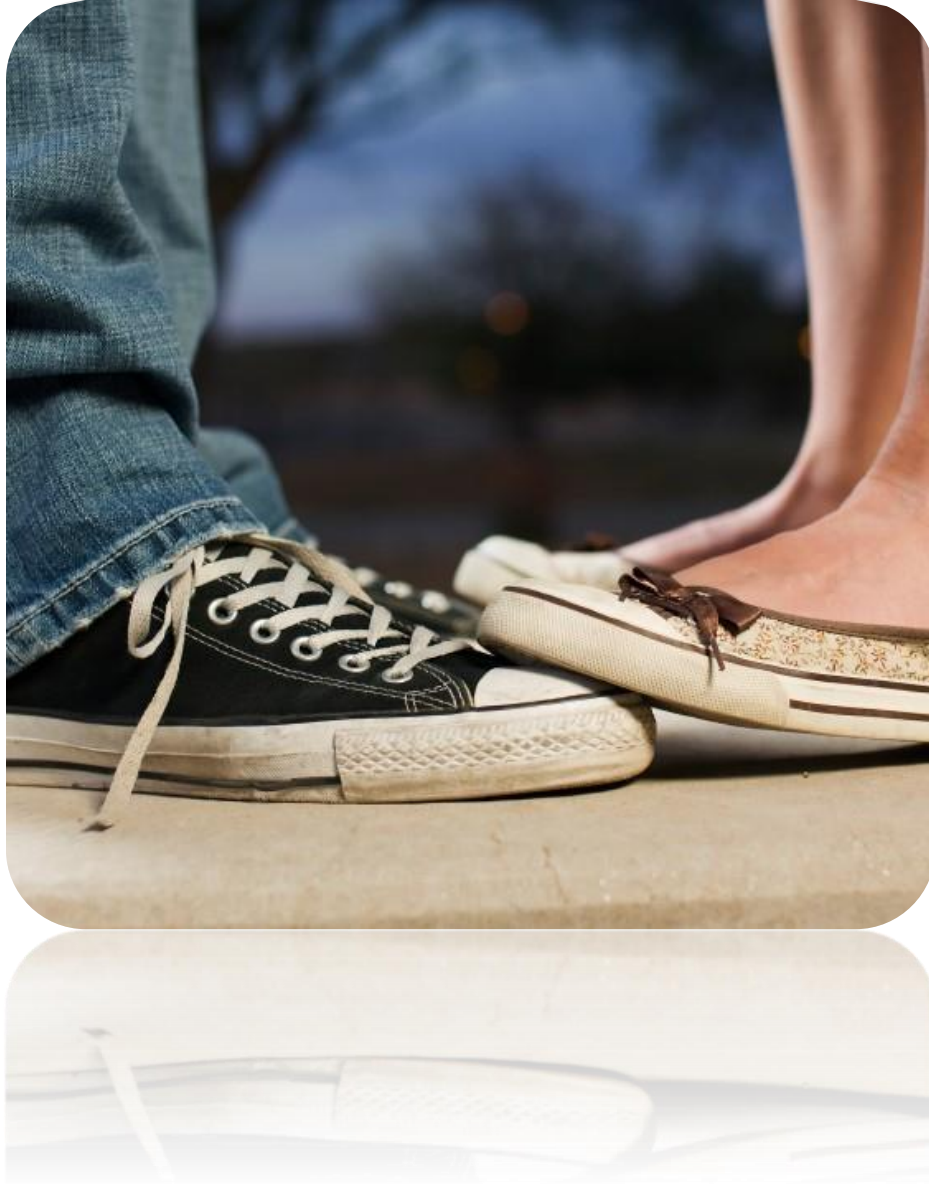


Preparing for Partnership
Online Premarital Training Course
Lesson Content for Pastor's



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Introduction:

The lesson outline given in this document is the actual content that is in the online teaching sessions. The sample couple who is taking the lessons are Sam and Debbie. Since it is Sam who is taking the lesson in this document, the script and questions will refer to Debbie as the fiancée. Content presented to the individual will vary because the path of teaching may vary according to the way the questions are answered. The answers chosen by our test male are bolded. You will not see all of the possible lesson content as some questions such as, “Are you a Christian?” if answered negatively will divert to a video presenting the plan of salvation. However, you will see the majority of the content that is presented.

The legend below indicates the teaching platform for the script you are viewing. Please note that the video has the script included and can be viewed by clicking on the link.

Note that only email responses the individual, couple and facilitator would receive from lesson one are included in this document. The process of providing email answers in this document is complicated because the content in the emails varies in correspondence to the way the individual answers the

questions. There are three emails that are generated after a couple finishes each lesson. These include:

- Individual Assessment Email – Evaluates the answers submitted by the individual.
- Couple Assessment email – Compares and evaluates the answers to key questions from both partners and generates an analysis.
- Counselor Assessment email – Sends the church facilitator an email that lists the topics studied in that lesson. It also includes areas of concern that the counselor should further address.

Lesson Legend:

Black – Text

Green - Quotes

Red – Video Vignettes

Blue – Scripture

Purple – Questions and answers

Burgundy – Book Reference

Preparing for Partnership

Online Premarital Training Lessons

Lesson One - Preliminary Considerations

Before You Start:

Have you read the "Getting Started Instructions" on your Couple Dashboard? If not, please go back to your Couple Dashboard and click on the "View Getting Started Instructions".

The course was designed so that each partner can take the lessons separately as their individual schedule allows. The instruction is basically the same, but occasionally varies slightly for males and females. The Individual Lesson Emails correspond directly to the answers of the individual. The site requires lesson answers from both the male and female in order to generate the Couple Assessment Email. If you desire to take the lesson together as a couple, we recommend that you both login either on separate devices or separate web browsers and advance through the lesson at the same time since you will both need to answer the questions individually.

Video L1C1: <https://youtu.be/VUA732LkcIE>

Welcome to lesson one. In this lesson we really want to challenge you to honestly consider just how compatible you are with each other. You see, a lot of times once you've spent time together, you grow so close to each other that you tend to lose all of your objectivity. So, to offset this we are going to examine principles from the Bible story found in Genesis chapter 24 where Abraham sends his servant to find a wife for his son Isaac.

Gen 24.1-6 Now Abraham was old, well advanced in years. And the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things. ² And Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his household, who had charge of all that he had, "Put your hand under my thigh, ³ that I may make you swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell, ⁴ but will go to my country and to my kindred, and take a wife for my son Isaac." ⁵ The servant said to him, "Perhaps the woman may not be willing to follow me to this land. Must I then take your son back to the land from which you came?" ⁶ Abraham said to him, "See to it that you do not take my son back there.

God wants single Christian men and women to understand that they should not be united together in an intimate relationship with an unbeliever (someone who does not have a relationship with Jesus Christ.) As you contemplate marriage, there is no greater consideration than both yours and Debbie's spiritual relationship with God.

- Please take a minute and write out a brief statement of what you believe that it means to be a Christian.

Text Box Answer

The true Christian is not just someone who acknowledges that Jesus is God, but one who actually belongs to Jesus, one whose passion for Christ is in his heart and life.

J. C. Ryle, a respected theologian from the early 1900's, uses his knowledge of the Bible to describe a Christian and his passion:

It is felt by himself in his heart. It is seen by others in his conduct and life. He feels his sinfulness, guilt and badness, and repents. He sees Jesus Christ to be that Divine Savior whom his soul needs and commits himself to Him.... Christ Himself is the cornerstone of his Christianity. Ask him in what he trusts for the

forgiveness of his many sins, and he will tell you in the death of Christ.--Ask him in what righteousness he hopes to stand innocent at the judgment day, and he will tell you it is the righteousness of Christ.--Ask him by what pattern he tries to frame his life, and he will tell you that it is the example of Christ. But, beside all this, there is one thing in a true Christian which is eminently peculiar to him. That thing is love to Christ.

A true Christian loves Christ for all He has done for him. He has suffered in his stead and died for him on the cross. He has redeemed him from the guilt, the power, and the consequences of sin, by His blood. He has called him by His Spirit to self-knowledge, repentance, faith, hope, and holiness. He has forgiven all his many sins and blotted them out. He has freed him from the captivity of the world, the flesh, and the devil. He has taken him from the brink of hell, placed him in the narrow way, and set his face toward heaven. He has given him light instead of darkness, peace of conscience instead of uneasiness, hope instead of uncertainty, life instead of death. Can you wonder that the true Christian loves Christ?¹

- After considering Ryle's description of a Christian, can you confidently say that you are a Christian?

Yes

Not sure – Directs to "The Story Video by SpreadTruth": <https://familyfortress.org/knowning-jesus>

No – Directs to "The Story Video by SpreadTruth": <https://familyfortress.org/knowning-jesus>

- Briefly describe how you came to faith in Christ.

Text Box answer

¹ J.C. Ryle, Holiness: Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties, and Roots

- Have you taken time to share your faith in Christ with Debbie?

Yes No

- Are you growing in your life as a Christian?

Yes

No

- Is Debbie a Christian?

Yes

No

Not Sure

- Does Debbie exhibit a thirst for God (a longing to know God better)?

Yes

Occasionally

Believes but does not discuss her faith

Never

- How is her thirst evident to you? Mark all that apply.

a) Prays

b) Prays with me

c) Reads his or her Bible regularly

d) Expresses a desire to grow in an understanding of scripture

e) None of the above

The passage not only emphasizes the necessity that a couple be likeminded in their relationship and passion for God, but also suggests that Abraham regarded Isaac as being a man mature enough to take on the responsibilities of marriage.

Video L1C2a: <https://youtu.be/j7HSfUqQhTc>

It is interesting to note that Isaac was 40 years old when Abraham sent his servant to get a wife for his son. Your age does not determine whether or not you are ready for marriage.

The question is not necessarily how old you are....but are you ready as a husband to take on the responsibility... for taking care of a wife.

Marriage is for men who are ready to take on this awesome responsibility, it is not for boys!

A successful marriage requires that both partners be unselfish and mature enough to discern when to limit personal activities that could interfere with marital harmony. One important indicator in determining maturity is how someone spends his time.

➤ I admit that I spend EXCESSIVE time with (mark all that apply):

a) Video Games (Wii, Playstation,Xbox, ect.)

b) Job or Career

c) Computer

d) Sports

e) Friends

f) TV

g) Other

h) None

➤ I feel Debbie spends EXCESSIVE time with:

- a) Video Games (Wii, Playstation,Xbox, ect.)
- b) Job or Career
- c) Computer
- d) Sports
- e) Friends
- f) TV
- g) Other
- h)None**

➤ I admit I struggle with bad habits such as:

- a) Alcoholism
- b) Drugs
- c) Gambling
- d) Pornography
- e) Other
- f) None**

➤ I feel that Debbie is struggling with bad habits or addictions such as:

- a) Alcoholism
- b) Drugs
- c) Gambling
- d) Pornography
- e) Other
- f) None**

Gen 24.7-8 The Lord, the God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and from the land of my kindred, and who spoke to me and swore to me, 'To your offspring I will give this land,' he will send his angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there. 8 But if the woman is not willing to follow you,

then you will be free from this oath of mine; only you must not take my son back there."

Not only did Abraham insist that the servant find a believing woman from Mesopotamia, but he also emphatically instructed the servant not to take his son back to Mesopotamia. Years before, God had directed Abraham to move to Canaan and to permanently establish his family there. Abraham wanted to insure that his son remain obedient to God by staying in Canaan where God had specifically sent them. Abraham acknowledged that honoring Almighty God should be the highest priority in life. He did not want marriage to hinder Isaac's obedience to God.

As a single man or woman, you must consider if marrying Debbie will in any way hinder what you have discerned is God's will for your life.

Notice also that these scriptures emphasize that Abraham was involved in the approval of Isaac's mate. Although your parents are probably not the ones that arranged your engagement, it is both wise and biblical to get their perspective on the relationship.

➤ Do your parents approve of your relationship with Debbie?

a) Yes

b) With Some Reluctance

c) My parents have not expressed an opinion of our Relationship

d) My parents have never met Debbie

e) My parents are deceased

f) No

➤ Do Debbie's parents approve of the relationship?

a) Yes

b) With Some Reluctance

- c) My parents have not expressed an opinion of our Relationship
- d) My parents have never met Debbie
- e) My parents are deceased
- f) No

➤ Have any of your friends expressed concern about your future marriage?

Yes

No

➤ Does your pastor approve of the relationship?

Yes

I do not have a pastor

My pastor does not know my fiancé or does not know her well enough to express an opinion

No

The Genesis passage we have been unpacking illustrates the biblical pattern for leadership in marriage. God ordained that the husband assume the major responsibility in providing for and protecting his wife. By taking the initiative in pursuing the relationship, Isaac (through the servant) is demonstrating that he is serious about this responsibility.

Video L1C3a: <https://youtu.be/YtbeekWJLDM>

In the passage, Isaac through the servant takes the initiative to pursue Rebecca. This demonstrates the biblical pattern of leadership and commitment. If a guy is not willing to make an effort to pursue a girl, he's probably not going to make a strong effort to care for her in the future.

- Who sets up most of your dates or activities?

Debbie

Me

Gen 24.9 So the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master and swore to him concerning this matter.

- The servant determined that he would do as his master had requested. Have you determined that you will pursue this relationship now and in the future as God (your master) requests?

Yes

No

God exhorts us in Proverbs 3:5-6 to trust in Him with all of our heart and not to depend on our own understanding, but rather to acknowledge Him in all of our ways knowing that He will then give us direction. This is a wonderful promise from God to us. He is a concerned father who deeply cares for His children. God desires that you pursue a life partner according to His principles in His Word. To continually look to God as you approach marriage is to trust Him and allow Him to lead you into a relationship that will both glorify Him and be what's best for you. In the following passage, the servant demonstrates this principle when he reaches his destination and pauses to seek direction by praying for discernment.

Gen 24.10-14 Then the servant took ten of his master's camels and departed, taking all sorts of choice gifts from his master; and he arose and went to Mesopotamia to the city of Nahor. ¹¹ And he made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water at the time of evening, the time when women go out to draw water. ¹² And he said, "O Lord, God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today and show steadfast love to my master Abraham. ¹³ Behold, I am standing by the spring of water,

and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water. ¹⁴ Let the young woman to whom I shall say, 'Please let down your jar that I may drink,' and who shall say, 'Drink, and I will water your camels'—let her be the one whom you have appointed for your servant Isaac. By this I shall know that you have shown steadfast love to my master."

Video L1C4a: <https://youtu.be/uDyNguaVeiE>

*Note that in the servant's prayer for God's assistance, the servant was concentrating on finding **only one young lady** that fit the requirements for a Godly wife.*

- *The Biblical principle is that a man should only pursue one woman at a time. He is not to pursue multiple women at the same time.*

➤ Are you currently attracted to anyone else besides Debbie?

No Yes

➤ Do you feel you have to compete with other individuals for Debbie's attention?

Yes

Sometimes

No

The servant was mainly concerned with one issue as he pursued a wife for Isaac. He wanted to confirm beyond the shadow of a doubt that the girl he was considering was the one God had selected. He bathed this pursuit in prayer.

➤ Have you prayed and asked God if Debbie is the mate that will best help you fulfill God's plans for your life?

Yes

No

- Have you prayed and asked God if there is any biblical reason that you should refrain from marrying Debbie?

Yes

No

- Have you prayed concerning this being the right timing for your marriage?

Yes

No

One of the greatest privileges God has given to his children is to have free access to the Heavenly Father through prayer. We are instructed in Hebrews 4:16 to draw near with confidence to the throne of grace to find help in our time of need. Deciding whom you will marry, and the timing of getting married is perhaps the most important decision in your life. Having communion with God through prayer over these decisions is of utmost importance. We urge you to take time to bathe these decisions before the throne of God.

Be alert for God's answer to your prayers. The way that the servant watched for the answers to his prayer for discernment in choosing the appropriate bride for Isaac was by observing the character traits of the girl. Pay very close attention to character traits that Debbie exhibits.

Gen 24.15-20 Before he had finished speaking, behold, Rebekah, who was born to Bethuel the son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, came out with her water jar on her shoulder. ¹⁶ The young woman was very attractive in appearance, a maiden whom no man had known. She went down to the spring and filled her jar and came up. ¹⁷ Then the servant ran to meet her and said, "Please give me a little water to drink from your jar." ¹⁸ She said, "Drink, my lord." And she quickly let down her jar upon her hand and gave him a drink. ¹⁹ When she had finished giving him a

drink, she said, "I will draw water for your camels also, until they have finished drinking." ²⁰ So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough and ran again to the well to draw water, and she drew for all his camels.

Video L1C5: <https://youtu.be/x5ym-um4Ir0>

Notice Rebecca's traits that stood out to the servant.

- *First of all, she was really pretty.*

God is not saying that your fiancée has to be a beauty queen, but guys, she needs to be attractive to you. Its important to a woman that she feels that she is attractive and special to you.

- *Rebecca was a virgin*

She had not been involved in relationships with other men. She had no baggage from past relationships. If you are carrying baggage from a past relationship, you need to ensure that this is thoroughly dealt with and that you are free emotionally and spiritually to pursue a relationship with your fiancée.

- *Rebecca was kind, polite, and considerate.*
- *She was not lazy. She was a very hard worker.*

Camels drink an average of ten gallons of water each. Water is heavy and the servant had many camels. This meant many trips between the well and trough. She also had stamina to be physically fit for this task.

- *Rebecca had a great attitude.*

We hear no complaints or whining out of her. Although watering the sheep was an expected part of her regular family and household chores, Rebecca voluntarily added the task of watering the camels because she was a worker with a kind hospitable

spirit. Girls, you need to make sure that you are physically fit and not lazy. You also need to know how to work, and work cheerfully. You need to be practicing household chores, now. You should be able to cook at least a few simple meals because guys like to eat. You need to know how to do laundry and clean a house. Start developing domestic habits now before you get married.

Video L1C6: <https://youtu.be/zjjCfQTcfUQ>

Guys, there are some women who may be fun to take out on the weekend..... but they may not be the one that you want to spend your life with..... or the one that will help you leave a Godly legacy. You need to ask yourself some questions;

- Do I want my daughter to be like my fiancée?*
- Do I want my son to marry someone like my fiancée?*
- What will my kids be like?*

Men, you are not just looking for a wife but a mother for your future children.

The Bible states in Proverbs 31:30 that:

Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.

God is showing us that a man should only pursue a woman with godly character.

- *Do you think that Debbie is a woman who will not only be a good wife, but also a good mother who will help you raise Godly children and leave a Godly legacy?*

Yes

No

- The servant noticed specific character traits in Rebecca. Mark the traits that Debbie consistently exhibits:

Humble

Positive attitude

Willingness to serve others

Critical

Kind

Tendency to complain

Hard working--not lazy

Sensitive to the needs of others

Depressed

Pursues holiness in her life

Gen 24.21 The man gazed at her in silence to learn whether the Lord had prospered his journey or not.

Even though Rebecca appears to be the correct choice, the servant continued to pay attention to the things that God was showing him concerning this relationship. He remained open to what the Lord wanted.

We challenge you to remain open to whatever the Lord wants to reveal to you throughout these lessons.

Gen 24.22 When the camels had finished drinking, the man took a gold ring weighing a half shekel, and two bracelets for her arms weighing ten gold shekels,

The gifts not only showed the generosity of the potential groom, but also showed that he was financially capable of supporting a wife.

- Is Debbie generous?

Yes

No

➤ Who pays for most of your dates?

Debbie

We split costs evenly

Me

Gen 24.23-24 and said, "Please tell me whose daughter you are. Is there room in your father's house for us to spend the night?" ²⁴ She said to him, "I am the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor."

The passage explained that before the servant proceeds, he confirms that Rebecca is from Abraham's family. By doing this, he is essentially confirming that she, like Isaac, is most likely a believer in Jehovah God.

Gen 24.25-27 She added, "We have plenty of both straw and fodder, and room to spend the night." ²⁶ The man bowed his head and worshiped the Lord ²⁷ and said, "Blessed be the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken his steadfast love and his faithfulness toward my master. As for me, the Lord has led me in the way to the house of my master's kinsmen."

The servant, who is representing Isaac, worshipped the Lord for sovereignly directing him. The servant trusted and obeyed God, but credited the reason for his success as being the direction of God. He continually acknowledges that God is sovereign! Similarly, as you pursue marriage, you and Debbie should remain in a vibrant relationship with the Lord where you are looking to God for confirmation in the relationship.

Gen 24.28-31 Then the young woman ran and told her mother's household about these things. ²⁹ Rebekah had a brother whose name was Laban. Laban ran out toward the man, to the spring. ³⁰

As soon as he saw the ring and the bracelets on his sister's arms, and heard the words of Rebekah his sister, "Thus the man spoke to me," he went to the man. And behold, he was standing by the camels at the spring. ³¹ He said, "Come in, O blessed of the Lord. Why do you stand outside? For I have prepared the house and a place for the camels."

Rebecca did not hesitate to tell her family about Isaac and the possibility of a relationship with him. Involving the family in the courtship process often provides valuable perspective and objectivity that the couple themselves may tend to overlook. God often uses the counsel of family and friends to uncover issues that should be addressed before the wedding.

- Is your family involved in your relationship?

Yes

Some

My family chooses not to be involved

Geographical Restraints Prohibit This

I do not have a family

No

- Does Debbie participate in activities with your family?

Yes

No

- Have you asked your family and friends to communicate any concerns that they may have noticed in your relationship with Debbie?

Yes

No

Gen 24.32-41 *So the man came to the house and unharnessed the camels, and gave straw and fodder to the camels, and there was water to wash his feet and the feet of the men who were with him. ³³ Then food was set before him to eat. But he said, "I will not eat until I have said what I have to say." He said, "Speak on."³⁴ So he said, "I am Abraham's servant. ³⁵ The Lord has greatly blessed my master, and he has become great. He has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, male servants and female servants, camels and donkeys. ³⁶ And Sarah my master's wife bore a son to my master when she was old, and to him he has given all that he has. ³⁷ My master made me swear, saying, 'You shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I dwell, ³⁸ but you shall go to my father's house and to my clan and take a wife for my son.' ³⁹ I said to my master, 'Perhaps the woman will not follow me.' ⁴⁰ But he said to me, 'The Lord, before whom I have walked, will send his angel with you and prosper your way. You shall take a wife for my son from my clan and from my father's house. ⁴¹ Then you will be free from my oath, when you come to my clan. And if they will not give her to you, you will be free from my oath.'*

Gen 24.42-49 *"I came today to the spring and said, 'O Lord, the God of my master Abraham, if now you are prospering the way that I go, ⁴³ behold, I am standing by the spring of water. Let the virgin who comes out to draw water, to whom I shall say, "Please give me a little water from your jar to drink," ⁴⁴ and who will say to me, "Drink, and I will draw for your camels also," let her be the woman whom the Lord has appointed for my master's son.' ⁴⁵ "Before I had finished speaking in my heart, behold, Rebekah came out with her water jar on her shoulder, and she went down to the spring and drew water. I said to her, 'Please let me drink.' ⁴⁶ She quickly let down her jar from her shoulder and said, 'Drink, and I will give your camels drink also.' So I drank, and she gave the camels drink also. ⁴⁷ Then I asked her, 'Whose daughter are you?' She said, 'The daughter of Bethuel, Nahor's son, whom*

Milcah bore to him.' So I put the ring on her nose and the bracelets on her arms. ⁴⁸ Then I bowed my head and worshiped the Lord and blessed the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who had led me by the right way to take the daughter of my master's kinsman for his son. ⁴⁹ Now then, if you are going to show steadfast love and faithfulness to my master, tell me; and if not, tell me, that I may turn to the right hand or to the left."

Since Rebekah's father is inactive, her brother Laban stands in for the father. Guys, if Debbie lives at home and is under the authority of her parents, you as the groom-to-be should speak directly to the father figure and declare your intentions to marry, love, and care for her. Maintaining a healthy close relationship with in-laws is important. If Debbie no longer lives at home, but her father is living, out of respect for the family and as a testimony of your relationship with Christ, you need to declare the ways that God is working in this relationship. If Debbie's parents are not living, it is advisable to declare your intentions and seek a blessing from other family members or other people such as a pastor that Debbie looks to and respects in her life.

Video L1C7: <https://youtu.be/yv8Q0laceE8>

By observing what the servant shared with Rebecca's brother Laban, a young man can gain insight into what he should discuss with his potential father in law or father in law figure:

- *That you are able to financially care for a wife (34-35).*
- *That you are a Christian man seeking a Christian wife (37-38).*
- *That you have prayed about the relationship and that you are trusting God to lead in it (40).*
- *That you see God sovereignly working in the relationship (42-47).*

- *That you are walking with God (48)*

After you have discussed these things with him, then ask for his permission to marry his daughter (49).

- Have you asked Debbie's father or father figure for her hand in marriage?

Yes

No

- Do you have a job?

Yes

No

- Do you believe that you have sufficient income to support Debbie?

Yes

No

It appears that what prompted Laban to consider allowing Rebecca to marry Isaac was the lure of the gold that the servant had given to Rebecca (Genesis 24:29-31). Laban was more concerned about his personal financial gain than he was about direction from God. Later scripture references idols that Laban worshipped, so we can conclude that Laban himself was probably not fully dedicated to the Lord. However, God is sovereign. The couple was seeking the Lord's will, so God worked this out even though Laban's motives may not have been pure. If you are in a situation where you are pursuing a godly relationship with Debbie but your family does not understand, continue to seek God. He is your ultimate source of direction.

Gen 24.50-53 Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, "The thing has come from the Lord; we cannot speak to you bad or good. 51 Behold, Rebekah is before you; take her and go, and let her be

the wife of your master's son, as the Lord has spoken." 52 When Abraham's servant heard their words, he bowed himself to the earth before the Lord. 53 And the servant brought out jewelry of silver and of gold, and garments, and gave them to Rebekah. He also gave to her brother and to her mother costly ornaments.

This passage provides an example of principles that should be followed now and throughout the marriage relationship:

Just as the servant paused and thanked God for answering his prayer, you should make it a habit to pause and thank God for bringing Debbie into your life.

The servant honored Rebecca's family with gifts. Likewise, special attention, respect, and honor should be given to yours and Debbie's family.

Gen 24.54-58 And he and the men who were with him ate and drank, and they spent the night there. When they arose in the morning, he said, "Send me away to my master." 55 Her brother and her mother said, "Let the young woman remain with us a while, at least ten days; after that she may go." 56 But he said to them, "Do not delay me, since the Lord has prospered my way. Send me away that I may go to my master." 57 They said, "Let us call the young woman and ask her." 58 And they called Rebekah and said to her, "Will you go with this man?" She said, "I will go."

Video L1C8: <https://youtu.be/30hE9GbYZWI>

Rebecca was not forced into this relationship. Her family asked her how she felt about the relationship. They wanted to make sure that she felt good about it, that God had confirmed it in her heart. It is never too late to call off a wedding if your heart is hesitant. It is better not to marry than to marry the wrong person.

Notice also that Rebekah was willing to adapt to Isaac. That's quite a commitment to be willing to ride a camel for 450 miles,

knowing that you may never have the opportunity to spend time with your family again. Marriage is serious. You will be committing yourself to a whole new lifestyle with a new purpose that is different than the purpose of your present family. Genesis 2:24 and Ephesians 5:31 both exhort married couples to leave their father and mother and to cleave or hold fast to each other. "Leaving" means that you will break dependence upon your parents and shift core loyalties to your new family. You will continue to love and honor your parents, but your time with them will be more limited.

In his book *Intimate Allies*, Dan Allendar eloquently states:

Leaving means starting a whole new relationship in which the core loyalty is not to parent's priorities, traditions, or influence; but to an entirely new family that must set its own course, form, and purpose.

- Are you willing and prepared to leave your parent's house?

Yes

No

- Are you willing and prepared to leave your parent's financial support?

Yes

Not at the present time because my parents are funding my college education.

No: I am employed by my parents.

No

- Have you and Debbie discussed the city where you will live?

Yes

No

- Have you and Debbie discussed what type of housing that you will live in (apartment, rental home, purchase a home)?

Yes

No

- Have you and Debbie discussed your employment?

Yes

No

- Have you and Debbie discussed Debbie's employment?

Yes

No

Gen 24.59-60 So they sent away Rebekah their sister and her nurse, and Abraham's servant and his men. 60 And they blessed Rebekah and said to her, "Our sister, may you become thousands of ten thousands and may your offspring possess the gate of those who hate him!"

The family pronounced a blessing on Rebecca that she would have many children. Psalm 127:3 states that children are a gift from God.

- Have you and Debbie discussed having children?

Yes

No

- Do you have children that are minors?

Yes

No

Gen 24.61-65 Then Rebekah and her young women arose and rode on the camels and followed the man. Thus the servant took Rebekah and went his way. ⁶² Now Isaac had returned from Beer-lahai-roi

and was dwelling in the Negeb. ⁶³ And Isaac went out to meditate in the field toward evening. And he lifted up his eyes and saw, and behold, there were camels coming. ⁶⁴ And Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she dismounted from the camel ⁶⁵ and said to the servant, "Who is that man, walking in the field to meet us?" The servant said, "It is my master." So she took her veil and covered herself.

As soon as Rebecca saw Isaac, she covered herself. This display of modesty reminds us that God intends that sexual activity be reserved until after the wedding. Elsewhere in scripture, the chorus (daughters of Jerusalem) in the Song of Solomon repeatedly warn not to awaken or arouse physical love until the proper time (Song 3:5,8:4). The proper time is marriage.

Video L1C10b: <https://youtu.be/ATEBYjWA2gU>

Ephesians 5:3 says that among God's people there should not be a hint of sexual immorality. This passage is referring to fornication which includes sexual touch or any touch with a sexual connotation.

Understand that God is not trying to keep you from sex, but He is saving you for sex because it is wonderful, special, and intended for marriage.

God's intention is that all sexual activity, including sexual fondling, be reserved for marriage. His purpose is to solidify the bond between a husband and wife. Participating in sexual activities before marriage can damage this bond. (This includes sexual intercourse, oral sex, sexual fondling, cybersex, phone sex, etc.) In our years of ministry, we have counseled couples who have divorced due to complications from premarital sex. Being involved in sexual activity outside of marriage is not only rebellion against the commands of God (Hebrews 13:4b, 1 Cor. 6:18-19), but is also a sin that will greatly hinder your ability to

hear the voice of God as you seek His mind concerning this marriage. Participating in premarital sex is exalting your physical desires over your desire to obey God. In addition, premarital sexual relations increase the likelihood of certain physical complications that can hinder sexual fulfillment in marriage. These complications are explained in Lesson Six. If you are currently participating in sexual activity, we strongly urge you to pause right now to seek God's forgiveness and ask Him in His mercy to spare you from the consequences of premarital sex. Commit to Debbie and to God that you will not put yourself in a situation that promotes lust and sexual temptation in the future. We understand that the sexual urge is strong. God created it that way. Keeping this commitment could be difficult. We recommend the book, *What is the Meaning of Sex?* by Denny Burk. This book will not only help strengthen you to keep this commitment of purity, but will also offer principles to guard against wrong sexual behavior that may tempt you after you are married. By abstaining from sexual activity until your wedding night, you and Debbie will be avoiding sexual sin and potential baggage that could hinder your sexual fulfillment after marriage. Be on guard in the future not to justify sexual activity using the excuse that you are engaged and getting married anyway. Maintain your sexual purity and anticipate the pleasure of sharing your love sexually on your wedding night! God desires that you begin a lifetime of sexual pleasure on that night.

- Are you willing to commit to sexual purity from this point until your wedding day?

Yes

No

Gen 24.66-67 And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. ⁶⁷ Then Isaac brought her into the tent of Sarah his mother

and took Rebekah, and she became his wife, and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

The servant confirmed to Isaac that God had directed him to Rebecca. Isaac embraced God's will and demonstrated Biblical love by committing to take Rebecca as his wife. He understood that true Biblical love is not based on feelings that come and go. True love is based on commitment to respect, honor and serve the spouse for a lifetime.

➤ Can you confirm that God has directed you to marry Debbie?

Yes

No

As you complete the remaining lessons, we pray that the Lord will clearly confirm whether or not He is directing you and Debbie to join in a covenant as husband and wife. If He is directing the two of you together, we pray that the instruction in the following lessons will prepare you for an exhilarating, fulfilling, stable life of love together.

The next question concludes this lesson. If you do not receive your Individual Lesson Analysis in your inbox within 5 minutes, please search for it in your spam.

Note: At the end of each lesson the participant can review how he/she answered the lesson questions and has the opportunity to go back to that question and answer it differently, or confirm that all answers are correct and finish the lesson.

Emails Generated by the Program:

Sample Individual Assessment Email: This email was generated by the program after assessing how Sam answered the questions in lesson one. He would receive this email within a few minutes of completing the lesson.

Lesson One: Preliminary Considerations

Individual Lesson Analysis:

You have successfully finished the first lesson of the Preparing for Partnership course. Please carefully review the email responses given below. Note that there may be links to suggested resources, articles to read or other websites in these responses.

You feel that you and Debbie both have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. There is no greater foundation for a successful marriage. (1 Cor. 3:11).

You have indicated that you spend excessive time on some activity. A healthy marriage requires spending time together, therefore, the excessive use of time watching TV, playing sports, or even excessive overtime on a job can be detrimental to the health of a marriage. One of the most frequent problems that a wife discusses with a marriage counselor is that her husband does not have time for her. Please consider how this excessive time might be redirected toward your relationship with God and Debbie.

You have indicated that both yours and Debbie's parents approve of your relationship. Allowing your parents to give their blessings on your future marriage partner, gives honor to them (Ephesians 6:1) and shows wisdom on your part. To have the support of both parents going into the marriage is very important and should provide reinforcement and encouragement to you in your marriage.

In His design of marriage, God designates that the husband should lead, protect, and provide for his wife (Ephesians 5:25-33).

You are demonstrating leadership by setting up your dates and activities. We commend you for your initiative.

You have earnestly sought God concerning Debbie becoming your marriage partner and concerning the timing of your marriage. Allowing God to lead you in these decisions shows that you are reverencing God in the most important decision of your life. Continue to seek Him in all of your plans and He will bless and lead you according to His will and ways.

*You marked that Debbie exhibits a tendency to complain, be depressed or be critical. It is very good that you are aware of these struggles in her life. The unavoidable stresses of marriage will magnify these struggles, so they should be addressed before the wedding. The book **War of Words by Paul Tripp** offers effective strategy for eliminating the root cause of negative communication. We challenge you to pray that God will reveal if this is an area of concern for your relationship. We suggest that you and Debbie take time to read the book before you get married. If these issues continue to manifest, seek godly counsel from your pastor. If you feel that she suffers from depression linked to wounds from her past, we highly recommend the book, **Redemption by Mike Wilkerson**.*

God designates the husband to be the major provider for the home (1 Timothy 5:8 and Ephesians 5:25-28). The fact that you cover the costs of most of your dates indicates a readiness to lead by providing for your family.

It is very good that you and Debbie have discussed the important issue of having children. Make sure that you discuss your perspectives on raising and disciplining your children. Talk about the ways you will be willing to adjust your lifestyle for future children. Before you expand your family to include children, commit to each other that you will read biblically based books on raising children.

You have confirmed that God has directed you to marry Debbie. As you enter into the most important decision in your life, there is

nothing more thrilling than to know that God has led you in this. We pray that the lessons to follow will help prepare you and Debbie to have a joyful, Christ-centered marriage!

We pray that this lesson challenged you to prayerfully embrace the preliminary considerations that were addressed. This course currently contains seven lessons that normally require 1 to 1 1/2 hours to complete. Altogether, that's less than one eight-hour day. That is a minor investment for a major benefit. The remaining lessons will lay a solid foundation for a lifelong bond. Prove your love to one another by making a commitment to schedule time to complete the remaining lessons before your wedding.

You can advance to Lesson Two. Once Debbie completes Lesson One, you will both receive an email assessment that evaluates the comparison of both of your answers. We challenge you to discuss your lesson evaluations and assessments with each other.

Lesson One: Preliminary Considerations

Couple Assessment Email

Sample Counseling Assessment Email: The pastor or counselor overseeing the training would receive after the test couple Sam & Debbie complete lesson One. Please note that the content of the email is compiled based on how Sam and Debbie answered the questions in lesson one.

This email is a comparative analysis of the responses that you and Debbie submitted in Lesson 1. Schedule a time to review the issues and follow up on the suggestions. Both of you should have also received an individual assessment at the time you completed Lesson 1. We recommend that you reference and discuss your individual assessments also.

Both of you have indicated that you are Christians. This is the first step to building a marriage and family on a solid foundation!

- 1. Make sure that you take time to share your salvation testimony with Debbie.*
- 2. Discuss the ways that you want your future life together to revolve around your relationship with Jesus.*
- 3. Pray that God will use this program to open your eyes to any issues that you need to resolve. Pray that your hearts will be committed to living as a husband and wife according to God's Word.*

Debbie admitted that she spends excessive time in an outside activity. Ask her what activity or area of life she was referencing. Discuss the way that you feel this has impacted or could impact your relationship and the purposes that God has for you as a couple. If adjustments need to be made, discuss ways you can approach the adjustments together.

This concludes the couple assessment for Lesson 1. You will receive the couple assessment for Lesson 2 when both you and Debbie complete Lesson 2.

Lesson One: Preliminary Considerations

Counseling Assessment

Both Sam and Debbie have completed Lesson One. The lesson taught preliminary considerations using the story in Genesis 24 where Abraham sends his servant to get a wife for his son Isaac.

Topics included:

- Importance of Centering the Relationship on God*
- Importance of Being Equally Yoked as Believer*
- Salvation*

- *Maturity and Responsibility*
- *Use of Time*
- *Addiction*
- *Financial Stability*
- *Character*
- *Involvement of Parents and Friends*
- *Importance of Remaining Sexually Pure*

Some of the topics were addressed in a general way as preliminary considerations. They will be addressed more comprehensively in future lessons.

Any areas of concern are listed below.

*The lesson briefly explained the urgency of premarital sexual purity. The program asked each individual to commit to abstain from sexual activity from this point forward until the wedding day. The definition of sexual activity included sexual intercourse, sexual fondling, oral sex, phone sex, cybersex, etc. God's plan for sexual intimacy plus additional exhortation for sexual purity will be covered in detail in Lesson Six. In order to emphasize the importance of remaining sexually pure, you may want to ask the couple if they are currently sexually active. The book *What is the Meaning of Sex* can be an excellent resource to strengthen a couple to withstand this temptation.*

The following are suggested questions you might want to bring up. The lesson asked most of these so the couple has considered the topics, however it may be beneficial for you to reconfirm that there are no problems in these areas.

Tell me how God has shown you that she/he is the right one for you to marry?

Have you discussed where you will be employed?

To Sam: Can you support her on your income?

To Debbie: Are you willing to adjust to a different lifestyle (if necessary)?

To Debbie: If God calls Sam to move to another state or country, would you willingly support and follow him?

Where will you live after the wedding?

To each one: Are you currently attracted to any other person besides her/him?

Are there any addictions or potentially harmful habits you failed to identify (or lied about - particularly porno) when taking the lesson?

Note: We have found that the male will often lie concerning his involvement with porno. This is a major problem with young men and they have the misconception that marriage will solve their addiction. It would be good to confirm that the male does not have this problem. If so, a good helpful resource to direct him to is Finally Free.

To each one: Do you spend excessive time on anything?

To each one: Do you feel your fiancée spends excessive time on anything?

Are your parents supportive of this marriage?

Are your friends supportive of this marriage?

Have either of you have been divorced?

Have you discussed having children?

Any there any physical problems that would prevent either of you from having children?

Have you discussed when you are planning to have children?

Have you discussed how many children you would like to have?

Have you generally discussed how you will discipline and train your children (note that this is a major source of conflict with many couples)?

Have you discussed whether Debbie will stay home after having children?

Do you have any overall concerns?

When both Sam and Debbie complete Lesson 2, you will receive an assessment for that lesson. You can check the progress of the couple on your church dashboard.

Lesson Two

Preparing for Partnership

The Sacredness of Marriage

Throughout the Bible God repeatedly uses the metaphor of marriage to reveal to us the amazing love relationship that He desires to have with us.

For example, in Ezekiel 16:3-14, God portrays Himself as one who rescues an abandoned, unwanted newborn, a baby without hope. This outcast child represents His people. He raises and cares for the child until she is old enough to marry. He tenderly claims her as His bride and abundantly provides rich food, exquisite clothing and kingdom prosperity. He pours out amazing love on someone who if not for Him would be hopeless and destitute. This portrayal of marriage demonstrates that His people are a special treasure to Him and He loves them and cares about them with all of His magnificent being. Therefore, marriage is sacred to Almighty God because it was designed to represent His unquestionable love to us. Understanding the purpose of marriage should overwhelm us and compel us to worship the designer of marriage.

God gives us further insight about His purpose for creating marriage in Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

Eph 5:31-33 "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." 32 This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. 33 However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Video L2C1: <https://youtu.be/N917y2W2RH8>

Interestingly, the apostle Paul states in Ephesians 5:32 that marriage is a "mystery." Then he unveils the mystery of marriage by saying that it represents Christ and His church.

From this, we see that God designed marriage to be an earthly manifestation of the heavenly relationship of Christ and his bride, the church.

In both the Old and New Testaments, the purpose of marriage is to display to the world that God loves his “bride” so much that He would sacrifice all for her benefit and that as a response to such incredible love, she should respect, adore and serve him. Hence, marriage is extremely sacred to God and should be patterned after His relationship with us.

God further says in Hebrews 13:4 that marriage is so sacred that every person, young and old, married or single is to hold it in honor. He even vows to judge anyone who dishonors marriage through adultery or sexual immorality.

Malachi 2:11-16 also addresses the sacredness of marriage, but at the same time provides, imbedded in the text, a definition of marriage.

Understanding God’s definition of marriage is foundational to building a lasting relationship. So, we will unpack this passage verse by verse to direct us into an understanding of the full definition.

Mal 2.11 Judah has been faithless, and abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem. For Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the Lord, which he loves, and has married the daughter of a foreign god.

God is angry. He declares that the men of Judah who are His chosen people have committed a despicable act that is an abomination to Him. These men have profaned His sacred institution of marriage.

Interesting-- that God would choose the word “profane” to describe the men’s behavior. We get our word profanity from this

word which means to make common or ordinary something that should be holy and set apart.

The men had totally warped and desecrated the picture of God's glorious relationship with His people by forsaking their Jewish wives for women from pagan lands who had no regard for Him and who worshipped other gods. The men had ignored God's command to only marry Jewish women who believed in Jehovah God. By taking additional wives (polygamy) who worship foreign gods, they had polluted the Holiness of God (God's holy institution of marriage).

Mal 2.12-13 May the Lord cut off from the tents of Jacob any descendant of the man who does this, who brings an offering to the Lord of hosts! 13 And this second thing you do. You cover the Lord's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand.

God takes the behavior of these men personally. He does not care what their educational or social status is. He is not even impressed if they are priests offering sacrifices. They cannot buy or work their way out of this. Mistreating their wives, breaking the marriage covenant, and intermarrying with unbelievers is so abominable to God that He cuts off communication with these men and refuses to accept their worship.

When the people realized that their sacrifices were displeasing to God, they began to come to the altars and weep before God. God gives us a parallel statement in 1 Peter 3:7, when He warns that if a husband does not care for and honor his wife that his prayers will be hindered. Or in other words, if a husband deals treacherously (cruelly, harshly, unfaithfully) and does not love and cherish his wife, he will be unable to communicate or hear from God. Is there any wonder that in most marriage ceremonies

the preacher declares that marriage is not to be entered into lightly?

Video L2C2a: https://youtu.be/6W5iYL7k_5o

God wants us to understand that marriage is precious; it is to be taken very seriously and entered into sacredly. If a married couple does not esteem marriage as holy, God will not receive their worship. This not only affects them, but hinders worship in the church that they attend.

As you and Debbie enter into marriage, it is essential that your understanding of the preciousness of marriage match God's high vision of this Holy institution. For that to happen, we must look at marriage from the perspective of the one who created it!

➤ Check the one that best describes your view of marriage.

I know marriage is a lot like prison, but I really enjoy the fringe benefits, so I'll see if it works for me.

Marriage is an arrangement that will benefit us financially and will be convenient. We are compatible. We enjoy doing things together and it just makes sense to make it official.

Marriage is sacred, holy and should be held in high esteem.

I hope my marriage works out, I'm going to give it my best shot.

As long as we get along and are both satisfied, we will share our possessions and coordinate our lives together, but if one of us becomes dissatisfied, we will peaceably separate and divorce. Our happiness is what is most important.

Mal 2.14 But you say, "Why does he not?" Because the Lord was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you

have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant.

These men are attending church; they are giving their money; they are going through their religious motions. The world around them has not questioned their behavior, so they remain oblivious as to why the Lord would cut them off and refuse to accept their offering and worship. In answering them, God reminds the men that just like in a court trial, He was a legal witness that saw them recite their wedding vows and enter into covenant with the wife of their youth. He has witnessed their unacceptable behavior that distorts the sacred picture that He designed marriage to display.

Video L2C3new: <https://youtu.be/zhENvHUDnyc>

One writer beautifully describes marriage this way. The design of man and woman in putting them on Earth is the setting of a divine theatre in which man is cast to play the part of Jesus and woman the part of the church. This theatrical production is shown through two lenses, the family and the church. Any distortion of God's casting distorts the glory of God both in the family and in the church.

To change God's design is like throwing paint on the masterpiece of the divine artist; it is like changing the cast in the middle of the play, it is like making a distracting noise in the middle of a symphony. Such is sin, it distorts the glory assigned to man, it creates havoc in the divine creation, it mars all that God has made beautiful.

What a profound description of what God intended that marriage should portray! No wonder God is angry that these men have profaned His holy institution of marriage. After God strongly rebukes these men, He admonishes them by declaring the correct view of marriage summed up in two very significant words at the

end of verse 14, "Though she is your companion and your wife by covenant."

God wants everyone to embrace the fact that marriage is much more than just an agreement or a contract. God is saying that;

Marriage is a Covenant of Companionship between a man and a woman.

The marriage covenant is a promise to always be faithful to the one you entered into covenant with. Companionship in marriage involves sharing all aspects of life together, emotionally, physically and spiritually. Marriage is a commitment to actively pursue, emotionally, physically and spiritually, what is most beneficial for the one that you are marrying even if it requires setting aside personal goals and desires.

The dramatic response that God pronounces against the attitude of the men of Judah should compel engaged couples to personally examine their hearts in order to insure that they not only understand and reverently commit to live out God's definition of marriage, but that they avoid treacherous behavior that profanes marriage and invokes God's wrath.

We will spend the next several lessons embracing and applying the full meaning of covenant and companionship in different facets of married life.

The remainder of this lesson will assess the blatant issues that distorted the marriage relationship in this Malachi passage.

Mal 2.15 Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth.

The prophet, Malachi, reminds the people how God intended that the covenant of companionship (marriage) should function as designed by Him in the original marriage relationship of Adam

and Eve. Both the husband and the wife were to become one unit with God at the center of the union. He was to be the focus and the identity of both hearts. His righteousness, His goodness, His love, His peace, His wisdom, His power would keep them glued together and would be passed on to their children. He would be their strength. He would be their joy. He would be their reason for living. This would be the source of unity in the marriage.

When the prophet challenges the people to guard themselves in their spirits, he is saying, the abomination that was committed was a heart issue. Their behavior was the result of a heart problem, a worship issue. Some desire, some lust, some expectation had become so strong in their life that it had overpowered their adoration for God and was controlling their hearts and behavior. The only way to resolve this atrocity was to get to the root cause and address the heart.

As preventative maintenance for your marriage, we will address the particular transgressions distorting the marriages in this passage.

1) Abusive Behavior:

A word study in verses 11-14 not only indicates that the men are unfaithful to their wives but there is a connotation that the men were treacherous and harsh in their behavior.

Verse 16 also suggests that the same men who are divorcing their wives are cruel, unjust and violent in their attitudes.

Malachi 2.16 "For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the Lord, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the Lord of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless."

31 % of American women report being physically or sexually abused by a husband or boyfriend².

Video L2C4: <https://youtu.be/pU8HEURNOKA>

We know from the married couples that come to us for counseling that emotional and physical abuse is a common problem. Couples allow personal expectations to obsess them to the point that common irritations and disappointments send them into rage. One or both partners scream, curse, call names, viciously degrade, throw objects, break objects, slam doors and exhibit various abusive behaviors. This is one of the sins that viciously distorts the sacredness of marriage and can eventually lead to marital disharmony.

Mal 2.15-16 Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth. 16 "For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the Lord, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the Lord of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless."

As both verses 15 and 16 emphasize, the diagnosis is a heart problem. Christ offers deliverance from bondage to this type of behavior; but the problem must be faced honestly and diligently. This requires confession (agreeing with God that you have a sin problem.) However, the diagnosis must go beyond admitting the wrongful acts to identifying the driving force behind this behavior. What was controlling the heart that it would produce such conduct? Once the true heart is exposed, repentance is required. Repentance is a total change of mindset that results in a lasting change of behavior.

² Family Violence Prevention Fund

In the beginning stages of potential violent abuse, the signs are subtle. If recognized and dealt with honestly at the heart level, they will not morph into cruelty. This is an issue that is becoming more and more prevalent in relationships, so please be honest in answering the following questions.

- When you are extremely irritated, (not just at Debbie, but at anyone,) you exhibit a tendency to (Mark all that apply):

You do not get extremely irritated

Want to talk it out

Mumble

Withdraw and leave

Clam up

Raise your voice

Become physical with the person you are angry with
(shoving, shaking, squeezing, or hitting)

Threaten to exert some type of physical punishment

Throw or break things

Threaten to breakup

Resort to name-calling

Curse the person who angered you

Slam your fist

Road Rage

- When Debbie is extremely irritated, she exhibits a tendency to (Mark all that apply):

Debbie does not get extremely irritated

Want to talk it out

Mumble

Withdraw and leave

Clam up

Raise your voice

Become physical with the person you are angry with
(shoving, shaking, squeezing, or hitting)

Threaten to exert some type of physical punishment

Throw or break things

Threaten to breakup

Resort to name-calling

Curse the person who angered you

Slam your fist

Road Rage

As indicated in the Malachi passage, actively living out God's definition of marriage is critical in maintaining communion with Him and each other. We urge you to prayerfully follow through with your email responses so that you can both avoid or eliminate any emotional or physical abuse in your future marriage.

2) Believers Marrying Unbelievers:

As acknowledged earlier in this lesson (Malachi 2:11), God is not only angered that these men have mistreated their Jewish wives, but he is angered that the new wives worship gods other than Him, the one and only true and living God. God had set his people apart for Him and His purposes and therefore, they were to marry only believers in Jehovah God. He reminds them why in verse 15 (Mal. 2:15). This is important not only for their marriage, but also in leaving a Godly legacy.

Video L2C5: <https://youtu.be/vlxWQPARwzo>

God intended that both the husband and wife be believers so that they could center their married life on worshipping God and living in joyful obedience to Him. As was stated earlier, the Spirit of God is the glue that solidifies marriage and enables the couple to achieve God's purpose in it.

Whenever a couple is divided in their belief about God, they cannot walk in agreement (Amos 3:3) since their lives have two different focuses. If parents worship different gods, they cannot effectively raise children who worship the one true God.

These men of Judah claimed to be believers in Jehovah God. Not only did they mar the sacredness of marriage by taking on additional wives, but these wives were non-believers. This mixture of religions angers God and produces division in the home which misleads the children.

Similarly, in 2 Corinthians 6:14-15, God exhorts Christians not to marry non-Christians.

A Christian is someone who has been called by God into a relationship with Jesus Christ. Now he belongs to Jesus and possesses an urgency to be pleasing to Him in everything he does. It is impossible to please, in everything, both Jesus and someone who does not desire to follow Jesus. Division and or compromise of faith is inevitable.

- We've asked this in Lesson one, but the teaching in this passage leads us to ask again, Are you a Christian?

Yes

Not Sure

No

- Is Debbie a Christian?

Yes

Not sure

No

3) Polygamy:

The men described in this passage were married and they took on additional wives, therefore they were practicing polygamy. Even though polygamy was practiced in the Old Testament, God clearly denounces this practice. His ideal for marriage is always one man and one woman who are faithful to each other for life. The prophet emphasizes this point also in verse 15 by saying:

Mal 2.15 Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth.

Theologians say that the question Malachi is asking actually infers; when God created man and instituted marriage, did he give many wives to one man (Adam)? God could have created multiple wives for Adam, but this was not His plan. When either Jesus or the apostle Paul answers questions about marriage, they like Malachi, refer back to the original marriage of Adam and Eve. Whatever does not harmonize with the first marriage in the Garden of Eden is contrary to God's design for marriage.

4) God Denounces Divorce

God not only denounces polygamy, but He declares that He hates divorce (Mal. 2:16).

God is not saying that he hates people who are divorced, but that he hates what divorce does to marriage and families. Divorce distorts God's sacred design of marriage. God intends that marriage partners be faithfully committed to each other for life.

Even though God hates divorce, He does allow for it in certain specific cases.

Therefore, if you have been previously married, you will need to examine your personal circumstances in light of scripture to determine if your proposed marriage complies with scripture.

➤ Have you been previously married to someone else?

Yes

No

The next several lessons will concentrate on the meaning and application of the two words that God uses to define marriage: Covenant and Companion.

Lesson Three

Preparing for Partnership Covenant

Lesson Two on The Sacredness of Marriage stated God's definition of marriage as:

A covenant of companionship between a man and a woman.

Fully comprehending this definition requires a more in depth understanding of the two words, covenant and companionship. This lesson investigates what is actually meant by being in a marriage covenant. The next lesson looks in detail at the word companionship.

Grasping the meaning of covenant as it applies to marriage is essential to building a marriage that is glorifying to God.

Video L3C1 - <https://youtu.be/2L9eZmBmV9o>

The word covenant is mentioned over 300 times in the Bible. It is woven through scripture like a beautiful thread in a fine garment. In Hebrew the word covenant is "berith" and means a compact or agreement made by passing through pieces of flesh. In the Bible a covenant is the most sacred and binding promise that could possibly be made.

The Old Testament is a book of covenants that God made with His people. Each covenant pictures the ultimate covenant of new life that God promised would be fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Marriage is a representation of this covenant between Jesus and His bride, the church (all Christians.) In order to grasp and apply the full meaning of the marriage covenant, an understanding of both the Old Testament principles of covenant and what these covenants represent in a relationship with Jesus is necessary.

In the Old Testament, the covenant that God made with Abram (later renamed Abraham) illustrates many major covenant principles.

Genesis 12.1-3 Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

God instructs seventy-five-year-old Abram to leave his country in the Ur of Chaldees and by faith go into a land where God promises to not only bless him but also, through his descendants, bless all the families on the earth.

In obedience to God, Abram, by faith, packs up his family and leaves his country to go into the land promised to him by God. Fifteen years later, Abram has no biological child. Therefore, Abram logically assumes that his servant Eliezer will become his heir. God once again reconfirms His promise to Abram and clarifies to him that his heir will be his biological son.

Gen 15.4-6 ⁴ And behold, the word of the Lord came to him: "This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir." ⁵ And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." ⁶ And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

Abram then asks God for a visible sign of His promise. God commands Abram to take a heifer, a goat, and a ram, and cut them into two halves, then, to arrange them on the ground. As the sun goes down, a great darkness falls upon the land and God visibly reveals Himself to Abram as a smoking furnace with a burning lamp. Abram observes this theophany (visible manifestation of God) as it passes through these pieces of flesh

that he had prepared. Scripture explains, “In the same day God made (cut) covenant with Abram” (Genesis 15:8-10, 18).

As a sign that Abram is entering covenant with God, God commands Abram to circumcise the flesh of the foreskin of every male among his people. This shedding of blood through circumcision becomes the visible sign of Abram’s covenant with God as He proclaims; “And my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant” (Genesis 17:10-13). God further confirms the covenant with Abram by changing Abram’s name to Abraham and Sarai’s name to Sarah signifying that they will be the father and mother of nations (Genesis 17:5,15).

Video L3C2 - <https://youtu.be/uwOExt5a3c>

God was making an unconditional covenant with Abram that one day the seed, the promised one, (the Messiah) would be born through his descendants and then all the nations of the Earth would be blessed. God’s confirmation of His covenant with Abraham through the shedding of blood is a foreshadowing of the new covenant of our salvation which is confirmed through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. By faith Abram looked to Christ, the promised descendant (seed) and believed God (Genesis 3:15, Galatians 3:16). Abram was not depending on who he was or what he had done or would do. He was depending on what God promised. As a result, not only was this a day of reconfirmation of God’s promise to Abram, but this was also the day of Abram’s salvation (Romans 4:1-3).

The Abrahamic Covenant, like all of God’s covenants, points to the new covenant that would come in the person of Jesus Christ. The prophet Jeremiah states:

Jer 31.31-33 31 “Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, 32 not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them

out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. ³³ But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Sadly, in this passage, Abraham's descendants repeatedly defied the sacred covenant God had made with them. Because of His loving faithfulness, God promises to establish a new and perfect covenant for mankind. Through the new covenant, the hearts and the thinking of the covenant partners will be changed so the participants will desire to live in loving devotion to God.

God establishes the new covenant with the ultimate sacrifice of His perfect son, Jesus Christ. Through this covenant, God forgives man for failing to honor and obey Him and covers man's sin debt to Him with the life of His son. This covenant sacrifice is complete and requires no additional blood sacrifices (Hebrews 10:9-12.)

The old covenant with its law and ceremony is now replaced with the new covenant of grace through the person of Jesus Christ. God through His Spirit brings man to the realization of his sinful condition and desperate need for deliverance. Man recognizes that no matter how hard he tries; he is hopelessly inadequate to fulfill God's righteous law. God's covenant love sends Jesus Christ to rescue man by fulfilling the requirements of the law for him. Man then by faith believes in Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior (2 Corinthians 4:3-4, Romans 10:9-10).

God calls this being born again (the new birth) because the new believer begins a new life that is surrendered to God (John 3:3). This refers not to a physical birth but rather a spiritual awakening or spiritual birth. When a person embraces and receives the life of Jesus, God seals the covenant by placing His Holy Spirit within the new believer. This "indwelling" changes (circumcises) the

believer's heart so that his desires, his perspective, and his identity are different. He becomes a new creature. The man who has entered into the new covenant now takes on a new name (Christian), picturing his new identity in Christ. Those with hearts circumcised by the Holy Spirit are truly Abraham's descendants, as they, like him, live in covenant relationship with God by faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 2:28-29). Abram's sons expand from sons of natural birth to include those who are descendants by new birth.

The covenant God made with Abraham is full of rich symbolism that adds meaning to every godly covenant made since that time.

Video L3C3 - <https://youtu.be/QAhRg9-fzaM>

Ancient Jewish covenants were patterned after the Abrahamic covenant. Cutting covenant between two Jewish men normally required severing an animal down the middle of its back leaving two bloody halves. The two bloody halves would be positioned on the ground leaving enough space for both participants to stand. The ones entering covenant would walk through the pieces in the form of a figure eight. Positioned between these two bloody halves, the participants would point their fingers to Heaven and say: "God, do so to me or more if I break this covenant." This was called a "walk into death," and signified that the partners were dying to their rights, and to independent living. Now they would no longer live for themselves, for their own pleasure, but they would live for their covenant partner. The ceremony inferred that if either participant broke the covenant, that person's blood would be shed. The participants were literally sealing the covenant with their lives!

Author Clay Trumbull states:

It is a peculiarity of the primitive compact of blood friendship that he who would enter into it must be ready to make a complete surrender of himself, in loving trust, to him with whom he

*covenants. He must, in fact, so love and trust, as to be willing to merge his separate individuality in the dual personality of which he becomes an integral part.*³

The marriage covenant is not established with the death of animals, but instead requires the great expense of the death of self in the merging together of two independent individuals into a new family unit which is held together by the supernatural love of God through Jesus Christ.

Just as Abram left his established life to follow the promises of God into a new unknown land, just as Christ left Heaven to come to earth, marriage requires a man and woman to leave their former life, especially the security of their parents. Having faith in the covenant promise made to each other before God, they launch out into the new frontier of marriage.

These covenant principles continue to apply. God created man and woman physiologically so that during the first sexual union, blood is shed as the marriage covenant is consummated. What an awesome God! This pictures the shedding of blood that establishes the covenant and binds the partners.

The ancient Jewish groom and bride proved that their marriage had been consummated by the shedding of blood on their wedding night:

*A garment or sheet from the bridal bed was carefully preserved. This special sheet is the one that had on it the spot of blood that demonstrated that the bride's hymen had been broken and that she was thus a virgin up to that point (see Deuteronomy 22:13-19)*⁴

³ H Clay Trumbull, *The Blood Covenant* (Kirkwood, MO: Impact Books, Inc, 1975)219-220

⁴ Glenn Greenwood & Latayne Scott, *A Marriage Made in Heaven* (Dallas: Word, 1990),73-74.

Virginity is a precious gift to be reserved as a symbol of absolute devotion that confirms to the new bride and groom that their union houses the unique privilege of a bond not shared by anyone else. As a newlywed couple surrenders their virginity to each other, they are sealing the covenant to be lifelong companions. Both the bride and groom are committing to die to themselves and actually surrender their life to become one with their mate. Their individualities are to be merged into the dual personality of the new marriage partnership. God calls this becoming one flesh (Gen. 2:24, Eph. 5:31).

Statistically, the majority of the participants that sign up for the Preparing for Partnership Course are not virgins. The intent of this section of the lesson is not a guilt trip, but a challenge to acknowledge the sacredness of sexual union. The purpose of the following question(s) is to recommend resources for cleansing and purity, so that anyone, no matter their sexual history can be better prepared to enter marriage free from sexual ties to someone else. Your responses to the questions about your sexual history in this section will not be acknowledged by this site to Debbie or to the counseling admin if you are registered through a church or organization.

➤ Are you a virgin?

Yes

No

Video L3C4 - <https://youtu.be/H9RbgxRLED4>

Following the walk of death, the participants would stand opposite one another and make a cut in their own flesh. Usually they would cut their wrists and then, clasping hands, would mingle their blood to signify that two had become one. No longer were they to live or act independently of one another. What affected one would now affect the other.

The mingling of blood between the covenant participants signified that they would no longer live or act independently of one another; what affected one would now affect the other.

Applying this to marriage, a couple should make all major decisions together. Each spouse needs to be continually aware that his habits, his purchases, his schedule, everything he does impacts his partner. This may seem restrictive, but in reality it is strengthening because as a married couple, joys will be doubled and burdens will be halved because what affects one affects the other also. These partners will be companions, forever bonded together, sharing all of life.

- List any struggles or challenges that Debbie is facing. Pause and pray that you will know what to do to encourage her.

Text Box Answer

- List victories that Debbie is experiencing. Plan a way to express pleasure in her happiness.

Text Box Answer

Video L3C5 - <https://youtu.be/MHdsMA-1rhM>

After they had passed through the pieces of flesh and mingled their blood, the covenant partners would give each other "blessings." Each would give to the other an accounting of all they owned; because these resources were now at the disposal of the covenant partner should they be needed.

As part of the covenant, the partners also pronounced verbal blessings on each other. To bless someone is to eulogize or to speak well of them. "A blessing is a spoken message of high value that pictures a special future and an active commitment to help the blessed one fulfill that future"⁵. In a wedding, this is the purpose of the marriage vows. You and Debbie should put some

⁵ The Blessing, Gary Smalley and John Trent

thought into the wording of your vows. Bible.org offers samples of Christian wedding vows.

- List any ideas for blessings or promises that you may want to consider to personalize your wedding vows.

Text Box Answer

As part of the blessings, Jewish participants declared their resources and vowed to share them. Obviously, the partners did not take the ceremony lightly. This commitment was reserved for matters of utmost value. If need be, the partners were prepared to give everything-- their possessions and their lives.

Likewise, a married couple should expect to share their resources. Resources should be handled respectfully, but there should be no selfishness when considering possessions. A wife should be pleased to share her belongings with her husband. A husband should be delighted to see his wife drive his car or enjoy his ipod. The attitude is "All that I have belongs to you because I want what is best for you. Our relationship is more important than my possessions."

- Do you have any possessions that you are reluctant to share with Debbie?

No, anything that I own will be available to her

A few things

Yes, I view possessions as separate from marriage obligations

Because of a previous marriage, some of my possessions will be passed to my children

- When one shares possessions, there are risks involved. Are you picky about your possessions?

No.

Somewhat. I am willing to share but I expect others to respect my property.

Yes. I get highly irritated if my possessions become disorganized, worn, or tattered.

- Will you determine to respectfully care for the possessions that Debbie shares with you?

Yes

No

Video L3C6 - <https://youtu.be/6UeqeTnbyAM>

After the Jewish partners had shared the blessings with each other, they would seal the covenant by rubbing something into the wound in order to cause a permanent scar. The scar would be a constant reminder to them that they were now responsible to one another.

Circumcision was a constant reminder to the Jews to be passionately devoted to God. The scars on the hands, feet and side of Jesus remind Christians that He is always there to do what is best for them. The wrist scar on the Jewish covenanters was a constant reminder that they were responsible for each other.

Just as the scars symbolized covenant, a wedding ring can be worn at all times as a constant reminder that you belong to Debbie. Once she slips your wedding ring on your finger, you should always be reminded to die to yourself for her good, to always be devoted to what is best for her. In addition, the wedding ring will signify to everyone that you come in contact with that you belong to Debbie.

- Do you plan to exchange rings during your wedding ceremony?

Yes

No

Video L3C7 - <https://youtu.be/kiYMPvAq1Bo>

The Jewish covenanters would also exchange names. They would take on the name of their covenant partner. After all this had been done, the two entering covenant would sit down and partake of a covenant meal.

At the conclusion of the Abrahamic covenant, God changed Abram's name to Abraham. A new believer incorporates the name of Christ into his identity by being called a Christian. The marriage ceremony exemplifies this when the wife takes on the name of her husband. The exchange of names is a link that confirms the partners as one unit before all of their wedding guests.

Some females today choose to keep their maiden names. The reasoning is that a woman may wish to maintain her identity for the sake of recognition that is established in her career. Brides who are already mothers may want to keep the same last name as their children. This may seem like an insignificant decision, but the implications are great. The value of the covenant relationship is overshadowed by the desire to maintain a former identity. This indicates an outside competitive link that is stronger than the marriage covenant.⁶

Remember the quote by Trumball:

It is a peculiarity of the primitive compact of blood friendship that he who would enter into it must be ready to make a complete surrender of himself, in loving trust, to him with whom he covenants. He must, in fact, so love and trust, as to be willing to

⁶ Information conveyed in the Jewish Covenant clips is from Kay Arthur, Beloved, (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1994), June 1-June 30

*merge his separate individuality in the dual personality of which he becomes an integral part.*⁷

- Have you and Debbie discussed whether she will take your last name?

Yes

No

Throughout the Old Testament, in His unconditional covenants, God promises to never abandon the relationship and to love His children with an unending, everlasting love. He demonstrates this love repeatedly. When the Jewish people, time after time, assert their independence, disregarding God, living life the way they see fit, failing to honor the covenant, God allows them to realize their wickedness and experience hopelessness, then He loves them, instructs them and draws them back into relationship. He consistently displays this loyal, unending love. Nothing deters this covenant love. God expresses this love regardless of the behavior and attitude of the ones He entered covenant with.

The Hebrew word that describes this covenant love is *hesed*.

*Hesed is God's lovingkindness—the consistent, ever-faithful, relentless, constantly pursuing, lavish, extravagant, unrestrained, one-way love of God. It is often translated as covenant love, lovingkindness, mercy, steadfast love, loyal love, devotion, commitment, or reliability...However, hesed has a much narrower definition than the English term love conveys. In the Hebrew Scriptures, hesed refers to a sort of love that has been promised and is owed—covenant love...Covenant love is the love God promised to give to his covenant people, and which they in turn were to respond in kind, loving God with all their hearts, minds, and strength.*⁸

⁷ H Clay Trumbull, *The Blood Covenant* (Kirkwood, MO: Impact Books, Inc, 1975)219-220

⁸ Marc Driscoll & Gerry Breshears, *Doctrine* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010),178-179

The concept of unconditional covenant love that is expressed through death to self for the good of the partner contrasts greatly with the contractual view of marriage that is prevalent today:

Video L3C8 - <https://youtu.be/snnuS6GaE3E>

Many couples today enter into marriage with prenuptial clauses and contractual agreements. Several years ago I clipped an article from the USA Today that described a marriage entered into through a contractual agreement:

No surprises for Albuquerque lovebirds Rex and Teresa Legalley. They have a sixteen page prenuptial agreement with the rules for their life together. Including how often they'll have sex (three to five times a week), which gas to buy (Chevron Supreme unleaded) and who does the laundry (Teresa). "We went into this knowing that it's a leap of faith when you get married," Rex told the associated press. "This gives us a list we can live by."⁹

Unfortunately, many Christian couples view marriage as this couple, thinking that for their own selfish protection the relationship should be controlled by pre-marital contractual guidelines. Consider how a typical contract is designed to function.

Video L3C9 - <https://youtu.be/XP8uUfDfATw>

Several years ago, I stopped by a car dealership to purchase a truck. After investigating the options for the ideal truck to fit my needs, I chose a certain make and model. The salesman escorted me into his office to fill out the paperwork to purchase the vehicle. The first piece of paperwork that he asked me to fill out was a credit application. The reason the dealer required a credit application was that he did not trust me solely on my word! As in this situation, all contractual relationships are based on distrust. If the dealership or whoever is making the loan trusted me, they

⁹ USA Today, February 14, 1996.

would not need to check my credit. Contractual relationships are distrusting relationships! Once my credit was approved and I was assumed to be a good risk, the salesman handed me the actual contract which stated the terms of the agreement. I legalized the contract by signing my signature. I agreed to pay a certain monthly amount to keep possession of the vehicle. As long as I do my part as the borrower, the bank will let me keep the car. If I fail to make payments, the bank will repossess the car.

A contract is a legal agreement that requires both parties to do exactly what they have agreed to do. If either party fails, the contract is void. Many couples approach marriage in a similar manner. Like the couple in the USA Today article, they develop a list of expectations for their mate that basically says, "If you do your part, I'll do my part. But if you don't do your part, I'm not going to do my part." This list is sometimes an officially written prenuptial agreement. Although most couples may not compile a written list, they will unconsciously accumulate a list of expectations within their minds that determine their acceptance of their mate.

Video L3C10 - <https://youtu.be/mrVIfyWVsSY>

- *If you treat me right, I'll treat you right.*
- *If you do your share of the housework, I'll do my share of the work.*
- *If you take out the garbage, I'll wash the dishes.*
- *If you speak kindly to me, I'll speak kindly to you.*
- *If you love me, I'll love you*
- *If you are a good husband, I'll be a good wife.*

This contractual list compiled in the minds of husbands and wives can continue on and on! This is not the approach to marriage that God intended. God always portrays marriage in scripture as a covenant held together with hesed! Unlike a contractual relationship, a covenant relationship says:

Video L3C11 - https://youtu.be/99_vdh1cg2g

- *I'm going to be the kind of husband I ought to be, even when you are not the wife you ought to be.*
- *I'm going to speak kindly to you, even when you don't speak kindly to me.*
- *I'm going to do my part, even when if you don't do your part.*
- *I'm going to love you, even when you don't love me.*

Sam Wood describes his efforts to live in a covenant relationship:

As soon as our honeymoon was over, I realized that I could never live out a marriage relationship this way. My human nature would never allow it. I wanted to insist on my way of doing things. My selfishness would try to convince me to get even when my wife was inconsiderate and took too long in the bathroom. My greed urged me to rebel when I wanted to purchase a golf club and she did not agree. My pride would continually raise its ugly head up and say, "It's not fair. I've got my rights." I had to continually remind myself that I had surrendered my life in covenant with God through Jesus Christ. I have God's enabling power within me to love and treat my spouse the same way God loves me.¹⁰

Oswald Chambers said, "Whenever our 'right' becomes the guiding factor of our lives, it dulls our spiritual insight."¹¹ The problem is marriage joins two imperfect independent people who are used to controlling their own lives, who are both used to expecting their "rights" to be honored.

But covenant says that a partner vows to die to himself and his rights in order to glorify God through promoting what is best for his spouse. In and of ourselves, this is next to impossible. But

¹⁰ Sam and Debbie Wood, *What is Marriage?*, (Jamestown, TN, Family Fortress Ministries, 2004), 85.

¹¹ Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1992), May 25.

with God all things are possible. If a Christian daily, with humble gratitude, remembers that Christ died for his selfishness; if he daily surrenders his independence and his way of doing things to the Holy Spirit, he will not succumb to the demands of his own selfishness (Galatians 5:16). Instead, he will, in love, serve the partner with whom he has covenanted. Marriage does not speak the language of rights, marriage speaks the language of responsibilities.

- Are you willing to enter into marriage with a covenant mindset, rather than with contractual expectations?

Yes

No

The Bible tells us that this covenant love in Jesus Christ is the strongest bond in the world. It is even stronger than death (Song 8:6-7)!

However, when life is challenging, Christians have a tendency to question if God's love will diminish:

Romans 8.35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?

Nothing can diminish hesed love. God gives His bride (the church) unquestionable security in her relationship with Jesus Christ as the bridegroom:

Romans 8.37-39 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ 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.

An engaged couple may look at crumbling marriages around them and wonder if their marriage has a chance. They may wonder if their relationship can weather the unexpected storms of life, sickness, financial challenges, mistakes, but the same supernatural covenant love that God demonstrates in the relationship with His bride is available to every Christian husband and wife. What one cannot do in his own self will and determination, God through His Holy Spirit can enable him to do. Therefore, every husband and wife can appropriate this same covenant love in their marriage and say:

For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, shall be able to separate our love as husband and wife, which is rooted in Jesus Christ!

Covenants do not stand unchallenged. They will be tested. Covenant relationships that withstand tests emerge much stronger. God was loyally committed to His covenant with Abraham, but He tested Abraham's devotion when he commanded Abraham to sacrifice something more precious than his own life, the life of his son (Genesis 22:1-11).

Video L3C12 - <https://youtu.be/Yp5msRdeWec>

Can you imagine! Any godly father prizes the life of his son over his own life. To sacrifice his own life would have been difficult enough, but to give his son's life required total surrender and trust in the one with whom he had covenanted. Through faith Abraham took his only son, Isaac, to Mount Moriah to be sacrificed to God. As Abraham stretched out his hand to slay his son, an angel of the Lord called to him from heaven

Gen. 22:12 Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me."

Abraham proves that he will trust God no matter what the cost! Abraham trusted God when he left his homeland and went into the land where God called him to go. Abraham trusted God when he was willing to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice to God on Mount Moriah.

Trust is essential to the survival of any relationship. As was stated earlier, contracts are based on distrust. Covenants are based on trust. Without trust you cannot have a covenant because trust is the bridge in every relationship!

➤ Do you trust Debbie?

Yes, I trust her implicitly.

I struggle with trust in general because other people have mistreated me.

I struggle because she has been deceptive in the past.

I struggle because she takes advantage of me.

No, I feel have to double check on what she does or says

Covenants will also be tested by challenges other than trust issues. At times unexpected or uncontrollable events that have nothing to do with marriage will test your covenant.

Video L3C13: <https://youtu.be/3JLW7VPMo34>

When Sam and I first got married we were able to purchase a nice home, but the color scheme and décor of the house was outdated and just was not us. We lived in that home the way it was for about two and a half years - then we upgraded....Not new flooring and light fixtures, we had our first son. I quit my job to

raise Josh and we were content to maintain the current looks of our house.

23 months later, another upgrade—Daniel was born.

A while after that, finally, we saved enough money to start planning our budget to remodel. I loved flipping through magazines and investigating alternatives and planning coordination from room to room.

Sam called from work one day and I was describing this fixture that I had discovered when I sensed a hesitation in his voice. He asked me to pray for him because he felt like God was trying to show him something. I did. I prayed for him and I prayed for good bargains for the remodeling. I sincerely wanted our lives and home to glorify God.

Sam called me back –same day and started describing how God had overwhelmed him to go into full-time Christian ministry.

I was stunned. Shocked. Scared. I was soooo disappointed because I knew this change would mean no more remodeling. I had generated so much enthusiasm in plans for the house that I felt like I was giving up the real me. It was hard.

God was testing my commitment to our marriage covenant. The covenant that I made to support my husband in God's purpose for his life needed to be stronger than the significance I would receive from a house that expressed my personality.

We ended up moving from that house to an older, smaller place. We faced a lot of changes and a lot of financial struggles,...but, I have never regretted the decision to reconfirm my covenant with my husband by setting aside a few plans and wholeheartedly supporting him.

Through all that our faith increased, but I most of all, proved I loved him. My confidence in our covenant intensified.

I can sincerely say I would rather have the precious bond generated by overcoming struggles than to have a totally coordinated house.

The principles that have been expounded from the Abrahamic covenant are powerful, but there are more. Another example in scripture that illustrates additional aspects of covenant is the friendship of David and Jonathan.

1 Samuel 18.1-4 As soon as he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. 2 And Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his father's house. 3 Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. 4 And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, and his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his belt.

Exchanging Likeness

Jonathan, the legal heir to the throne of Israel, humbly strips himself of his royal dress and places it upon his friend in acknowledgement of David being chosen by God to be king. David now outwardly bears the likeness of Jonathan's royalty.

Jonathan stripped himself of his robe, weapons, and girdle (belt) and gave them to David. These three items symbolized to David that he would take on Jonathan's likeness, his strengths, his weaknesses and his enemies.¹²

We also see this exemplified in Ephesians 4:22-24 when a Christian is commanded to "put off" his former way of doing things (the old man) and "put on" Christ's way of doing things (the new man). He is to put off pride and put on humility, put off harshness and put on kindness and goodness, put off impatience and put on longsuffering, put off selfishness and put on

¹² Kay Arthur, Beloved, A Daily Devotional (Eugene, Harvest House, 1994), June 1-June 30.

selflessness. Each of God's children is a new creation in Christ Jesus and is clothed in His robe of righteousness, meaning, each one should start to reflect Christlikeness to the world.

Similarly, in marriage when the husband and wife become "one-flesh," they each bear the likeness of a new person. The groom should no longer portray a carefree single guy, but a responsible married man. Likewise the bride should not flirt with other guys, but express a devoted commitment to her husband. The couple should be proud to be married to each other. They are now to share like goals, dreams, and purposes in their marriage covenant. Thinking switches from "me" to "we"; from "mine" to "our". The relationship is not competitive, but rather complementary.

Exchanging Strengths and Weaknesses

The exchange of belts between David and Jonathan symbolizes partners exchanging their strengths and weaknesses. In a covenant relationship with Christ, one is able to replace all of his weakness and inabilities with His strengths and abilities. Similarly, entering into a marriage covenant implies that you and Debbie take on each other's strengths and weaknesses.

Video L3C14new: <https://youtu.be/8pgQd0PkNd4>

The old saying that opposites attract is often true in marriage. We have found in our marriage that where one of us is weak the other is usually strong; therefore, we compensate for each other's weaknesses. This truth is also expounded by Solomon:

Eccl. 4:9-11 Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone?

When I am discouraged, I'm thankful for a wife who encourages me. When it's cold at night and the bed is freezing, Debbie is thankful that she can snuggle up to my warmer body. Because of my personality, I am a decision maker, and I naturally handle the routine financial decisions; but tedious record-keeping stresses me, so Debbie balances the checkbooks. When faced with the need for decisions concerning car maintenance and repair, I understand enough to make a confident decision where Debbie would nervously feel at the mercy of the advice of the mechanic. When the boys are hungry, she consistently provides tasty nutritional meals when I would settle for easily prepared junk food. God has made us differently; that's why we need each other so much. Two are better than one!

In marriage, God intends that this principle be used to edify and strengthen. However, many marriages allow their differences to become a point of division rather than using them to mobilize their strengths. Recognizing strengths in physical abilities, personality, and special talents allows a couple to function as partners that are pulling in the same direction.

- Please list in the text box the areas where you feel that you are weak and Debbie is strong:

Text Box answer

- List the traits and or assets from your life that could possibly enhance Debbie's life.

Text Box Answer

Exchanging Enemies

When Jonathan transferred his weapons to David, he was committing to join forces with David against any enemy David had. This is pretty significant since David's main enemy was none other than Jonathan's father, King Saul. When a man and woman enter into the marriage covenant, they join as one force against

any foe that would try to separate their union or harm them individually.

Video L3C15: <https://youtu.be/7Fq--Fu5hkY>

Andrea was devastated when she first discovered that her husband was addicted to pornography. She would wake up in the middle of the night and find Mark staring at vulgar sites on the internet. When she investigated the 900 charges on the phone bill, she found out that Mark was contacting sex operators. She was horrified. Her first impulse was to attack his character, but she remembered her pastor teaching that her spouse was not her enemy. Andrea drew herself together and acknowledged that the true enemy was Satan himself. She determined to stand against the enemy that was attacking her husband.

*Her prayer life intensified and she took authority against the evil influences. She cried out for deliverance for Mark. THEN She confronted Mark. She assured him that she was on his side and that she was battling for him. Mark admitted that he was struggling, but he just could not let go. Andrea investigated Christian agencies that minister to people with sexual addiction and she **insisted** that Mark attend counseling.*

When Andrea first discovered Mark's addiction, she had the ammunition and motive to initiate major marital conflict. She chose instead to join forces against her spouse's enemy.

In the self-sufficient society in which we live, many couples attempt to fortify their home through their own physical efforts. Many believe that a big bank account, a good security system, or some other tangible object will provide adequate protection. While these things may be beneficial, they are not effective in a spiritual war. This is why God instructs Christians to be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might, because His very real and hated enemy is also their real and active enemy. The devil may be unseen but he is subtly powerful. He is determined to wreak

havoc in a Christian's life. Human weapons of defensive words and strategy are ineffective against the devil's assault. To fight this spiritual war requires spiritual weapons! (Ephesians 6:10-12).

God has given every Christian marriage three spiritual weapons with which to fortify their homes:

- Prayer
- God's Word
- Power of the Holy Spirit.

Prayer requisitions protection and provision for the home; the precepts and promises of God's Word stabilize the home; and the power of the Holy Spirit adds love to the home. Spiritual weapons are required to defeat the power of the devil. As covenant partners, we must exercise the use of these spiritual weapons and battle for each other. No matter what you face in the future, remember, Debbie is not your enemy, the devil is. Aim your warfare at the devil.

- List ways that you will commit to stand against Debbie's enemies. Keep in mind that enemies may possibly include the devil, people, or emotional challenges.

Text Box Answer

We hope this lesson has provided you a clear understanding of what it means to enter into the marital covenant.

Preparing for Partnership
Online Premarital Training Lessons
Lesson Four - Spiritual Companionship

The concept of companionship began with God before the creation of the world.

God has always existed. In fact, God has always existed as a trinity-- one being in three persons, God the Father, God the Son and God the Spirit. Each person in the trinity continually orbits around the other persons within the trinity, in a continual state of worship pouring out love, honor, respect, and creativity. Each person of the trinity glorifies the other (John 17:5).

In explaining this divine relationship, theologian Cornelius Plantinga says:

The persons within God exalt each other, commune with each other, and defer to one another.... Each divine person harbors the others at the center of his being. In constant movement of overture and acceptance, each person envelops and encircles the others.... God's ¹³interior life [therefore] overflows with regard for others.

Tim Keller elaborates on this:

The Father, the Son, and the Spirit are each centering on the others, adoring and serving them. And because the Father, Son, and Spirit are giving glorifying love to one another, God is infinitely profoundly happy...Instead of self-centeredness, the father, the Son, and the Spirit are characterized in their very

¹³ Cornelius Plantinga quoted by Timothy Keller, *King's Cross: The Story of the World in the Life of Jesus* (New York: Dutton, 2011), 6

*essence by mutually self-giving love.*¹⁴

This is perfect community-- perfect companionship and it all existed before the creation of the world. Jesus described His relationship with the Father as being "one." He is equal with the Father, yet his purpose and pleasure is to serve His Father. The Father is intent on glorifying His Son.

Philippians 2.6-11 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The Philippians passage acknowledges the equality of the Father and the Son while at the same time recognizing a difference in their function and their roles. Although equal in essence, the Father leads the Godhead and the Son submits and is exalted. They exude perfect companionship, exalting, adoring, and loving each other.

The trinity of Father, Son and Spirit poured their majesty, wisdom, and love into the creation of the world, not because God needed something more out of life, but because He is life.

Image Bearers

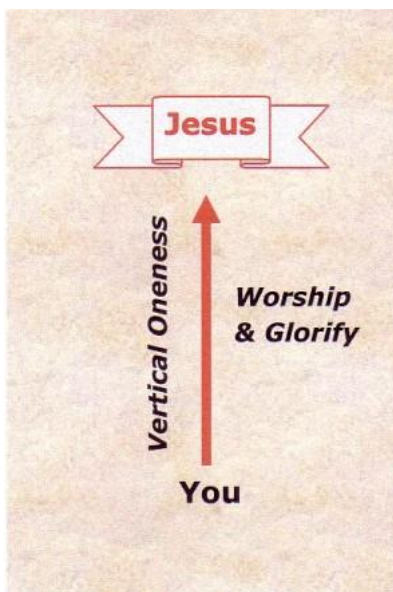
This trinitarian, relational God created both man and woman as image bearers of Himself (Gen 1:27). To be in the image of God means to be like God and to represent and reflect God here on

¹⁴ Timothy Keller, *King's Cross: The Story of the World in the Life of Jesus* (New York: Dutton, 2011), 7

Earth. Keller describes the orbiting relationship of the trinity as a dance and explains God's perspective in creating man and woman as an invitation to join the relationship, to be dance companions with Him:

He must have created us to invite us into the dance, to say: if you glorify me, if you center your entire life on me, if you find me beautiful for who I am in myself, then you will step into the dance, which is what you are made for....You are made to center everything in your life on me, to think of everything in terms of your relationship to me. To serve me unconditionally. That's where you'll find your joy.¹⁵

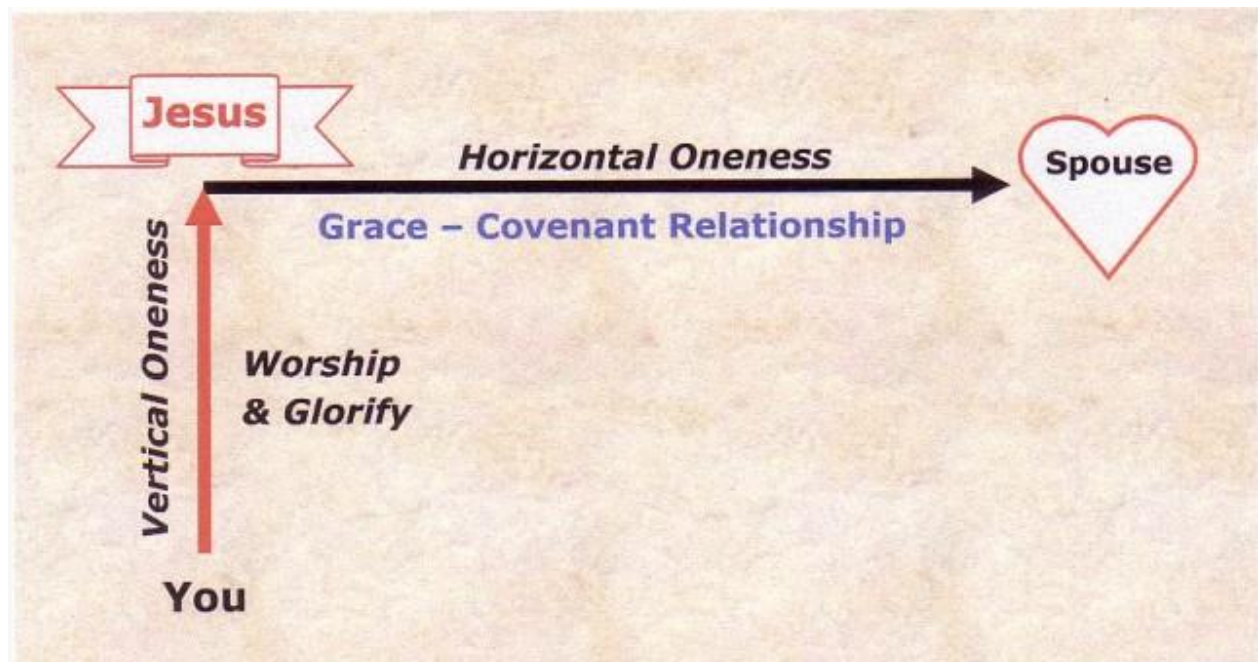
When we genuinely center our lives on Him, when He is our identity, when our purpose in life is to be in worshipful relationship with Him, we will overflow and outpour love. We will bear His image by being fountains of joy, just like Him. That is why Jesus says that the most important commandment is to love God with all of our being (Mark 12:30).



It is only then that we are able to obey the next commandment to love others as ourselves (Mark 12:31). We must have our

¹⁵ ibid

vertical relationship right with God before we experience the correct horizontal relationship with others. The more passionate our companionship is with Him, the more passionate and complete is our companionship with each other allowing us to minister to and serve each other.



Just as the three persons of the Godhead are equal to each other, God created man and woman to be equal in essence. Male and female stand before God (or should it be, dance around God): equal in value and equal in image (Galatians 3:28). Individuals may vary in looks, intellect, abilities, purposes, and temperament, but each one is equal in value.

- Do you consider Debbie as equal in value to yourself?

Yes

No

- Do you feel inferior to Debbie?

Yes

No

Husband and wife were created to be companions who are equal in value.

Video L4C1new: <https://youtu.be/N9a72C6-fCI>

A companion is someone that you share life with; someone that you are knit together with; someone that you participate in activities with; one that keeps company with another.

The etymology of the word companion breaks down as:

Com—with or together

Pan—bread

(As background have a pic(s) of a couple eating together.

Interesting that often the first tradition that a married couple observes is the exchange of wedding cake. This tradition actually symbolizes lifelong companionship, sharing not only meals, but sharing a bed, money, a home, children, work, recreation, plans for the future, dreams, struggles, and most importantly faith.

Different Roles

Just as the three persons of the Trinity are equal in essence, yet different in function, God created man and woman equal in essence, but different in function. He created them distinctively male and female and assigned them differing roles to fulfill within their companionship as husband and wife.

Before God created the female, He created the male and instructed him to work the garden in order to receive sustenance and pleasure from it. The male was to guard or keep the garden (Gen 2:15.) God designed man to be the protector and provider. God even physiologically designed man's body with a larger, more muscular frame that would better enable him to protect and provide. Note that man was not only to lead by protecting and

providing physically, but he was to protect his future family from ungodliness, that is the danger of ignoring God and self-directing their lives (symbolized by eating from the forbidden tree (Genesis 2:15-17.))

Genesis 2.18 Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."

"Adam had all he needed and was unaware of any incompleteness or loneliness until God brought it to his attention."¹⁶ God declares that man is lonely and that He will provide a specialized companion. Genesis 2:18 uses the word, "helper" to describe the companion that God created for man. The word means one who enables or one who empowers. It is the same word that is used often to describe the person of God as one who helps us (Psalm 46:1). The husband and wife would be a team, a unit, partners knit together with the common goal of joyful obedience to the Creator. They would experience life and respond to life together. As companions they would mutually encourage and support each other, thus eliminating loneliness.

In order to help Adam, recognize the void in his life, God instructs Adam to name the animals as they parade before him.

Video L4C2 - https://youtu.be/hHHNfUXX_bc

We know from the generalized creation account in Genesis 1:22 that God created animals to be fruitful and multiply and since procreation requires two sexes, the animals were probably gathered in pairs as they paraded in front of Adam to be named. In naming the animals, the first man no doubt marveled in the variety, magnitude, and wonder of God's creation, but at the same time the scripture notes that Adam recognized that he did not have a companion. There was not another earthly being like him. He had no one to laugh with, no one to talk to, no one to

¹⁶ Virginia Fugate, On the Other Side of the Garden: Biblical Womanhood for Today's World (Tempe, Arizona: Aletheia Division of Alpha Omega Publications, 1992), 8

surprise, no one to enjoy a meal with, no one to work with, or no one to worship with.

He realized his loneliness. This prepared the heart of Adam so that when God presented his companion to him, he would recognize the preciousness of this gift.

Genesis 2.21-22 So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. 22 And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.

Although God declared that it was not good for man to be alone, woman was not an afterthought. He planned from the beginning to create a female companion for Adam. He on purpose allowed Adam to recognize his aloneness so that he would realize the value of his wife.

God had created man from dirt, but the particular Hebrew word that scripture uses, “made,” means to artistically construct or to fashion (Genesis 2:7.) God fashioned woman from man. A part of man was taken from him, fashioned into his likeness and brought back to him to complete him and be his companion.

He now had someone to connect with, someone to experience the wonder of God’s creation with, someone to eliminate loneliness in his life.

Genesis 2.23 Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man."

When Adam saw Eve, he was overcome with delight that God would love and care for him so much that He would design and construct the perfect companion for Him. Some Hebrew scholars claim that he was so thrilled that he actually sang these words. Adam repeats the word —my bones,—my flesh because woman

was such a very personal gift. She belonged to him exclusively, not to dominate, but to cherish.

- Describe the first time you laid eyes on Debbie. How did you feel?

Text Box Answer: Beautiful

Do you consider Debbie to be a precious gift to you?

Yes No

Genesis 2.24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

God's goal for a married couple is that their companionship be such a powerful bond that they can almost be identified as one person or one unit. For example, after you have been married for a while, when referencing you or thinking about you, your friends will probably refer to you automatically as Sam & Debbie.

On the wedding day, the couple covenants to be companions in all areas of life, forever. Just like the trinity, the companions are equal in essence, but different in function. The husband leads by providing and protecting in all areas of life while the wife completes her husband by empowering and enabling him to fulfill God's purposes for their lives.

The Apostle Paul expounds upon the meshing of these roles in Ephesians 5. Before he explains the roles in marriage, he reminds husbands and wives that their companionship is to first orbit around God, then around each other so that their lives will constantly outpour joy, peace, and love to God and each other as they serve and minister to one another.

Ephesians 5.18-21 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, ²⁰ giving thanks

always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,²¹ submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Paul continues by explaining that marriage is to be patterned after Christ and His bride, the church. The husband, as protector and provider is to lovingly lead his bride in the same way that Christ lovingly leads His bride. The wife is to picture the bride of Christ as she lovingly, out of devotion, yields to the leadership of her husband, helping (empowering and enabling) him to accomplish the will of God.

Ephesians 5.22-33 Wives submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.²³ For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,²⁶ that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,²⁷ so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.²⁸ In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.²⁹ For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church,³⁰ because we are members of his body.³¹ "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."³² This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.³³ However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Many today think that this teaching by Paul is just an antiquated cultural teaching that only suited the day in which he was living. Therefore, they believe that this teaching is not applicable to

modern marriages. In addressing this thinking, John Piper aptly states:

In the Bible, differentiated roles for men and women are never traced back to the fall of man and woman into sin. Rather, the foundation of this differentiation is traced back to the way things were in Eden before sin warped our relationships. Differentiated roles were corrupted, not created by the fall. They were created by God.¹⁷

Differentiated roles are and always have been God's plan for marriage. To resist these roles is to dishonor God.

Compare marriage to an NBA team comprised of a coaching staff and players. The coach determines the game plan and makes the major decisions, but the starting players are more athletic and normally make more money than the coach. The players submit to the coach for the good of the team. The players and the coach are each vitally important to the team. The same is true in marriage.

Paul addresses the specific role of a wife when he explains that a wife is to submit to her own husband. Submission is a very misunderstood word. It has nothing to do with inferiority or superiority. Submission is voluntary allegiance or loyalty that requires adapting to another's needs. As explained earlier, the husband and wife are equal companions that serve each other in different capacities. The wife is a nurturer who empowers, enables, and encourages her husband according to his specific needs. In all areas of life, foremost in her mind should be the thought, "How can I help him? How can I serve him?" Just as each person of the trinity delights in adoring and serving one another, a wife should find pleasure in serving her husband.

¹⁷ John Piper, *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991), 35

Paul elaborates on the function of a wife in Titus 2.

Titus 2.4-5 and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, ⁵ to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.

The wife is to focus on her relationship with God, continually worshipping, so that she will be energized to outpour love into her family by being the manager of the home. The home is all about relationships, therefore the home should be managed in a way that blesses all that are connected to it. Managing the home involves overseeing the functions of the household, nurturing, organizing, cleaning, cooking, all for the benefit of the family.

Proverbs 31.10-31 An excellent wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels. ¹¹ The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. ¹² She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life. ¹³ She seeks wool and flax, and works with willing hands. ¹⁴ She is like the ships of the merchant; she brings her food from afar. ¹⁵ She rises while it is yet night and provides food for her household and portions for her maidens. ¹⁶ She considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard. ¹⁷ She dresses herself with strength and makes her arms strong. ¹⁸ She perceives that her merchandise is profitable. Her lamp does not go out at night. ¹⁹ She puts her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle. ²⁰ She opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy. ²¹ She is not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household are clothed in scarlet. ²² She makes bed coverings for herself; her clothing is fine linen and purple. ²³ Her husband is known in the gates when he sits among the elders of the land. ²⁴ She makes linen garments and sells them; she delivers sashes to the merchant. ²⁵ Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come. ²⁶ She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue. ²⁷ She looks well

to the ways of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness. ²⁸ Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: ²⁹ "Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all." ³⁰ Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. ³¹ Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates.

As part of supporting her husband, the wife manages the home, but because marriage is a companionship, a sensitive husband recognizes the immensity of this responsibility and should be willing to pitch in and help her with the household tasks.

- Are you willing to help Debbie with home improvement projects?

Yes, when our finances allow it

I am not a handyman, but I will hire or recruit someone who can help.

Changing things are unnecessary

She can handle stuff like that herself

No

Another aspect of submission involves following the lead of the husband. As a helper, one who enables and empowers, a wife should humbly, respectfully, and lovingly convey her perspective in major decisions. To withhold her perspective may deny her husband of the wisdom and talents God wishes to add to his life. A considerate husband will welcome his wife's perspective and objectively reflect on it. However, when a husband and wife continue to differ in perspective, a wife yields to the leadership of the husband. She is not submitting to his leadership because he deserves it or has earned it, or is always right, but because she trusts and obeys God. Submission is an act of faith.

Submission requires the death of self for the good of the one that you are entering covenant with.

- When you and Debbie have different perspectives on a matter, how do you foresee that the two of you will reach a decision?

Text Box Answer: Discuss it

The wife's submission to her husband gets placed in the context of a marriage in which a husband is called to be like Christ—laying down his life on her behalf, putting her first, serving her, caring for her, always loving her in the same sacrificial, lay-down-your-life manner in which Christ loves the church (Ephesians 5:25).

Paul describes an idealistic view of a simultaneous commitment to each other's welfare. I don't mean to use "idealistic" in a negative way—certainly every marriage should strive for it. But I also think Paul would be the first to object if he heard women being urged to submit while condescending and dictatorial husbands heard no corresponding challenge to love in the manner of Christ. The church must not teach submission of wives apart from the sacrificial love and servanthood required of husbands. This doesn't mean a husband's lack of sacrificial love cancels a wife's call to submission, but it does make applying that principle a little trickier.¹⁸

Ephesians 5.25-27 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶ that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without

¹⁸ Gary Thomas, *Sacred Influence* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 79

spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

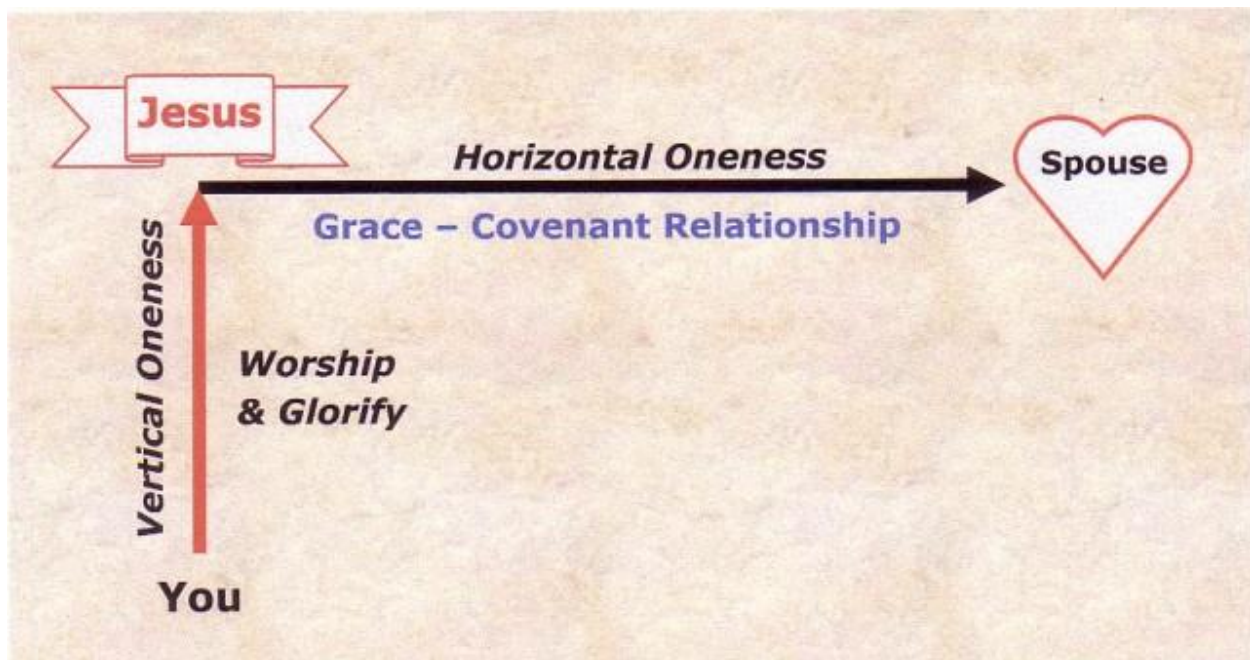
What is the responsibility of the husband in these verses?

The husband's main responsibility is to emulate the headship of Jesus with His bride, the church. The verses emphasize that headship's love is expressed through sacrifice.

Video L4C3: <https://youtu.be/NwhryCnoxMI>

Jesus was crucified for our sin. He died in our place and bore our sin upon Himself that we might live! In order to emulate the headship of Jesus, a husband must:

- 1) To have a personal relationship with Jesus!*
- 2) Get a fresh view of the cross every day! This means reflecting on the depth of your personal unworthiness that was atoned for by the undeserved costly sacrifice of the Son of God.*



Sacrificial love says:

I'm willing to die to myself for the good of the one I entered into covenant with.

Milton Vincent describes death to self¹⁹:

- *I must seize upon every God given opportunity to be conformed more fully to Christ's death, no matter the pain involved.*
- *When my flesh yearns for some prohibited thing, I must die!*
- *When called to do something that I don't want to do, I must die!*
- *When I wish to be selfish and serve no one, I must die!*
- *When wanting to cling to wrongs done against me, I must die!*
- *When enticed by the allurements of the world, I must die!*
- *When wishing to keep besetting sins secret, I must die!*
- *When dreams that are good seem shoved aside, I must die!*
- *Not my will, but your will be done!*

The husband's responsibility is not to dominate his wife, control his wife or to make his wife into his servant. The husband's responsibility is to serve his wife and lead her with love. Every decision he makes should be based on what is best for her, no matter what the cost to himself.

Christ literally gave His life for His bride. Most husbands will never have the opportunity to die physically for their wives, although they should be willing to. Sometimes, however it is more difficult for a husband to sacrifice his agenda, his time, his comforts, his recreation, and his habits than it is to die.

Sacrifice is costly.

NO COST = NO SACRIFICE

¹⁹ Milton Vincent, *A Gospel Primer for Christians* (Bemidji, MN: Focus Publishing, 2008), p 41.

As a companion who sacrifices, a husband is considerate of his wife's needs, always alert to pitch in and help with chores around the house or with the children. He is willing to give up activities with the guys in order to free her to do something she wants to do. He willingly sacrifices his time and energy to provide for his wife. He takes time to listen to her. Activities with her take priority over games, TV, hunting, and recreation.

- Did you see this type of sacrificial love modeled in the relationship between your father and mother?

Yes

Somewhat

No

- List ways in which you currently sacrifice in order to convey love to Debbie.

Text Box Answer:

- List any additional sacrifices you foresee that you will make once you are married.

Text Box Answer:

Ephesians 5.25-27 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶ that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

Paul teaches in this passage that the goal of Christ's sacrifice is His bride's holiness. The apostle Paul uses the word "sanctify" to convey how this takes place. To be sanctified means to be set apart for God and for His special use and purposes. When a person becomes a Christian, that person is positioned into a relationship with Christ. This person now belongs to Christ, is identified with Christ, and is called by His name.

This is a wonderful thing. This is what the Lord Jesus Christ has done with the church. The same occurs when a man finds his affections and his love set apart upon one girl out of thousands. He chooses her for himself, and he selects her from all the others. 'She is to be mine', he says. So he separates her, isolates her, 'sanctifies' her, puts her there quite on her own. He wants her for himself.²⁰

In marriage, a wife is set apart and positioned into the relationship with her husband. She takes on his name and is identified specifically with him.

Paul uses another important word to describe how the bride of Christ will be made holy. This is the word "cleanse". This refers to a continual process of purification. But, how is this continual purification to be accomplished? Paul's answer is that it is accomplished through the repeated "washing of water with the word."

Paul is saying that the Bible, the "Word" is the cleansing agent that purifies us from the power and pollution of sin. Jesus said:

John 15.3 Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.

John 17.17 Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.

If the husband is to emulate Christ's headship with the church, then he must cleanse his wife and sanctify her by washing her regularly and repeatedly in the Word of God, thereby purifying their marriage relationship with the Word. This means that a husband is to lead his wife spiritually by reading and studying the

²⁰ D.M. Lloyd-Jones, *Life in the Spirit*, Ephesians 5:18-6:9 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1973), 153

Bible with her regularly. This requires a husband to personally dedicate time to read, meditate, and memorize the Bible himself.

Jesus continually cleanses His bride with the Word of God so that she can one day be presented to Him as a glorious, holy bride of splendor (glorification). Likewise, the goal for every husband is to help his wife grow in glory and splendor—to increase her joy and peace in her relationship with Jesus.

- Do you currently pursue an intimate relationship with God through Bible Study?

I regularly find strength and pleasure in personal Bible Study

I make myself read the Bible regularly

I know that I should, but I do not set aside a regular time for this

Not really interested

I am not a Christian, so this does not apply

- How often do you and Debbie read the Bible together?

Regularly

Occasionally, but we plan to do this regularly once we are married.

Occasionally

Rarely

Never

I am not a Christian so this does not apply

Spiritual companionship also includes praying together.

Matthew 18.19-20 Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in

heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."

"The Greek word mesos used for "among" has the sense of being "between" or "in the midst" which implies that the Holy Spirit is flowing out of each person present and filling the space surrounding them."²¹ This means that God Himself is present when a husband and wife join together in a PRAYER OF AGREEMENT. The more the couple prays together, the more they are releasing the power of God into their home. This keeps the couple filled with the love of God that enables them to selflessly serve one another. Praying together allows the petty differences in marriage to be set aside so that you can focus on God and each other.

Video L4C4: <https://youtu.be/lvrOiGMeCVc>

Submission is one of the most difficult things I have ever attempted because I think differently than my husband and I want to do things my way. However, submission can become a much easier way of life when the husband is leading in the way that was just described. I delight in following my husband when he speaks kindly and respectfully to me and when he does sweet things for me, but I am stirred to devotion when he prays with me—not a mechanical prayer, but when he bares his heart before God admitting his weaknesses and requesting wisdom from God. When he opens his Bible with me and shows me his personal fascination with what God is saying, I am freed to follow him because I know he is submitting to Almighty All Sufficient God and I am ultimately submitting to God through him.

- Do you currently pursue an intimate relationship with God through personal prayer?

I regularly find strength and pleasure in personal prayer

²¹ Terry Wier, Holy Sex (New Kensington, Pa: Whitaker House,1999), 80

I make myself pray everyday

I know that I should, but I do not set aside a regular time for this

Not really interested

I pray when I need something

I don't really know how to pray

I am not a Christian, so this does not apply

➤ How often do you and Debbie pray together?

Regularly

Occasionally, but we plan to do this once we are married

Occasionally

When we need something

I feel inadequate and am embarrassed to pray in front of someone

Rarely

I am not a Christian so this does not apply

Never

Spiritual Companionship includes worshipping together with other believers, meaning attending church together. The importance of married couples attending church together is even shown in secular surveys:

During the 1980s and 1990s, when religious practice decreased overall, the association between regular religious attendance and marital stability became even more apparent. Those who had ceased religious practice divorced 2.5 times more frequently than those who continued to attend religious services²².

- Do you plan to attend church regularly once you are married?

Yes. We currently attend the same church and will continue to attend regularly.

We will visit different churches together until we find one that we both want to attend.

I will attend the church of my choice. Debbie will attend the church of her choice.

I will attend church regularly. I am not sure about Debbie

No. I will probably not go to church very often

- List the criteria that you feel should be considered when determining the church that you will attend.

Text Box Answer:

Keeping in mind that the reason a husband leads his wife in prayer, Bible study, and worship is so that she will grow in glory, he must also be sensitive that he never degrade his wife by speaking critically or hatefully. This requires death to self. This concept of sacrificial love is so critical that Paul elaborates even more:

Ephesians 5.28-30 In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ For no

²² Timothy T. Clydesdale, "Family Behaviors Among Early U.S. Baby Boomers: Exploring the Effects of Religion and Income Change, 1965-1982," Social Forces, Vol. 76, No. 2 (December 1997), pp. 605-635.

one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church,³⁰ because we are members of his body.

In the same way that a man cannot detach his head from his body, a husband should not detach himself from his wife. He is to think of his wife as being part of himself. Remember this is how Adam felt when God presented Eve to him (Genesis 2:23.)

Jesus also claimed that His bride was part of him. When He came to Saul (later named Paul) on the Damascus road, he questioned, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" (Acts 9:4). Saul had been arresting and killing Christians. Jesus was inferring that when Saul persecuted the church (the bride of Jesus), he was literally persecuting Him. Or, Jesus was saying, the church is me, my body! Similarly, a husband must have the mindset that his wife is his body.

A husband must be concerned for and care for his wife in the same way that he is concerned for himself. Paul uses the words, "nourishes" and "cherishes" to describe the way a person cares for his own body.

"Nourish" means to bring up, to feed, or to fatten. A person nourishes his body with food, shelter, clothing, and protection. In the same way a husband is to nourish his wife:

- When she needs strength, he gives her strength.
- When she needs encouragement, he gives her encouragement.
- When she needs protection, he protects her.
- When she needs food, he feeds her.

Bodies are also strengthened and nourished by exercise. The EXERCISE in marriage is COMMUNICATION. Husbands need to talk with their wives about everything that's going on, whether they feel like talking or not. A husband needs to take time to listen to his wife and find out what's going on in her life.

(Communication will be covered more in depth in another lesson.)

A husband is not nourishing his body when he neglects or abuses it. Neglect or physical and emotional abuse is a blatant refusal to nourish your wife and is abhorrent to God.

The other word that Paul uses to describe how a husband is to love his wife is “cherish.” Cherish means to keep warm, to give tender loving care and to show affection. The word “husband” actually means to CARE FOR.

Video L4C5: <https://youtu.be/wmYM5NvDvDU>

A husband cares for his wife by “cherishing her” through warming her with physical affection and tender loving care.

My wife loves the fact that God tells husbands to cherish their wives and that the word cherish means to warm. At night, her feet have a tendency to get cold—ice cold and she likes to crawl in the bed and remind me that it is my responsibility to sacrifice my warm body to defrost her popsicle toes. As a matter of fact she is convinced that to be one flesh means means we are to be one temperature.

Affection does not have a motive. Affection simply represents a heart that cherishes. When Sam holds me, gently caresses my cheek, and snuggles up next to me softly whispering how much he loves me, my spirit is immediately lifted and I feel precious to him. When he is driving and I reach over and rub his back or run my fingers through his hair or pat his leg, he knows that I am thinking loving thoughts about him. Affection confirms love.

Mel Gibson, playing cab driver Jerry Fletcher in the movie “Conspiracy Theory,” said this to someone riding in his cab:

“Love gives you wings! It makes you fly. I don’t even call it love—I call it Geronimo. You see, when you are in love, you’ll jump from the top of the Empire State building and you won’t care—screaming Geronimo all the way down!”

"Then you'll die," objects the passenger. "You'll squash yourself."

"Love gives you wings," Fletcher replied.

Nothing gives love new wings like affection.²³

- Describe what the word affection means to you.

Text Box Answer

- Describe your idea of a romantic evening.

Text Box Answer

After exhorting wives to convey devoted love and husbands to demonstrate sacrificial love, Paul emphasizes that the result of this combination is a unique precious bond. He accomplishes this by repeating the verse from Genesis.

Ephesians 5.31 "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."

When the Bible commands a couple to leave, it is declaring that their marriage must be the priority relationship in their earthly life. The only relationship that should have priority over the marriage relationship is their personal relationship with Christ!

Video L4C6: <https://youtu.be/-1DCUJuBccw>

1) The marriage relationship has priority over parents.

A couple should always honor their parents, but leaving them requires that the purse strings and the apron strings be cut.

2) The marriage relationship has priority over children.

A mother and father must be responsible to love, provide, care for, and train their children, but it is a tragic mistake to pour all of your devotion into those children at the neglect of a spouse.

²³ Sam and Debbie Wood, What is Marriage?, (Jamestown, TN: Family Fortress Ministries, 2004), 44-45

God's Word teaches that mate to mate is a higher relationship in the Bible than child to parent. Children whose parents express obvious love and commitment within their marriage feel more secure than children whose parents neglect spouses in order to center their attention on the child.

3) The marriage relationship has priority over friends.

4) The marriage relationship has priority over a career.

5) The marriage relationship has priority over hobbies and recreation.

Christ must be your top priority, then your marriage! If your marriage does not remain your highest earthly priority, it will probably not be permanent. That's why the verse admonishes husbands to cleave or hold fast to their wives. The connotation of this is to be glued together, to be inseparable, to be permanent.

God designed marriage to be a ceaseless, permanent, exclusive legal commitment to share in a loving covenant of companionship for an entire lifetime. A covenant of companionship is an incredible lifelong bond meshed together by the undying devotion of a wife to a husband who is willing to sacrifice his rights, his time, his energy, and his pleasure for her.

- List anything that you foresee could potentially hinder your marriage from being your highest earthly priority.

Text Box Answer

- Are you ready to commit to a permanent relationship?

Yes

Not yet. We are using this curriculum to determine if we should pursue a permanent relationship

We will do our best to make this marriage work,
but if things don't work out, we will go our
separate ways but remain friends forever.

No

Ephesians 5.32 This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

The profound mystery of marriage is that it is a divine display of Jesus Christ and the church.

Why is it so significant that married couples grasp that marriage is a picture of Christ and His bride, the church? The heartfelt realization of what Christ has done for His bride is the glue that holds this incredible bond together. Basing our life and marriage on who God is and what He has done for us is the key to life and marriage.

If an individual's life is not centered on God, he will of necessity be concerned for his own wellbeing. Instead of giving joy and love, he will be seeking self-fulfillment. Self-orbiting is what damages and can eventually destroy companionship.

Remember Keller's quote about the relationship of the Trinity?

The Father, the Son, and the Spirit are each centering on the others, adoring and serving them. And because the Father, Son, and Spirit are giving glorifying love to one another, God is infinitely profoundly happy...Instead of self-centeredness, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are characterized in their very essence by mutually self-giving love.²⁴

Christ's desire is that we experience the wonder of this relationship in marriage (John 17:9-26, Ephesians 5:22-32). To achieve this, Paul summarizes the way a husband and wife are to emulate Christ and His bride:

²⁴ Ibid.,7

Ephesians 5.33 However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Applying this verse:

Sam must be willing, no matter the circumstances, no matter how Debbie treats him, to continually express affection as he leads her by providing for her, by protecting her, by doing what is best for her. This does not mean that Debbie will always get whatever she desires, but that Sam is committed to selfless decisions that will ultimately be the best choice for her future well being. Debbie must be willing, no matter the circumstance, no matter how Sam treats her, to be devoted to respectfully enabling him and empowering him to fulfill God's purpose in His life.

Paul emphasizes an urgency that Debbie respect Sam's leadership. This does not mean that she commits to blindly comply with each of his requests, but that she always conveys an attitude of respect for his position. When there is an area where her opinion differs from Sam's, she should respectfully express her perspective in the matter, then be willing to accept his decision and follow his lead. If Sam ever directs the family to disobey the Word of God, she should show respect to Sam but humbly obey God rather than him (Acts 4:29).

Several hundred years ago Martin Luther described a godly and a good marriage this way:

Let the wife make the husband glad to come home, and let him make her sorry to see him leave.

- Have you ever considered that a female tends to yearn more
- for affection and security while a male tends to yearn for respect?

Yes

No, but it makes sense

No, I disagree

- List ways that you would like for Debbie to convey respect to you as the leader of the family.

Text Box Answer

Preparing for Partnership
Online Premarital Training Lessons
Lesson Five - Emotional Companionship

Emotional companionship originated with the Trinity. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit have always existed in community with love, respect, and admiration emanating from one member of the Godhead to the others. This is the character of God. Because man is made in the image of God, he is a social creature with a strong longing for emotional companionship. That is why God declares that it is not good that man should be alone.

The first marriage exhibited God's intent for emotional companionship. Adam and Eve lived in paradise where every need in their life was met by God. They completely trusted God and lived in joyful dependence upon Him. They found their soul's delight in God. As long as their security and significance was in God—as long as the basis for their identity was their relationship with God; they, like the Trinity, overflowed with love, gratitude, and respect. They lived in worship; a state of awe for the creator accompanied by gratitude for the creation. As a result, they were thankful for each other. Their relationship with God was the basis of the emotional bond that existed between the two of them.

Genesis describes their relationship as “naked” and without shame.

Gen 2.24-25 Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. ²⁵ And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

All other creatures were given coverings. Animals have fur, birds have feathers, fish have scales or shells. But man did not need an outer covering, for the Psalmist tells us God “crowned him with glory and honor” (Psalm 8:5). In essence the man and woman

*were clothed with the glory of the Lord and didn't need natural clothing.*²⁵

Although the term “naked” obviously establishes that the couple was not covered physically with clothes, it also implies that they were not covered emotionally with pretense. To be naked emotionally suggests an atmosphere of transparency in which the couple was fully known by each other, yet they were still completely loved and accepted. Since there was no shame, no humiliation, no defensiveness, no competition, no urgency to prove oneself, no fear of rejection, they lived in an atmosphere of gratitude, devotion and liberty where they could love unconditionally.

This demonstrates the divine plan for every marital relationship; that a husband and wife be completely transparent or emotionally naked with one another. Each spouse should have the liberty to share dreams without fear of ridicule and to admit struggles without fear of condemnation or rejection. When an individual supports the dreams of his spouse; when a partner joins forces with his spouse in overcoming her struggles, an incredible emotional bond is generated. When a couple dreams, shares, laughs and cries together, they are experiencing emotional companionship.

The depth of emotional intimacy in your relationship with Debbie will be directly proportional to the amount of personal revelation that you and she are willing to disclose to each other.

True unhindered emotional companionship requires a relationship of light where nothing is hidden, where there are no secrets or private arenas of personal life. Light reveals where darkness hides! Therefore, as long as the two of you, like Adam and Eve, walk in the light (the presence of God) you will experience the liberty to be totally open, or as the scripture declares “naked”

²⁵ John Bevere, *The Fear of the Lord* (Lake Mary: Creation House, 1997), p. 35

because God is light and in Him is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5). In relationship with God, the individual is totally known, but still loved and accepted (Ephesians 1:6). This divine security provides the confidence to risk exposing your deepest dreams and your toughest struggles to your mate because your security and significance will not be dependent upon your mate's acceptance but will be founded in your acceptance from Jesus Christ.

- Do you feel a liberty to share your dreams (goals) with Debbie without a fear of ridicule?

Yes **No**

- Are there any struggles in your life that you are embarrassed to admit to Debbie?

Yes **No**

- Do you have any secrets that Debbie is not aware of?

Yes **No**

When Adam and Eve led lives that were focused on the Creator, all of their needs were met in Him and His provision (Genesis 1:27-29). They experienced rewarding emotional companionship. Then:

Gen 3.1-6 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" ² And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, ³ but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.' " ⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. ⁵ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." ⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree

was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

Video L5C1: <https://youtu.be/p2u1velPXHQ>

The serpent (the devil) distracted the first couple and shifted their focus away from the Creator to created things. Self-centered thoughts invaded their hearts. Instead of delightfully trusting in the sufficiency of God through joyful obedience, they entertained the desire to control their own destiny. The result was sin and corruption (death). Shame immediately prodded them to hide—to cover up truth about themselves—to abandon transparency. In order to compensate for this loss, they resorted to blaming, manipulation, deception, justifying wrong behavior-- anything to avoid the truth (Genesis 3:8-13). Conflict in all human relationships, but especially in marriage has been the inevitable result.

Ever since the fall of man into sin, the futile stress of proving one's personal worthiness vaulted to the forefront of every human mind. Humans developed the tendency to seek security and significance from a mate without first finding it in God. This opens the door for fear to enter the relationship; fear of rejection and fear of failure. Fear of rejection results from the worry and concern that a spouse or anyone for that matter might consider you unacceptable, whereas, the pressure to perform acceptably promotes a fear of failure. Instead of living a life which is yielded to God, humans now base their decisions and responses on fear. The Bible describes fear as tormenting (1 John 4:18). It plagues your thought life with worry. This type of fear fosters a life that is either defensive or in extreme need of assurance. The relationship becomes tense and self-absorbed.

Since God's love and grace is greater than the sin of man, He promised to send a rescuer to deliver mankind out of this despairing darkness and usher them back into His light (Genesis 3:15). This promise was fulfilled in His Son Jesus Christ (Luke 4:18, John 8:32, John 14:6).

Because transparency increases the risk of rejection and leaves one feeling vulnerable, stable emotional companionship must be grounded by a confidence that comes from the security of a relationship with Christ.

- Have these truths alerted you to the possibility that you might not be a Christian?

Yes, I'm not sure that I am a Christian

No, I know that I am a Christian

The Christian life is a journey where one continually grows in an understanding of Jesus and His ways until one day (in heaven) he is like Jesus. Until then, we as human beings must battle the influence of a dark and corrupted world.

How will this fact play out in your marriage?

You will have a tendency to filter the situations in your married life through your personal perspective. Debbie will have a tendency to filter the same challenges through her different perspective. Conflict will result (Luke 17:1.) Each partner will be tempted to react in ways that hinder transparency.

However, occurrences of conflict and lack of transparency can be minimized by understanding and exercising simple communication skills.

Video L5C2: <https://youtu.be/SN1vgEpt4vg>

Research shows that there are four vital parts to effective communication. The first part is called the intent. The intent is the motive behind what you say.

For example, let's say that I have been out of town for several days and when I come home, my wife Debbie says; "Let's go outside, take a walk and look at the flowers."

Now being the logical thinking man that I am and having already made a list of the things that I needed to do when I got home, I might answer her this way, "We'll walk later."

In this illustration, what does Debbie really want from me; "Time alone".

You might say well you are pretty insensitive if you didn't understand that all she really wanted was to spend some time with you. But, I would answer, "yes, but you need to remember that men and women think differently." A woman thinks more from her heart, where a man thinks more from his head. I wasn't trying to be insensitive; rather, I was just thinking logically about all of catching up I had to do.

This brings us to the second part of communication which is called the criteria. The criteria is the plan for how to accomplish the intent. Most people hide the intent and communicate in the criteria. Going back to our example, Debbie communicated in the criteria, "Let's go outside and take a walk and look at the flowers." She made the assumption that I would understand her intent; to have time alone with me.

To avoid miscommunication, make sure the intent is clear. Don't make the false assumption that if you communicate in the criteria that your spouse will understand the intent of what you said.

As shown in the video, the first two essential elements in effective communication are the intent and the criteria. The third element is:

3. The Content: What we end up talking about.

Jan McLaughlin explains:

If we haven't made our intent clear and haven't shared our criteria, the content can become the battleground. Say you need to discuss with a coworker the impact it has on your team when they're late—which they frequently are. If we start the conversation with the sarcastic question, "So, is your alarm clock broken?" they are immediately placed on the defensive and will likely come back with an equally sarcastic retort. And, there are two words that signal the discussion we're having is about to deteriorate into an argument. We call them absolutes—always and never. "You're always late." "Am not." "Are too." "Am not." "Are too." Conversation over and nothing accomplished.

The final element is:

4. The Process: The manner in which you communicate

*The last essential factor in communication is the process—how we communicate. Albert Mehrabian in his book, *Silent Messages*, determined that if our message is incongruent, people will depend on what they see—our facial expressions and body language—for 55% of the message they receive. They will depend on what they hear—the tone, volume, pace and pitch of our voice—for 38% of the message they receive. Our words comprise a mere 7% of the message people receive IF our communication is incongruent.*

We want to make sure our voice and body language agree with the words that we say. We need to strive for congruent communication.

When we are careful to share our intent and criteria with others, when we think through our content and process, we are much more likely to get the results we want.²⁶

How does this affect your future marriage?

²⁶ <http://www.yourcommunicationconnection.com/resources.htm>

A couple tends to communicate emotions much more through body language and sound of voice than through the actual words said.

Video L5C3: <https://youtu.be/b3xFBJwW6JI>

The sound of the voice has 3 distinct characteristics. The first part is the tone which is the harshness or pitch of your voice.

For example, many years ago when I worked at an engineering firm, I would leave early in the morning to go slave away all day long for my wife and kids.

I mean I had to work, and my wife was lucky, she got to stay home with the kids. When I got off from work around 5 o'clock, I would think to myself, "I bet when I get home, Debbie will have the red carpet rolled out for her king. She will have a wonderful supper and my favorite dessert waiting for me."

When I pulled up in the driveway and went inside the house, there was no red rolled carpet out. And as I walked by the dining room, I didn't smell any food and did not see any food on the table.

I walked into the kitchen where I saw Debbie pulling some pots and pans out and I say to her, "I thought we were going to have supper at 5 o'clock!" How is she probably going to respond? ----- "here are the pans, help yourself." Or, "McDonalds is right down the road."

Well, how she responds will probably be determined by the sound or tone of my voice. If I say gently, "I thought we were going to have supper at 5 o'clock"; I might get by with that. But if I am abrupt or harsh---, "I thought we were going to have supper at 5 o'clock"; I probably would not get by with that.

The second characteristic is the tempo. I could say (fast), "I thought we were going to have supper at 5 o'clock" or I could say it much slower, "I thought we were going to have supper at 5

o'clock". How fast I speak also determines how my communication is received.

Thirdly is the volume of what I say. If I say it loud and shout, "I thought we were going to have supper at 5 o'clock", I probably wouldn't get by with that, but if I say it in a lower tone, "I thought we were going to have supper at 5 o'clock", I might get by with that.

A sarcastic tone communicates a different emotional message than a gentle tone, even if the words are identical. A rushed sentence communicates a different emotional message than the same words in a slowly spoken sentence. Screaming or yelling obviously conveys a different attitude than quietly speaking identical words. Tone, tempo, and volume can be catalysts to fuel anger or they can be a soothing balm that promotes understanding.

Be particularly aware of the characteristics of the sound of your voice. Yelling, screaming and sarcasm unveil a heart problem that severely hinders transparency and can critically damage a marriage. Christians are to speak the truth in love.

Eph 4.15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,

Jas 1.19 Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger;

Pause and pray that during your marriage, the Lord will make you alert to the tone, tempo and volume of the messages that you communicate.

Pray that you will avoid dramatic use of the words, "always" and "never."

Pray that you will be aware of negative body language.

When the Holy Spirit alerts you to undesirable characteristics, examine the reasons that you are communicating in this manner. Admit what is controlling your heart and replace that control with surrendered affection toward the Savior.

Keep a copy of War of Words on hand to reference when you struggle with communication. We believe that this is the most effective book available on communication.

- Do you have a tendency to yell when you are irritated?

Yes

No

- Does Debbie exhibit a tendency to yell when she is irritated?

Yes

No

- Mark any phrases below that describe the tone of your voice when you are determined to make a point.

Firm but kind

Concentrated on Being Understood

Hesitant

Excited

Positive

Hopeful

Angry

Tense

Harsh

Degrading

Sarcastic

Cynical

- Mark any phrases below that describe the tone of Debbie's voice when you are determined to make a point.

Firm but kind

Concentrated on Being Understood

Hesitant

Excited

Positive

Hopeful

Angry

Tense

Harsh

Degrading

Sarcastic

Cynical

Conflict is inevitable; resolution is not. It is to be highly desired, sought after and prayed for. It is something to be set as a goal any time conflict arises. Resolution is not automatic. It doesn't happen over time or by accident. For a conflict to be resolved, there must be an intentional desire for reconciliation followed by reconciliatory acts.²⁷

Solomon and his bride (Shulamite) were the two most romantic lovers in the Bible. During their courtship, the engaged couple wisely acknowledged that they should prepare in advance to

²⁷ Tommy Nelson, *The Book of Romance* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), pp 132-133.

handle inevitable conflict that would eventually infiltrate their relationship and threaten their transparency.

The following passage is a flashback to a springtime visit when Solomon visits his bride to be.

Song of Solomon 2.8-14 The voice of my beloved! Behold, he comes, leaping over the mountains, bounding over the hills. ⁹ My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. Behold, there he stands behind our wall, gazing through the windows, looking through the lattice. ¹⁰ My beloved speaks and says to me: "Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away, ¹¹ for behold, the winter is past; the rain is over and gone. ¹² The flowers appear on the earth, the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. ¹³ The fig tree ripens its figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance. Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away. ¹⁴ O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the crannies of the cliff, let me see your face, let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely.

Solomon is oblivious to everything around him. Nothing can stop him—not even a mountain. He is skipping and jumping and peeking through the lattice, trying to get a glimpse of his girl. Shulamite is delightfully observing all of this. She compares her fiancée to a gazelle or a hart—a graceful deer-like creature known for its sexual playfulness. Love is in the air-- like in the movie Bambi. After the fresh spring rain and all the flowers are popping up, the young animals are noticing each other and fall in love. Thumper is twitter-pated and he is flapping his foot and hearts are floating all around him and his bunny love.

Solomon is the king of Israel. He is bombarded with responsibilities but note that he is giving his fiancée his undivided attention. He has carved out time in his hectic schedule to concentrate on and enjoy her. He is beckoning her to come take a romantic springtime walk.

Courtship is the time to really get to know a person's dreams, to enjoy being with her-- to talk and talk and really get to know each other. Walks are a wonderful time to talk. You can unwind and really communicate with each other.

Once you are married, be protective of the amount of time that you spend together. Whenever you recognize that your life is becoming overwhelmingly hectic, follow the example of the busy king of Israel—slip away for a few minutes and take a relaxing walk together. Solomon is the richest man in the world, but he realizes that expensive gifts are not always the most effective way to convey love. There is nothing more romantic than a nature walk enjoying the beauty of God's Creation, especially in springtime.

- Have you talked about your dreams, your struggles with Debbie?

Yes

No

- How well does she know the “real” you?

Very Well

Not Very Well

Not Really Sure

Solomon is a romantic dude. He refers to his fiancée as his love, his darling, his sweetheart. He always uses kind, endearing words when he talks to her. Solomon leads in the relationship. He doesn't just mention the possibility of a walk. He skillfully and lovingly leads by inspiring his future bride with his descriptively alluring invitation. He urges her in verse 10 and in verse 13 to drop what she is doing and come for a walk. He conveys intentional love when he explains that he wants to be with her, he wants to look at her, he wants to listen to what she has to say

and then he presents his plan to make it happen. It is obvious that he is interested in her as a person.

Guys: Another major complaint from wives is that they often feel ignored or used. Get in the habit of backing your words with action so that Debbie knows that she is cherished by you; then never break the habit. Solomon made an effort through his words and his actions to convince his fiancée that she was special to him.

As this couple is walking, they are observing the world around them. They connect with each other when they unveil the deep thoughts that nature is triggering.

Song of Solomon 2.15 Catch the foxes for us, the little foxes that spoil the vineyards, for our vineyards are in blossom."

Evidently, Shulamite notices a little fox darting around. Foxes sneak into the vineyard and dig holes and loosen dirt around the roots of the plants. This hinders the growth of the plants so that the vines don't produce well. The families of the vine keeper diligently watch for these little creatures and even sleep outside to protect their vineyard.

Shulamite compares the little foxes to minor problems or differing viewpoints that gnaw at the vineyard of their blossoming love. She is acknowledging that it is not only advantageous to address potential conflict areas before marriage, but it is also wise to determine to continually guard against them during marriage.

Video L5V4: <https://youtu.be/QitNjDaT6Bs>

Flashing video of Potential Foxes that can gnaw at your blossoming love:

Irritating Habits

Obsessions

Laziness

Sloppiness
Misplaced Priorities
Conflicting Schedules
Job demands
Complaining
Health Issues
Weight
Debt
Differences in Background:
 Financial Stress
 Faith
 Church Attendance
 Lifestyle
Interfering Friends
Interfering In-laws
Step Children
Addictions
Past Relationships
My Ex
His or Her Ex
Control Issues
Anger Issues
Emotional Issues
Lack of Trust

Jealousy

Parents

Solomon and his fiancée wisely address potential problems in a non-confrontational, relaxing environment. Courtship is the time to talk about protecting your future from the “little foxes.”

Pray that God will reveal any foxes that you have not previously discussed. Be alert when He brings them to your attention. God could be alerting you to potential problems whenever you recognize sources of conflict in the lives of other couples or when you get frustrated or when a question from the future lessons jogs your thinking. Do not ignore problems. Deal with challenges before they damage the “vine” of your blossoming love. Get counseling if necessary. Your marriage is worth it.

- List any areas of concern that the PFP lessons have uncovered that the two of you still need to discuss.

Text Box Answer: Finances

- List any baggage from your past that tends to influence your emotions or decisions.

Text Box Answer: Anger from Father

- List any topic that comes to your mind that you would like to talk over with Debbie.

Text Box Answer: How my dad hurt me

- Have you openly discussed negative relationships from your past? This includes relatives, friends, or anyone significant in your life.

Yes

No

I have no negative relationships from my past

- Are there any habits in your life that Debbie may not be aware of?

Yes

No

Song of Solomon 2.16-17 My beloved is mine, and I am his; he grazes among the lilies. 17 Until the day breathes and the shadows flee, turn, my beloved, be like a gazelle or a young stag on cleft mountains.

Having discussed potential problems, note the confidence that Shulamite now has in their relationship. Discussing potential problems honestly and in a relaxed non-confrontational setting strengthens a relationship. She also commends her fiancée's character. She is a country girl and she process her thoughts accordingly. When she says the one she loves grazes among the lilies, she could be reapplying the simile from verses 8-9 where she compares him to a gazelle or stag. Like a grazing deer, he has slowed down his busy schedule and is leisurely enjoying time with her.

She affirms that she admires him and that she loves him. She gives him the freedom to be the delightful creature that he is.

How extremely important it is to conclude a discussion of differing opinions or potential problems with affirmation of your mate's character! Remind yourself and her of the reasons you are blessed to have her. Make a lifetime commitment to apply this affirmation of character when discussing problems or potential problems.

Author Joseph Dillow explains that this springtime visit was probably a business trip mixed with a pleasure visit. Shulamite requests that Solomon hurry back to see her when his work is done.

When you are forced to separate from Debbie, always convey the message that you are anticipating her return. The habit of a goodbye kiss not only reinforces the relationship by expressing the reluctance to separate but according to Red Book magazine this habit also indicates stability in the relationship.

Men who kiss their wives goodbye in the morning earn a higher income than men who don't pucker up. Why? Guys who practice rituals of affection tend to be more stable and methodical, thus higher earners.²⁸

Considering how much she cherishes Solomon's undivided attention prompts Shulamite, later that night, to think about one of their "little foxes" -- the problem that his career and responsibilities as king will require him to be gone too much, leaving her to feel lonely and neglected. Job requirements can be the catalyst for much discord in marriage.

Often when poets want to imply that someone is troubled about something, they will cast the difficulty in the context of a dream rather than describe it directly. The assumption is that we tend to dream about things that we think upon often or, in this case, that deeply trouble us.²⁹

The following passage appears to be a recurring dream that Shulamite not only repeatedly experiences during their courtship but will also experience in her marriage. The dream is evidence that there is tension concerning his vocation and that this is a "little fox" that could damage their future life together.

Song of Solomon 3.1-4 On my bed by night I sought him whom my soul loves; I sought him, but found him not. ² I will rise now and go about the city, in the streets and in the squares; I will seek him whom my soul loves. I sought him, but found him not. ³ The

²⁸ Elise Nersesian, Red Book Magazine, Jan 2006

²⁹ Dr. Joseph and Linda Dillow; Dr. Peter and Lorraine Pintus, Intimacy Ignited (Colorado Springs, CO:NavPress, 2004), pg . 70

watchmen found me as they went about in the city. "Have you seen him whom my soul loves?" ⁴ Scarcely had I passed them when I found him whom my soul loves. I held him, and would not let him go until I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her who conceived me.

Shulamite reasons out a proactive plan to respond to this inevitable conflict.

The Plan:

In the future, when her husband is not spending enough time with her, she determines not to get consumed by a pity party. She will make arrangements to meet him. No matter what obstacles she encounters, she will make the effort to contact him. Once she finds him, she plans to welcome him back in her arms and usher him to her home in the country for some privacy.

She reasons that she can plan a date. She determines not to pout about what Solomon is failing to do for her, but instead she will respect his demanding schedule and devise a creative way for some time alone with him.

Song of Solomon 3.5 I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or the does of the field, that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases.

One of the literary devices of the Lyric Idyll is an “imaginary” chorus. The chorus is used to transition from scene to scene or to give bits of advice to the audience. In the Song of Solomon, the chorus is called the daughters of Jerusalem.

This time, the warning that the bride-to-be offers to the daughters of Jerusalem is not to stir up love until you have settled that you can handle “the little foxes”. Do not stir up love—that is-- do not get married until you know that you are willing to work through the inconveniences and can adjust to the change in lifestyle. The reference to the gazelles and deer-like

creatures who were known for their sexual playfulness intensifies the warning as if to say; “For the sake of the delight of marital intimacy, do not get married and involved sexually until you have thoroughly considered potential problems.”

Please heed the warning of the scriptures. Ignoring potential problems can seriously hinder intimacy once you are married. Proactive plans devised for resolution in advance of conflict can prove valuable to a relationship.

Video L5V5: <https://youtu.be/xy4knNC83gw>

Shulamite preplanned that when Solomon’s career conflicted with her need to spend time with him, she would plan a surprise date. Often, when I am counseling a couple who is troubled with marital conflict, I instruct them to make a commitment to pause right when they notice that an argument is brewing. I tell them to hold hands, look each other in the eye, tell each other, “I love you;” then pray for God’s direction. It is difficult to be mad when you are praying.

- Devise and write down a proactive plan of conflict resolution that you can implement when problems surface in your marriage. Consider how you plan to adapt this response to “the little foxes” that you personally have concerns about.

Text Box Answer: Pray about it together

During their courtship, Solomon and Shulamite wisely discussed potential problems. At that time, Shulamite devised a plan to handle the impending conflict between his demanding career and her loneliness. As suspected, the conflict was inevitable.

Song of Solomon 5.2-3 I slept, but my heart was awake. A sound! My beloved is knocking. "Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one, for my head is wet with dew, my locks with the drops of the night." ³ I had put off my garment; how could I put it on? I had bathed my feet; how could I soil them?

The couple has been married for a while. Shulamite is experiencing the dreaded recurring dream again. (I was asleep, but my heart was awake.)

The Dream:

Solomon is rapping on the door of the bridal chamber and urging his bride to let him in. It is late, so late that Solomon has dew in his hair. Evidently this is a typical scenario for his bride because she obviously feels he is taking her for granted—he does not have time for her except late at night. She has allowed resentment to build up, then she justifies her resentment. She is cozy and asleep and does not want to go to the trouble to let him in when she is ticked with him. She informs him that she has already washed her feet and taken off her bathrobe, and it is not worth the trouble to let him in—He should have been home earlier.

When Shulamite focuses on her own rights and how the situation was unfair, her thinking spirals downward into a pity party that causes her to react in ways that she later regrets.

Warning: Focusing on your own rights will lead to selfish reactions.

Warning: The most common threat that wives make is to withhold sex and affection.

This is exactly what Shulamite does. She is so obsessed with the attention that she craves but is not getting, that she forgets the covenant that she (and every bride) made on her wedding day to love her husband unselfishly even when he is not correctly expressing love to her.

Girls: let this be a red flag warning to you. Whenever you are so irritated that you want to withhold sex and affection just for spite, you need to remember your covenant and your plan of conflict resolution.

Guys: Women do not tend to be eager for sex when they feel they have been ignored all day, day after day. Remember it is difficult for a woman to fully give herself to a man whom she views as inconsiderate or dishonest.

During courtship, Shulamite had devised a plan to deal with this problem, but in the heat of the moment, she selfishly nurses her hurt of loneliness. Her irritation increases to the point that she becomes defensive and fails to instigate her plan.

Fact: You are marrying a sinner who will at times be selfish and inconsiderate.

Fact: Debbie is also marrying a sinner who will at times be selfish and inconsiderate.

Result: Marital Conflict

One author aptly defines marital conflict as:

It's my "self life" irritating your "self life"; it's my ego irritating your ego. It's my "self life" rubbing your "self life" the wrong way and you react against it.

Commit yourself to resolving marital conflict quickly.

Song of Solomon 5.4-5 My beloved put his hand to the latch, and my heart was thrilled within me. 5 I arose to open to my beloved, and my hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with liquid myrrh, on the handles of the bolt.

Ancient bridal chambers had a hole in the door. Solomon reaches his hand through the door and leaves a gift of myrrh on the handles of the lock. Myrrh is a symbol of repentance, a request for forgiveness. He knows he was wrong and that he has hurt his bride.

Very interesting, that when Shulamite sees her husband's hand and realizes that he is sorry, she acknowledges that her pout bout is senseless. She shifts her thoughts away from herself and

is eager to embrace him again. She starts to instigate her plan for conflict resolution.

But evidently, she either responds too slowly or he reacts to the rejection too quickly.

Solomon longs to hear how his bride admires his work ethic, how the sound of his voice inspires her, how thoughtful his gift is and how she is turned on by the thought of him. He is not expecting rejection. Her sassy reply communicates contempt and disrespect. He has been inconsiderate, but her reaction cuts him to the core.

Men had rather feel alone and unloved, than inadequate and disrespected.³⁰

Girls, men have a very frail ego. They can take rejection in the workplace, face business reversals, face other problems, but the home should be a safe haven filled with respect.

It has been my observation that a bad woman can bring a good man down. Also, a good woman can lift an average man up and inspire him to be far more than he ever imagined he could be.³¹

But at this point in the passage, Solomon is thinking about the physical intimacy that he desires from his wife. He feels hurt and rejected! How does he respond?

Song of Solomon 5.6 I opened to my beloved, but my beloved had turned and gone. My soul failed me when he spoke. I sought him, but found him not; I called him, but he gave no answer.

Video L5V6: https://youtu.be/ZwlGTzt_s8I

When Solomon faces conflict with his wife he withdraws.

³⁰ Shaunti Feldhahn, For Women Only (Atlanta, GA: Multnomah Books (Veritas Enterprises), 2004), pg. 15.

³¹ Sam Wood, Let's Kiss and Make Up (Jamestown, TN: Family Fortress Ministries, 2007)

Ladies, you need to understand something about men. Men will typically respond to conflict in one of two ways. They will fight, either verbally through threats and screaming. And unfortunately at times some men even physically abuse their wife. Let me stop and say that no man has a right to verbally or physically abuse his wife. Guys, your wife is a gift to you from God and you are to lovingly lead her.

Now, other men don't fight, instead, they take flight! They run away and pout and fester over the misunderstanding. Some men:

- *Get in the car and drive away.*
- *Some men go to the bar.*
- *Some men go home to mama!*

Solomon chose option number two. He decided like many men to take flight and leave the scene.

- Have you ever been frustrated and hung the phone up on Debbie?

Yes **No**

- Has Debbie ever hung up on you?

Yes

No

- Have you ever gotten mad with Debbie and stormed off?

Yes

No

- Has Debbie ever gotten mad and left you?

Yes

No

Notice the longing of Shulamite's heart is for affection. She is so consumed with this desire that when it is not met on her terms, she rebels, and she almost does not recognize that Solomon is ready to meet that desire.

The deep desire that drives Solomon is respect. When his longing for respect is not met on his terms, he rebels and leaves so quickly that he misses her change of heart.

Men and women are different. Women generally tend to think with their hearts. They are emotional creatures. Men generally tend to think with their heads.

God created male and female uniquely different so that each one would be suited to fulfill the God-designed roles that were covered in Lesson Four. A man typically has larger bones, more muscle mass, and a larger lung capacity. A woman typically has smaller bones, breasts, and softer skin. God also formed male and female with a different brain design. Men exhibit tendencies to be lateral in their thinking, favoring the left side of the brain where facts and information is stored, whereas, women tend to be bi-lateral in their thinking, favoring the right side of the brain where the emotions are stimulated.

Video L5V7: <https://youtu.be/wwE2OQtPSyE>

1981, Dr. Roger Sperry won the Nobel prize for his breakthrough study on how the brain functions in males and females.

Dr. Sperry discovered that between the 16-22 week of gestation, boy babies have a chemical reaction in their brains that girl babies do not have.

Two chemicals are released that slow down that development of the right side of a boys brain.

Dr. Sperry found out what all women already know, that men are born brain damaged!

Although, to many women, men may appear brain damaged, however in actuality, their brains are intricately designed to specifically fulfill the role God has given to them as a husband and father. The female brain functions differently.

When a man puts his mind to work, neurons turn on in highly specific areas of the brain. When a woman does, her brain cells light up such a patchwork that the scans look like a night view of Las Vegas. One possible explanation: the corpus callosum, the bridge of fibers running down the center of the brain, is thicker in females, which may allow more "crosstalk" between the emotional, intuitive right hemisphere and the rational, just-the-facts left. As a result, the female brain may make connections that might not occur to a man. Some call this skill a form of emotional intelligence; others think of it as women's intuition.³²

These scientific discoveries support the scripture that God created male and female distinctly different in relational ways. A male tends to relate with logic and the female connects more emotionally. A man is wired to be more of a protector and provider whereas a woman is wired to be more of a nurturer and caregiver. Both attributes contribute to a balanced and meaningful relationship.

Video L5V8: <https://youtu.be/Jva1LNW-3Mc>

Not long ago I came across this magazine that had this little insight titled "He Says, She Says. It went like this:

A man is a person who, if a woman says, "Never mind, I'll do it myself," he lets her.

A woman is a person who, if she says to a man, "Never mind, I'll do it myself," and he lets her, gets mad.

³² Dianne Hales, "If You Think We Think Alike, Think Again," Readers Digest, April 1999, p.108,110

A man is a person who, if a woman says to him, "Never mind, I'll do it myself," and he lets her and she gets mad, says, "Now what are you mad about?"

A woman is a person who, if she says to a man, "Never mind, I'll do it myself," and he lets her and she gets mad, and he says, "Now what are you mad about?" She says, "If you don't know, I'm not going to tell you."

Women, like men, want to be respected and men, like women want to feel cherished, but the intensity of these desires normally varies according to sex. God created male and female differently. Ignoring these differences can be a roadblock to transparency and communication but understanding the differences can enhance the relationship.

In Ephesians 5:33, God admonishes husbands to continually and repeatedly show affection to their wives, whereas He strongly urges wives to exhibit respect for their husbands. God intends that husbands and wives concentrate on finding pleasure in meeting the deep desires of their spouse.

Shulamite recognizes her selfish mistake and humbly adjusts her initial response. She refuses to allow her disappointment to damage their relationship. She exits her pity party and seeks resolution. Winning a pout bout is not worth the price of an unresolved conflict. Remember when the couple was courting, she devised a plan of action to address the possibility of this problem. Now, she basically enacts her original plan. Likewise, the plan that you developed earlier in this lesson will be invaluable when conflict attempts to disrupt your marriage.

Song of Solomon 5.6-8 I opened to my beloved, but my beloved had turned and gone. My soul failed me when he spoke. I sought him, but found him not; I called him, but he gave no answer. ⁷ The watchmen found me as they went about in the city; they beat

me, they bruised me, they took away my veil, those watchmen of the walls. ⁸ I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, that you tell him I am sick with love.

In her original conflict management plan, Shulamite determined that when Solomon's inattention became problematic, she would plan a private retreat with him. She would find him, explain that she needed him, then take him to her home in the country.

This is not only a wise plan for conflict resolution but is highly advisable for preventative maintenance. For you and Debbie, this retreat could be as simple as a lunch date, a picnic, a walk through the neighborhood, a weekend away or a vacation, -- anything fun or relaxing where the two of you can concentrate on each other. Couples get married so that they can share life and enjoy each other. Don't forget to do that. That may seem like a no-brainer, but once you are married, the demands of life tend to override fun activities. Planning a regular weekly date night can alleviate a lot of stress and help you avoid some misunderstandings and conflict.

Back to Solomon and his bride--Shulamite is not content to leave their marriage in a state of conflict. She correctly desires resolution and reconciliation.

Luke 17.3 Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.

When we read the word "rebuke" we tend to think of getting in someone's face and dramatically spelling out what a rotten thing they did, but this word actually means to confront by going to the person that has offended and calmly presenting the facts in a way that allows the offender to respond. The purpose is to clear up misunderstandings and to reconcile.

Eph 4.26-27 Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷ and give no opportunity to the devil.

When faced with a conflict, the disagreeing parties may need some time to refocus their thinking, but reconciliation should not be delayed for long periods of time, especially for a couple that is married. Delaying resolution of a misunderstanding opens the door for the devil to infiltrate hearts and minds so that he can assume control through bitterness and resentment. Unresolved conflict grows in intensity and can severely damage or even destroy a marriage.

Shulamite is determined to pursue her husband to find resolution to the conflict (Song of Solomon 5:7). She does not let the watchmen or anything else distract her from her mission.

Steps to Conflict Resolution:

- 1) Admit where you are wrong and pursue your mate.

You may have noticed that Shulamite once again speaks to the chorus. She begs them to help her find her husband and let him know that she is faint with desire for him. The daughters of Jerusalem respond with a question that emphasizes the second step of conflict resolution.

Song of Solomon 5.9 What is your beloved more than another beloved, O most beautiful among women? What is your beloved more than another beloved, that you thus adjure us?

2. Adjust Your Thinking

Shulamite has admitted that she was selfish and that she responded in the wrong way when she rejected Solomon's advances. The chorus agrees that her thinking was wrong, but they lead her to adjust her thinking by essentially asking her, "What's so hot about your guy that you want us to comb the streets of the city looking for him?"

In any given situation, what is it that determines the attitude of a person's response?

The focus of his or her life—whatever is consuming his or her thoughts.

The chorus directs Shulamite to describe her attraction to Solomon. She starts to Philippians 4:8 her husband—instead of dwelling on the things that are irritating she names things about him that are true, just, honorable, pure, pleasing, lovely, noble, virtuous, and praiseworthy. She determines to concentrate on his admirable traits. She doesn't just think privately; she specifically declares to her friends how special her husband is.

➤ When I tell my friends about Debbie I (mark all that apply):

Vent the things that are frustrating or irritating so I will avoid reacting negatively when I am with her.

Vent the things that are frustrating or irritating so that I can learn how to handle the irritation.

Discuss problems with my friends so that I will know how to better prove my point.

Brag about her strong traits

Express gratitude for her character

Never talk negatively about her

One common habit that damages relationships is badmouthing a spouse or complaining to friends about a spouse's faults. This is another red flag warning to be alert to—anytime you find yourself complaining to friends about your spouse, you probably need to adjust your attitude.

Theologian Jonathan Edwards addressed this potential problem:

Resolved, whenever my feelings begin to appear in the least out of order, when I am conscious of the least uneasiness within, or

*the least irregularity without, I will then subject myself to the strictest examination.*³³

Shulamite praised her husband's traits to others.

Song of Solomon 5.10-11 My beloved is radiant and ruddy, distinguished among ten thousand. ¹¹ His head is the finest gold; his locks are wavy, black as a raven.

Shulamite brings up a picture of her lover in her mind. She views him as her personal prized possession. She is concentrating on the things that she finds attractive about him and because she is doing this, she can confidently declare that he is her choice and she is blessed to have him.

Solomon has dark wavy black hair. Shulamite thinks this is hot—but My lover has no hair. I choose to concentrate on the benefits of a bald head-- the smooth, shiny surface stirs a desire to plant kisses all over it. Shulamite doesn't know what she is missing.

Song of Solomon 5.12 His eyes are like doves beside streams of water, bathed in milk, sitting beside a full pool.

Shulamite loves to gaze into Solomon's eyes. They have a calming effect and she knows she can trust him.

Song of Solomon 5.13 His cheeks are like beds of spices, mounds of sweet-smelling herbs. His lips are lilies, dripping liquid myrrh.

You may be thinking that Solomon looked like a chipmunk with his cheeks stuffed full of, but Shulamite is thinking about his fresh breath. There was no Crest or Colgate or Listerine available at the palace. People chewed sweet smelling herbs, for clean teeth and fresh breath. Solomon was considerate and practiced good hygiene so that his breath would be fresh.

³³ Jonathan Edwards, The Works of Jonathon Edwards, Volume 1 (Carlisle, Penn.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1834, repr. 1987)p. xxii.

Hygiene may seem trivial, but we had a lady call us one afternoon after we led a marriage conference at her church. She said, "I'm struggling. Cleanliness is important to me but—my husband smokes cigarettes and his breath stinks. He has yucky grime under his fingernails and I am repulsed. I have no desire to kiss him or to touch him. What do I do?"

While we are on the subject, we did have four teenage guys in our home at one time and contrary to what they believed passing obnoxious gas or belching grandiose eruptions are not status symbols—they are repulsive to females.

Smell greatly affects intimate communication. Practicing cleanliness is a matter of being considerate. However, sometimes a partner can be unaware of bad breath or other hygiene issues. Your relationship should be stable enough to exercise the freedom to gently make each other aware of unpleasant odors.

Be that as it may, in this situation, Shulamite is deliberately concentrating on aspects of her husband that she finds attractive. She has taken notice of his fresh breath because she enjoys kissing him. Daydreaming about intimacy with your spouse will minimize trivial irritations.

Song of Solomon 5.14-16 His arms are rods of gold, set with jewels. His body is polished ivory, bedecked with sapphires. 15 His legs are alabaster columns, set on bases of gold. His appearance is like Lebanon, choice as the cedars. 16 His mouth is most sweet, and he is altogether desirable. This is my beloved and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.

Underneath the wealthy attire of the king, Solomon has strong arms, sturdy legs and a flat smooth six pack. He is physically in good shape. He pumps iron. He has smooth skin—He eats his veggies.

Shulamite is not fantasizing over a guy in a magazine or the office manager next door, she is enjoying the features of her man

that are attractive to her. She notices things in him that the other people overlook. This exercise of the mind—"Philippians four-eighting" her husband, concentrating on the good by praising him, rescues her from her pity party and motivates her to pursue reconciliation.

She can now confidently declare to her closest friends that her husband is her personal prized possession, her lover and her best friend.

A husband longs for his wife to be a friend—to accept him for who he is, to admire him, to be there when he is tired or struggling, to be someone he can always depend on.

A husband and wife should be best friends. This is so important that it is part of the definition of marriage—a covenant of companionship.

However, girls, do not be upset if your fiancée has some man friends. Do not deprive him of his friends or the occasional time he needs to hang out with the guys. Sometimes men need to hang out and watch a ball game together or go hunting.

In the same way, guys, do not be upset if your fiancée has some female companions. Occasionally, wives need some friends to do girly things with.

But always remember that God designed Debbie to be your most intimate friend! Behind Christ, she should be the number one person in your life.

The chorus offers additional advice in conflict resolution:

Song of Solomon 6.1 Where has your beloved gone, O most beautiful among women? Where has your beloved turned, that we may seek him with you?

The chorus challenges Shulamite to not only think about Solomon's positive traits and features but, as a friend, to also

consider where he is and what he is doing. In other words, part of conflict resolution is considering your mate's perspective.

3. Be a friend by considering her perspective.

Song of Solomon 6.2-3 My beloved has gone down to his garden to the beds of spices, to graze in the gardens and to gather lilies. ³ I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine; he grazes among the lilies.

Because Shulamite is now thinking unselfishly, her mind is clear and she can surmise exactly where Solomon is and why he is there.

Tommy Nelson expounds on her adjusted thoughts:

Solomon was going about the work and routine of his life. He was doing important work—cultivating the beds of spices that were vital both to the preservation and to the appeal of food. This could mean that Solomon, as king, was doing what was important to maintain his empire and to make it appealing to its citizens and to those who might seek refuge in it...

Solomon was also continuing to take the role of a good shepherd--one who would defend his flock..., one who would lead his flock into pastures and to pure sources of water...Solomon was about the work of defending his kingdom and home... Solomon was also gathering the fair lilies. In other words, he was a blessing to others in his endeavors, and he was causing others who were weaker and more fragile to delight in his strength and tender care of them.³⁴

Because Shulamite grants her husband the benefit of the doubt, she can confidently remind herself that he genuinely loves her and she loves him. She is rededicating herself to him and the relationship. The couple is committed to each other. With this change of focus, Shulamite can now admire her husband for so

³⁴ Tommy Nelson, *The Book of Romance* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishing, 1998), pg 128.

conscientiously fulfilling his responsibilities as a leader of the country.

Shulamite reaches the garden where Solomon is. They had both been selfish and wrong.

How is he going to respond to the way his wife treated him?

Video L5C10: <https://youtu.be/QTRZhzCIELo>

(This is a 6 ½ minute video clip from a conference. The script below gives an overview of the clip.)

Several years ago, when I lived in Charlotte, North Carolina, back before all the airline regulations, I would often fly out of the Charlotte Douglas International airport. Since I flew so often, I had down to a science what I would take with me on the plane. I would normally take two boxes of resources, one suitcase, one carry-on bag and a briefcase.

Such was the case on this trip as I walked up to the USAIR check-in clerk and handed him my ticket. He promptly asked me how many bags that I had to check. I responded, "I have 2 boxes and 1 suitcase or a total of 3 bags."

He then looked over my shoulder at my carry-on bag and the briefcase and asked if they were. I replied that they were. Then he said, "So, sir you really have 5 bags then don't you?" I said, "yes, but I am only checking three, two 2 of them carry-ons."

He then looked at me and said, "You will have to pay an additional \$55 for each one of the carry ons." I said, "Do what?" I said, "Look at the other people checking in, many of them have carry ons and they are not having to pay."

I then proceeded to tell him that how he was treating me wasn't fair! He then looked at me and said, "You of all people ought to know that life isn't fair."

I thought to myself, he's out to get me just because my ticket says Rev Sam Wood and he knows I'm a preacher. So, being the strong temperament that I am I immediately took action and went into phase one. I said sir I'm a valued USAIR frequent flyer ; what's your name? I then told him that I was going to write a letter to USAIR and tell them how he was treating me.

Then I said, sir is you supervisor here? When he responded in the affirmative, I said would you please go get him? He came back a few minutes later and said, "I told my supervisor about the situation and he said that normally we don't charge, but the rules say that we can charge extra for carry-ons. And today I'm electing to charge you for both bags.

I tried intimidation and it hadn't worked, so I moved to phase two.

I said sir, "could I borrow your packaging tape?" He responded, why do you need packaging tape? I said because I'm going to tape my suit bag to one box and my briefcase to the other, then I will only have three bags. I thought it was a good plan.

He said, "You can't do that!" I said, "Why can't I do that" and he responded "because I'm not going to let you use my packaging tape." I tried intimidation and it failed, I tried manipulation and now it had failed so I went into phase three.

You say, what is phase three? It's called ventilation! If you could have seen me you would have seen the heat rising from my bald head because I was mad! I proceeded to tell him exactly how I felt and how wrong he was.

He finally backed down and only charged me for one bag, but I still had to put \$55 on my credit card. Of course I was mad because I shouldn't have had to pay anything.

I walked away and went and sat down on the plane still fuming over what had just happened to me. When the plane got into the air, I thought to myself, I need a transformation because in about an hour I'm going to meet a pastor at the other end of this flight and I need to look happy and spiritual. And right now I don't feel too happy or too spirit filled.

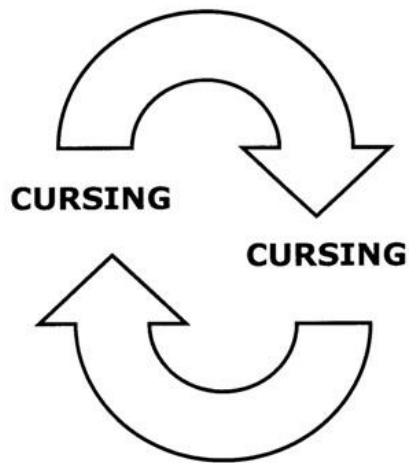
It was at this point that the Holy Spirit began to convict me, "You had a chance to be a testimony to this man and you blew it." "You responded just like any other person who is not a Christian would respond." I began to argue with God and said, "but God what he did wasn't fair." It was then that God said to me, "Who said life is fair", my son Jesus was perfect and they crucified Him. And you are to follow in his steps. That means that sometimes you will be treated unjustly and many times life won't be fair.

I finally confessed my sin to God and asked for forgiveness for the way that I had responded to this clerk.

When I think about this story, I am reminded that many times when we face marital conflict, we will use intimidation, manipulation and ventilation—whatever it takes to get our way. We respond in the flesh!

But Christian marriage is not about having OUR way. It's about God's way. He wants us to respond in the Spirit with words and actions that are seasoned with grace.

Because of human nature (sin nature), most individuals respond defensively. The tendency is to render harshness in reaction to harshness, to return accusations for accusations, to rail back at Debbie when she rails first or to even render deafening silence back and forth. Communication disintegrates into a vicious cycle of cursing and insults.



At the beginning of the dream, Shulamite lashed out with a sassy rejection (curse). Now it is Solomon's turn to react.

Shulamite is probably nervous and is pondering many questions in her mind:

- How will he respond?
- Would he return evil for her evil?
- Would he blast her?
- Is he going to be angry?
- Is he going to be bitter?
- Is he going to leave again?
- Will he give her the silent treatment?

Song of Solomon 6.4 You are beautiful as Tirzah, my love, lovely as Jerusalem, awesome as an army with banners.

Wow, what a response!

Solomon breaks the cycle of negative communication (cursing) when he renders a blessing to his wife. By verbalizing some of the same poetic compliments that he pronounced to her on their wedding night, Solomon communicates that his love for her has not faltered or changed. He further verifies his admiration by comparing her beauty to two magnificent cities.

Solomon says his wife is like Tirzah, a city of natural and rustic beauty with inviting gardens and groves. Then he tells her she is as lovely as Jerusalem, which was called the "perfection of beauty" (Psalm 50:2). Jerusalem was said to stir the soul and evoke awe in those who gazed upon her majesty...The fullness of Solomon's words declares that her inner beauty and outer beauty move him deeply.³⁵

Solomon is the most romantic communicator of all time. Comparing his wife to the pageantry and splendor of a military parade may seem a bit over the top, but this is an ancient song. There is no question that he is expressing true forgiveness. She is more important to him than his rights.

The wisdom and power of Solomon's conflict resolution is expounded in the New Testament.

1 Pet 3.8-11 Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. ⁹ Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. ¹⁰ For "Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; 11 let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it.

The cycle of rendering evil for evil is broken when one of the individuals in the conflict renders a blessing rather than a curse. This softens the heart of the "opponent" so that he or she is free to apply God's truth and love to the situation. The end result is that both parties are blessed.

³⁵ Dillow and Pintus, p. 206



It is significant that Solomon continues to adjust his attitude in the same way that his wife had adjusted hers. He acknowledges the traits of her character and the features of her body that attract and stimulate him. Solomon is not only adjusting his attitude but he is pursuing his wife with his words.

Song of Solomon 6.5-7 Turn away your eyes from me, for they overwhelm me— Your hair is like a flock of goats leaping down the slopes of Gilead. ⁶ Your teeth are like a flock of ewes that have come up from the washing; all of them bear twins; not one among them has lost its young. ⁷ Your cheeks are like halves of a pomegranate behind your veil.

Solomon declares that he is captivated by his wife's eyes. When you think about it, this is the theme of many love songs (Rascal Flatts: "I Melt").

When Shulamite was rehearsing Solomon's strengths to the daughters of Jerusalem, she included the compelling connection that resulted from gazing into his eyes. Interesting that Solomon admits that he is overwhelmed, even conquered by the emotions that are generated when he fixates on Shulamite's eyes. God created human beings in such a way that the eyes are the windows of our souls.

When Solomon poetically surveys the features of his wife's face; her eyes, her hair, her smile, her skin, he is purposefully convincing her that she is his special prized possession. This is not lame flattery. She knows he means every word of it.

Solomon probably realizes that some of Shulamite's feelings of abandonment may include a concern that the other women of the palace are more attractive to her husband than she is. Rather than losing patience with her obsessive insecurity, Solomon tenderly reassures her.

Song of Solomon 6.8-10 There are sixty queens and eighty concubines, and virgins without number. ⁹ My dove, my perfect one, is the only one, the only one of her mother, pure to her who bore her. The young women saw her and called her blessed; the queens and concubines also, and they praised her. ¹⁰ "Who is this who looks down like the dawn, beautiful as the moon, bright as the sun, awesome as an army with banners?"

Most women tend to be insecure especially about their appearance. Solomon truthfully acknowledges that in his kingdom work, he is surrounded by elegant women. Then he assures his wife that of all the women that he knows, she is definitely his choice. To him, she is outstanding in character and beauty. By stating that the royal ladies also consider her stunning, he convinces her that his words are not just flattery. These comments provide a nonconfrontational invitation to lovingly discuss the root of the conflict. He proves he is eager to resolve the conflict. He is forgiving Shulamite before she has a chance to ask forgiveness.

Solomon does two things:

- a) He praises her!
- b) He pardons her!

Solomon has chosen to hit the delete button on Shulamite's self-centered rejection. His love and concern for her impacts him more than his pride. Solomon does what Paul says that we should do in Ephesians 4:32:

Eph 4.32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Our forgiveness is to be modeled after God's forgiveness!

Each one of us has miserably failed to honor God for who He is. We have been distracted by our own concerns and have ignored His ways. We have arrogantly convinced ourselves that we should control our own destiny. For this, we deserve punishment; we deserve condemnation. But God loved us so much that He sent Jesus to bear our punishment instead.

Although He was totally innocent, Jesus willingly suffered and atoned for our transgressions and selfishness. Instead of the condemnation and punishment that we deserve, those who yield to faith in Jesus, receive forgiveness. We are declared innocent and pronounced righteous. We become His bride and join in a covenant of companionship with God. Our relationship with God is forever reconciled.

Grasping this understanding of Christ and what He has done for us who are His bride, fills us with such overwhelming gratefulness that we should be willing to yield to His Spirit and grant the same grace to our earthly covenant companion. The relationship of Christ and His bride is the basis for reconciliation with our companion.

I say to the glory of God and in utter humility that whenever I see myself before God and realize even something of what my

*blessed Lord has done for me, I am ready to forgive anybody anything.*³⁶

Forgiveness is a promise to not remember, --a promise never to bring the wrongs up to use them against the offender. Jay Adams vividly expounds forgiveness:

*I will not bring up these matters to you or others in the future. I will bury them and not exhume the bones to beat you over the head with them. I will never use these sins against you.*³⁷

When a spouse sets aside personal feelings and concentrates on what is true, good, just, honorable and worthy, his perspective on a matter changes. An atmosphere of acceptance is created that allows both parties to be transparent about their struggles--without a fear of rejection.

God through Christ chose to forgive us. Solomon chose to forgive his wife!

The couple returns home to a very intimate scene in the bridal chamber (Song 7:1-10). All is well! All is resolved!

They are kissing and making up!

*When a couple decides to kiss and make-up, and once again become one flesh, they are making a very important statement that, essentially, there is nothing fundamentally wrong with their relationship.*³⁸

Because the cycle of evil for evil is broken when both parties pursue reconciliation and offer blessings, they each receive an even greater blessing. The conflict is resolved with a sensual dance that leads to graceful movement of physical intimacy.

³⁶ ML Jones, *Spiritual Depression*

³⁷ Jay E Adams, *From Forgiven to Forgiving*, (Amityville: Calvary Press, 1994), p.12.

³⁸ Rabbi Shmuley Boteach, *Kosher Sex* (New York, NY: Broadway Books, 2001), p. 97.

Forgiveness is complete and their marriage bond grows even more intimate.

Throughout Solomon and Shulamite's reconciliation process, the imaginary chorus challenges the couple to think correctly. Most conflicts can be resolved by the steps that were listed, but if the conflict lingers or becomes too intense, you should seek godly counsel before the "foxes damage the vines."

- Will you commit now to seek godly counsel when you are faced with problems or struggles in your marriage that the two of you cannot resolve or when you repeatedly experience the same conflict?

Yes

No

Like Adam and Eve, Solomon and his bride understood the value of transparency in their communication. Living lives in which your identity and your source of security and significance is God Himself will promote a confidence and liberty that will enable you and Debbie to be open with each other.

Preparing for Partnership Online Premarital Training

Lesson Six - Physical Companionship

The most obvious way that married couples exercise companionship is by physically being with each other. However, even though most couples get married with the intention of “being together” physically, a lack of physical companionship is often what promotes distance, disillusionment and even divorce.

God designed two main avenues for physical companionship--dwelling together and sexual intimacy.

1 Peter 3.7 Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.

Physical Companionship by Dwelling Together

In this verse God exhorts husbands to dwell with, to take up residence, or to actually physically live with their wife. Living with Debbie requires not only residing in the same dwelling, but also participating in activities such as projects, chores, planning vacations, eating together plus sharing your dreams and goals with each other. In other words, you should enjoy the company of each other. The verse continues by teaching that the husband is to live with his wife in an “understanding way.” That is, a husband is commanded to physically live with and spend time with his wife so that he will have an understanding of her. It is impossible to have a true understanding of someone that you never spend significant time with. For example, you cannot have a true understanding of God if you never invest time in Bible study and prayer. You might know about Him, but you will not actually know Him unless you spend time in His presence getting to know Him. It is the same with marriage partners.

The trend of couples who are married but actually residing apart from one another is rapidly growing in American culture. According to 2006 U.S. Census data, about 3.6 million married individuals (excluding military marriages) lived apart from their spouses.³⁹ These marriages are appropriately called “commuter marriages” because during the work week, the couples pursue careers in separate cities or even states. They commute to visit each other occasionally on a weekend. This is not dwelling together.

Even though the majority of marriage partners are not separated by physical distance, a lot of marriages are comprised of spouses who are so enslaved to their jobs and the daily routines of their individual lives that the couple pictures two speeding metro trains who only cross paths in their home. They sleep in the same house, occasionally eat a meal together and possibly share children, but they only allow very limited daily “one on one” time with each other. According to a recent survey, the majority of married couples spend more time with their computer than with their spouse.⁴⁰ Busyness, schedules, careers, and children can often take a serious toll on marriages that do not continually make it a priority to carve out “special time” for each other.

Most engaged couples spend every spare minute together and may have difficulty foreseeing that this trend could ever be a problem in their future relationship. But be warned. The amount of quality time that spouses invest with each other typically and unintentionally decreases as the partners become more and more involved in careers and outside activities.

The encouraging news is that sharing living space in combination with participating in activities together can create a connection that bonds a couple. Maintaining companionship within marriage

³⁹ <http://www.gazettenet.com/2010/10/13/commuter-marriages-can-work-short-term>

⁴⁰ <http://www.engadget.com/2007/01/23/shocker-americans-spend-more-time-with-pc-than-spouse/>

will require mutual effort and adjustments but will yield a closer relationship. Make a commitment to protect your “special” time together.

- After you are married, do you and Debbie plan to live in the same physical residence?

Yes, I will rarely be away from home.

Yes; however my job will require that I travel. I will be gone several days a week.

No; my job requires that I live in a different location than Debbie.

No (for other reasons)

- Have you and Debbie discussed the schedules the two of you expect to have once you are married?

Yes

No

- Do you feel that your free time and Debbie’s free time will coincide enough that you can invest some quality time with each other on a daily basis?

Yes

No

Companionship is basically sharing life together. Companions strengthen their bonds when they enjoy pleasurable activities together. This could require the sacrifice of stepping out of your comfort zone to participate in something that is important to Debbie.

First, consider what activities you personally enjoy? Do you find pleasure in traveling? Outdoor activities? Skiing? Hiking? Tennis?. Swimming? Photography? Sporting Events? Restoring Furniture? Home Improvement Projects? Pets? Fishing? Hunting? Gardening?

Cooking? Entertaining friends? Ballet? Movies? Theatre? Music?
Mission Projects? Games? Art?

- What activities or hobbies do you enjoy doing with Debbie?

Text Box Answer: Hiking, biking, eating out

- List activities or hobbies that you have never done together but would like for Debbie to start participating in with you after you are married.

Text Box Answer: Playing golf

Since God commands the husband to lead the marriage in a God glorifying manner (Session Four), it is not surprising that He also instructs (1 Peter 3:7) the husband to make spending time with his wife a priority. This admonition includes more than quantity of time in the same room. The goal is quality relationship. Activities together enhance the bond of a relationship when the following four elements permeate the couple's time together; attention, appreciation, affection, and affirmation.

Solomon and Shulamite illustrate these elements on their wedding day as they converse with each other during the wedding feast.

Song 1.9-15 I compare you, my love, to a mare among Pharaoh's chariots. ¹⁰ Your cheeks are lovely with ornaments, your neck with strings of jewels. ¹¹ We will make for you ornaments of gold, studded with silver. ¹² While the king was on his couch, my nard gave forth its fragrance. ¹³ My beloved is to me a sachet of myrrh that lies between my breasts. ¹⁴ My beloved is to me a cluster of henna blossoms in the vineyards of Engedi. ¹⁵ Behold, you are beautiful, my love; behold, you are beautiful; your eyes are doves.

1) Attention

The context of the scripture seems to indicate that the couple is probably eating dinner. But, in the midst of this activity, they are fully concentrating on each other. Solomon speaks in verses 9-11. Shulamite responds in verses 12-14. then he answers her in verse 15. They are oblivious to everything else going on around them.

Right now, Debbie is such a high priority to you that you probably wholeheartedly acknowledge most things she says or does. But life is demanding and distracting. Our self-centered human nature steers us into our own little worlds to the point that we become preoccupied and unconsciously dismiss what is significant to another. We can all too easily fall into a habit of failing to listen to our partner. The element of attention requires that each spouse make a conscious effort to daily give significant segments of undivided attention where there is no competition from children, television or other miscellaneous distractions.

Video L6V1 <https://youtu.be/RGT6xXohXaY>

I can remember times in our marriage when I would tell Debbie, "Hey baby lets watch the football game together, all the time thinking to myself if you get up and walk in front of the TV, I'm going to tackle you." I was really more interested in listening to the game than in listening to her. I was not giving her my undivided attention or listening to her because of a major distraction called the TV. God eventually showed me that to give her my undivided attention, I needed to take time to listen to her where there were no distractions. God prompted me to start taking daily walks with her to the bluff line about a mile behind our house. This became our special time with each other every day. A time to we both would talk and listen to each other.

Exercising undivided attention should naturally result in empathy. Empathy requires putting yourself in Debbie's shoes in an attempt to experience what she feels.

Scripture uses the metaphor of a “head and body” to describe the relationship between a husband and wife (Ephesians 5:23, Ephesians 5:28). When your arm hurts, your brain signals you to do something to alleviate the pain. Similarly, an understanding husband communicates and listens to his wife (his body) so that he can recognize and respond to her struggles. He attempts to empathize with what she is experiencing.

If a couple does not carve out daily time for undivided attention, the opportunity to empathize will slip away. They may have good intentions, but often good intentions never materialize into practice. Therefore, we suggest that you commit to set aside a minimum of thirty minutes each day for undivided attention. This could be a regular time when you take a walk together, sit on the couch together, or enjoy a quiet meal together. Talk about the events in each of your lives. Be open about your personal struggles. Discuss your goals and dreams and how you can help each other achieve them. Read a devotion and pray together.

In addition to the thirty minutes of undivided attention, make it a standard practice to schedule a weekly date night-- a time when you set aside concerns and can participate in an enjoyable activity together. Do this forever.

- Do you take time to listen and empathize with Debbie?

Yes

No

- Do you feel that Debbie pays enough attention to you by listening and empathizing with you?

Yes

No

- Select the daily time slot(s) you feel will probably work best for you to give undivided attention to Debbie after you get married}

Early Morning

Midday

Afternoon

Early Evening

Right Before Bedtime

None

Not Necessary

- Which weekly time slot would work best for you to plan a regular date?

Weeknight

Weekday

Weekend

None

Not Necessary

2) Affection

Webster's dictionary defines affection as "a tender feeling and attachment towards someone"⁴¹. Obviously this tenderness should be a major component of every couple's life together. Therefore, communication of the affection one feels is critical. Most wives recognize affection as non-sexual meaningful touch. This describes moments when a husband hugs, caresses and gently kisses his wife without any sexual agenda in mind. This

⁴¹ Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary(Springfield,Mass:Merriam-Webster.,Publishers,1990),p.61

conveys that he is not being affectionate towards her in order to manipulate her into having sex with him, but rather because he genuinely cherishes his wife as his special gift from God.

Colossians 3:19 carries this a step deeper by warning the husband to avoid being harsh or bitter towards his wife. The positive application would be to be sensitive and affectionate toward his wife.

A husband recognizes affection from his wife when she expresses a delight to be with him. He is moved by her admiration for him and does not mind at all if the expressions of tenderness hint of a sexual connotation.

More than likely, at this point in your relationship, an affectionate smile or a hug from you is automatic when Debbie walks into the room. Once you are married for a while, be cautious that you never take each other for granted or the automatic smile and hug will lapse into a grunt and sigh.

3) Appreciation

The most effective strategy for maintaining a lifetime of spontaneous affection is to daily include a moment in your prayers where you express appreciation to God for both specific traits in Debbie's life and for acts of kindness she has performed.

- Mark your response to the following commitment: I commit to pause daily as I pray and express gratitude to God by naming specific acts or characteristics in Debbie's life that are meaningful to me.

I will strive to daily fulfill this commitment

I do not pray, but I will strive to daily think about the ways I am grateful for Debbie

This is unnecessary for me.

In addition to expressing appreciation to God, relationships thrive when appreciation is expressed directly to one other.

Solomon realized that when he brought his new bride to the palace to “dwell” with him, she would be facing major adjustments. Since he pulled her away from the countryside of Lebanon to live in the intimidating confines of the palace, he thoughtfully and empathetically designed the bridal chamber using familiar timber from her hometown so that she would feel more at home. When Shulamite enters the bridal chamber and realizes the thought and care that her husband invested when he constructed the chamber for her, she not only expresses affection through admiration of his looks, but she immediately and gratefully acknowledges his act of kindness.

Song 1.16-17 Behold, you are beautiful, my beloved, truly delightful. Our couch is green; ¹⁷ the beams of our house are cedar; our rafters are pine.

After you have been married for a short time, it will be very easy to take Debbie for granted. The husband will often take for granted that his wife cooks him tasty meals, cleans the house and washes his clothes. The wife often takes for granted that her husband cuts the grass, washes the car, and maintains the house. It’s so easy to forget to say “thank you” or “I appreciate all that you do.” Get in the habit of immediately and repeatedly thanking Debbie for the little things as well as the major things she does.

4) Time for Affirmation

A husband who regularly takes time to affirm his love to his wife reinforces the relationship with security.

Because she was just a country girl, Shulamite was intimidated by all of the elegant ladies that were in the palace and kingdom. Notice how Solomon gives her security by affirming his love for her and her alone.

Song 6.4-10 You are beautiful as Tirzah, my love, lovely as Jerusalem, awesome as an army with banners. ⁵ Turn away your eyes from me, for they overwhelm me— Your hair is like a flock of goats leaping down the slopes of Gilead. ⁶ Your teeth are like a flock of ewes that have come up from the washing; all of them bear twins; not one among them has lost its young. ⁷ Your cheeks are like halves of a pomegranate behind your veil. ⁸ There are sixty queens and eighty concubines, and virgins without number. ⁹ My dove, my perfect one, is the only one, the only one of her mother, pure to her who bore her. The young women saw her and called her blessed; the queens and concubines also, and they praised her. ¹⁰ "Who is this who looks down like the dawn, beautiful as the moon, bright as the sun, awesome as an army with banners?"

In verses 4-7, Solomon points out different ways that he finds Shulamite attractive. Then he declares that of all the elegant women in the kingdom, he considered her exceptional and chose her to be his bride. He strengthens his assertion by adding that the women of the kingdom also esteem her. What a convincing affirmation of his love to her!

A wife longs to repeatedly hear the ways that she is special to her husband. She needs to know that her husband will always love her and will never ever leave her. This is modeled in the New Testament by Jesus who confirms to His bride (the church) that He will always love her and that nothing will ever separate her from His love (Romans 8:35-39).

A husband also desires to hear that his wife loves him, but the affirmation he longs for most is that his wife respect him and his leadership role in their family (Ephesians 5:33).

Shulamite declares her utmost respect for Solomon:

Song 1.3 your anointing oils are fragrant; your name is oil poured out; therefore virgins love you.

Shulamite says that Solomon not only smells amazing, but his name, that is, his character, is comparable to expensive, refined fragrant oil. She respects him because his character is pure. She points out that because of his highly regarded integrity, the virgins also admire him. What guy wouldn't feel respected after a comment like that?

If your marriage is truly centered on Christ, these expressions of affirmation will not have to be "worked up" but will be genuine.

There are times when a spouse finds it necessary to communicate a negative fact or warning. This can offend the one receiving the admonition and actually incite defensiveness. Surrounding an unavoidable negative comment with affirmation promotes more of an atmosphere of liberty in communication. The Vantage Watch and Prayer Team offers sound advice on conveying a criticism in a loving way:

According to a recent New York Times survey, the number one desire of employees is recognition. They crave affirmation more than salary raises or improvements in working conditions. It's a basic human need. Maslow termed it an "esteem need" in his Theory of Human Motivation in 1943. The Bible contained this concept, however, long before Maslow or the New York Times figured it out. Christ knows people need encouragement before rebuke.

In the letter to the church of Thyatira, John first recognized their strengths, commending them on their deeds of love, faith, service and perseverance. He then pointed out their wrongdoing, but not without offering hope of how to change and the reward awaiting them if they did.

Does someone you know need admonition? It's easy to criticize and sometimes necessary, but before you do, remember to deliver your words with love. Affirming a strength before

*confronting a weakness aids in the process of restoration, which is the ultimate goal.*⁴²

Affirmation is vital to the health of a relationship. It can act as a stimulant to enhance the quality of the relationship or as a protectant during a needed confrontation.

➤ Does Debbie regularly affirm her love to you?

Yes

No

Each of the 4 A's-- attention, appreciation, affection, and affirmation require a conscious effort and should be demonstrated in several different ways:

a) Through Words

The Bible teaches that words possess the power of life and death (Proverbs 18:21). Your words can either be used to destroy Debbie or to empower her. 1 Corinthians 8:1 states that love edifies. That is, if you truly love Debbie, your desire should be to strengthen and empower her through the words you speak. Get in the habit of paying attention to Debbie by speaking or writing words of appreciation and affirmation that acknowledge both specific admirable character traits that she exhibits and specific acts that she has performed.

➤ In the space provided, write a quick thank you note for a specific act that Debbie has performed in the past week that blessed you. Include a direct compliment for one of her character traits that you admire.

Text Box Answer: Thank you for the cookies you baked.

b) Through Gifts

⁴² Vantage Point & Prayer Watch For March 16th, 2012 Presidential Prayer Team

In the Song of Solomon (Song of Solomon 1:10-11), as the bride and groom converse during the wedding feast, Solomon comments on how his bride adds beauty to the gifts that he has given her. He also promises to shower her with future gifts. All girls love gifts, especially surprise gifts.

Presenting a gift to Debbie is a tangible expression of affection and appreciation that says, "When I wasn't with you, I was still thinking about you." A gift affirms that the recipient is worth the time and attention required to select something especially for her. Most spouses expect gifts on special occasions, but simple inexpensive surprise gifts for no reason speak volumes of appreciation and affection. Gifts don't have to be expensive. A card, a flower, a cupcake, or even a pack of golf balls can brighten someone's week.

As noted above, most spouses will expect gifts on specific occasions—birthdays, anniversaries, Christmas, Valentine's Day, etc. Forgetting special occasions can be detrimental to the atmosphere of romance in your home. If you have a tendency to be forgetful or to procrastinate, pause right now to record each of these special dates as a recurring event on your phone or computer. Program an alarm at least one week prior for each event. Repeatedly reset the alarm until you have the special gift or plans ready for that day. Whenever your spouse comments on an item that she admires or would like, record it in a "Gift Ideas List" on your phone.

c) Through Actions

When Solomon went to the effort to construct the bridal chamber using timber from Lebanon, Shulamite experienced the affirmation of knowing that she was cherished by him. He was concerned that she would be overcome by homesickness. His thoughtful actions spoke volumes (Song of Solomon 1:16-17).

Taking the initiative to do things around the house that may or may not be on your "to do" list is an attentive and affirming way to express appreciation and concern. For example, Sam may not normally help with the dishes after eating a meal, but if he is attentive and empathetic and notices that Debbie needs some help, he can step in to perform a chore that she normally does. Or perhaps God blesses you and Debbie with several children, Sam could volunteer to watch the children on Saturday so that Debbie can sleep in or go shopping with some friends. If Sam becomes stressed because of all the traveling his job requires, Debbie can hide notes in his suitcase or stick snacks with love notes in the car.

As you perform these acts of service, make it a habit to thank God for specific characteristics in Debbie's life. When it comes to conveying attention and appreciation, actions can, at times, speak louder than words.

- Check the ways that you showed appreciation to Debbie this week.

Through Words

Through Gifts

Through Acts of Service

Too Busy this Week

Not Necessary, she knows I appreciate her

Physical Companionship through Sexual Intimacy

God designed the marriage relationship to be consummated by the sexual union or physical oneness of the husband and wife. Unfortunately, the typical view of sex and lovemaking in our culture today tends to be one dimensional--involving only the body. However, God's intention from the original creation of the first couple in the Garden of Eden is that physical intimacy involve

the body, soul, and spirit (three dimensions). This is total communication.

Video L6V2 <https://youtu.be/-hPGq6Mtdv0>

The sexual intimacy that a husband and wife experience in their marriage is a thermometer that indicates not only the temperature of their marriage relationship, but also the temperature of their relationship with God. That is, the depth and degree of sexual intimacy a married couple experiences is dependent upon the vertical oneness the couple is experiencing in their relationship with God. A Christian husband and wife who are filled with the Holy Spirit and approach sexual intimacy the way God's intended, will enjoy a much more thrilling and meaningful sexual relationship than the those who do not know God could ever dream of having. Once you are married, God desires that the temperature of the sexual intimacy in your marriage be hot or steaming, not frigid or freezing.

God is so concerned that the physical intimacy between a husband and wife be pleasurable and satisfying that He devotes much scripture to the subject. In the Song of Solomon, God reveals some very enlightening perspective through different "scenes" in the marriage relationship of Solomon and Shulamite. The scenes include their courtship, the wedding day, and very intimate sexual moments in their bridal chamber.

The Approach to Sexual Intimacy

As referenced earlier, chapter one of Song of Solomon highlights the evening that the couple spent conversing at the wedding feast. Their conversation was filled with admiration for specific traits that they found attractive in each other. This approach of exchanging compliments and praise (the "4 A's") began early in the day and continued throughout the sexual experience later that night. The heartfelt dialogue enhanced the romantic atmosphere with reassurance of the couple's love for each other.

We will pick up the song where the setting is the bridal chamber on the wedding night. The bride is speaking to Solomon.

It's important to note this intimate scene occurs in the privacy of the bridal chamber.

Video L6V4 <https://youtu.be/mF4Evkoa2UI>

Even though most men aren't concerned about privacy when having sexual intimacy, the wife is very concerned. I know in our home the doors had better be locked and the pets put out. Privacy was so important to my wife that I would put our boys in bed then tell them that daddy had released alligators in the hallway and if they got up out of bed the alligators would eat them. I told them that they had an alligator pass to go to the bathroom, but if they got up for any other reason, the alligators would get them! You might ask, did you really do that? No, but I wanted to! Guys remember that privacy is very important to your wife.

Alone at last, the bride is speaking to Solomon.

Song 1.16-17 Behold, you are beautiful, my beloved, truly delightful. Our couch is green; ¹⁷ the beams of our house are cedar; our rafters are pine.

Video L6V4D: <https://youtu.be/BCTq2D3mIqA>

In the end of chapter 1 in Song of Solomon, Shulamite acknowledges the effort that Solomon made to ensure that their bedroom was private, but also that it was unique and designed to delight her. Solomon had realized that because he pulled her out of the countryside of Lebanon to live in the intimidating confines of the palace, she might be homesick and struggle with the transition, so he designed the bridal chamber using familiar timber from her home country so that she would be comfortable and not feel so out of place in the palace. The ancients made their chamber room a very alluring retreat with particular

emphasis on scents. They lined walls with beautiful linen and satin curtains.

They dusted the sheets with scented powders and anointed their bodies with oil. They burned incense.

Your bedroom should be the most inviting room in your home. You should always make the effort to ensure that your bedroom is an escape from pressures, a haven for the two of you to enjoy each other.

Song 2:1 I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys.

Shulamite compares herself to very common middle Eastern meadow flowers, the rose of Sharon and the lily of the valley. It is as though she is saying “I am nothing but a dandelion, or a daffodil in the middle of a rose garden.” She admits she feels common and ordinary, like she left home and landed on Gilligan’s Island where she is Mary Ann living in the company of movie stars like Ginger. In Song 1:5-6 she had already communicated her insecurity when she compared herself to all of the other elegant women in the palace. Here, she is once again implying that she fears being out of place in the king’s palace. This fear is not outdated or exclusive to royalty. Most women are insecure about their looks. They need affirmation often, but especially during the sexual progression. Guys, take a clue from Solomon's wise responses that reassure his bride by conveying understanding words of loving affirmation.

Song 2:2 As a lily among brambles, so is my love among the young women.

Solomon answers her insecurity by agreeing that she is a lily, but not just any lily—a lily standing alone in the middle of a patch of thorns. The other women in the palace pale in comparison to her. Solomon initiates the lovemaking process by assuring his wife that she, not another woman, is his standard of beauty. He

has eyes for her and her alone. He approaches his wife with tones and terms of endearment.

*Husband, one sentence of criticism directed toward your wife in any area may well drive away the desire she would otherwise feel that day. On the other hand, one sentence of praise and approval (the more specific the better) is going to do wonders for her and for your sense of closeness in the sexual relationship.*⁴³

Guys, as much as you might want to think that your masculine body is what will turn your wife on, that's not primarily what turns her on! God may have wired the man to be stimulated visually, but He designed the woman to be stimulated more emotionally. A woman can win a man without a word (her body) whereas a man wins a woman with his words.

Video L6V3: <https://youtu.be/T9bmMcN9C2Q>

I remember several years ago when my boys were little that I was sitting on the couch with them watching a TV program when a commercial came on with Hulk Hogan in it. It then began to compare his body with mine. All of a sudden Debbie walked into the room and being the vain man that I am, I thought she is comparing his body to mine. Then she said two of the most beautiful words I've ever heard, "Oh Yuck". I then said "Praise God!" I was once again reminded that a man wins a woman with his words, but a woman wins a man without a word!

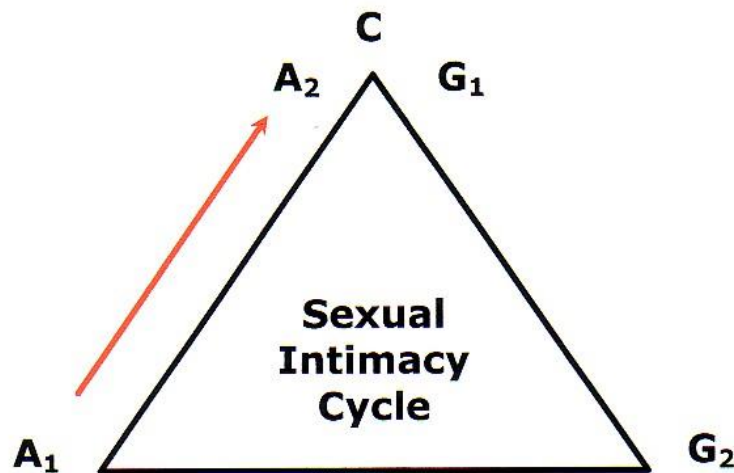
God's plan for the progression of physical intimacy begins with praise and kind words.

C.J. Mahaney aptly states:

⁴³ Ed Wheat, M.D., Love Life for Every Married Couple (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980), p. 74

In order for romance to deepen, you must touch the heart and mind of your wife before you touch her body.⁴⁴

The approach is the time of consideration and affection before sexual intimacy. Note that communication between Solomon and his bride began much earlier in the day when the couple was attending the wedding feast (Song 1:12-17). The husband's sexual approach to his wife does not start in the bedroom, but hours and even days before a husband makes love with his wife. The approach is the critically important initiation to the sexual intimacy cycle. This is shown figuratively as A1 to A2.



Ed Wheat captures the significance of a loving approach:

The husband has been compared to a warm coat he wraps around his wife. As long as she feels encircled and surrounded by his love, she can give herself completely to him.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ C.J. Mahaney, Sex, Romance, and the Glory of God (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), p.28

⁴⁵ Ed Wheat, M.D., Love Life for Every Married Couple (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980), p.82

During the approach, Solomon's affirmation relieves his bride's apprehension and frees her to focus on him.

Song 2.3-4 As an apple tree among the trees of the forest, so is my beloved among the young men. With great delight I sat in his shadow, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. ⁴ He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love.

Shulamite responds to Solomon's affirmation with sexual praise. In Palestine, the apple tree was a frequent symbol for sexual love. The bride is declaring that her man stands out as a sex tree in the middle of all the common trees in the forest.

Her body is probably underneath his because she comments that she is under his shadow. She lets him know that she is enjoying the taste of his kisses which are progressing in passion. All the affirmation (banner or canopy of love) that he has expressed is wrapped around her like a warm coat to the point that she is sexually liberated and free to give herself to her husband.

Song 2.5-6 Sustain me with raisins; refresh me with apples, for I am sick with love. ⁶ His left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraces me!

Raisin cakes (flagons) are an erotic symbol, an aphrodisiac. The passion is building. She implores him to continue because she is faint with love and passion and desire for him. The word *embrace* actually means to fondle. The progression continues with fondling and sexual stimulation. Their physical intimacy is now progressing from the approach towards a climax of sexual expression.

Song 2.7 I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or the does of the field, that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases.

What an interruption!! In the passion of the moment, the bride pauses to caution the imaginary chorus (daughters of Jerusalem).

The untimely interruption adds to the intensity of the warning. God is admonishing singles to avoid stirring up this stimulation or to avoid awakening this kind of sexual love (avoid starting this sexual progression) until the time is right (the wedding night). This experience is worth waiting for and there are valid reasons to avoid, not just the sexual act of intercourse, but also the intense sexual stimulation that promotes intercourse.

Obviously, sex before marriage is blatant disobedience to God. There is also the risk of pregnancy out of wedlock and the struggles of guilt and entrapment that accompany that disobedience. But there are more, less obvious, but nonetheless significant reasons that scripture so strongly warns against entering this sexual progression before marriage.

God has physiologically designed the female body to require a slow progression to prepare for a sexual climax. The progression should build in intensity with an uninterrupted flow of passion and delight.

Notice the sexual progression of Solomon and his bride:

1. Praise and sincere compliments
2. Sexual praise
3. Gentle kisses and soft touching
4. Passionate kissing and fondling
5. Actual act of physical love

Many times, engaged Christian couples determine that they will not “go all the way,” but they allow themselves to enter the progression and call a halt to the flow of passion right before they pull their clothes off. By God’s design, this flow of passion is powerful—at times too powerful to halt. Then it’s too late and the couple has broken their purity vow to God and each other.

Some couples may be disciplined enough to halt, but God intended that the flow of passion be uninterrupted. A habit or repeated ritual of starting the progression and then halting before

“going all the way,” trains the female body to build excitement then stop or sexually shut down before orgasm. A pattern of repeating this practice can hinder the ability of a female to experience orgasm in marriage.

In unmarried couples who practice starting the progression, then halting before penetration, the male subconsciously associates the progression in steps one to four with what is "permissible" during courtship. Therefore, when he gets married, he considers the progression as "courtship activity" and because his body is more easily stimulated, he advances quickly to the sexual act leaving his wife's body unprepared. He experiences orgasm, but his wife who has had no chance to build up stimulation for the orgasm, ends up feeling unfulfilled and used.

If you have allowed yourselves to advance beyond a gentle kiss and soft touch to uncontrolled passionate kissing or sexually stimulating touch, please heed this urgent warning from God. Ask for forgiveness from God and each other and save this holy God-given pleasure for your wedding night.

The verses you just read described the sexual progression before climax in a general way, but God considers sexual union so significant that he describes the progression in more detail in chapter four. Solomon begins his wedding night with praise and affirmation.

Song 4.1 Behold, you are beautiful, my love, behold, you are beautiful! Your eyes are doves behind your veil. Your hair is like a flock of goats leaping down the slopes of Gilead.

Notice how Solomon starts his approach by telling his bride not once, but twice that she is beautiful. A husband can never tell his wife too many times that she is beautiful. Then he gazes into her eyes and compares them to the eyes of a dove. A dove is symbolic of purity and peace. He is complimenting her on her virginity and expressing appreciation for the quiet peace she

brings to him when he looks into her eyes. Have you ever heard Rascal Flatts sing, “I melt every time you look at me that way.”? The message in Solomon's song is the same.

Solomon then moves from her eyes, to her hair. You might say, “That doesn’t sound like a compliment to me-- comparing her hair to goats on Mount Gilead.” Goats from Mt Gilead were world renown for their soft, long flowing black hair that sparkled in the sun. So, Solomon says, “Honey not only are your eyes striking, but your hair is exquisite!

Song 4.2-3 Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes that have come up from the washing, all of which bear twins, and not one among them has lost its young. ³ Your lips are like a scarlet thread, and your mouth is lovely. Your cheeks are like halves of a pomegranate behind your veil.

Solomon is impressed with his bride's full set of straight white teeth. He likes the way her lipstick accents her voluptuous lips and the way he can see her blushing cheeks.

His words may sound cheesy but remember this is an ancient song. The point is that Solomon is communicating delight and pleasure with the features that he finds attractive. His words fill his bride with complete security. He takes time to compliment specific features of her face and then begins to progress down her body and compliment specific features of her figure. He doesn’t rush and zero in on the “strategic” zones. He enjoys every aspect of who she is and this gentleness relaxes her and draws her to him.

Song 4.4 Your neck is like the tower of David, built in rows of stone; on it hang a thousand shields, all of them shields of warriors.

Comparing her neck to the tower of David suggests that he admires her queenly posture. Shields were hung around the tower of David to protect it from the enemy. The shields could be a reference to gold pieces on her necklace that are beaten out to

look like little shields. So, Solomon is reminded that the respect and confidence his bride has in him is a source of strength and protection from the kingdom struggles he faces.

Song 4.5 Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle, that graze among the lilies.

Fawns, gazelles, harts were all delightful deerlike creatures known for their sexual playfulness. By comparing his bride's features to these nimble creatures, Solomon suggests that they add a subtle personality and grace to her posture, maybe in a shy deer-like sort of way. This imagery implies that her breasts were uncovered and he is probably softly caressing them.

Song 4.6-7 Until the day breathes and the shadows flee, I will go away to the mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense. ⁷ You are altogether beautiful, my love; there is no flaw in you.

The mountain of myrrh and hill of frankincense refer to the erotic scents of her female organs. Solomon is anticipating making love to his bride but notice that he says that he will make love to her until the day breaks. This implies that he views lovemaking as a journey from one destination to the next. The journey is a gentle progression of stimulating and preparing her body. He is not rushing but plans to make love to his bride all night long.

Guys, if your lovemaking only lasts for five to ten minutes, then your bride may conclude that you are primarily treating her as an object of your sexual release.

The difference in the amount of time it takes for a man to achieve orgasm versus a woman is a real one. A husband usually needs about two or three minutes of stimulation to have an orgasm, but a woman generally needs ten times that amount of time.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Ibid, p.38

Guys, to help you remember this, realize that a man is like a microwave oven, he's ready in a few seconds, where a woman is like a crock pot, she takes a long time! Always remember that emotional intercourse (the exchange of thoughts and feelings) must precede sexual intercourse.

Solomon then pauses to sum up his wife's entire body (Song of Solomon 4:7). He says that from head to toe I can't see any flaws in you, you are altogether beautiful.

Every wife wants to believe that her husband is aroused by her body. Most wives don't think about how fair they are, but rather how flawed they are, therefore it is important that the husband continually convey to his wife that she is his beauty queen. If a husband does not make his wife feel secure in her beauty, he will disarm his wife and make her feel ashamed every time she is naked in front of him.

Song 4.8 Come with me from Lebanon, my bride; come with me from Lebanon. Depart from the peak of Amana, from the peak of Senir and Hermon, from the dens of lions, from the mountains of leopards.

Some commentators believe that Solomon is using imagery to encourage his bride to come with him to the peaks of ecstasy. Others feel that Shulamite is so overwhelmed with the transition from her home in Lebanon to the palace that she could possibly be distracted by homesickness and he is gently drawing her attention back to him. The fact is that men tend to have a one-track mind, but the brain signals of women tend to vacillate between different thoughts. Her thoughts could very well be drifting to the dramatic changes in her life. So Solomon pauses to consider her emotional needs. Instead of becoming irritated at her distraction or hesitancy, he gently invites her to escape from those thoughts and find comfort in his arms. It is only after Solomon is sensitive to meeting his wife's emotional needs that

he continues to pursue her sexually. A husband that is a skilled lover is more concerned about his wife's sexual satisfaction than his own. Guys, if you seek to satisfy your wife first, you will be more than satisfied.

Song 4.9-10 You have captivated my heart, my sister, my bride; you have captivated my heart with one glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace. ¹⁰ How beautiful is your love, my sister, my bride! How much better is your love than wine, and the fragrance of your oils than any spice!

Solomon's heart is about to beat out of his chest. He is fully concentrating on his bride and is delighted with her body and her responses. The word "love" in verse ten refers to her sexual caresses. He encourages her to continue by affirming her skill as a lover. Her caresses, touches, and kisses are more intoxicating than any wine. The oils that he refers to are the oils that her female organs are producing. They are more pleasant to smell than spices. He is not only ready for her, but he is saying, "I can hardly stand it anymore, I am overwhelmed with desire for you."

Girls, notice the bride looks good, smells good, tastes good and is responsive to her husband's sexual advances.

Video L6V5: <https://youtu.be/AGHz5He4YKs>

On the day of the wedding, brides are normally freshly manicured, their hair is styled, their makeup is perfect and their bodies are scented with fragrance. But that picture perfect presentation can degenerate quickly over time. I have a friend who was a widow for fifteen years and very sensitive to the value of relationships. She asked me once if I had ever considered that a lot of times after a woman has been married a while that she tends to let herself go---. She quits styling her hair, rarely wears makeup, gains extra weight and wears comfortable sloppy clothes all the time. And in the winter---she quits shaving her legs. Her husband goes to the office everyday and he is surrounded by

elegant ladies that are attractive and smell good. Then he comes home to his wife and she looks like a frump. Ladies, you don't have to be a June Cleaver and vacuum your house in a pencil skirt and pearls, but be considerate and show your husband that you want to look good for him. After you have been married for a while, remember to show him that you are his and you want him to be proud of the way you look.

Practicing considerate grooming habits is not limited to females. Guys, it is also important to be sensitive in your personal hygiene. When you play ball or workout, take time to take a shower, put on some deodorant and good smelling powder. Girls take time to shave your legs and put on some good smelling lotion. Both of you need to be aware of stale breath. Remember to brush your teeth. Be considerate. Practice good hygiene!

To enhance your romance; shower, shave and then snuggle!

Song 4.11 Your lips drip nectar, my bride; honey and milk are under your tongue; the fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of Lebanon.

The bride is obviously not passive in expressing her love to Solomon. Her kisses are stimulating.

Her sheer negligee is scented with her perfume.

Wives if your husband likes black, see-through lingerie, don't wear flannel pajamas to bed. You're not living in a nunnery; you are sleeping with a man. He's not interested in fighting through yards of cloth or "missionary muumuus" in order to find you.⁴⁷

Song 4.12-15 A garden locked is my sister, my bride, a spring locked, a fountain sealed. ¹³ Your shoots are an orchard of pomegranates with all choicest fruits, henna with nard, ¹⁴ nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense, myrrh and

⁴⁷ Joseph C. Dillow, Solomon on Sex (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1977), p.81

aloes, with all choice spices— ¹⁵ a garden fountain, a well of living water, and flowing streams from Lebanon.

Solomon uses the metaphor of a garden to refer to his bride's vagina. He is saying that she is a virgin and has never been entered. Gardens in Palestine were hidden and private. They were filled with fruit trees, sweet smelling blossoms, shade trees, winding paths and streams of flowing water. Perhaps he is comparing her to the original garden in which God placed the first man and woman. The word "garden" in Genesis 2:8, means an enclosed place of pleasure. To Solomon, sexually approaching Shulamite is like entering into paradise, an enclosed place of pleasure with the sweetest delights. Her garden is an open well from which he, like a thirsty traveler can draw refreshment. The streams of Lebanon refer to her juices that lubricate her vagina for intercourse. Since Solomon is married to her, he is the rightful owner of her garden.

Solomon has slowly and gently journeyed along Shulamite's body. With tender thoughtfulness, he romantically convinces her to enjoy the progression of pleasure with him. We know from chapter two that along the way, he was kissing and gently stroking and fondling (Song of Solomon 2:1-6).

This wise lover understood and respected the differences between a male and female body.

A man may have sex on the brain, but the part of his body he wants touched is approximately forty inches south. A man's sexual glands are concentrated in one location, his genitals. But that one location contains so many stimulation points that even a mild touch drives him wild. A man has seventeen sexual glands. Like millions of Energizer Bunnies, these glands work day and night, producing semen, which is stored in an inner sac in the testes. When the sac fills up, his testes tell his brain, "Do something quick before I explode!" A man's need for sex is not all

in his mind; his sexual command center demands release from the accumulated buildup.

Contrast this to a woman's body. Every inch of the female anatomy can trigger sexual longing. A caress in the small of her back, a lingering hand on her thigh, a slow stroke on her arm can all send tingles to the tips of her toes. And we haven't even mentioned the hot spots! These differences could be summarized like this: A woman responds to accumulated touches in many parts of her body until she reaches the desire to be "filled up" while a man quickly responds to direct touch of his genitals and feels a need to "empty out."⁴⁸

Solomon is waiting at the edge of Shulamite's garden.

Song 4.16 Awake, O north wind, and come, O south wind! Blow upon my garden, let its spices flow. Let my beloved come to his garden, and eat its choicest fruits.

Shulamite joins the metaphoric communication by inviting the north and south winds to blow. North winds remove clouds and bring clear weather, whereas south winds bring warmth and moisture. Cross winds are necessary to promote the growth of a garden. She is conveying to Solomon that what he is doing is stimulating her garden.

Because stimulation for a male and female body differ so greatly, communication is vital to achieve maximum pleasure. Silent sex hinders the groom's understanding of what his bride needs.

Video L6V6: <https://youtu.be/TjfluOiE62U>

Communication is crucial for sexual fulfillment, but this can be awkward. How should a couple refer to body parts? If you use proper names, you feel like you are in bed with your gynecologist. If you use slang terms, you feel cheap and dirty.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p.37

Solomon and Shulamite chose to use the poetic terminology of fruit and flower gardens. Each individual couple would be wise to take a clue from this romantic couple and choose pet names that fit the personality of their unique relationship.

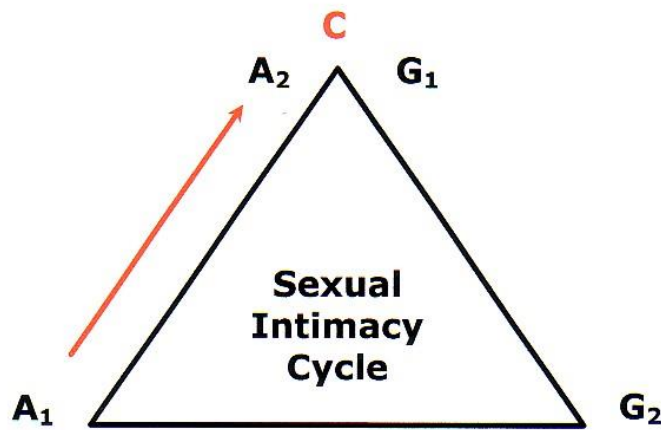
The Climax

When she is fully aroused, the bride invites her husband to enter into her garden. At this point her body is well lubricated and fully prepared. She is ready to completely give herself to him and to experience the peak of their erotic journey.

We sometimes call orgasm a climax and it should be just that: the highest point of interest and excitement in a series of happenings. How do you reach the high point? By climbing to it. Climax is a Greek word meaning ladder. You move to a climax with a slow, progressive build up resulting at the highest point in a sudden, thrilling release....When couples strive to obtain an orgasm without regard to enjoying their time together, sex becomes work rather than pleasure. Remember that orgasm lasts only a few seconds. Emotional satisfaction and gratification occur during the entire episode.⁴⁹

The couple's intimacy has progressed to where it is climaxing. See the figure on the next lesson page, the climax is indicated with the letter "C".

⁴⁹ Ed Wheat, M.D., Love Life for Every Married Couple (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980), p. 76



Some compare this sexual progression to a roller coaster ride. You gradually, with much anticipation, ascend the first hill. When you top the hill, you experience the thrill of release (the climax) that leaves you full of delighted relief that starts to anticipate the next hill.

Please understand that orgasm for males is mostly an instinctive reflex, but for the female, it is usually a learning process. If achieving orgasm does not occur as readily as you hoped, don't be discouraged. This can be due to a lack of education by both the husband and wife concerning how God designed them physiologically to sexually please each other. *Intended for Pleasure by Ed Wheat*, is an invaluable resource that should be read before marriage and should be reviewed occasionally throughout marriage. This book, written by a medical doctor who is also a Christian marriage therapist, offers practical help and invaluable insight in achieving maximum sexual pleasure. The rewards are well worth the effort to read the book.

Guys, always seek to satisfy your wife first and you will be more than satisfied. Where a male may only experience one orgasm, God has physiologically designed the female body to be satisfied more than once (have multiple orgasms). Girls, remember that God made you to be a responder. Therefore, where guys can be

easily stimulated, your body normally requires a longer period of stimulation to climax.

Although the world sees orgasm as the goal of lovemaking, God intends that lovemaking help us to better understand the intimacy that He desires to have with us as His bride.

God created human beings in his image....and his goal in creating human beings with personhood and passion was to make sure that there would be sexual language and sexual images that would point to the promises and pleasures of God's relationship to his people and our relationship to him. In other words the ultimate reason (not the only one) why we are sexual is to make God more deeply knowable. The language and imagery of sexuality are the most graphic and most powerful that the Bible uses to describe the relationship between God and his people – both positively (when we are faithful) and negatively (when we are not).

God made us powerfully sexual so that he would be more deeply knowable. We were given the power to know each other sexually so that we might have some hint of what it will be like to know Christ supremely.⁵⁰

Song 5.1 I came to my garden, my sister, my bride, I gathered my myrrh with my spice, I ate my honeycomb with my honey, I drank my wine with my milk. Eat, friends, drink, and be drunk with love!

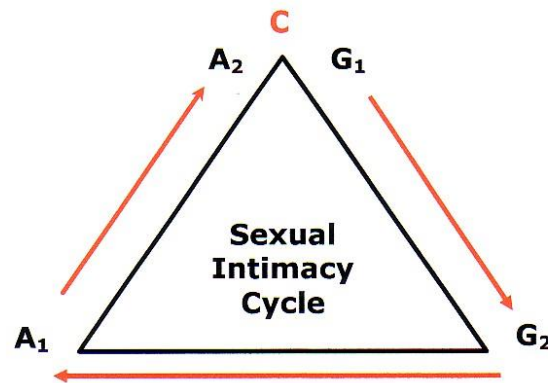
3) The "Afterglow"

After Solomon and his bride experience sexual climax, he communicates his fulfillment and pleasure.

This is the beginning of the "Afterglow" (G1) phase of the sexual cycle. This phase should usher in a reflection of the pleasure of

⁵⁰ John Piper & Justin Taylor, Sex and the Supremacy of Christ (Wheaton, ILL: Crossway Books, 2005).p.26,30.

the entire journey. A couple should cuddle, caress, and hug to confirm the loving bond that was just strengthened by their union. Keep communicating. Make sure that you don't just roll over from sweet exhaustion and fall asleep. The afterglow phase sets the pace and atmosphere that leads back to the approach for the next sexual journey (G2 to A1).



A good marriage typically functions somewhere within this intimacy cycle. A couple should be either approaching each other with loving touches and kind words of affirmation that have the potential to build passion (A1 to A2), or consummating the passion with the thrill of release (C), or afterglowing in the relief of sweet exhaustion and reflective gratitude by confirming their love (G1 to G2 to A1).

Notice that in the last part of this verse (Song of Solomon 5:1) an outsider observes the couple's sexual pleasure and encourages them, "Eat friends and be drunk with love." Since the couple is in the privacy of their bedroom, one must conclude that the observer is the omnipresent God, the creator of sex. In pronouncing His approval of their sexual passions and pleasure, He is granting liberty of sexual expression to all married couples.

God desires that you and Debbie enjoy and take pleasure in each other sexually on your wedding night and all the days that follow!

- Are there any areas of the sexual progression that you feel apprehensive about?

Yes

No

God not only endorses the preciousness of sexual intimacy by providing the stimulating instruction of the Song of Solomon, but he also provides exhortations to ensure its frequency and protection.

Biblical Commands Concerning Sexual Intimacy

In 1 Corinthians chapter 7, the apostle Paul writes a letter to the church in Corinth where he addresses some practical questions about marriage. In verses one through five he deals with specific commands concerning the sexual practice of a husband and wife.

1 Cor. 7.3 The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband.

a) The Principle of Need

Paul instructs husbands and wives to meet each other's sexual needs. A husband should not look to pornography and masturbation to meet this need. A wife should not depend on inanimate sex toys or objects to meet her needs. This verse rules any form of adultery or fornication as unacceptable and inexcusable. God is exhorting married couples to be unselfish and out of loving concern for each other to make an effort to satisfy their mate's sexual desires.

1 Cor. 7.4 For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.

b) The Principle of Ownership

This verse teaches that the wife's body literally belongs to her husband and the husband's body literally belongs to his wife. A spouse is correct in pronouncing to his marriage partner, "You are mine", since the couple actually does belong to one another. Understanding this truth will grant you the liberty to give your body to Debbie without inhibitions or shame, allowing you to enjoy each other as God created you to do.

Also, since both husband and wife have ownership or authority over each other's bodies, they are accountable to each other for their sexual conduct. Hence, a husband who is tempted to be involved in porno or an affair is accountable to his wife for his sexual conduct, and likewise a wife is accountable to her husband.

1 Cor. 7.5 Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

c) The Principle of Habit

God continues His instruction to husband and wives by exhorting them not to withhold sex unless the partners agree to do so for a limited time because they are devoting themselves to a period of fasting and prayer. When a couple is fasting and praying, their attention is totally funneled towards God and their focus is directed away from physical desires. However, when the husband and wife have completed their fast, the verse commands them to come together sexually so that they will not be tempted by Satan to get their sexual needs met outside of their marriage. God is saying that making sex a habit in marriage protects the marriage from infidelity.

The frequency of the desire for sex normally varies with respect to gender. A male's sex drive has been described as 40-50 days per month, however a female's sex drive normally fluctuates (6-

12 days per month) depending upon her cycle of ovulation. The husband and wife both have a biblical obligation to regularly fulfill the physical desire, the physical love and physical need of their mate. Therefore, a spouse who regularly withholds sex from his spouse is disobeying this command and is sinning against God and his spouse. Sex should be a frequent habit in your marriage.

Fulfilling, lifelong sex requires that you make the effort to keep your body healthy. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 explains that a Christian's body belongs to God. Therefore, you are commanded to glorify God in your body. Two major ways to care for your body are to develop healthy eating and exercising habits.

Over time, carrying extra weight will negatively affect blood pressure and increase the likelihood of diabetes. One of the major side effects of the medication prescribed for these medical problems is decreased libido. Neglecting the health of your body is selfish because it limits physical and sexual activity and hinders companionship. However, loving Debbie enough to live a healthy lifestyle will contribute greatly to a lifetime of sexual pleasure.

In a study conducted by sex therapist, Dr. Linda DeVillers, 27 percent of women reported an increase in their ability to climax after beginning an exercise program.⁵¹

Dr. Ed Wheat warns readers of numerous physical/medical causes of impotence.

Test results make it clear that heavy cigarette smoking does decrease testosterone levels in otherwise healthy men. Dr. Alton Ochsner of Tulane University School of Medicine has said, "After very long clinical experience, I am convinced that smoking is one of the most frequent causes of impotence today, particularly among young people."⁵²

⁵¹ Intimate Issues, page 192

⁵² Ed Wheat, M.D., Intended for Pleasure (Tarrytown, NY: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1981), p. 123.

- Do you know of any physical issues that would hinder you from having fulfilling sexual intimacy?

No

Health Limitations

Other Reasons

Since sexual intimacy is the most exciting physical sensation that a husband and wife can experience, a couple should protect this privilege by taking care to avoid the rut of routine when making love. Creativity enhances your romance and lovemaking.

Suggestions:

- Play romantic music.
- Light candles.
- Change the location sometimes. Don't limit sex to your bedroom. Try other locations in your home. Plan occasional romantic getaways at a nice hotel away from your home\
- Try different lovemaking positions.
- Read Christian books about sex together. Intended for Pleasure, Intimacy Ignited

Never allow the fear of pregnancy to hinder your sexual pleasure. God's Word pronounces that children are a reward and a blessing, not something to fear or avoid (Psalm 127:3). One of the first commands from God was to be fruitful and multiply. Raising godly children is one of the purposes of marriage and should not be avoided because of selfish ambitions or a desire to avoid the responsibilities. This raises the question of whether it is wrong for Christians to use birth control. The topic of contraception brings a wide divergence of opinions within the Christian realm. There are compelling arguments on both sides of this issue. Although the Bible does not speak directly of family planning or birth control, there are solid scriptural principles that apply to this issue from a biblical worldview. When these principles are

applied to personal circumstances, they allow Christians to reach decisions that are both wise and ethical. This is a matter that requires investigation and prayer. It is vitally important to realize that not all birth control methods are ethically the same. For example, certain birth control pills and also certain birth control devices are abortive and should be avoided.

We challenge you to be open to having children and to prayerfully investigate the different Christian perspectives of the birth control issue. Ask God to direct you as a couple to His purposes for your lives. You can trust Him. He will provide financing and energy for the family He desires you to have.

A good resource for further investigation is provided below:

Can Christians Use Birth Control by Albert Mohler.⁵³

Have you and Debbie discussed your perspectives on birth control?

Yes

No

Preparing for the Honeymoon

Both of you should schedule an appointment for a complete physical examination by your medical doctor or gynecologist. Remember to schedule the required blood tests before you go to get your marriage license. Ask that your blood be tested for AIDS, herpes, simplex II, genital warts, and any other sexually transmitted diseases that your doctor or gynecologist suggests.

Sex therapists recommend that all newly married couples have a lubricant available on their wedding night. Using a lubricant reduces demand and enhances your pleasure since you will not have to be concerned about whether or not lubrication is naturally

⁵³ <https://albertmohler.com/2006/05/08/can-christians-use-birth-control>

occurring. Investigate lubricants and agree on the one that is right for you. Your doctor may offer some input for this decision.

- Have you scheduled an appointment for a physical with your doctor?

Yes

No

- Have you had a recent blood test that screens for STDs?

Yes

No

Your honeymoon may or may not be your first sexual experience; however, there are some important considerations that will help ensure that your wedding night is filled with lasting positive memories.

The mind is the most important sexual organ in your body. Therefore, negative thoughts can seriously hinder sexual performance and satisfaction. These thoughts could be a result of guilt from past sin, bad experiences with previous partners, emotional scars, fear of failing, or incorrect information passed from parents or friends. The good news is that Jesus Christ came to set the captives free (Luke 4:18.) There is help available from the Lord to overcome hindrances such as these.

- Do you have any negative mindsets that would hinder you from enjoying sex on your wedding night?

Yes

No

You should feel no guilt, shame or embarrassment as you explore each other's body. Genesis 2:25 summarizes the intimacy of the first married couple; "And the man and his wife were both naked and not ashamed." As explained in an earlier lesson, to be naked

means to be known, yet still loved and accepted. If you unconditionally love and accept each other, you should experience no shame as you undress and expose your physical nakedness to Debbie. Even though there should be no shame, you still need to be sensitive to the vulnerability of your spouse as you fully expose yourselves. The husband should not immediately expose himself nor should he expect his new bride to do so. A double bubble bath, candlelight, and/or a sheer negligee can ease this apprehension. Follow the example in the Song of Solomon by slowly investigating each other's body and gradually enjoying your journey to the genital areas.

- Do you feel apprehensive about exposing your body to Debbie?

Yes

No

- Are there any sexual boundaries that you do not want to cross on your honeymoon?

Yes

No

Avoid silent sex. Solomon and his bride continually talked to each other as they progressed sexually to a point of climax. Since your bodies respond to different stimulation, it is very important that you communicate as you are progressing toward sexual climax. Don't hesitate to convey to Debbie how she can please you sexually. Praise her when her caresses are pleasing. Lovingly direct her to adjust if you experience discomfort or displeasure. Pleasing you will increase her pleasure.

Your Wedding Night

- 1) Remember to eat at least a little something nutritional during the day of the wedding. It is not uncommon for the bride or

groom to be so stressed and distracted by the details of the day that they skip meals and then pass out during the ceremony.

- 2) Carefully consider the time of day that you will be scheduling the wedding and wedding reception. If at all possible, plan the wedding at a time of day that will allow sufficient time to arrive at the hotel at an early hour. You don't want to get into your room at a late hour when you have become tired and sleepy. Remember, you only experience this first night once, so make it as special as possible by giving yourselves ample time to enjoy each other sexually.
- 3) Carefully consider the accommodations for your first night. Plan to stay at a nice hotel. Don't settle for a quick stop at a mediocre hotel on your way to your final destination. Make the memory as special as possible!
- 4) Take steps to avoid exhaustion. With all of the anticipation and stress that occurs on the wedding day, couples can easily become physically exhausted. Therefore, plan to go to bed at a reasonable time the night before your wedding. Guys do not let the groomsmen talk you into attending a bachelor's party the night before your wedding. Sleep in the next morning as late as possible. If possible, plan time during the wedding day to catch a nap. You want to be as rested as possible on your wedding night.
- 5) Eliminate Distractions. Do not watch TV. Silence your cell phones. Forget your email. Concentrate on each other. Guard your time together very carefully. Don't allow distractions to hinder your special night together.

Proverbs 5.18-19 Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, 19 a lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love.

Preparing for Partnership Online Premarital Training

Lesson Seven – Finances| Part A

Video L7C1: <https://youtu.be/ekb0syza7TM>

Finances is one area that is often neglected by couples before marriage, however it is one of the greatest sources of potential conflict within marriage. Time magazine states that the importance of money in relationships was underscored by one survey which found that 57% of divorces were rooted in arguments over money⁵⁴. Scripps Howard News Service as quoted in The Detroit News says: "Statistics show that as many as 70 percent of divorcing couples attribute the breakdown of their marriages to arguments over money."⁵⁵

More importantly, how we manage our money is so significant that God frequently addresses finances in His Word. In fact:

- *16 out of 38 of the parables of Jesus deal with money!*
- *More is said in the New Testament about money than heaven and hell combined!*
- *There is five times more said about money than prayer!*
- *There are 500 verses on prayer and faith and over 2000 verses that deal with money and possessions!*

Establishing a Biblical understanding of money management for both you and Debbie is essential to the strength of your marriage. Wise and godly money management will not only serve to protect your future from unneeded stress but will better prepare you to respond to the tasks to which God calls you.

The topics in this lesson include:

⁵⁴ Time Magazine, June 28, 1999

⁵⁵ Jaime Carter and James D. Carter. "Relationships: Communication Can Pay Off in Fewer Fights About Money," Holland news Service, www.detnews.com, July 15, 1997.

Understanding Money

Receiving

Borrowing

Giving

Developing a financial plan for your marriage (Parts B & C)

UNDERSTANDING MONEY:

God's first command instructs man to do two things. He is to exercise dominion over God's creation and to replenish the earth through having children.

Gen 1.28 And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

To "have dominion" means that God has delegated to man authority over all of His creation. That is, man is given the responsibility to be a steward over all that God has given to him. "A steward is someone entrusted with another's wealth or property and charged with the responsibility of managing it in the owner's best interest."⁵⁶ As a steward over God's creation, we are commanded by God to manage all things according to His purpose and for His glory.

1 Cor 4.2 Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy.

A faithful steward clearly understands that he owns nothing, and God owns everything! Therefore, as a steward, we are required by God to be trustworthy with all of the resources that He has entrusted to us. This includes not only our time and talents, but also the treasure (money) that He has blessed us with.

⁵⁶ Ben Patterson, *The Grand Essentials* (Waco, Texas: Word, 1987), 17.

Throughout the Bible, God teaches that to be a faithful steward of His money, one must not have a temporal perspective of money but rather an eternal one. Jesus very profoundly illustrates this in the parable of the hidden treasure:

Matt 13.44 "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field."

The man in this parable realizes that the kingdom of God is a treasure far more valuable than all the temporal possessions that he has, so, "in his joy," he sells everything to buy what is eternal and priceless. From this teaching, Jesus wants us to understand that when money is spent on earthly treasure, it has only temporal value; but when it is invested into heavenly treasure, it takes on eternal value and brings joy to the one who has rightly invested.

Video: L7C2 - <https://youtu.be/XbQOvZjMh0Y>

John Wesley said (L10P2 picture with quote on it):

"I value all things only by the price they shall gain in eternity"

Jim Elliott stated (L10P3 with quote):

"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

Martin Luther said (L10P4 picture with quote):

"I have held many things in my hands and I have lost them all. But whatever I have placed in God's hands; that I still possess."

In another command, Jesus reasons that how we use our money indicates whether our heart is inclined toward God or toward the things of this world.

Matt 6.19-21 "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Matt 6.24 "No one 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.

We will either use the money that God has given to us for our purposes (our glory) or else for God's purposes (His glory). Where we put our money clearly unveils the allegiance of our heart!

God desires that we treasure Jesus above all other things. Paul declares this truth in his letter to the Philippians.

Phil 3.7-8 But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.

Money is neither moral nor immoral, but amoral. So why is money so significant to God and why is it linked to so many marital conflicts? God does not say that money is wrong. Money is a convenient tool. However, scripture teaches us that the love of money is an underlying root of all kinds of evil that will lead us away from God and into great sorrow.

1 Tim 6.10 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.

As stated in the beginning of this session, many marriages have conflict over finances. However, the conflict is not over the actual money involved, but rather money conflicts are an indicator of a

much greater root problem; the heart of a husband or wife that loves money more than he or she loves Jesus.

If you and Debbie correctly understand that the money given to you by God is not yours to use as you wish, but rather is His to be used by you to carry out His plans and purposes, then you have a solid financial foundation upon which to build.

- Are you willing to be a faithful steward of the money that God gives, has given to you, and will give you in the future?

Yes

No

RECEIVING:

Since God owns everything and is the source of all money that we receive, we must be careful to receive money only according to His plans.

Phil 4.19 And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

This verse answers three important questions:

- 1) Who will supply? God!
- 2) How much will be supplied? All!
- 3) What will be supplied? Our needs!

What a wonderful promise! God promises to supply all of our needs. But not only does He promise to supply our needs, but God wants us to understand that our needs will be met through His provision. In developing the correct money management plan, we must be able to distinguish between our needs and our desires. Distinguishing our needs is necessary in adjusting a budget to fit our income. This brings up another important question; just what are our needs?

Our “needs” can be defined as “the total physical cost to physically perform the will of God”⁵⁷ in our life. Since the will of God varies for each person, the physical cost to perform the spiritual will of God will be different for each person or couple. For some, God’s purposes may require large sums of money, but for others not as much. Therefore, the needs in our life will be dictated by the calling of God upon our life. Jesus offers these comforting words concerning our needs:

Matt 6.8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

Even as a servant must talk with his master in order to understand what the master wants him to do, a faithful steward must communicate with God to determine his needs according to the master’s plan. Since God knows our needs before we ask, we can distinguish our needs by communing with God. This requires that we always keep God in mind when we attempt to understand what our needs actually are.

L7C3 - <https://youtu.be/8sHpRPB-Ij4>

It is very important to recognize that needs and desires can be supplied through two different sources, God and Satan.

Even as God will supply our needs for our good according to His will and purposes, Satan will entice us to receive not only provision for our needs, but provision beyond actual needs by luring us into bondage through incorrect receiving. A’gur wisely prays this prayer in Proverbs 30:8-9:

Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny you and say, “Who is the Lord?” or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God.

⁵⁷ Wayne Coleman, Obedience: The Key to Prosperity (Mt Juliet, TN: Cross Reference Books, 1985), page 20.

To avoid incorrect receiving through the schemes of Satan, we must seek God to both determine our needs and the way the provision for our needs is to be received.

When we scheme how we will receive provision, planning in our own wisdom without first consulting God and allowing Him to direct us in how the need should be fulfilled, we are acting independently of God. Instead of devising our own plan, we should dependently present our need to the Lord and allow Him to prove His sufficiency to us by providing in His way. Trusting His sufficiency is a call to worship Jehovah Jireh or God, Our Provider.

2 Cor 3.5 Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God,

Correct stewardship starts with correct receiving. There are four important keys to correct receiving:

- 1) Submission to God's definition of our needs. This requires prayer and obedience.
- 2) Submission to God's provision of the need. This requires contentment.
- 3) Submission to God's timing. This requires patience.
- 4) Submission to God's method of meeting the need. This requires prayer, trust, and obedience.

When it comes to receiving provision, Satan uses three main tactics to entice us into bondage and lure us into living independently of God.

1) Impulsiveness:

When we are impulsive, we are more obsessed with a desire for a particular thing than with the desire to be obedient to God, therefore fellowship with God is broken. The desire, rather than God, is ruling us.

2) Credit:

Credit allows us the opportunity of receiving through physical manipulation based on presumption (that we can pay it back).

3) Lack of Management:

It is vitally important to practice good money management. You may have heard the old adage that “No plan is a plan for failure.” Failing to prayerfully plan is irresponsible. Without a financial plan, we do not know where we are going and therefore will not like it when we get there. Being a faithful steward requires us to know what we have and to control where we spend it.

Luke 14.28 For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it?

- Would you describe yourself as an impulsive spender?

Yes

At Times

No

- Do you actively use credit cards without paying them off at the end of the month?

Yes

No

- Do you presently have a financial management plan (budget) for your personal money?

Yes **No**

Biblical receiving includes correctly receiving blessings beyond our needs. We do not want to give the impression that God wants us to be tightwads and live only with the bare essentials in life. There may be times when God limits our income in order to teach us dependence upon Him, but our God is also a Father who finds pleasure in blessing us beyond what we can dream or imagine. Sometimes the blessings are intangible, but sometimes the blessings are material. In those instances, we should overflow with gratitude toward God and His generosity. We should enjoy the gift of luxuries through worship, recognizing and marveling at the gracious favor of our Father.

Video L7C4: - <https://youtu.be/XUfvE-mMEFI>

Early in our marriage, Sam's income as an engineer allowed our family to live in a spacious home, to drive nice cars, to enjoy an occasional night out, to invest in hobbies, and take a family vacation. When our boys were all still young, Sam quit his job as an engineer and surrendered to the call to fulltime Christian service. Money was extremely tight. We trimmed our budget in every way we knew how. We drank only water. We used cloths instead of paper towels and paper napkins. We did not go out to eat or buy new clothes. In the spring, someone offered us the use of a condo in Kissimmee, FL, right beside Disney World. We thought this will be a great get away; we could relax, play games with the boys and enjoy our time away. We had no extra money so we did not even think about tickets to a theme park. Then a company that our ministry conducted business with offered us tickets to Disney World. Sam and I were overcome with amazement that our boys would be allowed to experience the fun of Disney when we had such a limited income. As we packed for our trip, as we gazed at the change in scenery on the way down, as the boys ran around exploring the condo, and as we climbed on every ride, we marveled that our Heavenly Father would care so much to orchestrate all the details for our family to experience

such fun. We continually explained to our sons how God had chosen to give us the vacation and how abundantly blessed we were. We thanked Jesus and led them to do the same.

Any earthly father is moved when his child repeatedly and excitedly acknowledges gratitude to him as the giver of a special gift. Likewise, our Father is blessed when we express sincere gratitude to Him as we fully enjoy His abundant gifts to us. If, as we enjoy the gift, we simultaneously delight in the giver of the gift (God), we are worshipping. The vacation just described was obviously a gift, but an income that allows a family to plan a vacation or to enjoy a nice lifestyle is just as much a gracious gift from God.

James 1.17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

BORROWING:

Debt is often viewed by various people in many ways. Some of these include:

- 1) Borrowing any amount of money is acceptable if assets exceed liabilities. If assets exceed liabilities, there is no debt.
- 2) Borrowing money is acceptable. Debt only occurs when a payment is missed, and the contract is violated.
- 3) Borrowing for an appreciating item is an investment. Borrowing for a depreciating item is considered debt.

However, debt is defined, there is one common denominator of debt. Debt is the result of borrowing!

What does God say about borrowing?

Prov 22.7 The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower is the slave of the lender.

God clearly states that the one who borrows is in bondage to the one who lends.

The word “borrow” in this passage actually means to be ruled over, where the word “lend” means to rule over.

Even though scripture does not specifically prohibit borrowing, there are no positive references to borrowing in the Word of God. Therefore, in most cases borrowing is unwise. Purchasing a house could be an exception since it is an investment. This lesson does not go into the depth required to fully investigate making wise investments. A more extensive financial course or resource that covers these topics is highly recommended.

Video L7C5: - <https://youtu.be/GP1rbhySQF0>

Today borrowing is made easy and convenient through the use of credit cards. Credit cards should have engraved on them “Dangerous! This Credit Card can be Hazardous to Your Marriage.”

Larry Burkett⁵⁸ lists three good rules when using credit cards :

- 1) Use only for budgeted items.*
- 2) Pay it off every month.*
- 3) The first month that you cannot pay it off, get rid of it.*

Borrowing will allow us to quickly receive the “thing” that we desire without taking time to seek God’s perspective over whether it is actually a need. Listening to God as a faithful steward is more important than the pursuit of the “thing” that we desire.

⁵⁸ A Complete Financial Guide for Young Couples

Borrowing promotes greediness! The result of borrowing in marriage almost always leads to stress and conflict.

If you currently have outstanding debt, a wise move would be to include within your budget a plan to pay off the debt and relieve yourself from this bondage.

- Please list in the table below all outstanding debts and corresponding minimum monthly payments that you personally have. Do not include Debbie's debt. Make sure that you list every debt (including loans in deferment).

<u>Item</u>	<u>\$ Balance Due</u>	<u>\$ Min Monthly Pmt</u>
<u>Visa 1</u>	<u>200</u>	<u>25</u>
<u>Visa 2</u>		
<u>MC 1</u>		
<u>MC 2</u>		
<u>Discover Card</u>		
<u>Amex</u>	<u>500</u>	<u>35</u>
<u>Gas Card 1</u>		
<u>Gas Card 2</u>		
<u>Dept. Store 1</u>	<u>800</u>	<u>40</u>
<u>Dept. Store 2</u>		
<u>Finance Co. 1</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>75</u>
<u>Finance Co. 2</u>		
<u>Credit Line</u>		
<u>Student Loan 1</u>	<u>5000</u>	<u>125</u>
<u>Student Loan 2</u>		
<u>Other</u>		
<u>Other</u>		
<u>Other</u>		
<u>Total</u>	<u>8500</u>	<u>300</u>

GIVING:

As stated in the receiving section of this lesson, God desires that every one of His children be a faithful steward through which He

can channel His resources for His glory. When we give as God directs, we are exercising both obedience to God and faith in God. In James 2:17 the Bible states that "Faith without works is dead".

Giving to meet the needs of others as God directs us, shows that our faith is alive and real. If we receive from God and do not practice giving, then we are like the Dead Sea which takes in millions of tons of water every hour but because it has no outlet, it becomes stagnant and as the name suggests, dead.

Prov 11.24-25 One gives freely, yet grows all the richer; another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want. 25 Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered.

We see in the gospel of Luke that giving and receiving are actually one experience rather than two separate ones.

Luke 6.38 give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you."

God promises those who give that they will receive back in the same measure according to how they gave. Giving becomes a cycle in which the giver receives so that he, in return, can give more.

However, our motive in giving is not to receive, but rather to both experience and expose God through our giving and receiving.

God has a plan for every dollar that we receive even before we receive it. Our responsibility is to determine from God how He wants us to use our money. Therefore, just like obedient receiving, obedient giving becomes an act of worship!

The Macedonians understood the grace of giving as an act of worship. Paul wanted the Corinthians to understand the great blessing of giving from this perspective also:

2 Cor 8.1-9 We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, ² for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. ³ For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, ⁴ begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— ⁵ and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us. ⁶ Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. ⁷ But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also. ⁸ I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. ⁹ For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.

Video L7C6 - https://youtu.be/ebi_Cm_MVDg

We see from this passage that New Testament giving was:

- *Sacrificial*
- *Not based on level of income (Everyone gave regardless of their income level.)*
- *Cheerful*
- *Directed by God*
- *In response to a specific need*
- *An act of love*
- *An act of grace*
- *An act of worship*

The reason that the early Christians experienced great joy through their giving was because they “first gave themselves to the Lord” (2 Corinthians 8:5). That is, they surrendered in faith to God and, as God directed them, they gave sacrificially according

to His will. Paul explains that they gave because they were so amazed and overcome with the selfless way Christ had given to them. Jesus set aside His riches and glory that we might have abundance of life. He became poor so that we might become rich. This is grace giving! Like the Macedonians, Paul wants the Corinthians, as well as us, to gracefully give that others might experience the grace of God. Or as stated above, our purpose in giving is not to receive, but rather to both experience and expose God through our giving and receiving. This is worship.

Paul continues his exhortation on giving.

2 Cor 9.7 Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

Our giving is to be from a willing heart, not under compulsion, but rather with a cheerful attitude as a response to the goodness of God! Therefore, our generosity or lack of generosity shown through giving is a reflection of the temperature of our heart toward God.

Paul continued teaching the Corinthians, just like he did the Galatians, to budget their giving:

1 Cor 16.1-2 Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. 2 On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come.

In other words, we should set an amount aside each pay period so that we will not unintentionally use this money for other things. We, like the Corinthians and Galatians, should plan amounts to give in our budget. The more we prosper, the more we should give.

Gal 6.6 One who is taught the word must share all good things with the one who teaches.

Paul also taught the Galatians to give to the ministers who taught them the word of God. Since most of our teaching today is normally an extension of the local church, that church should be our first priority in giving.

Video L7C7: - <https://youtu.be/73hTr7Zolbc>

Since the time we have first been married, our practice has been to give a minimum of ten percent to the church where we attend. For us, we have found that ten percent is a good starting place. In addition, as special needs are exposed to us: missionary needs, building projects, or emergencies in the life of fellow Christians; the Holy Spirit always seems to remind us how abundantly gracious God has been to us and our family and we are compelled out of gratitude to give to these needs also. After we had been married for about six years, I surrendered to God to establish and lead a new ministry. I quit my job as an engineer and my income plummeted. We continued to give proportionately even though the amount of our giving decreased. However, at this time, my family was allowed to experience, first hand the truth of these scriptures when caring Christian friends liberally gave to the ministry that we were building. We learned the grace of God through the generosity of others. What a difference their giving made in our lives and in the lives of the people we were ministering to! God was experienced and exposed through giving. We learned by experience that giving is an act of worship that cycles joy and pleasure between giver, receiver, and God.

- Are you a member of a local church or attending a local church regularly?

Yes

No

- Do you currently practice regular giving to your local church?

No

Yes

- Do you currently have a job?

Yes

No

- Please enter the Total Income that you will contribute after you are married. This includes job income, income from investments, and any other sources of income. If you do not have a job or job contract, use a conservative estimate.

Income Source	Amount - \$/month
Jobs	1500
Investments	
Other	800
Total	2300

- Have you set a wedding date?

Yes

No

- Will you be responsible for any wedding expenses?

Yes

No

- Will you be responsible for any honeymoon expenses?

Yes

No

- Do you have money reserved or a plan for saving to cover honeymoon expenses?

Yes

No

- Will you need funds for moving expenses and deposits on housing and utilities?

Yes

No

- Do you have money reserved or a plan for saving to cover moving expenses and deposits?

Yes

No

- Have you given Debbie an engagement ring?

Yes

No

Once Debbie completes Part A of this lesson, you will receive copies of both yours and her Debt and Income Tables in the "Couple Assessment Email".

Note: You will not be able to continue to "Finances Part B" until both you and Debbie have completed Part A. Part B will appear on your dashboard as "not started". Click on that link to access Part B. Part B requires that you input the projected living expenses that you expect to incur once you are married. The information you will need to collect for Part B will be listed in the "Individual Lesson Analysis Email" you will receive after completing this lesson. If you do not receive your email within 5 minutes, please search for it in your spam.

Preparing for Partnership Online Premarital Training

Lesson Seven – Finances| Part B

Prov 27.23-27 Know well the condition of your flocks, and give attention to your herds, ²⁴ for riches do not last forever; and does a crown endure to all generations? ²⁵ When the grass is gone and the new growth appears and the vegetation of the mountains is gathered, ²⁶ the lambs will provide your clothing, and the goats the price of a field. ²⁷ There will be enough goats' milk for your food, for the food of your household and maintenance for your girls.

Solomon, the wisest man in the world is exhorting his son, Rehoboam and God is exhorting us, His children, to be diligent to know the condition of our source of income and to oversee it efficiently because our family will need it.

DEVELOPING A FINANCIAL PLAN FOR YOUR MARRIAGE:

Developing a biblically sound financial plan for marriage is foundational to future marital financial stability and should help prevent marital conflict over financial decisions. Financial stability will also be beneficial in qualifying for a future home loan. In order to keep money in a God-honoring priority and perspective and to avoid disobedience, bondage, and idolatry in the financial arena, a wise couple prays over the purposes God has for their lives. The couple then establishes a budget as a tool that will guide them efficiently and obediently. A budget is a guideline that will often need to be adjusted. The intention is not to trap us in bondage to a set of regulations, but to give us liberty to follow Jesus and His purposes. By leading us to avoid waste and prevent bondage to debt, a budget will free us to not only enjoy more material blessings personally, but also to be able to share gifts more liberally with others.

Eph 4.28 Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.

In this part of our lesson on financial companionship, you will develop a preliminary budget for your future marriage. This session is not meant to develop an exhaustive financial plan, but to provide a basic budget which both you and Debbie can agree upon and put into action once you are married. We strongly recommend that you work through a family finance class together before you get married. If that is not possible, commit to studying a class or curriculum together within the first three months of your marriage. A financial class will cover decision making for insurance, investments, plans to eliminate debt, purchasing a home, self-employment, etc.

To get started in developing a financial plan for your marriage, you need to answer two basic questions:

- 1) What will our total income be?
- 2) What will our total expenditures be?

In Part A of this lesson, you filled out two tables that listed your "Outstanding Debt" and your "Projected Income". You should have received an email that included these tables filled out by both you and Debbie.

- Have you received the couple assessment email from Part A that includes both yours and Debbie' s income and outstanding debt tables?

Yes

No

The Combined Budget Table will be your personal evaluation of how to set up the family budget for your future marriage. Use the

Income Tables (see your email analysis for Finances Part A) from both you and Debbie to fill in Combined Projected Income.

Include all of the debt from both yours and Debbie's Debt Tables to help you fill out the debt section in Combined Projected Expenses.

Fill out the remainder of the table with what you know about your personal needs and with the information the email responses in Finances Part A instructed you to begin collecting. You will probably have to estimate some of the figures requested.

After both you and Debbie have filled in the Combined Budget Table and have completed this part of the lesson, you will be emailed copies of the table that you filled out and the table that Debbie filled out. You should discuss adjustments together before finalizing your budget in Finances Part C. You will not be able to continue with Part C until you and Debbie have both completed Part B.

Once all your figures are entered, please review the table. Make any necessary corrections. Save your information. If the table is complete, please approve. The table must be approved before you can finish this lesson.

TABLE 4A

COMBINED PROJECTED NET INCOME

Income	\$ Amount/Mo
Gross* Income for Both Marriage Partners	5100
Minus Taxes (State, Federal, FICA)**	600
Net Income	4500

Check your inputs, please enter only numbers!

* Gross Income is the salary or salaries before any payroll deductions that you and your spouse will be bringing in after the wedding. Add to this any other type of income that you will be receiving for living expenses.

** For Federal tax rate, google Federal income tax rate. For state tax rate, google name of state income tax rate. FICA taxes are 7,5% for employed workers, 15% for self-employed.

TABLE 4B COMBINED PROJECTED EXPENSES

Enter the estimated monthly payment for each line item that will apply to you and your spouse. The fields in this table are monthly figures. If the item is a yearly expenditure, then divide it by 12. The "Totals" will automatically update after you click "Save". Enter numbers only, no commas.

GIVING TO CHURCH/CHARITIES		510
	Total	510
SAVINGS		300
	Total	300
HOUSING	First Mortgage or Rent	1200
	Second Mortgage	
	Real Estate Taxes	
	Homeowners Insurance	
	Repairs or Maint. Fee	
	Furniture	
	Other	
	Total	1200
UTILITIES	Electric	100
	Gas	25
	Water	50
	Phone (landline)	
	Phone cell	75
	Cable/Dish	50
	Internet	25
	Trash Pickup	
	Total	325
FOOD	Groceries	600
	Restaurants	100
	Total	700
TRANSPORTATION	Car Pmt 1	250
	Car Pmt 2	150
	Gas & Oil	125
	Maintenance, Repairs	25
	Car Insurance	80
	Public Transportation & Tolls	
	License, tags, taxes	10
	Total	640
CLOTHING	Husband	50
	Wife	100
	Children	
	Cleaning/Laundry	25
	Total	175
Medical/Health	Insurance	40
	Doctor Bills	
	Dentist	
	Optometrist	
	Medication	25

	Disability Insurance	<input type="text"/>	
	Total	65	
PERSONAL	Life Insurance	<input type="text" value="20"/>	
	Toiletries	<input type="text" value="25"/>	
	Cosmetics	<input type="text" value="20"/>	
	Hair Care	<input type="text" value="100"/>	
	Education/Adult	<input type="text"/>	
	School Tuition	<input type="text"/>	
	School Supplies	<input type="text"/>	
	Child Support	<input type="text"/>	
	Alimony	<input type="text"/>	
	Subscriptions	<input type="text" value="10"/>	
	Organization Dues	<input type="text"/>	
	Gifts (Christmas, etc.)	<input type="text"/>	
	Pet	<input type="text" value="20"/>	
	Miscellaneous	<input type="text"/>	
	Fun Money	<input type="text" value="100"/>	
		Total	295
RECREATION	Entertainment	<input type="text" value="150"/>	
	Vacations	<input type="text" value="200"/>	
	Total	350	
Debts	Visa 1	<input type="text" value="70"/>	
	Visa 2	<input type="text"/>	
	Master Card 1	<input type="text"/>	
	Master Card 2	<input type="text"/>	
	Discover Card	<input type="text"/>	
	American Express	<input type="text" value="35"/>	
	Gas Card 1	<input type="text"/>	
	Gas Card 2	<input type="text"/>	
	Dept. Store 1	<input type="text" value="60"/>	
	Dept. Store 2	<input type="text"/>	
	Finance Co. 1	<input type="text" value="75"/>	
	Finance Co. 2	<input type="text"/>	
	Credit Line	<input type="text"/>	
	Student Loan 1	<input type="text" value="350"/>	
	Student Loan 2	<input type="text"/>	
	Other	<input type="text" value="35"/>	
	Other	<input type="text"/>	
	Other	<input type="text"/>	
		Total	625
		Total Expense	5185
WARNING Your total monthly expenditures exceed your Net Income by (685). Check your entries. If they were entered correctly you will need to decrease or eliminate some line items in your projected budget so that it will balance. Another option is adding a part time job or another source of income. You will need to balance these entries in order to continue with the program.			

Notice that a warning was given because the budget did not balance. Therefore, Sam had to go back and decrease the expenditures by \$685.

After decreasing the expenditures by a minimum of \$685, Sam was able to get the following approval to proceed with approval of a preliminary budget from his perspective.

Gas Card 1	
Gas Card 2	
Dept. Store 1	60
Dept. Store 2	
Finance Co. 1	75
Finance Co. 2	
Credit Line	
Student Loan 1	350
Student Loan 2	
Other	35
Other	
Other	
Total	625
Total Expense	4490

Your budget is balanced! Please click "Approve" to finalize the Combined Income and Combined Expense tables.

Save

Approve

Debbie will have to complete Part B and put her estimates into her worksheets just like Sam did. Once she does and gets an approval to proceed (her preliminary budget is balanced), then she can click approve.

Sam and Debbie can then proceed to Part C which will be their final preliminary budget after comparing their numbers in Part B.

Preparing for Partnership Online Premarital Training

Lesson Seven – Finances| Part C

To be at Part C, both Sam and Debbie must have completed Part B where they have both completed a preliminary budget for their marriage.

- Have you and Debbie taken time to review and finalize Table 4 (Combined Projected Budget)?

Yes

No

Note: For the sake of simplicity of this demo lesson, Debbie agreed to Sam's budget shown above in Sam Lesson 7, Part B.

Now that you have completed a working preliminary budget, the next step is to develop a strategy for implementing your budget and prompt payment of your bills.

When you sign an agreement to finance or rent your home and car, fund your education, or contract for utility or medical services, you are giving your word that you will pay this obligation when it is due. To withhold these funds or use them on something else that you could live without is equivalent to stealing. Habitually paying bills late shows lack of character and destroys your credit rating. It is dishonest. In order to live a life of integrity before God and man, it is imperative that the two of you develop and implement an efficient system to handle your finances.

Prov 11.3 The integrity of the upright guides them, but the crookedness of the treacherous destroys them.

Prov 20.7 The righteous who walks in his integrity— blessed are his children after him!

Devising and maintaining your budget is a key step in the financial strategy for your marriage. The next step is developing an efficient method to track and pay your bills on time. As stated above this is a matter of integrity. However, good financial intentions can quickly get buried under the urgent demands of life. Every marriage needs to apply a bill tracking method. The approach that we recommend will be explained in your email report. We challenge you, as a single, to immediately implement this procedure of tracking bills. Getting started now will avoid the hassle of learning a new system during the adjustment phase of your new marriage.

➤ How will you handle your finances?

Financial Software

Envelope System

Undecided

Who Will Handle Your Finances?

Although in financial companionship, both of you should understand the logistics of your financial strategy and both of you should be involved in any decisions and adjustments to your finances, the implementation of your strategy will probably be more efficient if one of you handles the mechanics of paying the bills, recording the transactions, and filing the receipts.

You may want to work on the set up of your system and even paying your bills together for a month or two until you can see whose schedule, discipline habits, and accounting abilities will suit this task most effectively.

Financial tips that will be helpful after you marry:

1) Re-evaluate your budget and financial system each month for the first three months of your marriage. You will most likely need

to adjust your spending in some areas to stay within your income.

- 2) If you have debt, sacrifice non-essential items to pay off debt as quickly as possible.
- 3) Be patient and wait on God to supply your needs.
- 4) Consider giving offerings above your tithe to God's work where God leads. God will bless you even more as you become a faithful steward that He can trust with additional monies for His kingdom.
- 5) Be sensitive and self-sacrificing regarding Debbie's needs. Be generous but stay within your income. Enjoy God's blessings of the income He has provided but be cautious not to exploit the blessings by spending money that you do not have.

Psalm 37:21-26 The wicked borrows but does not pay back, but the righteous is generous and gives; ²² for those blessed by the Lord shall inherit the land, but those cursed by him shall be cut off. ²³ The steps of a man are established by the Lord, when he delights in his way; ²⁴ though he fall, he shall not be cast headlong, for the Lord upholds his hand. ²⁵ I have been young, and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or his children begging for bread. ²⁶ He is ever lending generously, and his children become a blessing.

Lastly, take time to either enroll in a Biblically based financial course or read a good Biblically based book on finances together as soon as possible. Some that we recommend are:

- *Financial Peace Revisited by Dave Ramsey*
- *Complete Financial Guide for Young Couples by Larry Burkett*

May God be glorified and may your future family prosper as you and Debbie practice faithful stewardship of God's resources.

- Who will handle your finances?

Me **Debbie** Not Sure