

Relationships Week Three: Marriage Relationships



Name _____

Part One: The Mystery of Marriage

God made the two to become one.

Ephesians 5:18-33 (NIV)

¹⁸ Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be **filled with the Spirit**, ¹⁹ speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

²¹ **Submit to one another** out of reverence for Christ.

²² Wives, **submit yourselves** to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the **head** of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

²⁵ Husbands, **love your wives, just as Christ** loved the church and **gave himself up** for her ²⁶ **to make her** holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷ and **to present her** to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. ²⁸ **In this same way**, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church— ³⁰ for we are members of his body. ³¹ “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” ³² This is a **profound mystery**—but I am talking about Christ and the church. ³³ However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

Mystery is at the heart of marriage because it is built to work with God at the center.

The Two shall become Echad. The purest picture of the Trinity on this earth is found in marriage and the church of Christ.

You need the Spirit’s help to submit. Submission and service is the context for every Christian relationship.

Submission is about our attitude. It is not blind absolute obedience. It is not a license for people to abuse others.

3 verses for wives and 8 verses for the men.

Matthew 19:3-8 (NIV) ³ Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?”

⁴ “Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the **beginning** the Creator ‘made them **male** and **female**,’ ⁵ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his

wife, and the two will become one flesh'? ⁶ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, **let no one separate.**"

⁷ **"Why then,"** they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?"

⁸ Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives **because your hearts were hard.** But **it was not this way** from the beginning.

Questions:

1. Take a few minutes and talk at your tables about how the marriage examples in your life growing up has affected you.
2. Jesus says to the religious leaders around him that Moses gave people certificates of divorce because of the hardness of hearts. How do you see this condition of a hard heart playing into the relationships in your life?

Part Two: Protecting Your Marriage

The Four Horsemen: Criticism, Contempt, Defensiveness, and Stonewalling

1. Criticism

The first horseman is criticism. Criticizing your partner is different than offering a critique or voicing a complaint. The latter two are about specific issues, whereas the former is an attack. It is an attack on your partner at the core of their character. In effect, you are dismantling their whole being when you criticize.

The important thing is to learn the difference between expressing a complaint and criticizing:

Complaint: "I was scared when you were running late and didn't call me. I thought we had agreed that we would do that for each other."

Criticism: "You never think about how your behavior is affecting other people. I don't believe you are that forgetful, you're just selfish. You never think of others! You never think of me!" If you find that you or your partner are critical of each other, don't assume your relationship is doomed to fail. The problem with criticism is that, when it becomes pervasive, it paves the way for the other, far deadlier horsemen to follow. It makes the victim feel assaulted, rejected, and hurt, and often causes the perpetrator and victim to fall into an escalating pattern where the first horseman reappears with greater and greater frequency and intensity, which eventually leads to contempt.

2. Contempt

The second horseman is contempt. When we communicate in this state, we are truly mean—we treat others with disrespect, mock them with sarcasm, ridicule, call them names, and mimic

or use body language such as eye-rolling or scoffing. The target of contempt is made to feel despised and worthless.

Contempt goes far beyond criticism. While criticism attacks your partner's character, contempt assumes a position of moral superiority over them:

"You're 'tired?' Cry me a river. I've been with the kids all day, running around like mad to keep this house going and all you do when you come home from work is flop down on that sofa like a child and play those idiotic video games. I don't have time to deal with another kid. Could you be any more pathetic?"

Research even shows that couples that are contemptuous of each other are more likely to suffer from infectious illness (colds, the flu, etc.) than others due to weakened immune systems! Contempt is fueled by long-simmering negative thoughts about the partner—which come to a head when the perpetrator attacks the accused from a position of relative superiority.

Most importantly, **contempt is the single greatest predictor of divorce**. It must be eliminated.

3. Defensiveness

The third horseman is defensiveness, and it is typically a response to criticism. We've all been defensive, and this horseman is nearly omnipresent when relationships are on the rocks. When we feel unjustly accused, we fish for excuses and play the innocent victim so that our partner will back off.

Unfortunately, this strategy is almost never successful. Our excuses just tell our partner that we don't take their concerns seriously and that we won't take responsibility for our mistakes:

Question: "Did you call Betty and Ralph to let them know that we are not coming tonight as you promised this morning?"

Defensive response: "I was just too darn busy today. As a matter of fact, you know just how busy my schedule was. Why didn't you just do it?"

This partner not only responds defensively, but they reverse blame in an attempt to make it the other partner's fault.

4. Stonewalling

The fourth horseman is stonewalling, which is usually a response to contempt. Stonewalling occurs when the listener withdraws from the interaction, shuts down, and simply stops responding to their partner. Rather than confronting the issues with their partner, people who stonewall can make evasive maneuvers such as tuning out, turning away, acting busy, or engaging in obsessive or distracting behaviors.

It takes time for the negativity created by the first three horsemen to become overwhelming enough that stonewalling becomes an understandable "out," but when it does, it frequently becomes a bad habit. And unfortunately, stonewalling isn't easy to stop. It is a result of feeling

physiologically flooded, and when we stonewall, we may not even be in a physiological state where we can discuss things rationally.

Part Three: Questions and Answers