

Making Your Marriage Matter

“Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. 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 blessing. For ‘Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil’ (1 Peter 3:8-12, ESV).

Most of the time when couples are experiencing difficulties in their marriage the words reflected in the passage above are not even on the radar screen. Themes such as compassion, unity, humility, and peace have long ago fallen by the wayside. Attention has turned instead to an individual’s own agenda, and the majority of the time the central component of that agenda is “self” rather than God.

What are some steps that can be taken to reverse the process? What can make bad marriages good and good marriages better? That is the emphasis of our attention.

1. EMPHASIS ON THE EYES

Jesus said, “Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is a log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye” (Matthew 7:3-5 ESV).

The only way to look at logs and see them properly is through the lense of God’s Word. The very essence of Christianity is that Christians have been redeemed. In every conflict a Christian has, it is only proper to go back and review our “beams” against the backdrop of God’s holiness. After that we can more readily deal with “logs” and “beams” in horizontal relationships.

Sin narrows the vision of life to a point where all the individual can see is his/her fallen perspective of things. The Bible opens the sphere of vision so much that the perspective of the eternal God may be viewed. According to Jesus, relational reconciliation begins with an honest assessment of one’s own faults and a willingness to do something about it.

2. Living out Love

A. The language of “love needs” is not newly discovered – simply revived in our day. Anyone involved relationally can certainly attest to the fact that it is much easier to love

when you are receiving love in return. However, Paul chose to frame the concept differently. Romans 13:8 says “Let no outstanding debt remain except the continuing debt to love one another...” To view love as “I owe” instead of as “I need” is not appealing to most people. Yet, the passages about love in the Bible use verbs and describe ways we are to give, help, exercise patience, show kindness, speak truth, live compassionately, etc. Christian should ALWAYS pursue a mindset that giving love, regardless of the situation, is always a more noble and God-ordained call than falling prey to the cultural, self-seeking view of “I need” before “I give.” Otherwise the idea of love begins to resemble that of the “sinner” more than the One who graciously came to redeem the sinner.

B. Ephesians 5:25-27 tells us that the husband is to love their wife as Christ loved the church. Considering that in the same passage Paul makes it clear that the church is the bride of Christ (the Church is made up of husbands and wives; male and female) we learn a powerful truth from which men may find wonderful liberation. The framework to equip husbands to reflect leadership in the home is the true Husband to which all believers are subject and called to imitate. Men are called to be lovers and leaders. Notice the objective of Christ-like love in this verse: “that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word, 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.”

C. Ephesians 5:22-23 speaks of the love that a wife is to demonstrate. Our modern culture, highly influenced by feminine ideology, does not like the word “submit.” However, this in no way implies inferiority, insignificance, or a step downward. Rather, it is the pinnacle of worship and praise to God (see John 13:12-16). If we use this example (where Jesus is clearly Lord and Savior), we should draw some observations from it. Jesus was completely conscious of the selfishness of every disciple. Yet, in spite of this awareness, He, the Perfect One, washed their feet. Were they worthy? No. Was Jesus “less” because He served them? No. Jesus gave this sobering reality check: “Truly, Truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him” (vs. 16).

3. Trust and Obey

One of the most common arguments made by a spouse whose husband/wife has committed adultery (or broken their trust in some other way) is obviously “How can I ever trust you again?” It is a valid question. The thought process is “I forgive him, but how can I love him when I don’t even trust him?” However, there is a big difference in

the secular view of romance and the Biblical view of love. Read carefully Jeremiah 17:5-9 and you will see that the passage discourages **placing trust in flesh** and it points out that it ultimately destroys. **Conversely, if you place your trust in God, blessings will abound.**

Living as a tree planted by the waters does not depend on building trust in a spouse, but by learning to trust God in spite of the pain and the fear. The wise author of Proverbs said, "TRUST in the LORD with ALL your HEART, and lean not to YOUR OWN understanding...Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your flesh, and refreshment to your bones" (Proverbs 3:5, 7-8, ESV). It is also worth noting that **honesty and trust** are two different things. Working toward an honest relationship is imperative, but trust for the believer belongs exclusively to almighty God who alone can bring forth the foundation for trust, for He alone is faithful.

4. Tug-of War Leaves Rope Burns

This process often begins not with a rope on a playground, but by the exchange of a once vulnerable demeanor with a very guarded stance. Once an adversarial position is assumed, the sense of safety once experienced in the marriage mutates into guardedness, anger, doubt, fear, or even hatred. To keep from being hurt from this situation, creative strategies of control are developed. How? One spouse may choose to remain bitter, minimizing the potential for closeness, therefore preventing the potential for further hurt. One may yell at or criticize the other spouse, attempting to force them to keep a safe distance. Each may participate in "passive-aggressive" behavior in order to attempt to maintain control.

Jesus Christ is the most powerful person who has ever lived. His idea of power is unpacked for us in Philippians 2:5-8. "Have this mind in you, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. This is true power.

What is your priority in marriage? Are you married to serve or to be served? What "rights" are you grasping? One characteristic of humility is being willing to obey God. Even when Jesus was under profound pressure, his example of obedience is staggering.