

SERMON SERIES DISCUSSION GUIDE





WHY is Serena Williams the greatest women's tennis player in the world? It is not because she possesses a secret and unique arsenal of movements. It is because she has worked hard and mastered the six shots every tennis player, from beginners to experts, must learn: the forehand, backhand, serve, volley, lob and drop shot. It is the same with marriage. If you are struggling in your marriage, chances are you and your spouse have a problem with one of these 5 words: leave, cleave, one, love, or respect. Sounds too simple, right? But it is true. If you work on these 5 words, you can have an incredible marriage.



Over the next 6 weeks, we are going to take an in-depth look at each word and study how it can impact your marriage, whether positively or negatively. In addition to attending on Sundays, I am so glad you have chosen to join us for a weekly discussion group. This is a small commitment to make on behalf of your marriage, and I pray that you will finish this study not only having strengthened your relationship, but will have had a positive experience connecting with other believers in a small group. Connecting in relationships is, after all, one of our primary desires for each and every one of you. And true growth in the Christian life occurs when we walk through our struggles and triumphs together, not in isolation.

With that in mind, please open this booklet with one goal in mind: BE VULNERABLE. Be vulnerable and open to God's conviction, and be vulnerable and transparent when sharing with your spouse and your group. It is amazing what can happen when we choose to be real with one another and humble ourselves before God.

Praying for you and your marriage,


Dr. Matt Cassidy
Senior Pastor

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*An Excerpt from "What Did You Expect?" by Paul Tripp***CHAPTER 2 : REASON TO CONTINUE**

Everyone searches for hope. Everybody looks for a reason to continue. Everyone hooks their daily functioning to some kind of dream. Everyone wants to know that what they give themselves to will prove to be worth it. Human beings don't live by instinct. Made in God's likeness, we are rational beings. The things we do and say are rooted in deeply ingrained thoughts and desires. There is a way in which it is accurate to say that we are all on one big, lifelong, treasure hunt. Your treasure may not be my treasure, but we're both treasure hunters nonetheless. If you didn't think the things you are doing would pay off in some way, you'd probably quit doing them.

Tom was struggling and ready to pack it in. No, it wasn't that he had been dealt some disaster that had left him devastated and alone. In fact, from a distance, it seemed that Tom had a pretty good life. He had a bright, beautiful, and intelligent wife. He had three beautiful children under the age of seven. His job was never boring or mundane. Yet Tom toyed with the desire to quit his own life. It simply wasn't enjoyable anymore. He and Dara seemed to function with low-grade irritation toward one another all the time. Their schedule was ridiculously demanding, and their children seemed to be in need of endless attention. Tom felt that there was seldom a day in which he didn't upset Dara in some way. He was tired of working hard and having little to show for it, and he couldn't find much reason to continue.

Cindy lay in bed awake. She was looking at Mac. It was hard for her to grasp that the man she was lying next to was the same man who had swept her off her feet. As a tear coursed down her cheek, she remembered Mac's infectious smile and his sense of humor. She thought about how Mac had the ability to make the most mundane things enjoyable. She remembered getting excited at the sound of his voice; but no more. Somewhere along the way Mac had quit being Mac. He seemed perennially distracted and frustrated. He spent his time watching sports or on the computer. Going to bed was particularly hard for Cindy. She longed for a little bit of tenderness before they both caved into exhaustion and slept, but there was no tenderness. Mac would crumble into bed, sullen once again, mumble good night, give her a perfunctory kiss, and roll over into sleep. Night after night Cindy would lie awake searching for a reason to continue.

From the beginning, Erin knew that Will was very close to his family, but she never thought it would be like this. Erin feels like an outsider in her own life. She is tired of spending every holiday and vacation with Will's family. She is tired of all the intertwining of marriage, extended family, work, and church. How many holidays has she spent watching Will and his brothers having the time of their lives, quite oblivious to the fact that she isn't? She had long ago faced where Will's loyalty lies, and she knows that there will never be a decision that Will won't discuss with his family. She has thought a lot about what the Bible says about "leaving and cleaving," and in her heart of hearts she knows that Will has never left his family. Erin is tired of being the outsider and is finding it hard to continue. Nathan stood there with the crumpled note in his hand. He had found it several weeks ago on the floor of their walk-in closet. Things have been hard since then. Anita had made no denials. She had become emotionally infatuated with a coworker. No, this relationship had not been physical in any way. In fact, they had never been together outside work, but the note was devastating nonetheless. Anyone reading it would've called it a love letter.

Nathan doesn't know why he keeps it. He doesn't know why he digs it out day after day and reads it again and again. He just does. Anita seems remorseful and is doing everything she can to make amends. Nathan is thankful that she quit her job, but he can't get beyond the note. It stands in the middle of his life like an Everest that he knows he needs to climb but never will. It is as though the note has taken away every reason he has to continue.

Sandy looks at the uncooked egg that her three-year-old has just dropped on the floor, and she wants to scream. She feels more like a custodian than a wife. It seems to Sandy that day after day she gets up to clean and straighten things until she goes to bed, and then she gets up and does it all over again. She lives in sweats and sneakers; those days of feeling attractive have almost faded from memory. Fred has gained some weight and doesn't look too great himself. She passes by the full-length mirror in the upstairs hallway and thinks, "What happened to us?" The morning when the first-years-of-marriage photo album had fallen off the closet shelf and onto the floor, she had hit the wall. It seemed that the pictures were of a different couple from a different time and place. The comparisons were devastating. She is tired of a domestic's existence, and she is not finding much encouragement to continue.

Brandon is simply tired of the hard work. It is difficult not to wish for the early days once again. Being with Jessie had been so much fun. He had loved the spontaneous freedom of their relationship and schedule. He had loved the fact that Jess seemed ready for anything at anytime.

Back then he knew it wouldn't always be that way, but he never imagined that it would be like this. With his new job and the arrival of the twins, he and Jess do little but work hard. Busy and exhausting, life isn't very much fun, even in the rare moments when they have time to be together. When Brandon works late, Jess complains that he isn't home to help, and when he is home to help, she complains that he isn't making enough money. Brandon summarized it well to a coworker: "When you feel that you can't win, it's hard to continue trying."

Nora and Chris are both tired of arguing, but they don't know how to stop. They get up on different sides of the universe every morning and look at everything from opposing perspectives. They are both convinced they are right and are constantly frustrated that the other doesn't see things their way. It has gotten to the point where everything seems to matter. The crumpled towels in the bathroom or the dried-out cheese in the refrigerator have become much bigger issues than they ever should have been. They would both say that they love one another, and they apologize after the heat of another argument has waned, but they don't stop arguing. It is an unhappy existence, and they both feel it. Quietly they both wonder what it will take for things to be different and what in the world they will do if nothing changes.

NOT THE WAY IT WAS MEANT TO BE

It happens to everyone. It is the unavoidable reality of marriage. Somehow, somehow, every marriage becomes a struggle. Life after the honeymoon is radically different from the honeymoon that preceded it. The person you loved to play with, you are now living and working with. The person who was once your escape from responsibility has become your most significant responsibility. Spending time together is radically different from living together. Reasons for attraction now become sources of irritation. We are all confronted with the fact that in some way our marriage is not what it was meant to be. Why? Well, the reasons are found in what we looked at in the first chapter.

Somewhere along the way you realize that you, too, are a sinner, married to a sinner, and you are together living in a broken world. Sometimes this reality just makes mundane little moments more difficult than they should be, and sometimes it means facing devastating things you thought you would never face. But it happens to all. At some point you need something sturdier than romance. You need something deeper than shared interests and mutual attraction. You need something more than marital survival skills. You need something that gives you peace of heart and strength of resolve when you aren't feeling romantic and your problems are getting you down.

Everyone's marriage becomes something they didn't intend it to be. You are required to deal with things you didn't plan to face. In every marriage sin complicates what would otherwise be simple. In every marriage the brokenness of the world makes things more complicated and difficult. In every marriage either giddy romance wanes and is replaced with a sturdier and more mature love, or the selfishness of sin reduces the marriage to a state of relational détente.

So, what do you do when your marriage becomes what it was not intended to be? What do you do in those moments when you aren't so attracted to your spouse? Where do you look when you are irritated, hurt, or discouraged? Where do you reach? Where do you run?

ROOTED IN WORSHIP

So, what does give you reason to continue when the little problems have gotten under your skin or the big problems have left you devastated? What does produce a marriage with sturdy love, unity, and understanding? I think the answer I am about to give will surprise many of you. Here it is: a marriage of love, unity, and understanding is not rooted in romance; it is rooted in worship. Now, you may be able to read all the words, but you still might not understand the depth of the insight of this principle.

What does it mean to say that a marriage is "rooted in worship?" The word worship is a tricky word. When the average person hears the word worship he thinks of a gathering, of hymns, an offering, and a sermon. But there is a biblical truth embedded in this word that is vital to understand if you are ever going to figure out why you struggle in your marriage and how those struggles will ever get solved. Worship is first your identity before it is ever your activity. You are a worshiper, so everything you think, desire, choose, do, or say is shaped by worship. There is simply no more profound insight into the reason people do the things they do than this, and once you get hold of it, it opens doors of understanding and change that were never before opened to you. Let me explain.

When the Bible teaches that we are worshipers (see Rom. 1: 19– 25), it is not first talking about a religious function that is separate from the other aspects of our more regular functioning. No, in naming us as worshipers, the Bible is providing for us a radical insight into fundamental

human motivation. Because you are not an animal, which functions by ingrained instinct, the things you do and say are driven by some kind of purpose. In other words, whether or not your words and actions make sense on the surface, you have acted or spoken for a reason. The most general and fundamental reason for doing what you do is worship. Now, you are probably already sensing that this insight needs further explanation.

Think about this. Isn't it interesting that some of the things that upset you don't bother your spouse at all? Why is it that something that delights you is, at the very same time, a thing that your husband or wife could easily live without? Why are some things much more important to you than to others? And why is it that your list of what is important doesn't completely agree with your husband's? Why are there themes to your anger (certain times, places, situations, relationships, etc.) and certain themes to your discouragement? Well, all these things I have been describing are connected to worship.

When the Bible says that we are worshipers, it means that every human being lives for something. All of us are digging for treasure. All of us are in pursuit of some kind of dream. Behind everything we do is some kind of hope. Every one of us is in constant pursuit of life. Perhaps you're thinking, "Paul, I get all this, but I don't understand how it helps me understand my marriage." Let me take you further.

Being a worshiper means that you attach your identity, your meaning and purpose, and your inner sense of well-being to something. You either get these things vertically (from the Creator) or you look to get them horizontally (from the creation). This insight has everything to do with how a marriage becomes what it is. No marriage will be unaffected when the people in the marriage are seeking to get from the creation what they were only ever meant to get from the Creator.

Comfort had become Jeanie's functional god. No, she hadn't quit going to church. She loved Sunday worship services, and she loved her pastor's preaching, but comfort is what ruled her heart. Jeanie got her comfort from turning her home into a museum to her domestic dexterity. Jeanie owned a thousand decorating magazines. She was always redecorating or remodeling. She cleaned relentlessly and was obsessively neat. She would tell herself that she wanted to make her home a beautiful place for her family, but what drove her was not concern for her family. Jeanie had attached her identity, her inner sense of well-being, to the beauty of her home.

Jeanie was never really relaxed at home; neither were her husband and family. Jeanie didn't want her family to wear shoes in the house. She was upset at every hint of disorder and went after whoever she thought was the culprit. In a moment of anger, Jeanie's husband captured it very well: "Jean, we don't have a home to come home to anymore. This place is not our home; it's your museum, and we are feeling less and less welcome here!"

Tony had attached his identity to success. He had no idea that what he was supposed to be getting from the Creator, he was seeking to get from the creation, but that is exactly what was going on. The place where Tony looked for the success that made him want to get up in the morning was his job. Tony was good at what he did; the more he did it, the better he got, and the better he got, the more money and power he was given. It was all very exciting and intoxicating. It was as if he were living a dream. No, work wasn't perfect by any means, but it gave him a reason to get up in the morning.

But with every new promotion, the pressure got greater and the hours got longer. By the time Tony got home, long after his wife and children had eaten dinner, he had little energy left for his family. Yet something even deeper than this was going on. Because Tony got his value as a person from his job, when he drove away from his job and toward his house, he was driving away from what gave him value. His marriage actually existed outside his circle of value. So, while Tony would tell you that he loved his wife, he was not excited to arrive at home after work. He was easily irritated and often a non-participant in what was going on.

Abby hooked her meaning and purpose to Cameron. She didn't know it, but he had become her personal messiah. She would say that he was all she had ever wanted in a husband. You would think that would mean she was always happy and satisfied in her marriage, but the opposite was true. Abby was perennially dissatisfied. She got up every morning and rode the roller coaster of every action, reaction, or response that Cameron had toward her. She paid too much attention to his tone of voice, the look on his face, and his body posture. Even the littlest things had the potential to wreck her day. She was not only focused on how Cameron responded to her, but she also watched very closely how he responded to other women. For Cameron, it was marriage as a final exam, and he felt he was always being given a failing grade. It was all very exhausting and unappealing. Cameron needed a reason to continue.

I have become more and more persuaded that marriages are fixed vertically before they are ever fixed horizontally. We have to deal with what is driving us before we ever deal with how we are reacting to one another. Every relationship is victimized in some way when we seek to get from

the surrounding creation what we were designed to get from God. When God is in his rightful place, then we are on the way to putting people in their rightful place. But there is more. I am convinced that it is only in the worship of God in our marriages that we find reason to continue.

WHAT DOES A MARRIAGE ROOTED IN THE WORSHIP OF GOD LOOK LIKE?

Paul said something startling in Galatians 5: 14: “The entire law is summed up in a single command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’” (NIV). Now, I’ve thought about this many times. If I had written those words, “The entire law is summed up in a single command,” I think I would have followed with, “Love God above all else.” But that is not what Paul wrote. How is it that love of neighbor summarizes all that God has called us to? The principle embedded in these words is incredibly practical and insightful once you see it. It is only when I love God above all else that I will ever love my neighbor as myself. At the foundational level, the difficulties in our marriages do not first come because we don’t love one another enough. They happen because we don’t love God enough; and because we don’t love God enough we don’t treat one another with the kind of love that makes marriages work.

Consider the Ten Commandments: it is only when we keep the first four commands (having to do with the worship of God) that we will keep the last six commands (having to do with love for our neighbor). Sturdy horizontal love always begins vertically. Lasting, persevering, other-centered living does not flow out of romantic attraction, personality coalescence, or lifestyle similarity. It is only when I live in a celebratory and restful worship of God that I am able not to take myself too seriously and I am free to serve and celebrate another.

I probably taxed your patience here, and you’re thinking, “Come on, Paul, get to the point and help me understand what this looks like!” Worship that gives you sturdy marital love and a reason to continue will flow out of three ways that you must worship God.

1) A marriage of love, unity, and understanding will flow out of a daily worship of God as creator. It is only when you look at your spouse and see the glory of God’s creative artistry that you will treat her with the dignity and respect that a healthy marriage requires. God created every aspect of your personhood. He administrated every choice of your hardwiring. He determined how tall you would be, whether you would tend to gain weight, the color of your eyes, the texture of your hair, the shape of your nose, the size of your hands, the tone of your voice, your innate personality, your natural gifts, the tone of your skin, your natural degree of physicality or athleticism, and whether you are mechanical, analytical, or relational. You didn’t choose any of these things. You didn’t wake up at six months and say, “I think I’ll grow up and be a mechanical guy,” or “I’m going to work on developing a long, thin nose because that will benefit the symmetry of my face.”

All these choices were made by the Divine Artist who has infinite creativity. But there are moments in our selfishness, when that other person is in the way of what we want, that we all wish we could rise to the throne of the Creator and re-create our husband or wife into our own image, or at least into someone who would be easier for us to live with. The relational wife wants to turn her mechanical husband into her clone. The analytical husband wants to re-create his more emotionally wired wife into a dispassionate thinker like himself. The husband allows himself to be irritated by the screechiness of his wife’s voice, or the wife is impatient with how slowly her husband does everything.

In subtle and not so subtle ways we all question the Creator, and in so doing we dishonor and disrespect our husband or wife. We end up criticizing the other for choices he or she didn’t make. We all end up asking the other to change in areas where change simply is not possible. I cannot think myself taller. I cannot alter my natural Creator-initiated range of gifts.

When we celebrate the Creator, we look at one another with wonder and joy. When you look at your spouse and see the Creator’s glory, then you feel blessed by the ways he is different. You are amazed and respectful of the experiences and perspectives that he has brought into your life, which you never would have had without him. And you look for ways to communicate your honor for him and what the fingers of the Creator formed him to be.

2) A marriage of love, unity, and understanding will flow out of a daily worship of God as sovereign. You’ve probably noticed that your life hasn’t worked according to your plan! Last week didn’t work the way you had planned it to work. Each of our stories is being written by Another. Think about this: fifteen years ago you couldn’t have written yourself into whatever situation you are in as you are reading this book. In the same way, your marriage is an unfolding drama written by the wise control of a loving and sovereign God.

I was confronted with this in the very first moments of my relationship to Luella. I stood behind her in the very first lunch line of a new college year. The line was on a campus in South Carolina. Luella was raised in Cuba, and I was raised in Toledo, Ohio. There is no possible way that

we could have controlled all the things that would have to be controlled to guarantee that we would be in that line together, not only on the same day, but at the precise same moment during that day.

God ruled the whole process. He controlled all the cultural influences that shaped us. He controlled all the family values that helped shape us. He controlled all the situations, locations, and experiences that helped shape the particular ways that we think about and respond to life.

In marriage, we bring all those cultural, familial, experiential influences with us. So, we come into marriage with a list of givens that aren't the givens of our spouse. We come with cultural expectations that aren't the expectations of the other. We come in with schedule, aesthetic, and relational expectations that the other person doesn't have. One expects dinner to be a quick moment of food consumption, while the other expects dinner to be a time of relaxed eating and conversation. One person doesn't really care if the house is messy, while the other was trained to expect and maintain a neat environment. In one family, the roles of husband and wife were very defined and evident; in the other family they were there, but blurred. One family thought of money as something to be spent; the other thought of it as something to be saved. We could multiply example after example.

It doesn't take long in marriage before you realize that your spouse doesn't share your instincts. At that point, either you worship God as sovereign and celebrate the different way of looking at the world that your spouse has blessed you with, or you dishonor him by trying to rewrite his story. For example, the house you live in shouldn't be a reflection of one of you. It should be a beautiful mix of the sovereignly produced sensibilities of both. Many husbands and wives carry with them the pain of dishonor and disrespect that results when their spouse has mocked or denigrated their way of doing things or rejected their family and their way of relating or doing things.

But when you begin to celebrate the sovereignty of God and how he formed you and brought you and your spouse together for his glory and your good, you quit being irritated by your differences and start celebrating how your life has been enhanced by them. As a result, you will not only give room to your spouse's sensibilities, but you will honor him or her in what you do and say in the moments when you are confronted with the differences in your approach to the very same things.

3) A marriage of love, unity, and understanding will flow out of a daily worship of God as Savior. There is no area that is more important than this. It doesn't take long to realize that you have married a sinner, and what you do when you make this discovery will determine the character and quality of your union. You will only respond in a way that is right, good, and helpful to your spouse's sin, weakness, and struggle when you are celebrating the transforming grace of an ever-present, always-faithful Redeemer.

You cannot let your responses to your spouse in these moments be driven by hurt or self-righteousness. They must be driven by worship. What does this mean? Well, first it means that when you celebrate God as Savior, you are confronted with the reality of how much you are in desperate need of his grace. This makes it impossible for you to look at your spouse as the only sinner in the room, or more of a sinner than you are. The fact is that no one gives grace better than someone who is convinced that he needs it, as well.

Worshiping God as Savior also means that you find joy in being part of the work of grace that God is unrelentingly committed to doing in your spouse's life. So, when your spouse blows it, you will not throw her sin in her face. You will not make her feel guilty for how hard her failure makes life for you. You will not use her sins against her. You will not keep a detailed history of her wrongs against you. Rather, you will look for ways of incarnating the transforming grace of the Savior. You will be ready to encourage her when she fails and restore her when she falls, and you will not treat her as less righteous than you.

REASON TO CONTINUE

Where will you find the reasons to continue working on your marriage in those disappointing moments when those reasons are most needed? Well, you won't find them in your spouse. He or she shares your condition; your spouse is still a flawed person in need of God's transforming grace. You won't find them in the ease of your circumstances. You still live in a world that is groaning and broken. You won't find them in surface strategies and techniques; your struggles are deeper than that. You will only find your reasons to continue by looking up.

When your heart rests in the amazing wisdom of the choices of a powerful Creator, you have given yourself reason to continue. When your heart celebrates the myriad of careful choices that were made to bring your stories together, you have given yourself reason to continue. When your heart is filled with gratitude for the amazing grace that you both have been and are being given, you have given yourself reason to continue. You are not alone. Your creating, ruling, transforming Lord is still with you. He has brought your stories together and placed them smack-dab in the middle of his redemptive story. As long as he is Creator, as long as he is sovereign, and as long as he is the Savior, you have reason to get up in the morning and love one another, even though you aren't yet what he created you to be.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: GETTING TO KNOW YOU

We are so glad that you have decided to join a group during this series. Whether you're single, married, with children at home or out of the house, or even without children, it's crucial for all of us to know and understand these five words. I can promise you, you will gain much from this series if you take the time to invest the 5 words.

1. Please go around the room and have everyone share a little about themselves. How long have you been married? Where did you meet each other? What quality(ies) attracted you to your spouse? Do you have children? If so, what are their ages?
2. How long have you attended Grace Covenant Church?
3. When you hear the 5 words (Break, Bond, ONE, Love, and Respect), what thoughts come to your mind? Is there one topic that you would say is more challenging than the others? How about the one you would say as a couple you do really well with?
4. Would you mind sharing with the others in your group what you hope to gain from listening to this sermon series and being involved in a Discussion Group?
5. How can we pray for you during this time we will spend in the 5 Words series?

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An Excerpt from "The Ten Commandments of Marriage"
by Ed Young

A PERSONAL WORD

Thou Shalt Cut the Apron Strings

When we stand at the altar we, in effect, are telling our mate that he or she is number one. But if we're still attached to parents or past places and people, our spouse in reality may not even be in our top ten. To leave, cleave, and become one, you have to cut the strings. -E. Y.

Commandment 2: THOU SHALT CUT THE APRON STRINGS

During a group session, a counselor asked three men, "What would you do if you knew you had only four weeks to live?"

"That's easy!" the first man answered. "I'd go to Las Vegas and have a good time spending all my money. You can't take it with you, so I might as well live it up before I go."

The second guy, the group's humanitarian, said, "I'd go out and serve my fellowman any way I could. I would minister to people and try to make their lives better."

The counselor turned to the third man and waited for his response. Without hesitation, the man answered, "I would move in with my mother-in-law and I would stay with her every minute of every day for the whole four weeks."

"That's a little odd," the counselor replied. "Why would you do that when there are more enjoyable and productive ways to spend the last weeks of your life?"

"Because," the man answered, "those would be the four longest weeks of my life!"

My apologies to any mother-in-law who might be reading this, but you know more than anyone else how mother-in-law jokes abound in our culture. We laugh at them, not necessarily out of disrespect but because so often they contain small elements of truth. .

Some marriages enjoy mutual love and respect between in-laws. The parents know when to leave their children alone and let them work out their own marital issues. Sadly, however, many other marriages have to endure the constant meddling of parents-in-law or other relatives.

Interference in marriage, of course, doesn't come only from well-meaning in-laws. It also can come from friends, other family members, even ex-spouses, ex-boyfriends, and ex-girlfriends. Yet the last thing a married couple needs is external or internal interference--which brings us to our second commandment for marriage: Thou shalt cut the apron strings.

MARRIAGE: GOD'S PERFECT DESIGN

When the Frenchman Auguste Bartholdi designed the Statue of Liberty, he knew he had to structure it properly. The winds in New York Harbor would push and tug at the huge mass of copper and rip it apart if the statue weren't built right. The monument could even collapse under its own weight if its components weren't correctly placed in relationship.

Bartholdi therefore turned to Gustave Eiffel, a structural engineer who built the famous tower bearing his name. For the Statue of Liberty, Eiffel constructed a core of steel and iron and then attached frame supports to its central portion. Eiffel's knowledge of which parts should adjoin and which should have separate loads made possible the beloved statue that welcomes the world to America.

In a similar way, God carefully designed the structure of marriage to hold up in every type of storm. His key design principle for strong marriages can be summed up in two words: leaving and cleaving.

Even in marriage, certain elements must be joined for the sake of strength, while certain other components must be separated, lest their combined weight bring down the whole structure.

GOD'S BLUEPRINT FOR MARRIAGE

Right at the beginning of Adam and Eve's relationship as husband and wife, God told the pair, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Genesis 2:24 KJV).

Five times this command appears in the Bible.¹ Now, whenever God says anything, we know it's important. When He states something twice, we may put a star by it or underline it. But five times! Do you get the idea He's trying to get our full attention? When God considers something significant enough to say it five times, we can be certain it's vitally important. We'd better get it right!

God's statement to Adam and Eve contains three crucial words: leave, cleave, and flesh. Understanding these three words provides the key to understanding the way God meant for marriage to function. I believe that all marital problems stem from the husband's or wife's failure to fully follow the instructions in Genesis 2:24 to leave, cleave, and become one flesh. So if we can get this right, we're on our way to healthier, stronger, and happier marriages.

A MAN AND A WOMAN COME TOGETHER

In our culture, when an eligible man and woman meet and express a mutual interest, a dating relationship often begins. During this courtship period the couple discovers differences and similarities in goals, desires, dreams, and even likes and dislikes. Eventually, they may unite in marriage.

Coming Together. . . Like Glue

When this happens, God instructs the husband and wife to leave the parental influence of childhood and youth in order to cleave to one another. "Cleave" is our word for "glue." And not just glue--super glue!

I've learned the hard way to be very careful when working with super glue. To her credit, Jo Beth did try to warn me. When I told her I "accidentally" stuck my thumb to my index finger, she lovingly and patiently (and a little too slowly, I might add) walked into the bathroom and got some strong smelling liquid that helped separate my fingers. I came away with a whole new understanding of "one flesh." With enough super glue, the bond would have been too tight to break without damaging the flesh of one or both fingers.

That's how strong the bond of marriage is meant to be.

Coming Together. . . Like Candles

Most of us have attended a wedding in which the bride and groom light a "unity" candle. On the altar sits a candle stand with three candles--one large one between two smaller ones. At the appropriate time in the service, the bride and groom take the smaller candles, representing their individual lives, and together light the larger candle. When they finish lighting this "unity" candle, they blowout theirs, symbolizing that they are no longer two individuals but one.

I must confess that I don't believe this imagery best expresses what actually happens when two people marry. I believe that God intends the marriage partner to keep his or her own identity. The bride is still the bride, and the groom, the groom; they are still distinctly male and female; each keeps his and her own personality, needs, and gifts. But in marriage all their separateness bonds together to create something stronger and deeper than what existed before. They are now husband and wife!

When a man and woman "leave and cleave," they become one. This is what I like to call "God's divine math." One plus one equals one! There is now one flesh, one agenda, one marriage unit.

If every couple had a clear understanding of what they are to leave and to what they are to cleave, every marriage could enjoy the structural dependability that God designed in the beginning. No storm could bring it down!

LEAVING PARENTS

What does God mean when He tells us we are to leave "father and mother"? Let me first say what He is not saying.

By no means is God suggesting that we terminate our relationships with our parents when we marry. He simply wants us to know that our parents are no longer the preeminent figures in our lives; our mates now hold that exalted position.

Certainly every mother occupies a place that no other woman can take in the life of her son. But once he marries, she is no longer the number one woman in his life. That spot is now reserved for his wife. Likewise, while no one can ever take the place of a daughter's "daddy," the woman's husband, not her father, is the most important man in her world.

Married couples must remember they have entered a relationship in which they commit to honor one another, tend to one another's needs, obey one another, and keep themselves for

one another in every way. Children who get married need to “leave” and the parents need to let them go.

I call this process “cutting the apron strings.” There are two primary apron strings every couple must cut.

1. Cutting the “Counseling String”

Because we so often depend on our parents for advice, the first apron string I suggest severing is the counseling string. You can tell your parents to cut that string--or give them this section of the book and let them read these two points. After all, it's best that parents initiate this cut. So these two points are written primarily to parents.

As they grow up, our children need our advice. And it feels good being needed. But after they marry, we need to back off and let our married children work out their problems on their own.

As a parent myself, I know this is tough to do. My oldest son, Ed, was the first of our boys to marry. If I foresaw a problem coming or thought I knew what he ought to do in a certain situation, I always wanted to butt in and set him straight on how to be the ideal husband! But Jo Beth would punch me in the ribs or give me “that look,” reminding me that I knew very little about being the ideal husband.

Likewise, when conflicts or issues arise between married couples, they should never first call mom and dad for advice. Rather, they should go to one another and, using the principles laid out in God's Word, prayerfully try to work out their own problems, seeking outside counsel only if necessary.

So does this mean that an in-law should never offer counsel or advice? Of course not. At times, every family needs outside counsel. If you are a parent or parent-in-law, you can offer valuable perspective. Remember, however, wise parents understand they must listen to all sides, including the position of their in-law children. As you listen quietly, pray, and encourage, the day comes when you will discover you are genuinely loved, respected, and heard.

Now, to the person who has left (or is leaving) mother and father: Setting up a household does not mean you must terminate the relationship with your parents. You are to leave them, not forsake them nor forgo all their influence. After we marry, we are still to obey the Lord's command to honor our mother and father. The hard-won experience of parents can still play a vital role in the lives of their married children. The Bible contains many wonderful examples of just that.

Consider Naomi, the consummate mother-in-law who had a beautiful relationship with her daughter-in-law Ruth. And recall Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses. Jethro pulled Moses aside and told him he was working himself to death. He advised him how to be a more efficient leader and administrator. Moses followed his father-in-law's advice and made his life and his service to God much more effective.

It's not always easy for parents to cut the ties and allow their children to leave and start their own marriages and families. Likewise, it's hard for some married children to leave behind the security of the homes and lifestyles in which they grew up. But if you want a healthy marriage, you must leave the “safety net” of your parents behind and create your own “home, sweet home.”

2. Cutting the Economic Strings

Because some married couples stay too closely attached to parents and in-laws for reasons related to money, I suggest that parents cut economic strings. To not do so may make the couple dependent or even resentful.

When Elizabeth's husband died, leaving her a fortune, she lavished her married children and their families with homes, cars, and every luxury they desired. But Elizabeth's acts of generosity always came with a catch. Every time one of her children made a decision she questioned, Elizabeth would say, “After all I've done for you, you still won't do what I want.” Her children became heavily dependent on her and so were easy to manipulate--and not surprisingly, they became extremely resentful.

Ann and Bill had a healthier view. They discussed the level of support their children would receive from them when the kids reached adulthood. They determined they would help their children get established, then pull back so the kids could support themselves. Ann and Bill paid most college expenses and helped both their son and daughter buy their first homes. Then, although they had plenty of money, Ann and Bill reduced their financial support for the children and their families. With the economic string cut, Ann and Bill's family enjoyed a relationship free of manipulation and guilt.

Without knowing it, Ann and Bill followed the weaning method of the eagle. The mother bird nudges a baby out of the nest before the eaglet learns to fly. As the immature bird zooms toward the ground, the mother swoops under it and carries it on her back. Gradually, through this terrifying exercise, the baby eagle learns to flap its wings and support itself in the air. In a similar way, financial “weaning” can occur within a human parent-child relationship.

God calls married children to “leave” Mom and Dad. Much of this can be accomplished through cutting counseling and economic strings. But successfully married couples learn that they need to leave more than just their parents.

LEAVING “PAST PEOPLE”

Several years ago Willie Nelson and Julio Iglesias sang a popular tune, “To All the Girls I’ve Loved Before.” I can still hear them praising all their past girlfriends as they crooned.

Willie and Julio notwithstanding, men have to leave the girls they loved before, and women must leave their previous boyfriends. It’s a huge mistake to actively hang on to the memories of past loves. Husbands and wives must put those relationships behind them and give their total affections and feelings of love to their mates.

Hanging on to all the girls or guys you’ve loved before can lead to the “greener grass” syndrome. It’s only a matter of time before conflict erupts in your marriage. If you don’t “leave” your past loves, you’ll feel tempted to mentally compare your partner with that person from your past. Thoughts such as, If only I had married Sally instead, or I know Bill would have acted differently in this situation, can drive a wedge between a husband and wife.

You and I both know there really is no “greener grass.” Every meadow has its share of beggar lice, blighted spots, and thorns. So how do you get greener grass? By watering the grass you already have! Irrigate and cultivate what you have with your mate, rather than gazing longingly at former relationships.

LEAVING “PAST PROBLEMS”

No one can successfully cleave in marriage without first leaving problems of the past. Some individuals discover only after they get married that they can’t function because of previous failures or abuse suffered in an earlier relationship.

When the baggage filled with those past problems sits in the middle of the room--whether in the honeymoon suite or the bedroom at home--it blocks everything. The problems of the past adversely affect conversation between a husband and wife, their sexual relationship, and their trust.

Two years shy of thirty, Rose still carried the guilt of her high school years when her promiscuity had led to three abortions. When she married John she thought she had dealt with her past. But on their wedding night as her husband caressed her, all she could think about was her lurid history. She stiffened and became cold.

If we want our marriages to reflect well on God, it is essential that we leave our past mistakes right where they belong: in the past! We need to leave the things we’ve done and those things done to us at the foot of the cross. We have to move on.

You don’t know how bad it is for me, you may be thinking. I made such a horrible mistake that I can’t forgive myself I just can’t forget this and leave it in the past!

Would you like the key to getting rid of those footlockers full of past junk? If so, you’ll find it in the principle of confession and repentance. When we confess our sin to God and turn away from it, He is more than able and willing to forgive us and cleanse us from all the trash from our past (see 1 John 1:9).

Do you know what that word “all” means? It means all! Everything! God doesn’t pick and choose which sins He’ll forgive and which ones He’ll hold against us. He literally cleanses us inside and out, declaring each sin we’ve committed forgiven and divinely forgotten. Do you know what God then does with our sin? The Bible says He casts our sin into the depths of the sea (Micah 7:19). So lay your sins and mistakes--the ones you committed in high school, the ones you committed in college, and the ones you’ve committed since then--at the foot of the Cross. Then leave them there for God to pick up and bury at the bottom of the sea.

LEAVING “PAST PLACES”

I’m pretty sure that my wife and I are somewhat rare. We have known each other nearly all our lives. In fact, we first met in the church nursery. No, we weren’t dropping off our children; we were the children!

I like to tell folks that Jo Beth was working in the nursery and I was in a crib, but that's not true. We grew up in the same small town, attended the same church, and graduated from the same schools. So whenever I talk about a special event or friends from high school, she knows exactly what I'm talking about--she was there, and vice versa.

If you share that type of history with your mate, it's OK to talk about past places. But I would guess that most people met their husband or wife a little later in life than during the diaper years! Most of you "had a life" before you met your mate. So when you talk about special places or events from your pre-marriage days, especially if your mate was not present, you run the high risk of making him or her feel left out or estranged.

Alienation from a husband or wife can result whenever we fail to leave the things that prevent us from cleaving to our mate. What kind of things? Take your pick:

- an unhealthy emotional or material dependency on parents
- the people who once dominated your relationships
- the problems brought on by past behaviors
- the places where you had experiences apart from your spouse

All such "strings" have to be cut if we are to keep our marriage structure sound.

An Excerpt from “The Afternoon of Life” by Elyse Fitzpatrick

CHAPTER 5: LEAVING YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER

*For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother,
and be joined to his wife. Genesis 2:24*

From the time our children were young, splashing in the bathtub or shrieking as they ran through the sprinklers on a warm, summer’s day, I’ve prayed about their marriages. I’ve prayed that the Lord would provide the right spouse for them: someone who would encourage them in godliness and relieve their burdens. “Lord,” I’ve supplicated, “please bring them devout believers who will love them, who will cheer and care for them.”

In the summer of 1995, our daughter, Jessica, became Mrs. Cody Thompson. Then, in the spring of 2000, her younger brother, Joel was blessed to receive Ruth Scipione as his bride. Phil and I have been gifted with these wonderful new additions to our family. We love, respect, and are grateful for Cody and Ruth. They’re learning to live with their spouses, and we’re learning something new at the same time too: how to become godly in-laws. Phil and I are keenly aware that we’re still growing in these new roles, and we hope that we’re not making it too hard for them in the meantime.

The Counselor Counsels Herself

From time to time I’ve had opportunity to do premarital counseling.¹ I’ve sat down with starry-eyed young couples and tried to outfit them for the road ahead. One session is usually spent talking with them about what it means to “leave father and mother.” I ordinarily instruct them to write a letter to their respective parents, thanking them for their care and outlining the ways that their relationship will change after their marriage. A wonderful example of that type of letter is found in Wayne Mack’s *Preparing for Marriage God’s Way*, parts of which I’ve excerpted below:

Dear Mom and Dad, I want to thank you for your love and devotion to me as I was growing up. . . . At this time, a very important time in each of our lives, our relationship will change—not deteriorate but change, not disappear but be altered. . . . As a Christian I will always honor you, appreciate you, respect you, pray for you, commend you and seek to help you, but still God says I must leave. . . . From the time of our wedding onward ____ and I will become one flesh. . . . I ask you to help us to learn how to merge our two independent lives into a one-flesh relationship practically. . . . You have been given wisdom from God and from time to time, we will be turning to you for counsel. When we do, we will take your counsel seriously, but under God we will think, search the Scriptures and pray, and determine God’s will for ourselves. . . . We want you to be free to agree or disagree with us . . . and we want the same freedom. This will be hard for you.²

“This will be hard for you.” Oh, how easy it was for me to give that counsel to others, and how difficult it is to give it to myself. The change from being the number one authority in my children’s lives to stepping aside and encouraging them to form a separate family unit was daunting. Even now, as we’ve garnered some experience, it’s still difficult to keep my opinions to myself. After all, doesn’t mother know best?

In this chapter, we’ll take a look at some of the changes that occur when your children marry, suggest some steps to help your children establish their families, view some pitfalls to avoid, and then offer a letter for you to write to your married children.

The First Wedding

God performed the first wedding, as he brought Eve to her husband, Adam. While Adam was filled with joy and delight at this reflection of himself, God immediately stepped in to communicate his regulations for all subsequent marriages. “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24 ESV).

It is interesting, isn’t it, that the first command God gives after he establishes marriage is one of leaving the former family? This fact points out the truth that a new family can’t be properly developed until the old family is out of the picture. As Jay Adams writes, “Old ties cannot be

broken unless there is 'leaving.' New ties cannot be established unless the old ones are gone." In light of this truth, we need to be intentional about helping our children leave. After all, if we've prayed for them and taught them, now we need to let them learn to follow the Lord's commands, to lean on his strength and learn about his grace on their own. But this isn't easy, is it? Facing the realities of family life after our children leave to start their own lives is hard. It's so trying to step out of a role that's become so familiar and step into a new one. . . especially when we know that our way is best! When do I give my opinion? How much help should I offer? When is it right for me to tell them that they're making a mistake? How do I say no to them when they're in trouble... again? And how many times have I thwarted my prayers for them to grow in their marriages by offering too much advice or making things too easy for them?

All of these questions and thousands more like them tend to plague our thoughts. In the case of children with whom you have a good relationship, I know that it is particularly hard to stay out of their lives. My children are used to asking for and receiving my counsel, they love and respect me, and it's difficult for me to slip out of my role of the Bible Answer Mom into the lesser role of advisor. How am I supposed to keep my opinions to myself? I know them; I know what's best. Why can't I continue to guide them as I have all these years? Frequently these are the reasonings of my mind. It's hard to stand by and watch my children make choices that I think are unwise, and I'll bet that it's the same for you.

What Do You Mean, You Don't Need Me Anymore?

It's obvious that one reason why this transition is so difficult for me is that my heart is filled with pride, unbelief, and the desire to be needed by my children. On the off chance that it's the same for you, let's explore this struggle for a moment.

It is inherently arrogant for me to think that without me and my wisdom, my children will be doomed to failure and grief. This line of thinking reveals the self-sufficiency and pride that saturate my heart. Although I have been used by the Lord to nurture and discipline them, God has always been quite able to care for them without me, and he isn't worried about how he'll work in their lives now that I don't play such a prominent role. It's at times like this that I have to remember that they aren't my children anyway; I was just an interim manager.

The vexation that I feel at the prospect of these changes is also a sign of my unbelief. Do I trust the Lord with my children? Do I believe that God can providentially rule and overrule in their lives, guiding them by his great grace, protecting them from foolishness? Do I trust that even though he may allow them to make mistakes, he'll also wring immense good out of the situations that I worried and fretted over, growing them and teaching them to rely on him?

Another troublesome facet of letting them go is the fear that if I do, they won't need me any longer. Here's a reality that we all need to face: Motherhood is inherently fleeting. It is planned obsolescence. That's a scary thought for me, primarily because so much of my existence has been centered around and tied to my role as mother. Who am I if not James, Jessica, and Joel's mom? I've spent an afternoon or two wandering through our house, wondering what I'm supposed to be doing now. I've picked up the phone to call one of them, just to chat, and then realized that they're busy with their lives and they don't need to hear from me every day. My motivation in calling them is that I miss them and want to hear their voices. It's a habit of my heart. Should I spend this time in a better way? I wonder. Is there something else that the Lord has for me at this moment aside from pining for their voices?

I'm not saying that there isn't going to be any time when I'll be able to nurture or instruct them ever again. I'm just trying to point out the reality of life as the Lord has defined it. Every living thing grows and changes and leaves one family or group to start another. Why would we be any different?

I also need to understand what these changes teach me about God's love of multiplication and growth. As I've already said before, nothing in all of creation stays static. One of the first commands that God gave to Adam and Eve as he directed and defined their lives was to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth with fruit." How is that going to happen unless families split apart? Every cell in my body will split apart to create new living cells today. Think about this thought for a moment: Without this continual leaving and cleaving, all life would cease. Why do we think that our lives should be any different?

Father, we mothers should pray together, please help our unbelief and humble us. Please cause us to believe that your plan for our children is better than anything we could ever think of. Please help us to see what you have planned for us to do now, who you would like us to nurture and love. Please help us to learn what it means to be silent and especially help us to see the good that you see in our children and their spouses. And help us to bow down before your throne again and pray with our suffering Lord, "Not my will, no, Lord, not even here."

What Leaving Means to the One Left Behind

In light of the fact that my children are commanded to leave their parents and I'm commanded to love them, what steps should I take as I face their absence? I will think and pray before offering them any advice.

I will not tell them what to do unless my husband and I are sure that they are about to violate the plain teaching of Scripture. There will be expected differences in style in their home. Perhaps they will share the workload differently or choose to attend a different church. These are their decisions, and as an autonomous family, seeking to fulfill God's specific calling on their lives, differences in choice or style are unimportant.

In every other case, we will not advise them unless they ask for our opinion. Even when they ask us for our opinion, there will be times when we will find ourselves in disagreement with their choice. It will be then that we will have to believe that perhaps their choice is the better one for them, and that even if it isn't, the Lord will use it in their lives for his glory and their good. We will seek to avoid trying to save them or bail them out of every problem that they come upon. That doesn't mean that we can't, when we are able and when the need is there, help them. Our goal, however, must be to help them learn to lean on the Lord while encouraging them that we are standing behind them, praying for them all the way.

Our oldest grandchild, Wesley, is about to enter kindergarten. Because there are so many choices of schooling available to our daughter and her husband, she's asked me for my opinion in the matter, which I've given to her. I have also made it clear that although I would love to help them with Wesley's tuition, if they decide to send him to a Christian school, we won't be able to do so. We would love to be able to pay for all of our grandchildren's education, but we can't, and it wouldn't be right for us to pay for one and not offer to pay for others. This is a situation in which I would love to step in and take over. I spent many years sacrificing for my children's education. I know what this is like. I know how to do this, I think. But it wouldn't be appropriate for me to do this now. It would rob my children of the opportunity to learn the wonderful lessons the Lord has taught me.

Filling Up the Sufferings of Christ

I also recognize that there are undoubtedly women reading this book who don't have a close relationship with their children. Perhaps the relationship is pretty solid but they live at a great distance, or perhaps your relationship with them was never very strong, for whatever reason. Let's think about the special difficulties this time of life foists upon you.

At a conference I recently attended, a woman approached me after my teaching session. "My daughter and her husband are leaving for Ecuador in five months to do missions work. I'm trying to be glad that they're serving the Lord and that he'll be using them, but I'm also filled with sorrow and grief that I won't be able to see her every day anymore. I don't say anything about this to her because I want her to follow the Lord's leading, but my heart is breaking. Once they go, they won't be home for four years--it's just so far away. I don't know how I'll make it," she said as silent tears slid down her face. What could I say to her? How could I comfort her?

The apostle Paul had a view of his suffering that is quite foreign to many modern Christians. He said, "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions" (Col. 1:24). What did Paul mean when he said that there was something lacking in Christ's afflictions that he was "filling up"?

We know what he didn't mean. He didn't mean that there was something lacking in Christ's atoning death on the cross. The Lord was right when he uttered those three most precious words, "It is finished." His substitutionary death in our place was complete at that moment, and he doesn't need anything from Paul the apostle or any of us to make it any more efficacious. All that needed to be done was done. It is finished.

But what does Paul mean when he says that his sufferings fill up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions? Primarily this: Although the atonement is complete and there is no longer any need to suffer for our sins, Christians are called upon to suffer for the sake of the gospel, so that others may come to know the truth. Every tear that you cry and every heartache you endure for the sake of those people in that foreign land is a filling up of the sufferings of Christ. As John Piper writes,

Paul's sufferings complete Christ's afflictions not by adding anything to their worth, but by extending them to the people they were meant to save. What is lacking in the afflictions of Christ is not that they are deficient in worth, as though they could not sufficiently cover

the sins of all who believe. What is lacking is that the infinite value of Christ's afflictions is not known and trusted in the world. These afflictions and what they mean are still hidden to most peoples. And God's intention is that the mystery be revealed to all the nations. So the afflictions of Christ are "lacking" in the sense that they are not seen and known and loved among the nations. They must be carried by ministers of the word. And those ministers of the word "complete" what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ by extending them to others.

Many times our releasing of our children to move across the country or around the world with their spouses is part and parcel of our "filling up the sufferings of Christ." Perhaps they aren't called to full-time ministry, as this woman's daughter had been; perhaps they are only relocating to secure the education or job they think that God is calling them to. Even in these seemingly commonplace decisions, your love, support, and release of them to follow Christ's call is part of your work for him. Do you see it that way? Do you love his kingdom and work this much?

Perhaps your married children haven't pulled up roots and transplanted themselves thousands of miles away . . . perhaps they live around the corner. Even in this circumstance, will you release them to find and fulfill God's claim on their lives--even if that's something different from what you've envisioned for them? Will you even encourage them to leave, if they believe it's God's will? These are hard questions, I know. They are questions that get to the heart of what I believe about God's plan for me--as a mother, as a valiant woman, as a daughter of the King. It also gets to the heart of what I believe about his character and the importance of his kingdom.

I know that your desire is to fulfill God's will for your life. Like all Christians, we long to hear the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Divestiture is painful, however, particularly when our children have made a home with someone else. . . someone whose opinions, tastes, and desires matter more than ours. This is painful and tearing for most mothers, even when we approve of and enjoy the spouses they've chosen. There have been times when I've found myself in a cellar of affliction because of the choices that my children or their mates have made. It's at that time that I have to remind myself, as the Puritan Samuel Rutherford said, that "when he was cast into the cellars of affliction, he remembered that the great King always kept his wine there." "5 What wonderful wine have you imbibed in this cellar of affliction? What joy and relief has it brought to your heart? What have you learned about Jesus and his perfections through this affliction?"

Stepping to the Side of the Picture

Have you ever said to your children, "Your marriage is the most important relationship in your life"? Again, I trust that you believe that truth, but have you ever communicated it to your married children? How have you done that? I wonder how many marriages have been tainted by the carping of a mother-in-law who wouldn't accept the fact that her daughter or son had left their father and mother. We mothers must make it a matter of highest priority never to allow or encourage disparaging speech or gossip about our children's spouses. Even worse, we must never criticize them or seek to undermine their place. That doesn't mean that we never speak into their lives. But if we have something to say that is important and godly, we should say it to both of them, and we should do so respecting the fact that they are a separate adult unit, no longer under our authority. May the Lord grant us the grace to do so and to repent of the times when we've neglected this parental responsibility.

It may be that you feel so much love for your child that you can't bear to let him or her leave. First Corinthians 13 is instructive in this situation, teaching us that authentic love is not self-focused but rather longs for the best for the beloved. The best for your son or daughter is a holy, loving, committed, one-flesh relationship with his or her spouse, where your child looks for guidance, encouragement, and comfort first from the Lord and second from the spouse. You're probably going to still be in the picture but not in the center of the frame--and this is the right and godly way for it to be.

Another Wedding to Plan For

At the end of this chapter I've written out a sample letter for you to consider using with your married children. In the meantime though, let me encourage you to think about the wonderful wedding that we'll all be a part of when our great King will bring us to his home for the feast that is to come. At this wonderful celebration, we'll be joined to our Savior, and we'll cleave to him and become one in spirit in a way that will make all of our afflictions here worthwhile. Live in the light of this truth as you ponder your relationship with your children and their spouses, rejoice in the Lord's wonderful plan for you, and joyfully release them to their new, God-designed reality.

Becoming A Woman Of Wisdom

1. Write out your present job description. Is there anything on that list that doesn't belong there now that you are the parent of a married couple?
2. What does "leave your father and mother" mean to you? What would it look like in your life?
3. Study 1 Peter 4:12-13, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation." What would rejoicing in the participation in the sufferings of Christ look like in your life? How could you encourage your children in their desire to serve and lay down their lives for the Lord?
4. Prayerfully consider (with your husband, if you're married) writing a letter like the one below to your children. Please feel free to modify it in any way, making it your own.

Dear _____

You know, it was ____ years ago that I first held you in my arms and lovingly looked into your little face. Your tiny hand was so small, and as I held you I knew that you needed me. I was so afraid that I wouldn't know what to do or how to be what you needed me to be. How can I do this, Lord? I wondered. There in your dependency, you needed me to feed you, to dress you, and to teach you how to walk and how to communicate. Later on, you needed me to instruct you in how to live your life. This was a role that I loved and cherished. But this is a role that I'm no longer called to fulfill. Now that you and ____ are married, I need to learn a new role.

And in a very similar way to that day ____ years ago, I'm praying for strength and wisdom. How do I do this, Lord? I still wonder.

In Genesis 2:24, the Lord God instructed the first married couple to leave their father and mother. That's a command that's still in force today, and as I've thought about it and its ramifications for us, I can see that I haven't been doing what I'm supposed to do. There have been many times when I've [fill this part out with your own words. For instance, you could say, "I've given you money instead of teaching you to rely on the Lord's provision." "I've spoken in an unkind manner about your spouse to you (or with you); that's something that grieves God." "I've sought to advise you on matters that were not my concern, and tried to get you to build your new life according to my plan."]

These failures on my part to let you go and let you get on with building your own family were wrong. I'm asking you and ____ to forgive me for failing to see how God has changed our relationship and desiring to hold on to it for my own purposes.

Please don't think that I won't be there for you or that I won't still love you and cherish the times that we'll share together. It's just that now I'll be treating you as a fellow adult and giving you advice only when Dad and I think that you're sinning in some way or when you ask us for it. I want to encourage you to disagree with us, if you and ____ think that we're wrong. This won't affect our relationship or the fact that I love you. You no longer need to worry about my opinion or trying to please me.

It's been many years since I first received the gift that is you. I've been thankful for each of them, and I'm eagerly anticipating the delightful changes that will occur in the future. Please know that I'll always be your mom and that you can always count on me to pray for you and be there if you need me.

5. Summarize what you've learned from this chapter in four or five sentences.

Genesis 2:24

1. What is one point or phrase that captured your attention, either from Sunday's message or the materials provided you in this chapter, and why?
2. Think back to the days when you were dating or engaged—maybe some of you today are dating or engaged, and this question is for you too. Were you given any unique or interesting advice about “leaving/breaking” before getting married? Who gave you that advice?
3. Do you believe that breaking is the first thing a couple must do, that it is the foundation upon which all the other words are built? Is it possible to do the other four things (bond, ONE, love, and respect) if you don't first break?
4. What does the idea to *break* mean to you, individually and as a couple? Has your view of this concept changed after studying this first word in our series? If you could, what advice would you give your younger selves after studying this first word?

5. Who do you think the breaking is harder on, the parents or the child? Does anyone have a story to tell on letting your child go to be joined to their spouse? How was that process emotionally and spiritually for you individually and/or as a couple? Any advice you'd like to share with others who will be going through this stage in their parenting lives?

6. What can you begin doing now to prepare your own kids to break away from home to join their spouse in one flesh? The process shouldn't start once they "join in one flesh" with their spouse, but now whether they are preparing for marriage or single. Maybe come up with a list that, as a couple, you can develop and edit over the days or years to come. Perhaps this could even be a gift you present to your child(ren) when they get married!

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An Excerpt from "The Ten Commandments of Marriage" by Ed Young

CLEAVE TO THE COVENANT

Reciting a Covenant with Each Other and God

Leaving is important. But as important as leaving is, it's only a first step. Marriage is a two-step dance, and cleaving is the second step. With that in mind, let's look at some important things to which we should "cleave."

First, we cleave to the covenant of marriage. When a couple stands before me at the altar, I always say something like this: "Do you promise to love and cherish, to honor or sustain in sickness as in health, in poverty as in wealth, in the bad that may darken your days and in the good that may lighten your ways? Do you so promise, so help you God?"

I've yet to perform a wedding in which a bride or groom has answered, "I don't!" A few have taken a while to get it out, but they always answer, "I do!" And they truly believe with all their hearts they will keep these vows.

What happens at this "I do" moment? In exchanging vows, the man and woman seal a covenant with one another and with God. It's as if they sit down at a table with God to convince Him and their family and friends that they want to spend their lives together--exclusively. And Jesus Christ puts His arm around the couple and says, "Yes." God the Father witnesses the transaction and a sacred covenant is established. The Lord Jesus pronounces the benediction: "What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate" (Matthew 19:6).

Do you remember our triangle illustration about the marriage covenant? God is at the apex, with the husband and wife at their respective corners on the base. As the marriage partners grow closer to God, they actually grow closer to one another. The result of such a covenant relationship is a fulfilling and dynamic marriage.

Many choose to marry in a civil ceremony, before a judge or justice of the peace. In that regard I always think of the old guy who said, "Yeah, I got married at a justice of the peace, and my wedding day is the last time I saw either one of them--justice or peace!"

Contrasting a Covenant with a Contract

Whether you got married in a Christian church, at a justice of the peace, or at a quickie wedding chapel in Las Vegas, you still have taken part in a covenant agreement laid out by God in which He told us to "leave and cleave."

Marriage is a covenant, not a contract. In a morally and socially chaotic world where half of new marriages shatter through divorce, prenuptial agreements--a contractual arrangement--have become increasingly in vogue. Arlene Dubin, a New York divorce lawyer, says that some 20 percent of couples engaged for marriage seek prenuptial agreements.²

Consider the stark contrasts between a marriage covenant and a contract:

COVENANT

Based on love
Motivated by commitment
Assumes relationship 'till death
us do part"
"What's mine is yours"
"Your interests are my interests"
Prepares for life together

CONTRACT

Based on law
Motivated by compulsion
Prepares for marriage to fail
Protects what is "mine"
Secures "my" interests
Prepares for life apart

Couples seeking contractual agreements seem to expect that someone or something will separate what God has joined together. They appear to see such an agreement as an easy way to open the "back door" for a swift and clean getaway.

If you choose to operate your marriage only as a legal contract, you may stay together, you may even love one another deeply--but all you will have is you, your mate, and the state! You will miss the dynamic relationship that comes only with the spiritual bonding and intimacy of a divine covenant. God's formula, and only His formula, gives significance, creativity, and sizzle to a marriage.

Cleave to the sacred reality of the marriage covenant! And understand that what God joins together, no man or no thing is to drive apart.

CLEAVE TO GOD'S PRINCIPLES

Apply His "True" Truth

The Bible is our manual for every phase of life, including marriage. It gives us instruction for every important aspect of marriage--whom to marry, how to maintain and grow a strong and healthy marriage, and how to help and heal a hurting marriage.

The single biblical principle we've been exploring in this chapter (leaving and cleaving) is enough to get a couple through any kind of crisis. But the Bible contains additional wisdom on how to handle everything from the smallest conflicts to the most major crises. Even if the marriage gets fragmented, we can give the pieces to God, apply the principles shown in Scripture, and watch Him do a supernatural work of restoration.

Every one of the ten marriage commandments in this book is rooted in the principles of God, His "true Truth." The key to using God's principles in your marriage is to make sure you don't just read about them but that you apply them to every facet of your marriage.

Watch Out for a "Sensual Song"

Unfortunately, too many of us are like the people about whom God warned Ezekiel. The prophet taught the people of his day God's principles of life. The members of the crowd turned to one another and said, "Let's go hear the message coming from the Lord!" But God told Ezekiel what was really happening:

They come to you as people come, and sit before you as My people and hear your words, but they do not do them, for they do the lustful desires expressed by their mouth, and their heart goes after their gain. Behold, you are to them like a sensual song by one who has a beautiful voice and plays well on an instrument; for they hear your words but they do not practice them. So when it comes to pass--as surely it will--then they will know that a prophet has been in their midst. (Ezekiel 33:31-33)

God gives us the same alert today. Though some may congratulate the pastor on his sermon and even invite people to church with them, for many it's as if they've heard a "sensual song." They feel entertained but do not take the principles they heard into the core of their lives and put them into practice.

Don't make such a mistake in your marriage. Hear God's principles, make sure you understand them, put them into practice--and reap the delightful relationship that God wants you to enjoy.

CLEAVE TO YOUR MATE

My earlier "super glue" illustration might have led some readers to think that cleaving means a husband and wife must become inseparable. But that's not what cleaving means. Husbands and wives don't have to be together physically all the time. How would such a thing even be possible? But they do need to be together in their hearts.

Sound "corny"? Maybe it is. Nevertheless, I can say that Jo Beth is always in my heart and that I'm always in hers. What is important to her is important to me. What troubles me, troubles her. When she's insulted, I'm insulted. When I'm hurt, she's hurt. We strengthen each other, we encourage each other, we hold each other. In other words, we cleave, in both good times and in bad. We are covenant partners. And just as Eve completed Adam, Jo Beth completes me.

What happens when we leave our parents and the people, problems, and places of our past, and we cleave to the sacred covenant of marriage, the principles of God, and our mates? The answer is unity--we are one flesh!

TWO BECOME ONE

Years ago, when I lived in the mountains of North Carolina, some men in my church talked me into a bear-hunting trip. After climbing to the top of a bluff, I got myself all situated and began praying that a bear wouldn't show up!

Ah, but the view from where I sat was worth it. I could look down and see two streams coming together to form a beautiful river. One of the streams carried quite a bit of debris from the mountain as a result of melting snow. The other seemed somewhat silty. So I sat and watched as these little creeks flowed along quietly. . . until they met one another. At the point of convergence, these two trickling streams became churning white water!

No more peaceful, babbling brooks, but loud, roaring rapids. Each stream brought all the debris that had come down with it from farther up the mountain. As I looked beyond those rapids to where the two had become a single waterway, I saw they had become clear, clean, and quiet. They seemed to flow in harmony.

So it is in marriage. When two people become one, there may be an explosive convergence as they adjust to the new relationship. But as they get farther "downstream," a wonderful thing happens: oneness.

If we are to have this oneness in our marriages, we must do everything we can to cleave to our mates physically, emotionally, and spiritually. We're wise if we do it just the way God planned it when He said, "For this cause shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh." That's God's picture of true unity within a marriage. And as we walk in His principle of leaving and cleaving, we will fulfill the promise of oneness.

It works every time.

Reflecting on Your Relationship

If you are married:

1. On whom did you depend most before you married?
2. How has marriage affected that prior relationship?
3. Describe the greatest bond between you and your spouse.
4. What specific things do you need to "leave" in order to intensify the bond between you and your spouse?

If you are contemplating or preparing for marriage:

1. On whom do you most depend right now?
2. How will that relationship change once you are married?
3. Describe several areas of your lives where you and your beloved have grown together during courtship.
4. What things do you need to leave behind as you prepare for marriage?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: WEEK 2

*"For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and **be joined** to his wife; and they shall become one flesh."*

Genesis 2:24

1. What is one point or phrase that captured your attention, either from Sunday's message or the materials provided you in this chapter, and why?

2. On Sunday, Matt shared that the idea of bonding to your spouse shows up in at least three critical ways in marriage: trust, forgiveness, and love. When one of these essential areas is suffering in our marriage, it can throw everything off balance.
 - o Considering these three qualities, which do you need to focus on most to help you better bond to your spouse and why?

 - o Why are trust, love, and forgiveness important for a couple to be able to bond?

3. Was the transition of leaving your family and joining into a new union with your spouse easier or harder than you thought? Were there any challenges that you navigated your way through and came out better on the other side? Would you be willing to share those things with the group today?

4. Asking yourself this one simple question might just be the thing that could radically transform your marriage—What needs to be done in my life so that I can better bond to my spouse? You don't have to answer that question aloud, but please write down your answers or let someone know to help hold you accountable. What steps can you take today that will ensure you better bond to your spouse tomorrow?

5. If you are single, dating, or engaged, what does it mean to you to break from your family and bond with your future spouse?

6. For parents—What steps can you begin taking now to help your child(ren) prepare to bond with their future spouse? What would that look like individually and as a couple?

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An Excerpt from Sheet Music by Dr. Kevin Leman

CHAPTER 3: SHAKE, RATTLE & ROLL WHY A GOOD SEX LIFE IS WORTH STRIVING FOR

Tell me something: What would the movie *Jaws* be like without that menacing music? Ba-dum, ba-dum, ba-dum, ba-dum. This it would be half as scary?

I don't.

Imagine *Star Wars* with no triumphant composition playing as Luke Skywalker defeats the Death Star and saves the galaxy. I don't think it would be nearly as exciting, do you?

Or try to image those guys running for the gold medals in *Chariots of Fire*. Watching people run in slow motion without music to set the scene wouldn't be a good recipe for an Oscar in my book.

Each one of these blockbuster movies had a good script, good actors, and a very competent director--but none of them would be the same without the music. The music alone wouldn't be enough of course, but music is still a vital and essential element for a hit movie.

Sex is that way for marriage. You can be married without having any sex at all. You can still talk over dinner, celebrate the holidays, and -- if you adopt -- raise children. You can buy each other anniversary gifts, share intimate conversations, and even, in an emergency, share toothbrushes or bring in an urgently needed roll of toilet paper.

But something would still be missing.

A good sex life colors the marriage from top to bottom. Life requires us to do a lot of humdrum things. Sometimes my wife needs me to go to the store and pick up a bunch of boring stuff--lettuce, celery, lightbulbs, milk, ho-hum. But other times, I get to go to a lingerie store and buy something that's anything but boring.

At other times, Sande needs me to find out why the brakes squeak and squawk and make all kinds of nasty noises when she's driving the car. But in even better times, I get to discover what makes my wife squeak and squawk and moan and groan!

On some occasions Sande wants me to take out the Christmas decorations (and then, believe it or not, she expects me to put them back just six weeks later!) or take out the garbage. But in even better times, I get to take down the clothes she's wearing. I love that job!

Think about it: 90 percent of life is filled with mostly boring stuff, like changing dirty diapers, cleaning up countless spills, paying the bills, filling the gas tank. And many men and women often have to work in deadly dull jobs--checking food at the grocery store, pounding nails into a roof, or adding up the same batch of figures. I've even met accomplished lawyers and dentists who were bored out of their minds with their professions, but financial obligations insisted that they keep doing them.

Into this world of obligation and responsibility, God has dropped something absolutely fabulous into our laps. At the end of the day (and sometimes at the beginning!), when our work is done and the kids are in bed and we're home from work, we can touch each other and kiss each other and pleasure each other in such a way that the world feels like it is lightyears away. We're transported to another place and removed to another time and it's a glorious feeling indeed.

A fulfilling sex life is one of the most powerful marital glues a couple can have. Children are a powerful "glue," as are common values, a common faith, and common dreams. But sex is definitely one of the strongest.

The kind of sex I'm talking about takes a little work and a lot of forethought--but the dividends it pays are more than worth the effort. If your husband is sexually fulfilled, he'll do anything for you. He'll take a bullet, he'll race a train, and he'll do whatever it takes to make sure you're okay. And men, if your wife knows that you view sex as a special gift to give to her; if you can make your wife feel things she's never felt before; and if you will learn to become a selfless, sensitive, and competent lover, she'll purr like a kitten and melt in your arms.

A sexually fulfilled man will normally be a better father and a better employee. A sexually fulfilled woman will have less stress and more joy in her life. Sex is vitally important to a healthy marriage.

DIFFERENT INSTRUMENTS

Have you ever heard a small child learn to play the piano? Probably everyone has heard the obnoxious “Chopsticks” that first-time students learn, but most beginning songs are usually played one note at a time. When the child becomes more advanced, she learns to play chords; she begins using two hands, and two hands make all the difference. The kind of music you can produce with two hands is many hundred times more beautiful than what you can create with one hand.

Again, the same principle is true of sex. A man and a woman are the two hands of sex as God designed it. Neither one is the same; neither “hand” will play the same notes. But when they’re working in tandem, they can create some of the most beautiful sounds ever heard.

What I want for you as a couple is to have two people who are sexually fulfilled. A wife or a husband who has sex only out of duty will not fulfill his or her partner. Yes, there are times when sex will feel like a duty--at least initially--but if it *always* feels like a duty, it’s not fulfilling in the sense I’m talking about.

Since sex does take some work, let me tell you why it’s *worth* the work. Let me speak first to the wives. Here is why it’s to your benefit to have a sexually fulfilled husband.

WOMEN: WHY YOU WANT TO MAKE HUBBY HAPPY

1. A sexually fulfilled husband will do anything for you.

Sex is such a basic need for men that when this area of their life is well taken care of, they feel immense appreciation and act accordingly. A sexually fulfilled man is the kind who drives to work thinking, *I’m so glad I married that woman. I must be the happiest man alive!* and who then drives home thinking, *What special thing can I do for my wife this evening?* If you want this kind of loyalty and appreciation, meet your husband’s sexual needs; no other needs generate such deep thankfulness. Instead of resenting requests to stop by the store or take a look at a leaky faucet, a sexually fulfilled man will jump with eagerness. Instead of being cold and distant when you talk to him, he’s going to want to hear what you have to say.

Some wives reading this may be thinking, *I tried that, and it didn’t work.* Such a response shows me that you’re misunderstanding me entirely. You can’t just “try” this; it has to become a way of life. One good time of sex will make a man thankful--for a while. But if he’s turned down the next five times he approaches you, he’ll think about the five rejections, not that one special night.

Because of a man’s chemical makeup, sex feels like a need to most of us, and when a woman graciously and eagerly meets that need, we become very thankful. When a woman uses a man’s need to manipulate him, a man becomes resentful. When a woman uses a man’s need to punish him, he often becomes bitter.

For the majority of men, this sexual need is the primary request that they seek from their wives. You can be the best cook, a great mother, and a fantastic conversationalist, but if you put no other thought or effort into your lovemaking, your husband will probably feel disappointed. Conversely, if you give your husband a thrilling sex life, you might be surprised at how little he cares about other things that go wanting.

2. A sexually fulfilled husband is a scriptural mandate.

One time, late at night, Sande asked me to read the Bible to her. “Sure, honey,” I said. “I’d love too.”

She was a little surprised by my eagerness, but hey, I have an obligation to be the spiritual leader, don’t I? I wanted to take my role seriously.

I flipped open my Bible to 1 Corinthians 7:3-5: “The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife’s body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband’s body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control” (NIV).

If you call yourself a Christian, and if you’re committed to being obedient to what the Bible teaches, then you’ll have to learn to fulfill sexual obligations within marriage. I don’t pretend to be a Bible scholar, but this passage is clear enough that I can give you the Leman translation: One thing Paul is telling us is he wants us to do it. And if we want to stop for prayer that’s okay. And then what I love about this great saint of the church is that he wants us to do it again!

C.K. Barrett's translation is just as strong. Instead of the somewhat polite "do not deprive each other" put forward by the New International Version above, Barrett translates the Greek, "Do not rob one another." Now, men can rob women as well as vice versa; the obligation is on both parties. But the bottom line is this: to say to your spouse, "The store is closed," or even, "You can shop on this shelf, but not that shelf" is less than Christian.

Now, if talking to your husband, I would remind him that one of the all-time great biblical lines is "Love . . . does not demand its own way" (1 Corinthians 13:5). When a guy tries to use 1 Corinthians 7 to get his wife to do something kinky or distasteful to her ("Honey, you have to have anal sex if I want it" or, "You have to swallow"), give me a break! That's not what Paul is talking about. Just as Paul tells us we have sexual obligations within marriage, in the same book he insists that love does not demand its own way. In short, men, you don't force, *ever*.

Marriage is an exercise in mutual submission. We need to be realistic, of course. Admittedly, there are times when my head hits the pillow at night, thinking sex, and Sande's head hits the pillow, also thinking sex, but both of us wake up the next morning and realize that nothing has happened. Yes, there are times where you're too pooped to whoop; but if you're the only one too pooped, you may be willing to whoop anyway because you know doing so will please your spouse.

What I like so much about 1 Corinthians 7 is that Paul completely removes the religious argument (as if someone could use God to avoid sex) and turns it around, saying to married couples, "If you truly love God, you'll have sex!"

I can be very direct with spouses when I'm talking about this. If you really love your spouse and he or she, to put it bluntly, really wants your body, you're being selfish if you withhold it. That's not to say we're never selfish, because all of us are from time to time, but you can't make a marriage grow from a selfish attitude for a long period of time. Eventually your selfishness will kill it.

A wife who is in tune with her husband's needs and desires can really help him live a holy life. While writing this book I talked to one couple in which the husband had struggled for many years with an addiction to pornography. Although pornography is connected to deeper issues-isolation, loneliness, the inability to connect with others emotionally, to name a few-it can be an additional struggle for a man if his wife either isn't interested in, or available for, sex. The most difficult time for this man was during his wife's period, because she was unavailable to him sexually. After about ten years, she finally realized that pleasing her husband with oral sex or a simple "hand job" did wonders to help her husband through that difficult time. She realized that faithfulness is a two-person job. That doesn't mean a husband can escape the blame for using pornography by pointing to an uncooperative wife-we all make our own choices-but a wife can make it much easier for her husband to maintain a pure mind.

Here's a common scenario: A husband wakes up early in the morning with incontrovertible physical evidence that Mr. Happy is more than ready to go "dancing." He looks over and there's his wife, sleeping tenderly. With a quick glance at the clock, he notices that it's 6:15 and they don't have to get up until 7:00.

The more he thinks about it, the more intriguing the thought of sex becomes. *Forty-five minutes!* he says to himself. *Man, what I could do in forty five minutes!*

He then starts to communicate in a way that only a man would think effective--he reaches his toe over to his wife's side of the bed and pokes her, hoping she'll get the hint. When that doesn't work, he might become more direct and grab a breast, fully expecting, even after fifteen years of marriage, mind you, that this grab will turn her into a raging sex kitten: "Why honey, I was waiting all night for you to wake me up by grabbing a handful of my breasts!" Or--my favorite--he'll look at a woman who has both eyes closed and who is snoring like a donkey and loudly ask, "Honey, are you asleep?"

Every man has his own protocol, but more often than not it'll take just three or four annoying little pokes or prods before the wife rears back like a horse with a burr under its saddle screaming, "What do you think you're doing?! I still have forty-five minutes left to sleep!"

Sometimes the wife will be less forceful. "I haven't even brushed my teeth yet. Surely you, don't want to kiss me!" Honey, he wants to do a whole lot more than kiss!

If the marriage is a selfish one, the man will hear all sorts of defenses: "We'll wake the children." "I'm tired." "Are you some kind of a sex addict?"

If the marriage is a selfless but non-fulfilling one, the wife may acquiesce with a few stipulations and all the enthusiasm of someone reading the phone book. She becomes a sexual receptacle, but that's about it.

If the marriage is a satisfied one, both parties will see the other's side. The man may realize his wife needs her sleep and, because of his love for her, let her get that sleep--only to pursue her

sexually later. Or the wife may sacrificially decide that giving her body, with joy, to her husband is more important than those extra few minutes of precious sleep--because of the benefits to their relationship.

Some of these interludes, although they may start off rocky, can really end up being great, if there's enough time to get things going. But in so many marriages, when a spouse gets turned down, the seeds of bitterness are planted in the relationship to the point where, later that day, the wife asks the husband to take her mother grocery shopping and he says, "No, I can't."

"Why not? You're just watching the game." "I'm busy."

"You don't look busy."

"I don't care what I look like, I'm busy. If your mom needs to go shopping, why don't you take her?"

What's going on here?

It's a delayed reaction. Admittedly, it's a cheap shot, but it happens all the time. The husband thinks to himself, *If she turns me down, I'll turn her down.*

Proverbs 13:12 tells us, "Hope deferred makes the heart sick." Tell me, what was the hope for your marriage? What did you think it would be like? What do you think your spouse hoped for? If those hopes are discarded without thought, eventually a spouse's heart becomes sick. I've seen this happen over and over again: Young, happily married couples slowly watch a once-happy affection get completely buried by steady shovelfuls of bitterness and resentment. They become petty instead of kind, self-seeking instead of generous. And frankly, they make each other miserable.

When a man's hopes are regularly beaten down, anger, hostility, and resentment will eventually fill that house. Certainly, a lot of us have unrealistic hopes that need to be challenged--quite frankly, I thought I'd have sex every night of my marriage, and it didn't take me too many nights to figure out that wasn't going to happen! That's why it's so important to talk about your expectations and hopes with your spouse--before your marriage, at the beginning of your marriage, and all throughout your marriage. It's the only way to find out, for you as a couple, which needs are unrealistic, and which are legitimate. Hopes that are legitimate shouldn't be simply tossed aside; if they sour, they'll infect every aspect of your relationship.

3. A sexually fulfilled husband will feel good about himself.

So much of who we are as men is tied up in how our wives respond to us sexually. While this may surprise some of you wives, as a psychologist I believe that every healthy man wants to be his wife's hero. He wants to be like the late, great conductor Arthur Fiedler, leading his wife to a crescendo of ecstasy. While he's delighted that you're experiencing an ecstatic orgasm, he's also watching you thinking, I did that to her, thank you very much.

He may not be the top dog at work, he may not have the fastest car, he may be losing what little looks he had to begin with, his hair may be falling out while his gut is getting bigger, but if his honey loves him enough to occasionally put a few scratches on his back in the heat of passion, he will still feel like the king of the world. Why? Because he can please his woman. There isn't a husband on this planet who doesn't want to know he can make his woman go crazy in bed.

Conversely, if you want to emasculate a man, the bedroom is certainly the best place to do it. Call him a sex addict. Ridicule his lovemaking skills. Act like there's nothing he could do to turn you on. But if you do this, watch out. He'll find a way to strike back at you. Yes--he'll find a way. Believe me.

4. A sexually fulfilled husband will take on his life work with a vigor and purpose that is unmatched.

In today's climate of downsizing and fear of losing your job, a fulfilling sex life is sort of like putting your husband on a rechargeable battery. Every time the two of you have sex, and your husband knows you desire him physically, it recharges his battery. He'll take on the world, or that troublesome boss, or that difficult vocational challenge, or that seemingly closed job market, one more time. Twenty firms may have rejected him, but if the man has a loving wife at home, he'll wake up the next day to visit twenty more.

Sex is energizing for a man. It builds confidence in him and creates an overall sense of well-being. He gains strength to persevere in an unfulfilling job because he is tuned in to those he loves--there's a purpose for his working, and a reward at the end of the day.

Men get a great deal of satisfaction from providing for their families. Of course, in this day and age the great majority of women also work outside the home, but I don't think women get the same psychological jollies from bringing home a pay check as most men do. Sure, a few women do--but most see outside work as a necessary effort on their part to help the family.

5. A sexually fulfilled husband appreciates the important things in life.

Men are one of two things: home-centered or outside-the-home-centered. The outside-the-home-centered man may find his satisfaction by working long hours, or by going out to taverns and drinking with his buddies. Some may even escape to church. But whether a man is going to an office, a bar, or a church, if he's leaving his wife and kids at home, he's centered outside the home.

If a man is home-centered, it's likely because the queen is keeping the king pretty happy. A man's place is in the home. Many years ago people often said a woman's place is in the home. Women took great offense, but I think men belong there every bit as much as women! A man may have many bosses outside the home, but inside the home, he has the opportunity to kindly provide authority and to receive his rightful respect. A good home is a place every healthy man needs.

My travels often require me to be away from home, but I'm very home-centered. I can't wait to get home, and when I'm away from home, I call so often that I sometimes drive Sande crazy. "Look, Lemey," she says, "you may be on the road, but I've got to get a little work done around here!" A dream day for me is to be at home, putzing around the house with nothing to do. I just love it there. I can't even imagine wanting to be anywhere else.

If a man is centered on something outside the home, he'll always have to leave home to get his batteries recharged. He will come home only reluctantly, and when he is home, his mind will be somewhere else. He'll act like he resents being home, and he'll grow short with people who "bother" him while he's at home. His wife and kids will get just the scraps, not the prime cuts.

If a man is home-centered -- in large part because at home he feels like he's loved, wanted, and accepted for who he is, and he has a wife who wants to please him -- he'll do anything that will strengthen the home because that's his most important world. He won't think twice about sacrificing prestige at the office to be home by dinner; he won't let a boss browbeat him into missing his son's ball games or get home too late to tuck the kids into bed. He'll make sure the house gets repaired, because a healthy home is important to him -- more important than anything else except, perhaps, his faith.

Some of you wives may be reading this thinking, *Why isn't my husband home-centered?* You want to blame him, but let me turn the tables: Are you sexually pursuing him? Does he have reason to believe that his sexual needs and desires will be met in creative and sometimes spontaneous ways? In other words, are you making home a more exciting place to come back to?

If you are, your husband will want to make the investment of time and energy so you are sexually fulfilled.

MEN: MAKING YOUR WIFE PURR

1. It's better to watch.

Let's face it, men--our most natural fallen state tempts us to become voyeurs. That's our gender bent, so to speak. Men purchase the overwhelming majority of pornography. Women rarely call 1-900 numbers and pay three dollars a minute to hear a man talk dirty to them. Why?

Men like to watch.

There's a healthy side to this, however. We were made to watch *one woman in particular*, not all women in general. Our Creator wired us in such a way that we become just as thrilled watching our wife reach orgasm as we do reaching orgasm ourselves. That's why pornography or prostitution will never satisfy a man's soul. Most men feel demeaned and ashamed after a solitary sexual experience -- in our heart of hearts, we don't just want to be satisfied, we want to satisfy our wives. The best satisfaction comes from satisfying someone else, not in being satisfied. And that's something pornography, phone sex, lap dances, or prostitution can never give you.

If you've fallen into the gutter of any type of porn, put all that time, effort, and expense into creating a satisfying sexual relationship with your wife. Learn to enjoy sex by watching your wife have the time of her life.

"But Dr. Leman," some men have protested, "you don't understand. Talking about my wife's sexual needs is an oxymoron -- she doesn't have any!"

In a later chapter we'll discuss the problem of low libido on the part of both men and women, but for now, let me suggest just one possibility: Have you approached sex as something you deserve and want, or have you approached sex as a very wonderful way to please your wife like no other man can?

It may be that your wife has no interest in sex the way you want to have it. But are you sure she doesn't want to have sex in a different way? Have you ever considered the fact that if you finished up the dishes and put the kids to bed while she soaked in a hot tub, and then you rubbed some lotion into her feet when she got out and maybe read to her or talked to her about her day, that's what sex means to her? And buddy, I'm not talking about doing this just one time, expecting one night out of a thousand to turn your wife around sexually! This needs to become a way of life before your wife will feel rested enough and appreciative enough to open up more sexually.

Learn to find your satisfaction in your wife's orgasm, and you'll change your love life. Instead of making sex something you demand, try to make it something you offer. To truly offer something that's inviting, you've got to make it look enticing to your wife. Find out what gets her purring, and pursue that.

2. Who's winning the marriage?

Sometimes when a couple sits down in my office, they erupt into an immediate catfight. I'll let them go on just long enough to make my point, then I'll ask, "Tell me, who is winning the marriage?"

At times I'll be met with a confused stare: *What is this guy talking about?* But most often, the couples will know what I'm talking about. What I'm really asking them is, "Who has gained the upper hand?"

I then go on: "If someone is winning this marriage, both of you are losing because marriage is not a sport, it's a relationship."

Control wreaks havoc in a marriage, and control is where most men fail. Because a man is often expected to be the physical aggressor, it's easy for him to develop a controlling position in marriage by being so dominant sexually, "proving" his masculinity every time he has sexual relations.

You know what? Sometimes a woman enjoys being "vanquished," if that taking is in the midst of a healthy, loving, and committed marriage. But I've never met a woman who wants sex to be like that all the time, or even most of the time.

If sex becomes a real problem issue in a marriage, it's often some kind of power struggle over "who's the boss." And men are very adept at the subtle ways that they wield power. In fact, a woman can be "controlled" by a man who never approaches her for sex. In a passive way, he always insists that the wife initiate sexual relations, so he never risks being turned down. In reality, this is an aggressive act of "passive control." She has to come to him on his terms. Initially it doesn't appear to be controlling; in fact, it may seem very laid-back. But there is a psychological MO at play: For him to have emotionally satisfying sex, it has to be *on his terms* with her initiating.

A much healthier model is one of mutual submissiveness. This may be one of the most difficult things I discuss in the counseling room, because mutual submissiveness insists you die to your self, and if there's one thing Americans don't want to give up, it's self. We even have a magazine with *Self* as the title! But marriage is about learning to put someone else's needs above your own, and this goes far beyond the bedroom. It's about graciously doing the mundane, everyday things as part of being a couple, developing a friendship, and caring for each other.

If you "win" your marriage, you'll lose at life. Give up control. Use your authority to serve, protect, and pleasure. That's where it's really at, my friend.

3. Sexually pursue your wife outside the bedroom.

Good sex is an all-day affair.⁸ You can't treat your wife like a servant and expect her to be eager to sleep with you at night. Your wife's sexual responsiveness will be determined by how willingly you help out with the dishes, the kids' homework, or that leaky faucet that drips throughout the night.

This is so difficult for many men to understand, in large part because we remove sex from every other part of our life. We think sex fixes things on its own -- but it doesn't do that for a woman. The context, the history, the current level of emotional closeness -- all that directly affects your wife's desire and enjoyment of sexual relations.

That's why I spend a lot of time trying to help women get more active in the bedroom and trying to help men get more active everywhere else. If we could just meet each other half-way on this, most marriages would do fine. A good lover works just as hard outside the bedroom as he does inside it.

THE MOST TERRIFYING ACT IN THE WORLD

Most men don't realize, psychologically, how vulnerable a naked woman can feel. The very act of sex is one in which she is inviting someone else into her body. You can't get any more intimate than that.

Ask any woman how she feels about going to a gynecologist. Most women I talk to loathe this necessary appointment. Think about how demeaning it would be to visit an invariably cold office and then be asked to strip naked. You're given a flimsy gown to wear with an embarrassing flap in the back, told to put one leg in one stirrup and one in another so that you're spread-eagled, one leg going northeast and one going northwest, and you now feel like your most private parts are on public display as a fully clothed man (or if you're a little luckier, a woman) walks into the room. That's about as vulnerable as it gets.

And, oh yes, they cover you with a thin, white sheet. How nice.

In many ways, marriage can feel like a visit to a gynecologist's office. Marriage asks us to take off all the masks we use to protect ourselves from being hurt. Men fearfully wonder if their wife will ridicule them for their sexual requests; women wonder if their husband will find their bodies desirable. Marriage and marital sexuality require a lot of trust. People who have been hurt by life are going to keep their knees together emotionally.

That's why the marriage bed is usually a pretty accurate picture of what else is going on in the marriage. The degree to which a couple can develop a vulnerability to each other eventually gets played out in the bedroom, for good or for ill. If trust isn't built up, the marital bed will grow colder. When trust is lovingly handled, marital passion usually heats up. Conversely, success in the marital bed usually gets played out somewhere else in the relationship; the wife and husband are kinder to each other and treat each other with greater respect.

When you improve your marriage, you'll usually improve your sex life. When you improve your sex life, you'll usually improve the rest of your marriage. The two are intricately entwined, so making more effort in any one area is a very good investment.

Wives, do you want your husband to be a better father? Do you want him to spend more time at home? Do you want him to listen to you more carefully? If you do, work at helping him become sexually fulfilled.

Husbands, do you want a wife who has less stress, who is more appreciative and respectful of you? Then learn what pleases her sexually.

Every couple can benefit from improving their sex lives. It's very pleasant work, and in my experience, there are few things that produce such amazing fringe benefits.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: WEEK 3

*"For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall **become one flesh**."*

Genesis 2:24

1. Name 2-3 things that make a marriage successful.
 - o Are those qualities a part of your marriage? If not, would you mind sharing what it is that might be holding you back from seeing those qualities at work in your marriage?

2. Read through Ephesians 5:21-33 together and answer the following questions:
 - o What does this passage say about how our love for our spouse reflects Christ's love for the Church?

 - o If we love our spouse the way scripture commands us, how does that love change us and build our spouse's self-worth?

3. One flesh means much more in the Bible than simply the physical contact that you share with your spouse. It's also much more than just a symbol of what's taking place in marriage. It is a union between two people, before God, that He calls sacred. Sacred means "set apart for a purpose." Think about that for a minute. Your marriage, your union with your spouse before God, is sacred!
 - o With a willingness to be vulnerable here, does your marriage reflect that truth? Would others see your marriage as one that is sacred? Why or why not?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

NOTES

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Are You Speaking the Right Language?

by Gary D. Chapman

Knowing your wife's love language may make all the difference at home.

She was sitting in my office crying. "I just don't feel any love coming from my husband," she said. "We live in the same house, the bills get paid, the house is clean. Everybody thinks we have the ideal marriage. But it's empty. There's no love, just deadness. How long can you live with deadness?"

I looked at her husband and sensed he was humiliated and angry. His first words were "I don't understand her. I do everything I can to show her that I love her, and she still complains. I don't know what else to do."

"How do you express your love to her?" I asked.

"First of all, I have a steady job. I work hard, haven't missed a day of work in seven years. I turn the paycheck over to her to pay the bills. We don't have a lot of debt. We even have a little in the savings. Most women would be proud to have a husband like that, but she complains that I work all the time. Well, I don't work all the time but I do have to make a living. I got her flowers on Mother's Day. I took her to a really nice restaurant on Valentine's Day. I sometimes get her gifts for no special reason; just trying to show her that I love her. But she still complains that she doesn't feel loved and that I don't spend any time with her. But I do. I am at home almost every night."

After hearing his defense, I looked back at his wife. She said, "Dr. Chapman, he's right. He's a hard working man and I appreciate that. And I also appreciate the gifts he gets me, but I just want him to sit on the couch and talk to me. We haven't talked in years. He's at home at night, that's true. But he is either watching TV or working on his computer. We don't even share the evening meal. He wants to watch TV while he eats. And we don't ever go anywhere together. We used to take a weekend now and then and have really great times together, but we haven't done that in years."

I looked back at him. "Dr. Chapman, I would love to spend time with her. We used to have good times, she's right. But now when we spend time together, she never give attention to my needs. It's always a one way street. She wants to spend time together, do things together, but she is never thinking about my needs."

"What needs?" I asked.

"Well... sexual needs," he said. "You know how men are. We need sex. She's cold and uninterested. When she is like that, it's easier just to stay away from her."

"It's obvious you both are hurting very much," I said. "I understand why you are frustrated. But I want to tell you something that I think will help both of you. If you are willing to call a temporary truce to the fighting, I think I can help you make a permanent peace treaty that will lead you back to warm feelings of love for each other."

I shared with this couple what I have shared with thousands of couples about the "Five Love Languages." After 20-plus years of counseling, I am convinced that there are only five basic languages of love. Each of us speaks one of the five, but seldom does the husband and wife speak the same language. By nature, we speak our own language and wonder why our spouse doesn't feel loved. Let me show you the five languages and how they work in a marriage

LOVE LANGUAGE #1: Words of Affirmation

One of the primary languages of love is expressing words that build up the other person. "Bob, I appreciate that you have a regular job and that you work hard. I know there are men who are irresponsible. I really appreciate your hard work." Or, "Thanks for the meal, Mary. It was great."

I Corinthians 8:1 says, "Love edifies." One of the ways to express love is to use words that build up the other person.

LOVE LANGUAGE #2: Gifts

Giving gifts as an expression of love is universal. In my studies in anthropology, we have never found a culture where gift giving is not part of the love-marriage process. A gift says, "He was thinking about me." The gift need not be expensive. It really is the thought that counts.

LOVE LANGUAGE #3: Acts of Service

Cooking a meal is an act of service, a big act of service. Washing dishes is an act of service, as is vacuuming floors or servicing the car or cleaning the commode. Doing something that you know your spouse would like for you to do is an act of love.

Try doing an act of service that your spouse has complained about doing for years, and see what happens.

LOVE LANGUAGE #4: Quality Time

Giving someone your undivided attention is a strong expression of love. For the wife we discussed earlier, it is obvious her primary love language is quality time. She wants him to sit on the couch and talk with her. She wants to spend weekends with him where she can have his undivided attention. She is crying for quality time.

To give your spouse your undivided attention, the television must be off, and computer must be down, the newspaper must be set aside. Your spouse must be the focus of your attention. To give her quality time is to give her a portion of your life. It is a powerful emotional communicator.

LOVE LANGUAGE #5: Physical Touch

Holding hands, kissing, embracing, sexual intercourse, touching on the shoulder, rubbing the back, placing your hand on her leg as you ride down the road – all of these are expressions of love. And to the person whose primary love language is physical touch; they speak volumes of your affection.

Out of these five love languages, each person has a primary love language. One means more to you than all the others. You may appreciate all of them, but one will speak to you more deeply. Seldom does a husband and wife have the same primary love language. We often speak our own language or the language we were taught by our parents. If a father says to a son, “Get her flowers, son,” then we will likely get her flowers to express love. But if gifts is not her primary language, flowers will not mean to her what they may have meant to his mother.

For the couple we discussed earlier, the husband’s primary language was physical touch while hers was quality time. Neither of them felt loved because neither was speaking the right love language. He was expressing love by showing her acts of service (his hard work, his providing for the family) and gifts, but neither of those was her primary love language. He seldom spoke her primary love language, and apparently she was not doing a very good job of expressing love by physical touch.

I said to the husband, “Please understand that what the sexual part of the marriage is to you, quality time is to her. Now both of you can stop blaming each other and start loving each other in the right love language. In two months, the emotional climate of your marriage can be radically changed.”

They both agreed it made sense, and wondered why they hadn’t seen it before. In one month, they were back in my office with smiles. “We can’t believe that so much could happen in a month,” he said. “She has not been this responsive to me in years and I feel like we are on a second honeymoon.”

“It’s been a two-way street,” she said, “we’ve spent more time together this month than we have in the last year. I feel like he really cares. My whole attitude has changed.”

In my book, *The Five Love Languages*, I discuss not only the five basic languages, but the dialects that come under each language, and the ways you can express love to your spouse once you discover the primary love language.

If you can keep each other’s love tanks full, you are far more likely to accomplish the other objectives that God has in mind for each of your lives. A love-starved wife will never reach her potential as a wife, mother, or Christian. Fill her love tank and watch her blossom. Do you want to see her smile again? Discover her priority love language and speak it regularly. In turn, she will probably start speaking your primary language and your love tank will overflow again.

Ephesians 5:25-28, 31

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YOUR WIFE IS SPECIAL

MY WIFE IS ...

S **Security** is often defined as “freedom from threats of danger or pain; safe; certain and sure of one’s safety”. The key issue in meeting a wife’s need for security is a removal of fears. A wife fearing that her husband’s work is more important than she is might feel insecure. A wife who fears that her husband is not totally committed to marriage fidelity or permanence will normally feel threatened or jealous. Countless fears will arise over the course of a marriage relationship and a loving husband will be actively involved in helping remove them, this builds a more secure relationship.

P **Protection** of your wife specifically addresses her areas of vulnerability. She needs to feel your protection as a safe “umbrella” under which she can take refuge and find support. Two major common vulnerabilities would be (1) the pressure of family finances and (2) the pressure of raising children “alone”. Other specific sensitivities might include weight, shyness, education, etc. In whatever ways your wife feels vulnerable and insecure ... protect her!

E **Enjoy** your wife and you’ll experience the blessing of true “friendship” in marriage. A wife needs to sense that you enjoy her company and actually look forward to spending time with her. Two major factors in meeting this need would be (1) including your wife in things you enjoy and (2) involving yourself in things your wife enjoys. “Enjoying” someone will involve time shared together as well as prioritizing this special person above other activities.

C **Courting** your wife has to do with that feeling of being treated “special” ... being valued as a person and as a helpmate of immeasurable worth; courting might include dating your spouse, unexpected gifts or flowers, and even appropriate manners; courting has a particular emphasis on the husband’s initiative.

I **Intimacy** involves a freedom to share all of oneself – body, soul, and spirit – with your spouse. From this reflection on intimacy comes two important insights: the need for freedom and the focus on sharing. A wife needs a husband who is experiencing a growing personal freedom and is involved in encouraging her freedom; in a similar way he is committed to sharing and giving ... not taking.

A **Appreciation** is best understood as a process of discovering and expressing your gratefulness for another person in terms of “what they do” and particularly “who they are;” appreciation can be expressed privately as well as publicly; appreciation can be expressed verbally, in writing, or other creative ways. Discovering how another person blesses you requires that you notice them and get to know them – two important intimacy issues. Expressing your gratefulness is a way of communicating “I care about you” and “I need you.”

L **Leadership** speaks of initiative, direction, and example as a husband lovingly serves his wife. He is to lead as Christ did – by example and with a motive of serving, not being served. Practically, leadership might include apologizing first, being the first to give, or taking the initiative in finances, goals, or children’s discipline. Biblical leadership has nothing to do with “demanding” or “taking”, but everything to do with “serving” and “giving.”

CHERISHING YOUR HUSBAND

I WILL ...

C **Comfort** in this context might be defined as “giving loving reassurance and nurture to someone who is special.” Important aspects of “comfort” relate to one’s words and actions plus the atmosphere of a relationship. Words of tenderness, affirmation and empathy minister comfort; actions which nurture might include touching, love notes, and cooking favorite meals; a comforting atmosphere at home might come through a well managed household, welcoming a husband home, or prioritizing his needs above the children’s.

H **Honoring** your husband relates to valuing him as an especially meaningful person in your life ... your personal “hero”; it also includes honoring his wishes as you are sensitive in desiring to please him; you honor his decisions as you free him to lovingly lead you. Honoring your husband is a special ministry of love and requires a deepened work of faith.

E **Exalting** your husband is to build him up as his helpmate ... rather than to hinder him by playing his “holy spirit.” Exalting him involves his coming to trust implicitly that you’re lovingly working for his good and supportive of his needs. A helpmate has a particular ministry through her words in building up her spouse.

R **Respect** is communicated as a helpmate is supportive of her husband’s leadership and decisions; respect is fostered as a wife looks to her husband to meet significant needs in her life. Respect is conveyed in a variety of settings – at home, work, church, and in social activities.

I **Intimacy** is from the word “inner-most” and relates to a vulnerable sharing of one’s inner thoughts, feelings, and self. A man needs to feel secure in this sharing and confident of his wife’s support. This support might come through a wife’s listening, empathy or reassurance. Intimacy is also expressed in the physical sharing of one’s self in sexual closeness.

S **Security** speaks of an inner confidence that is certain and sure; a husband comes to have this deep confidence as trust in him is exhibited and commitment to him is expressed. Trust in him is often deepened as a wife helps cast out his fears through verbalized reassurances and initiated affection, commitment to him is often communicated through genuine support and sincere praise.

H **Happy** is the husband who has a wife and not a second “mother,” a helpmate and not another boss, a “completer” and not a “competer.” Happy husbands bask in the priority given them, the “cheerleading” to encourage them, and the spoiling to pamper them! Every man seems to have a “little boy” inside of him that just wants to enjoy happiness with you...the girl of his dreams!

... MY HUSBAND

*"For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh; Nevertheless, as for you individually, each husband is to love his own wife the same as himself, and the wife must see to it that **she respects her husband.**"*

1. If we aren't careful, we can have the tendency to make respect optional. It's easier to give when the other person loves and respects me, but not so much when they are unloving and disrespectful. Have you ever been in that cycle? The Bible tells us that giving respect is not an option; it's a command. Like any discipline, you need to learn how to do it, and then you need to choose to do it. We may not like giving it, but we owe it to each other. And God is pleased when we do!

- o In what ways are you making it difficult for your spouse to respect you?

- o What do you think would happen in your life and marriage if you first dealt with the difficulties in your own life and showed more respect to your spouse?

- o What do you think your spouse needs to hear from you today that would change the trajectory of your marriage? Don't delay talking to them after this session!

- 4. As we close out the 5 words series, I pray you and your spouse has been transformed by what you have studied, discussed, and worked through during this series. Please answer the following questions:
 - o With the five words in view—Break, Bond, One, Love, and Respect—which one of these have you found to be the most challenging for you?

 - o What are some things you can begin doing now to turn the challenges into strengths?

 - o Which of the 5 words we have discussed does your spouse does well?

Pray for one another—Pray that God would continue the work He has started in each person's life and marriage during this series.

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ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDED READING:

What Did You Expect? Redeeming the Realities of Marriage
by Paul Tripp

The Afternoon of Life: Finding Purpose and Joy in Midlife
by Elyse Fitzpatrick

**The 10 Commandments of Marriage:
Practical Principles to Make Your Marriage Great**
by Ed Young

**Sheet Music: Uncovering the Secrets of
Sexual Intimacy in Marriage**
by Dr. Kevin Leman

The 5 Love Languages: The Secret to Love that Lasts
by Gary D. Chapman

*The contents of this book have been printed by Grace Covenant Church
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