

Lifebyte 61

Followers of Jesus, It's Time To Live Repentantly—Part 4

Does Your Marriage Reflect Your Covenant With Our Father? (Lesson 1)

"Thanks be to God, Who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of Him. For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing." (2 Corinthians 2:14,15)

Sanctify Your Marriage Into Christ's Likeness — Repent! and Stay Repentant!!!



**Turn away from sin
and strongholds**



**Turn to Jesus and
become like Him**

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to Himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless."

(Ephesians 5:25-27)



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**“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out,
that times of refreshing may come from the Lord” (Acts 3:19)**

Introduction

As you can see by the cover page, we'll be focusing this series on marriage with a resounding call for *repentance*. We're doing this for two specific reasons:

1). Our Father intended that a marriage covenant be the *physical representation* of the union His people claim to have with Him in spiritual Covenant. In other words, your marriage relationship should *increasingly manifest* the love and character of Jesus *because your love for Him* causes you to willingly yield to the work of the Spirit of Christ in you. This is what the Bible calls “sanctification.”

2). Church-goers in this nation have a higher divorce rate (50% higher in the Bible-belt) than do unbelievers. Dark and sinister elements are not being confronted in marriages among Christians. Like those who have already experienced the pain of divorce, your marriage may contain toxic seeds that will ultimately destroy it.

We hope that this series of Lifebytes will encourage you to incorporate biblical facets within your marriage that can help you *grow together* into the character of Jesus. Damaging attitudes and behaviors may be hindering you from growing in Christ's likeness in your love and Kingdom purpose as a couple, and we want to help you identify and rid yourselves of their influence.

It's important that you recognize that your journey into marital Christ-likeness begins with your *love for Jesus* and your *heart appreciation* for what He has accomplished for you on the cross. Your *relationship with Him* is first and foremost, for only in Him can you perceive your mate from His perspective and be healed from past pain.

Please, be diligent in going through these Lifebytes. It doesn't matter how long you've been married. (If you're single, you can help your married friends access this material!) The vital role of your covenant union to bring *praise to our Father* comes closer to fruition when you can answer this question with a resounding “Yes, praise God!”:

Does your marriage union manifest the aroma of Jesus in ways that others desire to emulate?

If not, then set your heart to eagerly seek whatever the Spirit would have you do until your marriage reflects the increasing presence of Jesus in each and both of you. What a joyful privilege and responsibility for every married person who follows in the steps of Jesus as their Lord and King! And what a joyous privilege and responsibility to follow through by His Spirit in loving one another according to the framework set by His Word.

We've divided each of these Lifebytes on marriage into short lessons for you and your spouse to discuss. Over the course of this series we'll be presenting specific topics as a training course of “hurdles” for both of you to cross in order to grow in Christ's likeness as a couple.

If you find that the Spirit convicts either or both of you of sin as you go through the different lessons that make up each “hurdle”, be sure to repent. Don't go on to the next lesson until you *both* have acquired the necessary attitude and behavior changes that are more like Jesus. His Spirit wills for this to happen; will you cooperate with Him?

Never lose sight of this truth: Ongoing repentance is essential if your marriage is to grow in Christ's likeness

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and purpose! Repentance means *willingly turning away from* those things that violate the commands of our God and your relationship with Him, and *turning eagerly to* His way of life (Psalm 34:14-16). Any reluctance to turn from your sin or to turn to our Lord’s way of life for you in His Spirit actually reveals your *lack of love for Him*. Is this the testimony you want to give to others—your reluctance to become more like your Lord?

Authentic devotion to our Lord Jesus within your marriage translates into this: that the two of you make *His way* your way — walking in loving, obedient trust according to His commands as you abide in His love (John 15:9,10).

We won’t be offering *techniques* to help you have a better marriage. Christ-likeness within your marriage, both individually and collectively, is a matter of *developing His character* through purposefully heeding His Spirit Who works in you (Philippians 2:13; see Colossians 2:11).

Is your confidence in His Presence and promises firm and secure? The One Whom you trust empowers you to walk in His authority!

**Blessed are those who *hear*
the word of God and *obey it*.**

“I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by My Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in My name, there am I with them”
(Matthew 18:18-20).

Through this promise, our Lord is giving you and your spouse *halakhic*

authority. That is, He’s calling you to *apply His Word*, establishing biblical parameters of freedom and boundaries within your marriage and family. Walking within that framework of His Spirit and His Word, your specific applications (your personal *halakhahs*) will be recognized in the heavenlies. As you agree together in His name to apply God’s ways to your marriage, Lord Jesus promises to be in your midst to strengthen you to walk uprightly.

(For more on biblical application to your life and that of your spouse and family, see our book *Christian Halakhahs—Loving Jesus Through The Way You Apply His Word*. Page 14 offers key recommendations to get you started.)

Your earnestness to *apply His Word* is His means for you to recognize any and all ungodly influences you may have picked up in your lives, and to eliminate them. You may have *unbiblical views* of the role each partner fulfills, or of God’s purposes for sexual intimacy, or how to raise children who love God and are growing in obedience to His Word.

These and many other areas need to be reviewed in light of His commands, because the Word of God is ***“living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart”*** (Hebrews 4:12).

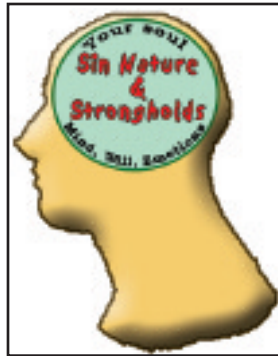
Your willingness as a couple to bring every area of darkness in your marriage into the light of His Word is a key expression of your love for your Lord. And as you do this, your Christ-like love



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for each other will deepen and be demonstrated in your attitude and actions toward each other. This is how your marriage will come to mirror the character of Jesus, which is our Father’s ardent desire for you: to reflect in your covenant union the image of His Son Jesus to the world.

Let’s clarify the difference between character and personality. You inherit your *personality* from your parents at conception through your soul: your mind, will and emotions. Tainted by your sin nature, your personality is often influenced by demonic strongholds that have been passed to you generationally.



Character, however, does not come from your parents at conception. Rather, character traits must be learned and practiced throughout your life. This is the purpose of *biblical sanctification*—being set apart by the Spirit to *turn away* from the influence of your sin nature and strongholds, and to *turn to* the Spirit of Jesus within you so that you increasingly grow in the character qualities of Jesus. It’s the *Jesus reflected in your marriage* that the world needs to see as relationships around them crumble!

Character first takes root as a motivation of *your heart*. If you treasure that work deeply, you’ll refuse to give up when you’re tested. Note that your personality, whether attractive or not, doesn’t get tested. Maybe praised or rebuked, but not tested!

Character qualities, on the other hand, are often tested by our Lord to see if they’re authentic and not just a “reli-

gious mask”. This testing for authenticity often takes the form of suffering, a proving ground well-known by followers of Jesus throughout the ages:

*...for a little while you may have to suffer grief in **all kinds of trials**...so that your faith may be **proved genuine** and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed (1 Peter 1:6,7; see also Psalms 66:10; Isaiah 48:10; Job 1:8-12).*

You don’t have to pursue testing within your marriage — it comes in many forms! That word “genuine” is what our Lord Jesus wants to see in you — a couple whose collective character is a loving and accurate representation of the Scriptural Jesus.

Our Lord and King isn’t calling you to publicly flash around Bible knowledge of what a good marriage should be. Rather, the world will see Him most clearly if your walk of genuine loving service matches your talk of what it should be!

In your inmost heart, do you respond to your life partner with attitude and actions as if Jesus were acting in and through you? If this isn’t an eager desire on your part, then you’re missing one of God’s primary purposes for establishing the covenant of marriage. Cry out *together* to Him for this to be made true in both of you!

In order for your marriage to be a mirror that reflects Jesus to all you meet, you need to cooperate with each other in the sanctifying work our Lord desires to do in each and both of you. And keep in mind that no marriage fully depicts Him in the beginning! This reflection is developed as each spouse helps the other *cooperate with the changes* Jesus wants to make in them.

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Hurdle 1: Is Your View of the Bible the Same As God’s?



The “faith” of many people throughout Christendom is based on what they’ve been taught by their religious leaders. You may need to consider that some of what you’ve received has been an erroneous departure from Scriptural truth. Before you object, please consider that Jesus called the religious leaders of His day “Hypocrites!” because they led the people astray.

Through His atoning, reconciling work Jesus announced the establishment of a Kingdom into which those who *did the will of His Father* would enter (Matthew 7:21). The religious professionals, however, kept adding heavy prohibitive burdens onto the people rather than coming alongside to compassionately lead as God would have them:

*“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! **You are shutting the kingdom of heaven in men’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you allow those who are entering to go in**” (Matthew 23:13).*

Two verses later Jesus declares the zealous but erroneous teaching of these religious leaders to produce disciples

who are “*twice as much a son of hell*” as they are (Matthew 23:15).

Do you think that His condemnation of religious hypocrisy was confined to His encounters with first-century Temple leaders? Might there be religious leaders today whom Jesus would call “Hypocrites!”? Even more to the point, would He say this to those who predominated in your own religious instruction?

With over 23,000 various denominations and sects all claiming to own the truth, how do you discern if what you’ve been taught is God’s truth according to His Word? And, if you and your spouse come from different religious expressions, have you thoroughly reviewed your faith practices and beliefs in light of God’s Word to ensure that you’re in agreement?

Let’s look at the results of a survey taken several years ago among 10,000 clergy representing a variety of denominations, both liberal and conservative. (We’ve presented this elsewhere in our writings, but its shocking results bear repeating.) The responses of these religious professionals to basic Bible truths:

- Was Jesus born of a virgin?
19% to 60% said “No.”
- Was Jesus the Son of God?
57% to 89% said “No.”
- **Is the Bible the inspired Word of God?**
57% to 89% said “No.”
- Do you believe that Satan exists?
14% to 62% said “No.”
- Was there a physical Resurrection of Jesus?
13% to 51% said “No.”

Did you notice that 57% to 89% *didn’t believe* that God was the inspiration behind the Bible? Could one of these pastors have been *your* primary source for instruction? Has *your* view of and reliance on the authenticity and authority of God’s Word subsequently been tainted?

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Those who disbelieve in their hearts the very foundations of scriptural truth aren't alone. Some with great influence in the religious establishment consider the Bible to be a moral teaching manual but rather quaint and culturally entrapped by the supposed primitive, uneducated people represented within its pages.

And surely, according to liberal seminary theologians, God doesn't intend for modern men and women to abide by the Scriptural roles each are commanded. Nor would any contemporary reader actually believe, sniffs the scientific community, that the recorded miracles are anything but exaggerated fantasy and ancient legend.

We strongly urge you to consider this as you reflect on your own spiritual journey. Have YOU been infected by any of these misrepresentations of the Word of God and the truth it unabashedly proclaims? Has your confidence in the inerrancy and accuracy of the Bible ever been even mildly disturbed, particularly in regard to Jesus as God made flesh, or to Satan as a very real and intentionally evil unseen being?

In order that their confidence would remain unshaken regarding the utmost reliability of God's Word, Paul wrote about what today is called the *Old Testament*:

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16,17).

Both the Older and Newer Testaments are completely reliable, for they've been preserved and protected by God. So where do you and your spouse stand in regard to the sacred script? Please discuss

with one another each of the following questions to make sure that you *both* have the same level of confidence in God's Word and its veracity. Be sure that what you believe is fully supported in the Scriptures.

The degree to which you *both* share God's perspective about His Word is the depth of conviction with which you'll *apply it* in your sanctification into Christ's likeness in your marriage.

- 1. Is there one all-wise, consistent God Who inspired the Bible — *breathed it into the writers*?**
- 2. Are there errors in the Bible? Or, has God kept it free from error?**
- 3. In what ways is *all of Scripture* profitable for teaching, rebuking, correcting and instructing you and your spouse in righteousness in both your individual lives as well as your covenant union?**
- 4. Describe your view of the Older Testament. Do you consider it less important than the Newer Testament in your spiritual journey? Equally important? Why?**
- 5. Do you think that God's will can be frustrated by human sinfulness? Why do you think He has given mankind free will?**
- 6. As you read the Bible, do you generally rely on its *literal sense* to interpret it? Is this the only way to understand its meaning? How do you deal with imagery and poetry, such as the word picture of God having wings (see Exodus 19:4)?**
- 7. Do you think the Scripture writers always understood the meaning of what they wrote, especially in prophetic declarations?**

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8. Do you interpret the Bible in a way which excludes the supernatural events, rationalizing that at least some of the miraculous accounts were inaccurate or scientifically explainable?
9. Do you use the Newer Testament to understand the Older Testament as both an example and warning to us today of God’s interaction with His people, and the consequences of willful lawlessness?
10. How does your perception of God in the Older Testament enhance or conflict with your perception of Him in the Newer Testament?
11. Which is a more important determining factor for fundamental biblical teachings: what the Bible says or what your church tradition sets forth? Answer the following questions. Is there any difference between the *biblical understanding* and the *teachings of your tradition*?
12. Was Jesus born of a virgin?
13. Was Jesus the Son of God?
14. Do you believe that Satan exists?
15. Was there a physical resurrection of Jesus?
16. Do you believe in creation or in evolution?
17. Is Jesus the only way to heaven, or are there other ways?
18. What is your understanding of law and grace? Are they opposed to each other? How would you define *grace*? How do you define *law* (which in Hebrew refers to “God’s teaching”)?
- You may need to explore God’s Word to *discuss together* the biblical stance on the following questions!
19. What is the Bible’s position on abortion?
20. What is the Bible’s position on homosexuality?
21. What is the Bible’s position on fornication of any type?
22. What is the Bible’s position on divorce?
23. What is the Bible’s position on public education and training up children?
24. What is the Bible’s position on tithing and giving?
25. What is the Bible’s position on wives working outside the home?
26. What is the Bible’s position on spiritual gifts?
27. What is the Bible’s position on the TV/Internet/movies/reading material you pursue?
28. What is the Bible’s distinction between those with whom you fellowship, and those with whom you are friends or acquaintances?