

Lifebyte 63

It's Time For Followers of Jesus To Live Repentantly—Part 6

Does Your Marriage Reflect Your Covenant With Our Father? (Lesson 3)

"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)*

Hurdle 3: Do you distrust God in any way? How sovereign is He in your life? Have you fully accepted the things in your life that you cannot change?



“Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight” (Proverbs 3:5,6).

During our years of retreat center ministry we tried to help people uncover any distrust they might have toward God. Your first response might be, “I trust Him completely!” But consider this. Before you were born, our God assigned you a very particular and unique set of characteristics that make you *you*.

These qualities aren’t confined to aspects of your *physical composite*, even those areas you or others might describe as “deformities” or “disabilities”. Your *mental abilities* and even your *parents* and *siblings* were also set into place by your all-knowing heavenly Father. So, if you have problems with any of these attributes, you have a problem with God and His sovereignty.

This is no small matter! Many who consider themselves “Christian” go through life plagued by distrust in God

for having allowed one or more of these “unfortunate, unpleasant, unwanted” situations in their life. You may find an underlying current of distrust yourself toward Him because of something in your life that can’t be changed!

But one of the stipulations for embracing His Covenant is **to trust Him**. And, biblical *trust* in our God means that you realize how completely sovereign He is in ALL matters. That sovereignty encompasses our Lord’s *rulership over everything!* That’s why He calls your trust in Him *as God* to be a foundational element of His Covenant in Jesus with you.

He assigned these aspects of your life — your physical, mental, and familial attributes — as His particular signs of ownership of you. Now ask yourself: Are you able and willing to express *heartfelt gratefulness* to your Creator for the unchangeable things? If you can’t, then ask the Spirit of Christ in you (and ask your spouse if you’re married) to help you see the beauty of *why* you received each particular characteristic from your Father’s hand. Why you received these unique characteristics are part of God’s plan for you!

We’ve frequently found that demonic strongholds develop when people are unable or unwilling to accept their God-given characteristics. For example, Mike had an abusive, alcoholic father. When he wondered why he had to be born to that particular man, he had a difficult time thanking God for his Dad. As Mike continued to cry out to God to help his heart to change, God gave him an unexpected answer.

Through his father, Mike had learned how to *give deference* even to a person most would consider unworthy of it. Equally important, Mike learned that bondage to the *spirit of rejection* was behind the addictive behavior of his

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father — a generational stronghold that had been passed down to Mike as well. When that came to light, Mike was not only able to evict that spirit in himself; he was also able to come alongside his father with a forgiving heart and help him overcome that spirit too.

You may not be plagued by addictive behavior, but if you have trouble *thank- ing God* from your heart for certain unchangeable facets of your life, then you’re not fully trusting the One Who orchestrated their existence.

Hurdle 4: Are your motivations more often concerned with how to bless others, or more aimed at meeting your own desires and needs?



**“Dear friends, let us love one another,
for love comes from God.
Everyone who loves has been born of God
and knows God” (1 John 4:7).**

A marriage will never reflect the character of Jesus if each spouse is bent on having their own desires and needs met. To become Christ-like in your marital relationship means that you have (and are increasingly growing in) His motivation, “looking to the interests of others.” The Apostle Paul, although single, will-

ingly suffered throughout his life journey in Jesus so that those he loved as a spiritual father could benefit from his sacrifices. Often Paul mentions that he purposes for his life to be *an example* for others so that they might grow in spiritual maturity in the likeness of Jesus:

*Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility let each esteem others **better than himself**. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, **but also** for the interests of others. Let **this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,***

*Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but **made Himself of no reputation**, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men (Philippians 2:3-7).*

The lifeblood of a Christ-like marriage is what each spouse lovingly and willingly *does for the other*. Their loving interconnectedness grows ever stronger when they gladly sacrifice to meet the needs of the other — with no hint of personal martyrdom! Authentic service comes *from the heart*, not as a begrudging obligation. Think again about the pattern of loving sacrifice on the part of Jesus *on your behalf*.

In the eyes of Jesus, marriage isn’t a relationship in which you concentrate on what *you* can get out of it. Rather, as He patterned in the spiritual realm on behalf of His Bride, your marriage affords one of the most intimate opportunities for you to fully meet the interests and needs of another.

As a guide for *how* to specifically go about this, the Newer Testament lists abundant “one anothering” verses to apply to our lives—54 of them, to be precise!

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Besides these are approximately 1000 other commands which put a face on living in Christ in a way that's opposite of the world's ways. You can recognize some of the commands by their “imperative” nature: “Be...”, “Don't be...”, “Do...”, and that oft-repeated “Let...”, which isn't a recommendation to *allow*, but a directive to follow through! Others are precise verbs, such as *believe, cast away, honor*.

We want to focus here on some of the relational, *one-another commands* and how they might be applied to help you increasingly manifest the character of Jesus both as His individual follower as well as within the dynamic of your marriage.

The various “one anothers” often overlap due to their very nature of being “Christ-like”. It's impossible to break down His holy and perfect character into completely separate points! However, you'll notice that *love* is always the key ingredient in all of our Lord's motivations. Let's begin with that.

1. Love one another

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another” (John 13:34; see also Romans 13:8; 1 John 4:11 and many others).

The essence of a Hebraic-Christian marriage of the early Church could be summed up in this: **“If you want to know the extent of my relationship with Jesus Christ, look for it in the love He has given me for my spouse.”**

Marital love is a visible representation of a couple's relationship with Jesus. God has designed a husband to draw strength from his wife. As an *ezer kenegdo* (Genesis 2:18,20) she corresponds perfectly to him as his nurturing companion and suitable life partner. They are complements in *unique oneness* as they follow God's pur-

poses and plans together.

But because each of these partners has a sin nature, this relationship involves opportunity to sacrifice self-will on behalf of the other. That calls for the kind of love our Lord Jesus commands, the *agape* love that only the Holy Spirit can give you for another person (Galatians 5:22). You aren't instantly imbued with this kind of love when you receive the Spirit of Jesus upon regeneration. You develop a heart-based motivation to love your spouse through prayer and through asking the Spirit to empower your spirit to love — and then by following through in ways that He makes clear will meet that person's love needs.

There is no shortage of books offering *techniques* in how to demonstrate love for your spouse. But unless your actions are undergirded by authentic love that seeks to give without expectation for response, these various techniques will *prostitute* your marriage. They may show you how to purchase favor from your spouse through the good things *you do* toward him or her, but that's not sacrificial love. That's *manipulation for an outcome*.

- **How intense or persistent have you been in seeking the Holy Spirit for the love your spouse deserves from you?**
- **Can your halfheartedness be causing some of the friction or disunity you're experiencing in your marriage?**

2. Forgive one another

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32; see also Colossians 3:13).

For good reason Paul tells us that *agape* love “*keeps no record of wrongs*” (1 Corinthians 13:5). It's the tendency of

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our sin nature to want to make sure that those who hurt us never forget their error. So we quietly keep a mental filebox of past wrongs to bring up when we’re being confronted by our own misdeeds. The other person’s wrongs become fuel to justify our behavior or attitudes.

Record-keeping always erects a protective wall against the wrongdoer so that lingering distrust mars the relationship no matter how long ago the incident took place. Can you see how destructive this is, especially within a marriage?

Keeping no record doesn’t mean that you completely blot out the memory as though it never occurred. Nor does relying on the false adage that time will heal all wounds. Healing doesn’t happen by itself. Wounds tend to lurk just beneath the surface, with the pain from the occasion erupting seemingly out of nowhere for no rational cause.

Only the healing power of Jesus can *wipe away the pain* of any wrongs done to us. The pain-free, healed memory that’s left can then be used as an identifier with someone else who has undergone a similar situation and needs the hope that Jesus can heal them as powerfully as He’s healed you.

The forgiveness *from the heart* that our Lord commands is undergirded by a holy fear of the God you’ve turned to yourself for forgiveness. After all, when you’ve grasped the depravity of your *own* sins and our Lord’s incredible grace to forgive those sins, then you realize you can’t hold unforgiveness against anyone else no matter what they’ve done to you!

For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins (Matthew 6:14,15).

Most contemporary teaching on seeking forgiveness focuses on what you’ve *done wrong*. But this is incomplete. It avoids your full responsibility for the *hurt you’ve caused* by your offense. You’ve damaged a relationship and wounded another person by your choice to violate God’s ways. That’s all the more grievous when the other person is someone you vowed to honor, love and cherish in the covenant of marriage!

Biblical forgiveness takes place when the offender recognizes the hurt they caused and takes responsibility for it, purposing to not repeat it. The one who was offended needs hope that *further intentional sin* isn’t being planned, and that forgiveness isn’t being asked just to avoid repercussions. The offended person forgives *from the heart*, recognizing how much Lord Jesus has forgiven them.

- **Is any unforgiveness plaguing your marriage at this time? Is there any distrust lingering because of past wrongs? Do either of you bring up past wrongs?**
- **If a particular pattern of sin keeps taking place in your marriage, what process can you follow to get out of that rut together? Do you think that forgiveness means that no changes need to be made in the relationship? Why or why not?**

3. In honor prefer one another

“Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another” (Romans 12:10).

Romans 12:9-21 is an absolute goldmine of relational commands that flesh out what love in action looks like! We’re citing here just a single verse, but do your marriage a loving favor and discuss prayerfully together how you can make

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each of this passage’s commands a way of life for both of you.

The passage begins with an initial framework of *agape* love, the devoted kind of sacrificial love our God has extended to us, and the kind of love that His indwelling Spirit works in and through us.

But in verse 10, another love is referred to: the *phileo* love of companionship and warmth as fellow sojourners in Jesus. In marriage, that means treating your partner with the utmost of respect, esteeming them greater than yourself (Philippians 2:3). The interest of your spouse comes first, and that which benefits you comes after.

Remember, only as you cooperate with the heart-transforming work of the Holy Spirit can you set aside self-interest as your motive! In God’s economy, His Lordship means that you must get beyond self-focus and learn to anticipate the needs of your spouse out of love.

Keep in mind that what you’d like done *for you* isn’t necessarily what would seem a blessing to your spouse! That’s where honest and open discussion comes in—to determine how, as each other’s first line of blessing, both *agape* and *phileo* love can fill your lives and your home.

As you seek to honor your spouse, putting his or her well-being above your own, you’ll find yourself becoming more patient and longsuffering. In essence, your honoring enables you to carry some of their load as a heart expression rather than as a sense of duty. Purposing to appropriate gentleness and humility, you’ll perhaps surprise yourselves by *bearing with one another in love* (Ephesians 4:2).

• How do your words and actions show that you honor your spouse? In what ways

does he or she feel important and cherished by you?

• Is your marriage marked by a companionable kind of love as well as a sacrificial love? How might you add that friendship-in-Christ element to your relationship?

4. Edify one another

“Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another” (Romans 14:19; see also 1 Thessalonians 5:11).

To edify literally means the process of constructing a building. In a spiritual sense, mutual edification is helping to strengthen the temple of Christ that each of us is in Him. You’re taking deliberate steps *to build the other person up*, comforting and encouraging them to press on in the righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit which is cited by Paul two verses earlier.

The edification which pursues “things of peace” doesn’t mean that you agree with everything just to avoid argument. Rather, you build one another up by identifying your differences and discussing how to apply that which most accurately lines up with God’s Word.

Edifying one another is designed by our Lord to be an outflow of His work within our heart. Most often it’s *what we say* that expresses edification—and what we say can either tear down or build up! Words that edify are both given and received in your *soul*, your mind, will and emotions, and can either benefit your physical well-being or contribute to its breakdown: **“The heart of the wise teaches his mouth, and adds learning to his lips. Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and health to the bones” (Proverbs 16:23,24).**

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A spouse is given the privilege of being the one who helps keep their beloved from giving in to the deception of sin. When you're discouraged and down, you're more likely to yield to your sin nature as you entertain negative, unedifying voices swirling in and around you. But a word fitly spoken by your life partner can help you take those thoughts captive and bring them into obedience to the way Jesus would think!

One of your most helpful steps of edification serves to both lift the spirit as well as to protect from ongoing deceit. *Daily* encouragement can help us as marriage partners keep our eyes on our eternal goal and turn from the *deceit* of sin. It's all too easy to excuse sin by any other name in order to rationalize an attitude or action. But the love that motivates biblical edification and exhortation confronts Satan's schemes and reiterates the way of righteousness:

Exhort one another daily, as long as it is called Today, lest any of you may be hardened by sin's deceit (Hebrews 3:13).

- **Does your spouse frequently hear uplifting words from your mouth? Does he or she feel appreciated by you?**
- **In what ways do you as a couple *pursue* that which edifies each other's spirit? Discuss how you can build on what you already do so that your mutual edification spills out onto your family and others in your life.**

5. Serve one another

“For you, brethren, have been called for freedom; only do not use freedom as an opportunity for the flesh [your sin nature], but through love serve one another” (Galatians 5:13).

We've noted in other writings that at

conception all of us received a sin nature, a propensity toward sin. When we're *born again*, our sin nature doesn't disappear. In fact, it wars against everything the Spirit of Christ is trying to change in us in order that we can be more like Him (Galatians 5:17).

One measure of a battle won over your sin nature is when you freely serve your spouse without any expectation of reward from him or her. The word used here for “serve” actually connotes service a slave would do for a master — and we're *fellow slaves* to our one Lord and Master, Jesus! That means we're not serving one another for what we can get out of our service, but serving with hearts motivated by doing good to another “body part” in Christ.

Authentic service means that you not only know the needs of the person you're serving but are also willing to meet those needs in a way that blesses them from God's perspective. What someone *thinks* they need and what they *truly need* may not be the same!

This is where meaningful intimate conversation is necessary. To be an effective servant, you are free in Christ to meet a need through His love at work in and through you. You also have been given the power of His Spirit to both discern if it's *you* who should meet that need and if the timing and way are His. It's in your *loving obedience* that the service becomes richly satisfying to your spirit and to the one receiving your service.

- **How well do you know the current needs of your spouse? How intimate are you in what you reveal about yourselves to each other?**
- **Do you serve one another freely, without expecting to be served in return? Give some examples.**

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Other One-Anothers To Discuss and Apply

We’ve purposely offered you just a sampling of the many ways in which your love for one another can be lived out in the footsteps of Lord Jesus. Below are some of the other one-anothers that will build up and strengthen your relationship both with Jesus Himself as well as your covenant union with each other in your marriage.

Use your concordance to discover the context in which each of the following is used, and discuss how you can put these into action — not slavishly, but joyfully as you journey together in His Kingdom.

- Accept one another (Romans 15:7)
- Stimulate one another to love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:24)
- Instruct one another (Romans 15:14)
- Admonish one another (Colossians 3:16)
- Confess your sins to one another (James 5:16)
- Have peace with one another (Mark 9:50)
- Do not deprive one another [of intimacy] 1 Corinthians 7:5)
- Comfort one another (1 Thessalonians 4:18)
- Don’t grumble against one another (James 5:9)
- Don’t speak evil of one another (James 4:11)
- Minister your spiritual gift to one another (1 Peter 4:10)

This list certainly isn’t exhaustive, but it’s a jumping off platform to get you started. Remember, LOVE undergirds all!