

Discussing How To Restore The Early Church

Returning Intimacy and Power to the Father's Children

*"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 18:19,20)



SECTION 5 - LESSON 30

THE HOME

The Basic Building Block For Spiritual Growth:

- *God's Purpose For Marriage*
- *So Your Marriage Had A Bad Start*
- *Honey, We Aren't The Same*



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Introduction

Beginning with this lesson we'll explore the second area of relational priorities, The Home. Within the home are two critical relationships—marriage and children. Whether you're married or not, please consider the points in these lessons for two very important reasons:

1. Parenting is not an exact science! Parents too often assume their children are picking up the skills they'll need to form healthy adult relationships and parent children themselves at an appropriate time.

However, studies reveal that today's parents, especially the single or divorced, are overwhelmed with jobs and chores. Their vastly diminished capacity translates into less time training up their children.

Children, left too much on their own or with peers, fail to learn how to maintain a marriage or raise the next generation. Tragically, they know more about how to divorce and to fill self-gratification needs than to establish a committed marriage covenant.

If you're married (or hope to be at some point) and yearn to experience the quality of marriage covenant our Father desires for you, you'll have to evaluate your marriage completely from His criteria. You need to become aware of any key areas of relational responsibility that are missing, and by His grace make them part of your marriage.

We strongly encourage you: Don't make any assumptions about the condition of your marriage. **Scrutinize it with great diligence!** Western contemporary society may have had a sorrier impact than you'd believe.

In Lesson 3 we discussed the *three family types* that predominate in the life-cycle of any culture: Patriarchal, Domestic, and Atomistic. The least stable, the Atomistic Family, most accurately describes the family structure of this nation, and western Christendom as well.

“Each person perceives himself as a distinct unit, disconnected from the family. *Individual rights* are emphasized, while *family responsibilities* are neglected. Whereas self-sacrifice was the norm under the Trustee and Domestic families, complete and unabashed *selfishness* characterizes the atomistic family.

At this stage, *childless liaisons* and *increased divorce rates* are typical. Because the majority are unwilling to sacrifice for the future, *fewer children* are born to those who have the means to raise them.

Religious and moral standards have little effect on protecting the sanctity of the family. Marriage *loses its sanctity* as a stable, committed institution. The permanence of marriage as a *covenant* is lost. *Public disrespect* for parents, parenthood, and authority in general rises. *Parenthood becomes more difficult* for those still trying to rear children with biblical values.”¹(emphasis added)

This widespread societal breakdown permeates Christendom. The U.S. leads the the world in fatherless families (34% of all kids live in homes where the father doesn’t reside). Nearly 40% of all children in fatherless homes haven’t seen their dad in the last year. The number of children raised by single mothers has tripled in just 40 years.²

A number of factors in the last century contributed to each generation increasingly outsourcing their children for others to raise. Most parents assumed that their moral principles would be upheld by the religious and educational systems. This has proven far from the truth.

The goal of humanist-oriented public education has been to *minimize* the influence of parents on their children. The founders of public education designed the system to neutralize the influence of parents on their children in order to have a strong federal government. When viewed from a biblical standpoint, public “education” is better understood as public “indoctrination” so that children will grow up to be good taxpayers and fight the country’s wars.

In the 1900’s Secular Humanism, which has been advanced by the

National Education Association, built upon the goal of its founders to depreciate the influence of parents, especially fathers. The goal of Secular Humanism is to eliminate absolute moral standards, particularly those set forth in the Bible.

If you have any doubts about this, read the *Humanist Manifesto* of 1932 which was endorsed by the NEA. Sacrificed in this propaganda is the sanctity of marriage and the training of one generation to instill the values of strong godly marriage and childrearing in the next.

[For more on this vital issue, see our Hebraic Article, [He Has Showed You](#) on our website.]

Influenced greatly by public education were the Sunday schools and youth programs within Christendom. Today, studies show that the moral values of those who call themselves “Christian” differ little from those of the unbelieving society around them.

Sundays schools and youth programs encourage parents to **outsource** their children for spiritual development by others. Most use entertainment approaches which appeal to the flesh but have little or no impact on the spirit. “Serving God” becomes another activity for self-gratification if youth are to take part—and almost any worldly activity is disguised as “fellowship”.

The result? Less than 23% of church children today follow in the faith of their parents. And youth programs have been found to be less than 3% effective in equipping young people to continue in Kingdom purposes in relationship with Jesus as Lord of their lives.

If you're both married and a parent, you need to scrutinize your *faith responsibilities* to your spouse and your children. You may not realize how many unbiblical standards and deceptive practices the generations before you have passed along. If you're a product of public education, the child of divorced parents, or have been heavily involved in Nicolaitan (professional clergy-led) youth ministry as you were growing up, we encourage you to take a close look at what our Father requires of you.

2. If you aren't married, you can still be a great help to the families with whom you interact. This is especially true if you're in the extended spiritual family of a home fellowship. You have much to offer as well as to receive!

In Lesson 26 we cited Philipians 2:12,13: "***continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose.***" ***Your*** salvation is plural, indicating that we need to help one another grow in the changes God wants to make in us.

Helping each other as extended spiritual family is not only the way to increasing Christ-likeness, but also a means to undo the influence of the Atomistic Family in each person. Each adult can be brother or sister to the other adults, and spiritual aunts, uncles or grandparents to the children. Biblically, that's what Paul means by "family" interaction.

If you're divorced, you need to know God's parameters to help your own children avoid the same mistakes you and your spouse made. Spiritual family who "bear the load"

with you are a great intergenerational resource to come alongside with practical intervention and love.

THE HOME

The Basic Building Block For Spiritual Growth: *God's Purpose For Marriage*

By now you've gathered how important the *permanence of covenants* is with our Lord! The covenant of love with Abraham and his descendants which our Father ratified with a sacrifice foreshadowed the everlasting covenant of love He established through the blood of Jesus.

There is much to glean in understanding the covenant of marriage by probing God's relationship with Israel in the Older Testament. It was no accident that our Father chose a *covenant* to define the union between a husband and a wife. This is a holy, "set-apart from all others" relationship, and as He amply demonstrates from Scripture. Defiling the covenant grieves Him greatly and brings grave consequences to the unrepentant.

God had "cut a covenant" sacrifice with ancient Israel and Judah to set them apart as His spiritual "wife". Yet through blatant compromise they "***married the daughter of a foreign god***" (Malachi 2:11). This phraseology may seem strange to contemporary readers, but to our Hebraic ancestors the meaning was crystal clear: God's spiritual "marriage" with His people was being profaned by those He had set apart as His beloved to represent Him to the nations. Instead of bringing His Light to pagans, they were being seduced to add heathen practices to their relationship with God.

Do you see how tragic this situation was? The people He had called through covenant to set an example of *spiritual faithfulness* were themselves committing

spiritual adultery and corrupting their relationship with their “Husband”!

Immediately afterwards the prophet laments the flagrant disregard for broken marriage covenants among the people. Just as the spiritual leaders corrupted the covenant with God, so did the people follow their pitiful example in violating their marriage covenant. They forsook their wives, “dealing treacherously” with them as the people had “*dealt treacherously*” with God and with one another—a phrase repeated to emphasize its atrocity before the Almighty (see Malachi 2:10,11,14,15,16).

Breaking the covenant union through divorce is hateful to God. Despite contemporary custom to treat marriage as a disposable entity if the couple is no longer “happy”, marriage vows are intended by our Lord to be permanent. That’s why they’re called *vows* and are confirmed through the presence of *witnesses*!

Now let’s apply this background truth to our discussion of God’s purpose for marriage—specifically, for your marriage or for that of your children.

Keep in mind that when you enter a *covenant*, you’re concerned for the *good of the other party* as well as for yourself. By contrast, when you sign a *contract*, you’re seeking only *your own* advantage. So don’t lose sight that purity of motive and willingness to die to your own interests are key to you experiencing a Christ-like marriage.

It’s popular today for engaged couples to write their own wedding vows. Most are idealistic and focus on the happiness of both parties. But if there’s any relationship that requires realism, it’s marriage. A marriage vow that depicts establishing a *biblical covenant union* might go something like this:

Challenge to the Groom:

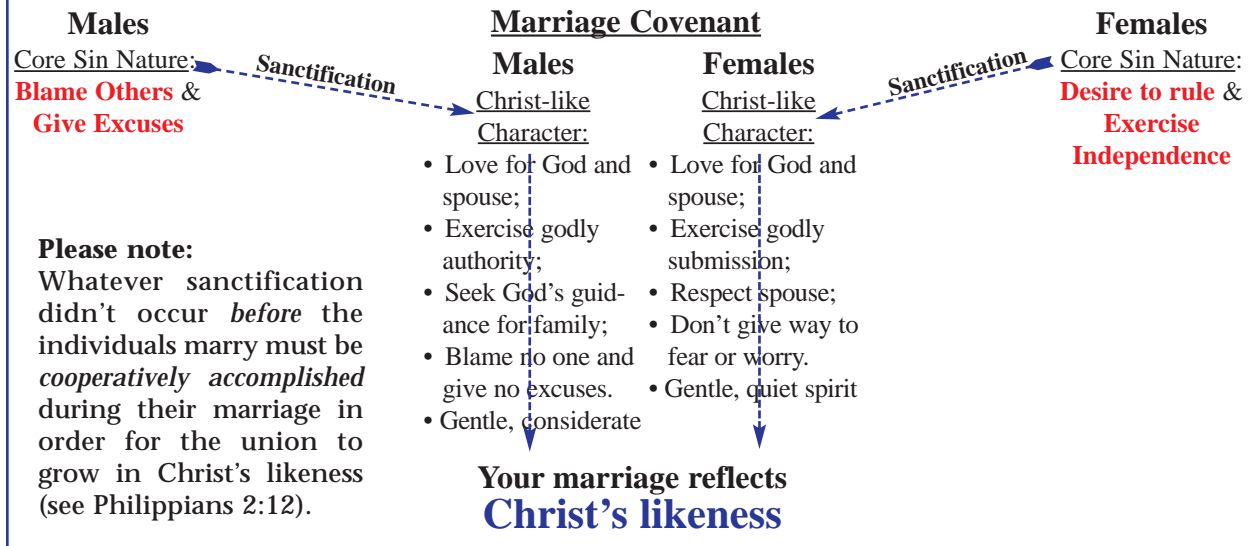
- Do you take this woman to be your wife?
- Do you promise to *die to all you once were* in order to love her as Jesus Himself would care for her?
- Do you promise that nothing on earth will compete with your devotion to her?
- Do you promise to *sacrifice your own ego* so that you will treat her with Christ-like consideration?
- Do you promise, with God’s grace, to live as a *servant-leader* in your home, and to *make it easy* for your wife to *respect you* as God has commanded?

Challenge to the Bride:

- Do you take this man to be your husband?
- Do you promise to *die to all you once were* in order to be his helper as Jesus Himself would support him?
- Do you promise that nothing on earth will compete with your devotion to him?
- Do you promise to *sacrifice your own ego* so that you will treat him with Christ-like consideration?
- Do you promise, with God’s grace, to *lovingly submit* under your husband’s protection, and to *make it easy for him to love you* as God has commanded?

“Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. ¶ The man said, ‘This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called “woman,” for she was taken out of man.’ For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. (Genesis 2:22-24).

Sanctification of a Man and a Woman Is Necessary For a Christ-like Marriage Covenant



“He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the Lord”
(Proverbs 18:22).

We've stated previously that God's purpose for the *marriage covenant* is to physically represent the *spiritual Covenant* we have with our Father. If you're married, the quality of love relationship you claim to have with your Lord is seen in the quality of love you share with your spouse.

The marriages of followers of Jesus are on display for all mankind to see what the New Covenant looks like. For the married, these two covenants are inseparably linked. Embracing the Covenant our Father offers and uniting in a marriage covenant are the two most important relationships people will ever share. No other person or activity should ever compete with either.

See diagram above. Whatever sanctification in either person was lacking prior to the marriage must be *worked out together* afterwards in union with the Spirit. The core sin nature of man to **blame** and **give excuses** will hurt his wife throughout the marriage if he's not sanctified in

these areas. The core sin nature of woman with the **desire to rule** and **exercise independence** will hurt her husband throughout the marriage if she's not sanctified in these areas.

This is the process of marriage as God sees it. In order for a couple to grow in loving union, the **combined sanctification** of each is crucial. This is made easier if each person can cooperate with and mutually support the other in whatever still needs to be circumcised in their hearts.

Let's revisit God's foundations for marriage. When God created Adam, He placed the man in the Garden of Eden to enjoy fellowship with Him and to work. Adam was assigned to take care of the garden and to name the animals and birds. His life had purpose and meaning, but Adam alone of all creation had no partner "*according to [his] own kind*" (see Genesis 1).

The man needed a "**helper suitable for him**" (see Genesis 2:18). The Hebrew word for helper, *ezer*, designates one who assists, especially in time of need. Now

this is important to realize: *Ezer* is used most often in reference to *God* as the One Who meets the needs of Israel.

Therefore from this reference point, a wife's role as a "suitable helper" does not imply inferiority. She is the needed helper whom God supplies to be alongside the man *to complete him*—to be his life companion. When a man and woman enter the marriage covenant with *pure motives*, the wife is God's perfect person to complement the husband's weaknesses. If he had no weaknesses, he wouldn't need a wife!

Your *motive* for entering into a marriage covenant is the vital first step to consider before God. As we mentioned in Lesson 25, "*Pure motive is crucial in order for a biblical covenant to come into existence.*"

Viewed within a Hebraic framework, marriage is a *pilgrimage together*, an individual and collective growth of a couple in the character of Jesus. Changes in the heart nature of each partner are going to happen as Jesus the Circumciser continues His work in them.

For a man, the initial circumcision calls him to humble himself to love his wife as Jesus would love her. His wife is God's instrument to teach him humility in ways that nothing else on earth can do. If a man doesn't understand the role his wife plays to help him walk humbly, he'll wound her heart.

A husband who lacks humility can't love her the way Jesus calls for. The man who refuses to humble himself is a Hardened, Mocking or God-denying fool (see Proverbs 26:11; 15:12; Psalms 14:1).

For a woman, the initial circumcision calls her to humble herself to lovingly come alongside her husband as his helper. She is God's representative to

complete in him that which he lacks. If a wife doesn't understand this role, she'll nurture independence. An independent woman wants to rule rather than help her husband. Her contentious attitude will wound her husband's heart (see Proverbs 19:13; 21:9; 21:19).

For both the husband and wife: God purposes that the quality of love in your marriage should mirror your love relationship with our Lord. John's words are the hallmark of a godly marriage: "*No one has ever seen God; but if we love each other, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us*" (1 John 4:12).

The followers of Jesus in Ephesus were surrounded by the same licentious immorality and unabashed self-gratification that characterizes our Atomistic culture. Determined that his flock not be compromised, Paul made clear the facets of a marriage which has been set apart by and for the Lord:

Each one of you [husbands] must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband (Ephesians 5:33).

Respect and *love* in a marriage that displays Jesus can only be accomplished by permitting Him to circumcise your heart of anything that hinders these from developing and deepening. Note that God speaks specifically to the husband regarding *his love* for his wife, and to the wife regarding *her respect* for her husband. He does *not* ask the spouses to remind one another of their particular responsibility!

- As a husband, you are humbly coordinating your purposes with God's when you consider in what ways you can become *easier to respect*.

- Similarly, as a wife, humbly examine yourself through the eyes of the Spirit to determine how by His grace you can become *easier to love*.

This isn't an attempt to *earn* love and respect; rather, it's an ongoing opportunity to be a willing and malleable vessel that testifies to the Potter's touch as *He* changes you through His Spirit. In essence, because of your love for your Lord and for your spouse, you're willing to put whatever may hinder Christ-likeness in your marriage on God's altar.

If you are presently married, how did you determine that your intended was God's will for life partnership with you?

Have you ever had doubts since then that you misread His will? Yes or No? If yes, what causes you to think this way?

Looking back, how prepared were you to be married? Who or what has helped you to *stay* married?

Has *dying to yourself* become real to you in your marriage? How yielding have you been to the Spirit's prompting to set aside self-interest? What are the areas of your greatest difficulty? After you've filled this in, ask your spouse for his/her input.

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres”
(1 Corinthians 13:4-7).

Did you know when you got married that key to maintaining your covenant is the **longsuffering** you need to exercise with each other? This is especially true in this Atomistic culture in which *intolerance* is the norm.

To understand the importance of longsuffering and the forgiveness that it entails, we need to look again at God's relationship with the Israelites.

The book of Hosea presents some powerful insights into the longsuffering devotion it takes to maintain and prosper a marriage covenant. The character of God as the “husband” of His wife Israel is wonderfully manifested in the analogy of faithful Hosea and his adulterous wife, Gomer.

The people of Israel had repeatedly committed *spiritual adultery*—a violation of their covenant with God—with other gods as they forsook the Lord (see Hosea 1:2). Even *their children* were impacted by this pursuit of idols (Hosea 2:4)—a consequence that the self-gratifying generation of parents of today seems to ignore.

God had showered blessings upon Israel, yet the people credited these to false gods and indulged their sin nature. Therefore, out of His longsuffering love and desire to bring her to repentance, God thrust upon Israel famine and ruin (see 2:9-13). When she repented out of desperation, Israel declared, “*I will go back to my husband as at first, for then I was better off than now*” (Hosea 2:7).

Note that God did *not* respond as an arrogant wronged party; He did not demand a “pound of flesh” for Israel’s transgressions. Instead He determined, “*I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert,*” away from distractions and responsibilities.

There she could focus intently on their relationship, and God could once more open her eyes to His loving kindness: “*[I will] speak tenderly to her. There I will give her back her vineyards*”—in the desert, where grapes normally do not grow and would thus be totally unanticipated!—“*and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope*” (2:14,15).

In this situation of infidelity and repentance, God becomes the model of mercy and forgiveness in the context of a spiritual *marital covenant* between Himself and His people. He gives hope to His beloved when she knows she deserves nothing but wrath. What a picture of intimacy and true love!

And what an eye-opener for *you* to ponder as the fundamental consideration in your marriage covenant! It’s

inevitable that you and your spouse will wound each other. But as the foundational character of our Lord, a **longsuffering** and **forgiving heart**, grows within you both, your marriage will continue to strengthen and mature.

God continues the marriage theme in Hosea with words of hope that foreshadow the loving relationship our Lord Jesus has with His redeemed Bride:

*In that day, declares the Lord, you will call Me ‘my husband’; you will no longer call Me ‘my master’... I will betroth you to Me forever; I will **betroth you** to Me in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion...*

*I will **betroth you** to Me in faithfulness, and you will **know the Lord**... I will **plant her for Myself** in the land; I will **show My love** to the one I called ‘Not My loved one.’ I will say to those called ‘Not My people,’ ‘You are **My people**’; and they will say, ‘You are **my God**’ (2:16,19,20,23).*

Why would God go to such great lengths in His Word to open His heart to His people as a Husband bereaved by the most devastating of sins, adultery? Isn’t He underscoring that marriage is more than a relational agreement; it’s an illustration of the *covenantal sanctity* of that union in His sight?

The words that God speaks through the prophet—*prostitution, adultery, unfaithfulness*—take on even greater significance if we allow our *first love* for God to deteriorate due to any type of distraction. How greatly we as followers of Jesus need to reflect through the physical realm of marriage on the reality of our *devotion* to our heavenly Bridegroom.

The passionate ardor that God seeks from His people is poignantly described by Rabbi Menachem Mendel:

A bridegroom might under the bridal canopy repeat to the bride “You are betrothed” a hundred times. If however he does not add the [Hebrew word] *li*, ‘[You are betrothed] **to me**,’ then it is as if he had said nothing.

The entire wedding with all its preparations are worthless. The crucial point is *li*—to me.

All of scholarship [is] worthless and all of worship is futile if they do not penetrate my bones. Essential is *li*.³

How long-suffering, forgiving and merciful God expects us to be in relation to the spouse to whom we are joined in covenant. How needy we are of His grace and sanctification to be able to do so! Although our culture portrays marriage as a disposable option to other lifestyles, God presents an image of permanence and sanctity as the model for married followers of Christ.

Does long-suffering forgiveness require circumcision of your heart and total yieldedness to God’s sovereignty through the Holy Spirit? Absolutely! Does the reality of struggling with your sin nature also show how much you need others in the Body of Christ for strengthening, admonishment and encouragement (not to mention prayer and fasting!)? Most assuredly!!

Remember the interconnection of God’s stipulations for embracing His Covenant and the marriage covenant. Because of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross our Father commands His people to be both **repentant** and **forgiving toward each other**.

Willingness to forgive from the heart and forsake sinful heart attitudes

is especially needful in the marriage relationship. Jesus did allow for divorce to break a marriage covenant if it was due to unfaithfulness, and the offended party could not forgive (see Matthew 5:32, below). Yet how much more reflective of our Lord would be the forgiveness Hosea was able to show adulterous Gomer!

Rather than choosing to forsake a repentant adulterous spouse, our Father’s love for unfaithful Israel should be our guide. While the offended partner is *permitted* to divorce, our Father would rather the person **first seek Him** for the grace to forgive.

Note that *re-marriage* from God’s perspective is adulterous. The first marriage covenant, which was ratified by *vows*, has instead been broken.

*But I tell you that anyone who **divorces his wife**, except on the ground of fornication, **makes her an adulteress** [when she remarries]; and that anyone who marries a divorcee **commits adultery** (Matthew 5:32).*

Because marriage is analogous to Christ’s relationship with the Church (see Ephesians 5:22-33), Satan has focused special attention on keeping Christian marriages from exemplifying the loving commitment of Jesus.

In this “atomistic” culture in which people are so disconnected, marriage can resemble two parallel existences similar to railroad tracks. Their lives are going in the same general direction. A few common concerns, such as their children, pets or chores, may act as rail ties that connect their lives periodically. But the couple doesn’t see themselves as *one* in the sight of God.

As we'll discuss more fully in a later lesson: In the current "Christian" culture the enemy has kept wives and husbands at bay from the support of the mentoring relationships the Bible calls for. These "load-bearing" relationships are nearly non-existent in congregations. Satan is winning this battle. His tactic? Pressure on couples to *make it on their own*.

We're told, "[love] keeps no record of wrongs" (1 Corinthians 13:5). How forgiving are you? Are there issues you have against your spouse, children, or anyone else? If so, identify the person and what you're holding against them.

You need the help of your spouse or someone else close to you to forgive these people. Forgiveness only gets you out of negative territory to point zero. You need to enter positive territory with God by asking His blessing on those against whom you once held unforgiveness. Only by doing this will your heart grow in love so you can be available to serve as His effective instrument.

THE HOME
The Basic Building Block For Spiritual Growth:
So Your Marriage Had A Bad Start

"Judah recognized them and said, 'She is more righteous than I, since I wouldn't give her to my son Shelah.' And he did not sleep with her again"
(Genesis 38:26).

A little helpful background information: Mike was raised in a home with an alcoholic father. Sue was only eight when her parents divorced. We both became followers of Jesus after seven years of marriage. And, through many opportunities to forgive one another, we'll be celebrating our 36th anniversary on February 21, 2006. Each of our parents became a follower of Jesus after us—some very near the end of their earthly journey. We are living testimonies to what our Lord's sanctification (*heart circumcision*) can do!

If you need encouragement in how wondrously our Lord can intervene with relational healing to correct wrongs, read Genesis, chapter 38. Matthew's Gospel reveals that *Perez* is in the lineage of Jesus. Who is Perez? Read the Genesis chapter and see what God does on behalf of a righteous woman in a messed up situation.

Many marriages today didn't come into existence with the quality of motive our Lord calls for. Sometimes motive has been contaminated by excessive *dating*, a corrupt practice with absolutely no biblical foundation.

Most people don't realize how emotionally calloused they become as each relationship breaks up. And with each dissolution a person decreases the potential for lasting emotional commitment to the one with whom they enter into the covenant of marriage.

But personal experience with failed relationships isn't the only model for impermanence. Images of disposable attachments and divorce fill the media. People are influenced by the practices of those around them. Think of the proliferation of feminist propaganda. Women

now initiate over 85% of divorce filings each year, whereas only a few decades ago men led the sorry way.

When you habitually view TV programs or movies that glorify promiscuity and independence, you're soaking in elements that make divorce seem desirable, especially to your impressionable children. Self-gratification and self-fulfillment rather than longsuffering and forgiveness put the marriage covenant in the disposable, replaceable category.

And, when Hollywood deceitfully portrays second marriages as happier than the first, the problem is compounded. Wishful hopes don't hide the fact that the divorce rate is much higher in second (and subsequent) marriages.

What if you entered marriage missing some of God's key criteria? This is where **sanctification** can correct a shaky start (see Lesson 26). You need to be confident that there is *nothing* outside our sovereign God's ability to miraculously change hearts. Jesus, our heart Circumciser, is LORD of everything. What's impossible for everyone else isn't for Him. You'd marvel at what He can do with a **repentant** and **contrite heart!**

Sanctification is God's means of correcting bad situations. Our Lord Jesus doesn't correct your marriage problem. He aligns your *inner character and motives* with His. Each spouse must earnestly seek the heart circumcision that our Lord can accomplish. When your hearts are repentant and contrite, our Lord can transform your marriage to truly reflect your Covenant with Him.

If you're a spouse who is eager for this to happen but your partner isn't, walk by His Spirit in the righteous path our Lord has outlined for you in His Word. Hide yourself in the cleft of the Rock for peace

and His transforming work in *you*. Earnestly call out to Him privately in your prayer closet, and interact with your spouse in loving kindness and peaceful spirit. That person is *not* beyond our Lord's reach when you're walking in love-grounded obedient trust yourself!

Most married people who experience problems later in their marriage because they entered the covenant with self-seeking motives need special help. It's like a diabetic requiring a different diet than a marathon runner. The diabetic who staunchly refuses to deal with his condition through a prescribed regimen of diet, exercise and medication exacerbates his problems and faces an early death.

Couples who don't diligently pursue the "prescribed regimen" of sanctification by yielding to His work of grace will most likely face increasing predicaments and the death of their marriage.

If ever there were a place for Paul's admonition to apply, "**continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling**" (Philippians 2:12), it's in marriage. Rather than regarding your marital difficulties as *problems*, you need to view these challenges as **opportunities** to grow together into Christ's likeness. (Refer back to our diagram on page 5.)

If a friend comes to you with marriage problems, the first thing to realize is that the couple does *not* need you to solve their grievances. That approach addresses the "what", and much of today's counseling is devoted to solving "*what's wrong*".

Often the counselor enjoys being the "fixit" person rather than directing each spouse to the lasting "Fixer", Jesus. The fixit usually prescribes some techniques to try rather than directing each person to cry out to Jesus in repentance for the heart circumcision they really need.

Keep in mind that a counselor frequently takes the side of the person who brings the problem, listening to only one side of the situation (Proverbs 18:17). The Bible calls this slander. Make sure you don't entertain that yourself, or perpetrate it!

[For more on this issue, see our [Lifebyte 24, What's the PROBLEM?](#)].

The troubled couple needs to find out "why" they are having difficulty. The first step is for each person to humbly and willingly go Vertical.

Remember, whether the couple realizes it or not, their marriage is *intended* to be the physical reflection of the Covenant our Father desires with each of them. If they have problems in their marriage covenant, they may have problems with their Covenant in God. But, NONE of these problems is irreconcilable!

So, in light of this framework, *each* spouse needs to verify:

- **That they are in Covenant with the Father.**
- **That *all* stipulations of the Covenant are just as viable at this moment as they were when they were first ratified.**
- **That each of them is in full fellowship with God, and that they have no unconfessed sin.**

Each spouse needs to scrutinize their Covenant relationship with God first. Focusing on the *horizontal*—their interpersonal problems—without going Vertical first will only bring failure. Our

Lord's grace won't enter the situation because He's not glorified by horizontal techniques.

Horizontal focus is why so much marriage counseling is ineffective. It doesn't adequately address problems in the Covenant with God *first*, and the woeful effects these problems have on the marriage.

If everything is fine vertically with the Father, next look at how the stipulations of the marriage covenant are being kept by both partners.

Consider what we shared in Lesson 27:

Just as in a marriage, it is your *heart devotion* to want to live in Covenant with our Father that makes it happen. As you weigh these criteria for embracing the Covenant our Father is offering you, can you see how the five stipulations apply to your own marriage covenant?

1. Can it exist without Repentance?
2. Can it bloom without your *agape* Love?
3. Can there be peace without your mutual Trust?
4. Can it flourish without Forceful Conviction and Steadfast Determination for it to succeed?
5. Can love grow without Forgiveness?

When there are ongoing problems in a marriage, these five stipulations are the initial place to start. First look at them vertically from our Lord's perspective. Is their Covenant with our Father vibrant? Then examine the strength of these stipulations in their marriage relationship. If these are healthy and viable, then other problem sources may exist. We'll discuss these in subsequent lessons.

Did you date a lot before marriage?
What effect has it had on your marriage?

Did you and your spouse fornicate before marriage? Yes or no? If yes, how does that effect intimacy in your marriage? Has it hindered you from experiencing intercourse as *covenant renewal*?

If you were raised by a single parent, how has that affected your relationships, particularly your marriage?

If you're divorced, which parts of our Father's stipulations, both in your Covenant with Him and with your spouse, did you fail to keep?

THE HOME

The Basic Building Block For Spiritual Growth: *Honey, We Aren't The Same*

"The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame"
(Genesis 2:25).

You don't have to be naked with your spouse to realize the two of you were created differently. Studies show that men and women have far more differences than similarities in all dimensions.

Especially because of the deceitful "unisex" mentality that permeates this culture, a growing source of problems in marriages is the failure of spouses to fully understand how different they are from one another. For example, how you learn and what motivates you are among the many variables that are profoundly dissimilar between the genders.

Even the government recognizes that innate **gender differences** exist! As the percentage of women in the military was increasing during the Vietnam era, the leadership needed to understand the differences in men and women so they could make proper adjustments in training and assignment. These studies showed men and women to be *97% different*. Brain utilization, hormones and a variety of other influences make men and women two very unique representations of humanity.

Any number of these differences can be points of frustration or misinterpretation between husbands and wives. What better place to discuss these differences than in the home, where they're likeliest to be manifested in conflicting ways?

Yet, so many families are either overstressed or have disintegrated that few parents are spending time in meaningful conversations with their children. It's no

surprise that so many young people are entering marriage with false assumptions about the opposite sex. All their “knowledge” has been acquired from their peers or from the media!

Genetic predisposition is also a key factor in why you respond as you do, often in ways totally in contrast to your mate’s. I [Mike] grew up surrounded by a large, intergenerational extended family. As a youngster at family gatherings listening to the conversation of the adults, I learned a lot about the strong influence of genes on why people act as they do. I came to realize how much I was like my mother’s dad who died when I was a year old.

Heredity plays a large part in who you are. One ministry which specializes in families emphasizes that over 65% of a person’s response to their environment is genetically pre-determined. Many people who are planning to marry would benefit by spending more time with their intended in-laws for a clearer picture of their spouse-to-be.

“Why you can’t understand me?”

Ignorance of genetic and gender influences can create some very painful adjustments after the wedding takes place! As we mentioned, government and sociological studies reveal vast differences between the genders in terms of thought processes, perspectives and emotional influences, as well as an array of physiological variants.

According to Dr. Donald Joy, professor of human development and family studies at Asbury Theological Seminary, the manner in which males and females process information in their brains is strikingly different.

Research indicates that women are able to simultaneously access both sides

of their brain. The two hemispheres of a man’s brain, however, are connected by a smaller corpus callosum, the pathway by which information flows. While a male baby is still in his mother’s womb, she produces antibodies which retard the growth of this connector, thus affecting how men think.

Women are able to immediately access past experiences from *both hemispheres* of the brain and come to speedy conclusions. Men, on the other hand, *predominate strongly* in either their analytical left hemisphere or in their affective, emotional right hemisphere. They require more time to sort, analyze and conclude.

Couples who are unaware of these differences in thought processes may experience frustration or irritation. They grumble, “Why can’t my spouse see things *my way*?” God, however, has “wired” them differently to make them mutually interdependent!⁴

A little review here might help women to understand why their husbands (or fathers or sons) tackle problems from a different perspective than they do. Men *do* men predominate in either the left or right hemisphere. As we discussed in Lesson 8: A Hebraic Perspective, the majority of men in this nation are right-handed and left-brained (their analytical logic side). As a result they depend to a far greater degree on analytical logic than on their emotional, affective right hemisphere.

Most theological textbooks and topics taught to western Christians have been “logically” compiled by right-handed men. An intellectual framework passes the relationship between God and His Beloved through a cognitive filter that brings about little if any life transformation. Thus people get to know a lot

about God without having to be changed by His Presence.

That's one reason why women, who can easily access both hemispheres, are able to relate to God through their heart as well as their mind. He is their *life-transformer* to be known and experienced, not an academic subject to be studied and evaluated.

An important point to remember:

Men *can* access both sides of their brain; they're just slower in the process than women are. Regrettably, the **stoic influence** of Hellenism has hindered many right-handed men from accessing the emotional side of their brain. The stoic influence produces a worldview that "Men don't cry", and that emotional expression among men (outside of rowdy group "Rah-rahs") should be quenched.

When men aren't reluctant to access their affective side, they begin to understand love, compassion and mercy—the tender side of God. Putting to use the right-side of the brain is crucial if men are to restore the Hebraic foundations to their lives and families.

Biblical mercy, love, compassion and sympathy can never be manifested if the right-side of the brain isn't accessed. And wives who understand this internal struggle will come alongside uncritically to patiently offer input.

We realize that no spouse can learn everything about what motivates the other or causes them to come up with such diverse responses. But, that there *are* major differences illustrates the *interdependence* God desires for the marriage covenant partners to achieve wholeness in their union with the help of His Spirit.

It takes REAL humility for spouses to appreciate their differences and their *need* for interdependence. When unity is achieved in a marriage, you're assured of this: **God is certainly the Source!**

Too often, rather than growing in appreciation of the differences and God's design for interdependence, husbands and wives criticize one another for their unique methodology and approach. This ego-centric view only impedes what our Lord could do in and through the marriage. We'll be discussing more about the differences and biblical issues facing men and women in the next two lessons.

How well do you know yourself? Take at least 10 minutes to describe yourself, your motivations, tastes, short-comings, etc. Then talk your response over with your spouse.

For the wife: Describe the positives and negatives you see in your marriage based on whether your husband is right-handed (logical), or left-handed (affective).

Both genders: Take a little time to reflect: What don't you like about the way your spouse thinks? What don't you like about the way *you* think?

What are the strengths of thought processes and decision-making that you bring into your marriage based on your gender? What are the strengths your spouse brings?

Briefly describe how you perceive God views your gender contribution to your marriage. Then describe how He views your spouse's contribution.

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