

BUILDING UNITY IN YOUR FAMILY

MARRIAGE—HAPPINESS OR HOLINESS?

The number of couples seeking marriage counseling continues to increase in my ministry, The chief factor I have observed that brings these couples to our center is a lack of happiness in the relationship. Typically people are seeking to get the honeymoon back. The following illustrates what the Lord is teaching me about marriage:

“By all means marry,” Socrates urged. “If you get a good spouse you’ll become happy. If you get a bad one, you’ll become a philosopher.” We may chuckle at this statement, however, most people today are surprised to learn that our modern obsession with romanticism was unheard of by those in ancient times. The belief that marriage can provide much of our personal fulfillment and emotional satisfaction is a very recent development. This thinking made its entrance into our greater collective culture around the end of the eleventh century. It got its greatest boost from the writings of Shakespeare several centuries later. In contrast to this, Francis de Sales told a young woman: “The state of marriage is one that requires more virtue and constancy than any other. It is a perpetual exercise of mortification... in spite of the bitter nature of its juice, you may be able to draw and make the honey of a holy life.” I believe the ancients would agree with Francis de Sales because even when two believers live under the same roof some occasionally “bitter” juice is going to come out. Nobody has an ideal marriage because nobody is an ideal person. We have this pesky habit of sinning against each other and especially God. We tend to wound the ones we love the most.

We need to ask what God had in mind when He created marriage. I believe God’s goal for marriage goes beyond happiness, comfort, our desire for infatuation and fulfillment as if marriage can somehow result in perfect bliss. God’s end in marriage is to make us holy. For me, submitting to God’s goal in marriage better reveals my selfishness, teaches me servanthood, helps me learn how to forgive, and stimulates me in spiritual growth. This wonderful, 24-hour-a-day, 7-day-a-week relationship puts me in a pressure pot like none other I have ever been in. This perhaps more than anything develops in me the character of Christ.

In fact my observation is that the couples I counsel don’t “fall out of love,” but they fall out of repentance. I notice that “little” vices, such as anger, resentment, impatience, disgust, disrespect, laziness, and pride, tend to adulterate and pollute a once precious relationship. Rather than letting marriage lead us into holiness, we often let it push us into bitterness and accusation. Some of my counselees want out of the marriage not so much because they are no longer “in love” but because they now despise what they themselves have become. Thus they want a new start with someone who hasn’t seen them at their worst.

Changing mates is not the answer. God changing us is. Every marriage is occasionally going to reveal you at your worst. By the grace of God we can learn from this revelation, not run from it. The day came when I died to the expectation that human relationships could ever possibly fulfill me. I then redirected my focus and spiritual hunger on God who created me. Then and only then did I learn to cherish my wife in a new way.

Many of those I counsel seek happiness first and holiness second and in the process miss both. Some honest, Spirit-led introspection will show you if you are allowing the enforced pressure pot to bring out the worst in you or if you are letting it lead you further into holiness. Your marriage can survive “falling out of love,” but you’re headed for disaster if you ever let yourself fall out of repentance.

I. DESTROYERS OF FAMILY UNITY

A. Attitudes and Behaviors that Destroy

- Pride vs. Humility
- Rebellion vs. Obedience
- Strife vs. Encouragement

B. Division Between a Husband and Wife

Seven Areas that Satan Wants a Husband and Wife To Be in Disagreement

1. Children (character goals, education goals, career goals, etc.)—Psalm 127:3
2. Child discipline and training methods—Ephesians 6:4
3. Finances (budget, purchases, etc.)—2 Corinthians 9:7-15
4. God's direction and church involvement for the family.
5. Relational boundaries (in-laws, extended family, friends, children, etc.)—2 Corinthians 6:14
6. Biblical roles for husband and wife
7. Marriage bed—1 Corinthians 7:3-5

II. BRINGING RECONCILIATION IN RELATIONSHIPS

A. Understanding One Another (1 Peter 3:8-12)

“Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. For whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

How walls build around our hearts in marriage and family relationships

1. Unresolved hurts bring rejection (lack of emotional understanding and heart forgiveness).
2. Most people do not know how to resolve ruptures in a relationship so that they both feel better.
3. Each hurt is a brick in the wall they build around their hearts.

Responding to others to bring reconciliation (heart-felt living and true forgiveness)

1. **“Be ye all of one mind”**
 - To think the same regarding the need to love each other.
2. **“Having compassion one of another”**
 - Five English words for one Greek word: Verb form of *sumpatheo*—*sumpathes*—literally means, “to feel together with.”
3. **“Love as brethren”**
 - *Phileo* love as a fellow countryman (family type)
4. **“Be pitiful”**
 - Compassionate at heart.

5. **“Be courteous”**
 - Demonstrate humility in your attitude.

Four response options

1. **“Evil for evil”**
 - God will be against them (1 Peter 3:12).
2. **“Evil for good”**
 - Solomon says that evil will never depart from his house (Prov.17:13).
3. **“Good for evil”**
 - They will experience God’s blessing (1 Peter 3:9).
4. **“Good for good”**
 - Jesus described this relationship in Luke 6:31 by saying, “as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.”

God promises five blessings for rendering good for evil

1. We will inherit a blessing.
 - *Inherit*: obtain what is rightfully ours as God’s child
2. We will enjoy life.
3. We will see good days.
4. God will watch over us.
5. God will answer our prayers.

A. Forgiveness

Resolving Past Hurt in Your Relationship (Matthew 18:21-35)

“Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven. “Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay what you owe.’ So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”

1. **Bitterness is something Satan can use to bring destruction to a marriage.** When unresolved within a person's spirit, bitterness creates resentment, anger, and emotional damage. Paul traces the development of unresolved bitterness in Ephesians 4:31. Bitterness leads to wrath (outbursts of anger), wrath leads to anger (rage, constant state of anger), anger leads to clamor (making a public scene), clamor is followed by slander (derogatory, injurious speech), and slander leads to malice (inner hatred of heart). The natural consequence of harboring an attitude of bitterness is that it eventually controls you.
2. **Scripture warns against bitterness.** Paul warns that bitterness is like a "root." The longer it is allowed to grow, the more difficult it is to get rid of. Hebrews 12:15 states that a root of bitterness left to grow will bring defilement to many. This root will produce the blighted fruit of anger, ungratefulness, a critical attitude, insensitivity to others, revenge, mistrust, and depression. Unresolved bitterness is also like a highly contagious disease that has a contaminating and destructive effect on others.
3. **The cure for bitterness is heart forgiveness.** In order to resolve bitterness, we must first understand and experience God's forgiveness of our sin. God chose to focus on His desire to forgive us rather than to hold us accountable for our failures (Isaiah 43:25; 55:7; Psalm 103:12). He could have demanded justice and required us to pay for our sins, but instead, placed them on Jesus Christ. He satisfied the payment on our behalf. The moment we believe by faith that Christ died for us, we are set free from the penalty of our sins.
4. **Forgiveness demands a payment.** When someone has sinned against us and hurt us, our sense of justice demands that a fair payment be made to us for their failure. If that person cannot pay or chooses not to pay, we resent the injustice and either become bitter and angry, leading to depression, or we can exercise forgiveness leading to peace. If we choose to forgive, as God forgave us, and assume the emotional debt or payment for the pain that person caused us, we will be free from resentment, bitterness, anger, and depression. As we free the offender through forgiveness, we become free from the effects of holding on to those damaging attitudes.
5. **Forgiveness isn't easy.** We never feel like forgiving someone who has hurt us because deep inside we believe they deserve to pay for the damage they caused us. Forgiveness involves our willingness to go to the cross for the person who has hurt us and to embrace the emotional pain they have caused us. Jesus didn't feel like going to the cross, but chose the Father's will (Mt. 26:39). Forgiveness is taking the focus off of ourselves and graciously choosing to go to the cross on behalf of the wrongdoer.
6. **Forgiveness involves:**
 - A choice: The offended person can choose to forgive or not to forgive.
 - Releasing: It is the voluntary act of releasing someone from the emotional damage caused by his sin and no longer holding him responsible for the consequences of that failure.
 - Substitution: One person pays for the emotional pain that another caused. In doing so, the debt of emotional damage is paid (assumed).
7. **Resolving bitterness involves:**
 - Making the choice to forgive your husband unconditionally.
 - Accepting and releasing the emotional pain within your heart by forgiving him.
 - Allowing the Lord to heal the pain within our hearts.
 - Beginning to build trust in your relationship again.

III. RESOLVING CONFLICTS

A. Good Communication Skills

Rules of Communication (Eph. 4:25-32)

“Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.”

- The Greek imperative—speak, people cannot read our minds.
- Speak truth—we are always to speak the truth!
- Speak the truth in love—we must not be brutal with the truth.
- We must have the person’s best interest in mind.
- Care must be given not just to what we say but also how we say it.
- Godly communication is evidence of a changed life.

Effective Communication

- One of the most difficult things in life is communication. Effective communication has not occurred until the following things happen.
 1. Person A — tells the message or feelings to person B.
 2. Person B — listens to the message of person A.
 3. Person B — repeats the message back to person A and says, “Is this what you meant?”
 4. Person A — then responds by either “Yes” or “No.”
 5. If the answer is no then the whole process is repeated.
 6. Then person B shares his message or feelings with person A, and the whole process is repeated.

Elements Assumed if not Communicated Effectively

- Assumptions—false assumptions are well packaged lies. On the outside they appear to be true to us, but on the inside they are deceptive and cause us great harm in relationships.
- Perception of events—specific details of circumstances as you perceived or understood them.
- Mood—what mood are you in?
- Feelings—emotional response.
- Meaning of Words—meaning of words as in the person—not the dictionary.
- Values—how important is something to you on a scale of 1-10?
- Motives—reasons or why?
- Meaning of tone of voice used—what was meant by your tone of voice?
- Meaning of body language—what did your body language express?
- Anticipated response—how well do you think others will respond?
- Personal preferences—what would you prefer to be done?

B. Biblical Solutions

Destructive when in the Flesh	Constructive when in the Spirit
Spouses do not understand the value of conflict that naturally comes when other opinions and perspectives are shared.	Spouses understand the need to hear the other side so responsible decisions can be made (Ephesians 5:21).
There is a competitive climate that implies a win-lose situation.	There is a cooperative spirit and commitment to the marriage that searches for a win-win situation (1 Peter 3:7).
“Getting my own way” is all important.	Doing it God’s way is all important (Colossians 3:23; Ephesians 5:10,17).
Spouses employ all kinds of defense mechanisms including: projection, suppression, blame, withdrawal and aggression.	Spouses are not defensive and know that disagreements evolve from the other person’s sincere concern for the marriage (Philippians 2:3).
Spouses are locked into their own viewpoints, unwilling to consider the perspective and ideas of their mates.	Spouses believe they will eventually come to an agreement that is better than any one individual’s suggestion (Philippians 2:2).
Spouses resort to personal attacks instead of focusing on the issues.	Disagreements are confined to issues rather than personalities (Ephesians 4:15).
Personal ideas and opinions are valued over the marriage relationship.	The marriage relationship is more important than the need to win or be right (Philippians 2:14-15).
Resolving marital conflicts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the problem? • What are the solutions? 	Resolving marital conflicts What is God leading us to do together to resolve the problem?

PERSONAL EVALUATION QUESTIONS

1. How do you handle conflict?
2. How quickly do you acknowledge God when you have a conflict?
3. Are there areas of disagreement between you and your spouse that you need to resolve with God’s help?
4. What steps does God want you to take to improve communication in your family?