

MARRIAGE WORKSHOP

Covenantal, Complimentary, Communication



PA BIBLE
TEACHING FELLOWSHIP

Living Out Our Covenant Commitment with Communication

► The priority in marriage should be displayed in that if everything else in your life is not good, but your marriage is strong you are in a place of strength.

If everything outside of your marriage is strong, but your marriage is weak, then you are in weakness because you are one-flesh.

► We tend to prioritize our work, our children, our hobbies, and our own ambitions above the covenantal commitment of marriage. This leads us to disappointment and lack in our marriages.

Proverbs 27:17 ESV -

17 Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.

► Good friction and confrontation in marriage helps to develop our character so that we grow and become sharper.

► In marriage, we should expect conflict and we should also embrace conflict.

Not self-centered conflict, but the mutual sharpening that happens when we live honestly, critically, and constructively. We *cannot* avoid conflict; this is unhealthy, we need to face conflict constructively, for the mutual benefit and sharpening of each spouse.

► Often when we have marital problems, we think it is because of our spouse, we think; “well if *they* would just...” But, what marriage often does is bring us face-to-face with *ourselves* and our own weaknesses! Marriage makes us to look at ourselves in the mirror and be confronted by ourselves because of the viewpoint of another person.

► Constructive conflict helps us to grow and change. This is a good thing, because if we do not change, we will not grow! So then expect marriage to be a major means of change and growth in your life.

Ephesians 5:18-33 ESV –

18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, 19 addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart,

20 giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

21 submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

► It is about to speak regarding marriage but set in the context of a Christ-centered life, filled with the spirit. There are many gospel truths assumed by the time you get to the verses about marriage in Ephesians, where marriage teaches us more about Christ and his church, and Christ and his church teaches us about marriage.

The description of the “one-flesh” marital *covenant* between husbands and wives in the Lord:

22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.

23 For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.

24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,

26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,

27 so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

28 In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.

29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church,

30 because we are members of his body.

31 "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."

32 This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

33 However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

► The wife is to honor, reverence, and submit to her husband, as to the Lord Jesus Christ. She honors her Lord in reverencing her husband. This frames all her interactions and relationship with him- to be a helper (yielding her power and influence for enabling and equipping, rather than replacing) and to support and help his leadership by reverencing and submitting to him.

► Submission *does not mean* the husband makes every decision. Marriage is a partnership, we need to build a consensus. Ultimately, the husband has the final burden of headship, to be responsible for the marriage.

- ▶ The husband is to love his wife, in the sacrificial way that Christ gave himself for the church.
- ▶ He is the head of his wife, so he has authority (for her good) in the marriage and is to be a supply of nourishment and care (verse 29)
As the head he is the one who must ultimately take responsibility for the health of the marriage.
As the head, he has the responsibility of Christ-likeness in his leadership: selfless, sacrificial, and loving. He leads in love, to love and be sacrificial even if unloved and unsupported.
- ▶ In this way, both the husband and the wife will change, grow, and develop so that they can be better fulfilled in marriage for a relationship with God.

Roles and Callings:

- ▶ Men and women are equal as humans, although their callings in marriage are not equivalent. This is by design, to help us to subordinate our self-serving desires for the betterment of our spouse and family.
 - ▶ E.g.: Husbands are to “love your wives”- is this not true of wives also?
Of course, it is also true of wives! But this is speaking to the husband’s *specific calling*, as having the role of headship.
The same is true with honor and submitting (verse 21), the husband submits to his wife as well, but it is the wife’s *particular calling and role*.
- ▶ When it comes to practical, covenant-committed living, husbands and wives are equal in value, but are different in callings. They are called to specific aspects of marital roles because of God’s wisdom, and our human propensities toward sinfulness.
- ▶ *God understands the unique strengths and weakness of men and women, especially in a fallen creation:*
 - ▶ God is pointing these things out, that the *unredeemed natural tendencies* of humanity are at cross purposes with God’s marital design.
- ▶ So then, these God-designed roles are to be constructive, not destructive. They are for our good and sharpening, and not for making differences become divisions.

Husband's leadership responsibility as head of the wife:

- ▶ NOT domineering, not oppressive- but Christ-like sacrificial service.
- ▶ Setting and arranging (supply nourishment and care) so that your wife can thrive alongside of you.
- ▶ Much of leadership is service: we lead by sacrificial love.

- ▶ Husbands, what matters to your specific wife? Give purposeful thought to this.
- ▶ What communicates to her that you are "poured out" for her?
Practical tip: ask her!

Additionally, your relationship with God is vibrant and prayerful, you'll be sensitive to the needs of your wife, not only to supply what is a blessing, but to steer and help what is lacking.

Wives, how can you honor and reverence your husband will providing help?

- ▶ Perhaps it's seeing where he needs encouragement.
- ▶ Perhaps in seeing where he needs improvement.
- ▶ Then help; provide influence and power in those places, without replacing him.
- ▶ Encourage him to lead well, rather than taking over. The wife is the "helper" that is fit for him, yielding a power and influence that the "helpee" does not have.
- ▶ Bring things to his attention that he isn't seeing, so that he can assess and address.

▶ **"Washing with the word"**- with your spouse, it's intimate, vulnerable- we are entrusted to each other to care for one another.

▶ Think about the concept of washing or bathing, how someone would see you at your dirtiest, but then be able to help you wash or bathe in a way that intrinsically understands what you're feeling as they do so. "Washing with the Word" is a way in which we deal delicately with the "dirt" of our spouses. As married people, in some way, we are vulnerable and allowing someone else to help us in something so intimate.

▶ We need to trust our spouse to deal with us delicately, wisely, and honestly according to God's Word.

Read these verses with *your spouse* in mind:

Colossians 3:11-17 ESV

11 Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

12 Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience,

13 bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

14 And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.

16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

18 Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

19 Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.

“Christ is all and in all”

► Fundamentally, how do you view your spouse? In Christ? With particular honor as your one-flesh partner?

► Over time, we may tend to view our spouse through their *weaknesses* instead!

► Scripture is clear that we are to love our spouse based on *who they are* (identity) first and foremost. I.e., husbands love your wife (identity) as Christ loved the church. This is not, husband love your “nice” wife, etc...

► How and why do spouses become so “nit-picky” with each other?

► One of the reasons is because they lose sight of the honor of the identity of their spouse due to close quarters familiarity.

► Another is because they see their *differences* as cause for *division*, instead of opportunities for help and strengthening.

► Perspective point: you married and committed to love a person who is guaranteed to be different than when you first married them!

► One of the only things you can guarantee about your future spouse is that they will be different than they are today!

► So then, the Christian relationship is built upon love in a covenant, not something flimsy like temporal compatibility.

▶ Sustained Love: In a sustainable manner, the feelings of love tend to follow the actions of love and not the other way around.

▶ Love *has* feelings, but it is not *just* feelings: as we do the actions (choices) of love, so the feelings follow.

▶ Again, Christ loved his church when we were not loveable, but his love toward us made us *lovely*- this is how it is with our spouses as well. As we love them, they become more and more lovely to us.

▶ This section (Colossians 3) addresses choosing to love, which includes forgiveness, letting go of bitterness and complaints, having longsuffering patience, forbearing one another etc...

▶ All these things of love can be done when we honor who our spouse is and look to subordinate our self-centered desires for the good of our spouse- the actions of love.

▶ Self-centeredness is a basic root of many of the problems in a marriage.

“Husbands love your wives and do not be harsh with them”

▶ Why would this be pointed out if it weren't a sinful tendency? Again, the headship of the husband is rooted in the love and example of Christ. Not harsh toward his wife, but lovingly nourishing and caring for her.

“Wives submit to your husbands as is fitting in the Lord”

▶ Why would this be pointed out if culture and sinful tendencies were not at play? As a wife submits (reverences, honors) to her husband, she is showing her devotion to the Lord. This is “fitting” or pleasing to the Lord Christ- he gave himself for the church.

COMMUNICATION:

Ephesians 4:1-32 ESV –

17 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.

18 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.

19 They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.

20 But that is not the way you learned Christ!—

21 assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus,

22 to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires,

23 and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds,

24 and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

▶ We are bringing these gospel and mystery truths into our marriages. In fact, marriage is the best opportunity to live these things because it is the most intimate of relationships and presents the most frequent opportunity!

25 Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.

26 Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger,

27 and give no opportunity to the devil.

28 Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.

29 Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

▶ **V25 - let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.**

▶ We cannot have a strong or stable relationship if we do not trust one another.

▶ *Build a trust in the relationship.* It is better to be honest (even if uncomfortable) than to lie (in order to maintain comfort).

▶ **“speak truth”**

▶ This is the key, the opposite of lying is speaking truth.

▶ **V26 - Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger,**

▶ Do couples get angry? YES!

▶ Not even just at one another, but at their children, at their extended family, at their friends, community, work, life-situations. etc....

▶ Anger is assumed, but the teaching is clear- resolve that anger.

▶ What steps are you taking to do that?

▶ Do you approach anger with your spouse openly and honestly?

▶ **Resolving Anger is Crucial:**

- ▶ You may be angry but can resolve it without speaking about (make sure it is really resolved and really forgiven).
- ▶ You may be angry but need to speak about it so that you can work it out with them according to the standards of God's Word.

- ▶ To express the angers or frustrations you feel can be profitable (even if already resolved) because then you can grow together in your perspective.

Example: If I'm doing something that makes you angry, and I don't realize it... although you forgive me, it may be more profitable/sharpening for me for you to lovingly point it out!

▶ **V27- and give no opportunity to the devil.**

- ▶ Have some perseverance to fight for the relationship and have spiritual awareness that Satan is against marriages and tries to divide them, i.e., Gen. 3.

▶ **Giving and Receiving Criticism:**

Do so in an affirming way, constructively.

Realize the deep power you have over your spouse's heart.

You can make or break them; you can shape them. Be wise.

- ▶ If we edify, build up, and affirm genuinely, from a standpoint of love- then our spouse has a security and assurance in their most vulnerable place. So then, instead of having to be defensive or resistant, they can receive it and grow from it.

▶ **Suspecting motives: give the benefit of the doubt.**

Instead of accusing your spouse in your heart of their wrong motives, give them opportunity to express their motive.

Be wise to not always initiate criticisms or conversation with "accusatory" language. This automatically makes people defensive.

Pro 15:1 "A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger."

There is something important to not only *what* you say, but *how* you say it. Some conflicts never become constructive because they are approached without consideration or gentleness and instead devolve into unresolved arguments.

▶ **Corrupt communication: putrid words, corrupted words.**

Instead of speaking- hold your tongue. Then, work on your heart.

How many hurtful things in a marriage could be avoided if we held our tongue and checked our hearts?

► So many couples do not know how to disagree, argue constructively, or resolve conflict. They do not resolve conflicts and they do not resolve disagreements. Over time, they develop patterns (yellers-ignorers-passive aggressive, etc....) **Then they just fight, they don't sharpen.**

“Pro 12:18 ESV - 18 There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.”

► Over time, they will then be arguing over the history of their marriage, instead of whatever the current problem is with words like: “you always do this”... or “you never...”

► At this point they are no longer disagreeing or constructively helping each other to broaden their viewpoint, instead they fight over history and fall into ruts of bad communication habits.

Work on your communication skills and tactics:

- Do not be overly passive about this, be proactive and thoughtful.

Pro 29:11- A fool gives full vent to his spirit, but a wise man quietly holds it back.

Pro 10:19- When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent.

Pro 17:27- Whoever restrains his words has knowledge, and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding.

(He is thoughtful about communicating his soul).

- Conflict does not need to be argumentative, but instead can be shaped to be constructive and edifying.
- Bring it to loving language- not accusatory, not putrid.

Pro 15:4 ESV - 4 A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit.

- Be honest, be open, but give the benefit of the doubt.
- Really *listen*.
 - *“Swift to hear, slow to speak.”*
- While listening to your spouse, perhaps “say it back” in your own words to see if you comprehend what they trying to communicate.
- Be careful with your tone- it is not just what you say, but how you say it.

Pro 15:1 - A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

- Learn what communicates to your specific spouse- most likely, they are different than you!
- Resolve to not give up until you have built a consensus in your relationship.
- Those who make a habit of ignoring or going their separate ways on issues may soon find themselves doing the same to their spouse.
- You are one-flesh, the head can't go one way and the body another- you need to move together!

▶ **V29 - but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.**

▶ Even in conflict, this should be our goal: to affirm our spouse, to build them up, to encourage them and minister grace to them. This is being a true helper and a true head.

▶ **31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.**

We must resolve these conflicts.

Either truly forgive it or talk it out- but don't sweep it under the rug or let it fester.

If we develop habits of unresolved anger and bitterness, this will eat away at the core of our relationships.

▶ Many people like to "avoid conflict." Unfortunately, this is quite unhealthy if unresolved. In marriage, conflict is unavoidable- in order to grow, you must change. Conflict can be used for *building up* instead of *tearing down*.

▶ In order for a marriage to grow, you must come face to face with yourself and your spouse. Ephesians shows us how the gospel, the Word of God, and the Spirit of God help us to do this!

▶ **32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.**

▶ This must be our posture toward our spouse:

Blanket forgiveness. Tenderheartedness. Remembering that we (ourselves) are also in need of God's help and grace and forgiveness. We live in a covenant commitment according to the will of God in Christ Jesus, rather than our feelings alone, the culture, or the difficulties of life.

▶ When we live according to the covenant, it gives *security* that we will work through the difficulties of marriage *together*. This allows us to be truthful enough to be *ourselves* so that we can live honestly and openly, while constructively sharpening one another. We are one-flesh.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- What are some actionable ways your spouse can express their care and love for you?

- What are a few actions that you do to show your spouse your care and love for them? Does your spouse recognize this?

- Are your conflicts generally constructive or destructive? In what way can you better approach conflict to “sharpen” or “better” one another?

- What Biblical approach do you take when you find yourself avoiding talking or being with your spouse?

- Do you feel like you *really* listen and understand your spouse? Does your spouse agree?

- How can you make yourself more available for communication? Are there distractions that can be removed in order to make time for thoughtful communication?

*Encouragement: Actively attend to your marriage, it’s the most important earthly relationship in your life. If you need help, consider inviting godly counsel into your marriage. Don’t wait until everything feels broken to try to fix it, instead, use godly counsel to help sharpen, address, and re-focus with the love of Christ in your marriage.