

MARRIAGE WORKSHOP

PART TWO: Covenant, Complementary, Communication



PA BIBLE
TEACHING FELLOWSHIP

MARRIAGE WORKSHOP PART 2

Session 1: Marriage and Cultural Worldview

Session 2: Roles in Marriage- Complementary

Session 3: Living Out our Covenant Commitment with Communication

***Reflection Questions**

TEACHING 1: Marriage and Cultural Worldview

High-level review of Part 1:

- How did two become one?
- God's joins them by His Word and His presence in the union.
- Not a "me-marriage" but for the glory of God.

What is the spiritual significance of this?

- Covenant commitment: marriage is primarily a covenant, not a convenience.
 - God will treat you as connected to one another, as one-flesh, not just as an individual.We discussed building a greater reverence for the spiritual significance of marriage.

God's Design and Order:

- Christ-centered.
- Headship
- Submitting
 - God's Word ideas, not worldly ideas.
- This design is with a view to being one body, one flesh.

► This is God's "authority" structure, and it is for our blessing.

► We spoke to men and their role as head to always use this to the good and blessing of their wife; to love, and lead by love- purposefully, thoughtfully, and sacrificially.

► We spoke to women as under their husbands as the help-meet proper for him, to influence him for God, to honor their Lord and serve their Lord in the marriage in this way.

Biblical Marriage and Culture:

Statistics and Culture - Marriage in the cultural context of the United States:

- Divorce rate near 40-50%, this is double than what it was in 1960.
- In 1970 almost 90% of all people born were to married couples, now it's below 60%
- In 1960 about 75% of all adults were married, now it's about 50%
- In 1960 co-habitation was statistically negligible, now 25% of all unmarried women between 25-50 years old are living with a partner and it's estimated 50% of unmarried women will live with a partner sometime before they're 40.
- Along with this change goes attitude and cultural belief changes:
- A belief that most marriages become unhappy (due to divorce rate).
- The prevalent cultural idea is that the key to marriage is *compatibility*: someone I don't need to change much, and I don't myself need to change much (this is antithetical to Christian view of marriage).
- This is accompanied by the cultural belief that in order to find compatibility, co-habitation prior to marriage is helpful and sexual relationship prior to marriage is especially helpful.
 - Obviously- these ideas are not supported by Scripture.

But do these cultural conceptions line up with reality?

- ▶ Statistically, those who *do* live together before marriage are more likely to split up than those who do not.
 - ▶ Most co-habitations statically do not lead to marriage... yet that is a prevailing idea in the culture that *they are key to compatibility*.
- ▶ Statistically, the divorce rate significantly decreases if you are over the age of 18 and graduated high school- it decreases further if married when over the age of 25.
So, the 40-50% divorce rate is somewhat a false indicator.
- ▶ Statistically, 62% of those who are married would consider themselves happy to very happy. 66% of the people who would consider themselves "not" happy in marriage, if they stay together, 5 years later, consider themselves happy to very happy.

► So why the disconnect between what people think of marriage and the actual?

► *It's our cultural worldview!* In our culture, we have a deep belief that you, as an individual, must be free to pursue what personally fulfills you.

► Our culture views marriage and our spouse as helping me achieve my valued goals. *We are looking for someone who will enhance our freedoms without shackling us down (the "ol' ball and chain").*

► In many ways, this runs opposite to Biblical teaching, which shows us that humans are best fulfilled in subordinating personal desires for fulfillment and to be instead, fulfilled in living for something greater than themselves: **"For this is the whole duty of man ("this is what it means to be a human"), fear God and keep his commandments." Ecclesiastes 12:13**

► So then, marriage calls together two fundamentally different people (man and woman), and calls them to work together, to serve a greater purpose than themselves.

This will provide opportunity for personal character development, while subordinating personal impulses for the greater good of the marriage and family unit.

► An Impediment to Freedom- "the ol' ball and chain":

► If we view our marriages on a "value exchange" concept, like the "me-marriage"- then we will tend to think that our own needs are greater than the relationship itself, and if our own personal desires come first, then this will be antithetical to the relationship's overall purpose.

Again- our culture teaches us to want a mate who will enhance our freedoms without shackling us down.

► Sacrificial living fulfills us because it changes us, we see this patterned in Christ and his bride, the church: he sacrificed for us, now we are changed by that sacrifice, and grow up into him when we live sacrificially as well.

► Whereas our culture now views marriage as a means to an end: *self-fulfillment*.

► This is the "ME-marriage" concept where our cultural idea focuses around *self* for marriage, whereas the Biblical view focuses on marriage as service to *another* person and to and for *God's* glory.

► So, in our "me-marriage" culture, once your spouse "stops fulfilling you," or is an impediment in some measure to your personal fulfillment, people begin to feel stuck, unhappy, and closed off from what they "could have."

► What our culture tends to do then is instead of thinking of marriage as a covenant commitment that is character-forming and shaping (through "sickness and health, 'til death do us part") ... we start "shopping around" for what would seemingly instead! "Don't make me change, I'll just change-out my spouse."

► In regard to this, we treat our spouse almost like a "product" that we can buy and sell, we shop around for something that could be "better" than what we have.

► This is because we tend to look at marriage on a value of "exchange." Can I get as much out of it as I put into it? I'm looking to be fulfilled by what I *get out* of it, rather than what I *put into* it.

So, as your spouse changes and are not who they used to be or they don't quite put in the same effort as they used to, then we feel justified to withdraw and to treat them differently than our covenant commitment.

► Inversely, we do not do this with children. We don't shop our children around; we are committed to them despite the amount of fulfillment we are receiving from them. We find value in the relationship with our children by how much we *give them*, not necessarily their contributions to us.

► This cultural worldview (self-fulfillment focused) is antithetical to marriage because marriage is primarily *sacrificial*, which brings true fulfillment in relationship to God.

God has not designed us to be *self*-fulfilled, but fulfilled in giving ourselves to *Him*, which we do in a marriage by loving and serving one another.

► Why does all this matter? Because *God* designed marriage, and if you don't live according to His design (*how it works*), then the fullness of the blessings of marriage will be limited.

► So then, in sacrificial covenant love, we express love by action, and the feelings of love follow. We commit to love and serve our spouse in view of who they are (identity) as my honored one-flesh.

► As we do the actions of love in thoughts, words, and deeds, we see the fulfillment that the sacrificial love of God brings to our marriages.

► Ultimately, the solution to the cultural view of marriage is the gospel of Christ which both humbles us and empowers us at the same time.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- How has culture impacted your view of the marriage relationship?

- In what ways does the Scripture encourage you to pursue God's design in marriage?

- In what ways have you and your spouse changed from 2016-2022. How does change like that affect your marriage?

TEACHING 2: Roles in Marriage - Complementary

Genesis 2:15-25 ESV -

15 The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

16 And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden,

17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

18 Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."

19 Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name.

20 The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him.

21 So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh.

22 And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.

23 Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man."

24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

25 And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

► Are there any differentiations between the roles of a husband and a wife in a marriage?

Yes, this is by God's design!

► We see this intrinsically in the first sentence about wives:

"It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."

In regard to man's relationship with God (the purpose for which he was created) it was not good for him to be alone. He needed a helper.

► This shows that a man by himself in his relationship with God would be *bettered* by a companion that was fit for him.

"I will make a helper fit for him"

► The word "helper" is a word that is primarily used of God Himself- as the helper of people because of who He is.

In our nomenclature, we tend to minimize helpers as *lesser*: they are less capable, they are less powerful, they have less resources, less abilities.

► But when used in this Biblical sense, a helper is not lesser, but *powerful*: the helper provides an influence and equipping that the "helped" one does not have. Even before sin and death entered the world, the wife (Eve) would provide *a power and influence* that Adam did not have, which would be different from his.

► The man and the woman are equal in value (they are one-flesh)- but they are not equivalent in their roles. God wisely designed them to help and complement one another; that their differences in strengths would be “good” and equipping for one another.

► We often view *differences* as reasons for *divisions*, or as generally *negative*. Differences are not bad, they are beauty!

The power of the wife is reflected in a verse like this:

Proverbs 14:1 KJV - 1 Every wise woman buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh [tears] it down with her hands.

► This shows an example of how the wife as the helper fit for him wields tremendous influence and strength in their lives.

How to Help:

► There are two general ways to yield the power of help:

- 1) By bringing yourself under another to enable them
- 2) Or to domineer over and so to replace.

► The wise woman builds up her house by coming under the headship of her husband, to enable, by her special influence and power to do greater and better. A foolish way to yield helper-ness is to domineer and to replace. This is not really helping someone to become better, this is overtaking.

► This is a common danger in marriage which the Scripture warns against in several places!

The Wide-Range of the Wife’s Influence:

Proverbs 31:10-31 ESV –

10 An excellent wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels.

11 The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain.

12 She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life.

13 She seeks wool and flax, and works with willing hands.

14 She is like the ships of the merchant; she brings her food from afar.

15 She rises while it is yet night and provides food for her household and portions for her maidens.

16 She considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.

17 She dresses herself with strength and makes her arms strong.

18 She perceives that her merchandise is profitable. Her lamp does not go out at night.

19 She puts her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle.

20 She opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy.

21 She is not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household are clothed in scarlet.

22 She makes bed coverings for herself; her clothing is fine linen and purple.

23 Her husband is known in the gates when he sits among the elders of the land.

24 She makes linen garments and sells them; she delivers sashes to the merchant.

25 Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come.

26 She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.
 27 She looks well to the ways of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness.
 28 Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her:
 29 "Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all."
 30 Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised. 31
 Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates.

- ▶ The value of an excellent or virtuous woman- more precious than rubies!
 This word "excellent" is the word for "army," "host," "man of valor."
- ▶ Her husband trusts her- implying explicit *partnership and relationship*.
- ▶ She's involved in real estate and investments...she's involved with the needs and functioning of the entirety of the household... She's involved in reaching out to others with need and is generous... She is strong and dignified... she is wise... she teaches kindness by her words...she is active... she is praised by all... she fears the LORD!
- ▶ Where is her husband in all of this? Presumably, in all these things with her.
 Marriage is not separate- but together. Partnership and working together with complementing roles and actions.

Genesis 2:23 "Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man."

- ▶ This is the headship of the man, reflected in this statement: she is "flesh of my flesh" (my body). We see this reflected in the New Testament where it calls the husband the "head" of the wife.
- ▶ This is God's design of authority structure: (we covered this a lot in Part 1).
- ▶ Headship is both *authority and supply*.
- ▶ But the wife is his body- he needs his body, he cares for his body, he is greatly helped by his body, and he couldn't exist without his body!
- ▶ He intrinsically recognizes this woman as a proper companion, a helper fit for him... as opposed to the animal over whom he ruled- Eve was different.
- ▶ The idea of the man's headship is that it is always for the benefit of his wife and never for her hurt- this is why Jesus is called the "head" of the church, he sacrificed himself for the church, and leads it as it's supply (it's "all in all").
- ▶ A practical issue that arises in marriages is "thoughtless headship" where the husband does not actively and purposefully lead his household in godliness. This often leads the helper to attempt to help by replacing rather than coming under and enabling the head of the marriage.

An example of purposeful headship:

Psalms 128:1-4 ESV –

- 1 Blessed is everyone who fears the LORD, who walks in his ways!
- 2 You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands; you shall be blessed, and it shall be well with you.
- 3 Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table.
- 4 Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the LORD.

- ▶ His priority is to fear (reverence) the LORD and to walk in his ways.
- ▶ This shows the man's diligence for godliness, which will affect and bear weight on all of his relationships with his wife and family.
- ▶ From this place of reverence and walking in the ways of God, there is a fruitfulness seen in his wife and children- they are supplied by his vibrant godliness in all areas of life.
- ▶ This results in blessedness and it goes "well with you" as you have prioritized a relationship with God (spiritual life) and that spiritual relationship supplies nourishment to your family relationships.

Genesis 2:24 - "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."

- ▶ "*leave*" mother and father and "*hold fast*" to his wife is the covenant language of Genesis. There is no more necessary, familial, and binding relationship than parents and children- until you have a spouse. Then you must "hold fast" to them while leaving the constraints of mother and father, to form a new family unit.
- ▶ *Priority of the marriage relationship.*

- ▶ When it comes to marriage, all our actions must be understood in light of the covenant commitment:

Malachi 2:14 ESV - 14 But you say, "Why does he not?" Because the LORD was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant.'

- ▶ Husbands and wives are covenantally committed to love one another (not just emotionally), so then because of the covenant, there is a partnership and a deep togetherness as one-flesh.
- ▶ To be "one flesh" means that you are *not* independent of one another, you have a deep oneness, you are in a partnership and working together. So then, all your actions should be in light of that oneness.
- ▶ This requires *building a consensus* in the relationship (working together, partnered together, headship, and helper-ship) in order that the "head" doesn't go one direction and the "body" runs in a different direction!
- ▶ But rather, this building of consensus in the relationship shows that you are committed to the deep oneness you share as husband and wife.
- ▶ If this covenant commitment is lost, then much of the blessings of God's design in marriage will erode, and your commitment to love and help one another will wax and wane with the circumstances of emotions, seasons, trials, etc...

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 ESV –

9 Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil.

10 For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up!

11 Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone?

12 And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him--a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

This is not speaking strictly regarding marriage, but of companionship in general: two are better than one.

Why? Different strengths = better together.

We tend to think that “different” equals worse... but not so, when strengthened and helped (influence and power provided) by another.

► Marriage is the ultimate partnership. There is no one closer to you to help you in the rising and falling of your life than your spouse.

► Marriage brings a special kind of completeness and a friendship.

► Ultimately two are better than one because they can be enjoined to a three-fold cord, with God himself being the third fold in the cord. Helping one another to grow and increase in their life and relationship with God.

**This is the original design of marriage, that husband and wife would lead one another upward.*

Proverbs 27:17 ESV - 17 Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.

► Again, this sharpening of one another is what helps us to change and to grow.

► Marriage is the ultimate friendship as well, and this sharpening should be taking place with the person who sees you at your most raw, honest, and open.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- In what ways are you similar to your spouse and in what ways are you different?

- What are some differences from you that your spouse has that you see as strengths?

- How could you use your differences to help and empower one another? Are there ways that your differences are dividing you from one another?

- What are a few ways in which “two are better than one” in your marriage?

- Wives: in what ways can you use your influence and power to provide help to your husband (without replacing him)? *Helpful Hint: ask your husband!

- Husbands: in what ways can you be purposeful to use your headship role for the benefit of your wife? *Helpful Hint: ask your wife!

TEACHING 3- 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.

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.

- The Husband's leadership responsibility as head of the wife:
 - Not domineering, not oppressive- but Christ-like sacrificial service.
 - Much of leadership is *service*: we lead by sacrificial love.
 - But husbands, what matters to your specific wife?
 - What communicates to her that you are “poured out” for her?
 - Practical tip: ASK her!
 - Also, as your relationship with God is vibrant and prayerful, you'll be sensitive to the needs of your wife (not harsh), not only to supply what is a blessing, but to steer and help what is lacking.

“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.

- Wives, how can you honor and reverence your particular husband?
 - Perhaps it's seeing where he needs encouragement.
 - Perhaps in seeing where he needs improvement.
 - Then *help*: provide influence and power to that area without replacing him.
 - *Encourage* him to lead, rather than taking over.
 - Bring things to his attention that he isn't seeing, so that he can assess and address.

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.

