

Developing a Vision for a Gospel-centered Marriage

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

A program for pre-marriage counseling with Pastor Mike Sharrett at Redeemer Presbyterian Church

Wedding Policy

Pastors at Redeemer will perform weddings for members at no cost within the greater Lynchburg area. Couples may provide honorariums if they so desire.

Couples must complete pre-marriage counseling with one of Redeemer's pastors, or someone approved by the session.

Pastors cannot miss Sunday mornings due to weddings except in rare instances and only with prior consent of the session.

Couples should plan their wedding budgets with the following in mind:

- Weddings occurring outside the area (Lynchburg, Bedford/Campbell County) need to reimburse the pastor at the going rate for mileage to and from the rehearsal and wedding.
- If the distance is greater than 60 miles the couple needs to provide housing for the pastor.

Weddings should be timed so as not to compromise the Lord's Day worship. Pastors will not do weddings that start later than 5pm outside of the Lynchburg area on Saturdays or on Sundays without consent of the Session.

Recommended Reading:

The Meaning of Marriage Tim Keller

The Mystery of Marriage Mike Mason

When Sinners Say I Do Dave Harvey

What Were You Expecting? Paul Tripp

The Marriage Builder Larry Crabb

Questions That Help Frame a Biblical Vision of Marriage

1. Are you both Christians?

- a) Please share a brief testimony of God's grace in your life and how he is working in you now?
- b) Do you believe the Christian life is lived as a continual process of faith and repentance?
- c) What will you pledge to your fiancé to do on a regular basis in order to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ?

2. Do you wholeheartedly accept the gift of marriage on God's terms versus your own?

God invented marriage. It is his gift to you, giving the other to you for his glory and your good. Notice in Genesis 2 that *God saw that it was not good for the man to be alone, so he created a helper for him*. Husband and wife are uniquely designed by God to settle the problem of loneliness. That means marriage is first a covenant of companionship. (Are you, therefore, intending to marry your best friend?) It also means for marriage to work the gift must be accepted on God's terms.

- * The goal of marriage was one flesh-ness.
 - * The beauty of their persons was the image of God.
 - * The responsibility of the family was a stewardship to be co-caretakers and multipliers on earth.
 - * Once sin entered the world in Genesis 3, something utterly unnatural to the created order began to wreak havoc in its functioning.
 - * That means for relationships to work something must be killed.
- You can't NOT deal with sin in your marriage. Life in marriage comes from death. Dave Harvey says, "when sin becomes bitter, marriage becomes sweet." (When Sinners Say I Do, playing off of Thomas Watson's quote: *Til sin be bitter, Christ will not be sweet*).

God invented marriage to glory himself. Will you both pledge to "do marriage" to the glory of Christ? That means your marriage is not first about either of you. It is to be a picture of Christ's love for the church. That is why God invented marriage; Paul in Ephesians 5 calls it a mystery because in the Garden this fact was hidden. Now it is revealed in the New Testament. Your relationship will either be on a Christ exalting trajectory or a relationship idolatry trajectory, depending on what you are primarily seeking (your own happiness versus Christ's glory). If the Lord should be pleased to give you, by his grace, a deeply enriching and satisfying marriage, it will be solely to do his goodness and mercy.

2. Why do you want to marry this person?

There are many ways to answer this question, from the crass (fortune and fame) to the more thoughtful (they make me a better person). Here are two cautions:

a. We tend to fall in love because of what it does for us. Think of the old long songs: “I knew she could make me happy!” That is essentially a self-serving view of marriage. I am in this for what you can do for me, for how you can make me happy. We are all plagued with this tendency.

The world’s way of love is, I like what I get from you and I’ll stay as long as I get it. But when it stops I am leaving.

The biblical model of love is the promise of future love. I will be there, through thick and thin, *til death do us part*. These walls of commitment secure a place for creative conflict; divorce isn’t an option.

b. When you say I want to marry you, apart from natural reasons of attraction and friendship (always best to marry your best friend, and never harmful if you also happen to think they are pretty/handsome), you are saying, “You are the person I want God to use in my life to make me more like his Son. I am a broken sinner and I invite you into my junk to help me be healed. You will know me like no one else, and will help me see myself in a way I have never seen myself. But I trust you to do that gently and humbly. Likewise, I am called into your heart to help you with the same because marriage is a major instrument God uses to sanctify us, to smooth out the rough edges. God uses an intimate ally in this work; trust is critical, because you are going to tell me I am wrong and I naturally don’t want to hear that. Only if I deeply believe you have my best interests at heart, and not first your own, will I be willing to be vulnerable and humble.

3. What kind of sinner do you want to marry?

Unfortunately, there are only sinners to marry in this life. And you are one of them! But do you know that? Do you expect to marry a perfect person? Do you expect to be perfect yourself?

There are really only two kinds of people in the world: those who are BIG sinners and know it, and those who are BIG sinners and don’t know it. Guess which is more pleasant to be around?

Among us sinners, there are essential three ways to approach life: (Tim Keller)

a. Be your own person.

This person is self-absorbed and self-reliant. Everything must be about them. Their spouse exists to fulfill their dreams. They want to be served.

b. Be a good person.

This person sees himself as basically good. Bad people are broken. They relate to others based on the law. They tend to be demanding and judgmental.

c. Be humbled by grace.

This person knows they are broken. They are desperate for grace. Because they know that left to themselves they will inflict injury on others, they seek grace, are humbled and grateful to receive it, and are serious about pursuing a life controlled by the Holy Spirit, bearing his fruit.

One measure of how you live is asking yourself: Are you ready to change the way you view yourself? What are you repenting of on a regular basis? What do you want your spouse repenting of? (hint: the humble person repents of their lack of humility!)

Are you repenting of proud thoughts, such as, Any other woman/man would love to be married to me?

Therefore, are you planning to struggle together against sin, starting with yourself? Will you start with the sober truth: My sin against God is greater than anyone else's sin against me?

Will you be honest about the log in your own eye (being suspicious of your own motives, inspecting your own sin) before you seek to take the speck out of the other's eye? (Matt.7:3-5)

When the war between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of self, which rages in all our hearts, is not being won, then we enter marriage driven by little-kingdom purposes. The problem is that our spouse does the same thing. So, it will just be a matter of time before the carnage begins as our little kingdoms of one collide. It is only when a husband and wife each live in a purposeful and joyful allegiance to the plans, purpose, and Lord of the kingdom of God that their marriage can really be a place of unity, understanding, and love. Now free from the debilitating anxieties of the wants, needs, and feelings-fulfillment agenda of the kingdom of self, they are free to rest in God's goodness, and because they are, they are also free to love and serve one another. Marriage is a beautiful thing that only reaches what it was designed to be through the methodology of a painful process. (Tripp, p.52)

4. Are you headed in the same direction in life?

Do you share the same core values, ideas, expectations about politics, theology, life-mission? Do you want to be in the same place in 10 or 20 years geographically, spiritually, family-wise?

5. What do others who know you well think of your relationship?

Do you have close friends who would, in love, raise a red flag if they thought they needed to? What do your siblings and parents think? What does God think of this relationship?

6. How would you describe the impact of your upbringing (parents, role reversal, circumstances, abuse) on the way you view marriage?

7. What would you be most tempted to change in the other person?

Your differences are usually due to the way God wired you, your cultural upbringing, and your sin. Do you believe your differences are an asset? What are you doing daily to keep your heart open for the humility necessary to accept changes to the way you think life should be?

Are you most naturally a:

Controller: want things to always go your way

Pleaser: want to be liked, approved of, peace at all costs.

Masterer: want to be right, competent, seen as in the know, correct others, give opinion

8. What is your greatest fear entering into marriage?

Most of think along these lines:

I won't be loved like I really want;

We'll out grow our compatibility, and wake up terribly lonely one day.

It is most helpful to understand that, despite your sense of being very alike at the beginning of the romance, because of sin no two sinners are perfectly compatible. Once sin entered into Adam and Eve's relationship, they started hiding from God (the death-knell of all relational health), blaming each other in suspicion, discord and shame (if you really knew me you'd reject me). Therefore, your greatest fear should be: my sin will ruin this bond of companionship if left unchecked.

Your greatest concern should be *your* sin. We naturally think of the other's sin as the gravest potential problem, that's why most folks get on the defensive sooner or later. Jesus said we all have an uncanny tendency to spot splinters in other's eyes before we see planks in our own. If that is true you must learn to be plank-conscious before you are splinter conscious! Are you humble enough to admit when conflict comes (and it surely will, since when two sinners live under one roof it is inevitable) your pride is the biggest problem to be conquered?

The greatest threat is your sin, so own it. My pride, selfishness, neediness, pettiness, demandingness, however it is manifested, will steal what I owe the other: unconditional love and service in Jesus' name. Daily repentance of being a vacuum of self-concern, a take-take heart demeanor versus give-give, is the path to freedom.

9. What is the greatest gift you have to give the other?

Your strongest contribution to the health of your marriage is your weakness. Knowing you can't do what it takes to love well, you go in brokenness to Jesus to receive what he can abundantly supply. You become a grace-getter, humbly dependent on his unfailing grace. When you are a passionate pursuer of the heart of Jesus, receiving mercy and grace, you will not only become ravishingly beautiful like Him, but you will also have grace to give. Paul says, forgive one another and bear with each other, as Christ has forgiven you. Jesus said, those forgiven much love much. You can't give away what you don't have. Get grace, give grace! Grace is the fresh air that makes marriage breathe. Grace in you makes you safe; how could you abuse someone else when you are intoxicated with Jesus' love?

10. Do you understand the biblical vision for intimacy?

A healthy, growing relationship is marked by intimacy- the opening of hearts to each other, sharing dreams, concerns, fears, flaws, thoughts, feelings. But who can risk that? What if they reject me for discovering I am something they don't find attractive?

Only the courageous can be so vulnerable, and only the gospel can produce that. The gospel is,
*your heart is more wicked than you ever imagined,
but you are more loved than you ever dreamed possible.*

The love of Jesus for you, despite your sin, anchors the soul and liberates it to care boldly for another. You can only draw near to each other as you draw near to Christ.

What does Jesus give us as we draw near to him? He creates a repentant heart, fear of the Lord, a healthy suspicion of our own motives. He gives us a picture of what he wants for our spouse, over against what we may want. His grace bends our heart into Christlikeness.

Grace gives your marriage a lifetime warranty. What this means is that God will give you everything you need to be what you are supposed to be and do what he has called you to do

in your marriage. But you must do it. His grace enables, reconciles, restores and repairs. His grace teaches you and changes you. His grace gives you what you need to ask forgiveness and to forgive. His grace empowers you to overlook minor offenses and target what is truly important. His grace helps you see yourself with greater and greater accuracy and respond to what you see with greater and greater wisdom. His grace gives you strength to continue when you feel like quitting. His grace gives the power to resist temptation and to turn to do what is right. His grace rescues you from your obsession with self-love and welcomes you to the joyous work of loving another. His grace enables you to be good and angry at the same time. When grace works a commitment to God's kingdom and righteousness in your heart, you will be angry at what sin does to you, and to the situations in which you live, and that anger will motivate you to be a tool of change. His grace causes you to be committed to giving grace. (Tripp, p.235)

The sooner you can own the fact that your sin hurts your relationships, the better. Intimacy per se is not the problem. We all long to be accepted unconditionally, but ironically, fear it. Mike Mason, The Mystery of Marriage, p.84:

It is not intimacy itself which is so distasteful...but rather the moral condemnation that comes with it. People crave closeness with one another, but are repelled by the sin that such closeness inevitably uncovers in themselves: the selfish motives that are unmasked, the pettiness that spills out, the monstrous new image of self that emerges as it struggles so pitifully to have its own way.

11. Do you know why intimacy is difficult?

In their one "fleshness" Adam and Eve appreciated their differences, were not threatened by anything. In a fallen world it means you are free to celebrate the other's strengths, and can pity them in their weaknesses. Intimacy is being accepted in the face of your faults. Truly intimate spouses are vulnerable, honest, at liberty to fail or look bad.

The posture of Adam and Eve after the fall is revealing of the loss of intimacy. Sin had introduced some devastating factors into the relationship equation: (Alec Motyer, Look to the Rock)

1. their openness is replaced by a secretive awareness of self, and a desire to retire from the other, to hide, retreat, seeking protection from the gaze of the other. Once they were joint sides of the same reality, now two separate realities. They see the world on the basis of sin and disobedience vs. good and obedience.
2. moral perceptions are clouded so that self-centered values over rule God-centered values. They acknowledge their sin, but they fail to come to grips with the seriousness of sin. They ought to beg to be banished from God's presence.
3. they are now naturally afraid of God. best friend becomes enemy. In their guilt they have something to prove, I still belong here
4. finding their sense of identity in self-protective blame shifting, rather than standing together as each other's defenders

They are fearful, instead of trusting.

They are hiding, instead of protecting.

They are blaming, instead of defending.

They are making excuses, instead of taking responsibility.

When relationships are new, novelty trumps the effects of the fall for a season. Sin tends to lie dormant. With time and tension it rears its ugly face and the test of the relationship must be passed: Does she really know what I am, how I'm frail, why I tick, what I fear, what I secretly want out of life? Are we honestly united, "glued" is what cleave means in the text, in goals, faith, vision, hopes, hurts? What am I fearful of revealing? That is the test, isn't it? The opposite of loneliness is intimacy; at one level we crave it, at another we're deathly fearful of it because we don't want to be rejected. Deep inside all of us is a profound insecurity that, if you really knew me, you would reject me. No one wants to suffer the torment of rejection, feeling worthless, being a non-person.

What are our fig leaves?

**It is easy to hide behind task. Life goes on, there is the earth to cultivate and culture to build. We've got too much to do to work on intimacy.

What this produces is the widow who says, We were married 45 years, he worked hard, but I really never knew him. No one ever said on his deathbed, I wish I'd spent more time at the office.

**It's also easy to hide behind comforts. If you've been blessed with comforts and pleasures and wealth, you might think things are OK.

What this produces is the extremely rich man who asked one time, what would you trade for all your millions? One happy marriage.

**It's also easy to hide behind niceness. Because one person was a peace-at-all costs type, conflicts were never settled in a way that forged a deeper unity.

Who could bring you out of hiding? Only a person who knew you thoroughly, and still accepted you. That's Jesus. He'll take the vilest heart and clean it for himself. He'll even stay despite repeated failure at goodness.

We get the first hint of this in the Garden when God announces to the serpent that the seed of the woman will bruise him on the head. Jesus came, born of a woman, to crush Satan at the cross.

What he accomplished is the ultimate fulfillment of God's gracious act of covering Adam and Eve with skins on their way out of paradise.

12. What makes a relationship safe?

When you *first* pursue Christ passionately in daily prayer and bible study, fellowship and worship. When you are hungering for God's glory more than anything else, you will live by his standards for his pleasure, which includes the welfare of others. You will grow in humility:

not *thinking less of yourself*, but *thinking of yourself less*.

Grace will empower you to love as you've been loved.

Only when love covers a multitude of sins is any relationship going to be healthy. Therefore, love is a commitment to give your best in the service of the other's utmost edification, if even in the face of their worst.

Paul Tripp contrasts self-love and true love:

It is self-love that hates difference. It is self-love that makes you impatient. It is self-love that makes you want your own way. It is self-love that convinces you that your way is the right way. It is self-love that makes winning more attractive than unity. Love celebrates who

God has made the other person to be. Love celebrates the process of working together to become one. Love celebrates the grace of change that operates in the middle of the difficulty of difference. Love prizes unity and is willing to make sacrifices to achieve it. Love turns difference into an opportunity to experience a deeper and fuller unity. Love isn't impatient and doesn't walk away. Love perseveres. Love stays active until what God has planned becomes your actual experience. Love listens, works, and waits. Unity happens when love intersects with difference. (p.171)

13. Do you embrace the biblical pattern for husband leadership and wife follow-ship?

Ephesians 5:22 Wives, *be subject* to your own husbands, as to the Lord. **23** For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself *being* the Savior of the body. **24** But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives *ought to be* to their husbands in everything. **25** Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, **26** so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, **27** that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. **28** So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; **29** for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also *does* the church, **30** because we are members of His body. **31** FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH. **32** This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church. **33** Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must *see to it* that she respects her husband.

NOTICE:

a) Context: Eph.5:18 *be filled with the Spirit.....being subject to one another in the fear of Christ.*

Be subject: to put in order under

In the fear of Christ: humble, grateful, confident dependence upon Christ's gracious love

b) Responsibilities:

Wife: *submit to your own husbands* (22); *respect* (33)

To put in order under

Ordered equality, same dignity, different roles

An attitude toward life: take and use all that I am as a woman to make him fully a man

Qualified: *to your own husband; as to the Lord; in everything*

Husband: *love your wives*

Paradigm: *just as Christ loved/ cherishes the Church; as you love your own body*

Process: *to sanctify her by washing with the word*

Presentation: *without spot or wrinkle*

What will you be producing if you lead well?

How will you handle failure by each in this area?

A startling revelation: husbands are also wives! Jesus is husband to the church, and therefore all men stand in some way in the position of wife. Jesus' gracious, forgiving, patient, compassionate, merciful leadership over his church serves as a model for the way husbands should lead their wives.

To the degree you experience such kindness under Jesus' self-sacrificing hand, you will also lay down your life for your wife. *25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her,*

Paul captures the *love as Christ has loved you* dynamic in Col.3:12f:

And so, as those chosen of God, holy and dearly loved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience...

Who doesn't want to be treated this way? Who doesn't want their children's spouse to be this? *...bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.*

This is essentially a call to humility:

Humility is the indispensable ingredient to intimacy in marriage. It is being, like Jesus, radically other-centered. Dying on the cross, in his most painful hour, he could say, *Father forgive them, they know not what they do.*

Your motive always to be, I'm sacrificing not for my spouse's sake, but for Christ's.

Humility has a way of making the other feel like the most cherished person in the world.

Humility expressing itself in prayer for yourself, Don't let my sin ruin this relationship.

Humility expresses itself in prayer for the other.

14. Do you accept God's terms for this marriage as a covenant?

A covenant is a binding, legal contract between two parties. Therefore, marriage is primarily an institution of law, which goes against our culture's notion of marriage as an arrangement of present affection. Marriage promises future love- tender, caring, sympathetic faithfulness.

The marriage vow, based on law not emotional states, is unconditional, holding in any situation (for better or for worse) and at all times (til death do us part). That means we cannot run our marriages the way we want to. The covenant is public (before God and these witnesses) unconditional (accountable to God and the state) and accepting of God's regulations for marriage.

When folks live together because they don't want the messiness of a divorce, they are really saying, I am not so committed to this relationship that I will vow to it.

The covenant bond secures the secure environment for oneness, or one flesh (Gen.2:24). That is to be one person, joined and unified in purpose, goals, faith, hopes and hurts. Three components of this are:

*Leaving: move out from parents to become a new decision-making unit.

*Cleaving: means to be glued, referring to commitment and communication, knowing the other by putting them first.

*Weaving: becoming one in companionship

15. Do you have a track record of solving problems together in a Biblical fashion?

Over what have you had conflict?

What is your default mode when you don't get your own way?

What are things you personally struggle with?

Do you have any unresolved issues right now?

What style of conflict resolution do you grow up witnessing?
 How do you think Satan wants to destroy this bond?

Four phases of Marriage (John Bettler)

1. ROMANCE The nice phases where you don't want to do anything to upset each other.
2. CONFLICT Conflict comes when you wake up one day and realize you didn't marry yourself.
3. RESOLUTION Where you learn to work together, you are pulled together learning to solve some of these problems
4. INTIMACY That deep and abiding trust that says, "We are going to make it."

Key principles to embrace for healthy conflict resolution:

- a) Conflict is inevitable. We live in a fallen world. No one does it right all the time.
- b) Conflict is ordained to make the relationship better. It shows us how much we need God. It shows us our need to view the world from the other's point of view. It makes the relationship stronger once resolved.

Peace--→ conflict -→

- Not resolved = bitterness
- Poorly resolved = deteriorates
- Well-resolved = deepened bond (like broken bone)

- c) You need to understand each other's style and move toward being resolvers:

view of
relationship

pleaser	resolver
ignore	controller

low

high

willingness to take risk

- d) Start and end discussions with prayer. God must win, not me!
- e) Seek to discern the difference between:
 - what you interact over (principle, preference)
 - how you interact (listen for understanding)
 - why you do what you do (motives)

16. Do you understand one another's love language?

Premise: we all want to be loved in a certain way. BUT, we tend to love others that same way. We think, if this means so much to me, why not extend this to my spouse?

Chose your top three ways of wanting to be loved, and predict your spouses: (Gary Smalley)

Husband
Mine Hers

Wife
Mine His

1. Giving me things
2. Helping with chores
3. Listening/sympathy
4. Talking: letting me know what you're thinking
5. Physically warm, affectionate
6. Affirming me; telling what you like about me
7. Standing up for me
8. Changing things that bother me
9. Spending time with me
10. giving me freedom/space

Love in action
(from Tripp, pages 191-201)

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God...If God so loved us, we ought to love one another...whoever loves God must also love his brother 1 John 4

Love is:

- being willing to have your life complicated by the needs and struggles of your spouse without impatience or anger.
- actively fighting the temptation to be critical and judgmental toward your spouse, while looking for ways to encourage the daily commitment to resist the needless moments of conflict that come from pouring out and responding to minor offenses.
- being lovingly honest and humbly approachable in times of misunderstanding, and being more committed to unity and love than you are to winning, accusing or being right.
- a daily commitment to admit your sin, weaknesses and failure and to resist the temptation to offer an excuse or shift the blame.
- being willing, when confronted by your spouse, to examine your heart rather than rising to your defense or shifting the focus.
- a daily commitment to grow in love so that the love you offer your spouse is increasingly selfless, mature, and patient.

- being unwilling to do what is wrong when you have been wronged but to look for concrete and specific ways to overcome evil with good.
- being a good student of your spouse, looking for his physical, emotional and spiritual needs so that in some way you can remove the burden, support him as he carries it, or encourage him along the way.
- being willing to invest the time necessary to discuss, examine, and understand the problems that you face as a couple, staying on task until the problem is removed or you have agreed upon a strategy of response.
- always being willing to ask forgiveness and always being committed to grant forgiveness when it is requested.
- recognizing the high value of trust in a marriage and being faithful to your promises and true to your word.
- speaking kindly and gently, even in moments of disagreement, refusing to attack your spouse's character or assault their intelligence.
- being unwilling to flatter, lie, manipulate or deceive in any way in order to co-opt your spouse into giving you what you want or doing something your way.
- being unwilling to ask your spouse to be the source of your identity, meaning and purpose, or inner sense of well-being, while refusing to be the source of theirs.
- the willingness to have less free time, less sleep, and a busier schedule in order to be faithful to what God has called you to be and to do as a spouse.
- a commitment to say not to selfish instincts and to do everything that is within your ability to promote real unity, functional understanding, and active love in your marriage.
- staying faithful to your commitment to treat your spouse with appreciation, respect and grace, even in moments when he or she doesn't seem to deserve it or is unwilling to reciprocate.
- the willingness to make regular and costly sacrifices for the sake of your marriage without asking anything in return or using your sacrifices to place your spouse in your debt.
- being unwilling to make any personal decision or choice that would harm your marriage, hurt your spouse, or weaken the bond of trust between you.
- refusing to be self-focused or demanding but instead looking for specific ways to serve, support, and encourage, even when you are busy or tired.
- daily admitting to yourself, your spouse and God that you are not able to love this way without God's protecting, providing, forgiving, rescuing, and delivering grace.
- a specific commitment of the heart to a specific person that causes you to give yourself to a specific lifestyle of care that requires you to be willing to make sacrifices that have the other person's good in view.

The World of Feelings

In a marital relationship the ability of two individuals to be aware of the whole range of feelings, to express them appropriately, and to accept them in themselves and in each other, can pave the way for increased self-awareness and for stronger bonds of trust and deeper intimacy. It may make each partner more vulnerable, too. But perhaps the potential for self-awareness and growth and for increased trust is worth the risk. (Dave Powlison)

1. In our relationship, when we relate together, I am happiest when:
2. In our relationship, when we relate together, I am saddest when:
3. In our relationship, when we relate together, I am angriest when:

4. The best thing about our relationship is:
5. I feel most afraid when:
6. I fell loved when:
7. I feel appreciated when:

8. My greatest concern/fear for our marriage is:
9. What I like most about myself is:
10. What I dislike most about myself is:
11. What I like most about you is:
12. My greatest fear/concern for you is:
13. The feelings I have most difficulty sharing with you are:
14. The feelings I can share most easily are:
15. Right now I feeltowards you.
16. Right now I feel towards myself.

Communication Jammers Inventory (Tim Keller)

Him

Her

Clamming up

Hinting instead of forthrightness

Being slow to admit when wrong

Piling on when the other admits they're wrong

Problem-centered vs. solution-centered

Exaggeration (you always, you never)

Defensive (make excuses, reject criticism)

Hitting below the belt (hurtful statements)

Know-it-all (quick to analyze, I told you so)

Jumping to conclusions

Interrupting

Sending mixed messages

Aborting with early apology

Change subject/bring up past

Cold Shoulder

Belittle feelings

Use scare tactics

Eight Ways Spouses Hurt Each Other

According to reports of many spouses, we can say or do hurtful things without intending to do so or realizing it. Here are the most common:

1. Frequently criticizes you
2. Doesn't pay attention to your words, ideas
3. Doesn't assume enough of the household responsibilities
4. One's own needs and desires always come first
5. Tries to explain your hurts instead of trying to empathize with your feelings.
6. Acts as if he is superior and you are inferior.
7. Shows preference to others.
8. Doesn't go out of the way to add romance to the relationship.

Differences Between the Sexes

Mental/Emotional

Intuition vs. logic

Personal vs. ideas

Butterfly (sensitive to changes going on around) vs. buffalo (rough, plough on)

Physical

Large biological differences, even at cell level; metabolism slower in women/ skeletal

Sexual

Women stimulated by words and touch/ attracted to personality, tenderness, consideration

Men wired for sight/ difference between an iron and a light switch

Need

Men need to be admired, accepted, appreciated, advice deemed valuable

Women need tenderness, support, help, understanding

Physical Oneness

*Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge. **Hebrews 13:4***

A. Purposes

1. Procreation

Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it... Gen.1:28

(everyone clear on “plumbing issues?”)

***1 Cor. 7:1** Now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to touch a woman. **2** But because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband. **3** The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. **4** The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. **5** Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.*

2. Fun

***Prov. 5:18** Let your fountain be blessed, And rejoice in the wife of your youth. **19** As a loving hind and a graceful doe, Let her breasts satisfy you at all times; Be exhilarated always with her love.*

3. Communication (Song of Solomon)

***1 Thess.4:3** For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; **4** that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, **5** not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; **6** and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you. **7** For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification.*

B. Barriers

1. Ignorance

2. Lack of communication

3. Boredom

4. Fatigue

C. Issues

1. Kids

2. Birth Control

3. Honeymoon cystitis

4. Don't persist with problems

Resource: Ed Wheat, Intended for Pleasure

Money

2 Cor.8:9 *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.*

Principles

1. EVERYTHING belongs to God.

Psalm 24:1 *The earth is the LORD'S, and all it contains, The world, and those who dwell in it.*

2. Trust is indispensable.

3. Don't spend what you don't have; live within your means.

4. Make a budget and stick by it.

5. Give faithfully to the Lord (you cannot out-give God!)

Malachi 3:8 *“Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, ‘How have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings. 9 You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation of you! 10 Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this,” says the LORD of hosts, “if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows.*

6. Save for unexpected needs

Prov.13:22 *A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children.*

7. Set aside funds for fun.

Dt.14:26 *You may spend the money for whatever your heart desires: for oxen, or sheep, or wine, or strong drink, or whatever your heart desires; and there you shall eat in the presence of the LORD your God and rejoice, you and your household.*

8. Always discuss large purchases

9. Will you pray this prayer for your heart?

7 Two things I asked of You, Do not refuse me before I die: 8 Keep deception and lies far from me, Give me neither poverty nor riches; Feed me with the food that is my portion, 9 That I not be full and deny You and say, “Who is the LORD?” Or that I not be in want and steal, And profane the name of my God. (Proverbs 30)

Appendix: Sermons on Marriage-Related Topics

Hope for Wives 1 Peter 3:1-6

Introduction

“I am a woman. I am married. And I am in pain.” How many of you could say that right now. If only one could say that, it would be too many. Maybe you’re thinking: My, what a cheerful way to begin the sermon, Mike. But this is on Peter’s heart in this text, and we need his help.

When we talk about marriage, as Peter does in this text, we are on very sacred ground. We are in a place where human hearts are very frail, and wounds run deep. We are in a place God has designed for unspeakable joy and potential for profound growth, companionship, intimacy. And many of us are missing the joy. In fact, you may be suffering.

Peter acknowledges this. The context of the passage is suffering unjustly. Peter continues this theme, evident from the introductory phrase, *“In the same way”*. He is very realistic. Wives will often find themselves in a place they didn’t dream of, they didn’t ask for, they wouldn’t desire on their best day.

Peter has help for wives in all kinds of marriages, which applies across the board, *“so that even if her husband is “disobedient to the word.”* That means a wife is either:

- married to a man who claims to be a Christian, but is living contrary to the claim- the tenor of his life is disobedience to God, rather than obedience, he is self-directed not God-directed, he answers to himself rather than the Lord,
- or to a man who is not a believer in Jesus at all.

You can see how this would be a common occurrence in Peter’s world. The gospel would be preached in a locale for the first time, and the wife would be converted prior to her husband. Women seem to have much better spiritual sensitivities than men, and they seem to be less proud, on the whole. So it doesn’t surprise us to find Peter addressing this scenario. A woman finds herself under the same roof with a man she pledged to stay with for a lifetime, yet increasingly feels the stress in the relationship because they’re in two different orbits. Her core values have her on a trajectory opposite his. She’s becoming a worshiper, a lover of Jesus, a woman of eternal convictions. And he’s sitting there wondering who’s going to win the super bowl.

What do you do, ladies, in such a marriage?

What Peter proscribes may cut against your instincts. Our normal instincts thrust us into self-reliance, self-effort, self-management. Therefore, come before your savior in utter helplessness, and plead with Him for what we are certain he will abundantly supply. Ask Jesus to create in you, by His grace, through the power of His Spirit, three realities:

- 1) Wordless living
- 2) Inner beauty
- 3) Fearless hope

Peter proscribes these for the tough marriage situations, and no doubt by extension, these are wonderful qualities for any marriage.

1. Wordless winsomeness

What is your default mode when you are chafing under disappointment in an intimate relationship?

-Some of you retreat in anger or self-pity, use silent treatment, become passive aggressive and pay back by withholding affection.

-But most of you instinctively rely on words

You will talk your way through. Plead. Correct. Preach. Persuade. Show him where he's wrong.

Tell him what you need. Nag.

Peter says, *win him without a word*.

What? That sounds like going fishing without bait.

That doesn't mean you never talk, you never do conflict resolution. There are various spheres of life in which you must communicate:

driving: tell him if he's running off the road. finances: talk about whether you have savings for a new TV

parenting: you have to discuss what is going on in your children's lives.

But in the sphere of winning or gaining a Godly perspective, a way of looking at all of life from a biblical point of view, seeing God as first and foremost in everything, don't rely on words, particularly if he's in rebellion. The goal is to win him to a point of view, *Won* means won over to God's point of view.

-Not prove you're right or loveable. -Not show you were worth marrying.

-Not demonstrate you alone have your act together because you walk with Jesus.

You are after the heart- if their heart is won to Christ, you'll be happier than you ever imagined

It means that your main instrument of influence, your most cogent arguments, your most potent persuasion, is behavior, not words. And isn't that the way most people think about situations. You say you love me, but show me! Don't just talk about it, do something. Persuade me by your actions, not hot air.

How?

The key word is...*submit*. I know, our culture hates the word. It has all the wrong connotations: doormat, abusive, Archie Bunker, male chauvinist pig. Too bad. We all believe in some forms of submission:

-If you want an education, you submit to the demands of the institution and teacher.

-If you want a safe society, you trust that everyone submits to the laws which make life safe.

-If you want to make money in a business you submit to the state's regulations, etc.

-If you want to be healed you submit to the doctor's plan for healing.

So why is submission so repulsive to you? You consider yourself equal to your husband, yes, so does God. Submission doesn't mean inequality, it simply refers to order.

The word means to *put in order under*. In God's universe there is order everywhere. Submission is used:

of the creation to God, of Jesus to His parents, and to His father, of Christians to Jesus, of church members to their elders, of children to their parents, of citizens to the state, and yes, of wives to husbands.

You defer to his leadership or authority, given by God, in the same way you do other authorities in life, only this one is far superior. How so? You follow his leadership, as God's good design. You

never follow him in to sin, into disobedience of God, or the state, or by putting yourself in a dangerous situation.

Biblical submission is a mindset or disposition that says this: I want you blessed. That's exactly the way we want to be treated. Therefore, I give myself to God, yielding first to his authority, so that God can take me and use me to bless you. I want my womanhood to nourish your manhood. Even if he is not loving or following Christ, even if it inflicts pain, which it will, even if it is unjust, even for longer than you think reasonable, live under his authority.

Why?

God has designed it so that what your husband sees, not hears, will break his stony heart. God knows his heart is stony, you don't have to point that out. God has vested no power in nagging, complaining, back talk: "You never, you always, I told you so, if you would just PLEASE.." That has no power. Well, it's power isn't what you want, because it normally drives him away. Verbal sparring, threats, criticism, manipulating work contrary to what you think. The power to melt his heart is v.2 *chaste and respectful behavior*.

In other words, you create a situation where your husband has to conclude, I may not agree with my wife's theology, but I sure can't find fault with the way it transforms her actions. The way she lives is ten times better than anything she could say. *Chaste* means pure, clean, morally upright. Your motives are irreproachable. *Respectful* alludes to your posture toward his role as leader.

Trust that God will use what He promises. Ask God for the faith.

Before moving on to point two, let me encourage you to use your words when you need to communicate the way God says words work effectively:

Prov.16:24 *Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.*

Prov.15:1 *A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh words stirs up anger.*

Prov.21:23 *He who guards his mouth and his tongue, guards his soul from trouble.*

Prov.25:11 *Like apples of gold in settings of silver, is a word spoken in right circumstances.*

A potent contrast is captured in Prov.12:18:

There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.

Ladies, you set the tone if he won't; don't slump to his level if he can't speak winsomely.

2. Inner beauty

v.3

See the contrast Peter draws here? The temptation to win your husband by your external beauty, clothes, jewelry, shapeliness, instead of the internal inner person of the heart. Peter is not forbidding externals or sex appeal, they have their place. If you have any doubts, read the Song of Songs.

He's saying they don't have the ultimate power to win his heart to God's point of view.

Don't you wonder, when you read about Hollywood stars breaking up, and you see the picture, a ravishing beauty, you think, wow, they didn't break up because she wasn't gorgeous or he wasn't a hunk. Of course not. They break up because they can't get along. Because they've missed personhood for some reason. Because they have failed to gaze upon the kind of beauty that smittens hearts permanently- the beauty of the heart.

For a woman, ironically, the hidden heart beauty is evident to all.

Imperishable: One perishes the other is eternal.

It's authentic, doesn't fade, you can't melt it away. Not dependent on things you have to buy.

Depicted by two words:

Gentle: (Is not inherently feminine) a quality commended of all Christians; a fruit of God's Spirit, Jesus says He Himself is gentle. It's twin sister is: Humble, thinking of others first. Not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less. Not pushy or selfishly assertive. Don't insist on my rights.

Such huge self-confidence, power under control, because you know who you are, to whom you belong, and who's in control, that you don't need to be brash. In last chapter Jesus revealed His glory in this way.

Quiet: not a rambunctious spirit. Don't have anything to prove; don't have to shout to be heard because your behavior commands a hearing. You can be quiet because so intact and secure in Christ's love for you. You've already been criticized and come out smelling like a rose. Live by grace. The worst is over, and Jesus took it. Confidence, Jesus will take of this. I am worse than you know; I deserve worse than you're treating me. Yet I'm more loved than anyone dreamed possible. He's crowned me with beauty. If you saw me for how precious I am you would worship me.

Best of all, this is precious in the sight of God. Costly, valuable. Cost the father his son to produce this.

This is the heart where Christ is. What He brings is His grace and kindness, truth, wisdom, perseverance.

God delights in being trusted and relied upon. Someone said,

"A pretty face may capture a man's attention, but only a beautiful spirit will hold it."

3. Fearless hope. v.5

Peter provides motivation for you by mentioning examples of women in the past that did indeed submit to their husbands, and lived to tell about it. He says they adorned themselves with that spirit which is precious in the sight of God. From where did they draw their strength? How did they escape the natural tendency to be afraid of an overbearing husband, or a weak leader who may fail them, or the future?

They hoped in God. That set them free. According to v. 6, such hope enabled Sarah, the matriarch supreme, to respect her husband Abraham's headship. *She called him lord*, a polite form of address meaning sir or mister. That doesn't mean she never yelled from the kitchen, Honey, dinner's ready. Or sweetie, would you take out the trash. It means she respected Abraham in his position as master of the house; she sought to bend her will to his.

In the Jewish mindset the highest honor among women of the covenant community was to be in that line of women who have received grace and help from Sarah's God. Because you know the glory of Sarah's God, you would in turn keep covenant, or *do what is right*. And isn't that one of the points Peter is making in the extended context?

When you do what is right you have nothing to fear. Such submission can't harm you. Such submission reveals the glory of Christ, who bore up under unjust sorrows without a word.

What does it mean *to hope in God*? Everyone places their ultimate confidence in something. If you look to your husband to make you happy, or even the circumstance of a happy marriage, that becomes your confidence. Maybe it's reputation, you're well thought of by others, maybe it's wealth, maybe your personality. Where you place your sense of security or stability, that is your functional hope.

Biblically, hope means certainty. Hope in God is a confidence bred by exposure to God's promises

In his Confessions, the great 4th century theologian Augustine wrote this concerning his mother's witness to her pagan husband Patricius:

Monica served her husband as her master and did all she could to win him for you, speaking to him of you by her conduct, by which she made herself beautiful. Finally, when her husband was at the end of his earthly span, she gained him for you.

Understanding Husband **1 Peter 3:7**

Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as a weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.

I saw this in the paper recently under "favorite quotes":

"A husband is someone who takes out the trash and gives the impression he just cleaned the whole house."

That works for me, because I suspect I'm a lot like that. I do some little task around the house and all of the sudden I'm a hero! Meantime I'm ignorant of the tons of things my wife does without mentioning them. Sometimes, men just don't get it. Perhaps that's why what Peter says to husbands basically involves understanding.

"Live with your wife in an understanding way", or literally, with knowledge. The idea seems to be, with considerate understanding. This is answering the question,

What sort of man are you praying your sons will be for their wives, or God will give to your daughters for their husbands? or, What sort of husband are you trying to be? Do you believe a husband's true charm is in his understanding?

This text then gives rise to the following questions:

1. Do you *want* to understand your wife?

Let's apply the golden rule. Treat your wife the way you want to be treated. In highly important relationships in your life, do you want to be understood, respected, honored, given the benefit of the doubt? Of course. Do you want to be manipulated for someone else's gain? NO. Of all people your wife deserves your best, just like you want your wife to give you her best.

Understanding:

As you think about your relationship, what is your vision? What are you trying to accomplish? Is it more than simply someone to sleep with who does her share of the chores? Do you have a vision which transcends the bedroom into personhood? For vision to work it needs to be informed by

reality. Reality is found in God's word. The Bible says the male-female union was originally God's idea- therefore it is a good one- and the central thrust of the union is companionship.

God saw Adam's loneliness, He saw there was nothing else in all creation suitable for him, so God himself fashioned from the rib he took from Adam a woman, and he brought her to the man. The first wedding on earth, God walked the bride down the aisle. God gave Eve to Adam; here, for you, for your unspeakable happiness, for My glory. "I don't want you lonely."

Adam was thrilled. Are you jealous for the same sense of thrill? You should be.

The marriage covenant is a covenant of companionship. Two equals, forging one life, sharing emotionally, physically, intellectually, spiritually. In the words of Genesis 2, you **leave** your parents, you **cleave** to your spouse, and you **weave** one life (become one flesh). Share secrets dreams goals desires. A knitting of hearts in vulnerability, intimacy. Laughing together, weeping together. Encouraging, supporting, challenging, or in the words of v.8, "*let all be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit.*" If spouses can't apply that to their marriage, they don't understand.

So here's a simple test for the health of your marriage: Is either one of us lonely?

Companionship in a covenant bond under God's mercy.

Who has that? Apparently, between 38-43 % of Americans do not, because that is the current divorce rate, down from 48% in 1991. If people had what God intended they certainly would not divorce. God designed marriage to be something you would not dream of giving up if you had it.

But it goes deeper than that, because there is another problem beyond Adam's loneliness. Once they fell into sin, a new challenge arose. Blame and shame.

When God came looking for Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, they were ashamed and hid themselves from God. They were ashamed of what they were no longer morally, and that was, perfect. So they tried to cover themselves. As if God can't see through their fig leaves to their moral impurity. Their broken relationship with God severed everything else. You simply can't be in proper relationship to anything else without being rightly related to God. It's like trying to sprint with your shoelaces tied together. Shame and blame keeps us from relating with the freedom we need. Otherwise, you have an inferior product, a counterfeit, or something diluted.

They were ashamed of their sin in God's sight, yet started blaming. He said, "The woman you gave me!" She said, "The serpent deceived me!" So the propensity from then on is to have shame for our moral guilt before God, but hide it behind blaming others. Where is the authenticity in that?

Want proof you're like this? Do you believe the majority of the problem in your marriage is mostly the other's fault? Where's the authenticity in that? If you have understanding, you will admit you are guilty of the shame and blame thing. Is there a way out?

Genesis tells us God Himself covered their nakedness. In other words, until you receive the gift of God's righteousness and cleansing, you'll never escape the shame and blame syndrome. Where is that? In Christ Jesus. The glory of the gospel is that God takes the penalty for our shame in His Son at the cross, and by Jesus' perfect righteousness we are clothed in his perfection. Peace with God! Nothing to prove, nothing to lose. Restored by grace to the status of sons and daughters. Do you see, you have to have a third person in the relationship. Intimacy is too risky; companionship too costly.

Only in the security of the gospel can you look at your spouse and say, I'm warped by the fall, I'm a mess, I'm a natural born blamer, I have more to be ashamed of than I know, yet Jesus loves me more than I ever imagined. I can stop pretending I am something I really know I'm not. You know it, you live with me. Since my trust is in Christ, please come in to my mess and be used by Him to make me the man I was created to be. And I want Jesus to move me in to your heart so you can be the person He created you to be, to make you more like Christ. That's authenticity. It's relational freedom.

Do you have the vision? You need a third person in the marriage, Jesus Christ, the grace giver. Whenever he shows up, relationships turn for the better. Always. Therefore, the greatest gift you can give your spouse is your own passionate pursuit of Christ. When your feet hit the floor in the morning, tell Jesus you're a mess. Tell him your pride and selfish will ruin the relationship unless His sweet grace subdues it. Ask Him to forgive you afresh, fill your heart with his grace, and then to let it overflow to your spouse in each situation of the day.

2. Do you use the tools which foster understanding?

They are the same tools you use in any area of life:

Listening: don't talk at talk with. Don't interrupt. Don't assume you know everything. Let her unpack her feelings, and impressions and thoughts. Assume you have more to learn than you know. Assume your perspective needs tweaking. Assume you'll be better off for her input. There's a joke that says, I quickly learned the two words which make a happy marriage: "yes dear". But that's so condescending, patronizing.

I personally confess that early on in my ministry I didn't value Janice's input to the degree I should have. It finally dawned on me, she represents the average person in the pew; if it is not clear to her, it must not be to most people. I also had to learn to appreciate her as a woman. I grew up with brothers and a mom who was self-admitted tomboy. After 15 years of marriage we finally discovered, I didn't appreciate the differences between men and women.

Questions: What is she saying? Why does she think that way? Probe for understanding. How does my manhood help her with her womanhood?

You may be thinking, I'm not really a talker, I'm the shy type, I'm task-oriented, not verbal. It's time to learn a new trade. I use all my words at work.

Observations: You need to observe the way she processes life, her needs, what tenderness looks like in her case, etc. You need to gather the data which empowers you to elevate her personal glory, to see that she flourishes intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually.

What am I doing to suppress understanding in our relationship? What has helped our relationship increase understanding? Time spent away together is a great vehicle for this. Here's simple test to see if you are getting close: Your wife can say, I am the most understood and cherished woman in the world. My husband weeps over my sins and rejoices in my graces.

How could that happen? Only if you know Jesus. The glory of Jesus is He swore to His own hurt to serve the highest purposes of your welfare. The gospel is, your heart is more desperately wicked

than you ever imagined, yet you are more loved than you ever dreamed possible. When you believe that it transforms your deepest being.

See the paradigm? Husband, because by faith you know Jesus is for you, yes the one who knows you best loves you most- wonder of wonders- so you relate to your wife in such a way that she believes, My husband is for me. We are not in an adversarial relationship.

Why does it feel adversarial sometimes? Usually because someone in the relationship has to be right. Adversaries vie for or are driven by the need to be in control, to be right, to be competent, to get their way, to conquer, to vindicate themselves! Ask yourself what it is you're conquering. Aren't you already conquered by King Jesus? What is lacking in His reign of mercy that you are seeking in your spouse.

When you are this way you are often defending something. You really need to understand why you're that way. You apparently haven't understood that you both are sinners in need of grace. Those who get mercy, give mercy. Those who think they deserve something often become bitter, resentful, hold grudges. They haven't been near the grudge taker, Jesus, on the cross. Jesus has come to heal you of the need to prove ourselves, to be right. He shows we aren't, humbles us, and then loves us and forgives us. Those forgiven much love much.

3. Do you understand the delicacy of her womanhood?

Peter says, "*as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman.*"

This isn't inferior weakness, but delicate weakness. It's how we hold sand dollars when we find them beachcombing. They're quite fragile, pieces are easy to find, but a whole one is rare. When we find one we cup it carefully in our hand.

How is your wife a weaker vessel? Weaker is a comparative term, doesn't mean weaker in intelligence, moral capability or spirituality. In Christ we're all equally glorious. It may refer to physical strength, if so, the context would mean enduring the physical stress of persecution and hardship, since that is the context, enduring unjust suffering. I favor the interpretation: the weaker position with respect to authority. Since she is in a subordinate position, don't abuse your stronger position of authority. Be sensitive to the constant temptation for her to resent your authority, to wrongly assert herself. John Calvin: Nothing destroys the friendship of life more than resentment. Wives, do you resent his God-given authority?

Far from justifying some sort of abusive, domineering chauvinist, the understanding husband will assign her *honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life*. So your authority and understanding is gift-wrapped, as it were, in honor. She is highly esteemed because like you, she will inherit the same glories of eternity as you will. C.S. Lewis: If you could see your wife now, the way she will be in Jesus' presence, you would be sorely tempted to fall down and worship her. In other words if you focus on her warts and pimples (of which you have more, incidentally!) your vision is shortsighted. Plus, anyone can do that. But who can rise above that and see beauty where others need to criticize?

So valuable to God is understanding, that He allows prayer to be hindered if husbands fail here. That's how highly God values your wife. Does this refer to your prayers together, or simply a husband's prayers for his wife and others? Hard to tell. Doesn't ultimately matter. No one in their right mind would want any prayers to be hindered.

Recovering Intimacy **Genesis 2:24**

Most of us pray for protection for various things: health, traveling, loved ones, country, church, financial stability.

When was the last time you prayed,
Lord, protect my marriage from....?

Well, let me ask you, what do you think your marriage needs to be saved from? I wonder how many of us pray, Lord, save my marriage from ...me!

Why?

Because that disposition is an indicator of whether or not you have intimacy in marriage.

If you pray that, or something like:

Don't let my pride ruin our relationship;

Don't allow my selfishness to harm our union;

it is very likely you have a great marriage.

Without such a disposition, it is safe to say you lack deep friendship in your marriage.

Friendship in marriage—open, trusting, authentic friendship is intimacy.

Is intimacy a sissy word? No way. Intimacy is what God has in himself and wants us to have in our marriages. I need more of it; I want you to have it now if you are married, or if you ever do marry.

My guess is many of you have marriage on cruise control. You co-exist, you have detent, but lack intimacy. Maybe you've never known it was possible. Maybe you started well, most folks are brimming with enthusiasm at the altar, but eventually gave up. You hit so many ruts it just feels most convenient to stay in one. Or intimacy doesn't feel safe.

Some of you dislike me for talking about this. It's only going to open a huge scab on your soul.

Some husbands are thinking, Now she's going to bug me about this. I like it better when she leaves me alone. Some wives are thinking, not intimacy that will mean he'll want more you know what.

Some of you believe recovering intimacy with your spouse is impossible. It's not going to happen.

And I agree, with that expectation, it won't.

But I invite you to hang in here with me, so we can unpack intimacy

Think of it this way. We're answering the question, how would you like your child's spouse to treat them? Or your best friend—how do you want their spouse to view their relationship?

If you could wave a magic wand over your marriage to make it become ideal, what would it look like?

That depends on what you're looking through. All of us look at life through a lens. It's our interpretive lens. It colors how we think things should be, and how we evaluate what is. What we're going to do is use a Bible lens to look at marriage. If you are not a Christian but wonder why we think about marriage as we do, this will give you some idea why we view relationships as we do. I heard a news reporter speak disparagingly of Mike Huckabee's view of marriage. She has her lens, he has his.

The reason we take our cues from the Bible is because we believe relationships have their foundation in God; he created them. They are his idea. If you created relationships, you ought to have the final say in how they ought to work. The Bible says that if you didn't invent something you ought to be open-minded enough to use that thing according to the inventor's guidelines. The inventor knows best how they work.

The lens is bifocals.

On the one side, we have CREATION// FALL

On the other, we have REDEMPTION//RECREATION

In other words, to understand what God wants for you, you have to see how it was designed, how it was affected by sin, how it is transformed by Jesus, and how it will be one day.

1. What is intimacy?

We see two aspects of it in the text:

a. It is the opposite of loneliness.

From the very beginning marriage was God's solution to loneliness.

God saw that it was not good for the man to be alone, so he created a companion suitable for him.

(Gen.2:18) God settled Adam's main problem of loneliness with an incredibly wonderful companion called a woman, *bone of his bones, flesh of his flesh.* (2:23) In other words, a creature so much out of his own fabric that no other created thing could possibly satisfy him like her. She is suitable for him, or corresponding to him, because nothing in the animal kingdom would do the job. She is a special creation who shares his physical, psychological, emotional, intellectual and spiritual DNA.

b. It is the product of a new union.

Intimacy doesn't just happen. It's not automatic. It results from a pattern. In Genesis 2:24, God says, *for this cause* (of accomplishing companionship) *a man shall **leave** his father and mother, and shall **cleave** to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh* (or to finish the formula in rhyme, **weave** a new existence together). This oneness is so celebrated and sacred that God uses it to picture what our oneness with Christ is like (Ephesians 5). Fantastic! One flesh, and we aren't lonely any more!

How would you recognize this if you were fulfilling it?

You know you are weaving an intimate union by an open heart. Sharing secrets, thoughts, desires, fears, dreams, hopes. You want to be known, and to know the other.

You cherish being understood and appreciated.

You want to run to that person with your deepest joys and sorrows, because you trust them, you're transparent in their presence with what you are ashamed of. They help protect you from yourself. Open heart, emotional oneness.

This is also why Paul says in 1 Cor.6 that physical union with a prostitute is a monstrosity because it joins the flesh without the heart. That raises an obvious question...

2. Is intimacy good?

Is intimacy a worthy goal for your marriage? (Notice we stress marriage. The kind of intimacy the Bible describes is decidedly not intended to be sought among our teens in their pursuits of “dating relationships”, or for close friendships for those unmarried right now.)

Why should you bother overcoming loneliness? Here are several reasons:

- a. God created humans to reflect certain aspects of his glory. We call this “*bearing the image of God*” (1:26-27). The One true God is by nature eternally three distinct persons who exist in perfect intimacy. Sounds silly to say, but between the Father, Son and Spirit, there is absolutely not a molecule of tension, bitterness, conflict, hostility, etc. The union of the three is blamelessly and unspeakably harmonious, despite differences in function. It is our honor and glory to reflect something of that divine intimacy in our relationships; nothing else in all of creation can or ever will.

God desires that our intimacy be a mirror in which the creation sees a reflection of God’s intimacy and stands in awe.

- b. Intimacy is good because God designed it for our enjoyment. He said let the two become one flesh. “*They were both naked and not ashamed*” (2:25); nothing to hide, fear, doubt, or question. God gave all the graces necessary to pull it off: communication, sexual expression, and emotional/volitional oneness.
- c. Intimacy is good because God commands it. Everything God commands is good. If he says the way to profound happiness in marriage is through intimacy, then you have no right to attempt to accomplish oneness another way. Besides, you won’t ever get there another way.

3. Why is intimacy difficult?

In their one “fleshness” Adam and Eve appreciated their differences, were not threatened by anything. In a fallen world it means you are free to celebrate the other’s strengths, and can pity them in their weaknesses. Intimacy is being accepted in the face of your faults. Truly intimate spouses are vulnerable, honest, at liberty to fail or look bad.

The posture of Adam and Eve after the fall is revealing of the loss of intimacy. Sin had introduced some devastating factors into the relationship equation: (Alec Motyer, Look to the Rock)

- 1 their openness is replaced by a secretive awareness of self, and a desire to retire from the other, to hide, retreat, seeking protection from the gaze of the other. Once they were joint sides of the same reality, now two separate realities. They see the world on the basis of sin and disobedience vs. good and obedience.
- 2 moral perceptions are clouded so that self-centered values over rule God-centered values. They acknowledge their sin, but they fail to come to grips with the seriousness of sin. They ought to beg to be banished from God’s presence.
- 3 they are now naturally afraid of God. best friend becomes enemy. In their guilt they have something to prove, I still belong here
- 4 finding their sense of identity in self-protective blame shifting, rather than standing together as each other’s defenders
They are fearful, instead of trusting.
They are hiding, instead of protecting.

They are blaming, instead of defending.
They are making excuses, instead of taking responsibility.

When relationships are new, novelty trumps the effects of the fall for a season. Sin tends to lie dormant. With time and tension it rears its ugly face and the test of the relationship must be passed: Does she really know what I am, how I'm frail, why I tick, what I fear, what I secretly want out of life? Are we honestly united, "glued" is what cleave means in the text, in goals, faith, vision, hopes, hurts? What am I fearful of revealing? That is the test, isn't it? The opposite of loneliness is intimacy; at one level we crave it, at another we're deathly fearful of it because we don't want to be rejected. Deep inside all of us is a profound insecurity that, if you really knew me, you would reject me. No one wants to suffer the torment of rejection, feeling worthless, being a non-person.

What are our fig leaves?

**It is easy to hide behind task. Life goes on, there is the earth to cultivate and culture to build. We've got too much to do to work on intimacy.

What this produces is the widow who says, We were married 45 years, he worked hard, but I really never knew him. No one ever said on his deathbed, I wish I'd spent more time at the office.

**It's also easy to hide behind comforts. If you've been blessed with comforts and pleasures and wealth, you might think things are OK.

What this produces is the extremely rich man who asked one time, what would you trade for all your millions? One happy marriage.

**It's also easy to hide behind niceness. Because one person was a peace-at-all costs type, conflicts were never settled in a way that forged a deeper unity.

Who could bring you out of hiding? Only a person who knew you thoroughly, and still accepted you. That's Jesus. He'll take the vilest heart and clean it for himself. He'll even stay despite repeated failure at goodness.

We get the first hint of this in the Garden when God announces to the serpent that the seed of the woman will bruise him on the head. Jesus came, born of a woman, to crush Satan at the cross.

What he accomplished is the ultimate fulfillment of God's gracious act of covering Adam and Eve with skins on their way out of paradise.

We now trust Christ's righteousness as that covering that hides our shame and guilt.

In other words, it always takes a third person to make it work. God brought her to the man. He didn't say, now try by yourselves to make this work. We can do nothing of ultimate value apart from God's empowering.

The gospel alone makes relationship possible.

The gospel is the pledge of God's all-seeing love; he who knows you best, loves you most.

The gospel is the pledge of God's intimacy.

I have nothing to prove

Have you ever gone back to a house you once lived in because you're curious to see how it looks compared to the way you left it? We did that one time and were really disappointed. What we had worked hard to keep in pristine condition looked a little run down, a bit shabby, and suffering from neglect.

Your marriage can get that way. The intimacy you once prized can suffer neglect; it can become over grown with weeds of selfishness and the wear and tear of conflicts and disappointments. Emotional connectedness doesn't just happen; it takes work and maintenance.

The sooner you can own the fact that your sin hurts your relationships, the better. Intimacy per se is not the problem. We all long to be accepted unconditionally, but ironically, fear it. Mike Mason, The Mystery of Marriage, p.84:

It is not intimacy itself which is so distasteful...but rather the moral condemnation that comes with it. People crave closeness with one another, but are repelled by the sin that such closeness inevitably uncovers in themselves: the selfish motives that are unmasked, the pettiness that spills out, the monstrous new image of self that emerges as it struggles so pitifully to have its own way.

A. Here are three specific ways sin ruins relationship:

1. Role Reversal

It appears that the fall has left women seeking to dominate (3:16 “*Your desire will be for your husband, yet he will rule over you*”) and men abdicating their responsibility to lead as servants. In both postures, neither is dependent on the other. Why is that problematic? Because intimacy is the product of, or flows out of, mutual dependence. The fall has left us essentially craving autonomy, to be the rulers of our own little kingdoms, exclusive of God.

Prov.21:2 *Every man's way is right in his own eyes.*

Autonomy gobbles up intimacy; intimacy flourishes in an ambiance of, “I humbly need you. I can not be fully human without the various graces you bring to the relationship.”

Paul says in Ephesians 5 that marriage mirrors a greater and more enduring relationship, that of Jesus Christ with His church. A couple's mutual dependence is best expressed in loving servant-leadership by the husband and respectful submission by the wife.

The husband is like Christ, laying down his life for his bride, doing all he can to promote her glory. He leads as a servant, not a tyrant, ever conscious of promoting her best.

The wife is like the church, following Jesus in humble submission, never of course, into sin.

2. The savior syndrome.

It goes like this. I was born for the perfect world God made. I long for that existence despite the fact that sin leaves me spiritually empty and hurting in a fallen world. I seek to fill this void or hole in my soul with a relationship. We reason thus: “Wow, she likes me, and I love what she does for me, she is my ticket to avoid the pain of living in a fallen world.”

That usually characterizes relationships in their early phase. Things are novel, fresh, exciting, fun, there's discovery, etc.

Then that comes to an end. It simply has to. After a certain amount of time people settle into routine. It's not so novel, thrilling, etc.

Hey, I never saw those pimples, that little nagging mannerism.

Patterns of less-than-perfection emerge.

Finally, some form of disappointment.

You've gone from "Wow, she could make me happy the rest of my life" to "Well, am I going to be able to handle this or not?"

In other words, everything will be great in your relationships until you don't get your way.

Disappointment, he lets me down, and just isn't there for me the way I really need him. So with unmet expectations I withdraw into my little shell, unwilling to entrust my fragile self to her, fearful she'll reject me if she truly knew me. She becomes the "enemy".

We throw up walls of self-protection, and spend the rest of our lives bumping off of each other's walls.

If you had intimacy, your attitude would be,

"At your worst I am committed to help you find grace."

Love is a commitment to give your best in the face of your spouse's worst.

Do you see the problem? I assumed she could be my savior (that's all!).

This came home to me in a profound way listening to an oldies station in Texas. After the Righteous Brothers sang:

you're my reason for laughin' and for cryin', for livin' and for dyin', you're my soul and my heart's inspiration, without you baby, what good am I?

the disc jockey said, "My what a terrible burden to put on another person."

Do you see? Do you really want to be someone's everything? Isn't it only a matter of time before you are unable to fulfill their every desire? You are not responsible for your spouse's happiness. After all, you're only human. You were never built to be someone else's heart's inspiration...but someone else was.

Only Jesus can restore us to God, deliver us from the guilt of our sin, and save us from our emptiness.

3. The "god-complex".

It goes like this. On the one side, because at the fall I sought **to be God** rather than submit to God and worship Him, I now want to be worshipped. If my spouse doesn't worship me, why should I continue to give her what she needs? On the other side of the god-complex is this: I want my own little kingdom. I want to rule a world without God in it (the heart of sin). Often your fantasy world is a clue to this false reality.

Autonomy basically says, cooperate with me and all's well; challenge me and you'll pay. Men typically ignore their wives emotional needs. Some women ignore the physical needs of their husbands

Our desire for autonomy (life as we desire it) usually expresses itself on one of three main ways, a bent which clashes with my spouse.:

control

pleaser

being right or competent

You have to constantly go after these to kill them or they will kill your marriage.

Let me put this another way. You say, *I'm not happy in my marriage*. Why? It usually boils down to, *I'm not getting what I want*. BUT, do you want the right thing? There's a difference between what you *think* will make you happy and what will truly make you happy. Having your

needs met is far less powerful to make you happy than desiring your spouses welfare. Life comes from dying, not satisfying self.

When you must point these out to your spouse, when they admit their failure, don't meet that with a lecture. I told you so. Meet it with compassion. Jesus made this point vividly by saying, If you've spotted the speck in their eye, it's only because you first dealt with the log in your own.

1 Peter 3:8

To sum up (marriage dynamics), let all be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit.

But the soil in which these idols are nurtured is unbelief. You don't believe God is a worthy king. You don't believe God is good, or that his idea for intimacy is good enough for you. If we don't want intimacy in marriage, is that because we ultimately don't want to depend on Jesus, without whom such oneness is impossible? This brings us to the conclusion...

B. How is intimacy recoverable?

Notice the question, how do we **recover** intimacy. I put it that way because I assume most of us struggle to have it. If you are in the minority, and God has granted this precious jewel to you, then thank Him for it, do all you can to preserve it, and pray that God will bring to you many who will benefit from what you have learned.

If you don't desire to change the status quo, I understand. But are you truly thriving in your marriage? Why not ask Jesus to make you willing to change, and to pour out His grace upon you, since you are in a painful situation? The trouble with remaining in the status quo is not so much that you prolong pain for both you and your spouse, but that you deny the gospel. Jesus did not leave you in the status quo; He jumped into the mess of this world to become bloodied and beaten Himself to rescue us from the condemnation of our sin. And Jesus stays in our mess; he's not demanding we be perfect for him to love us.

If Jesus can bring us to God, he certainly can bring you to your spouse!

Confess your helplessness and despair, but then confess the sufficiency of Christ to remedy it.

If you desire to change, is there any hope? Christ desires to be one with us, to be intimate. Here is the marvel of grace: the one who knows you best loves you most. Such grace is truly irresistible. There is more grace and power in Christ than you need. Come to the feast of Christ's grace; be satisfied in him first. Take Christ by faith, he only gives himself to sinners. He only mends the broken. There is no shame telling Jesus that you are an intimacy flunky, because he already knows that, and he loves to be glorified in our weakness.

Here is the critical point: Only safe in Christ's love will you be vulnerable to open up for intimacy with another. If you know he loves you, in spite of your sin, how could anyone else's criticism be so bad?

If you desire to change, your hope is in nothing but the grace of Christ through the Spirit. Ask Him to change this fundamental attitude about intimacy ("I fear intimacy because of what my spouse might do to me") to this one particular conviction: "I am thoroughly capable of ruining my marriage." Ask the Lord to convince you of that. When you believe that, expect the following:

You'll take your treachery to God in prayer. Forgive me! Grace comes...

You'll crave more of God's grace and thus...

You'll extend grace. The nature of grace is, wherever it goes, it softens and then splashes out. You both want to be splashing grace all over each other.

Think about Jesus. He daily bathes you in grace, giving you breath, strength, life, forgiveness, help, hope, his presence and wisdom, the Spirit!

Grace-receivers always become humble.

You'll be more humble. You'll be more forgiving. You'll be more patient and understanding;

You'll be more approachable you'll be more irresistible.

Paul captures this dynamic in Col.3:12f:

And so, as those chosen of God, holy and dearly loved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience...

Who doesn't want to be treated this way?

Who doesn't want their children's spouse to be this?

...bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.

Such will most certainly grease the tracks to intimacy, God's gracious gift to save us from dreadful loneliness.

Humility is the indispensable ingredient to intimacy in marriage. It is being, like Jesus, radically other-centered. Dying on the cross, in his most painful hour, he could say, *Father forgive them, they know not what they do.*

Your motive always to be, I'm sacrificing not for my spouse's sake, but for Christ's.

Humility has a way of making the other feel like the most cherished person in the world.

Humility expressing itself in prayer for yourself, Don't let my sin ruin this relationship.

Humility expresses itself in prayer for the other.

Wisdom for Sex: God's Gift God's way **Proverbs 6:24-29**

Introduction

Is fire destructive or helpful? It depends on how and where it's used. A fire in the floor of your living room is destructive because it spreads, consumes, it's an untamed monster that only produces ashes and heartache. A fire in the oven, heating food, is helpful because it's contained, regulated serving a wonderful purpose, producing a blessing: food that is delightful and nourishing.

In the text we read God says sex is like fire: used in the wrong place, it consumes, destroys, and leaves ashes and heartache. Used in the right place it produces blessings- something healthful and nourishing.

Now the fire analogy is very obvious to us- anybody can see that. V.27-28 Fire wasn't made for your coat; and it doesn't work for flooring- your feet weren't made to walk on it. BUT... that sex is potentially destructive may not be so obvious.

That's why I want to start this discussion with a plea to

A. Be open-minded

Bible-believers are routinely criticized for being narrow and close-minded about sexual mores. We're even accused of misrepresenting Jesus on the issue. Bill O'Reilly interviewed an author Thursday night who said Christians are homophobic because we don't understand that Jesus was all about love and compassion. That's a pretty narrow way of representing Christians and the Bible, and a close-minded way of representing Biblical love.

What do I mean by open-minded? Simply this: You should be careful how you use something you didn't invent. Be open to ideas beyond your preferences, beyond what you think is intuitively permissible.

Most open-minded people check first with the instruction manual before using a device that is powerful.

For example, is it closed-minded to not walk on hot coals? Yes and no. No, because you did your research open to the possibilities, determined that flesh always burns on fire, and so yes, the case is closed.

American pop culture claims open-mindedness in sexuality. It's with a view of sexual expression I would call "pure preference". It's up to you to decide how you should express your sexuality. Isn't that the approach of most sex-ed programs in public schools?

It claims to be open-minded but has its own limits, to be sure. It doesn't particularly like Biblical values of sex; and it isn't open to perversions such as rape, bestiality, or incest. But you see the question becomes, where did those parameters come from? Who made you the determiner of those limits? Someone has become a close-minded standard giver? Where did they get their authority?

Again, popular culture seems open-minded, but only if you invented sex. If you invented sex, you ought to be free to use it on your own terms. If you did not invent it, would it be wise to know how the inventor says it works best?

Proverbs assumes a lot of things aren't so obvious to us, depending on our age and worldview. That's why Proverbs employs the address of a father leading a son to maturity. The parents, the primary mentors for personal health, look at life and speak candidly about things they didn't invent and that are inherently powerful- words, money, wine, emotions, authority, sexuality- and speak from the Inventor's perspective: here's how you use these to your greatest benefit. The author has walked down the path, seen the pitfalls, he's seen the genuine and the counterfeit and shares the wisdom he has gleaned. He has an insider's word from the Creator; so why wouldn't you learn from him? That's what Solomon does in his prologue with God's great gift of sex; he contrasts the blessings of sex used God's way with the dangers of counterfeits. How to benefit from the gift and to use it safely, therefore, is a wisdom issue.

To give us wisdom Proverbs uses four scenarios which raise four questions to ask of our motives and actions concerning sex.

B. What does it reduce you to? (6:24-29)

Wisdom keeps you from the evil woman (could just as easily be a man, which it is in v.32) who uses beauty and words to catch you, both of which inflame the imagination, the seat of lust. If you are caught you are reduced to your lusts.

You've also reduced beauty to a thievery. Her beauty is a gift **from** God **for** her husband. The Song of Solomon celebrates the delight of a husband and wife in one another's physical beauty. But true beauty is always accompanied by the fear of the Lord. (31:30)

Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain but a woman who fears the Lord shall be praised.

If all that counts is skin, what are you saying about the value of moral glory? Those things that get you through tough times, the things you look for in a relationship after someone uses you and discards you: loyalty, honesty, diligence, sympathy, faith, kindness.

Her words likewise are a gift from God, given for edification.

But if you are caught by them you're reduced to a gullible fool. You're naïve and perhaps insecure, if you need her words to feel good about yourself.

You also may be reduced to a slave because her words have defined your needs.

She's hunting her prey, reducing you to a loaf of bread, v.26.

When you fall to sexual perversion you should feel empty. If you use pornography your soul should feel like stale bread. You think you're consuming it but it also reduces you to its prey- it keeps hunting you, consuming your view of romance, the opposite sex, and real personal intimacy.

v.33-35 say you are reduced to a fugitive. Unlike a thief who can make restitution, you fail to see you cannot repay the harm done.

Is there any help in this passage? Yes, v.26 reminds us that God won't do this to his own.

You're precious. To whom? To the God who fashioned you for Himself. You bear his image. He doesn't reduce us, he elevates us! In the gospel He pays the price of our salvation, in the death of His own Son, and binds us forever to Himself in that love. God turns slaves into sons. He rebuilds in His own true human glory by the Holy Spirit. When your greatest sense of personhood is tied to being the Lord's precious one, you won't fall for false suitors. You'll want the true lover of your soul to keep before himself the fact that you are the Lord's precious possession.

C. Do you have a consumer mentality? (2:16)

What's the evidence she (or he) is a consumer? Two things:

1. **Flattery**- using words for your own ends, for your benefit not another's, getting someone to like you, deceiving for selfish purposes

It's often the case that many illicit relationships begin with seemingly innocent conversation that can be nuanced:

You look pretty today

I feel so understood by you

No one really knows this about me but I want you to know...

Words are very powerful tools to create attraction. God woos us to Himself through His written word. God gives us words for ministry, not as a lasso for roping people in to our agenda, but bricks for lifting them up for a clearer view of God. To encourage one another, communicate our hearts, dreams, to create faith.

V.24 says her words are smooth, literally, slippery, perhaps indicating no where to land your heart for security. You're never sure if you stand secure in the relationship.

2. Covenant breaking v.17

v.17 *she forgets the covenant of her God*

What is the covenant of her God? Sounds like she's a member of the community of God's people. The covenant of her God is:

1-the covenant law, the 7th commandment, given to protect from self-harm
(Who questions the unspeakable pain and heart shattering rejection of adultery?)

2-the covenant of grace

He befriends the unlovable, the unlovely, the stranger to his holiness. God pledges to us in His covenant to love, save, protect, provide, to be our God. To walk out on that for adultery is treason. It's saying God isn't worth sticking with. It's better to have this sexual adventure than everlasting paradise with God: v.18-19

3-the marriage covenant

She leaves the companion of her youth.

The heart of the marriage covenant is companionship. Emotional, personal, intellectual, spiritual oneness. The only way it works is within the bonds of a covenant. I'm going no where. I will be with you til death do us part.

She's saying you're no longer serviceable to me so I'm looking for satisfaction in someone else- it's all about me.

If you don't believe your selfishness is the greatest threat to your marriage, you may be destroying it.

That's one reason v18 says this is the way to death. Life is only found giving ourselves away.

When you consume in a relationship you consign it to death.

D. Is this intensity without intimacy? (Chapter 7:6-23)

You could call this chapter "anatomy of seduction".

What's the problem here?

Aside from the obvious fact that there's another person involved, away on a business trip, who has feelings and a heart... All of this would be fine if they were married.

1. Using each other to feel good- no doubt there's plenty of intensity here.

That's a denial that sex is also about personhood. When you have made sex the goal of a relationship you show yourself to a crass consumer with no heart for relationship. You're no different than an animal.

2. Her heart is closed. She is cunning of heart v. 10, meaning guarded, closed.

We're not sure of the motives, though she has persuasive excuses, but it may play to their fears- you're afraid of true intimacy- sexual expression with a person with whom you share your heart. How could v.15 be true when this is a "random" encounter?

God's design is intensity with intimacy. The joy of being known, sharing secrets. A heart that gives, loves, sacrifices, serves. Soul mates make the best bedmates.

Pornography offers a form of intensity but without intimacy. This kind of intimacy is impossible apart from the gospel. In the gospel, two critical questions for my sense of well-being are answered. Am I safe? Yes, Jesus has freed me from the condemnation of the law. Am I a valued person? Yes, by faith I am united to Christ and God treats me as He does His own Son. Only in that posture will anyone be free to take the risk of being intimate. Only secure in Christ can we experience the pain love without it crushing us.

E. **Is this God's pleasure God's way?** (Chapter 5:15-20)

God is no killjoy or prude. Sexual pleasure is God's invention and should be a regular part of the marriage relationship. Paul's forbids depriving one another in 1 Cor.7:2-5.

Sex is a sign post to glory, the presence of Christ. The pleasure of perfect love- being known, knowing.

We were created for sexual pleasure, but not to stop there. The greater pleasure is knowing intimately the God of pleasure, Jesus Christ. In Him is the love you're looking for, love that transcends the fear of being exposed. Total acceptance without shame and condemnation because He went to the ultimate extreme for you- suffering a tortuous death on the cross to cleanse you of sin.

Valiant Companion Proverbs 31:10-31

Introduction

For several years my wife taught second graders at a classical Christian school in Texas. For one assignment she had the children write a paragraph on the subject, "Mom". Here are three samples from her class:

Victoria:

My mom is always looking out for me. I pray for her each night. Her specialty is cooking meals and playing games. She has brown eyes, and smells like roses and violets. I am so happy my mom had me born to believe in Christ.

Benjamin:

My mom is married to a man. She has brown hair, green eyes, smooth hands and rough feet. My mom does the laundry and the dishes. Every day she helps us with our homework. Her free time is napping!! but she loves us and God no matter what I do!

David:

My mom is so beautiful that her reflection even feels bad. Her favorite hobby is loving me and kissing me. She is so nice. Mom's meals are so good. Our mom loves me so much that she lets me go to school. My mother is the coolest most nice mom in the whole wide world.

We can only trust that these children's affection for their mom will endure their whole lives. One day, these two boys, if they're wise, will ask their moms a very important question. Do you know what that is? Maybe it will be in response to an inquiry such as this:

Son, you've graduated from college and landed a good job--so when are you going to settle down with the right girl?

What question can we hope will follow?

Mom, how do you know what kind of person you should marry?

It may be that the some such discussion set up the text we are examining. Proverbs 31 is different from the rest of Proverbs in two ways. First, verses 10-31 form an acrostic poem, each stanza starting with the successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Second, while the first 30 chapters of Proverbs is written in the form of a father counseling his son, this chapter records a mother speaking to her son, King Lemuel.

What, O my son? And what, O son of my womb? And what, O son of my vows? (31:1)

After charging him with carefulness in several key areas of morality (v.2-9), she turns to a most critical subject for a young man: finding a spouse. Already Proverbs has sanctioned the glory of marriage:

He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the Lord. v.18:22

House and wealth are an inheritance from fathers, but a prudent wife is from the Lord. 19:14

An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, but she who shames him is as rotteness to his bones. 12:4

Those reflections set up the question which frames the text before us:

An excellent wife, who can find? v.10

It's not that a father can't or shouldn't give an answer to the question, but perhaps a bit surprisingly, in this case a mother shares her wisdom. Notice it is an evocative question:

An excellent wife, who can find?

The question seems to imply three truths:

One, there are various qualities of wives to be found, but it is the *excellent* that should be the object of your search. Look at the motivation to try: *For her worth is far above jewels.*

Two, it may be hard to find such a woman. Who can *find* her? She's a rare jewel. Ask anyone if they'd rather be happily married or wealthy in a bad marriage.

Three, not everyone can find her. Well, *who* can? The person who knows what she looks like!

The text is that portrait of a valiant wife, the Hebrew word "denoting competent strength... membership in a select group, including a warrior class." (Waltke, 520) It's a quite comprehensive picture of virtue from A-Z. If you're a wise son you will want to marry a person like this. If you're a wise daughter you will want to be like this person. This portrait helps you determine why you do the things you do and what kind of person you are seeking to become.

Everyone in some way develops an image of the type of person they want to be. The initial crisis of wisdom is, who determines that?

In our culture we see several typical answers:

1. Decide for yourself. Be yourself. No one can tell you who you should be. Shape your own image, reality is what you make it.
2. Others maintain that it just doesn't matter. Don't think so hard about such matters, just roll with the punches, let life happen, live existentially in the now.
3. Some people shape their image around the stars- actresses, singers, athletes, people who have made it big and are successful and popular. So they use the formula to be like them: wear what she wears, talk like she talks, etc.

4. Some people are so driven for relationship that they will shape their persona according to the person they want to have. I like that guy, and since he likes girls that are such and such, I'm going to be such and such.

The bible says, you're going to get hurt if you use any of those methods.

What is the best starting point?

The best starting point is *the fear of the Lord*. The climax of this text is verse 30:

Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised.

A. What is the fear of the Lord?

Proverbs says *the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*. You can't know God without it, you can't be wise without it. Fear doesn't mean afraid, as if you cower before your captors or avoid them. Rather, it means reverence or awe. Why would you revere the Lord? Because you have a relationship with him and you know what he is like. How does that develop?

First, you admit that you don't fear the right things. In our natural state we fear giving control to God, we fear letting Him in; we want to rule our lives on our own terms, we insist in being our own interpreters of life. Sin blinds us to the terror that should come upon our souls living in rebellion against God.

Second, you admit you can do nothing about your guilt. You're stuck in a little house in the middle of the prairie, surrounded by fire; it's only a matter of time until you are overwhelmed by the flames. If you decide to take a shower and clean yourself, is that going to save you from the flames? You can engage in all manner of religious activities, but will they shield you from the inferno? If you decide to do tons of good things for other people in the house, will that keep you from the fire? If you say to God, here, take all my money, will that save you from the flames. The fear of the Lord says, you can do nothing to save yourself.

Third, you believe a promise God makes in the gospel. Jesus was consumed by the flames to make a safe way out to the father. Jesus delivers you from the wrath due your sins by being consumed by it. So the fear of the Lord moves from terror to freedom, joy and delight-he saved you! At the cost of his own son! What wondrous love is this?

You love God so much and see Him so clearly that you have both utmost respect and deepest affection. He made you, cares for you, orders your life in a wonderful way, and doesn't count your sins against you. So you fear disappointing or losing his heart. The fear of the Lord keeps you from sin and in a spirit of worship. It draws you to prayer and keeps you humble. It creates thirst for intimacy with God. The result? God-centered living frees you for other-centered living. Because the Lord is on my side, I have nothing to fear, nothing to lose. God's grace in Christ is sweet to your soul.

How does the fear of the Lord affect relationships?

The fear of the Lord functions positively and negatively.

Positively, God alone knows what makes relationships work, so I'll submit to his way.

Negatively, it keeps you from trouble. On the path of life are many dangers, toils and snares, but by the fear of the Lord we stay safe. For example, we meet in Proverbs the adulteress woman. We see her again and again. She's sexy and sweet. She easily answers a guys top two criteria for

relationship: someone who is fun to be with and attractive. Well, 31:30 says charm, fun to be with, is deceitful, and beauty, she's attractive, is vain.

Therefore, you need better criteria. That's the purpose of this portrait. Here she is in quite a bit of detail. These details give you the information you need to find a lifelong companion, the heart of the design for God's marriage. It's a covenant of companionship, Adam being given Eve to resolve the problem of his loneliness.

B. How do you recognize the fear of the Lord in a wife?

This portrait reveals at least three themes:

1. She values virtue

Why does the poem focus on virtue and make such a bold statement against charm and beauty at the end?

First, because you may not be what this woman is, a wealthy matron in the upper echelon of society, but you can have her heart. God doesn't ask you to be something physically which you may never be.

Second, probably as a polemic against contemporary cultural norms. The genre is that of Israel's heroic poetry (Waltke, p.517) which recounts the mighty acts of Israel's heroes.(1 Sam.14:48; Ps.60:12-14) Here, the hero is the godly wife and her acts. Virtue is extolled over against the praise of women in ANE literature for their physical charms from an erotic point of view. The Greeks praised a spouse who was a silent homebody with rare engagement with the world outside. You see how different this woman is?

Do you value virtue or are you seeking accomplishment, accolades or recognition? To be sure, she is accomplished and praised- but it's not what she seeks. She fears the Lord. She's a champion of applying wisdom to all of life.

Are you developing your character or are you motivated to seek adventure, pleasure, security, ease. Are you trying to marry a man who has money? If you work out hard to keep your body in shape, are you as diligent to build relationships which keep your soul in shape? Do you protect yourself so no one can get the best of you, or do you seek to give your best to anyone? Do you need to wear a look of confidence or grace?

How is her virtue visible?

a. She lives outside of herself in gracious spirituality
strength and dignity are her clothing v.25

The poem addressed all spheres of her life: she blesses her husband, children, maidens, the poor, those in the community. She doesn't seek to intimidate, keep others at arm's length, or manipulate.

Can only do this if you know you have resources to give away, regardless if they come back. That's grace. God continually gives. He opens in your heart a well of grace, so that the more you give, the more you get.

b. By the way she talks.

The teaching of kindness is on her tongue v.26

2. Her husband values her v.11-12

She's a precious treasure to him. Why?

Her heart: he wants to live in it, its trustworthy; she is for him, does him good and not evil, he will have no lack of gain.

Brothers, what kind of man are you that she would trust you?

Her home: he wants to live there, its pleasant, cheerful clean,

Her hands: he wants to praise her for her industry, versus laziness. Vision of future

Her help: v.27

They live together in mutual blessing. She resists the sin of Eve, who left Adam's side as a companion and became a tempter. Nothing she does should tempt her husband from fulfilling all that God calls him to be.

3. She lives faithfully

a. As a productive provider

This is probably a picture of productivity covering a lifetime. She isn't doing all of this every day. It looks absurd if so, what an overwhelming to-do list! This is why ladies have a love-hate relationship with the Proverbs 31 woman. They love what she stands for but hate the fact that they can't come close to pulling it off.

The point is she embodies wisdom; she is disciplined, diligent.

b. In the details

OT scholar Peter Enns explains that Proverbs comes at you like life does- lots of seemingly random things, in which it is important to master the details. This lady has mastered the details. To be faithful in the mundane is to be wise. God cares about the details; if God is in your details, He has you. Jesus said, if you are faithful in a few things, you'll be faithful in large things. So you must be careful. Neglect in small things is what comes back to bite you. There may be a small part of life God wants you to master, so it doesn't master you.

Charm is deceitful because it promises a lifetime of happiness that it cannot deliver. There is one man who can deliver such a life, Jesus Christ. Let His love fill your heart and you'll be ravishingly beautiful beyond description.

The Beauty of Well-placed Words

***Like apples of gold in settings of silver
is a word spoken in right circumstances
Proverbs 25:11***

Couples are going to exchange millions of words with each other over a life time. How will you find the right words in dicey or stressful situations, where folks may be irritating or offensive. What does it look like when a humble heart overflows with words of grace? It looks like *apples of gold in settings of silver*. That's the picture given in Prov.25:11. It's a compelling metaphor. When you have the right words for the right situation, you've created something as beautiful as a sculptor's

ornate *apples of gold in settings of silver*. The verse invites you to imagine such a work of art, and how it might inspire awe, praise, or delight, and how such a masterpiece bespeaks value, beauty, worth, satisfaction. That's how our words ought to leave folks who hear them; they sense their rightness and beauty.

This metaphor helps us understand three aspects of grace-filled speech: like the artisan we inevitably have motives, methods, and goals.

1. Motives

The artisan has a reason for creating his work of art. Maybe it is as simple as, I want to make something beautiful. Or, I want to imitate the glory of nature in a way that highlights some aspect of it: contrast, color, depth, texture, setting, shape, etc. In the case of this metaphor, the setting shows off or highlights the apples. Apples of gold in mud, by contrast, doesn't fit. Nor would apples of manure in silver.

The same is true for words. We have reasons for the way we speak.

Jesus said you have to examine your reasons:

The mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. (Mt.12:34)

Your words reveal much more what's going on in here than what's going on out there. In our hearts reside desires either for our own glory or for others glory. The stronger the desire the more charged the words. Jesus also said we'll be judged by our words. That means you have to come to grips with how powerful words are. My words are dangerous; like weapons they can be used for good or bad.

"Life and death are in the power of the tongue." (Prov.18:21)

"A fool's mouth is his ruin, and his lips the snare of his soul." (Prov.18:7)

"A worthless man digs up evil, while his words are a scorching fire." (Prov.16:27)

"The tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity. It is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell." (James 3:6)

Since our words are powerful we need to constantly think about their effect on others. The humble heart is other centered. So you need to learn the discipline of asking yourself, are my words about me or them. What am I trying to prove?

Proverbs identifies two kinds of motives, good and bad.

Bad motives:

a. just to be heard

"The fool only delights in revealing his own mind." (Prov.18:2)

This verse, a sure marker of self-centeredness, condemns you if you feel called to give a running commentary on everything going on around you, or if you believe your opinion is so important that everyone needs to hear it all the time.

Most of us err in one of two directions; we say too little or we say too much.

Prov.17:28: *"Even a fool, when he is silent, is considered wise; when he closes his lips he is considered prudent."*

Prov.29:20 bluntly warns: *"Do you see a man hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him."*

Again, the question is, why do you speak too little or too much? Some of you speak too little out of fear; you're afraid you'll be judged by your words.

You are protecting yourself from criticism because you are insecure.

Some of you speak too much because you think your significance hangs on what you say. You are influencing or controlling, but why? Are you insecure with something to prove? Are you compensating with words for what you lack in your soul? And what might that be? In either case, your heart is not controlled by the love of God. You don't believe how deeply God cherishes you. If you did, you've have nothing to prove to anyone.

b. to esteem yourself

Prov.27:2 Let another praise you, not your own mouth, a stranger, not your own lips.

Pridefully bringing attention to yourself

(HOF 2010) I am the greatest

c. to flatter

29:5 a man who flatters his neighbor is spreading a net for his feet

26:28 a flattering mouth works ruin

28:23 he who rebukes a man will afterward find more favor than he who flatters with the tongue

29:25 the fear of man brings a snare

What's going on in the heart that we feel the need to flatter others? We flatter so others will like us. We need to be liked because we think that makes us significant or safe. So words of flattery aren't about another person at all, they're about us.

d. to gossip

The words of a whisperer are like dainty morsels, And they go down into the innermost parts of the body. Prov.18:8

Since we know that physical violence is wrong, we tend to allow ourselves more latitude in the area of rumor and gossip. We enjoy gossip, even calling it metaphorically "juicy" for the pleasure it gives the soul.

Why do we like gossip, the sentences starting with: "Did you hear about Mike...?"

It makes us feel in the know, and therefore powerful, important, better than others, in a privileged class. If I can share with you what few others know, you'll like me for letting you in on something, and you'll feel pretty special for knowing it. Most of us don't relish appearing ignorant. Plus, when I gossip about other's sins, well, don't I look good because I wouldn't do that!

Gossip springs from and fuels pride and self-righteousness.

What should you do with reports of other people's sins? Treat that information the same way white blood cells in your body do microbes and foreign substances- they quickly surround them and contain them so they go nowhere and die a contained death.

You refuse to accept reports about another person, instead sending the reporter back to the party they are concerned about.

Protect your neighbor's reputation (9th commandment)

e. to criticize

How do you feel when perhaps objectively someone has erred where you haven't? You know what that means you are? What's that make you? Merely a recipient of more grace than they. Rather than put someone down whom you don't like, why not say,

Lord Jesus, the only reason I'm not worse than him is the grace you've given me.

Lord Jesus, give them the grace they lack.

Lord Jesus, considering all the mercy you've extended to me, I should be a whole lot better than I am.

Considering the grace they lack they're a lot better than I'd be!

When we are motivated to put down others with our words, to answer tit-for-tat, we feel a temporary sense of pleasure or victory. But what have we truly accomplished? What glory is there in seemingly putting another in their place? Does that make us a better person? Are we smarter or more moral for having done so? Whose job is that, anyway? When we aim to hurt with our words, when we are guilty of "arguing *ad hominem*" (proving a point by attacking the person), we've only shown our hearts to be as petty as the person we feel the need to malign. Paul instructs us "*to malign no one, to be uncontentious, gentle, showing every consideration for all men.*" (Titus 3:3)

God is very jealous for our words to reveal the power and beauty of His words, and the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ:

"Pleasant words are a honeycomb." (Prov.16:24)

"There is gold, and an abundance of jewels, but the lips of the righteous are a more precious thing." (Prov.20:15)

Each of these verses depicts the speaking ministry of Jesus.

Good motives:

a. to build up

***by correction or reproof

25:12 *Like an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold, is a wise reprover to a listening ear*

Questions:

Do they have a listening ear?

Do you have wisdom?

****by encouraging *"Anxiety in the heart weighs it down, but a good word makes it glad."* (Prov.12:25)

b. to healing/ feeding reminding of the truth *"The tongue of the wise brings healing."* (Prov.12:18)

"The lips of the righteous feed many." (Prov.18:21)

He kisses the lips who gives a right answer Prov.24;26

2. Methods

Just as an artisan's work is thought out carefully, crafted intricately, so 15:28 *The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer*

One of your greatest assets in knowing how to answer is to use questions.

16:23-24

The heart of the wise instructs his mouth and adds persuasiveness to his lips. Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.

"A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." (Prov.15:1)

I have to drive through a residential neighborhood every week to pick up the church bulletin from the printer's home. I confess that I normally zip in and zip out from the main road. Translated, I roll through the stop signs and exceed the speed limit. One day I noticed a man waiting in his car on the street as I left the house where I get the bulletins. I thought perhaps he needed directions. I approached his car and he asked me if I lived in the neighborhood. I explained that I did not. He said, not in the happiest tone, "I know. You speed in and out of here every week, disregarding the stop signs and the neighbors, and you create a safety hazard for our children." I'd say he was ready for a fight. But even though my pride welled up within me in momentary denial, I couldn't argue with him, he was absolutely right. I said, "You're right, I'm sorry. I have been disrespectful to this neighborhood, and it is flat out wrong. Please forgive me." I really doubt he was expecting that response. Immediately he backed off and toned down. Yet I persisted to maintain my guilt and apologized again, and thanked him for warning me before anything serious happened. He dropped it and went on his way. The only way to account for my "abnormal" behavior is the grace of God and the Holy Spirit bringing this verse to mind as soon as the man confronted me.

Just as artisans know when to stop, so 17:14 *abandon the quarrel before it breaks out,*

When your emotions are out of control it is NOT time to talk

12:18 *There is one who speaks rashly like the trusts of a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.*

If you feel like you've drawn a sword and your words are going to begin slashing what you don't like, drop the sword, bite your tongue.

3. Goals

The artisan sets out not to produce something mediocre, but glorious.

So should be our goal with our words.

Let me just mention one: Words that give life.

"The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life." (Prov.10:11)

"Life and death are in the power of the tongue." (Prov.18:21)

But do you see the problem? You have to have that life in you for it to flow out to others. Isn't your well polluted by sin, bad motives, misplaced words? Who among us has not complained, grumbled, criticized, maligned, shaded the truth, spoken when unnecessary?

There was a man whose heart was a pure fountain—completely undefiled by sin. Jesus Christ.

These last two verses are most truly fulfilled in Christ.

Because he was and is God, He actually has the ultimate power of death and life in his mouth. If He gave any of us what we deserved, with one word---guilty!---He could condemn us to death.

Or, he could actually merely use our own words against us.

Instead, Jesus came to earth for sinners with the word of life in His mouth. He spoke to us the word of forgiveness and grace. His promise of grace is the power of eternal life for all who believe the

gospel. He is the one true righteous man who gave His life a fountain of eternal life for all who trust in Him.

The Dangers of Money

***He who trusts in his riches will fall,
but the righteous will flourish like the green leaf. (Proverbs 11:28)***

Have you ever seen a parent give his little child a chainsaw to play with? It will be a tragic day when a parent puts a 16" chainsaw in a toddler's hands, starts it, and says, "Have fun! Go for it!" Why? Because it would be so utterly foolish. A chainsaw is an extremely dangerous tool even for a person who knows how to use it, let alone a child who would instinctively make it a toy. You don't need a PhD to see the principle involved here: never put a dangerous, powerful tool in the hands of someone incapable of safely handling it. The stronger the force, the greater the potential for danger. Money, like a chainsaw, can be a powerful tool for blessing or a lethal weapon to harm.

How can you be sure you are using money wisely? Proverbs gives us several tests:

1. Do you take it from wisdom's hand?

When we understand wealth from God's perspective we will see clearly enough its true benefits and hazards. Notice how Lady Wisdom is presented to us: "*She is more precious than jewels; and nothing you desire compares with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor . . . happy are all who hold her fast*" (Prov. 3:15-16, 18). To understand wealth, you first need to make a comparison between Wisdom and wealth. Which do you really believe is more desirable? Do you honestly think no amount of wealth, however you measure it, can compare to the surpassing, incomparable value of Wisdom incarnate, the Lord Himself?

This verse also makes an explicit promise: if you take wealth from Wisdom's hand, you'll be happy (which is, naturally, what you're desiring). It also gives an implicit warning: if you take wealth from your own hand, you're in trouble (which is, naturally, what you want to avoid).

2. Are you aware of money's power in the heart?

"The rich man is wise in his own eyes" (Prov. 28:11).

How would you know if you were aware of its power? Ask:

- a. Do you resist the fact that we're talking about money—or are you truly appreciative for your own safety?

Have you confessed the sin of greed to anyone? Do you feel protective of your money and autonomous over its use, or do you routinely submit significant expenditures to God? You are on unstable footing if your fundamental attitude is, No one has the right to tell me what to do with my money.

- b. Are you in a hurry to obtain wealth?

"A faithful man will abound with blessings, but he who makes haste to be rich will not go unpunished. . . . A man with an evil eye hastens after wealth and does not know that want will come upon him" (Prov. 28:20, 22).

Are you patient with your station in life, or in debt up to your eyeballs trying to live beyond the lifestyle God has allotted to you? We live in a culture that encourages us to have everything now. Just put those purchases on a credit card and worry about it later. The pain and suffering resulting from such folly is incalculable, not to mention the magnitude of the slavery that ensues: “The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower becomes the lender’s slave” (Prov. 22:7).

c. Is sorrow in your wealth?

“It is the blessing of the Lord which makes rich, and He adds no sorrow to it” (Prov. 10:22).

What sort of sorrow is the sage envisioning? Perhaps sorrow because you don’t have more? Sorry that you might lose some of it? Sorrow relationally because you love money more than people? Sorrow experienced because you acquired what you thought would make you happy (a new car, house, vacation, jewelry, etc.) and you felt empty soon afterward? The point remains clear. God is the source of wealth, He gives it because He delights to, and He doesn’t give it to make us sorrowful. If your wealth is accompanied by sorrow it is a likely indicator you have received it (ungratefully) or use it (selfishly, unwisely, impulsively) in a way contrary to God’s plan.

d. Is money a false security?

“He who trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish like the green leaf” (Prov. 11:28).

Why should you be concerned about trusting riches? Because it is so easy to do. The heart incessantly longs to trust something. Sin loves to trust the tangible--something I can see, feel, handle, or smell. Money gives me freedom, power, and choices; it allows me to plan for tomorrow and to enjoy today (not necessarily bad in itself). Money creates independence, something we all crave, and therefore is extremely hard to give up. Jesus met a rich man just like that. “ ‘Sell all that you possess and distribute it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me’ ” (Luke 18:22). He couldn’t do it. He was slave to his wealth; he didn’t own it, it owned him!

Is wealth the problem here? It may be tempting to think so, but that would miss the truth. Both rich and poor, and everyone in between can be tempted by money. Our hearts are the problem; the heart is so deceitful that we abuse all sorts of things to our detriment. If money itself was the problem the Bible would exhort us to strive for poverty (which it does not do) and would not make statements such as:

“It is the blessing of the Lord that makes rich” (Prov. 10:22). “The generous man will be prosperous” (Prov. 11:25). “Great wealth is in the house of the righteous” (Prov. 15:6). “A good man leaves an inheritance to his children’s children” (Prov. 13:22).

It is one thing to enjoy humbly the blessing, quite another to make it a security. We know it is becoming a security when money is making us single-minded: “I’ll get it at all costs; I’ll protect it at all costs. I can’t give generously.” Therefore, God warns: *“Do not weary yourself to gain wealth, cease from your consideration of it”* (Prov. 23:4). Only a self-deceived heart would refuse to believe the sober warnings of the Bible: *“Make sure that your character is free from the love of money”* (Heb. 13:5). *“But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil”* (1 Tim. 6:9-10).

Money is a false security in two other ways. First, it is possible we could lose it somehow. Through lawsuits, medical costs, financial crises, theft, etc., people lose money. I pastored a brilliant engineer who, just on the eve of retirement, lost all of it to the Enron scandal. Second, money doesn't deliver what it promises. One wealthy man was asked, "How much money is enough?" He answered, "Just a little bit more,"

e. The heart uses wealth to escape reality.

"A rich man's wealth is his strong city, and like a high wall in his own imagination" (Prov. 18:11).

Wealth has the power to create in us a sense that we are far better off than we actually are: preaching to the mind, as it were, an impregnable strength. It creates a false standard of measuring one's worth before God: "I'm so materially well-off, I must also be spiritually well-off with God." Perhaps this accounts for why so few wealthy people feel the need for God. Jesus explicitly told the rich young ruler: "'How hard it is for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God'" (Luke 18:24). In fact, most Americans are relatively in the same position. When was the last time you sincerely asked God for your "daily bread"? Proverbs warns for a good reason:

"Riches do not profit in the day of wrath" (Prov. 11:4).

f. The heart believes wealth sets one above the law.

"The rich man is wise in his own eyes, but the poor man who has understanding sees through him" (Prov. 28:11),

There lies a thought within all of us, "Don't tell me how to use my money!" It is an extension of our propensity to autonomy: "I'll run my life the way I want to!" When "my money" is a lot of money, the idea becomes larger than reality. What motivates "white collar" crime? Isn't it normally people in power positions who think they are above the rules? Wealth has a way of eating at the integrity of the heart; it sticks its claws on a person's integrity and tries to squeeze out a compromise with principle. *"Better is the poor who walks in his integrity, than he who is crooked, though he be rich" (Prov. 28:6).*

3. How do you pray about wealth?

(Prov. 30:7-9)

Two things I asked of You, do not refuse me before I die: keep deception and lies far from me, give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is my portion, that I not be full and deny You and say, 'Who is the Lord?' or that I not be in want and steal, and profane the name of my God

It is not natural to us to pray like this. It is much more our tendency to want blessings, and lots of them. Can you earnestly pray this contentment prayer? We all want to believe we're the exception: try me, Lord, I can handle wealth. How many people do you know who have significantly scaled back their lifestyles after amassing substantial wealth?

Who prays this way:

The wise. They know that without the inventor's manual we are going to get it wrong. God made the world and to enjoy it most fully we do so on his terms. The fool says, it doesn't matter if I didn't make the world, I can figure this out on my own. The fool will have no one tell him how to find happiness. They know themselves well. They are skeptical of their own motives because they know how deceitful the heart can be. They know there is no reason for them to be exempt from humanity's proclivity to underestimate the power of money. Notice the tone of desperation here:

“*don't refuse me*”! This healthy skepticism frees him to be honest, transparent; did you notice, he is talking about money. Most of us would rather not.

What are the requests?

There are two, *keep* and *give*. Each gets a little elaboration. *Keep* deals with the heart, especially motives. *Give* deals with circumstances. What connects them to each other? It is our attitude or expectation that governs how we respond in specific circumstances. Your character determines how you respond in circumstances.

Keep deception and lies far from me.

Deception and lies are two related words forming one idea, according to Waltke, deceit that takes the form of a verbal lie. Why pray this? Because certain ideas seem valid, but upon close inspection prove to be lies. Some ideas are very appealing to us, and can fool us into being true, when they are not. So he prays, keep them far from me.

How would you recognize a lie about money from a truth?

Only by what God's word says about it—and everything God says about it, not just select things. We could go to passages which may easily lead you to think God wants you rich, while other passages lead you to think he wants you poor. The main point is this: if you have no intimate, working relationship with God's word, you will likely be deceived by money. But, just because you know God's word doesn't guarantee his truth controls your heart.

What lies tempt you and me?

If I'm poor I won't worry about money. God wants me rich. I'll be happy and content with more money. The more I get the more I'll give.

These are so seductive we need God's word as the only infallible source of understanding. Do you believe you are fundamentally prone to underestimate the power of money over you? If not, you don't know your self well. The wise person says, yes, keep me from lies. They are too strong for me, I am too weak for them.

Give me neither poverty nor riches, feed me with the food that is my portion.

Give means to provide anew with; to cause to receive. This sounds like Jesus' prayer in Matt.6:11: “give us this day our daily bread.” We can ask God for what we need, for our portion. Food is probably a literary device called synecdoche, part for the whole. Food is one part of the whole, all of our needs. God is committed to meeting the essential needs of his creatures- food, shelter, clothing. He gives food to all of us, beast and human alike. He feeds the ravens and clothes the lilies. Therefore Paul can exhort us, “If we have food and shelter, with these we shall be content.” (1 Tim.6:8)

Agur's prayer looks like a plea for contentment: desiring what you have, not desiring what you don't have. Then he gives his reasons why contentment is a safe place for his heart. He lists two extremes, poverty and wealth.

Poverty may drive him to steal to meet his needs. It deceives us by justifying desperate measures to meet essential needs. That would be tantamount to profaning God's name, that is, saying something about him that is not true.

To be satisfied, on the other hand, or *full*, tends toward neglecting the provider. To say *who is the Lord* is to forget where the blessings come from. Who is he? Never forget to answer! He is my provider, the determiner of my gifts, income, and welfare. It is to be deceived into thinking you are in control or self-sufficient. When we are full we tend toward complacency. Urgency is lost. A stomach at ease portends to a heart at ease.

What ought you to say when you are full?

Thank you, I am tremendously blessed to have this.

Why me? I don't deserve this!

Let me give back to you in proportion to how full I am.

To be full is a metaphor for wealth. How does wealth deceive? Wealth is like medicine. Before you use it, you need to know the side effects. Side effects are the manifestations you can expect, the ways your being will be influenced, by the benefit you receive from the medicine. Wealth has benefits. But they are only truly enjoyed when you are cautious about the side effects.

Agur's contentment is motivated by the glory of God. That is his greatest concern, an authentic expression of faith. He knows only God can save him from the power of human greed. You could call this humble ambition:

Work hard? Yes!

Save money? Yes!

Have enough for your grandchildren? Yes!

Ever vigilant over wealth's deceptive power? Yes!

If you've given me wealth, Lord, it is for your glory. Now let me live and give to your glory.

4. Do you delight in money well-used?

a. Examine your generosity.

There is only one way to know whether your money owns you: scrutinize your willingness to part with it. If you can't be generous, you are its slave. Be careful here. Some people measure generosity by what they give away. The Bible doesn't do accounting that way. Generosity is marked not by how much you give away, but by what you give up. If your giving costs you nothing, it isn't generosity. King David needed to make an offering to the Lord and Araunah tried to give him the necessary animals as a gift (2 Sam. 24:24). David would have none of it: "No, but I will surely buy it from you for a price, for I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God which cost me nothing."

In Luke 21 Jesus tells the story of the widow's mite. Who gave generously to God, the poor lady with a few cents or the rich people with their thousands of dollars? Generosity is not measured by how much one gives, but by how much one gives up. "[The rich] all out of their surplus put into the offering; but she out of her poverty put in all that she had to live on" (Luke 21:4). Paul found such faith among the Macedonian believers "*that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints*" (2 Cor. 8:2-4).

b. Our use of money is a window for the world to see God.

“Honor the Lord from your wealth and from the first of all your produce . . . ” (Prov. 3:9).

Our giving says a lot about God. When we are generous and faithful with our resources we reveal that God is the owner of all things and a wonderful provider. But how does anyone know what I give? They may not know what you give, but they probably have a good idea what you spend some of your money to buy. This verse, in its historical context, was given to an agrarian society. The tithe was fruit, vegetables, and wine brought into the storehouse for the priests and the poor. What Joe Israelite brought in was no secret; nor was it hidden whether he brought the firstfruits, the best of the crops. The point is, unbelieving neighbors are watching and they may be wondering: what kind of God do they worship? Do we look like all the other materialists in our culture? What does your lifestyle say about your faith, ultimate trust, priorities, and belief about what God has done for you? Has He withheld His best and firstfruits from you?

c. Well-used money builds faith.

The point of the firstfruits is faith. When you give away the first portion of the harvest, you're trusting that the rest will be available for your needs when it's time. God will have to preserve the rest of the harvest. Does He love you enough to do that? Is He powerful enough to do that? God is Jehovah-Jireh, Yahweh our provider, who knows how to make things stretch (if need be) to the end of the month. Faith is forged not when we write checks out of our abundance, but in the furnace of need and provision. I have had the enormous privilege as a pastor to watch young couples struggle financially, yet remain faithful to give generously to the church. While in a few extreme cases our mercy fund has helped some in crisis, I have never seen one of them become destitute. You cannot out-give God! Do you know that experientially, or as simply a mental abstraction?

In the spirit of Malachi 3:10 (“*Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this, says the Lord of hosts, ‘if I will not open for you the windows of heaven, and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows.’*”), I urge you to test God in this. Start with the basics. Make the first check you write after payday, if you don't already, your tithe check. Then have something set aside for spontaneous opportunities to give, and pray for God to bring them providentially to you and for wisdom to recognize them.

d. Money well-used reveals the work of Christ.

When the day is over we must confess that we are dull of heart and slow to trust. We tend to love our wealth (Americans are wealthy compared with the rest of the world) and trust in it. I've not met many Christians who appeared to give away their money in proportion to the sacrifice of their Savior. Salvation is about sacrifice. So is biblical giving. We've not given our hearts to God as He deserves, and we're guilty. The glory of the gospel is that Jesus stepped in where we deserved to go. He set aside the riches of His glory in heaven to come to earth to live a life of economic poverty. No one could accuse Jesus of misusing wealth. His entire ministry, He depended on the gifts of others. He had nowhere to lay His head. He knew material poverty, but this is not what counts. He willingly knew spiritual poverty, taking upon Himself the wrath our sins deserved:

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich” (2 Cor. 8:9).

Jesus could have asked the Father, How much should I give? The question was never up for discussion. He came to give it all away, for only by His perfect obedience and sinless death on the cross could He atone for the greed and guilt of sinners like us.

Your money is a chainsaw; used wisely, it will cut paths of joy and righteousness. Used carelessly, it will certainly hurt you. Wisdom teaches us those distinctions. Wisdom says, First give yourself to the Lord, saturate your wealth with Christ's riches for you, and you'll know how to give.

A Different Kind of Beauty

*“A man’s discretion makes him slow to anger,
And it is his glory to overlook a transgression.”*

Prov.19:11

We all tend to look for gimmicks to make us feel beautiful, to make us attractive in the eyes of others, especially our spouse. Some think in terms of a prowess, personality, physical, or performance. Something inside knows that we’re not all that we should be! The desire to be beautiful is healthy, but what does it really take?

The Bible says there is something that will make you will shine, you’ll be more beautiful than you ever imagined, more glorious in character---because God promises! Proverbs 19:11 says your boast, greatness, beauty, glory is to “*overlook transgressions*”.

The word “overlook” appears to picture passing by, moving beyond. It doesn’t mean ignore, that’s impossible. God never asks you to pretend sin isn’t real. The idea is, when you are sinned against, keep going, keep that relationship moving, “*so far as it depends upon you.*” (Rom.12:18) In other words:

Don’t let anger stall you.

Don’t let un-forgiveness put you in a rut.

Don’t let a root of bitterness tie you to the ground.

Don’t hold a grudge in your hands so they’re not open them to receive God’s other blessings.

Notice what the verse assumes:

1. **You will be sinned against;**

This verse is given to people who live in a fallen world where there is a lot of sin. There are no sinless people on this earth.

-you have been and will be sinned against by all kinds of people (believer and unbeliever), even those you think shouldn’t!! (why do you expect *anyone* to be perfect in a fallen world?)

2. **You will respond in one way or another;**

-we don’t have to pretend sins don’t hurt!

-the temptation is to be angry and unforgiving, to not get past it, notice how the first half of the verse:

“*wisdom makes you slow to anger*” sets up: “*it is your glory to overlook a transgression*”.

-HOW you respond determines whether you live in a self-made prison of resentment, or move forward in freedom. Circumstances don’t make you respond in one way or another. They simply reveal the struggle deep within your own heart.

3. **You don’t have to get stuck in bitter resentment**

That’s why the verse holds out the promise for you of a spiritual beauty

-Hebrews 12:14-15 warn about a root of bitterness

4. Implicit behind this verse is the Biblical assertion that **God is sovereign over these hurts.**

Prov.16:9 says: *The mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps.*

Prov.19:21 *“Many are the plans in a man’s heart, but the counsel of the Lord, it will stand.”*

Therefore, you can be confident your conflicts are ordained by God *for your good* (Rom,8:28). Everything God is doing in your life is designed to make you like Christ, especially afflictions and difficulties in relationships.

God uses these:

- To help you grow
- To help you see your sin: faults of others are like mirrors reflecting what we hide from ourselves
- To help you see how much grace you need
- To help you see how great is His mercy and comfort to you
- To help you experience God's redemptive power
- To help you love others in ways they might never have known.

If God has His purposes in the offenses we suffer, then He also must have the proscription to remedy the injury. That means we have to use God's remedy, not our homespun concoctions. You will be tempted to treat the pain only, not the injury.

Perhaps you'll want to retreat, throw up walls of self-protection, and not let anyone in to your heart.

Perhaps you'll promise yourself never to take risks in relationships.

These are decidedly not God's solutions; the Triune God is utterly committed to harmony.

What is God's remedy? **How** do you overlook, pass by, go beyond, other's transgressions?

Prov.19:11 doesn't say. It leaves us longing for more. Therefore, this verse catapults us to the New Testament. There we see the great transgression eliminator: the cross of Jesus. At the cross Jesus promises to remove your sins from you! There is only **one way** to move past other's offenses: put the cross between you and them.

"Forgive one another, as Christ has forgiven you..." (Col.3:13)

There is an amazing power in the cross experienced by those who take the time to stand beneath it.

When you ask for an open, humble heart, to know God, to see his glory, you will see in the cross both:

*the horrible consequences of your sin, putting Jesus there, holding your transgressions;

*the unspeakable wonder of his love for you, willingly staying there.

The cross is the supreme concrete demonstration of the love of God. *"God demonstrates his own love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us..."* (Rom.5:8)

The issue at the cross is love for sinners. That's why Jesus said, John 15:12:

"love one another, just as I have loved you." You would never know the love of Christ if He hadn't overlooked your transgressions, and taken you with Him to glory.

That's the basis for the promise: *"love truly covers all transgressions"*. (Prov.10:12)

1 Peter 4:8: *"Keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins."* Love covers transgressions means you refuse to harp on them, to reveal or expose them; instead, you bury any reason to put yourself above another person. God's word teaches that the issue when others hurt us is: can you still love them? In a sense, you don't know how much you love until you have to love the unlovely.

1 Cor.13:5: *"love does not take into account a wrong suffered"*

Jesus said a startling thing will happen if you stay long at the cross. Your vision will be improved!

"Take the log out of your eye, then you'll actually be able to see the speck in another's."

But what if objectively another has sinned significantly against you?

a. That is a cause for pity and patience:

Then can't you thank God for the grace to not have been given over to sin as much as them? For what person among us could claim to have sinned less except by the sheer restraining mercy of God? 2 Timothy 2:23f (God does the changing)

b. That is a cause for self-examination

What's going on in your heart? Why *would you* stop and not pass by another's offense? What are you believing about yourself to claim to not overlook an offense? Isn't it: How dare you offend me! But why not offend you? Who made you a person exempt from offenses?

Is your unwillingness to overlook a transgression really a covert attempt to bolster your own righteousness, to be God, who alone has the right to not forgive?

If you are unwilling to try to bring the other person along with you (where? To the throne of grace where we all find help in time of need) are you saying that they really aren't worth it?

Now you may protest, well I've overlooked, I just don't care to deal with that person!

But does God treat you that way in the gospel? Or is it much better than that? Doesn't God proclaim in the gospel of Christ, "I forgive you, and now I adopt you! Now that I've forgiven you I've only just begun to open the floodgates of My blessings! Now that I've bought you as My own, by the blood of My Son, come share in all the riches that are His!" (Rom.8:32)

Here's the test to see if you're truly overlooking offenses:

Will you give that person the benefit of the doubt- attribute the best of motives?

Will you concretely promote their best- including your service?

Will you pray for them as you would want God to bless you?

Can you see them as someone sinned against and warped by the fall, desperately needing your pity and compassion?

Will you pay the price for their sin (all sin involves a debt) with the riches lavished upon you in Christ?

That's your greatest glory, because when you overlook another's offense, never are you more like Christ!

Traditional Wedding Ceremony

Prelude

Seating of Mother of Groom

Seating of Mother of Bride

Processional

Genesis 2

Welcome

(We are gathered together...)

Questions of Intent

Giving of the Bride

(Special music, scripture reading)

Charge to Couple

Wedding Vows

Exchange of Rings

Prayer

Pronouncement

Kiss/ Introduction

Benediction

Recessional