

## Practical Counsel for Real Marriage

- I. The Purpose of Marriage
  - A. God warned that marriage would be attacked from within (Gen 3:16, similar wording in Gen 4:7)
  - B. Purpose #1: To multiply families who will subdue the earth. That is, families who will fulfill the cultural mandate which is to steward natural resources for the good of man and the glory of God. This is done through the fields of education, science, art, purposeful vocations, exploration, etc. (Gen 1:28)
  - C. Purpose #2: To be a picture of Christ's love for his church (Eph 5:22-33)
  
- II. How Marriage Accomplishes Its Purpose
  - A. Marriage is accomplished as one or both spouses fulfill their biblically assigned roles before God.
  - B. Wife's Role: To come alongside her husband as his helper and encourager, to strengthen him in his leadership of the home (Gen 2:17-18). She accomplishes this from a position of deference (Eph 5:22-24).
  - C. Husband's Role: To sacrificially lead his wife and children in such a way where God's priorities reign in the home. He does this through servant-leadership (Eph 5:25-33)
  
- III. God's Purpose in Marriage Cannot Be Accomplished Apart from a Growing Relationship with Christ
  - A. God's commands require supernatural strength (Matt 5:44; 18:21-22; Lk 6:28; I Pet 2:18)
  - B. You must find your sufficiency and satisfaction in Christ, not your spouse (Rom 8:31-39; Jn 5:11; Matt 5:6; Ps 142:5)
  
- IV. Communication in Marriage
  - A. Communication is part of being made in God's image
  - B. Satan hijacked communication to provoke the fall. "hath God said...?"
  - C. Communication is like nuclear radiation. It can power a city or melt down a city. The Bible mandates extreme caution in the way we communicate (Ja 3:5; Col 4:6; Prov 15:28; Prov 15:1; Prov 12:18; Prov 17:27; Ecc 9:17; Prov 16:24; Prov 10:19-21; Prov 18:7; Prov 18:2; Eph 4:29)
  - D. Communication is 90% the heart, and 10% verbal technique. The key to changing communication is changing your heart motives behind your words (I Cor 13:4-7; Prov 20:5)

Homework: 1.) Write down the last time you violated one of these fruits of love. Example: “Love is patient.” “The other night I was impatient with my wife when she interrupted my television program to seek my help in putting the kids to bed.”

2.) Ask yourself what idol you were protecting as evidenced by your impatience. When our words are unloving, it is proof we are protecting an idol. Example: “I was protecting the idol of ‘I deserve down time because of my hard day at work.’ I don’t deserve/have a right to anything. My calling as a husband is to sacrifice my comforts to serve my family.”

## V. Conflict-Resolution

A. A primary purpose of marriage is to spur one another to holiness. As such, the Christian marriage should be a place where a husband and wife can lovingly and gently confront one another (Eph 5:26-27; Gal 6:1; Ja 3:17 KJV)

B. Preparing to confront

1. How will you respond if they blow up?
2. How will you respond if they brush it off and makes it about you?
3. How will you respond if they are crushed?

Often, a confrontation deteriorates when one spouse isn’t receiving the kind of response they expected. Entrust your expectations to God.

C. Praying to confront

1. Pray for the sanctification of you and your spouse
2. Prayerfully give up your “right” to be understood, to receive an apology and to have your feelings vindicated. God understands and that is enough.
3. Remember, your only job is to be obedient to Christ. Obedience (not results) is its own reward.

D. Confronting

1. Begin by admitting your own faults.
2. Admit you might have misread the situation.
3. Explain what you perceived as the sin issue. Give them a chance to explain and process.
4. Your only job is to graciously point to the truth. You are not the Holy Spirit. You can lovingly appeal, but you’re competing with the Holy Spirit if you seek to force your viewpoint by anger, manipulation, nagging, pressuring, coldness, etc.

E. What if your spouse persists in unrepentant sin?

1. Bring in an elder or trusted, seasoned Christian. This is what the church is for (Matt 18:15-17).
- F. How should you confront a non-sin issue?
  1. Ask if it is worth bringing up. Will it matter a year from now? Jesus yielded to less than ideal circumstances to avoid offense (Matt 17:27)
- G. What if it's a bigger, non-sin issue like schooling choice, budgeting approach, etc.
  1. Agreement must be accomplished for there to be unity (Amos 3:3)
  2. Bring wisdom into your relationship (Prov 24:6). Bring in a godly person who has experience in the issue under debate. The church is a rich resource of godly experience in many areas of life.

## VI. Battling the Mind in Marriage

A. Satan desires to take you off the battlefield by imbedding in your mind the shrapnel of fleshly thinking

- resentment, bitterness, unforgiveness
- hopelessness, despair, depression
- paralyzing loneliness
- anger, frustration
- discontentment,
- annoyance
- lovelessness

B. Identify the language behind your attitudes (Ps 139:23-24)

1. Identify language behind hurt/resentment

Example: If you are withdrawn and cold towards your spouse because they hurt you, the language behind your coldness could be, "He doesn't deserve my forgiveness." Or "If I'm kind to him, he'll get away with his bad behavior." What ungodly attitude is behind this language? Answer: You are punishing him to correct or expose his behavior.

Response: Does the above response agree with how God says we are to respond to hurtful behavior? (Rom 12:19-21; I Pet 3:1-2; Matt 18:23-35)

2. Identify language behind loneliness

Example: David, after his wife was taken from him and he was driven from the land (Ps 142)

Response: After honestly declaring his loneliness to God, he places his faith in God who is his refuge and portion. He believes God will heal his loneliness by surrounding him

with the righteous. The lonely spouse must surround herself with godly sisters in Christ who can help fix her gaze on the truth. The lonely often isolate (Ps 142:5-7).

### 3. Identifying language behind lovelessness

Example: What is someone to do who says they no longer love their spouse.

Response:

- a.) Realize that romantic emotions are immaterial to biblical love. Lacking these emotions towards your spouse is not a valid reason to withhold loving actions. Obedience always precedes emotions (Prov 3:7-8).
- b.) Our culture idolizes emotions. Emotions are to be subjected to obedience. Don't let "Christian" pop-psychology make you a slave to your emotions. It will destroy you and your marriage.
- c.) Feelings of lovelessness only result from marriage-breakdown, unrestored trust, or a lack of relational investment. If these things are biblically addressed, romantic affections will follow.

## VII. What about emotional abuse?

- A. Physical abuse is a criminal act and any spouse who hits, blocks a spouse from leaving or forces himself sexually should be turned into the police (Prov 22:3)
- B. Emotional abuse has been difficult to define
  1. Broad definition of abuse: Any of God's good gifts that are misused to harm another person can be called an abuse (I Tim 6:3-4; Col 3:8, speaks to the abuse of language to harm others).
  2. Broad definition of spousal abuse: When a spouse, in a position of trust, betrays that trust to the harm of the other.
    - a. Example of Israel's shepherds abusing a position of trust (Jer 23:1-4)
    - b. Other examples of abusing relationships of trust (Prov 3:29-30; 26:18-19; 26-21)
  3. Narrow definition of an emotionally abusive spouse (can be a wife but is primarily the husband): When a spouse, abusing his position of trust, develops a pattern of oppressive control to the harm of his spouse.

Common characteristics of emotional abuse:

- a. He repeatedly engages in character assassination (control, to keep her weak and dependent upon him)
- b. He keeps her from having close friends because they are outside his control

- c. He constantly tracks where she's going (because when she's "out there" she's outside his control).
- d. He crushes any idea that disagrees with his (independent thought is outside his control)
- e. He tries to harm her reputation among friends to strengthen his network of control over her.
- f. He threatens to use physical force, take the kids, or abandon her to maintain control through fear and intimidation

C. The victim's response to emotional abuse

- a. When a husband's mistreatment transitions from mean to abusive (a clear pattern of fear-based control), the wife should seek safety. Firsthand accounts of POWs testify that mental torture is more scarring than physical.
- b. Divorce is not the solution to safety. Physical safety is the solution. Divorce says, "There is no hope. God will never save or change my spouse."
- c. Every situation is different, but the godly spouse, committed to her sacred vow to help her husband, should work with qualified church leaders to seek her husband's repentance.
- d. She should resist the temptation to isolate and surround herself with godly sisters in Christ who can help her resist despair by pointing to Christ. She needs the church.