

Part 5: *RELATIONSHIP PROBLEMS*

Marriage Counseling

CHRISTIAN MARRIAGES

Typically in marriage counseling, 100 percent of the time is spent giving tips on how to get along. And the advice, even from Christian writers and counselors, tends to be little more than manipulation techniques. “Romance her, and she will give you what you want.” “Show him respect and he will give you the love you desire.” That’s not love; that’s just a transaction.

Good marriage counseling will never encourage manipulation. Christian love says, “Give, and require nothing in return.”

Even when marriage counseling does offer more than manipulation techniques, typically it still is limited to tips on getting along better (how to improve communication, how to avoid making each other angry, etc.). With that approach, root problems will usually never be addressed.

In fact, beginning with tips on getting along will often make the situation worse than it already is. If, for example, a man works too many hours and does not listen to his wife, and the wife is miserable, a counselor’s first reaction is to want to solve the problem by getting the husband to work less and pay more attention to his wife. The result will be that the wife will become even more focused on what he is doing wrong, because it has been confirmed by the counselor.

If a couple is fighting, the solution will not come from tips on communication clarification or annoyance avoidance.

James 4:1,2a What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it.

If you are continually angry with your spouse, it is not because of your spouse’s failures. It is because of you. The reason you quarrel and fight is because of your lusts. A lust is any strong desire that you give too high a priority. Whenever a desire is elevated to the level where you must have it to be content, it has become a sinful lust.

The word “lust” in this context is not so much about sexual desire (although that could be included) as it is about a person’s desires, or lusts, regarding the way he or she wants to be treated.

If a person has not learned the secret of contentment, these lusts (the lust for respect, the lust for affection, the lust for kind words, the lust for consideration) rage on the inside. When they are unfulfilled, there will be anger—no matter how hard a person may try to control or conceal it—toward the one who is blocking the fulfillment of his desires.

James does not proceed to give tips on how to satisfy your desires or lusts. Instead, he denounces the type of behavior that characterizes living for your lusts. He calls it friendship with the world and spiritual adultery.

The solution he gives is not manipulating people to meet your “needs” (lusts). The solution is humility.

James 4:2b7a You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely? But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” Submit yourselves, then, to God.

The solution is humility—selflessness—dying to self.

Typically when someone seeks marriage counseling it is either a woman so miserable she can't stand it another day or a man whose wife is so miserable she has persuaded him to go with her for counseling. Men in a bad marriage do become miserable, but they tend to be reluctant to seek counsel.

The one who takes the initiative to seek counseling has some objective in mind. The counselor's first step should be to discover what that objective is. Though a person may be reluctant to come right out and say it, the objective is generally this: “I'm seeking counseling because my spouse is making my life intolerable, and I want you to help me get my spouse to change.”

People who seek marriage counseling are usually angry and frustrated because their goal has been for their spouse to change, and their spouse has blocked that goal. If you, as a counselor, confirm that goal by collaborating to change the spouse, you will do more harm than good.

Practically every woman in marriage counseling says the same thing: “He keeps saying he will do this or that, but nothing ever changes.” In fact, there are multiplied thousands of wives who would all agree on this one thing: “Despite all the promises, nothing ever changes.”

What is happening? Is it actually true that all these Christian husbands are not changing? Is it possible that the sanctification process God has promised for every believer—day by day transformation into the image of Christ—is malfunctioning in a large number of Christian husbands? Is it true that they are *not* changing for the better despite the promises of Scripture to the contrary? No. *If a person is a Christian, he is being sanctified day by day and is gradually being transformed into the image of Christ.*

The problem is this: If you tie your happiness to a person, put your hope in a person, it will not matter how much he changes. As long as he is still a sinner you will never be happy.

God changes His children into His likeness, but almost never in the way or at the rate that we think is best.

Whenever a person is living for *any* desire other than the desire for God, her life will be filled with anger and she will begin to resent whoever stands in the way of the fulfillment of her lusts.

James calls this kind of life “adulterous” because the one legitimate desire that should drive our lives is our desire for God. When a person is not satisfied with Him and seeks satisfaction in some earthly thing or in a human relationship, that is spiritual adultery against God.

People who are dissatisfied in marriage generally need to learn four virtues: contentment, forgiveness, humility, and love. The hard part is persuading them to pursue those goals rather than the lust they have been pursuing (the lust of getting the treatment they want).

The longer they have lived for their own lusts, the more convinced people tend to become that fulfillment of those lusts is the only way they will be happy. And the longer they have lived that way, the more seemingly impossible it is for them to believe that happiness and contentment could come without getting whatever they so desperately want.

It is not uncommon for a counselor to tell people this principle from James and for them to nod and say, “Yes, yes, I know all that. I understand that. Absolutely, I agree. I understand.” But a few minutes later they return to talking about how poorly they are being treated, and it becomes obvious they have not adjusted their goals at all.

When this happens, often the only way to get through to them is to rebuke them. Each time they start to say something that suggests they are living for the goal of being treated better, interrupt and tell them, “That kind of thinking will cause you nothing but anger and misery.”

It is essential to help them come to grips with the need to think differently, to change their goals and give up the pursuit of their lusts.

A person should never have a goal that can be blocked by someone else because inevitably it *will* be blocked, and that will cause frustration and anger. In the context of marriage, a spouse’s goals should be only those that are in his or her own control.

Some people will give up the goal of changing their spouse only if they are convinced that the counselor will pursue it for them (“I’ll stop nagging my husband if you’ll start”).

When people are living for their own lusts, all the tips in the world on communication or getting along will only make them better at manipulating each other. The anger, fights, and quarrels will not end.

The Four Virtues

No matter what the spouse is like, no matter what the couple have or do not have in common, and regardless of the past, if each partner is progressing in four specific virtues, they will have a healthy marriage.

These have been discussed in detail in previous chapters, so the following is a summary of how they relate to marriage.

Contentment

Whatever one spouse does that bothers the other is just part of the package of suffering that God has for the other one’s life, and it should be thought of as suffering for the name of Christ.

When counseling a spouse who is suffering in this way, ask this: “The last time your spouse did something you did not like, why didn’t you simply divorce?” If it was because of his commitment to Christ, then suffering in the marriage is because of his commitment to Christ. Therefore it is in the category of suffering for Christ—bearing on your body the marks of Christ. That is a noble thing.

A person with marital problems needs to understand that in this life suffering is inevitable. The choice is between the suffering of singleness or the suffering of marriage.

That is not to say marriage is a bad thing, but in a fallen world there is no such thing as a love relationship that does not involve suffering.

When we are discontent, we are saying to God, “This level of suffering You have ordained for me is not tolerable.” As Christians we must willingly accept the suffering we receive from the hand of God.

It will help if you show a woman who is discontent that her suffering is from God instead of seeing her husband as the source. The husband is simply the agent through whom God is working. God is in charge of all our suffering, and we are to “[e]ndure hardship as discipline” (Heb. 12:7a). So when he leaves his socks on the floor or she makes an unfair accusation, teach the spouse to look at those things as coming from the hand of God.

Some people can handle all kinds of suffering in other areas of life, but for some reason they think they are not supposed to have to suffer in their marriage. They may do a good job of handling every other kind of pain except for suffering in their marriage because they do not consider that to be in the category of suffering for Christ.

The first step in marriage counseling is bringing a person to the point of saying, “Lord, I do not want anything other than what You want for me.” This is difficult. When a woman comes to you, for example, and she is a wonderful wife and her husband is a terrible husband, your natural inclination is to focus your attention on her husband.

But that will be counterproductive. If you commiserate with her, you push her in the opposite direction she needs to go. You encourage her to be less content rather than more content.

It seems unreasonable to address her spiritual problem of lack of contentment when she is trying hard to be a good wife and her husband is not trying at all. But this is the greatest gift you can give her. It is her only path to happiness.

Teach her to pray, “Lord, You have given me the same thing You have given every other married woman—a man who hurts his wife. Obviously it is my request that he do so less and less, but I willingly accept Your will and Your timing.”

Forgiveness

After years of living for your own desires and having them frustrated by a spouse, you build up resentment. That resentment makes it impossible for your spouse to do anything that makes you happy.

When a woman begins to resent her husband, he might make some changes, but she can't seem to take any satisfaction in them. Here's why: Suppose a man works too much and his wife resents it. Finally she blows up at him, so he tries to change. He rearranges his work schedule in a way he thinks will make a big difference. Now he is coming home late twelve nights a month instead of twenty.

From the wife's point of view, nothing has changed. This is because the wife who resents her husband will be so focused on the twelve nights he is late that she will not be able to see anything else. Every night he is late, every minute he is late, she is building up anger and thinking, *nothing ever changes*.

Spiritual progress is slow. Even after a wonderful day of sanctification, your spouse is going to be almost as sinful as he or she was yesterday. And that is going to be true every day for the rest of your life. Remember the illustration of the teenager who wants to build his muscles (p. 160)? It takes a long time, and there is virtually no progress from one day to the next. That is how growth works.

The real issue is not how godly your spouse is. It is how forgiving you are. When you respect someone, you tend to cut him slack and you do not see his faults. When you resent someone, you tend to notice every failure and are blind to anything good he does.

The solution is to spend enough time thinking about how much God has forgiven *you* that you in turn will have the ability to unilaterally, unconditionally forgive your spouse. It must be your habitual practice to overlook faults and sins as quickly as you notice them.

Resentment is particularly common among women. It is vital that a wife not build up anger or resentment toward her husband. Each thing that bothers her must be dealt with conclusively as it happens, because if things are piling up—however small or infrequent—eventually the pile will be huge, she will explode, and her husband will be helpless to do anything about it.

The same principle applies to men (see Col. 3:19).

Think about it. What can your spouse do about a pile of 500 past sins? He can apologize and repent of the last one that set you off, but you will not be satisfied with that, because nothing has been done about the other 499. He can talk with you and discover another 200 complaints, and try to do something about all those, but that still leaves 300. When you allow things to build up so that your heart hardens against your spouse, you are putting your spouse in a hole with no way out.

Humility

Forgiveness requires selflessness. It requires placing your spouse's interests ahead of your own. To do this you must die to self. Unselfish humility does not come naturally. It means giving up fighting for your rights, and it means getting hurt for the rest of your life.

Love

As mentioned previously, the goal should be something that is totally in your control, so it cannot be blocked. Your goal should be to love your spouse. If you love your spouse, your marriage is a success.

Marriage counseling should involve helping a person to learn to take delight in his or her spouse. For a husband, that does not mean merely providing an income, doing various tasks around the house, taking his wife out on dates, and purchasing all the requisite flowers, cards, and gifts. It means truly delighting in her and taking satisfaction in her. For a wife, that does not mean just cooking and cleaning and providing physical intimacy. It means truly delighting in her husband—looking up to him with genuine honor, respect, and appreciation.

Couples need to cultivate contentment, forgiveness, humility, gentleness, and love. These qualities make for a wonderfully strong and lasting marriage.

Take Time to Plan for Improvement

When the major issues have been addressed, one piece of advice on getting along is this: Evaluate the past and plan for the future.

Many marriages never improve—not because the couple doesn't know what is wrong, and not because they do not know what they are supposed to be doing—but because they never take the time to be intentional about making changes.

The book of Proverbs teaches us general principles of success in life, with the implication that it is wise to make plans.

Proverbs 20:18 Make plans by seeking advice.

Proverbs 15:22 Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.

Proverbs 21:5 The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty.

God requires us to be good stewards of our lives and to live wisely. Wise people make plans. It is not wise to fly through life by the seat of your pants making all your decisions as you go.

God has given you a life to live. This is a gift of immeasurable value. Your life is in your control, but only as a steward. It does not really belong to you, but it has been entrusted to your care.

Your duty as a Christian is to live in the most excellent way possible. Just as you should brush your hair and not be a slob so as to glorify God in your appearance, in the same way your life should not be disheveled. This is also true of your marriage.

Proverbs 16:3 Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed (lit., “be established” or “made firm”).

One way God blesses us is by causing our plans to be realized.

Amazingly, even God makes plans. Scripture is full of references to the plans of God. For example:

2 Kings 19:25 Long ago I ordained it. In days of old I planned it; now I have brought it to pass.

Married couples should schedule a one or twoday planning retreat every six to twelve months. It helps if a couple can get away from home to do this, but doing it at home is better than nothing.

During the retreat, go somewhere for each meal where you can sit and talk for quite a while. Bring a notebook. Begin by listing all the weaknesses in your marriage and personal lives and all the potential threats you can think of. Do not neglect to think through the threats. In the natural course of living, families and marriages and individuals commonly degenerate. People who have been healthy sometimes become unhealthy. Similarly, there are many dangers that can overtake even healthy marriages.

Proverbs 22:3 A prudent man sees danger and takes refuge, but the simple keep going and suffer for it.

Instructions for a planning retreat

Meal 1

Start by asking each other, “How could I improve?” Write down your major concerns, then pick the top five or so and rank them in order of importance to address. Some issues can wait six months until the next planning retreat. Others must be handled right away.

Once there is a consensus on the top five, write those on a new piece of paper. Now put that paper away, and just enjoy each other and do something fun together until the next meal.

Meal 2

The goal now is to take an organized approach to addressing the top five issues.

We all tend to go through life with a vague awareness of things that need our attention. We think I need to get organized; our marriage needs attention; we have to get our budget together; I need to exercise; I must spend time with the kids; etc.

These things never get done because we fail to set specific goals. The purpose of your time together at this second meal is to set goals. The more specific they are, the better. Avoid vague words such as “improve,” “cut back,” “give more energy to,” etc.

Vague goal: I want to get in shape.

Specific goal: I want to work out twenty minutes a day, five days a week.

Vague goal: I want to spend more time with the kids.

Specific goal: I want to devote a full hour just to the kids at least four days a week.

Vague goal: I need to be more romantic.

Specific goal: We will go on a date at least once a month.

Once all the goals have been written down, put the paper away and enjoy each other until the next meal.

Meal 3

Plan the steps to reaching your goals. For example, if your goal is to have family devotions every night, you need to decide:

- Who will plan it and lead it?
- Where will it take place?
- How are you going to find good material to use?
- By what date will this material be purchased?
- Who will be in charge of getting the family together?
- What will you do when the phone rings during devotions?
- What about nights when you are out or have guests over?

If your goal is to go on a date once a month, you will need to determine:

- Who will plan the date?
- How will you make sure that money is set aside?
- What has to take place on the date for it to be successful? How will that be achieved?
- If the date will be on the last Friday of the month, on what day will you plan it?

Even if your goal is to study the Bible for thirty minutes each morning, several decisions need to be made:

- What will you study?
- What materials will you use?
- What about days you oversleep?

Writing down your plan of action will help clarify your thinking and enable you to modify or eliminate unrealistic goals.

The last step is to determine when you will go back over this list to see how you are doing. It is a good idea to check up on yourselves about a week after your planning retreat.

It takes doing this a few times to get the hang of it. Most couples, on their first planning retreat, tend to set far too many goals and set them way too high. Remember these two principles:

- 1) The more minor the adjustment to your lifestyle, the greater your likelihood of success.
- 2) The fewer changes you make, the greater your likelihood of success.

The value of this approach is that it relieves much of the concern that “if I pursue selflessness, maybe my spouse will never change.” You know that at the retreat you will hear your spouse ask, “How can I improve?”

It also eliminates the “need” to nag each other between planning retreats. When an issue arises, you know you will have a chance to address it at the next planning retreat, so you can overlook it for now. This eliminates 99 percent of nagging, plus it avoids the problem of suppressed nagging that turns into resentment. Most of your complaints end up not even being brought up at the planning retreat, because by then you realize they are insignificant or you forget them altogether. So instead of little things building into an imposing mountain of resentment, they begin fading into oblivion.

One last tip

Think of the planning retreat as work, not as a vacation. If you have the goal of enjoying yourself, then you have expectations for the retreat other than the purpose for which it is intended. If it falls short of those expectations, then you may be disappointed and become upset. The purpose of the retreat is to solve problems, not create new ones.

Premarital Counseling

Premarital counseling is the least helpful type of counseling. If you talk to an engaged couple about whether it is wise for them to get married, they do not have ears to hear—they have already made up their minds. If you give them tips on getting along, there is no context in which to apply the principles and they will be quickly forgotten.

Much better is pre-engagement counseling to help a couple decide whether to become engaged, followed by post-marital counseling after about six months of marriage to help them learn how to get along.

If you do preengagement counseling, make sure that both individuals are strong believers, that the man is a spiritual leader (i.e., the woman is better off spiritually with him than without him), and that both are strong in the four virtues described above.

MIXED MARRIAGES

When there is an unbelieving spouse, most often it is the husband. This is such a prevalent problem that a significant section of the Bible is devoted to addressing it—1 Peter 3:16.

1 Peter 3:12 Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.

That passage is not difficult to interpret. What should a woman do if her husband is an unbeliever? Try to win him *without words*. Devote yourself to a pure, reverent lifestyle, and be submissive and respectful. Attract him into the kingdom of God with your inner beauty.

1 Peter 3:36 Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear.

What about a husband who claims to be a believer but acts like an unbeliever? You cannot know for sure what is in a person’s heart. Only God can perfectly judge whether someone is saved. So to the degree that he acts like an unbeliever, this principle applies—the wife should try to win him over without words by the purity of her life.

Abuse

Every married person is an abuse victim. Anyone who lives in the same house with a sinner is an abuse victim (some more than others, of course).

How should you counsel a victim of abuse? All of the principles previously covered about suffering still apply. In the case where a woman or the children are in danger of death or serious injury, I think it is appropriate for her to leave. That is a personal opinion, not based on any particular Bible passage, but it is consistent with biblical principles.

In the Old Testament God called His people to submit to the king. Yet when Saul was trying to kill David, it was appropriate for David not only to flee but also to deceive Saul and the high priest so he could escape, and even to eat the sacred Bread of the Presence. In Matthew 12 Jesus seemed to sanction what David did. So when life and limb are at significant risk, it is appropriate to flee. It is not appropriate to take revenge or to show disrespect, but it is appropriate to flee.

The Bible never sanctions separation without divorce, so to “leave” means to divorce.³

Chapter Summary

Christian marriages:

Marriage counseling should not offer techniques of manipulation. When working with a couple, focus your energy on whichever spouse is willing to listen, and offer that person advice on how to improve. Do not offer advice on how to cause the spouse to improve (unless it is the advice of 1 Peter 3).

Help the person give up the goal of receiving good treatment and instead pursue the goal of developing these virtues:

- contentment
- forgiveness
- humility
- love

Teach the couple how to plan for improvement.

Premarital counseling:

Make sure that both individuals are strong believers and that the man is a spiritual leader. Emphasize the four virtues listed above.

Mixed marriages:

The believing wife should win over her husband without words by the reverence and purity of her life.

Abuse:

When life and limb are at significant risk, I believe it is appropriate to divorce.

Key passages:

James 4:17

Proverbs 22:3

1 Peter 3:16

Review questions:

1. How do you counsel Christians who are unhappy with how they are being treated by their spouse?

2. Once a couple is on track and growing in the four fundamental areas, what further action should they take?
3. How do you counsel an abuse victim?
4. How do you counsel a woman married to an unbeliever (or to a man who acts like an unbeliever)?

Codependence

Definition

One of the biggest challenges of Biblical Counseling is translating psychological lingo into biblical terminology. Before attempting to translate what the world calls codependence into biblical terms, let's consider the following list of commonly accepted characteristics of codependence. This is the world's description of the "disorder" labeled codependence:

- My good feelings about who I am stem from being liked and accepted by you.
- Your struggle affects my serenity. My mental attention is focused on solving your problems or relieving your pain.
- My mental attention is focused on protecting you and manipulating you to do things my way.
- My self-esteem is bolstered by solving your problems.
- My own hobbies and interests are set aside and my time is spent sharing your hobbies and interests.
- Your clothing and personal appearance are dictated by my desires and I feel you are a reflection of me.
- I'm not aware of how *I* feel; I'm aware of how *you* feel.
- I'm not aware of what *I* want. I ask what *you* want.
- The dreams I have for my future are linked to you.
- My fear of rejection determines what I say or do.
- My fear of your anger determines what I say or do.
- I use giving as a way of feeling safe in our relationship.
- My social circle diminishes as I involve myself with you.
- I put my values aside in order to connect with you.
- I value your opinion and way of doing things more than my own.

- The quality of my life is in relation to the quality of yours.

What Is the Biblical Terminology for These Characteristics?

The items on this list have been jumbled together and slapped with a psychological label. If we sort them into biblical categories, we see that they fall into four categories: fear of man, thinking on earthly things (or seeing life from a worldly perspective), selfishness, and love.

Fear of man

- My good feelings about who I am stem from being liked and accepted by you.
- My own hobbies and interests are set aside, and my time is spent sharing your hobbies and interests.
- My fear of rejection determines what I say or do.
- My fear of your anger determines what I say or do.
- I use giving as a way of feeling safe in our relationship.
- I put my values aside in order to connect with you.
- I value your opinion and way of doing things more than my own.

Scripture calls these behaviors “fear of man.” When you counsel people with these characteristics, point out to them that fear of man is the opposite of trust in God, and it is a trap:

Proverbs 29:25 Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe.

Usually a person exhibits this type of behavior out of a strong desire to be kept safe. A woman, for example, may desperately try to ensure that her worst fear (being left alone) is not realized. Show her that she has fallen into the trap of trusting in man. Rather than bringing her safety, such misplaced trust brings great danger and is a *snare*. True safety comes only when a person’s trust is totally in the Lord.

Isaiah 51:12-13 “I, even I, am he who comforts you. Who are you that you fear mortal men, the sons of men, who are but grass, that you forget the Lord your Maker, who stretched out the heavens.”

It is a slap in the face of God when someone is more concerned about human opinion than God’s assessment. When a person comes to realize this fact, repentance should be followed by a desire to learn to fear God more.

If you are working with a woman who is afraid of losing her boyfriend, help her see that what she fears is not nearly as great as the danger she faces when she puts anyone else in God’s place. If she fears losing her boyfriend more than she fears chastisement from God, that is evidence of a lack of faith. She simply does not believe God’s Word.

When someone is so afraid of losing another person’s favor that she will not do what she knows is right, that other person has taken the place of God in her life. He has become an idol that must be deposed. The solution is to study the goodness of God in order to come to a point of trusting Him—even if His good plan is to take away a valued relationship.

Thinking on earthly things

- Your clothing and personal appearance are dictated by my desires and I feel you are a reflection of me.

- I am not aware of how I feel. I am aware of how you feel.
- I am not aware of what I want—I ask what you want.
- My social circle diminishes as I involve myself with you.

COLOSSIANS 3:12 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, not on earthly things.

Just as the overeater and the anorexic are obsessed with food, and the porn viewer is obsessed with sex, so someone with the characteristics above is obsessed with a person. Any subject that captivates your thinking more than “things above” distracts you from what your mind is supposed to be set on. The solution for anyone who is obsessed with something or someone other than God is this: Learn to discipline your thought life.

Selfishness

- Your behavior is dictated by my desires and I feel you are a reflection of me.
- My mental attention is focused on manipulating you to do things my way.

This type of behavior indicates another problem altogether—simple selfishness disguised as concern for another person. What is needed is humility and selflessness. When counseling people who fit this description, teach them passages such as Philippians 2 so they can learn to stop focusing on self.

Love

- Your struggle affects my serenity. My mental attention is focused on solving your problems or relieving your pain.
- My mental attention is focused on protecting you.
- My self-esteem is bolstered by solving your problems.
- The dreams I have for my future are linked to you.
- The quality of my life is in relation to the quality of yours.

What disease would cause problems such as these? How about love? The characteristics in this list are all good things. Just because the world has lumped them together with certain other sinful things under one title, “codependent,” do not assume they are part of the real problem. When counseling, admonish people to make progress in areas of sinfulness, but make a point of encouraging them in other areas. They should be grateful to God for the good things in their heart. Urge them to maintain and strengthen their love for others.

A Word of Caution

One final word to anyone in a counseling situation: *Don't let the world dictate the categories of your thinking.* When someone comes to you and says, “I have a problem with codependency; what should I do?” it is a mistake to assume all of the problems described in this chapter. The person may have a problem with obsessive thinking but not with manipulation or selfishness. She may have a fear of man rather than fear of God, but none of the other problems. Or she may simply have godly love but someone has told her it is codependency. As always, you need to talk to her, ask questions about what goes on in her mind, and discover where her thinking goes off track, if at all.

Chapter Summary

Biblical terms for characteristics of codependency:

- fear of man
- thinking on earthly things
- selfishness
- love

Key passages:

Proverbs 29:25

Isaiah 51:12

Colossians 3:12

Review question:

How do you counsel a codependent person?