

Marriage & Family ENRICHMENT

Remembering How God Designed It



Gen 2:23-24

- 23 The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man."
- 24 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

INTRODUCTION:

The reason we are in this class is because as a couple, you wish to vow your union to each other before God. That is a very serious step.

Eccl 5:5-6

5 It is better not to vow than to make a vow and not fulfill it.

6 Do not let your mouth lead you into sin. And do not protest to the messenger, "My vow was a mistake." Why should God be angry at what you say and destroy the work of your hands?

(NIV)

A vow is not something to be broken, a vow before God is even more serious. It is not something to be made for the sake of tradition or sentiment.

If we are going to make a serious vow before God, it only makes sense to understand God's view of what we are committing to. It is only logical to look openly at how He says it is possible to live out that vow. And for that reason, we will refer to God's teaching on family, what it means to be a good wife, and what it means to be a good husband.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. FAMILY: HOLDING IT TOGETHER
2. THE GOOD WIFE
3. THE GOOD HUSBAND
4. MARRIAGE KILLERS
5. ABUSE
6. CHILDREN
7. TEENAGE WASTELAND
8. MONEY MATTERS

1. FAMILY: HOLDING IT TOGETHER

It's the first thing you are part of when you enter this world, and it is the last thing you leave. It shapes and molds you before anything else has a chance. This thing ***is the family***. It's in the family we first learn to be cynical or positive, kind or cruel, biased or open. It's the family that paints the first pictures of love and hate. It's in the family where we first learn what it means to be human. The family is ***that*** important!

DISCUSSION POINT

WHAT IS THE IDEAL FAMILY TO YOU?

Family psychologist, Dr. James Dobson, writes this in an article entitled, 'Couples in Crisis':

Western nations are witnessing a continuing epidemic of dysfunctional relationships. A recent study done by sociologists at Rutgers University concluded that the institution of marriage itself appears to be dying.¹ I shudder to contemplate what life will be like (and how children will suffer) if the researchers prove to be right! ...

Only those who have been rejected by a beloved spouse can fully comprehend the tidal wave of pain that crashes into one's life when a relationship ends. Nothing else matters. ...Nothing in human experience can compare with the agony of knowing that the person to whom you pledged eternal devotion has betrayed your trust ... Death itself would be easier to tolerate than being tossed aside like an old shoe.

The good news is; this doesn't have to happen. With the proper wisdom, we can avoid that kind of pain- or at least, going through it *again*.

So what's the 'bonding agent' that allows a marriage to survive? What's the glue that holds our marriages and families together? -We call it 'love', but what is love?

POINT OF DISCUSSION:

HOW DO YOU DEFINE LOVE?

GOD IDEA OF LOVE AND IN THE ROLES OF MEN AND WOMEN

Gen 2:20-24

20 ... But for Adam ***no suitable helper*** was found.

21 So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took ***one of the man's ribs*** and closed up the place with flesh.

22 Then the LORD God ***made a woman from the rib*** he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

23 The man said, "This is ***now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh***; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man."

24 ***For this reason*** a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will ***become one flesh***.

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT

(NIV)

Man is *incomplete* in himself. Someone is designed to make life richer, and the challenges easier to bear. Someone is created from his very flesh- out of his side. It is a picture of equality, partnership, and especially... union.

But something goes wrong-

Gen 3:5-6

5 "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, **knowing good and evil.**"

6 When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, **she took some and ate** it. She also **gave some to her husband**, who was with her, and he ate it.

(NIV)

It's critical that we see what has happened here. Christianity says it is at the root of understanding the human condition as it now exists. The issue is here, is not about eating some kind of fruit. It is that mankind **betrayed** God, and in so doing, twisted human nature.

What does that have to do with your marriage? It is this- we all have faults imbedded in our character because of this. And we take those faults into our relationships. If we remain unaware of this fact, if we let them go unchecked, we will very quickly destroy any hope of meaningful relationships.

God describes the effect of our broken natures like this:

Gen 3:16-19

16 To the woman he said, "I will greatly increase your **pains in childbearing**; with pain you will give birth to children. **Your desire will be for your husband**, and he will **rule over you.**"

17 To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' "Cursed is the ground because of you; **through painful toil** you will eat of it all the days of your life.

18 It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field.

19 By the **sweat of your brow** you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and **to dust** you will return."

(NIV)

POINT OF DISCUSSION

1. DO YOU THINK PEOPLE REALLY HAVE DEFECTS IN THEIR HUMAN NATURE TODAY?
2. WHY OR WHY NOT?

Faults in our nature can come out in various forms of cruelty in a relationship. Noted researcher, Dr. McBurney offers these reasons for cruelty in marriage relationships:

1. ***Cruelty was modeled in childhood.*** We criticize because it's what we know... it's a familiar pattern. (*Remember this as we raise our children.*)

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT

2. **Unresolved anger spills over.** Dealing with conflict isn't easy. As Christians we might even feel it's a sin to get angry at all. Sin isn't the anger; it's the wrong *response* to the anger. As McBurney puts it, "Beneath... demeaning comments are areas of disappointment or tension."
3. **Individual insecurity breeds cruelty.** It's a common tendency, when a person feels inadequate; they lift themselves up by putting others down... especially people close to them.
4. **Passive guilt can be used to provoke a response.** One person is angry below the surface, so they deliberately provoke the other person. *Spite talk* is an ineffective way of trying to vent pain.
5. **Fear of emotional closeness.** Intimacy creates vulnerability. Admitting the desire to be loved can be scary, especially if there's the chance of rejection. Some people survive by maintaining a distance. They perform a kind of painful dance of emotionally stepping close and then pushing away. But if the dance continues, it brings terrible consequences. It erodes the self-confidence of the mate, and it teaches the children of the family to take on the same pattern of being inconsiderate and unkind.

Cruelty nullifies real love. It dissolves the glue that will hold your family together. But according to God, **what is real love?**

1 Cor 13:2-11

2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but **have not love, I am nothing.**

3 If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I **gain nothing.**

4 Love is **patient**, love is **kind**. It does **not envy**, it does **not boast**, it is **not proud**.

5 It is **not rude**, it is **not self-seeking**, it is **not easily angered**, it **keeps no record of wrongs**.

6 Love does **not delight in evil** but **rejoices with the truth**.

7 It **always protects**, **always trusts**, **always hopes**, **always perseveres**.

8 **Love never fails**. ...

11 When I **was a child**, I talked **like a child**, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I **put childish ways behind me**.

(NIV)

What is love according to God's view?

It is **patient and kind**. What is patience? **Patience** is when you have the right, or at least the urge, to blast your partner, **but you don't**. **Why?** Because you are *always protecting* their dignity, you are *always hoping* they'll get it right. You are *persevering*. ... **Kindness, not self-seeking, not keeping score, holding your temper, and protecting instead**- these are things you choose to do.

Our culture speaks of love as a powerful emotional attachment. But if it is *only* emotional, we have no control. -We *fall* in love. We *fall out* of love. That is not what God calls love. **Love is a choice**.

Here is a great revelation: **You can choose to love**. You *choose* who will come first in a relationship. You choose to protect or attack.

Now, don't get this wrong- this is **not to say you're a doormat**. Love can be tough. In cases like abuse, or codependency, real love demands there will be change. But *real* love never works from selfish interest. God guarantees a love that will never fail. But you have to understand, God is talking love by **His definition**.

POINT OF DISCUSSION:

1. HOW DOES THIS IDEA OF LOVE DIFFER FROM WHAT OUR CULTURE TELLS YOU IS LOVE?

2. HOW DOES IT DIFFER FROM THE WAY YOU PRACTICE LOVE NOW?

But how do we get this kind of love?

The **first thing** we've got to do is- **go to the source**. There is no Biblical teaching that says you can develop this quality of love **on your own**- no one can do it. Why? -Because human nature is 'broken out of the box'. We all have aspects of our nature that tend to sabotage our own love relationships. The good news is; God is able to fix that. But that empowerment is not possible unless He is present in our lives.

Secondly, we've have to-**Grow up**. 1 Cor. says you have to leave behind the **childish ways**. The discussion we are having today is little more than planting a seed of thought. The seed is from an un failing and perfect God, but it's still, just a seed. To know the real power and wisdom of love, we have to grow up **in its use**.

Rom 12:2

Do not **conform any longer** to the pattern of this world, but be **transformed by the renewing of your mind**. Then **you will be able** to test and approve what God's will is-- his good, pleasing and perfect will.

(NIV)

The Bible refers to this as transformation. It is the empowerment to leave behind old patterns.

McBurney offers these practical steps in our transformed thinking:

1. **Be aware of how you have been treating each other**. It's amazing how blind we can become to our own destructive patterns. Keep in mind, the process of discovery may not be easy or painless. Ask a trusted third party or a counselor what they see. *Start praying together*.
2. **Respect each other**. A few years ago, there was a study done on long-lasting marriages. And despite the incredible variety in the couples, one thing was common to every one of them- an uncommon level of respect. Turn that around and do you know what it says? No healthy marriage has a **hope of existing without genuine and mutual respect**.
3. **Be a positive, confident, effective partner**. Be your spouse's greatest fan. Be your kids' greatest fan. As McBurney puts it, 'Nit-picking and criticism will slowly, but surely, reduce your mate to a person of insecurity and self-doubt.'" And as we've learned, that's the path to cruelty.

Every marriage will see conflicts, we can't avoid them all. But we can learn how to **resolve** them. Is it a serious effort? You bet! But just look at the alternative! Family was designed to be a love-relationship.

3 CHALLENGES:

1. *Take the time* to reflect on God's definition of love. (1Cor 13)
2. *Make a conscious decision to* **choose to love your spouse that way**.
3. *Open yourself to the* only source that can empower your decision in this kind of love- God, Himself, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

POINTS OF DISCUSSION:

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT

1. WHAT DO YOU THINK WILL BE THE MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR IN MAKING YOUR MARRIAGE A SUCCESS?

2. WHAT WAS THE MOST CHALLENGING POINT FOR YOU IN OUR DISCUSSION TODAY?

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT

2. THE GOOD WIFE

Although the *majority* of women will spend the *majority* of their lives as wives, our culture offers no working definition of what makes a *good one*. Every young woman is left to formulate her own ideas, influenced by pop psychology, market-driven magazines, and the entertainment industry. No wonder there's barely a 50% chance her marriage will survive! ...But the good news is; God doesn't leave us floundering.

POINT OF DISCUSSION

1. WHAT IS YOUR IDEA OF A 'GOOD WIFE'?

Scripture goes into great detail describing the 'good wife.' And we find one of the fullest descriptions in **Proverbs 31:10**.

The passage might be 3000 years old, but it reads like a description of today's 'super mom'. For the sake of let's summarize the highlights:

Prov 31:10-31

- 10 **A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth** far more than rubies.
- 11 Her **husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value.**
- 12 **She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life.**
- 13 She ... **works with eager hands...**
- 15 ... **she provides food for her family ...**
- 17 She sets about her **work vigorously,** ...
- 18 She sees that her trading is **profitable,** and her lamp does not go out at night...
- 20 She **opens her arms to the poor and ... to the needy.**
- 21 **When it snows, she has no fear for her household;** for all of them are **clothed ...**
- 23 **Her husband is respected** at the city gate...
- 25 She is **clothed with strength and dignity...**
- 26 She **speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction ...**
- 28 Her **children arise and call her blessed;** her **husband also, and he praises her. ...**
- 30 **Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.**
- 31 **Give her the reward she has earned,** and let her works bring her **praise at the city gate.**

(NIV)

Now obviously, every woman can't be Martha Stewart, Marilyn Monroe, and Mother Theresa combined. The purpose of this passage isn't to offer an ideal so unrealistic it only leaves you feeling inadequate. It's to serve as a list of qualities God defines as 'goodness' in a wife. **So, what qualities do we find in here?**

✓ **By God's definition, goodness in a wife means:**

She is worthy- v 10- The proverb says a good wife is worth more than precious jewels. Think about this: Having the quality of goodness as a wife is worth more than the most precious things, materially, on this earth. Ladies, as you wrestle with your value and purpose as a woman... as you juggle home and career, consider this opening statement from God.

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT

She is trustworthy- V11-12- Her husband has all the confidence in the world in her. Why? Because *she only brings him good, never harm*. There's a lot of ways to do harm, especially to someone close to you- by action, by *lack* of action, by a poison word, or withholding the right words. And it only takes a *few times* to destroy someone's confidence.

She is conscientious- V13- She doesn't just work, she works with 'eager' hands. What makes a person eager? A few people will work hard out of duty, but almost everyone works hard when they see *direct value*. A good wife is eager because she is wise enough to see the direct value in what she is doing as a wife.

She is enterprising- V16-18- Being enterprising simply means you are productive in your abilities. And you seek God's help in rounding out the weak areas. Combine that with wisdom and discretion and you will be 'profitable.'

She is compassionate- V20- Compassion is the product of Godly wisdom. It is Godly wisdom that turns *your* trials into *empathy* instead of *emptiness*. You empathize with the struggles that come up in other people's lives. Your nature knows compassion for one reason; the God of compassion lives inside you.

She is forward-looking- V21- Any financial councilor will tell you- *it's not how much you make, it's how you spend it*. A pastor at Indiana Wesleyan spoke about the grounds keeper there from 15 years ago. He put his children through college on a family income of some \$20,000 a year. How? -By ***looking ahead***. -By living wisely. God says a good wife will have that same quality.

She is an effective supporter- V23- Our passage is talking about the wife, and then there's this abrupt switch to the husband. He's sitting at the city gates. In ancient times, the gates were 'city hall.' All the important magistrates worked there. So, the husband has done very well in life. That's great! But what does that have to do with the wife? - Great men develop in large part because of great wives. *Great men need great supporters!*

She is a woman of character- V25- She has ***strength*** and she has ***dignity***. Here is how the dictionary defines dignity: 1. The quality of *being worth* esteem or honor 2. Proper pride and self-respect. A good wife does not devalue or cheapen herself. Because she sees her value through God's eyes and that is the gateway to *everything else*.

She is a woman of spiritual intellect- v 26- She is *wise* and what's more, she is able to communicate that wisdom. When the ancient Hebrew used the word 'wise' this is what he or she meant:

WISE- transliterates: ***hakam***

Religious experience was not a routine, a ritual, or faith experience. It was viewed as a ***mastery of the art of living*** in accordance with God's expectations. ...Wisdom was a process of ***attainment*** and not an ***accomplishment***. (*It is; what you are- not what you have done.*)

She is 'well developed'- If we say well developed in our culture, the first thing that comes to mind is breast augmentation and liposuction. But that is not God's idea of true development. In fact He says- v30 ***Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.***

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT

Take a look at these virtues- wisdom, compassion, skills, and disciplined focus. These things don't start a year before you marry. But on the other hand, it is never too late to change... if God is doing the transforming. It's a life-long pursuit. You are never done '*becoming*.' **Every day is a choice.**
POINT OF DISCUSSION

1. **For you only:** AS A WIFE, WHICH OF THESE QUALITIES ARE A PARTICULAR CHALLENGE FOR YOU?

To share: WHICH CHALLENGES DO YOU FEEL ARE GREATEST FOR WIVES?

2. **For you only:** AS A HUSBAND, WHICH DO YOU SEE YOUR WIFE STRUGGLING WITH? HOW CAN YOU HELP HER? **To share:** HOW CAN A HUSBAND HELP?

PRACTICAL STEPS FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT

✓ **But how does someone become this kind of 'goodness'?** Let me share a few critical points from the New Testament.

Eph 5:21-22

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. (NIV)

Now there's a nasty word to modern ears- '*submit*'. But before we reject it, let's look at what '*submit*' means according to the Bible. Let's go back to the beginning:

Gen 2:18

The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will ***make a helper suitable*** for him."

(NIV)

The very first description of a wife is a '***suitable helper***.' What does that mean exactly? Let's go ahead several thousand years and find another use of this term:

Heb 13:6

So we say with confidence, "The ***Lord*** is my ***helper***; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?" (NIV)

Wives, do you know what this means? **The very word God uses to describe Himself, He bestows on *you* as a title.** Such honor is found nowhere else in Scripture! The concept of '*submission*' isn't a statement of *rank*, but of *functionality*... of ***mission***. It is the focus of ***helping*** out of real love.

Here is a beautiful definition of the Biblical '*helper*':

'Helper' is an aide to man who allows him to do what he could not possibly do on his own.

The word refers to the Spirit of God, and it refers to the role of wife.

POINT OF DISCUSSION

1. HOW DO YOU UNDERSTAND THE WORD 'SUBMIT' AS WE'VE JUST STUDIED IT?

2. HOW DO YOU AGREE, OR DISAGREE?

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT

So, **how does a wife carry out this noble mission of 'helper'?** Let me share an interesting passage:

Eph 5:33

However, each one of you also **must love his wife** as he loves himself, and the wife must **respect her husband**.

(NIV)

Isn't it curious, the husband is commanded to '**love**', but the wife is commanded to '**respect**'. Why? -Because, men interpret **love through respect**. A wife **can do a whole lot of things right**, and **nullify it all by simply denying respect**.

If you do **not** communicate respect to your husband, if you don't teach your children to communicate respect, you are doing this: You are chipping away at the core of your **husband's identity**. And regardless of what legitimate complaints you might have, God's Word says **you** are failing at the most basic definition of 'goodness' as a wife.

✓ **So wives, how do you communicate respect in 'man language'?**

Don't try to "change" him- Ladies, it seems it's a natural tendency for women to want to change their men into **their** idea of what's right.

Supporting your spouse to *grow* is the very definition of 'goodness.' But no human being has the power to *transform* another. God reserves that power for Himself through the Holy Spirit. Nagging, manipulating- trying to change the essence of a man only communicates lack of respect.

Allow him the room to lead- Ephesians 5 defines man as the head. Once again, it is not *superiority*, but *function*. Sheryl Wunder of *Family Life Today* says-

Look into the homes of dominant wives and you will find resigned husbands, daughters that will take on a model of overbearing wives, and sons of weak character. If you read the social research, you'll find she's right; the incidence of gender confusion is significantly higher in families with domineering wives and resigned husbands. Scripture says a good wife *expects* and *believes* in her husband to **lead** his family.

Mrs. Wunder offers wives some practical tips in this department. She says ***a man won't compete for leadership***. Your husband's response to nagging is to either give in, or dig in; and both have negative consequences. *Giving in* simply builds deep resentment, and *digging in* will cause him to refuse what is right, even when he realizes it.

And allowing *to lead* is also **allowing to fail**. Your husband may not accomplish some things to perfection. He may even make some serious mistakes. But constantly watching over his shoulder or throwing up past failures will only harm **your** cause, not help it. **It is in your best interest to build up your husband in as genuine a manner as possible-**

Prov 14:1

The wise woman builds her house, but with her own hands the foolish one tears hers down.

(NIV)

Learn to listen. When a poll was taken of husband's complaints, #1 was- ***Wives tend to talk too much and listen too little***. Traditionally, men are the less vocal in a relationship. But the complaint of many men was, even when they **do** try to open up, their wives cut them off in the conversation. There was a sense their wives weren't really hearing, and so the man withdraws. More than wives

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT

realize, their husbands do look for their support. They may not admit it, but they want a confidante in their wives.

Despite all the pressures life brings, ***maintain a love life.***

And there are two very important reasons for this. Dr. James Dobson explains the female and male side in very frank language. Since we are trying to understand the man I summarize from that side:

Women should also understand how their husbands' needs differ from their own. When sexual response is blocked in males, they experience an accumulating physiological pressure that demands release. ... Hormonal influences sensitize the man to all sexual stimuli.

Whereas a particular woman would be of little interest to him when he is satisfied, he may be eroticized just to be in her presence when he is in a state of deprivation.

That's not to say every husband will cheat, but wives, you need to realize your husband's own physiology can work against him in ways yours doesn't.

Jill Renitch in her book, 'To Have and to Hold', offers a second reason of which many wives may not be aware: Studies show that typically, a man's sexual acceptance by his spouse is part of his **core identity**- for a wife to follow a pattern of sexual rejection is to tear at the very core of her husband's identity. As Sheryl Wunder puts it, 'Ladies, we are not doing our husbands any favors by merely *accommodating* them sexually.'

A wife- of strength, and dignity must understand what love means **to her partner** as well as herself. It is vital for a blessed family. Love... respect... it is **a choice**, it is a wisely understood **objective**. Real love **isn't passive**; it is **active**. It is **creative**. And it must happen at all levels of living and union.

POINT OF DISCUSSION

1. WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT FACT YOU FEEL WAS DISCUSSED TODAY?
2. AS A WIFE, WHAT ARE YOUR HURDLES IN BEING THE BIBLICAL 'GOOD WIFE'?
3. HUSBAND, WHAT IS A GOOD WIFE TO YOU?
4. ARE THERE ANY POINTS YOU STRONGLY AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH?

3. THE GOOD HUSBAND

Gen 1:27

27 So God created man in his own image... male and female he created them.

(NIV)

Last week we discovered how that reflection works for the wife. She is meant to be a reflection of the Holy Spirit, the *'suitable helper'*. -But what about the husband? ***What is he designed to reflect? Or to ask another way...***

WHAT MAKES A GOOD HUSBAND?

Ephesians 5 is a great anchor for the husband.

Eph 5:23-31

23 For the husband is the ***head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church***, his body, of which he is the Savior.

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

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

26 to ***make her holy, cleansing her*** by the washing with water through the word,

27 and to ***present her*** to himself as a radiant church, ***without stain or wrinkle*** or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

28 ***In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives*** as their own bodies. ***He who loves his wife loves himself.***

Men, as husbands you have the awesome privilege, potential, and mandate to ***reflect Jesus Christ, Himself***. And in this reflection you are called to be 'the head', but...

What exactly does v23 mean by 'the head'?

Men, we'd love to read as far as '*the husband is the head of the wife*', and then stop. "See honey, the Bible says I'm the head and you need to submit."

Sorry guys, it doesn't work that way. Before the sentence is even finished this 'headship' is given a very specific qualification. You are head as '***Christ is the head of the church***'. And this takes us into two very serious areas: the issue of **leadership** and the issue of **responsibility**. To understand ourselves we need to ask two basic questions:

a. How does it mean to be responsible?

John 6:38-39

For I have come down from heaven ***not to do my will*** but to do the ***will of him who sent me***.

And this is ***the will of him*** who sent me, that ***I shall lose none of all that he has given me***,...

(NIV)

Jesus was able to say, "***I have not lost one of those you gave me.***" **John 18:9**

When the **drama of Apollo 13** began to unfold, and the spacecraft was in serious trouble, the flight engineers moaned, 'This is going to be the worst disaster in NASA history!' But the missions chief said, 'Gentlemen, I disagree, I believe this is going to be our finest hour. ***No one is going to die on my watch.***'

Can you see yourself as a husband who says this about his family- "No one's going to die eternally on my watch"? -Or in the words of Jesus, "***I have not lost one of those you gave me***"?

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT

Matt 16:26 –says-

What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?

Let's change a few words just to make it personal to the husbands today:

What good will it be for a husband if he gains the whole world [providing a beautiful house, two cars and every possible toy], yet forfeits the souls of his wife and children? Or what can a husband give in exchange for the souls of his wife and his sons or daughters?

Take a look at the culture- Half of all families **will not** survive- the roles of husband and wife are questioned by arrangements like cohabitation and same-sex marriage. Children of failed families to the 3rd and 4th generation understandably doubt true marriage is even possible at all. Being married in a church is often an empty status symbol and is quickly becoming neither status nor symbol. The family is dying... and husbands carry the responsibility!

POINT OF DISCUSSION

WHAT DO YOU FEEL ARE THE HUSBAND'S RESPONSIBILITY IN A MARRIAGE?

WHAT IS A HUSBAND'S SPIRITUAL RESPONSIBILITY?

b. How does a husband lead?

Let's start with a perfect example of leadership in a loving relationship? How did Jesus lead?

John 13:1-5

1 It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world ...

So God in the flesh- wraps a towel around His waste and comes to the supper table... the last meal He will ever eat. It should be a special honor. But instead He begins washing dirty feet. He carries out the task of a slave to each person who calls Him their leader. **Why?**

Matt 20:25-28

25 ... "You know that the **rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them**, and their high officials exercise authority over them.

26 **Not so with you. Instead**, whoever wants to become **great among you must be your servant**, ...

28 **just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve**, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

(NIV)

Husbands, have a mandate not to *simply lead their families*... but to lead through **servicing**.

Husbands, like Jesus- are called to be **'servant-leaders.'**

HOW DOES A HUSBAND BECOME A SERVANT LEADER?

It all starts in this foundational act- '**Love your wives.**' -V25- But guess what, that's not enough! You must love your wives '**as Christ loves the church.**' Now just **what does that mean?**

1 Pet 3:7

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT

Husbands, in the same way **be considerate** as you live with your wives, and treat them with **respect** as the **weaker partner [sex]** and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that **nothing will hinder your prayers.**

(NIV)

Now, here's another term that can cause the postmodern woman to bristle. Peter refers to them as the **weaker partner** based solely on their gender. Well, before we beat poor Peter into the ground, let's follow his line of thought. We'll discover just what it ***means to love as Christ loves the Church.***

❖ ***This Christ-love means- not hurting***

The word, 'weaker' in the original Greek was 'asthenes'. Here's the meaning:

Literally 'strengthless'. Of **physical weakness** by *comparative* degree.

Is this a fair assessment? It's a biological fact that the male hormone, testosterone causes a building of muscle tissue and makes behavior more aggressive. It is a biological capacity God has given the male for His design in life. But like every capacity God gives, it can be abused.

So, is Peter being chauvinistic, or simply realistic? Every few weeks our church gets a flyer from 'Sheltering Wings' in Danville. The ministry is for one purpose, to give wives, and their children, a safe place to go because of the physical danger posed by a male partner.

A PEEK OF CURRENT EVENTS:

The Tuesday night news in South Bend covered a special YWCA dinner. It was to raise awareness on the rise of domestic violence in the Mishawaka area. And as a graphic reminder, they had plaques with little yellow ribbons on a table for every woman recently murdered through domestic violence- and the length of that table was disturbing. As our culture continues to take God out of our families... as men abandon their design in God, we are reaping a murderous whirlwind.

Husbands, we need to realize, there are less dramatic ways of hurting our wives. The Christian commentator, Charles Barclay writes, "**The cruelty which is hardest to bear is often not deliberate but the product of sheer thoughtlessness.**"

God calls you as a husband to be **considerate**. Listen to how the dictionary defines this word:

Having or showing regard for the feelings of another- thoughtful- well considered, deliberate.

God calls the husband to *deliberately* give regard to the feelings of his wife, then to *show* regard. 'Goodness' in the husband is sensitivity to his wife's emotional and physical needs while seeing her as a spiritual equal. Then Peter ends this thought with a very stern warning, "**so that nothing will hinder your prayers.**"

The Christian writer, Bigg puts it this way:

"The sighs of the injured wife come between the husband's prayers and God's hearing."

Husbands: **You can't be right with yourself, or with God and be wrong with your wife.**

❖ ***Leading means -Going beyond not hurting to cultivating her growth***

Listen to the plans of Jesus in verse 26:

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT

to **make her holy, cleansing her** ... to **present her** ... **without stain or wrinkle** or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

The goal as a husband should be **to cultivate the very best in your bride?**

Husbands, God says you are responsible for your wife's welfare- especially her spiritual welfare.

❖ **LEADING IN LOVE MEANS –The willingness to sacrifice**

Mark 14:23-24

Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them... "This is my blood of the covenant, which is **poured out for many,**" ...

(NIV)

For Christ to do what He came to do, involved self-sacrifice. Husbands, we also need to sacrifice in order to **let our wives grow**. Christ poured Himself out. Sometimes we have to 'pour ourselves out.' You come home tired from work. But your wife is tired too. She's been working outside the home, or at home watching the kids. Self-sacrifice may mean taking the kids for a while and giving her some needed down time.

When you're **tempted to resent** the opportunity to let her rest, or grow, or heal *at your expense*, consider this: When Jesus died on The Cross for you- it wasn't good for Him, it wasn't convenient, and it wasn't what He deserved. **That** is your example to follow as husband.

❖ **LEADING IN LOVE MEANS- Loving despite the response**

Let's take a moment to look down from The Cross through Christ's eyes:

Matt 27:39-44

Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, "... save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!" In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him... In the same way the robbers who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

(NIV)

And what was His response?

Luke 23:34

"Father, **forgive them,** for they do not know what they are doing." (NIV)

(NIV)

Do you see the principle of real love here?

Loving by God's definition means **choosing to love, despite the response**. Real love is a resolve. It may be tender or tough, but it is always in the *best interest of the loved-one*. Jerry Wunder of *Family Life* puts it like this;

Our actions are real love- not those because they *feel right*, but because they *are right*. -They are the *right* choices *despite* the response.

❖ **LEADING IN LOVE MEANS- Taking the initiative.**

It means taking the first step in things like **forgiveness**. Let me share a side drama of The Cross with you:

Luke 22:31-32

31 "Simon, Simon, **Satan has asked to sift you as wheat.**

32 But I have prayed for you, Simon, that **your faith may not fail.** And **when you have turned back,** strengthen your brothers."

(NIV)

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT

Look at what Jesus is saying here! "Peter, you are going to fail me. But I want you to know in advance; I forgive you. And you still have a part in my life."

Now look at this summary of Mark 16:1-7

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene... entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe ... and ... he said ... go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'"

(NIV)

'And Peter', did you catch that? Not only does Jesus *forgive in advance* for a 'strong' betrayal, he makes a special effort to reassure Peter afterwards. Husbands... as 'servant-leaders'- that's taking initiative! That's taking the first step in those hard things. That is your role.

POINTS OF DISCUSSION

1. HUSBAND, WHAT DO YOU SEE AS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES IN LEADING THROUGH SERVING?

2. WIFE, IN WHAT WAYS COULD YOUR HUSBAND HELP YOU- GROW... REST... HEAL... FEEL LOVED?

WHAT PRACTICAL STEPS CAN A HUSBAND TAKE TO SHOW THIS KIND OF LOVE?

1. ***Become a student of your wife-*** study her

Find things out- What is the most important to her. What's her greatest concern right now? What would make life easier for her at this point in life? Here's an idea, how about shutting off the TV for a night, and finding out.

2. ***Encourage her abilities-***

Do you know what your wife is good at? Do you encourage those abilities? Do you praise or challenge her to reach the next level?

3. ***Communicate***

Demands will swallow your time if you don't make a deliberate effort- make a date to communicate.

4. ***Romance her way***

Last week we talked about the man, sexually. On the other side, Dobson makes the point that a man can be done before a woman has even gotten her mind off the kids and the challenges of the day.

"Husbands be considerate of your wives."

Surprise her with something that says you still love and appreciate her. Guys, it doesn't have to be a major production. A note on the fridge, a simple card, flowers for no special reason... small things are important.

5. ***Be trustworthy***

28 ***...husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.***

The world is full of beautiful women who are ***not*** your wife. Men, make a covenant with your heart, and with your eyes. You don't have to look twice. And you don't have to look long.

Matt 5:27-28

27 "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.'

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT

28But I tell you that anyone who **looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.**

(NIV)

Internet porn is the fastest growing and most insidious vice in our culture today. All across this country, men have become addicted, behind their office doors. Voyeurism, eroticism is only a click away.

Husband, if you are having trouble with this, make yourself accountable to someone and break the cycle. - Jesus calls it adultery. Pornography and infidelity kill marriages. You cannot reflect Christ and betray your wife. You are Jesus or Judas.

6. *Be joined to your wife spiritually*

Statistics show, being a church member will not save your marriage. Divorce in the church equals the world. However, when families simply pray together routinely- the failure rate drops to around 5%.

POINT OF DISCUSSION

1. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE SPIRITUALLY RESPONSIBLE? -AS A HUSBAND? -AS A WIFE?

3. WITH WHAT FACTS OF TODAY'S DISCUSSION DO YOU AGREE, OR DISAGREE?

4. WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT FACT WE DISCUSSED?

4. MARRIAGE KILLERS

The renowned Christian, family psychologist, Dr. James Dobson, was asked that very question. And this morning we're going to explore a summary of Dr. Dobson's response through the lens of Scripture. After a lifetime of family counseling and ministry, here are the **top 10 killers** listed by Dobson:

1. THE LIST

#1 KILLER: Over-commitment and physical exhaustion-

When asked the greatest **threat to family stability**, this is what Dobson says counselors face with disturbing regularity:

The scenario involves a vulnerable woman who depends on her husband to meet her emotional needs and a workaholic man who has little time for family responsibilities. Year after year she reaches for him and finds he's not there. She nags, complains, cries, and attacks him for his failures- to no avail. He is carrying the load of three men in his business or profession and can't figure out how to keep that enterprise going while providing what his wife needs. As time goes by, she becomes increasingly angry, which drives him even further into his workaday world. He is respected and successful there. And thereafter he is even less accessible to her. Then one day, to her husband's shock, this woman reaches a breaking point and either leaves him for someone else or files for divorce.

From the first moments of marriage, it is critical we understand what is really important, and live those priorities. What standard of living is high enough? How many overtime hours at the expense of family hours? How high up the career ladder is high enough?

Or to ask it another way: In twenty years, what will be more precious to you; a fancier office, or a relationship with your wife or children, deepened by twenty years of meaningful connection? The answer starts now.

POINTS OF DISCUSSION

WHAT IS FINANCIAL SUCCESS FOR YOUR FAMILY –INCOME? –LUXURIES? -HOUSING? -LEISURE TIME?

Eccl 3:1

1There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven:

There is a time for every basic act of living, like earning a living, and there is a time to refrain from it to do something else. God has a promise here-

Eccl 8:5-6

Whoever obeys his command **will come to no harm**, and the **wise heart will know the proper time** and procedure.

For there is a proper time and procedure for every matter.

Balance is the key. -To balance means to set priorities. Setting wise priorities means truly *understanding* what's important. Understanding what's truly important comes by looking through the eyes of truth- that is the eye's of God, Himself. Doing everything **in its time** reduces stress ... the stress that rips the joy from life and marriage.

#2 KILLER: Excessive credit and conflict over how money will be spent-

Ecc 7:12

12 Wisdom is a shelter as money is a shelter, but the advantage of knowledge is this: that wisdom preserves the life of its possessor.

(NIV)

God tells us where we're supposed to be storing up real treasure- with Him. We all want nice things, but when Christians bury themselves in debt in order to gratify themselves with things they can't afford- it isn't just a money problem, it's a *spiritual* problem. Money can be a shelter or it can be a deathblow to your marriage- the difference is wisdom.

POINT OF DISCUSSION

WHAT DO YOU TREASURE MOST REGARDING YOUR FAMILY?

WHAT DO YOU FEEL YOUR PARTNER TREASURES MOST?

#3 KILLER: Selfishness-

James 3:16

For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

(NIV)

What exactly is selfishness? Here's how the dictionary defines it:

1 too much concerned with one's own welfare or interests and having little or no concern for others; self-centered **2** showing or prompted by self-interest¹

If we could look down the line of every evil action back to the dawn of time, do you know what we'd find? *Self-centeredness... self-interest* would be somewhere at the heart of it. A gratifying marriage hinges on each partner putting the other first. So what could be deadlier than selfishness? Unfortunately, it is so embedded in our human nature that it is the first thing we do, the last thing we see, and the hardest thing to admit.

Here is an incredible list of killers:

Gal 5:19-21

19 The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery;

20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions

21 and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

(NIV)

Think about it: Selfishness is ranked up there with orgies and worshiping idols, even witchcraft! Why? -Because *selfishness* is a murderer.

POINT OF DISCUSSION

1. *For you only:* HOW HAVE YOU BEEN SELFISH? *To share:* **LIST 3 COMMON AREAS OF SELFISHNESS-**

¹Excerpted from *Compton's Interactive Encyclopedia*. Copyright (c) 1994, 1995 Compton's NewMedia, Inc. All Rights Reserved

2. *For you only:* HOW DO YOU FEEL YOU WERE THE VICTIM OF SELFISHNESS IN YOUR MARRIAGE?

3. WHAT HAVE YOU DONE ABOUT SELFISHNESS- YOURS? YOUR PARTNER'S?
To share: MAKE 3 SUGGESTIONS FOR COMBATTING SELFISHNESS-

#4 KILLER: Unhealthy relationships with in-laws-

The Pharisees were experts at loaded questions and divorce was a big one.

Mark 10:2-9

2 Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?"

And here's where the conversation ends up-

6 "But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.'

7'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, ...and the **two will become one flesh.**' ...

(NIV)

Do you see what happened here? A question on **divorce** to Jesus, ends with the **in-laws**. One of the greatest wedding gifts you can give yourselves- is to acknowledge the relationship has **changed** with your parents. Until this point, the top loyalty of the young man and woman was their parents. Then they pledged themselves to each other before God, and everything changed. You are now 'one flesh.' And that is especially important when children enter the equation. Realize, and help your parents, and grandparents realize- how they view you as their married children, 'one flesh' will determine whether they are a *support*, or a *stress* to your relationship and the raising of your children.

DISCUSSION POINT

For you only: HOW WAS YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR PARENTS BEFORE YOU WERE MARRIED?

For you only: HOW HAS IT CHANGED?

For you only: HOW DO YOUR PARENTS FEEL ABOUT YOUR PARTNER? -YOUR IN-LAWS?

To share: **WHAT CAN YOU DO TO ENFORCE A POSITIVE IMAGE OF BEING "ONE FLESH" TO YOUR PARENTS? -TO YOUR IN-LAWS?**

#5 KILLER: Unrealistic expectations-

It's kind of a funny thing; even though 100% of marriages are imperfect, many newly weds feel that somehow *they'll beat the odds*. Expecting a perfect marriage between two imperfect people is to expect the impossible. And unfortunately ladies, research shows that unrealistic expectations are especially true among *American women*. Dr. Dobson puts the result this way, "**The consequent disappointment is an emotional minefield.**"

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT

The **book of Ruth** is a touching story of a young woman whose husband dies and the only deeply loving relationship in her life is with her mother-in-law, Naomi. Listen to this vow Ruth makes to Naomi:

Ruth 1:16-17

...Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me."

(NIV)

Husbands, wives... how many more marriages would survive... how many would remain vital if this was the **one** expectation we held for our union before God.

POINT OF DISCUSSION

1. WHAT DO YOU EXPECT FROM YOUR MARRIAGE?
2. WHAT DO YOU EXPECT SPECIFICALLY FROM YOUR PARTNER?
3. HOW HAVE YOUR EXPECTATIONS CHANGED OVER TIME?
4. DO YOU FEEL YOUR PARTNER'S EXPECTATIONS ARE REALISTIC?

#6 KILLER: Invasion of personal space-

Here is a reality that's proven over and over again: **Insecure** partners are destined to destroy the relationship by **suffocation**. In their insecurity, they try to build a cage around their partner, and the bars are made of envy and jealousy. Let's go back to Galatians.

Gal 5:19-21

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: ... discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions... I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

The insecure partner becomes threatened even by the other's innocent relationships. It interferes with their selfish ambition to possess their partner. In their jealousy, they fly into fits of rage. If that describes you in any way let me emphasize this: With all due haste, deal with your insecurity. Bring it before God. Ask God to bring you to wise counsel. And this is why: **You will never have a long, loving relationship until this weakness is healed.** Even if you move on to a second, third, or fourth union- you will eventually suffocate them all. As Dobson puts it, "Love must be free, and it must be confident."

POINT OF DISCUSSION

1. ARE YOU SECURE IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP?
2. WHY OR WHY NOT?
3. WHAT CAN YOU DO TO RELIEVE YOUR INSECURITY? -YOUR PARTNER'S INSECURITY?

#7 KILLER: Sexual frustration especially combined with the greener grass of infidelity-

Prov 9:17-18

"Stolen water is sweet; food eaten in secret is delicious!" But little do they know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of the grave.

(NIV)

Several years ago, the family stopped in a health food store in the Boston area. And in our never-ending quest for guilt-free sweets, Kathy picked up some delicious looking carob bars. We were hungry and as she unwrapped that bar, it looked like the tastiest chocolate. And I'm thinking, "Yummy, I've got to talk her out of a bite of that." And she sinks her teeth into this bar, and as she pulls it away, we look to see what delicious filling is in that bar. But what we see instead, are all these little spiders coming out. ...I decided I didn't want a bite after all. Kathy has never gotten over that bar yet!

A sexual hunger that satisfies itself in infidelity tastes sweet at first, but eventually *the spiders come out*. The dead are there. Every affair embraces the grave.

POINTS OF DISCUSSION

For you only: **HAVE YOU BEEN CONFRONTED WITH TEMPTATION IN YOUR MARRIAGE?**

For you only: **HOW DID YOU DEAL WITH IT?**

To share: **HAVE YOU WITNESSED WHAT UNFAITHFULNESS CAN DO?**

To share: **AFTER LOOKING AT GOD'S WORD, WHAT CAN YOU DO TO DEFEND YOURSELF – YOUR PARTNER AGAINST TEMPTATION?**

#8 KILLER: Dramatic shift in career-

Career failure is especially devastating to men. Men have such a strong tendency to define themselves by what they do. So, when they lose a career, they lose self-value. And when we lose self-value, we tend to lose value in everything close to us. But failure isn't the only danger. Dramatic success can be just as dangerous.

Stresses- negative or positive, can cause a spouse to lose grip on their marriage. It's no wonder Solomon wrote:

Prov 30:8

... give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread.

(NIV)

Edward Fitzgerald once said, "One of the saddest pages kept by the recording angel is the record of souls that have been damned by success."

POINT OF DISCUSSION

1. HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED A DRAMATIC CAREER SHIFT? -YOUR PARTNER?

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT

2. WHAT STRESSES DID YOU EXPERIENCE?
3. WHAT CAN YOU DO... WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO HELP RELIEVE THE STESSES?

#9 KILLER: Alcohol and substance abuse-

In our indulgent culture, few things do more damage than substance abuse. Substance abuse destroys **the individual**; it dissolves them into an empty shell. And if you are destroyed as an *individual*, how can you possibly have a successful partnership with someone else? You cannot be a good husband; you cannot be a good wife. In the grips of this killer- You cannot be a good mom, you can't even be a good *womb*. Crack babies, fetal alcohol syndrome, effects of smoking- substance abuse has brought baby after baby into this world crippled before they've even had a chance to live. What tragedy can be more heart-wrenching and what could be a greater stress on a relationship than that?

Galatians 5- ...drunkenness, ... and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

POINT OF DISCUSSION

1. **WHEN DOES THE USE OF A SUBSTANCE BECOME ABUSIVE?**
2. *For you only:* DO YOU OR YOUR PARTNER STRUGGLE WITH SUBSTANCE ABUSE?
3. *For you only:* HOW DID YOU (YOUR PARTNER) BECOME ENTANGLED?
4. **WHAT DAMAGE HAVE YOU SEEN FROM SUBSTANCE ABUSE?**
5. **SUGGEST 3 ACTIONS A COUPLE CAN TAKE TO PREVENT/ COMBAT ABUSE?**

#10 KILLER: Pornography, gambling, and other addictions-

In our human nature- we have this tendency to get hooked on the very things that harm us.

Dobson writes this:

I've made a twenty-year study of those who wreck their lives. Their problems often begin in experimentation with a known vice and ultimately end in death... or the death of a marriage. [*He warns*]...All that is needed to grow the most vigorous weeds is a small crack in the sidewalk.

A few months ago, there was a very revealing program on the effects of gambling in our culture. At one point they focused on the effects of **Internet gambling**, which is perhaps the most insidious of all, because it is only a click away and open to all age groups. They read a letter from an elderly lady who had built a lifetime of equity. Her plan had been to leave financial support for her children and

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT

grandchildren. She was in a position to open financial doors to college and career building. But she became obsessed with Internet gambling, and she lost her savings. Eventually, she even lost her home and had to move in with her adult children. Instead of being a financial support to her family, she became their burden. And what's disturbing is this is not an isolated incident. Addiction to gambling is crushing the lives of countless families all across this nation.

When it comes to **pornography**, Dr. Dobson speaks as an authority as he served on the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography since the 1980's. He writes this:

It is extremely important to understand what is being produced and sold by pornographers today... It is commonly believed that mainstream pornography is represented by the centerfolds in today's men's magazines. In fact, that is precisely what the... sex industry wants us to think. But if a man were to go into the sex shops ... in [the] large cities ... he would find very few depictions of normal heterosexual activity. Instead, he would see a heavy emphasis on violent homosexual and lesbian scenes, on excrement, mutilation, enemas, oral and anal sex, instrumentation for the torture of men and women, and depictions of sex between humans and animals.

Let me ask you a question; if a partner is using this kind of stuff as a basis of stimulation, what kind of sexual activity do you think they'll want from their spouse? Last week, we talked about Jesus presenting His bride, the church, as blameless, pure, and without stain. And that is the example for the husband to follow. There is no way to converge these two realities. A partner addicted to pornography has only three options: 1. Reduce the spouse to this level of gratification- 2. Become unfaithful and look for it elsewhere- 3. Get out of the poison.

Little wonder that Proverbs gives one of its longest passages to this topic. Here's a summary starting at verse 10:

Prov 7:10-27

10 Then out came a woman to meet him, dressed like a prostitute and with crafty intent.

11 She is loud and defiant, her feet never stay at home...

16 I have covered my bed with colored linens from Egypt.

17 I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes and cinnamon.

18 Come, let's drink deep of love till morning; let's enjoy ourselves with love!

19 My husband is not at home; he has gone on a long journey. ...

21 With persuasive words she led him astray; she seduced him with her smooth talk.

22 All at once he followed her like an ox going to the slaughter, like a deer stepping into a noose

23 till an arrow pierces his liver, like a bird darting into a snare, little knowing it will cost him his life.

24 Now then, my sons, listen to me; pay attention to what I say.

25 Do not let your heart turn to her ways or stray into her paths.

26 Many are the victims she has brought down; her slain are a mighty throng.

27 Her house is a highway to the grave, leading down to the chambers of death.

(NIV)

In our day, this isn't simply the adulterous woman... it is an entire sex industry. It is armed with high technology and years of practiced manipulation and perversion. They eat the innocent, they rape lives, and they disease the normal appetites. Pornography kills what is *human* in whomever it touches.

Gal 5:19-21

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery;

... I warn you, as I did before, that **those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.**

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT

POINT OF DISCUSSION

1. *For you only:* WHAT KIND OF OBSESSIONS ATTRACT YOU? -YOUR PARTNER?
2. IS A LITTLE PORN OK TO SPICE THINGS UP?
3. HAVE YOU KNOWN ANYONE WHO HAS INDULGED IN PORNOGRAPHIC MATERIAL?
4. WHAT HARM HAVE YOU WITNESSED FROM THIS?

3. CONCLUSION:

Imagine you are at home. You hear someone quietly forcing the lock on your front door. You know that there are a group of murderers prowling your community. You even know some of your neighbors who have been victims. Can you imagine yourself sitting there thinking, "That sounds like them breaking in now. But I'm not going to take any action. I'll just *hope* for the best, that they won't kill my family."

In effect, this very scenario is going on right now. The killers may not be physical criminals, but they are every bit as deadly. And the door isn't on the front of your house, but the front of your heart. It all starts with what you allow *in there*.

Husband... wife... you have a choice. There are two, very different visitors knocking on the door of your marriage. One type is a murderer, and the other is life Himself. ***Which are you going to invite in?***

5. ABUSE

POINT OF DISCUSSION

HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE ABUSE IN THE FAMILY?

The word is like a clanging alarm in our culture today- 'abuse'; but what exactly is *abuse*? The dictionary defines it this way:

a **buse** **1** to use wrongly; **2** to hurt by treating badly; mistreat **3** a bad, unjust, or corrupt custom or practice

So in context to the family- ***abuse would be any pattern of behavior that is against the design of the family- which ultimately leads to hurt.***

In our series, we've been looking at God's ***design*** for the family. If we take an honest look at ourselves- who hasn't operated outside that design? Who hasn't hurt a spouse with an angry word instead of building them up per God's design? Who hasn't punished a child out of impatience instead of training them up per God's design? According to the definition of the word, we- at least in that moment- abused our position in the family. Here's what I'm getting at- we are all imperfect, and to *some degree*, we are all in danger of abusing and being abused. The topic today is for all of us.

A weak moment or an extreme case; how do people abuse? When Jesus was asked the greatest commandment, His answer revealed the major components of the human being-

Matt 22:37

"Love the Lord your God with all your ***heart*** and with all your ***soul*** and with all your ***mind***."

Your '*heart*', the ***emotions***; your '*soul*'- literally, 'the breath of life'; implying the life of the physical ***body***, and the ***spiritual*** being. God has created each human element to a specific design. Anything with a design can be *abused*. So, a person can be abused emotionally, intellectually, physically, or spiritually.

Before we consider abuse of the design, let's review the design- starting with the core of the family, the husband and wife:

Eph 5:22-26

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

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

26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word...

(NIV)

Early in the series, we explored how love is communicated? Men interpret love through respect- that is the crux of the command to the wife. Love your husband in the way he is *designed*.

And husbands love your wives as Christ loves the church. Love her by actively caring for her needs- those that build her up from the inside. Love her in the way she is *designed*.

So wives and husbands- if our customary practice is *outside* this design; we are to some degree, in a state of abuse. Wives, if you're in a power struggle with their husbands, domineering, or disdainful- don't be surprised if things aren't going well- you're operating outside the design.

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT

Husbands- I'd challenge you to find one verse in Scripture where the church was secondary to some other focus in Christ's life. That is your model as a husband. Anything else is outside the design.

And then this great model of Ephesians 5 ends this powerful word picture:

Eph 5:28-29

28 In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.

29 After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church--

(NIV)

Physical injury to the wife- is the basest and most extreme violation of God's design in marriage.

POINTS OF DISCUSSION

IF ABUSE CAN BE DEFINED AS BEHAVIOR OUTSIDE GOD'S DESIGN- GIVE REALISTIC EXAMPLES OF SPOUSAL ABUSE:

PHYSICALLY

MENTALLY

SPIRITUALLY

For you only: IN WHAT WAY ARE YOU MOST IN DANGER OF OPERATING OUTSIDE THE DESIGN?

For you only: IN WHAT WAY DO YOU FEEL YOUR PARTNER MAY BE IN DANGER OF OPERATING OUTSIDE THE DESIGN? *To share:* **LIST WAYS MEN OR WOMEN MIGHT ABUSE-**

DEALING WITH ABUSE

First, recognize the signs before it ever happens. Dr. James Dobson acknowledges that conflicts happen in all marriages. But he says this:

In healthy relationships, a period of confrontation ends in forgiveness –in drawing together- in deeper respect and understanding.

But in unstable marriages:

A period of conflict produces greater pain and anger that persists until the next fight. When that occurs, one unresolved issue is compounded by another and another.

Secondly, if abuse has become a pattern, Dobson says it is time for *tough love*. In virtually every case, the abuser will not change behavior until the situation reaches a crisis point. For instance, if the wife is abused, she should separate herself- and she should make it clear that she doesn't intend to return until concrete steps are taken to change the behavior. If the husband never responds, quite simply, she never returns. Let me qualify with this- it is still a Christian responsibility to bring that husband to the Lord fervently in prayer, and call for God's interceding- never underestimate the power of prayer, or the power of God.

It may take a year, or five years. If the husband acknowledges his problem and desires to change, there should be negotiations for intensive Christian counseling with a person of the wife's choosing. As things progress, and the wife feels safe, gradually the relationship can be put back together. And the reverse is true if the husband is abused.

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT

Yes- it may very well be a long shot. But the restoration of a marriage is worth it, especially where children are involved. -And especially considering the alternative... and that is the greatest abuse of marriage...

-Divorce. Let's start from this understanding; many in here have already been touched by divorce. There is no point in resurrecting old pain- however, there are two things we can do from **this point on**: We can **learn** from the past, and we can **prepare** for the future by taking God *seriously*.

If you do a word search, you will find that in the entire Bible- wisdom written over some 3000 years- divorce is only mentioned *18 times*. Listen to this complaint from God a mere generation before the collapse of Israel:

Mal 2:13-17

13 Another thing you do: You flood the LORD's altar with tears. You weep and wail because **he no longer pays attention** to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands.

14 You ask, "Why?" It is because the LORD is acting as the witness between **you and the wife of your youth**, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.

15 Has [He] not made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because **he was seeking godly offspring**. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth.

16 "**I hate divorce**," says the LORD God of Israel, "and I hate a man's covering himself with violence as well as with his garment," says the LORD Almighty. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith.

17 You have **wearied the LORD with your words**. ...

(NIV)

What's being said here? An entire culture has caused God to turn a deaf ear. And a main reason is the **abuse of marriage**. He has grown tired of their rationalizing and widespread practice of divorce. And within a generation, the culture completely implodes! It happened to Israel, God's chosen people. ***How long do you think we'll get away with it?***

Considering the aftermath to both partners, to the children, and even the grandparents; divorce isn't the 'quick fix' our culture would lead us to believe.

Allow me to summarize an article written by Pat Conroy of the Atlanta Magazine. It's a reflection on his own divorce:

Each divorce is the death of a small civilization. Two people declare war on each other, and their screams and tears infect their entire world with the bacilli of their pain. The greatest comes from the wound where love once issued forth.

...In my own case, I think it would have been easier if Barbara had died. I would have been gallant at her funeral and shed real tears- far easier than staring across a table, telling each other it was over.

...There are no metaphors powerful enough to describe the moment when you tell the children about divorce. Divorces without children are minor-league divorces. To look into the eyes of your children and to tell them that you are mutilating their family and changing all their

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT

tomorrows is an act of desperate courage that I never want to repeat. ...It felt as though I had doused my entire family with gasoline and struck a match.

Although many in here have suffered divorce, let us acknowledge three things for the sake of the future:

1. Divorce is the ***last and most extreme recourse***, not the first.
2. We don't have to feel that pain ever again- our great defense is living within God's design, and out of abuse
3. We must all be diligent against abuse –even to a small degree- and on a daily basis.

POINTS OF DISCUSSION

IF YOU WERE BEING ABUSIVE IN SOME WAY- WHAT SOURCE WOULD YOU TRUST TO ALERT YOU?

IF YOU WERE CONVINCED YOU WERE ABUSIVE- WHAT WOULD BE YOUR FIRST COURSE OF ACTION?

IF YOUR SPOUSE WAS BEING ABUSIVE, HOW WOULD YOU TELL THEM?

IF YOUR SPOUSE WAS ABUSIVE, WHAT WOULD BE YOUR FIRST COURSE OF ACTION?

WHEN WOULD YOU SEE DIVORCE AS THE MOST VIABLE OPTION?

Abuse between partners is the heart of the family; but it isn't the only area of abuse. There can be **abuse of our children**.

Again, let's start by acknowledging the intended design. What is the design for children in the family?

Prov 22:6

Train a child in the way he should go...

Prov 23:13-14

Do not withhold discipline from a child... Punish him with the rod and **save his soul from death**.

Matt 18:2-6

2 He [Jesus] called a little child and had him stand among them.

3 And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and **become like little children**, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. ...

5 "And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name **welcomes me**.

6 But if anyone **causes** one of these little ones who believe in me **to sin**, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.

(NIV)

If we put it all together, we come up with this:

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT

- Our responsibility is to **train a child** through discipline and love in order –above all things- to bring him or her to spiritual life.
- But, a child is more than a responsibility- they are a **reminder** of how we get to heaven ourselves.
- A child is more than a reminder- they are a **representative** of Christ in our family. As you treat your son or daughter you are treating the God of the universe! And unrepented abuse carries serious eternal consequences.

POINTS OF DISCUSSION

FROM WHAT YOU HAVE SEEN AND HEARD IN SOCIETY; WHAT ARE THE MOST COMMON WAYS CHILDREN ARE ABUSED IN THE FAMILY:

PHYSICALLY

MENTALLY

SPIRITUALLY

So, how can a child be abused?

The can be abused emotionally-

Through criticism-

Col 3:21

21 Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.

(NIV)

There was some **interesting research** done on children and get this- it was found, with the average child: it takes *nine positive comments to make up for a single negative comment*. Children are designed for **affirmation**. Dobson offers this ominous warning- children hungering for affirmation are especially vulnerable. Put a skilled child predator into a room full of children and within five minutes he will have control of those children vulnerable through the hunger for affirmation.

Emotional abuse- through neglect or separation-

To 'train', we have to be around. An expert on parent-child relationships, Dr. Armand Nicholi found himself gathering data that he knew would not be culturally popular considering the number of moms working outside the home, and absentee dads. But in light of the truth he felt obligated to report what he found. So this is what he shared at a White House conference on the American family- May, 1983:

Dr. Nicholi stressed the undeniable link between the interruption of parent-child relationships and the escalation of psychiatric problems that we were then seeing and that are even more pronounced today. If the numbers of dysfunctional families and absentee parents continue to escalate, he said, serious national health problems were inevitable. One half of all hospital beds in the United States at that time were taken up by psychiatric patients. That figure could hit 95 percent if the incidence of divorce, child abuse, child molestation, and child neglect continue to soar. In that event, Dr. Nicholi said, we would also see vast increases in teen suicide, already up more than 300 percent in twenty-five years, drug abuse, crimes of violence, and problems related to sexual disorientation.

Granted, there are circumstances in which separation is inevitable- but regardless of the reason- our children are created to a certain design- as we stray from that design, we are- and we will reap even more, the fruit of our actions.

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT

Our children can be abused intellectually- especially in the area of self-image.

I had a very talented friend in college named **Dawn**. Dawn was a devout Catholic and often sang at the masses. And if you're familiar with the Catholic setup- very often the singer sings from a balcony at the back of the sanctuary, completely unseen unless you turn around and know where to look.

One day Dawn told me about an experience at Sunday mass. She had sung from the balcony and returned to her pew. And as she was coming out- a mom was holding the hand of her four year-old. And the little girl said, "Mom, was that an angel singing today?" And the mom responded, "**No stupid, it was only Dawn.**"

-If we only realized the damage we cause with our tongues. -If we only used a little self-control. If we only made a little effort not to scream at our kids, or refrained from careless words, if we only remembered every action is to 'train up the child'- how much pain would our children be spared?

How about physical abuse?

There is a place for physical discipline- but if the 'rod' is a release of anger instead of a deliberate course of training- it is *abuse of the rod*. A good principle- Never discipline in anger.

We can abuse our children spiritually-

It's as simple as not being active in the **building of their faith** system. I would challenge anyone to find a single verse in the Bible that says –you don't have to take your child to worship because they don't feel like going. I would then challenge you to look up how many times it says to teach and train your child in God. Parent- the design is for you to take the initiative with the child's eternity in mind- and sometimes, that doesn't make you very popular for the moment.

Prov 22:6

Train up **a child** in the way he should go, and **when he is old he** will not depart from it.

POINTS OF DISCUSSION

IN WHAT AREAS DO YOU FEEL PARENTS TEND TO SLIP OUTSIDE OF GOD'S DESIGN IN RAISING THEIR CHILDREN?

WHAT AREAS OF STAYING ON BIBLICAL TARGET ARE HARDEST FOR YOU?

HOW COULD YOU DEFEND YOUR FAMILY AGAINST THESE DANGERS?

MAKING IT WORK!

So, how do we apply this wisdom?

1. **We don't have to abuse-** God clearly shows us the design. And in Him, we have the direction and power to avoid the pain of abuse.

2. **We can identify the abuser- in ourselves, or in others.** Consider this:

Prov 14:16-18

16 A wise man fears the LORD and shuns evil, but a **fool is hotheaded and reckless.**

17 A quick-tempered man **does foolish things...**

Prov 17:10

10 A rebuke impresses a man of discernment more than a **hundred lashes a fool.**

-Or more graphically-

Prov 26:11-12

11 As a dog returns to its vomit, so a **fool repeats his folly.**

12 Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.

(NIV)

It is a fool that doesn't see his foolishness. It is a fool who returns to the same behavior even as he is causing pain to himself. It is a fool who doesn't exercise self-control and causes injury. **An abuser is a fool.** Anyone can get caught playing the fool- and if we do, there's only one hope for happiness and healing- **stop playing the fool.**

3. **We don't have to be prisoners of abuse.**

It's incredible how many adults are trapped by some dark episode from 20, 30, even 50 years ago. The abuse continues because it still affects how they live today. There is a way out:

Matt 6:14-15

14 For **if you forgive men** when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will **also forgive you.**

15 But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

(NIV)

Forgiveness is the only recourse for two, very important reasons:

- **First of all-**

'Forgive' in Biblical Greek means literally, 'to send away.' God has 'sent away' all the wrongs that you have done. And *our* wrongs have caused spikes to pierce His only Son and to nail Him to an agonizing death. Our abuse caused Him to bear the refuse of every repulsive sin ever committed. ...Has anyone done worse to *you*? **You must forgive because you have been forgiven.**

- **Secondly-**

There is no other way to **set you free.** Unforgiveness makes people small. God fills people with eternity- and that makes you a very big person. We can't be small and eternal at the same time.

Prov 30:33

33 For as churning the milk produces butter, and as twisting the nose produces blood, so stirring up anger **produces strife.**"

(NIV)

Strife shrivels the soul. -Forgiveness, by God's power, is the cure.

Eph 4:26-27

"In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and **do not give the devil a foothold.**

Unresolved anger is the harbinger of abuse that creates abusers of others... your children, your spouse. Abuse is a **foothold of the devil.** You can defend your family by being alert, and plugged into The Designer of your family. Right now is an opportunity- to take back the foothold.

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT

POINTS OF DISCUSSION

WHAT KIND OF RELATIONAL THINGS ARE HARDEST FOR YOU TO FORGIVE?

HOW CAN YOU FORGIVE? OR HELP SOMEONE FORGIVE YOU?

AS WE CLOSE, WHAT SPECIFIC AREAS IN YOUR FAMILY COULD USE PRAYER?

6. CHILDREN

CHILDREN'S LETTERS TO GOD:

Dear GOD,
I went to this wedding and they kissed right
in church. Is that okay?

-Neil

Dear GOD,
What does it mean You are a Jealous God?
I thought You had everything.

-Jane

Dear GOD,
It rained for our whole vacation and is my
father mad! He said some things about You
that people are not supposed to say, but I
hope You will not hurt him anyway.

Your friend -- (But I am not going to tell you
who I am)

Dear GOD,
I want to be just like my Daddy when I get
big but not with so much hair all over.

-Sam

Dear GOD,
I think about You sometimes even when I'm
not praying.

-Elliott

Dear GOD,
I bet it is very hard for You to love all of
everybody in the whole world. There are
only 4 people in our family and I can never
do it.

-Nan

Dear GOD,
If You watch me in church Sunday, I'll show
You my new shoes.

-Mickey D.

Dear GOD,
I do not think anybody could be a better
GOD. Well, I just want You to know but I am
not just saying that because You are GOD
already.

-Charles

Dear GOD,
I didn't think orange went with purple until I
saw the sunset you made on Tuesday. That
was cool!

-Eugene

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT

Our children are incredible creations of God. Each one is a unique combination of liabilities and potential. Each one is capable of great goodness, or moral failure. Since every child is different, there is **no universal formula** for raising kids. But God does offer us a **guideline of principles** that do not fail.

Prov 1:7-9

7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge...

8 Listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching.

9 **They will be a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck.**

(NIV)

Before we start this morning, let's qualify something: In our world today, the people **filling the mother and father roles** are not necessarily, the biological mother or father. They may be a grandparent or stepparent, sibling or relative. So today's word is every bit as much for you- for the purpose of this message; you are the mother or father. That being said let me ask a question-

WHAT DO YOU INVISION FOR YOUR CHILDREN?

What is the garland do you see gracing your child's future? Maybe it's high achievement or maybe it's just to be happy. No matter what your hope or how different the child; true success starts with the same thing- '*fear of the Lord.*' -Deeply ingrained, reverent respect for the One who created their life... the one who has designed a part for them in His marvelous, eternal plan. That's quite a destiny!

SO HOW DO WE PLAY OUR PART IN THE DESITNY OF OUR CHILDREN?

Parents, if we take a moment to reflect on Prov. 1:8, we find our part comes down to one thing- teaching. And that carries two critical implications.

1. To truly teach you must know- yourself. *Because- you cannot impart what you don't understand.*

2. To truly teach you must live it- yourself. *Because- you cannot be an example of what you have not experienced.*

Since the first humans, this has not changed- Every parent will pass on something to their children. And we can only pass on who we are. And that begs a question: ***For the sake of your children, who are you?***

POINTS OF DISCUSSION

WHAT ARE THE TOP THREE QUALITIES YOU WOULD LIKE TO PASS ON TO YOUR CHILDREN? WHY THOSE?

AS YOUR CHILDREN WATCH YOU- WHAT KIND OF THINGS DO YOU FEEL YOU ARE PASSING ON; GOOD AND BAD?

AS THEY WATCH YOUR SPOUSE?

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT

We started a passage last week that lists a number of character elements that kill, and a number that bring life. The list is found in **Galatians chapter 5**. If you have your Bible please turn to it now. For the sake of our children, let's take a serious look... Since every word is a concept, it is worth a survey in the original meaning.

Gal 5: 19-22

Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

The first three deal with what we do with our bodies, sexually; listed from the outward behavior to the inward condition. Then we hit:

Idolatry- eidololatria

Official definition: *The sin of the mind against God ... associated, and traced to lack of the acknowledgment of God...*

"Lack of acknowledging God." In other words; idolatry is messing with God's throne. It's trying to **replace** Him with what we want Him to be, or our ambitions, or recreation, or even our hurts and fears. Or idolatry can be just trying to get God to **share** His throne. "I believe in the Biblical Christ, with a few pet ideas of my own."

Sorcery [witchcraft]- pharmakia

(Eng., "pharmacy") Official definition: *The use of drugs, generally accompanied by incantations and appeals to occult powers, with the provision of various charms, amulets, etc., professedly designed to keep the applicant or patient from the attention and power of demons, but actually to impress the applicant with the mysterious resources and powers of the sorcerer.*

It's mind-boggling to think in this age of science we have to consider such a thing- but we do. If you surf the Internet, you can find site after site of old pagan practices like druidism, and new pagan practices like the Wickens. An alarming number of our children are being seduced by the idea of 'magic' for good intention- 'white magic' or, 'white witchcraft'.

Isn't it interesting that the only mention of witchcraft in the New Testament (Acts 8) is in affect, 'white witchcraft'. And it ends with a curse from God, "May you perish." -The only hope- immediate repentance. *Anything* that smacks of witchcraft is wrong for the same reason- it tries to harness supernatural powers for personal use. It's messing with God's throne, and as Acts 8 says; with a wrong heart, and a wrong power source.

Then the list moves on to what we might call-

Emotional behaviors- *enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit-*

Enmity- ekh'-thrah- *hostility, hatred*; **Strife**- eris-*the expression of "enmity"*; **Anger**- thumos- *wrath or unchecked anger in action*; **Selfish [factions]**- erithia- *"self-seeking rivalry," "seeking to win followers"*; **Dissension [sedition]**- dee-khos-tas-ee'-ah- *lit. "to stand alone"; "insurrection"*;

Party spirit [heresy]- hairesis -*lit. "a choosing", especially a self-willed opinion, which is substituted for submission to the power of truth, and leads to division and cults.*

-Everyone gets angry by times. But when anger is a way of life- when the impulse is to be offended rather than to forgive- when our influence is to divide rather than unite- to make God into our image instead of being made into His- we are on the list.

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT

Drunkness, Greek: “*methe*” ...*habitual intoxication*- Putting your brain under the influence of a chemical substance.

I really want us to get this right- Galatians doesn't say you're a bad person if you are gripped by these things, or a good person if your not. It doesn't say you're inferior or superior, it simply says this- “**You will not inherit the kingdom of God.**” No matter *who you say you are*- you are not plugged in. And here's the real kicker mom and dad- this goes beyond your life. It's about the life of your children. How can you connect a young soul to God when you're disconnected yourself?

Thank God the passage goes on to list the opposite:

v22-23. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law.

If you've really let Christ in, these are the things that will come out. And very few people, including our children, will walk away from this kind of beauty.

Another important step for parents...

Know the real priorities and live them with urgency

Deut 11:19-21

19 Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

20 Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates,

21 so that your days and the days of your children may be many in the land [of] the LORD

...

(NIV)

One family psychologist after another is saying the same thing: you can't separate quality and quantity when it comes to time spent with your children. Do you want to know what God's idea of quality time is? It is saturating your children with Him- His values, His ways, His presence. It is **being there** when that little heart opens. It's seeing and grasping the opportunity when it comes- those moments life opens that we can't possibly foresee.

And take heart parents- sometimes the seed doesn't blossom until later in life. But if a true seed has been faithfully planted, hold on to this promise:

Prov 22:6

Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.

(NIV)

These are universal truths for *all* care-givers, male or female. Now let's share a few insights, specifically for the mother and the father.

POINTS OF DISCUSSION

HOW DO YOU SHOW YOUR CHILDREN YOUR LOVE?

HOW DO YOU SHOW THEM GOD'S LOVE?

WHAT THINGS ARE YOU DOING TO HELP THEM FALL IN LOVE WITH GOD? WHAT DO YOU FEEL YOU COULD DO?

Starting with the moms-

President Teddy Roosevelt once said, 'Next to the soldier in the field, there is no greater citizen than the mother.' Why? -Because mothers more than anyone else, set the direction in the early years. And in that way set the direction of the future.

In their instruction, mothers are models of very specific things.

To your daughters: mom is a living illustration of that girl's future. Mothers are the first example of what it **means to be a woman**. They are the most intimate illustration of what it means to be a **wife**. How does a woman express love to her husband? How does a wife settle differences in the family? How do you raise a ten year-old, or seventeen year-old? They may not care at seventeen, but they **will** care at twenty-seven. If they are going to learn Christian dignity and modesty... if they are going to learn the skills of healthy relationship... if they are going to value themselves as a woman of God's design- it will be the *mother role* that teaches them.

To your sons: mom is the training ground of how a **woman should be treated**. You are the first example of how a **wife** should be respected. Moms are the first line of practical training in **family responsibility**.

A social psychologist by the name of **Jean Blush** made an interesting discovery. For years she counseled men of widely different background who couldn't hold a job. And in this wide variety, she found *one common denominator*: None of these men learned domestic responsibility as children. They lacked the skills to be *others-centered* or be team players. And that weakness has plagued their lives.

Mothers are a male's first exposure to female relationships. And for the greatest part, they set the pattern.

FOR DADS-

God's design is for men to take on the responsibility of leadership in the family. Dads, you are called to lead, but it would be wise to remember this old saying, "**He who thinks he leads but turns around to find no one following, is merely taking a walk.**"

Today, too many men are not leading their families. They are wondering in circles of materialism, and relative morality. And they are taking their children nowhere.

Mal 4:6

He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike **the land with a curse.**"

(NIV)

When weak fathers have weak connections with their children, do you know what we get? -A cursed land. We get weak families, weak churches, and a sickly culture. Every father is called to the ministry. He is called to be the pastor of his family. And that means meeting needs at every level- the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual as well as the physical.

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT

In the New Testament, there are two times that instruction is given directly to the father. Each carries its own particular mandate. The first is this:

Ephesians 6:4

Fathers, do not **provoke** your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

‘Provoke’ here, is one of several Greek forms: parorgiz: ***par-org-id'-zo***

It means to enrage... to wrath.

Do you know what research shows as the greatest scourge of our youth today? –**Rage**. In many states you can find billboards condemning widespread meanness in schools. Children are being driven to the breaking point by the cruelty of their peers. But ultimately, ***where does the meanness start***. According to Ephesians 6:4, it ***starts in the home***. It often starts with fathers.

And how do fathers enrage their children?

In one way or the other, it happens when dads abandon or neglect their responsibility as a pastor-*failing to meet the needs*. For example failure to express, teach or model love. Consider these verses for a moment:

Col 3:12

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with **compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience**.

(NIV)

1 Pet 3:15

But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer ... **But do this with gentleness and respect...**

(NIV)

If we're called to express this level of tenderness to each other, how much more should we be expressing it to our children?

The second instruction sounds much the same since it translates to the same word, ‘provoke.’ But in Greek, it has an entirely different texture.

Colossians 3:21

Fathers, do not **provoke** your children, lest they **become discouraged**.

This time ‘provoke’ is: erethizo- *er-eth-id'-zo*

Meaning "to excite, stir up," ... in an evil sense -To quarrel, wrangling, debate, strife, variance.

Why this warning specifically to dads?

We talked about testosterone the other day. It's a biological fact; men are chemically engineered to be more aggressive. That means: dads are usually *less patient* than moms. Men are one track-task oriented creatures. That means we like to fix stuff... even our children. “*There's something wrong with that boy and I'm going to fix it right now.*” But dad's there's a danger on fixating on single elements especially in the personality. It can lead to a pattern of criticism. It can convey complete lack of approval and squelch every visible expression of love. Expose any of us to that, and what's going to happen? **We are going to get discouraged**.

Ann Landers had a heart-wrenching letter in one column. It was from a father who said something to this effect:- Dear Ann:

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT

Today I kissed my son for the first time in more years than I can remember. Unfortunately it was at his funeral. Deeply depressed, my son had taken his own life.

Why do fathers feel we have to hold back, teach our sons to be strong and that means *not* showing tenderness. It is too late for me. But I hope you will share this letter and maybe save someone else from making the same mistake.

Dads, there is a time for tough discipline, and there is a time for tender love- both are tools to the same end- to train up a child.

And dads, social research shows we are far more ***essential models*** than most of us realize: ***To your daughters-*** you are the first male relationship. You are the first example of how a man treats a woman. You are the mold for all her future male relationships.

A wise pastor carried on a great tradition when his daughters were young. From the age of about 8, he would take them out on 'dad dates.' And he would do it just right. He'd formally ask them out, and they'd get all dressed up. He'd open the car door for them and they'd go out to a fancy restaurant... like Chez MacDonald's. And he'd bring them home and be polite and considerate. Besides making some wonderful memories, he did something *seriously* important. He set an example for his daughters- a template in their minds. This is the right way for a young man to treat a young lady. If he doesn't respect you- don't accept it, you're better than that.

How many young girls think the right way to hold a young man's attention is to give their bodies? How many daughters have been set up for lives of abusive relationships? And how many can be traced back to the father?

To your sons- You are the first and greatest illustration of ***what it means*** to be a man. Has that ever been more critical than these times? We live in a culture that has become confused on gender, let alone relationships.

Research on the absence of fathers offers disturbing results. Homes where there is no father model, young men are given to 'hypermachoism', or overly aggressive and violent behavior as the proof of manhood. Anti-authority tendencies and a higher incidence of criminal behavior are common. In other words, ***they lack the skills and understanding to be real men.***

If you're a single parent, don't be discouraged, but take this as being forearmed by God. Knowing these gaps exist gives you the opportunity to compensate. Perhaps a grandparent, sibling, or even a trusted friend- God can bring someone to help.

POINTS OF DISCUSSION

MOM/ DAD WHAT DO YOU FEEL YOU ARE TEACHING YOUR DAUGHTER ABOUT BEING A WOMAN? WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO TEACH HER?

MOM/ DAD WHAT DO YOU FEEL YOU ARE TEACHING YOUR SON ABOUT WOMEN? WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO TEACH HIM?

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT

MOM/ DAD IN WHAT WAY DO YOU TEND TO "PROVOKE" YOUR CHILDREN? HOW COULD YOU HANDLE IT DIFFERENTLY?

WHAT PRIORITY IS YOUR CHILD'S SPIRITUAL WELFARE IN RELATION TO OTHER PARENTING CONCERNS?

HOW COULD YOU BE A BETTER EXAMPLE TO YOUR CHILDREN/ GRANDCHILDREN?

AS A COUPLE, HOW COULD YOU PREPARE YOUR CHILDREN FOR SUCCESSFUL MARRIAGES OF THEIR OWN AT THIS POINT?

WHAT IS YOUR CHILD'S IMAGE OF THEMSELVES? -OF GOD IN RELATION TO THEMSELVES? WHAT STRENGTHS COULD YOU BUILD ON?

MAKING IT WORK AS PARENTS!

For good or bad- parent; you will pass on something to your children-

In closing, let me give you a little something to think about- this is the lineage of two different families:

The first is that of a Mr. Max Duke. He and his wife were of poor moral character. And in a century of decedents they left this legacy: 310 vagrants, 440 given to debauchery; 130 in prison; 60 convicted thieves; 7 murderers; 100 alcoholics; 190 prostitutes. None contributed to society and in fact, they burdened the state of New York for millions.

The second family is that of Jonathan and Sarah Edwards, parents of genuine integrity. This is their lineage: 100 lawyers; a dean of law; 65 professors; 30 judges; 66 physicians; a dean of medicine; 83 college presidents; 80 holders of office; 3 mayors; 3 senators; and a vice-president of the United States.

Parents, we can only pass on **who we are**. For the sake of your children, and your grandchildren- **who are you? What are you passing on?** If you haven't been moved to get honest and right with God for your own sake, perhaps you'll do it for your children. This morning is a time to choose- that is what the altar is for, that is what the response tabs in your bulletin are for.

As we stand for the offering prayer and the closing song, -for *the sake of your children*- don't let God go unanswered- 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning.' -For you and them...

POINT OF DISCUSSION

WHAT ISSUE COULD YOU SAY YOU'D RESOLVE TO IMPROVE AFTER LOOKING AT GOD'S WORD ON CHILDREN?

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT

AS WE CLOSE HOW COULD THE GROUP PRAY FOR YOUR CHILDREN?

HOW COULD THEY PRAY FOR YOU AS A PARENT?

7. TEENAGE WASTELAND

THE WASTELAND

"*Teenage Wasteland*" More than a generation ago, that song resonated through the day's youth culture. It claimed the world had become a wasteland for young people, in fact the youth themselves, had become wasted. With the rise of drugs and the loss of moral absolutes; innocence and hope were 'wasted'. So, how is it for the *children* of this generation? Is it a fair assessment to call the culture in which they are growing up, a wasteland- or is that simply negative sensationalism? Well, let's consider some aspects of the world in which our children find themselves.

To be sure, our culture has made many positive strides. But many strides are not so positive. But rather than share personal opinion, I'll let the statistics speak for themselves:

Through the 1950 and 60's, it's estimated that 200,000 prenatal lives were terminated through abortion. From 1973, when abortion was legalized- only to 1997, there were 3.5 million. Today, nearly 50% of all unintended pregnancies are ended this way. ***The very cradle from where our youth have come is at least half-way, a 'wasteland.'***

How about our entertainment- Let me ask a question: If I said I was going to spend the afternoon watching adult movies- what impression would come to mind? (*Time to get a new pastor, right?*) Why? It comes down to how our culture defines 'adult.' Here's how the dictionary defines the word:

a dult (dult , ad ult) **1** grown up; mature in age, size, strength, etc. **2** of or for adult persons [*an adult novel*] **3** containing or ***providing pornography*** [*adult movies*]²

ma ture (m t r , - r , -ty r) **1** fully developed, as a person, a mind, etc. ³

So to our youth who are ***maturing*** to ***adulthood***, our culture says this as an ***officially recognized*** part of its definition: Being an adult means reaching an age where you can experience things ***too immoral for those yet to mature***. Now you're a man... you're a woman- you can legally intoxicate yourself; you can smoke until cancer claims your lungs; you can experience all kinds of sexual perversities. Welcome to adulthood!

Now, compare that with ***God's definition of maturity:***

Heb 5:14

But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have ***trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.***

(NIV)

So what happens when, a culture completely reverses a concept as basic as- what it means to grow up?

Since the definition included pornography, let's look at some current facts on that: ***FACT-***

²Excerpted from *Compton's Interactive Encyclopedia*. Copyright (c) 1994, 1995 Compton's NewMedia, Inc. All Rights Reserved

³Excerpted from *Compton's Interactive Encyclopedia*. Copyright (c) 1994, 1995 Compton's NewMedia, Inc. All Rights Reserved

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT

- Today, there are more pornography outlets than there are MacDonald's Restaurants in America.
- Along with the rise of pornography, rape has gone up 500% since 1960.
- 86% percent of rapists confess they regularly use pornography
- 81% of serial killers use it regularly
- The average age at which a male sees his first porn magazine- 11
- The number of males who say pornography was a significant part of their sex education- 29%
- The number of college age males who say they would rape if they were certain they could get away with it- 20%
- The number who say they would possibly rape after watching 10 hours of violent pornography- 57%

From the most powerful tools of communication in our world today, this is what our culture is passing on to our children. Let me ask you- without being a sensationalist, isn't it fair to call it a wasteland?

How about in education?

Perhaps you've heard the decision of public schools in Maryland this year- To separate church and state- *God* will be removed from the historical account of 'Thanks Giving'. Children will be taught that the pilgrims simply thanked the Indians for helping them.

So- how are our schools doing as public education deepens its erasure of God?

The National Center for Education Statistics, NCES, estimated in the 1999–2000 school year, there were 1.5 million violent incidents in public schools.

Our educational institutions decided to try a great experiment- they've tried to transfer knowledge in a *moral vacuum*. Whatever else has been accomplished, it is undeniable things like violence and promiscuity have also risen at an exponential rate. From kindergarten to college, our children are -with a few notable exceptions- wading through a morally ***intellectual wasteland***.

And there are our homes-

Another disturbing discovery is the direct link between sexual experimentation and parental divorce. A study was done of 201 junior and senior high boys in a 'high-crime area'. It was found only *18 percent of the boys* from intact families were promiscuous. In fact, 57% from families where divorce never occurred were virgins. A study of over 5000 women, with babies out of wedlock showed the same correlation. ***The wastelands extend into our very homes.***

Along with navigating the cultural wastelands our youth face the challenge of simply-growing up.

In 1840 the average age in which a girl reached puberty was 16.5 years old. Today that figure has dropped to 12.8! The result has been a younger and younger trend toward dating and sexual awareness. Even our blessings can play against us.

Current research shows that eighteen is the greatest time of conflict between parent and child, but typically thirteen or fourteen is the most difficult time for young people. It's a time when self-doubt and feelings of inferiority peek and social pressures are felt the worst. Dobson puts it this way:

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT

It is common knowledge that a twelve- or thirteen year-old child suddenly awakens to a brand-new world around him... That world is populated by age-mates who scare him out of his wits. His greatest anxiety, far exceeding the fear of death, is the ***possibility of rejection or humiliation in the eyes of his peers.*** ... It is impossible to comprehend the adolescent mind without understanding this terror of ***the peer group.***

To be balanced and fair, of course there are a lot of positive things as well. But the reality still remains; there *are* vast wastelands. And that leads us to a question: **How can our youth navigate the ‘teenage wastelands’ and come out the other side not just surviving, but victorious?** Let’s approach it in two ways- from the *parent’s* side, and from the *teen* side.

POINTS OF DISCUSSION

WHAT ARE THE GREATEST CULTURAL INFLUENCES YOU FIND YOURSELF FIGHTING IN YOUR CHILDREN’S LIVES?

WHAT QUALITIES OF ADULTHOOD WOULD YOU LIKE TO CONVEY?

WHAT BATTLES DO YOU SEE YOUR TEEN DEALING WITH?

SURVIVING IN THE WASTELAND

First, for you parents.

Dobson has an interesting parallel for the teen years. He compares them to the early days of NASA. Remember how everyone would hold their breath during those six or seven minutes of communication blackout as the landing capsule first entered the earth’s atmosphere? -And then there’d be a sigh of relief as the first words came through the static saying everything was OK. Dobson puts it this way:

After the training and preparation of childhood are over, a pubescent youngster marches out to the launching pad. His parents watch apprehensively as he climbs aboard a capsule called adolescence and waits for his rockets to fire. Without warning, the mighty rocket engines begin to roar and the ‘umbilical cord’ falls away. ‘Liftoff! We have liftoff!’, screams the boy’s father.

...A week later, his parents go through the scariest experience of their lives: They suddenly lose all contact with the capsule. ...The same kid who used to talk a mile a minute and ask a million questions has now reduced his vocabulary to nine monosyllabic phrases. They are, “I dunno,” “Maybe,” “I forget,” “Huh?” “No!” “Nope,” “Yeah,” “Who- me?” and “He did it.” Otherwise, only static comes through the receivers...

...Years later, when Mission Control fears the spacecraft has been lost, a few scratchy signals are picked up unexpectedly from a distant transmitter. The parents are jubilant as they hover near their radio. [His voice] is deeper and more mature than they remembered.

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT

...He was fourteen years old when he blasted into space and now he is nearly twenty. Could it be that the negative environment has been swept away and communication is again possible?

So parents, how do we do it? **How do we survive the 'space mission'?** Let's go back to a verse we've already taken to heart :

Ephesians 6:4 Fathers, do not **provoke your children to anger**, but bring them up in the **discipline and instruction of the Lord**.

In this *one* verse lays the **duality of the parent's job**. On one hand we must bring them up in *discipline and instruction*. But on the other hand we are not to *provoke them to anger*, or as the International English version puts it- '**rage**'. **Question:** What's a sure fire way to raise extreme frustration in *any* person? **Answer:** Withhold the power and freedom to do something they are capable of doing themselves.

So in effect; **parenting is the delicate art of transferring power**. One side involves exercising control as needed. In almost every case, releasing power *too early* cultivates an attitude of **disrespect for authority**- and not just to yours, but to all authority- ministers, policemen, judges, *even God*. If your child doesn't learn to yield to authority at home, they won't learn... and *their lives will be cursed for it*.

On the other hand, if a parent *holds back* on freedom too long, they may find themselves reliving 1776- that's to say, there will be an uprising for independence. There will be a lot of suffering and turmoil that really could've been avoided.

So when does this transfer of power start? It should start when they're still in diapers. It is granting tiny freedom after freedom. When a child is able to tie his shoes; it becomes his right *and* responsibility. When she is able to choose her own clothes- it's her selection *within reason*- even if it means averting your eyes from the lime top and the wrinkled blue pants.

Parents, if we think the main objective is to **take care of our children**, God says we're missing the big picture. The objective is not to take care of them, but to raise them to **take care of themselves in a relationship with God**.

And let me end the parental advice with this- the greatest thing you can do is **pray for them**. Prayer is unleashing the power of God to change a heart- and that is where the battle is truly lost or won.

POINTS OF DISCUSSION

DO YOU SEE "TRANSFERRING POWER" AS THE TOP PRIORITY IN YOUR PARENTING? WHY OR WHY NOT?

AS YOU BALANCE BETWEEN KEEPING CONTROL AND LETTING GO- WHAT IS YOUR BIGGEST FEAR? WHAT IS YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE?

WITH YOUR DIFFERENT CHILDREN, HOW DO YOU SEE IT DIFFERENTLY?

Now, for the teens-

To find your way through the wastelands, let me share **three simple steps.**

1. Understand your Heavenly Father- *He's not the enemy.*

I can't tell you how many kids have confided something like this: 'I've done this bad thing and now something bad has happened to me... I know it's God punishing me for what I've done wrong.'

Guess what kids! *God doesn't work that way.* God isn't an angry friend who gets back at you every time you mess up.

Listen to this:

Prov 3:11-14

- 11 My son, **do not despise the LORD's discipline** and do not resent his rebuke,
 12 because the LORD **disciplines those he loves**, as a father the son he **delights** in.
 13 Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding,
 14 for she [wisdom] is **more profitable** than silver and yields better returns than gold.

(NIV)

Whatever God brings, or allows in your life... whether it is a joyful or painful- He *always* has the same reason at heart- to help you become what you are meant to be- and that's always a great thing. It's training worth more than a pocket full of gold. Why? Give a foolish friend a hundred bucks and in his foolishness he'll waste it. Chances are he'll be trying to tap you for another twenty. Give a wise person *twenty* bucks and they may very well turn it into one *hundred*. –And of course, God blesses in ways far more meaningful than money. Understanding *your heavenly Father* is the most profitable thing you will ever do.

2. Understand your earthly father and mother- *they're not the enemy either.*

This is what God says directly to you.

Eph 6:1-3

- 1 Children, **obey your parents** in the Lord, for this is right.
 2 "Honor your father and mother"-- which is the **first commandment with a promise--**

There's something very special about this command- *it has a promise*, in fact it is the first command *ever given* with a promise and it's given to *you*. So what's the promise?

- 3 "that it may **go well with you** and that you may enjoy **long life** on the earth."

(NIV)

That it may '*go well*.' The Greek word used here is '*eu*'. It is a special form because it means the ***direct opposite of evil***. Evil things can happen to young people. Adults have lived long enough to realize some important things: We've done too many stupid things ourselves and are alive only by the grace of God. We've passed too many roadside crosses where a young person thought they could drive mindlessly drunk- and found out they were dead wrong. We've heard too many reports of young people hurting or even taking a lifetime from another young person for reasons that won't matter in a week.

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT

Especially if your parents are alive in Christ- you might not see them as the coolest, or even the wisest people- but **they have lived long enough to know how to live long**. God says they have a few tips to pass on.

And the promise is more than that- it isn't just to live long, it is to **enjoy** long life. You see, it's very possible to live long and suffer through every minute of it. Example- The young woman who thinks it's lame not to have an active sex life. -Being forced into motherhood at sixteen means missing a lot of wonderful things growing up. Perhaps she'll give up her child for adoption, or maybe she'll just have an abortion. Social research shows either option brings a heavy burden of guilt. And from sixteen, that's a long time to carry it.

You might say- "Well, God forgives and offers a new start." Yes, He does, but **that doesn't mean the consequences go away**. That young woman can be made pure in Jesus, but the unintended child is still there. The memory will still be there. You're parents have lived long enough to understand the implications. How do you avoid the wastelands, how do you live a long life you can enjoy? It involves this key- **Children, obey your parents**.

POINTS OF DISCUSSION

HOW CAN YOU CONVINCe YOUR CHILDREN "GOD IS NOT THE ENEMY?"

HOW CAN YOU CONVINCe THEM YOU ARE NOT THE ENEMY?

RECALL EVENTS YOUR CHILD TOOK YOUR ADVICE SERIOUSLY... A TIME THEY DIDN'T?

WHAT COMMON FACTORS WERE THERE IN THE "SERIOUS" EVENTS? "NONSERIOUS"?

3. **Play by different rules.**

Ever since the baby boomers- there has been such a concentration of young people that they have developed a culture of their own. For two generations young people have adopted their own music. They develop their own rules of etiquette. They even cultivate their own language. **But the driving force behind it all has never changed**. Dobson puts it this way:

Adolescent society is based on the **exercise of raw force**. ...It comes in various forms. For girls, there is no greater social dominance than physical beauty. A truly gorgeous young woman is so powerful that even the boys are often terrified of her. She rules in a high school like a queen on her throne, and in fact, she is usually given some honor with references to royalty [like] Homecoming Queen.

Boys derive power from physical attractiveness too, but also from athletic accomplishment... usually skilled in sports that exhibit sheer physical strength [like] football or size [like] basketball. ...The name of the game [is] power.

So there you are- in a world where power plays fly like bullets in a battle. **What do you do?** ...It is said that **a true Christian lives life in such a way that it causes others to wonder**. In your school, in your peer group... have you stopped to think, God has called you to live by different rules? Rules so different from the petty rat race of power grabbing, that it *causes others to wonder?*

Live how? How about this-

- In a teen society that says, 'no fear'- no respect for authority, *you* say:

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of [all] wisdom."

- In a teen society that says power's the game, and if a kid is weak he gets ignored, or she gets put down- *you* say:

Rom 15:1-2

1 We who are strong ought to **bear with the failings of the weak** and not to please ourselves.

2 Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, **to build him up.**

- In a teen society where approval of peers is the highest value in the universe, *you* say:

Heb 13:6

"The **Lord** is my helper; I will not be afraid. **What can man do to me?"**

(NIV)

- In a teen society that slips and slides on the meaning of truth- where your peers find it nearly impossible to really believe in anything- *you* say this about **your belief:**

2 Timothy 1:12

I am certainly **not ashamed of it,** for **I know the one** in whom I trust, and I am sure that **he is able** to safely guard all that I have given him until the day of his return.

It is incredible what God has done with young lives. Back in the sixties- it was a time the youth culture looked for truth in mind-altering drugs. The mentality was to rebel against everything, and take responsibility for nothing. And in the midst of this, something amazing happened- young people began finding Christ in the most personal and powerful way. How did it happen? One of the first spiritual sparks ignited in 1967 on an average evening in a little coffee house in Seattle. It began with a young lady by the name of Linda Meissner who revealed a dream she had- that dream was simply this- **She saw an army of teenagers marching for Jesus.** When she told her peers of this dream, a response began to grow- young people began turning to Christ. They turned in the hundreds and then the thousands, and then the tens of thousands until it became a youth movement- we are still living in the effects today. But here's the thing: **God doesn't work that kind of power with people who hold Him at arm's length.**

Heb 11:6

Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who **earnestly** seek him.

(NIV)

'Those who really seek Him' See... the question isn't- can you survive the wastelands? The question isn't- can God do something fantastic with your life? The question is- **ARE YOU REAL ENOUGH?**

Are you real enough to follow *three basic steps*- and to make it even simpler, here it is in *two- Understand it, then Live it.* If you can be **that** real, you will be surprised at how real God can be- that's the promise.

POINTS OF DISCUSSION

HOW COULD YOU COMMUNICATE THESE LIFE PRINCIPLES TO YOUR CHILDREN?

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT

HOW COULD YOU MODEL THEM IN YOUR OWN LIFE?

WHAT IS YOUR TEENS GREATEST LIABILITY? GREATEST STRENGTH?

HOW CAN WE PRAY FOR YOUR CHILDREN AS WE CLOSE?

8. MONEY MATTERS

THE "OOL FAMILY"

Here's the true story of the Ool family. Frank Ool was brought up in the church. As a teen, while the sermons and youth meetings talked about things you couldn't see- Frank was dreaming of stuff you could see. He dreamt of being a wildly successful rock star, or perhaps a C.E.O. of a mega-company. Frank was sure that's where the real power was.

Frank couldn't get the music thing down, so he went to college and got his business degree. At college he met Fay. Frank and Fay were soon married because they had the same passion- *money*. Their marriage was really more of a business merger. They were the typical young professionals. They were so busy with their careers they had to slot time for each other on their PDA's. And when the kids came along, they had to slice that time even thinner. They worked hard, climbed their respective corporate ladders and earned more- but *more* was never enough. There was never enough money, never enough luxury, never enough power. It was always- just a little more and they'd be happy.

Finally the magic day came for ol' Frank. He got his gold watch, and it was time to start enjoying that big fat retirement portfolio he had been building. He was going to take a cruise. He was going to play every golf course in Florida... twice! Frank was going to take his ease. He was going to eat, drink, and be a happy man. And it was all going to start tomorrow.

That night as Frank headed off to bed he thought to himself, "I've got it made." But as he sat admiring his gold watch in his recliner, life ended abruptly in a massive coronary. The watch fell to the floor, the gold inscription facing up, "To Mr. F. OOL for dedicating all his time to the company. May your retirement be just as profitable."

Luke 12:20-21

20 "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'

21 "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."

(NIV)

The story is very true, not in the person, but in the Biblical principle. Frank isn't real but his life story is tragically real.

Listen to this:

Luke 12:15 Then Jesus said to them, ``Be careful and guard against all kinds of greed [covetousness]. A person's life is not measured by the things he owns."

The word for '**greed**' or more precisely, '**covetousness**', is an interesting one. In the *original Greek*, it is '**pleonexia**'. And the literal translation is the combination of two words- *pleon*, which means "more", and *echo* which means "to have". Always used in the bad sense. -Always a need to *have more*. There is never enough. Have more, have more, and have even more... all kinds of 'more'- money, power, indulgences. -Be careful, Jesus warns, and guard against all kinds of temptations to '*have more*.'

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT

-And how about Mr. F. OOL's children? Years of counseling and research have lead many to the same conclusion- large sums of money to people who haven't earned it themselves is most often- very destructive. When it comes to large inheritances, Dr. James Dobson has been lead to this conclusion:

...It's also been my observation that nothing will divide siblings more quickly than money. Giving them a large inheritance increases the probability of tension...within a family. Your sons and daughters will fight over control... some of them will lose their motivation to be responsible and will experiment with various addictive behaviors- from gambling to alcoholism. There are exceptions... of course...but it is a difficult assignment at best and one that requires the greatest maturity and self-control.

Isn't it amazing! ***Even in success- a lust for money not only destroys the individual, it can destroy everyone around them.***

POINTS OF DISCUSSION

WHERE DOES RETIREMENT FIT IN YOUR LIFE AMBITIONS?

DO YOU THINK FRANK REALLY PLANNED HIS LIFE WRONG? WHY OR WHY NOT?

WHEN DOES RESPONSIBLE FINANCIAL SECURITY CROSS THE LINE TO "COVETOUSNESS"?

WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO DEAL WITH YOUR CHILDREN AND YOUR RESOURCES?

POVERTY AS THE SPIRITUAL ANSWER

Well, perhaps it's more spiritual to simply ***distain money***. Perhaps it's more Godly to spend all our time in prayer, and not worry about work at all. Before we take our vows of ease and poverty, perhaps we should consider these verses:

Prov 6:10-11

10 A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest--

11 and poverty will come on you like a bandit and scarcity like an armed man.

(NIV)

- ***There is a connection between laziness and poverty.***

This insight made such an impression on Solomon, that he states it *twice*- in Prov 6:10 and Prov 24:33! Godliness isn't license for doing nothing. Consider this warning from the New Testament:

1 Tim 5:8

8 If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, ***he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.***

Now, Scripture doesn't say that everyone who is poor is lazy. But laziness is definitely **a** cause, according to God.

- ***Poverty can also be a reflection of our spiritual condition.***

Prov 11:24

24 One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another **withholds unduly, but comes to poverty.**

(NIV)

A Canaan member once recounted an interesting conversation. Talking to a neighbor lady, the topic of money came up. She said, “Do you want to know how to instantly increase your home income?”

“Yeah, sure!”

“Stop giving to that church of yours.”

Wrong! Giving money –to *whatever cause* God puts before you- and ending up with *more* seems completely backward. It doesn’t make sense... until you put God into the equation. Everything is under His control- so is it really surprising that as *we give to Him, He gives to us?* It’s not to say we’ll all end up as millionaires if we are faithful. In fact, God may **not** bless a person financially because He knows wealth would destroy them. The principle in Prov 11 is this: ***When we stop returning our blessing to God, God may very well stop sending His blessing to us.***

- ***And then, poverty may quite simply be our own fault-***

*-So many of us are weak in our financial planning or exercising self-control in our spending. –And you know what? It is really no big surprise considering today’s culture. We are submerged in a mindset of **instant gratification.** Working for a shipping company, I watch the items going into my aircraft and I often wonder- ‘Does someone really need an item like that shipped overnight?’ Considering the ‘*must have now*’ attitude of most adults- how will **our children ever learn** patience, planning, and discipline, **and Godliness** in their resources?*

Perhaps you remember this passage from God’s idea of the good wife. In that description was this verse:

Prov 31: 21. She is **not afraid of snow** for her household, for all her household are **clothed in scarlet.**

What does that mean? Well- Snow symbolizes times of adversity. Scarlet, in ancient times was a very expensive dye. It was the best possible clothing. It meant living well. So how does the good wife allow her family to live well in times of adversity? ***-By planning.*** And planning involves *discipline*, and it involves *wisdom*. It means being wise enough to know adversity comes to everyone in some form - so be ready for it. Someday your car will need repair, someday your body may need repair- someday you will have a financial setback of some kind- *that’s life!* Discipline means you’re ready when ‘*the snow*’ falls.

POINTS OF DISCUSSION

HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE MATERIAL POVERTY?

For you only: DO YOU FEEL YOUR FAMILY IS RESPONSIBLE IN THEIR FINANCES?

WHAT IS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE IN THE AREA OF FINANCES FOR YOU?

IN WHAT WAY DO YOU TRY TO BE A WITNESS TO GOD IN YOUR FINANCES?

IN WHAT WAYS COULD YOU USE MORE WORK?

FOUR PRINCIPLES

Money is a major point of conflict in marriages for a simple reason- even as men and women; we **value differently**. From different life experience we may approach money with entirely **different principles**. So it stands to reason, a key to financial harmony in the home is to adopt the **same principles**. Now, *same* is good- but *wise* is better- so why not adopt the *wisest*? What is that? – *God's principles*. Dobson summarizes a Scriptural understanding of money in four short principles:

- **#1 God owns it all-**

It's all too easy to fall into the mindset that God deserves 10% or so, and the other 90 is all ours. The truth is; it is all God's. Job had it right. When he had fallen into misfortune, this was his response:

Job 1: 21. "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return; **the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away**; blessed be the name of the Lord."

Do you realize- ***Every penny spent is either a testament of our faith, or an act of denial of God in our lives.***

- **#2 There is always a trade-off between time and effort and money and rewards-**

We buy with money, but that money was a trade for work and time. So in effect: Every material thing you buy is a trade for the moments or days, or even years of your life. ***Think about what that can mean.*** That item you bought- you know- the one that broke after a week and now sits in your garbage can- it is moments of your life, sitting there in the garbage can. If we're not careful, our lives can end up in the garbage can. And here's the thing: we only get one of those to invest.

- **#3 There is no such thing as an independent financial decision-**

There will never be enough money for us to buy or do all we would like. It's all linked together. When you buy one thing, it means there is something else you will not have. -A new car or college? -A new TV or home repairs? -Indulgent living at thirty, or a solid retirement at sixty? Every financial decision is linked to all the others.

- **#4 Delayed gratification is the key to financial maturity-**

Since resources are limited but choices aren't, the only way to get ahead financially is to **deny** ourselves *some of the things* we want. Quite simply- if your life style is to ***spend*** more than you ***make***, you will end up in serious debt- no matter *how much* you make! Just look at our government. They take in more than a trillion dollars annually. But because they spend *more*, we have a national debt in the order of hundreds of billions.

Some level of ***self-denial*** is inevitable. Self-denial requires ***discipline***. And discipline comes from ***maturity***. And genuine maturity starts as at the ***spiritual level***. This is how the Living Bible puts it:

Proverbs 9:10 For the **reverence** and fear of God are basic to all wisdom. Knowing God results in **every other kind of understanding**.

POINTS OF DISCUSSION

HOW WOULD YOU PUT THOSE 4 PRINCIPLES IN YOUR OWN WORDS?

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT

WHICH PRINCIPLE CAUSES YOU THE MOST –PAUSE FOR THOUGHT?

WHICH PRINCIPLE IS THE GREATEST CHALLENGE IN YOUR HOUSEHOLD? WHY?

THE THEOLOGY OF MONEY

Theology is the study of God; it is how we understand God. Pastor Tony Evans once said, “*Show me a person’s checkbook and I can tell you in five minutes what they really believe about God.*” He’s right! There is a ***theology of money***. Let’s look at a few points on the Biblical theology of money:

Prov 13:18

18 He who ***ignores discipline*** comes to poverty and shame, but whoever heeds correction is honored.

(NIV)

- **How we use or abuse our money is a direct reflection on how seriously we take God.** It could be God is trying to tell you something through that financial crisis- and it most likely goes deeper than simply controlling your cash-flow.
- **Money is a revealer of what kind of transformation has really occurred in our lives.** For example: It reflects our ***integrity***:

Ps 37: 21. The wicked borrows, and ***cannot pay back***, but the righteous is generous and gives

When Kathy and I were considering the mission field, one of the questions on the application was- Have you ever declared ***bankruptcy***? It seemed like a curious question, but not when you consider God’s idea of integrity-

Rom 13: 5. Therefore one must be subject, not only to avoid God’s wrath but also for the ***sake of conscience***.

6. For the same reason you also ***pay taxes***, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing.

7. Pay ***all of them their dues***, taxes to whom ***taxes*** are due, ***revenue*** to whom revenue is due, ***respect*** to whom respect is due, ***honor*** to whom honor is due.

According to God’s Word, what we do on our tax forms is every bit as important as what we do in our church. How we talk about God is supported or nullified in how we handle our utility bills. ***A Godly handling of money means paying what we owe to everyone.***

POINTS OF DISCUSSION

WHAT DOES YOUR CHECKBOOK SAY ABOUT GOD IN YOUR LIFE?

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE IT TO SAY?

WHAT CHANGES/ PRESENT USE WOULD ENSURE IT SAYS THAT?

Let's say we **do** follow God's principles and we **are** blessed financially.

- **Then what's God's principle for dealing with that abundance?**

Wouldn't it be good stewardship to invest it where it would keep multiplying? You know- to give where we're sure people will give it back? -In human reasoning maybe, but not in God's. Listen to this:

Luke 14: 12. "When you give a dinner or a banquet, **do not invite your friends** or your brothers or your kinsmen or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return, and **you be repaid**."

13. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind,

14. and **you will be blessed**, because **they cannot repay you**. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just."

The great cosmic plan of God was to rescue us by paying a price beyond comprehension; one which we couldn't possibly repay.

God calls us to worship. Do you know what it means to worship? It literally means 'to take on the image of...'. Helping those in need without the thought of return is a small reflection of God- **but it is worship.** And it is what we are called to do.

POINTS OF DISCUSSION

HOW DOES ONE- WORSHIP WITH THEIR MONEY?

IN THE PRESENT SITUATION OF YOUR COMMUNITY, CHURCH, AND FAMILY- SUGGEST A PRACTICAL WAY YOU COULD WORSHIP WITH YOUR PRESENT RESOURCES?

CONCLUSION

A religious young man ran up to Jesus and asked how he could be certain he'd enter heaven. This was the answer:

Luke 18: 22. And when Jesus heard it, he said to him, "One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and **you will have treasure in heaven**; and come, follow me."

23. But when he heard this he became sad, for he was very rich.

24. Jesus looking at him said, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!"

Jesus used the word '**treasure**.' What mental picture does the word, 'treasure' bring to you? For me, I think of a chest full of gold and jewels- perhaps buried on a sandy beach somewhere. But the Biblical Greek gives quite a different picture. The word is '**thesauros**', and it denotes "**a place of safe keeping**." But here's the interesting part- it alludes to both a **safe-house** and a **casket**.

Money in itself is neither good nor bad. It is a neutral power. It can be a power that will keep you and your family in a '**safe-house**', or it can be the '**casket**' in which you *bury* your marriage, your

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT

family, and your life. It is a positive power in the hands of **wisdom, discipline, and maturity**. And do you know what those things are? -They are **inner qualities**. (*They define what you're made of- or they don't.*) How we handle our money is quite virtually, a direct reflection of our souls.

Husband and wives- let me leave you with this challenge- especially if finances are a point of conflict in your home. **Sit down with your Bible in one hand and your check book in the other and compare the two**. Look through the verses mentioned in this session. And when you get to the end, let Jesus balance your books with this one line:

Matt 6: 21. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Where is your treasure... where is your heart? -If we answer that question honestly it will tell us something vitally important: ***It will tell us if we've turned our money into a family 'safe-house', or a 'casket.'***

POINTS OF DISCUSSION

SPEAKING HONESTLY- DO YOU FEEL YOUR FAMILY "TREASURE" IS MORE A SAFEHOUSE, OR A CASKET AT THIS TIME? WHY?

SUGGEST ONE PRACTICAL WAY THAT YOUR RESOURCES WOULD SERVE AS A FAMILY SAFEHOUSE:

WHAT'S THE WORST POSSIBLE THING YOU COULD DO WITH YOUR MONEY?

WHAT IS THE GREATEST POSSIBLE THING YOU COULD DO WITH YOUR MONEY?

HOW COULD THE GROUP PRAY FOR THE FINANCIAL LIFE OF YOUR FAMILY?

1 Cor 1:8

He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Thanks for sticking with it until the end! Now comes the hard part- putting it into practice.

You may want to leave this to the following week, if time doesn't permit- quickly review your study as a reminder and discuss these questions-

CLOSING THOUGHTS

OF ALL THE SESSIONS WHICH WAS THE MOST ILLUMINATING TO YOU? WHY?

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT

WHICH WAS THE LEAST INTERESTING? WHY?

WHAT CHANGES, IF ANY, HAVE YOU RESOLVED TO MAKE IN YOUR FAMILY?

WHAT OTHER FAMILY ISSUES WOULD HAVE BEEN A HELP TO STUDY?