

MARRIAGE SEMINAR FOLLOW-UP

THE MEN'S
CHALLENGE
“GETTING STARTED”

FEBRUARY 20, 2010

We all want stronger marriages. Therefore, we must strive to grow as husbands.

No matter the current state of your marriage, there's hope that you can become the kind of husband God desires you to be. The Scriptures lay the foundation for what a godly and fruitful marriage looks like and provide simple, attainable means for strengthening it.

Grace is available for change, and change begins with yourself. The decision is yours; you CAN change with God's help.

“... Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and work for his good pleasure.” — *Philippians 2:12-13*

This work requires a plan that is saturated with Scripture and reliance on God. To help you get started, we've created a two-week plan. Each day, you will be given a Scripture passage to reflect on, a brief assignment and space to write what you are learning and how your spouse is responding.

With a plan like this, it's important to persevere even when you lack motivation and desire.

“And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.” — *Galatians 6:9*

May it be said of us in every season we persevered for the good of our marriages and, ultimately, for the glory of God.

DAY 1

“God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

— *Romans 5:8*

“We love because he [God] first loved us.”

— *1 John 4:19*

Christ did not wait for us to initiate love and kindness before he demonstrated love to us by sacrificing his own life. Take time to reflect on God’s demonstration of love for you despite your rebellion.

Read and reflect on 1 John 4:7-11.

List two specific ways that you can initiate sacrificial love toward your wife.

1. _____

2. _____

Assignment:

Schedule to do both of these things today as an expression of love for your wife, expecting nothing in return.

Reflections:

DAY 2

“In humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”

— *Philippians 2:3b-4*

“One of the greatest hindrances to fellowship in a marriage is pride — self-confident, self-exalting, self-protecting pride. One way the foolishness of pride is displayed in our communication is in our love for our own voice and opinions.”

— *Gary and Betsy Ricucci,
Conflict & Communication
Marriage Seminar, Fall 2009*

The humble husband makes time to listen closely to his wife and ask questions.

List two specific questions you can ask your wife today that show you are interested in what matters to her:

1. _____
2. _____

Assignment:

Make time today to ask these questions. Purpose to listen closely. Do not be in a hurry to conclude this conversation.

Reflections:

DAY 3

“Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.”

— *Ephesians 4:29*

“Good communication and fellowship are the fruit of a godly marriage. Communication and fellowship are gifts from God to be enjoyed for God’s glory and our good. We have an opportunity to serve our spouse each time we speak.” — *Gary and Betsy Ricucci, Conflict & Communication Marriage Seminar, Fall 2009*

Take time to think about one specific way you can encourage and build up your wife through your words.

Assignment:

During dinner tonight, take time to communicate this to her in detail. Consider writing it out in a card that you can hand to her after you communicate it verbally.

Reflections:

DAY 4

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” — *Jeremiah 17:9*

“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” — *1 John 1:8*

“God’s intention for marriage is companionship, fellowship, intimacy, and growth in godliness for his glory. This requires a humble heart. Pursue communication and fellowship as a means of walking in the light, growing in godliness, and helping your spouse to mature in Christ as you are becoming one.”

— *Gary and Betsy Ricucci, Conflict & Communication Marriage Seminar, Fall 2009*

Assignment:

Ask your spouse where she has observed patterns of sin in your life that you might be blind to. To do this, you must exhibit a humble heart and resist the urge to defend yourself. This is an opportunity for you to benefit from your spouse’s perspective. After you have taken adequate time to hear from your wife, pray together and ask God for help to grow.

Reflections:

DAY 5

“Husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it.”

— *Ephesians 5:28-29*

It comes naturally that we love and care for ourselves. This attention and care for self gives us a picture of the devotion that should be given to our wives.

Where do you see selfishness in your life that hinders you from loving your wife as yourself?

What is God calling you to give up because it diverts your attention from your wife?

Assignment:

Ask your wife: “Is there any area of my life that hinders me from loving you as much as I love myself?” Listen carefully to her response. (Prepare to be humbled.) Receive her answer with humility.

Reflections:

DAY 6

“Husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman.”

— *1 Peter 3:7*

Part of growing as a godly husband is learning to understand your wife's current burdens/challenges/fears and caring for her as she walks through them.

Assignment:

Take some time tonight to ask your wife what current burdens/challenges/fears she is facing. Listen carefully and ask follow-up questions. Before ending your conversation, pray for the issues weighing in your wife's heart.

Reflections:

DAY 7

“Husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman.”

— *1 Peter 3:7*

“Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant.”

— *1 Corinthians 13:4*

Sometimes, a wife does something that a husband doesn't like. But it is not sin; it is an issue of preference. With this in mind, are there things your wife does that you can overlook because they are preference issues, not sins? Remember, she is overlooking many issues in your life.

Assignment:

Write down a list of the preferences that you can begin to overlook. Purpose today to start overlooking one of the behaviors you don't like.

Reflections:

DAY 8

“For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.” — *Romans 5:10*

“Conflict in marriage is common, and left unresolved proves destructive. But the cross brings hope to our lives’ deepest conflicts. Because of what Jesus Christ has done on the cross to reconcile us to God, we can be restored to right relationship with him, and as a result receive grace to live in harmony with one another. The Bible tells us that God is conforming us to the image of his Son, and he is working redemptively in our conflicts.” — *Gary and Betsy Ricucci, Conflict & Communication Marriage Seminar, Fall 2009*

Consider this: Are there any unresolved conflicts in your marriage? If so, seek to biblically define YOUR sin that YOU contributed to the conflict. What desire became a demand? Read James 4:1-2 to better understand your part in the conflict.

Assignment:

Once you have clarity on your sin, approach your wife with the following: Will you forgive me for my sin and failing in the following areas of resolving our differences and conflicts? (List them below.)

a. _____

b. _____

Are there other ways in which I have failed?

Will you please forgive me for these as well?

Reflections:

DAY 9

“What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel.” — *James 4:1-2*

Take time to read this passage through a few times and contemplate its simplicity: cravings underlie your conflict.

Assignment:

As a follow-up to the previous day’s assignment, continue the dialogue with the following question: “What issues are you reluctant to discuss with me because of my responses in the past?”

Don’t assume you know the answer to this question. Patiently draw out our wife, and humbly respond throughout.

Pray together as a couple for grace to change. Thank God for resolving your greatest conflict—your sin against a holy God—through Christ’s redemptive work on the cross.

Reflections:

DAY 10

“Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.”

— *Colossians 3: 12-14*

As you forgive your wife, just as God has forgiven you, choose to keep “no record of wrongs.” Choose not to bring the offenses up again. Choose to sincerely forgive. Choose to look to God the Father as your perfect example of true forgiveness.

Assignment:

Forgive your wife as the Lord has forgiven you (always and without keeping a record).

Reflections:

DAY 11

“He who loves his wife loves himself.”

— *Ephesians 5:28*

In order to love our wives as ourselves, we must do our best to know our wives as we know ourselves. In other words, we must become students of our wives and act on the knowledge we have.

In his book, “Sex, Romance and the Glory of God,” C.J. Mahaney gives us a simple formula to grow in and apply knowledge of our wives:

1. Review what you already know, and gain new knowledge (learning).
2. Identify opportunities to apply what you know (planning).
3. Practice applying what you know (doing).
4. Repeat steps 1-3.

Application:

Plan a date where you seek to apply the knowledge you’ve acquired about what blesses her most.

Reflections:

DAY 12

“Let your fountain be blessed,
and rejoice in the wife of your
youth, a lovely deer, a graceful
doe. Let her breasts fill you at
all times with delight;
be intoxicated always in
her love.” — *Proverbs 5:18-19*

Within marriage, sex is to be enjoyed as a good gift from God. It's part of celebrating God's plan that the “two become one.” Notice the various terms used in this proverb: “blessed,” “rejoice,” “delight,” “intoxicated.” It speaks to a pursuit of passion. God's Word clearly elaborates on this in the Song of Solomon with poetic detail of sexual acts between a husband and wife. God's plan for your marriage is this kind of intoxicating romance.

Take time to evaluate your current romantic pursuit of your wife. How can you grow in serving your wife here?

Assignment:

In the near future, take time to talk with your wife about what she enjoys/doesn't enjoy in romance/intimacy. Study your wife's preferences in order to please her and become a more skilled lover.

Reflections:

DAY 13

“How beautiful is your love, my sister, my bride; you have captivated my heart with one glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace. How beautiful is your love, my sister, my bride! How much better is your love than wine, and the fragrance of your oils than any spice! Your lips drip nectar, my bride; honey and milk are under your tongue.”

— *Song of Solomon 4:9-11*

In the Song of Solomon, we are given an example of lovers speaking to each other. They are communicating their passion for each other in erotic prose. These words aren't separate from the act of sex. They are an essential part in building anticipation of physical intimacy. Our words should touch the mind and heart before our hands touch her body.

“Before you touch her body, touch her heart and mind.”
— C.J. Mahaney, “Sex, Romance and the Glory of God”

Assignment:

The language of love should be present both before and after physical intimacy. Read Song of Solomon and take note of the spouses' passionate phrases to each other. Praise the beauty of your wife in ways that bless her. Detail the passion you have for her with your words.

Reflections:

DAY 14

“Love never ends.”
— *1 Corinthians 13:8*

There will be times when your sin momentarily disrupts your affection for your wife, but your love must never end. Forgiveness will need to be sought and extended. But your love for your spouse is bound in a lifelong covenant before God, made possible by Christ's atoning work on the cross. Christ's supreme example of sacrificial love gives us hope to fulfill God's good design in all areas of marriage, whether it's communication, conflict resolution, romance, etc. By God's grace, we can build strong marriages for his glory and our good.

As you have worked through this material, you undoubtedly have considered how you can grow in communication, conflict resolution and romance. But don't stop thinking about these important items just because this material has come to an end! Continue allowing God's Word to shape and direct your marriage in the weeks and months ahead.

Assignment:

Create your own list of things to do to further strengthen your marriage.

Reflections:
