

SESSION 1	3
SESSION 3.....	7
SESSION 4.....	25
SESSION 5.....	47



SESSION 1

GETTING TO KNOW YOU

THE 5 P'S OF MARRIAGE

1. PROVISION

First, we see that marriage is a *provision*. Specifically, it is a provision for companionship and help (Gen. 2:24). God himself determined that it was not good for man to be alone. Adam needed a suitable helper, so God created Eve from and for Adam (see also 1 Cor. 11:9). Since she was from him, the text makes clear that she is like him, the same kind of creature, equal in nature and worth, and so capable of a profound union with him. Adam would have an intimacy with Eve that no mere animal could ever provide. As Paul says, “Husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church . . .” (Eph. 5:28-29). And of course this loving intimacy isn’t limited solely to the physical, but includes emotional, social, and spiritual care and union as well.

Marriage is also the context for the provision of a family’s material needs. “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” (1 Tim. 5:8).

Finally, marriage is a provision for society at large. It is ordained by God at the creation as the founding relationship

*“The 5 P’s of Marriage” are adapted from Capitol Hill Baptist Church

and structure of the family as well as the basis of other social institutions like government and church.

2. PRODUCTIVITY

In Genesis 2:15 Adam was given a task to complete. He was placed in the garden to tend it and to subdue the earth and fill it. He was to be *productive* in that sense. What is the garden? It is the place where Adam lived, but also the place where he met with God. It was the place where the glory of God was known. So, in spreading the garden until it filled the earth, Adam was, in effect, to work to demonstrate the Lordship of God over all things and to spread and expand the realm in which God was known and glorified.

However, he was not and is not competent (by himself) to complete so grand a task. He was to demonstrate the Lordship of Christ in all of creation. That was beyond his ability, so God created woman to assist him in that task. Man was oriented to a task, and woman was oriented to man in order to assist him in obeying God's command.

3. PROCREATION

Marriage is also for *procreation*. We see that clearly in Genesis 2. Adam and Eve, a husband and a wife, are to multiply and fill the earth with godly offspring. But here too man is incompetent. He cannot reproduce alone, so God sanctions marriage for the procreation of godly offspring. "Has not the Lord 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" (Mal. 2:15).

And there is more to this context than simply producing children; the family is also the context in which they are to

be raised in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. (Deut. 6:1-9; Josh. 4:4-8; Eph. 6:1-4)

4. PROTECTION

One function of marriage is to *protect* men and women against the temporal and spiritual dangers of sexual sin. The sexual privileges and duties of marriage serve as protection against the burning passions of lust (1 Cor. 7:1-5, 8-9; Col. 3:5; 1 Thess. 4:3-8; Heb. 13:4).

5. PRAISE & PROJECT [THE PRIMARY PURPOSE!]

And of course, the most glorious purpose of marriage is to *project* the love of God specifically as it is shown in Jesus' sacrifice and care for the Church (see Eph. 5:22-33).

The husband's relationship to his wife was designed by God to be a picture of Christ's relationship to the church. From the beginning, marriage was intended to show us how God relates to his people. That is Paul's point in Ephesians 5:32. It's not that God designed his relationship with us on the analogy of marriage; it's that marriage was created with Christ and the church already in God's mind. He is the original groom; the church is the original bride. The rest of us are pale reflections and imperfect copies. Still, with such a glorious original, marriage is a deeply serious commitment before the Lord, intended to last until the death of one of the partners or until Christ returns. Marriage is intended to point to an unrealized reality, an incomparable love that will one day be consummated when Jesus returns for His bride. (Rev. 21:2).

CONCLUSION

Therefore, when two people marry, they are doing far more than expressing their love and affection for the other. They are party to more than a temporary contract for living arrangements and fiduciary responsibility.

When two people marry, they are entering into a relationship more fundamental than their previous parent-child relationship and more essential than any other social institution. They are participating in a glorious institution created by God for the blessing of mankind and for the spread of his glory to do together.



SESSION 3

TRUE LOVE

A PICTURE-PERFECT MARRIAGE

BY TIM CHALLIES

This article is meant to explain and apply Ephesians 5:22-33, that great text in which the Apostle Paul explains the mystery of marriage.

I am going to cheat a little bit by going to the end of the text before the beginning. I do this because any discussion of biblical marriage involves some intimidating words and ideas like *submission* and *headship* and this can make for a tense and emotional discussion. However, if we go all the way to the end of the text, we will see that everything turns out really well. Then we can breathe easy as we go back to the rest of it.

We begin with Ephesians 5:31,32: “‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.”

As he comes to the end of his teaching on marriage, Paul springs a giant surprise. He says that marriage is a mystery, that there is a hidden meaning in it and that until now this meaning has been hidden. The surprise is that marriage is a type or a picture. Marriage is meant to be a portrait of something else. To show this he goes to the Old Testament, to the very first marriage of the very first man and woman. Some context will prove helpful.

THE MYSTERY

God had created Adam and then allowed Adam to live by himself for a time so he could come to this understanding that in all of creation there was not a helper that was suitable to him. All the animals God had created paraded in front of Adam. Adam gave them names but saw that they were all very different from him. It's not that he was lonely and pining away, but that God had him see that there was nothing or no one who was equal to him, no one who could help him carry out his God-given mandate. Adam had received his mandate from God, that he was to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it. But he knew that he could only do that with the help of something or someone that was like him.

Then God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone." He caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep, he took one of his ribs and he fashioned a woman from it. He presented this woman to Adam in the first-ever wedding ceremony and the man immediately broke into a song of praise. Now he saw his helper, the one who would complement him and complete him and he sang out:

This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called Woman,
because she was taken out of Man.

Then we read these words: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." Now here, thousands of years later in this letter to the church in Ephesus, Paul returns to these words and says this: "This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church." Just like that, Paul gives

a whole new meaning to marriage. He says that for all this time the joining of husband and wife in marriage has actually been a mystery, that it has been pointing to something else, something greater. Only now after the death and resurrection of Jesus are we able to see what it has been pointing to. The mystery is that the marriage relationship is a portrait of the relationship of Christ to his church. This relationship is the ultimate marriage, the real marriage.

This means that *your* marriage will be a portrait of the marriage of Christ to his church, which in turn means that your marriage will be all about the gospel. Marriage is not ultimately about relational fulfillment or sexual fulfillment or procreation. All of those things are tied up in it, but the ultimate purpose of marriage is to serve as a portrait of the real marriage. The question is, will your marriage be a good portrait or a bad one? Will it be an accurate one or a distorted one? Will it be a masterpiece or mere kitsch?

THE WEDDING PORTRAIT

It may be helpful to picture an artist who has been called by the king and told to come to his wedding. This artist has been given the task of painting the official wedding portrait of the bride and groom. So he gets there early, he sets up his easel, he gets out his paints and begins to mix them, to make the colors he will need. He prepares his canvas and brushes. When the bride and groom come, he sits for a long time and just looks at them and studies them. And then he begins to put paint on canvas. At first it is just lines and blobs, but as he keeps working, the people begin to take shape, the groom in his fine suit and the bride in her dress. And as he works, hour after hour, the portrait gets better and sharper and more accurate and more beautiful. First you can see the outline of

their heads, then the shape of their faces, and then the expressions in their eyes. And when at last that artist is finished, he has painted a masterpiece, a stunning portrait of the bride and groom.

The relationship of Christ and the church, the gospel, is all about the marriage of a bride and groom; we, Christians, are the bride and Christ is the groom. This union of Christ and the church is the real marriage and our marriages are to serve as that portrait, that image of the ultimate reality.

So here is the happy ending to the story: Our marriages get to be a portrait of Christ and the church. What a privilege! Marriage is a display of the gospel. This means that whatever you do in marriage is meant to bring glory to Christ, and that is the happiest ending of all. Now that we know that, we can read those scary words like *submission* and *headship* and see that it is all going to work out really, really well.

THE WIFE

Having laid that foundation, I now want to look at how the wife fulfills her part of that great marriage portrait.

Here is what Paul says to wives: *You make your marriage an accurate portrait of the real marriage when you willingly submit to your husband's leadership.* You have the unique task of displaying the gospel in your willing submission to your husband. Here is the text I am drawing on: "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands" (Ephesians 5:22-24).

In this relationship that serves as a portrait of Christ and the church, it is the wife who is called to be an accurate por-

trait of the church—at least an accurate portrait of what the church is called to be. Wife-to-be, this is your calling from God. It is your duty and your privilege. As you relate to the man who will soon be your husband, you are to be toward him as the church is toward Christ. That is a little bit abstract so let's see how it takes shape by asking three questions: What, how and why?

What?

First, the *what* question: What are you to do to complete your part in this portrait? The answer is, You are to submit to your own husband in everything.

Paul says, "Wives, submit to your own husband." Let's not miss *your own*. A woman is not to submit to every man, but to her own husband. The Lord has determined that there should be a leadership structure within marriage but this does not mean that women are to submit to men in general. The head of the church is Christ and the church is to submit to him; the head of a wife is her husband and she is to submit to him.

She is to submit *in everything*. That is an intimidating statement and we need to deal with that word *everything*. We need to be careful that we don't make it mean more than it says. If you want to be ridiculous you could say that a man could now order his wife to jump off the Golden Gate Bridge and she would have to obey him. But of course we know that a wife is to submit to a higher authority before a lesser one. The heart of a hierarchy of authority is that there are levels of authority; if a lesser authority tells you to disobey a higher authority, your submission needs to be to the higher authority. So let's not make *in everything* more than it says.

Yet let's not make it mean less than it says either. It is an all-encompassing phrase which means that you really are to

obey your husband in everything that isn't directly contradictory to what a higher authority says. You are not free to follow his leadership or ignore it as you see fit. Really, the only time you are to refuse to follow your husband's leadership is when you can come to him with your Bible and say, "Here is where God says that I may not submit to you." You don't have to believe in what he says and you don't have to like what he says, but you do have to follow him. This will not always be easy and yet the Lord calls you to submit to his leadership. This is the role God has given you—a role in which you can beautifully display the gospel. You aren't submitting to your husband for your own happiness or peace, but to be that display, that portrait.

How?

That is the *what* question: you are to submit to your own husband in everything. But *how*? How is a wife to submit?

The answer is, You are to submit willingly. There isn't any such thing as forced submission—that is just servitude or slavery. God calls you to submit to your husband with joy and freedom. Submitting to your husband is not just your wifely duty, but your unique calling and privilege, the unique way that you can make your marriage an accurate portrait of the real marriage. Paul doesn't impose this upon you as a cross to bear. He doesn't apologize for this and comfort you as if this is in any way undignified or dehumanizing or a negative result of the fall into sin. He isn't describing a kind of submission that makes the wife completely passive and broken; he doesn't describe something here that robs you of your will or dignity. Paul simply and unapologetically describes this position of submission as your God-given role in the created

order and your unique contribution to the marriage relationship.

Paul wants you, the wife-to-be, to understand that God has made you to fulfill a unique role in the display of the gospel and he wants you to embrace this role joyfully and voluntarily from the first day of your marriage. He is calling on you to understand who God has made you to be and then be glad to fulfill this role with true joy because in submitting to your husband, you are able to be a great display of the gospel. No one else can do this. It is your unique privilege.

Why?

And now the *why* question: Why are you to willingly submit to your own husband in everything? Because ultimately your submission is God-ward. You are to submit to your own husband as to the Lord.

Your submission to your husband is a component of your greater submission to Christ. Submission to husband and submission to Christ are not two different things. The wife's motive in submitting to her husband is to submit to Christ by submitting to one of the lesser people to whom he has delegated authority. When you submit to your husband, when you submit willingly and joyfully, when you submit to your husband as a God-ordained authority in your life, you are being a picture of the bride in the real marriage — the bride who submits to Christ, the bridegroom.

How do you live with this in view? How do you take verses from the Bible and live in such a way that you are now doing your part to be that beautiful, sharp, accurate portrait of the church?

Well, why not begin like this: In your mind, in your heart, in your marriage, always be thinking about this question: "How

does the church submit to Christ? How do we as Christians relate to Jesus?" That is how you are to then relate to your husband. Of course you are not to begin worshipping him or singing hymns to him, but you do need to give him respect, to make much of him. You are his helper, which means your life is wrapped up in his.

Whatever he longs to be, however he intends to use his gifts and passions and calling, you are to join him in that. His mission is your mission, his calling is your calling, his passion is your passion. So join him, serve him, love him, respect him and you will be your part in this portrait, this image of the real marriage.

THE HUSBAND

Paul also speaks to husbands and here is what he says (in Ephesians 5:25:32): *Husbands, you make your marriage an accurate portrait of the real marriage when you give up your life to your wife.* You have the unique task of displaying the gospel in your willing, joyful, loving leadership of your wife. In this relationship that is meant to be a portrait of the relationship of Christ to the church, the husband is called to be an accurate portrait of Christ. Husbands, you are to be toward your wife as Christ is toward his church. That is a little bit abstract so let's see how it takes shape by asking three questions: What, how and why?

What?

What is a husband to do to? Husband, love your wife and give yourself up for her. Notice that Paul does not exactly parallel what he has said to wives. He does not immediately command you to be the head of your wife. He has told your wife to submit to your leadership, but he doesn't begin by

saying, “Husbands, lead!” Instead, he tells you to be filled with love for your wife. You are to lead in love, to give yourself up. This is not love as we may think of it in our culture — love as an emotion or love as something that is purely physical. True love is an act of will. It requires action. You are not commanded to be romantically warm and fuzzy with your wife, though hopefully you have that too, but you are told to act in love toward her.

The model for your love is Christ’s love for his people. How did Christ love his people? How much did he love his bride? He loved in action, not just in words or feelings. He gave himself up for her. He gave up his life. Christ gave himself up, he did not get given up. He was active and deliberate. Christ may still have shown love for us if he went to the cross kicking and screaming and protesting his innocence and begging to be let go. But how much more is his love displayed in his willing sacrifice, in going to the cross of his own volition. You display your love for your wife when you willingly, joyfully give yourself up for her.

You are to lead in love, in forgiveness, in repentance, in sacrifice, in giving of your time, your attention, your very self. You are to lead by loving first and loving most and loving best, by loving to the very end.

How?

Now what about the *how*? How do you as a husband do all of this? You make your marriage an accurate portrait of the real marriage by washing your wife with the word. As part of your God-given role, you are to lead in washing your wife with the Word of God, which is to say that you are to lead in your spiritual and devotional life together.

Most husbands are good at being providers. Some are good at serving their wives and learning to speak her “love language.” They are good at setting direction for the family and displaying godly character. Those are all good things and things they should do well. But the heart of husbanding, of being a display of Christ in marriage, is washing your wife by the Word of God.

Why?

There is still the question of *why*. Why would a husband do all of this? This is where marriage and husbanding takes off into a whole new dimension. It gives it such a beautiful and inspiring goal and purpose. Why are you as a husband to give yourself up for your wife and to wash her in the Word? Because you get your marriage as close as possible to the real marriage when you prepare your wife to be presented to Christ as holy and unblemished.

Paul paints this picture of Jesus Christ dying for his people so they could be made holy, so they could be presented to him, so they could stand before him free from any kind of blemish. That is your future. That is what Christ promises and all Christians are looking forward to that day. Now let’s apply that to marriage. Husband, you need to picture yourself one day presenting your wife to the Lord! There you are, standing beside her before the Lord and saying, “Here she is! Here is the wife you gave to me. Look how beautiful she is! I have given up my life for her, I have washed her in the Word, and now here she is. I present her to you.”

Do you see what your wife will be on that day? On that day she will be completely free from sin. Every shred of sin, every shred of imperfection will be gone. That old self will have been put off entirely and the new self will be all that she

is. She will be completely holy, completely pure and clean, all that God created her to be. As beautiful as she is now, she will be more beautiful in that day.

Do you have that picture in your mind of your wife-to-be standing there before the Lord, washed clean of every trace of sin? Fix that in your mind because God calls you to help her get there! As your marriage begins, you will have this amazing privilege of seeing more and more glimpses of what she will be. You will get to see it better than anyone else, of seeing her in that eternal perspective, of holding onto it with faith, and helping her get there. Marriage is about holiness the same way the Christian faith is about holiness. Christ died to make his people holy; you will be married to make your wife holy.

This means that you cannot afford to be short-sighted in marriage. Don't take too low a view of it. The farther ahead you can look, the greater the vision is. You're standing in the plains with this whole mountain range spread out before you. You can look down at your feet and enjoy the beauty of the grass and pebbles. You can raise your eyes a little bit and enjoy the low hills and small mountains. Or you can look straight ahead and see the sun breaking through the clouds over the whole mountain range. Do that and it puts everything in perspective—the grass and pebbles and foothills and all of it.

When we see God's purpose for marriage, when we see Christ and the church, when we see that church being presented to Christ in splendor, washed by the Word, holy and without blemish, we have raised our eyes and taken in the whole view. And it's just so beautiful.

If God has charged you with washing your wife by the water of his Word, this means that you need to be in the Word.

If God has charged you with helping your wife become holy, this means that you need to lead in holiness. For the sake of your wife, as a tangible expression of your love for her, you need to be relentless in your growth in holiness.

How do you live with this in view? How do you take verses from the Bible and live in such a way that you are now doing your part to be that beautiful, sharp, accurate portrait of Christ? Why not begin like this: When you think about your marriage you are to be always asking yourself, “How did Christ love his people? How can I display that kind of love to my wife? What would it mean in this situation to act the way Jesus acted toward his church?” This is true when you take time to sit and ponder your coming marriage and this is true in those moments where in a heartbeat you need to choose to react with grace or pride, calmness or anger. Everything you do, everything you say, every way you lead, is to be a reflection of that great portrait of the real marriage.

CONCLUSION

The Bible tells us that your marriage will be a portrait of Christ and the church, and in view of all this great gospel theology of salvation by grace through faith, of course you will long for it to be an accurate portrait. Picture that same wedding scene, that bride and groom, painted by the hand of a toddler using finger paints, or as an eighth grade art project, or from the brush of a capable artist, or from the hand of a master. Fix this in your mind and see that you have a lifetime’s worth of work here, to keep growing in skill and wisdom, to make that portrait a more accurate portrayal of the real marriage.

When a wife rubs against authority and bickers with her husband, when she refuses to respect him or refuses to follow

his leadership, the beauty of that portrait, the sharpness of it, is disrupted. When a husband loses love for his wife, when he dominates her or stops treating her with love, this picture gets all out of focus and distorted. And if a husband and wife divorce the portrait is destroyed altogether.

Your marriage is a work of art to be stewarded, to be held as a treasure, to be worked on like a masterpiece, so it can become a beautiful and accurate portrait of the real marriage, a stunning picture of the gospel.

SPEAKING LOVE'S LANGUAGES BY TIM CHALLIES

Gary Chapman's book *The Five Love Languages* has spent years on the bestseller lists and, like so many Christian books, it is one which combines genuine strengths with substantial weaknesses. It is a book that demands that we heed the old cliché to chew the meat while spitting out the bones. What follows is a critique of the very idea of love languages and them some ways in which they may be useful.

THE BASICS

The heart of the book is a description of five ways in which people tend to be wired or ways in which they tend to want to have love expressed to them: affirming words, gift-giving, physical touch, quality time and acts of service. Chapman believes that each of us has tendencies toward some of these and away from others. Each of us can probably take a look at the list and order them from one to five. Some of us love being served while some of us love receiving gifts. For others acts of service and receiving gifts are nearly meaningless. In his wisdom and kindness, God has made us to be very different even in the ways we give love and receive love.

There is no doubt that Chapman touches upon something real here. I need only look to my own marriage to see that my wife and I both have our own "language." The ways I can best express love to her are through quality time and acts of service while the way I love to receive love from her is through physical affection and quality time. Chapman's idea, of course, is that I find out from my wife how she likes to be loved and then begin to love her just like that. If quality time is at the top of her list, I will be sure to give her a lot of qual-

ity time. Implicit in this is that she will return the favor — she will learn my love language and love me that way in return. When we follow the model, a happy marriage will ensue. In this way, then, Chapman gives us a helpful way to describe the different ways we are wired and gives a realistic way of putting these love languages into action.

But the book also has some very notable weaknesses. Biblical counselor David Powlison has written a very helpful review and I am going to track with him for the next few paragraphs before returning to my own thoughts.

5 LUST LANGUAGES

After affirming some of the book's strengths, Powlison looks to the Golden Rule ("Do unto others as you would have them do to you") and offers this commentary: "Obviously, the most basic violations of the Golden Rule occur when we simply mistreat others, doing and saying malicious things we'd hate to have done and said to us. But perhaps the most common misunderstanding of the Golden Rule is that even in attempting to love others we do what we would want. It's a less heinous form of self-centeredness, more clumsy and ignorant than hateful."

This is important to see in the context of love languages. If I respond best to physical touch, then the way I will tend to express love to my wife is through physical touch. However, physical touch may mean nothing to her. My expressions of love, then, are actually selfish as I am only giving what I long to receive. At its best *The Five Love Languages* can correct this, but the reality tends to be a little bit different. The foundation of the book is that as I give my wife the kind of love she wants, she will reciprocate with the kind of love I most want. Powlison says, "What is Chapman working with here? Un-

wittingly, he exalts the observation that ‘even tax collectors, gentiles and sinners love those who love them into his guiding principle for human relationships.’” Do you see it? “Identify the felt need and meet it, and, odds are, your relationships will go pretty well.” This sounds pragmatically useful, but it doesn’t sound much like Christian living.

There is another big concern. “Love me as I long to be loved” is in a certain way a fair request, but it can also begin to sound like, “Scratch my itch” or, worse, “Bow before my idol.” Powlison says, “Part of considering the interests of others is to do them tangible good. But then to really love them, you usually need to help them see their itch as idolatrous, and to awaken in them a far more serious itch! That’s basic Christianity. *5LL* will never teach you to love at this deeper, more life-and-death level.” In demanding or expecting that my wife love me as I long to be loved, or in loving her in the way she longs to be loved, I may be bowing before idols.

What *The Five Love Languages* can actually do is teach us that the desires we feel within—desires that may truly be *lusts*—are actually *needs*. And as soon as we see them as needs, we have deviated from biblical Christianity to human psychology. “Chapman’s model is premised on a give-to-get economy: ‘I will give to fill your love tank. But in the back of my mind I’m always considering whether and when I’ll get my own tank filled.’” In Powlison’s words, “*5LL* replaces naked self-interest with civilized self-interest. ‘I give, hoping to get.’”

So now we’ve got 2 big concerns: that there is an inherent selfishness with the love languages and that they may at heart be a form of idolatry.

Where, fundamentally, does Chapman go wrong? I think it is in this: He assumes that what we feel as needs are fundamentally good. “He never deals with the fact that people

can desire evil. ... Chapman never deals with the fact that even desires for good things can still be evil desires in God's analysis of what makes us tick. Your 'love language' ... is a curious mix of creation and fall." At the heart of *The Five Love Languages* is a fundamental misunderstanding of the fallenness of man. We are sinful to such an extent that even our deepest desires, things we may consider needs, may be inherently sinful.

When we understand our natural depravity we are prepared to look at God's love for us and see that Christ's love language is one that none of us desire. "We might say that the itch itself (an ear for God's language) has to be created, because we live in such a stupor of self-centered itchiness. The love language model does not highlight those exquisite forms of love that do not 'speak your language. ... The greatest love ever shown does not speak the instinctively self-centered language of the recipients of such love." Do you see this? The saving love of God, expressed in the death of Christ, does not speak anyone's natural love language. And yet it is the greatest love and our most desperate need. In this way Christ fails the love language test! We wanted to be loved in all sorts of ways—but none of us wanted to be loved in the way Christ has loved us, by dying for us, sending his Spirit to indwell us, and being Lord over us. And yet this is what we have needed more than anything in all the world.

MY LANGUAGE

Powlison has offered some tough critiques, but this should not cause us to miss what truly is valuable in the book. So let me return to a couple of the ways I have found *The Five Love Languages* to be useful.

In the first place, I have found it helpful to categorize the ways people want to be loved. This has opened to me the panorama of means through which it is possible to love another person. Though Chapman offers only five categories, they are sufficiently broad that they offer endless ways to express affection. I have found it beneficial to look at my wife through those languages and to seek to love her well. At the same time, it has been valuable to see ways in which she may make a desire a need, a lust or an idol. And, of course, it has done the same for me. I've been amazed to see how the language I speak best can be the language of idolatry. As Powlison says, "I've found that one acid test of my heart is how I handle being misunderstood, caricatured, reviled, dissed—not how I handle being accurately known and loved! It's when someone doesn't speak my 'love language' that I find out what I'm made of, and by God's grace begin to change what I live for."

Second, and probably most importantly, I have found it helpful to see the ways in which my wife longs to be loved because it has taught me how she is most likely to express love to me. She and I speak very different languages and that can leave both of us feeling unloved. But once I came to understand that our languages are different, it began to open my ears to a whole new language. It turns out that it was not that she wasn't loving me, but that she was loving me in her own language. This had closed my heart to those expressions of love. But once I understood her better, then I was prepared to receive love in different and unexpected ways. Now I am learning to understand new languages and to respond to them. And this has brought about far more benefit than demanding (or even hoping) that she will learn to speak mine.



SESSION 4

MONEY, SEX & CONFLICT

THE BIBLE AND BIRTH CONTROL

BY TIM CHALLIES

The Bible is silent on any explicit discussion of the subject of birth control. Nowhere in the Bible does God command that a couple must or should use birth control at any stage in their marriage. Likewise, nowhere in the Bible does God explicitly forbid the use of birth control. It's not that birth control did not exist in the day the Bible was written or that God has no opinion on the matter, but simply that he, for his own good purposes, chose not to give us explicit direction. However, the Bible has so much to say about marriage, sexuality, family and human life that we are not simply left guessing and hoping for the best.

WHAT GOD FORBIDS

From what the Bible teaches about life and marriage, we can all affirm that two methods of birth control are clearly forbidden by Scripture.

God Forbids Abstinence. The Bible tells us that spouses are not to deprive one another but, rather, are to regularly enjoy the sexual relationship. The only exception is given by the Apostle Paul who says that a couple may abstain for a short time in order to devote themselves to prayer. "Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time,

that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control” (1 Corinthians 7:5). Long-term abstinence within marriage is not to be used as a method of birth control.

God Forbids Abortion. The Bible places the highest value on human life. Time and again Scripture affirms that we are to treasure and protect life, knowing that God is sovereign over life and death. Therefore, we may not destroy life as a method of birth control.

All of this is helpful in narrowing the scope of our conversation. We now need to determine if God allows any form of birth control at all. Once we have done that, and if we determine that at least some forms may be acceptable, we can move on to a discussion of whether one form or method of birth control is morally superior to another.

PRINCIPLES

What I want to do next is look to the Bible to find principles that can offer guidance as we consider this issue. Here is a survey of biblical truth that may prove helpful. Consider each of these a potential piece of the puzzle.

Be Fruitful and Multiply. God created human life and as one of man’s primary roles told him to “be fruitful and multiply.” It is our duty as humans to procreate and our special duty as Christians to fill the earth with people who know and love the Lord. Therefore it is reasonable to say that as a general principle God expects that a husband and wife will have at least some children and raise them for his glory.

Children Are a Blessing. The Bible is clear that we are to regard children as a blessing and not as a burden. Psalm 127 says “Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, The

fruit of the womb is a reward.” Where our culture too often sees children as a financial, emotional or psychological burden, the Bible tells us that they are a blessing and a reward. Further, *Many Children Is a Great Blessing*. God gave no conditions to his command that we be fruitful and multiply. He did not say “multiply up to and including eight children at which point you must stop.” At the same time he did not say “be fruitful and multiply until you have exceeded two children.” We are given no rules about how many children are appropriate in God’s eyes. We do hear hints, though, that God approves of large families and that many children represent a special blessing. Psalm 127 continues, “Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, So are the children of one’s youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them.” Many children represent many blessings.

God Is Sovereign. God is absolutely sovereign, having foreordained every pregnancy. Whether a woman has one children or seven, God has decreed the beginning and end of each pregnancy. It is the Lord who opens and closes the womb and he makes no mistakes. In the same vein, God is sovereign over provision. Scripture tells us time and again that God will provide for all of our needs. We are to have confidence that no matter how impossible our needs may seem, he will provide. This means that when it comes to our confidence in God’s provision, a family with fifteen children can have the same confidence as a family with one child.

There Is No Built-in Birth Control. God has not given humans the innate ability to enjoy the sexual relationship while absolutely avoiding pregnancy. This means that under normal birth control-free conditions, and during the childbearing years, there is always the possibility of a pregnancy when a

husband and wife obey God by enjoying the sexual relationship.

These are some of the principles we will want to keep in mind as we consider the morality of birth control.

CHRISTIAN FREEDOM

We come now to a conclusion: If it is true that the Bible neither forbids nor explicitly commands birth control, this places it within the realm of Christian freedom. This is not to say we are just free to do whatever we want. Rather, we are to use the resources God gives us in Scripture, in conscience, in wisdom, in Christian community, and come to what we then trust is a God-honoring conclusion. As we do this we must acknowledge that other Christians may come to different conclusions and we must be prepared not to attack them or do battle with them.

If birth control does fall into the area of Christian freedom, it means that even while the Bible states that children are a blessing and while it tells us to be fruitful and multiply, it does not demand that we are all to be exactly as fruitful as we possibly could be or that we are to all have as many children as we can possibly have. There are good reasons and bad reasons both to limit the size of your family and to choose not to. Both extremes can be a means to pursue idolatries or to give in to those who would overstep their boundaries and bind another person's conscience. If you do not want children because you just plain don't like children or because you are a selfish person who wants to pursue your own dreams of a life of ease, you ought to examine your heart and repent and consider that children are a blessing of the Lord. If you want to have twenty children because that is just what people do in your community or because you have made family size into a

kind of idol, you also need to examine your heart and repent. The human heart truly is tricky and deceptive and wicked and it will often latch on to good things and raise them into ultimate things.

BAD METHODS OF BIRTH CONTROL

As there are bad reasons to use birth control, there are also bad methods. Two of these bad methods of birth control have already been mentioned: abortion and abstinence. I will add a third: abortifacients.

There are some contraceptive devices that do not block or prevent conception, but rather, destroy or disrupt a pregnancy. If we believe that life begins at conception, then we must conclude that such methods of birth control do not prevent pregnancy but actually destroy human life.

While there are many contraceptive methods available, most fall into one of two camps: those that prevent pregnancy by blocking contraception (condoms and other blockade devices) and those that prevent ovulation (pills, patches, and so on). If you hold that Christians have freedom to choose whether or not they will use birth control, you will likely agree that the first group, the blockade devices, are acceptable choices for the Christian. The second group introduces a greater level of difficulty.

There are several reasons that the birth control pill (and similar methods) make an attractive method of birth control: It is simple, as a woman need only take a pill once a day to have near-perfect protection against pregnancy; it is highly effective so that when used perfectly, the chances of becoming pregnant are minuscule; it is also convenient, promoting spontaneity and ease-of-use. Compared to other forms of birth control, the pill is highly desirable and it is easy to

understand why it has come into such widespread use, even among Christians.

The pill prevents pregnancy by essentially fooling a woman's body into thinking it is pregnant. There are two main types of birth control pills. The first is a combined oral contraceptive that contains two hormones: estrogen and progestin. Estrogen helps prevent ovulation by suppressing the hormones that would cause the ovary to release an egg. Progestin thickens the cervical mucus which hinders the ability of the sperm to travel through the fallopian tubes. It may also prevent the lining of the uterus from developing normally which means that if an egg is fertilized, it will be unable to implant. The second type of pill contains no estrogen, so while it does not prevent ovulation, it does inhibit the ability of the sperm to fertilize the egg (both by thickening mucus and by suppressing its ability to unite with the egg) and, should fertilization take place, the likelihood of implantation.

A search of resources geared mainly towards women's health shows that most doctors agree that birth control does not cause abortions. However, many of these doctors also deny that life begins at conception. If life does, indeed, begin at conception, preventing implantation is already causing an abortion.

Many Christians who have medical knowledge and who affirm that life is inherently precious from the moment of conception have tackled this issue. Many of these experts seem to be backing the claims of their colleagues, saying that there is no hard evidence that the birth control pill can cause abortions.

For example, Dr. Michael Fields is a medical expert who attends John MacArthur's Grace Community Church and he insists that the birth control pill is in no way an abortive

method of birth control. Similarly, the majority of the experts James Dobson spoke to “feel that the pill does not have an abortifacient effect. A minority of the doctors feel that when conception occurs on the pill, there is enough of a possibility for an abortifacient effect, however remote, to warrant informing women about it.” It seems that while the evidence increasingly indicates there is little likelihood of causing an abortion by taking the pill, the jury is still out. This leaves Christians having to weigh the evidence on their own and attempting to sort out the facts. My conviction is that because nothing less than human life is at stake, couples should avoid the birth control pill until medical research has advanced to the point that no doubt remains.

CONCLUSION

Of course there is much more that could be said on this topic, but I will close there. To recap: Because the Bible does not command or forbid birth control, we have freedom to choose, provided that we first avail ourselves of the resources God gives us. Given this freedom, blockade methods of birth control pose no ethical difficulty but oral contraceptives may. We do well to get the facts and choose wisely.

Like everything else in the Christian life, the issue of birth control is a heart issue and one that exposes our attitudes toward children, toward God’s providence, and so much else. I am convinced that men and women on both sides of this debate can love and value children, can live in full assurance of God’s providence and can trust and obey God. I am convinced that God gives us freedom to use birth control or to decide not to use birth control. I am convinced that what matters most is motives and a desire to live for his glory.

FROM THE PORTRAIT TO THE MARRIAGE BED

BY TIM CHALLIES

You have already examined Ephesians 5:22-33 and seen that it provides the big picture of marriage, that marriage is meant to be a portrait of the bride and groom. What follows is a brief explanation of how we can draw the sexual relationship out of what we know to be true of marriage.

The Bible knows no good in sex outside of the marriage relationship. In love God says that within marriage sex is to be enjoyed and to be enjoyed freely and regularly. In love God says that outside marriage, sex of any kind is strictly forbidden. Why? Because God designed sex for a specific purpose and that purpose can only be expressed within marriage. Any other expression of sexuality, whether that is adultery or fornication or masturbation — all of these things ignore God's design for sex and reinterpret it according to our sinful designs.

To understand this we need to look at the covenantal nature of marriage. Marriage is a covenant that a husband and wife enter into, a covenant in which they come together before God and before other people and are made one. It is not the rings or the white dress that makes marriage, but the covenant. While husband and wife obviously remain two individuals, two independent life forms, there is now a sense in which God regards them as one entity. Again, we have to go back to Genesis 2 and see the man leaving his father and mother and being joined with his wife as one flesh.

Now Paul was obviously aware that this talk of one flesh can be taken literally and is meant to be taken literally. But he goes further and shows that it is more than a physical joining, but a joining that parallels the union of Christ and his church. So whatever sex is, it is more than flesh, it is more

than just physical. The physical sex act where the two are literally joined together signifies something more—it points to Christ and the church. Sex is a sign of the union, something that points to what the two have become.

And not only that, but it is a means of recommitment, of reaffirming all that marriage is meant to be. When a husband and wife have sex together they are both affirming that they have given themselves to the other in a whole and complete way. Sex proclaims, “I am yours. I am yours alone. I am committed to you to the end.”

It is in the marriage bed that the physical, emotional, the sexual and the spiritual meet in an unparalleled way. It is here that you will allow your spouse to see you in the deepest and most vulnerable context. No one else is ever meant to see you here, to see you in this way. This is where you will lay yourself bare, where you can be naked and unashamed in all that you are. This is where you abandon pretence and self-love in favor of authenticity and service. This is where you express the kind of commitment to your spouse that says, “We are working on this portrait together, and by God’s grace we will work on it to the end.”

CRAVINGS & CONFLICT

BY C.J. MAHANEY

It is with great confidence that I can predict: you will face relational conflict in your future. Not only your distant future, but your immediate future. Whether between husbands and wives, parents and children, pastors and church members, employers and employees, professors and students, friends, or relatives, conflict will occur. For as sinners living in a fallen world, conflict is inevitable and in fact, is heading your way right now. You can count on it. The question is: are you prepared for conflict?

DIVINE INTERRUPTION

In James 4, God interrupts our often romantic and selfish view of life and graciously prepares us for relational conflict. He also identifies the root issue underlying conflict and provides life-transforming wisdom for resolving conflict. Let's make eye contact with God and receive his wisdom by reading, considering and responding to James 4:1-2: "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."

Serious relational conflict existed among the original recipients of this letter. This is no flattering portrayal of the early church. Although the recipients were genuinely converted, there was the distinct presence of relational hostility and the marked absence of reconciliation and relational harmony. Notice the plural in verse one: "quarrels"... "fights." These were not occasional events, but common. It is a chronic condition that James is addressing here.

Particularly interesting is the fact that James does not specify the nature of the conflicts (although we could certainly speculate based on the rest of the letter). By deliberately (and brilliantly) making a general reference to “quarrels” and “fights,” James refuses to draw attention to the potentially distracting circumstances. The occasion and the issues are irrelevant to James, because they aren’t the source. Instead, he highlights the underlying biblical categories by which we can best understand every conflict.

What James understood—and what we must understand as well—is that the circumstances of a particular conflict can never be the root cause. Nor can they alter the root cause. That’s good news for us, because regardless of the occasion or circumstances of our quarrels and fights, the biblical categories always apply. This should give us hope for discerning our hearts and resolving conflict.

How wonderful that these verses were not only written for the original recipients, but for us as well! Here in this passage, God is kindly addressing us with a wealth of wisdom and economy of words—revealing both the root issue of relational conflict and its solution.

In this article we will briefly explore both the root and solution, for they are inseparable. From these few and wise words of James 4:1-2 we learn three things about relational conflict: Conflict is more serious than we think, conflict is easier to understand than we think it is and conflict is easier to resolve than we think

CONFLICT IS MORE SERIOUS THAN WE THINK

Take a moment to reflect on your most recent relational conflict. What words and phrases come to mind when you try to identify its cause? Here are some popular ones: We just

don't get along. We aren't wired the same way. Our personalities clash. We have issues.

It's our sinful tendency to minimize the seriousness of relational conflict. Often, we have a very flattering assessment of ourselves, and we assume the other participant is primarily to blame. We're quite comfortable describing conflict with superficial, morally neutral generalities such those listed above.

But James won't allow it. He won't allow us to minimize or ignore quarrels or fights. He insists that we examine our quarrels and fights more closely and carefully. As we do, we discover that conflict is more serious than we thought.

Look carefully at the language of this passage. What begins as a "quarrel" at the outset of verse 1 is described as "war within" at the end of verse 1. What begins as a "fight" in verse 1 is described as "murder" and "coveting" in verse 2. The language doesn't soften as the passage progresses; it strengthens. These verses begin with a human assessment of relational conflict (fights, quarrels) and proceed to a divine evaluation of relational conflict (war, murder, coveting).

When we quarrel and fight, God sees war and murder. What we may see as an "issue" between two individuals, God sees as a violation of his holy law rooted in covetousness and self-exaltation. Quarrels and fights reveal the presence of sin—and not simply sin against another person, but ultimately and most seriously, sin against God. Conflict is far worse than we think.

Do you tend to minimize your relational conflicts? Do you attribute them to something superficial, or entirely to someone else? Or do you seek to evaluate your conflicts from a divine perspective?

When, after years of denial, baseball player Pete Rose finally acknowledged betting on the game while manager of

the Cincinnati Reds, his apology was as follows: “I’m sure that I’m supposed to act all sorry or sad or guilty now that I’ve accepted that I’ve done something wrong, but you see, I’m not built that way. So let’s leave it like this. I’m sorry it happened. I’m sorry for all the people, fans, and family it hurt, let’s move on.”

All too often, this can be my approach to resolving relational conflict. There’s a degree of sorrow, but it’s superficial. And the accent of guilt is on the other individual. As for me, I just want to “move on.”

But this passage confronts me: “There’s no moving on yet, pal. Where do you think you’re going? Come back here, please. Let’s have no ‘Pete Rose type’ confessions among those who profess to love and serve Jesus Christ—but rather confessions that proceed from a genuine awareness of our sin against God.”

James 4 can transform how we respond to relational conflict. A divine perspective will keep us from minimizing conflict, help us avoid vague, superficial confessions, and prevent us from prematurely moving on, leaving unresolved conflict in our wake. Through this passage we understand that to engage in quarrels and fights is to sin against a holy God. Conflict is more serious than we think.

CONFLICT IS EASIER TO UNDERSTAND THAN WE THINK

When you are in relational conflict, it often feels complicated, hard to unravel, impossible to resolve. But James insists otherwise. Conflict is not complex, confusing or mysterious. It’s not demonic. It doesn’t require professional help to understand. It doesn’t even ultimately matter how or when it began.

James pinpoints the origin of conflict at the end of verse one: “the passions that are at war within you.” Conflict isn’t the other person’s fault, or the result of unfortunate circumstances—as James reiterates several times: “Your passions are at war within you. You desire and do not have. You covet and cannot obtain.”

These three phrases describe not only the location but also the root cause of conflict: the sinful cravings resident in all our hearts. Again, notice the repetitious language: Your passions are at war. You desire and do not have. You covet and cannot obtain. Each and every conflict reveals an inordinate—strong desire for something—something we want so much that we’re willing to quarrel and fight, to sin against others and dishonor God in order to get. “What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you?” Sinful cravings within our hearts are the root cause of quarrels and fights.

My friend David Powlison, has taught me much about the doctrine of sanctification and the topic of sinful cravings in particular. He observes:

One of the joys of biblical ministry comes when you are able to turn on the lights in another person’s dark room....I have yet to meet a couple locked in hostility (and the accompanying fear, self-pity, hurt, self-righteousness) who really understood and reckoned with their motives. James 4:1-3 teaches that cravings underlie conflicts. Why do you fight? It’s not “because my wife/husband...”—it’s because of something about you. Couples who see what rules them—cravings for affection, attention, power, vindication, control, comfort, a hassle-free life—can repent and find God’s grace made real to them, and then learn how to make peace (*Seeing With New Eyes*, p 151).

“Cravings underlie conflicts” is an excellent summation of the wisdom found in James 4. Why do we fight? Because we don’t get what we want. It’s that simple. Wherever there’s a conflict—whether it’s between two people or two countries—there’s a sinful craving that hasn’t been satisfied yet. There’s no deeper reason.

Take James 4 with you into your next conflict, and you will be able to identify the source of the problem. Ask yourself, “What do I want that I am not getting right now?” The answer will help you recognize the specific sinful craving that is fueling your quarrels and fights.

Despite the unflattering nature of this discovery, we can be grateful for the clarity and specificity of God’s Word. In his kindness, he has provided us with precise and practical wisdom for understanding our hearts in the midst of relational conflict.

By contrast, we often live in a world of unhelpful generalities. For example, you’re driving along and a light appears on the dashboard: “Check Engine.” That’s all it says. What are you supposed to make of that? The first time it happened to me, I dutifully complied. I pulled over, opened the hood, and stood in front of the engine, thinking, “Wow, there’s a lot of stuff in here.” But there were no blinking lights, no tiny flags waving, nothing at all to tell me what exactly I should be checking. Within moments I had determined beyond any doubt that the level of the windshield wiper fluid was just fine. Having exhausted my checking abilities, I got back in the car and continued on my way, clinging to the vague hope that such checking had been sufficient.

My computer is another example. One day I’m typing. It’s a simple document, and I’m just naïve enough to think that basic word processing is something my computer was

made to handle. Suddenly a message pops up: “Error has occurred.” The message itself seems to carry an attitude. I can almost hear a mocking voice from deep within my computer: “Ha ha, ha! An error has occurred. This document is dead. Your computer is dead. You’re dead. It’s an ERROR!” If you were nearby, you might have heard me talking back to my computer (don’t tell me you never have...), as I commented on the overall unhelpfulness of this message.

“OK, an error. So I should...what? Save the document? Not save it? Print it out? Copy it all by hand? Reboot the machine? Back up my hard drive? Purchase an entire IT department?” In the end, I employed the most sophisticated technical solution of which I am capable: Ctrl-Alt-Del.

I am so glad that when it comes to relational conflict, God doesn’t provide mere generalities. He gives us so much more information than, “Sin has occurred” and “It’s worse than you think.” Now that is accurate and even quite valuable, but it doesn’t suggest a solution any more than does “Check Engine” or “Error has occurred.” No, God provided James 4:1-2 so that we can identify and confess our specific cravings, receive forgiveness, and begin to weaken our cravings and cultivate righteousness.

Douglas Moo, in his commentary on the letter from James, writes the following: “With penetrating insight...James provides us with a powerful analysis of human conflict. Verbal argument, private violence or national conflict—the cause of them all can be traced back to the frustrated desire to want more than we have, to be envious of and covet what others have, whether it be their position or their possessions” (*The Letter of James*, p. 184).

This passage offers hope. Our lives need not be an endless, inevitable cycle of unresolved quarrels and fights. Instead,

God provides insight and discernment so that we can put to death the sinful craving at the root of every relational conflict.

The truth that “cravings underlie conflicts” was vividly displayed in my own life, when I arrived home one evening from work. My family was gathering for dinner, and hugs and kisses and “I love yous” were given all around. Carolyn walked by me on her way to the table with some food and kindly mentioned in passing that I had failed to tell her about a calendar commitment I made for both of us.

There was nothing sinful, either in her words or tone, but my response was immediate: “I did tell you about it.” Walking past me back into the kitchen, she said, with a smile, “I don’t think so.” Still civil, but a bit more firmly, I insisted that I had indeed informed her of this commitment.

After dinner, when Carolyn and I were alone, she humbly appealed: “Lately, I feel as if you have not been keeping me informed of various plans like you usually do.”

I wish I could tell you that I responded with humility. I wish I had heard her out and then humbly evaluated her critique, appropriately suspicious of my own heart and eager to learn from her observations. But I did not. Instead I began to question her, and rather quickly my approach came to resemble that of a prosecuting attorney. I was being misrepresented and this injustice must be righted.

Carolyn was merely trying to preserve intimacy and communication in our marriage, but in my pride I quickly became angry. Before long I had moved beyond disagreement and (since no one else was honoring me) begun to honor myself. I actually said something like, “Dear, it’s tough not to admire how effective a communicator I have been in our marriage.” I followed this up with *A Brief History of Our Marriage According to C.J.*, featuring a number of illustrations portraying me

as possibly the most communicative husband of all time. And although she expressed appreciation for what I had done in the past, Carolyn was not persuaded.

My arrogance was pronounced and my anger was escalating; but Carolyn chose to serve and not sin. In my prideful state, that was simply unacceptable. So to my shame, I made several remarks intended to provoke her to join my sinful party. I wanted her to have something to confess as well. But Carolyn wasn't playing my game, and we ended the conversation in disagreement.

Did I then go to another room, fall to my knees, open my Bible to James 4, and repent? No, I went to our bedroom, sat down, opened my new *Sports Illustrated*, and dove in. But I wasn't reading the articles. I was imagining my wife coming into the room and saying, "Love, you really are most incredible husband in all of world history. How could I have possibly criticized you in any way? Will you please forgive me?"

That's when God, in his kindness, began to convict me. I began to see that I had brought cravings right in the front door with me that evening—cravings for my home to be primarily (if not exclusively) a place of refuge and relaxation, rather than a context in which to serve. I wanted a hassle-free evening. I wanted to be lavished with attention, affection and approval. And I'd received correction instead.

My passions were warring within me, and when they weren't satisfied, what did I do? Because I coveted and could not obtain, I fought and quarreled. Because I desired and did not have, I sought to drag my patient, loving wife into the mire with me. In the final analysis, I was railing against God and his purposes in my life for that evening.

When the Holy Spirit clarified my sinful cravings, I saw not only that the situation was more serious than I had

thought—I saw where the source and cause of this conflict truly resided. It wasn't complicated. The problem was within me!

Understanding conflict is simpler than we think, for God's Word makes it clear that cravings underlie conflicts.

RESOLVING CONFLICT IS EASIER THAN WE THINK

Whatever the nature of your next conflict, it's also easier to resolve than you think.

No matter its duration, intensity, severity, or subject matter, the solution is found in James 4:10: "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up." This non-negotiable divine command is accompanied by a promise.

How can we humble ourselves before God?

We find the motivation right here in this passage. James 4:1-2 reminds us that relational conflict is first and foremost conflict with God. When I quarrel and fight, I have a more serious opponent than my spouse, or any one else. In James 4:6 God reveals himself as actively opposed to the proud. When I'm in conflict, God is opposed to me.

My sin against God must first be resolved before there's any hope of reconciliation with others. I must confess my sinful cravings to him—clearly, specifically, and without excuse. I must repent and turn away from quarrels and fights.

When I genuinely repent, there is sweet hope in the promise that: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9.) When we humble ourselves before the Lord, he will forgive, and he will exalt us.

But in light of the seriousness of my sin against God, how can forgiveness be so easy? There's just one answer. It can

only be this easy because the Savior has done the unimaginably difficult.

On the cross, the Son of God resolved the most serious conflict: the conflict between a holy God and wicked sinners. It has been settled, completely and forever, through the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The ultimate relational conflict has been totally resolved. Our sin is worse than we think, but God's grace is greater than our sin.

Because that infinitely serious conflict with God has been resolved, there is hope for resolving every human relational conflict. When we have humbled ourselves before God through repentance, we are then equipped by grace to seek interpersonal resolution. With our sins against God forgiven, we can begin to find reconciliation with others.

When you have contributed sinfully to a conflict, return to that individual with a confession that is sincere, specific, and—in most cases—brief. Just as specific confession is vital when repenting before God, it is also important to identify specific sinful cravings when confessing to others. We must also guard against a lengthy confession, which can sometimes be a front to excuse sin instead of requesting forgiveness. Only when your confession is sincere and specific will you be able to help your wife, child, friend, church member, or fellow employee.

Resolving relational conflict is easier than you think. It involves humbling ourselves before the Lord, and where appropriate, humbling ourselves before others.

I did finally pull my head out of my *Sports Illustrated* that evening. Convicted by God's merciful illumination of my sinful heart, I humbled myself before him, repented specifically, and received forgiveness. I was then able to return to Carolyn with a very specific confession about the cravings that

had caused the quarrel. She forgave me quickly, graciously, and completely. Once again, I experienced the sweet fruit of peace with God and the person I love most in all the world.

Friends, there is a relational conflict in your immediate future, just as there is in mine. Let's prepare now for this temptation and purpose to apply the wisdom of James 4:1-2 in the midst of quarrels and fights. For conflict is more serious than we think, it's simpler to understand than we think, and because of the Savior, it's easier to resolve than we think.



SESSION 5

THE WEDDING CEREMONY

SAMPLE VOWS

I, JILL, take you, JACK, to be my husband, to have and to hold, to live with and love together and in the sight of God; for better, for worse; for richer, for poorer; in sickness and in health; to love and to cherish, until death do us part; as God is my witness, I give you my pledge.

I, JACK, take you, JILL, to be my wife, to have and to hold, to live with and love together and in the sight of God; for better, for worse; for richer, for poorer; in sickness and in health; to love and to cherish, until death do us part; as God is my witness, I give you my pledge.

JILL, I love you and take you to be my wife for as long as God gives life to both of us. I don't know everything there is to know about love or about myself, but what I do know I want to share with you. I want to be open and honest with you in order that through the bad times and the good times our relationship might grow. I join you in praying that our relationship with each other and our relationship with God would both grow and prosper. Therefore, I commit myself to you in the sight of God.

JACK, I love you and take you to be my husband for as long as God gives life to both of us. I want to share with you the

good and the bad times the happy and sad times. I want to encourage you when you are discouraged. I have faith and trust in you and in your abilities. I will go anywhere with you letting the Lord be the guide of our lives and the Head of our home. I want to be honest and share with you those things which will make our relationship grow. Therefore, I commit myself to you in the sight of God.

I, JILL, in love, faith and honesty take you, JACK, to be my husband to share with you God's plan for our lives united in Christ. I have prayed that God would lead me to His choice and I am confident that His will is being fulfilled today. Through the joys and pressures of the present and the uncertainties and hopes of the future I promise to be faithful to you, JACK. I will love, obey, and encourage you as long as we both shall live. I promise to follow you through life's experiences as you follow God, that together we may grow in the likeness of Christ and our home be a praise to Him.

I, JACK, in love, faith and honesty take you, JILL, to be my wife to share with you God's plan for our lives united in Christ. Together we will be vessels for His service in accordance with His plan, so that in all areas of our life Christ will have the preeminence. Through the joys and pressures of the present and the uncertainties and hopes of the future I promise to be faithful to you, JILL. I promise to love, cherish and protect you as Christ does His church, as long as we both shall live. With God's grace, I promise to lead you and share life's experiences with you, that together we may grow in the likeness of Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord.

In the Name of God, I, JACK, take you, Jill, to be my wife, to

have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, in sorrow and in joy, to love and to cherish, until we are parted by death. This is my solemn vow.

In the Name of God, I, JILL, take you, JACK, to be my husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, in sorrow and in joy, to love and to cherish, until we are parted by death. This is my solemn vow.

SAMPLE CEREMONY

Pastor, Groom and Groomsmen Enter

Bridesmaids' Processional

Bride's Processional

Statement of Purpose

- The pastor briefly explains the purpose of marriage and the reason for the ceremony.

Prayer

Singing

Declaration of Intent

- The pastor asks both husband and wife why they intend to be married with words similar to these: "Jack, do you now intend to leave your parents, to establish your home with Jill as her husband, to lead her as your wife, to make a home where she will be loved, cherished and cared for as long as God grants her life? If so, answer, 'I do.'"

Giving Away of the Bride

- A traditional element in which the father symbolically transfers the primary care and leadership of his daughter

ter to the groom.

Scripture Reading

- Often the couple will choose their own wedding text and the pastor will read it and preach from it.

Message

- Most wedding sermons are short and are intended to challenge and encourage the couple while also preaching the gospel to the congregation.

Marriage Vows

- More than any other element, it is the vows that make the marriage.

Exchange of Rings

Signing of the Registry

Singing

Prayer

Pronouncement

- The pastor, acting on behalf of God and government, proclaims that the couple is now husband and wife.

Kiss

Presentation of the Bride and Groom

- “It is my honor to introduce to you, Mr. and Mrs. ...”

Recessional

HONEYMOON THOUGHTS

Here are a few things to consider for your honeymoon.

- Plan to not be too busy with tours, travel, friends, and so on. This could be the one opportunity in a very long time that you have just each other to worry about. Make the most of it!
- Start your marriage right by planning to spend time reading the Bible and praying together every day that you are away.
- Please do not let your honeymoon go bad. Call the pastor immediately (collect!) from wherever you are in the world if you reach a problem or situation that you cannot resolve together. There is no shame in this and you will not be the first to do so.
- Have realistic expectations for your sexual relationship. Sex, like so much else, requires practice, patience and familiarity. You've got a whole lifetime together, so don't grow discouraged if you get off to what seems like a slow start.
- Take *Intended for Pleasure* with you.

