

A Marriage Made in Heaven

Student Handbook

The background of the cover features a silhouette of a large, spreading tree on a dark hill. In the center, a couple is silhouetted against a large, bright sun setting over a horizon. The woman on the left is pointing towards the sun. The sky is a gradient of orange and red.

Ted and
Esther Dean

"Finding greater love and fulfillment in you marriage"

FulfilledMarriage.com

Session 1: Getting off to a Good Start

Note: Please if you have not read “A Word of Encouragement”, please do so prior to doing your homework.

God Really Loves Us

God loves us, our marriage, and our family. Remember, “God is Love”! He wants us to know and experience divine love. Ask Him to reveal more and more of His inexhaustible love over these next nine weeks so you can love Him at a depth you have not experienced before. There are no limits to God’s love, no matter what has transpired in your life before. Make your participation in a *Marriage Made in Heaven*, a journey of love, first for God, then for yourself and your husband or wife.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.
John 3:16

He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things.
Romans 8:32

My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.
John 15: 12

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.
Jeremiah 29:11

A personal note from the author:

Although this program is designed primarily for Christian couples, the principles outlined in the texts are just as vital and their application will be effective for non-Christians. If you or your spouse do not count yourself as followers of Christ, there will not be any pressure for you to participate in prayer, or subscribe to any of the beliefs or tenets expressed in this book. We do require you to complete all your homework, so that you can participate in discussions in the classroom and more importantly, if your spouse is a Christian, understand their beliefs and viewpoints and how that affects your marriage. In the class environment, you will never be criticized for your beliefs, and of course we know you will not criticize others for theirs.

For spouses that do not share the faith of their wife or husband, but feel a tugging in their hearts to discover the foundation on which this course finds its full meaning and purpose, you can share in God's divine purpose for marriage like your spouse by becoming a follower of Christ, a Christian. Please read the Appendix A which provides a simple path to follow that will result in more meaning from this course, and a wonderful starting point to become truly one with your wife or husband, and share in the greatest of joys of life, walking daily with your savior and Lord.

The Steps to a Normal Christian Life

It is clear that many of our lives, and many of those in the Church universal fall short of normalcy, both as God's word declares, and as well as His past dealings with His chosen ones illustrate. Is it probable that our understanding of the use of the word "normal" as it relates to our walk with God, corresponds with the word moderate? What is normal for a Christian will never be normal or moderate in our or any other culture. We cannot compromise God's purposes to fit into the world. What only matters are what God declares should be normal for His adopted and chosen ones. Don't skip over this thought without a little soul-searching, to determine where you are in relation to where God wants you to be. This week's lesson is designed for you to discover what should be normal for your personal life, and in your marriage.

During the course, we will periodically be utilizing the analogy of "Building Our Home" to help us understand important aspects of building a strong marriage. In the building of a home the first thing that is needed is not laying the foundation as many would say, but it is the clearing and the preparation of the lot that will eventually hold the foundation, and ultimately the entire house. For our purposes, "clearing the lot", includes removing all the trash, entangled brush and even some "weed trees" that have taken root. This is not an easy job. Unlike digging the foundation and erecting the structure, where we will have bulldozers and power tools to get the job done. For this job, each one of us are going to have to pull all the weeds out, and tear down the smaller weed trees that have sprouted where the house needs to go, and we must especially make sure the roots are removed, so that all of the undesired vegetation cannot regrow.

Except for daily Couples Prayer, this week's assignment, unlike the remaining eight weeks, will be mostly an individual effort. Please look at this week as a fresh start, not only for your marriage, but also for your personal relationship with our living and loving God.

On page five, in the "What is in the Name" section of this Guide it says the following:

“Christians should have the most successful, happy and fulfilling marriages on earth. God makes available for all His adopted children unlimited resources for this through His love for us.”

This is not just some platitude to get you excited, it is what God wants for you and your spouse. You don't have to be a super star spouse or a miracle working Christian, just normal, God's normal, not the world's or Hollywood's normal. Just stay on the path of life with your Savior.

I am convinced that if we line our individual lives up to God's requirements, and then as a couple commit to applying the wisdom that He will bring you over the next nine weeks, we will have the kind of marriage that is rare today in both the world, and unfortunately also in the church. Walking with God in your life and marriage is not to be so difficult that it takes away joy and fulfillment. No it actually brings much more joy and fulfillment into your life. Not only that, but God makes your life easier when you are walking within His plan.

“For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Matthew 11:30 NIV

Step 1: Exalting God

Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth.

Psalm 57:5

You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.

Revelation 4:11

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, “I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless.” Genesis 17:1

A. W. Tozer in his Christian classic, *The Pursuit of God* brings clarity for our understanding of what our position as “created ones”, is in relationship to the Creator:

“Every soul belongs to God and exists by His pleasure. God being who He is, and we being who and what we are, the only thinkable relation between us is full Lordship on His part, and complete submission on ours. We owe Him every honor that is in our power to give Him. Our everlasting grief lies in giving Him anything less.”

Since Adam and Eve, every sin committed by man has been an affront to God, and his rightful position as Creator. Yes, we are God's children, yes, we are made in His likeness, but we are not divine, and we need to submit to His Lordship in all things! Every creature but man lives within their proper boundaries, only man dares to step out of God's appointed place for him.

Do you not know? Have you not heard?

The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.

Isaiah 40:28

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

Proverbs 9:10

Step 2: Trusting in God's Love

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Romans

8:28

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding

Proverbs 3:5

Those who know your name trust in you, for you, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you.

Psalms 9:10

This course is in no way about me, but I have had my fair share of troubles, and one thing I will share is that God always delivered me out of them. Once through them, I could always say "thank you, now I see it was necessary". For those that are in difficulty, I can assure you, if you determine to be a "normal Christian", Romans 8:28 above will always be true in your life, and you will be able to say "thank you Lord, I needed to go through my problems". There will be times, when we can see no way out. It's in those times I have been reduced to a point that I could only say to God, I am going to hang on to you because I have no other one to go to. God is not looking for heroes, just those that hang on, and He will give you the strength you need.

My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.

Psalms 121:2

*The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him,
and he helps me. My heart leaps for joy, and with my song I
praise him.*

Psalm 28:7

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own
understanding.*

Proverbs 3:5

Step 3: Absolute Surrender to God

This step should be an obvious one for us, but it tends to be the most difficult. Surrendering should flow directly from step one, trusting God. There is usually no problem in surrendering some things, but to surrender “absolutely” all things is another matter. Often, we find it difficult to surrender a child or a spouse, because we want to do God’s job of fixing them. Other times, we may have trouble releasing a “pet sin” like gossiping about others, or a sin like cheating on your income tax, because you cannot trust God for your finances. It is so important that we realize that God always has a better way, and His ways are many times incomprehensible to us. That is why we need to surrender completely all things to him.

“As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

Isaiah 55:9

At the end of World War Two (WWII) the allies insisted on a surrender without conditions. Once Germany surrendered, the United States instituted the Marshall Plan, which aided West Germany in rebuilding their nation’s infrastructure and economy, now the strongest in Europe. Similarly, all of us in our past, were guilty of “transgressions” against the authority of God, and we were His enemies. But like the U.S.’s treatment of Germany, He has forgiven us, and will always will do what is best for us if we “absolutely” surrender to Him.

*...that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue
acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the
Father.*

Philippians 2:10-12

*And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for
themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.*

2 Corinthians 5:15

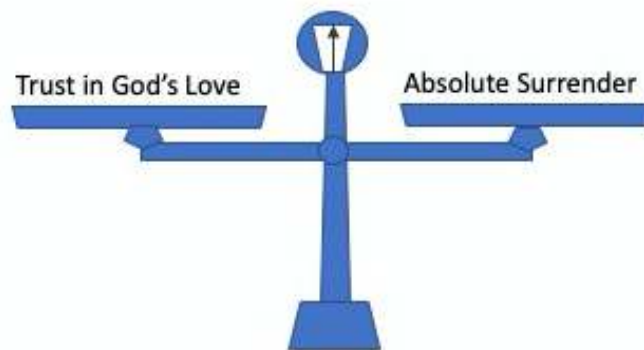
the prophecy of one who hears the words of God, who has knowledge from the Most High, who sees a vision from the Almighty, who falls prostrate, and whose eyes are opened:
Numbers 24:16

Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.
Proverbs 30:5

For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.
Hebrews 4:12

Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.
James 1:4 NIV

A Life Lived According to God's Plan



Forgiveness-Getting Rid of the Weeds

For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.
Matthew 6:14-15

Forgiveness is not optional, it is God's direct command to you to forgive, and a lack of forgiveness results in a curse (God will not forgive you) if you do not obey this command.

Delaying forgiveness of your spouse, or anyone else will keep you from receiving the benefits that you could be receiving over these next weeks. Saying, "I am not ready to forgive" is just as deadly as saying, "I am not ready to receive an

antidote for a snake's bite". Forgiveness is not a once in a lifetime act, but must be a lifestyle for your marriage and your life, to be called up on a daily basis, or whenever you are offended. Many wrongs have continuing adverse effects on our lives, and forgiveness must be given each time we experience those effects.

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. *Mathew 18:21-22*

Before we begin building, let us try to look at forgiveness from God's perspective. In receiving Christ as Lord and Savior, we receive both forgiveness for all our sins past, present and future, and in addition we are immediately adopted into God's own family. As members of God's family, we are expected to emulate our Lord's character by living as Christ did on this planet. God, who is Love, gives us love in granting us forgiveness. Agape, the love God gives us is not our human type of love. God's love is divine, always giving without expectation of getting anything in return, and one of the characteristics of this love is the unconditional, unmerited love through the act of forgiveness.

Whoever does not love, does not know God, because God is

Key: As members of God's family, we are expected to emulate God's character by living as Christ did on this planet.

love.
John 4:8

Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.
Colossians 3:13 NIV

Look at this second scripture closely, what is different about it from other scriptures on forgiveness? "Forgive as the Lord forgave you", these words add much more to the requirement for forgiveness. God tells us that we are instructed to forgive others in the same way and degree as He does for us. Is that possible?

Have you ever wondered why Jesus seemed to ask the impossible of us? Have His words ever caused you to pause and ask yourself, "How on earth could I ever do that"? Here are just a few examples:

But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you.
Luke 6:27

He answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

Matthew 19:21

Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Matthew 5:48

I will never forget the day that I noticed something I seemingly of minor importance in Acts 7:55 and with its connection with verse 60.

But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

Acts 7:55

Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep (died being stoned!).

Acts 7:60

If you read the entire chapter seven of the book of Acts, you cannot but be moved by Stephen's courage and anointing. In verse 55 we see Jesus overlooking this event while "standing".

This is the only instance that shows Jesus getting up from His throne; I believe He did it to honor this hero of faith for not only for his being martyred, but also his forgiving of his assailants.

Clearly Stephen is supernaturally anointed with fearlessness and at the same time demonstrating love as his killers are in the process of stoning him. In verse sixty not only does he forgive his assailants, but in addition asks God to forgive them. I would be very surprised if this courage and love did not pave the way for Saul's later conversion on the Damascus Road. If that is the case, and I believe it is, in a sense, the work of Paul as an Apostle must to a great part, be credited to Stephen. With the example of Stephen's granting of forgiveness to his murderers, is there any way that we could be justified in not forgiving those who have wronged us?



Stoning of the Apostle Steven (note: Jesus standing in background), by Domenico Fiasella, 1589-1669

On the issue of forgiveness, we often hear both from Christian teaching and from experts on health about the adverse effects to the health of a person having unforgiveness and bitterness towards another. They include adverse physical health issues, mental distress, bitterness, depression and unhappiness. Living with the effects of unforgiveness makes it impossible to improve our marriage, and to have a life of joy and freedom in our relationship with God.

Today you have the choice of blessing all those who in your life have caused you hurt, or having great difficulty, not progressing in your marriage, or your relationship with your spouse.

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

Matthew 6:15 NIV

And when you stand praying; if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.

Mark 11:25

Another good example of the need to forgive is the story of Joseph, son of Jacob the Patriarch. Even though his brothers sold Joseph into slavery, he was able to forgive his brothers and bring much blessing to his entire family. Truly God can make “all things work for good”.

Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still living?" But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence. Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come close to me." When they had done so, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance".
Genesis 45: 4-7

Considering what we have just discussed thus far, it is clear that:

- God requires that we forgive all others.
- That within our marriage we must, at God's direction, have an ongoing forgiving lifestyle.
- That failure to forgive results in serious spiritual, emotional and physical problems.
- That the act of love worked out in forgiveness requires *Agape*, the totally unconditional love that only God has, but makes available to all of His children through the working of the Holy Spirit.

Key: Granting Forgiveness through Agape (Divine Sacrificial Love) is a privilege, because God uses us to be the vessel of His divine and unconditional forgiveness.

- First it takes our will to align with God's will to forgive.
- Second, it needs our Faith in God's ability for love and forgiveness to come through us.
- Thirdly it takes our will to plant a temporal monument on the day of forgiveness that we can always remember when and where forgiveness was given without reservation and in non-revocable permanence.
- Fourth, we must control our inner ear, shutting it off from the enemy's accusations that we have not forgiven.
- The final work of forgiveness is your blessing, empathy and love towards the offender (this is your "being Christ-like moment").

Action-answer the following questions:

Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

Colossians 3:13

1. Reread Colossians 3:13 above. There is qualification for forgiving, what is it? What do you think it means?

Re-Write this scripture in simple and practical terms as it applies to your mate, or another.

I forgive Martha (fictitious name) for running up our credit card debt. We will work together to come up with a mutually agreeable way of paying only cash until we can develop a budget and pay down our debt.

Notice in the example above, there is a mutually agreeable immediate answer that relieves the current situation, and a longer-term permanent solution that will provide both of them the financial wisdom they need for their entire lives.

2. If Martha's husband, who had agreed to be the primary person for handling the finances, did not monitor the spending every month, would you think that he was partially responsible? Yes_____ No_____

In many if not most cases when offense is made, the offended person has played at least a small part in the offense, but that of course never justifies wrong action by the other.

3. If you answered yes, how should he have expressed this issue when he discovered the spending?

4. If you currently have an issue with your spouse or have had one in the past, write out how you believe God would have you grant forgiveness. Use all of the five steps of granting forgiveness in the in the Key block on a previous page.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Stop here for Day 1's lesson

Putting the Past Behind You: Removing the Roots

A point that is important to remember is that we are new creatures in Christ and that we no longer have to be bound by our past. Remember God chose you with knowledge of your sinfulness and your tendencies towards sinning. Now, Satan has no legal rights in your life. You do not have to listen to his accusations. With faith as a shield you can put out his fiery arrows of lies and accusations. Remember Satan is a created being and isn't even close to the level of God. Remember you are God's Child and so valuable that Jesus suffered and died for your freedom from the father of lies!

*Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?
It is God who justifies.*

Romans 8:33

*In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according
to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with
the purpose of his will.* Ephesians 1:11

*Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe
yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and
patience.* Colossians 3:12

I don't want to give our enemy too much attention, and if you are doing your couples prayer every day he will not be able to thwart your efforts, but he may try.

The truth though, is that Satan wants to derail your effort through discouragement, accusations and lies. Don't let him do it; stand firm and he will get tired of seeing you being devoted to making your marriage into something wonderful. You will continue to be the seed in good soil if you do all your assignments as outlined. Do not forget to pray together every day, and seek God's wisdom, love your spouse, and draw on the power He wants to provide through the Holy Spirit.

Some people (but not you) are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them.

Mark 4:15

One way the enemy can find weak spots in our life is to utilize personal tendencies that you may have as a result of your heritage or upbringing. We shouldn't say, "the reason we get angry is because of our cultural heritage, or that's the way it was in our house". This is a common issue amongst the students that have gone through this course.

...maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.

Exodus 34:7

In Christ we no longer have to live under generational sin or tendencies. Satan, our adversary, is the Father of Lies and wants us to believe otherwise. Do not become discouraged, simply tell God you are sorry when you slip, and praise Him. Confession is powerful, and Satan doesn't want to be around if your failures ends in praising God!

Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

James 4:7

Before we attempt go any further into treating this issue, let us discover who we really are and what it really means to belong to God. First, we must have a deep surety in our salvation and by extension, our adoption into the household of God. Adoption throughout the period of the New testament writings gave the adopted person, a child or an adult, identical positional standing and inheritance rights as an actual child born into a family.

As example of the legal standing in this era of adoption, Emperor Octavius's maternal great-uncle Julius Caesar was assassinated in 44 BC, and Octavius was named in Caesar's will as his adopted son and heir. ⁱ

In a sense, because of the death of Christ and our adoption by our heavenly father we have received all the rights and high standing of sonship.

he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—
Ephesians 1:5

So, in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith.
Galatians 3:26

Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— John 1:12

These scriptures should give us a deep understanding not only of how important we are to God, and how much He loves us, but also encourage us to realize that Satan has no hold on us unless we allow him to do so, or we step out from our protected place.

It is this adoption that gives us our status in things of the "spiritual world", the unseen but very real realm in which our enemy and his subordinates operate. Our positional authority is vitally important, because with it comes all of the unlimited resources that heaven can bring to bear on our behalf. And of course, it also comes with the responsibilities that are associated with the Father's expectations for His children.

It is important for us to understand that God has given us all we need to succeed in our role in overcoming all aspects of what we call spiritual warfare, especially as it pertains to our becoming more and more of what a child of God should be. Never forget that Satan and your flesh, your well indoctrinated old self that was in control before you were redeemed, are fighting against your going forward with God, and your new life's redirection towards holiness.

The primary requirement for your success is simply to put on the armor of God, freely given, and in a word, stand! Don't be enticed by temptation and lies to move out from under God's cover and grace.

Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. Ephesians 6:11

Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, Ephesians 6:14

Action Item:

Let's pray the following prayer out loud now:

"Father, I know that through my Savior's death on the cross I am a child of God and I am no longer subject to the curse of my forefathers. I renounce any spiritual attachments that my ancestors, or I have had as a result of sin. In the name of Jesus Christ, the Lord of Lords, I declare my whole allegiance to you my Heavenly Father, to Christ and to the Holy Spirit."

In the Beginning God: Building on the Right Foundation

But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand.

Matthew 7:26

The true foundation of marriage is found in God Himself, the creator of Mankind, and the designer of and participant in the marriage covenant. For the believer, the scriptures and each spouse's personal faith bring enlightenment and power to those who are submitted to the lordship of Christ. Note, the caveat "submitted to the *Lordship of Christ*". That being said, for all students at home while discussing your weekly lessons, this would be a wonderful place and time for you to express in the presence of your spouse, the assurance that you are submitting to Christ and His plan for your marriage. This is important because many problems between spouses in Christian Marriages are the result of both lacking understanding (wisdom) while at the same time trying to fix the problems themselves without being submitted to doing it God's way with His empowerment. It will be amazing what God will do, and what wisdom and resources he will bring to bear if you ask Him to lead the way in your marriage.

The Right Perspective

It is important as we begin any serious endeavor, especially one as important as improving our marriage, with the right perspective, otherwise we will not be successful. By participating in *A Marriage Made in Heaven* you have agreed to commit to weeks of study, application, conversations and committed to be accountable not only to your spouse but also to all your fellow classmates.

If we were building a new home and decided without any knowledge to serve as our own architect and general contractor, the results would be disastrous. If, on the other hand, we had a most knowledgeable expert to both design and build our home, we would listen to him for his recommendations and trust him in directing the project until it is finished.

...unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain.
Psalm 127:1a



Unfortunately, like the couple without this expert leadership, many of us enter marriage with little or no knowledge of how we can develop a healthy, intimate marriage that will not only endure, but also prosper and grow into something most harmonious and beautiful. This is sad because there is a knowledgeable marriage contractor wanting to help and He stands at your heart's door and knocks.

At this moment, open the door of your heart and invite God into the leadership role of your life and your marriage. Write out your prayer below.

“The first four words of the Bible, "In the beginning God”, hold within their full meaning, all else that follows, from Creation to the final unfolding of the Kingdom of God in the book of Revelation. "This is the foundation truth of the Judeo-Christian beliefs. God is the great Originator and Initiator. It is the ignoring

of this, which is the basic error in all human schemes; false systems of theology and philosophy that all begin with man, and seek to work up to god”.

In A. W. Pink’s *Gleanings in Genesis* quoted above, “we must, in all our thinking, begin with God and work down to man”, this helps us to fully understand where we should begin our journey.

One of the greatest benefits in being a Christian is that God has, from the very moment that you received Christ as Lord and Savior, given you the Holy Spirit to dwell in you, and as a result provided the ability for you to be guided in your thinking and understanding. The Holy Spirit can provide you the ability to see things as God sees them. It is this very blessing that gives us as Christians the potential for having the greatest marriages on earth.

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives.

Colossians 1:9

Paul, the most prolific of all the Apostles, penned the following words that show us the way to do just that.

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

Colossians 3:1

In addition to getting the “elevated” perspective of Marriage, this scripture gives us the ability to discern God’s original and ongoing plan for marriage. We should have complete confidence that God “invited in” will now guide and empower us in various ways to insure our success.

Key: There is only one authentic plan for marriage.

- God is the Originator
- God is the Designer
- God is Sustainer
- His plan cannot be modified or replaced.

Marriage with Purpose

If God was the initiator, then it is obvious that all of creation, including mankind, were made for His purposes. Those of us that were fortunate to be raised

with a Christian background were taught, and in many cases required to memorize one of the primary tenets of our Christian faith: “We were created to glorify God”

The great prophet, Isaiah, echoes this:

everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made
Isaiah 43:7

And Paul tells us:

So, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.
1 Corinthians 10:31

And David:

I will praise you, Lord my God, with all my heart; I will glorify your name forever.
Psalm 86:12



Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden by Wenzel Peter, Vatican Museum

What does all this really mean as far as my marriage is concerned? It means simply that marriage was God’s idea and that our lives and marriages are primarily for His purpose not ours. On the human level, it means that since God created marriage, it would follow that it should be good and full of love (“God is Love”), In fact God said it “was very good”!

Additionally, the very nature of God is such, that in addition to His purposes, we can trust Him in the design of marriage, and that it will bring blessing when His plan is followed. Throughout scripture we see that God loves us. The Apostle John, called the “Apostle of Love” for his deep understanding of that subject, penned these most eloquent words:

Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.
1 John 4:8

And so, we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.
1 John 4:16

Action-answer the following question:

If your marriage is for God’s purpose, what does that mean to you, and in what ways should it affect your marriage?

Stop here for Day 2’s Lesson

The Design Unfolds

Read the Scripture below:

The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.” Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals. But for Adam no suitable helper was found. 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 then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. 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.” That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

Genesis 2:18-24

Although, you ladies might not want to make a point of it, you might find it humorous that Adam was made out of dirt. For our study, what is important is that Eve came from Adam's side. For both of you, note, Eve did not come from Adam's back, or his front, but his side; the symbolism should be obvious.

God determined that Adam would need a partner long before the creation. Was the pause between the creation of Adam and the making of Eve for the purpose of giving Adam a sense of incompleteness without a counter-part? God never does things without purpose, so this pause in time must have been part of the original plan. Adam surely observed that all the creatures God had made, had mates (counterparts). Thus, Eve was just as important to God's plan as Adam was.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love, he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will.

Ephesians 1:3-4

The above scripture, places us as part of the creation story unfolding through all of time. This is important to grasp because Jesus showed clearly that he was pointing us back to the creation time when declared that divorce was against God's original plan (before the fall).

Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning."

Matthew 19:8

But the plans of the Lord stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations.

Psalms 33:11

Action-answer the following questions:

What does it mean to you as a person and as a spouse, that God, "chose us ...before the creation", not to be happy or to be fulfilled, but to be "holy" (separated from the sinful world and belonging to the Kingdom of God)?

As a person:

As a Spouse:

Suitability of Adam to Fulfill God's Plan

The knowledge of what took place in Genesis chapter two is fundamental to our understanding of our mate and what our marriage is all about. Using logic and reason let us see what can be understood.

Obviously, from what we have learned, Adam by himself could not fulfill God's purposes in at least two ways. He obviously could not fill the Earth without a partner and thus fulfill God's desire to have a family and populate the World. And even more significantly, in God's eyes, it was not good that Adam dwell alone, and in Adam's "aloneness" he could not fulfill God's intention even in a sinless nature because He had no one to love or sacrifice for.

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

Genesis 2:18

Equality and Interdependence of Adam and Eve

In the scripture above, the word "helper" does not mean a subordinate, it is closer to the meaning "companion" or more definitively, "suitable, adapted to, complementary". Read below from the Young's Literal Translation (YLT) I think you will be surprised.

And Jehovah God saith, "Not good for the man to be alone, I do make to him a helper -- as his counterpart."

Genesis 2:18

Counterpart, Oh what a wonderful word!

Here is Webster's full definition of *counterpart*:

- 1. One of two corresponding copies of a legal instrument: duplicate*
- 2. A thing that fits another perfectly*
- 3. Something that completes: complement*
- 4. One remarkably similar to another*
- 5. One having the same function or characteristics as another*

“Bone of my bone”, “flesh of my flesh”, in taking part of Adam to make Eve, all arguments that Adam is superior are also negated logically. Logic indicates that one or the other could not have been more important, because without the other they could not function as God intended and without each other Adam would fail in achieving oneness, and completeness. It would be impossible, because it would be only in interdependence that they could accomplish the tasks that lay before them. “It is not good that man dwell alone”, must mean, “I did not design him to function without a mate, a partner.”

I cannot emphasize this enough because this, Genesis 2:18, God's first words about the marriage relationship pointedly says to us, "you are not only equal in all ways, but you fit together perfectly." With this, God's concept of "oneness and one flesh" begins, and the potential of a pure and loving harmony between wife and husband becomes a real possibility.

The New Testament supports this with several clear passages:

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord.... Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her..... In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies..... However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

Ephesians 5:21-33

Again, we see that when God speaks of marriage, he speaks of mutuality in the context of oneness. This scripture begins to unfold what this course is all about, “sacrificial love”, caring for one another and fulfilling our particular equal roles as God intends.

There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus
Galatians 3:28.

In Galatians, Paul in one sentence eradicates hundreds of years of Jewish teaching, tradition and culture that had taught the inferiority of women. What screams out in this scripture is God saying, “Where did you ever get that idea, it wasn’t from me?”

Let’s take a moment and think about these scriptures and see how they might apply to our participation in this course. In this course, you will begin to see

what you are doing wrong, and what you need to do to play your role in fulfilling your spouse's God given unique needs. In order to accomplish that, we have to understand our responsibilities within the marriage but also, and every bit as important, is the necessity and the role of sacrifice. Frequently love requires doing and giving what you really do not want to do or give. Is it possible that, in God taking Adam's rib from him to form Eve, God was showing us that in becoming one, there must be self-sacrifice, a giving of oneself? What a beautiful thought, does it also support the reasons God delayed Eve's arrival?

The amazing thing is that in giving and sacrificing for one's spouse, you actually increase your love for her or him. In a sense, love is not love except when it is given away; at least not in God's kind of love. I think reading this next scripture you will see that it reveals a great truth for our lives and marriages. Sacrifice and giving of one's self to another, and to God, leads us to the highest of revelation and fullness of life itself. Isn't that what the Father did for us, in sacrificing His son?

For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it.

Matthew 16:25

Keys: -Frequently love requires doing and giving what you really do not want to do or give.

-Love is not God's kind of love, unless it is given away freely and without expectation.

Adam and Eve's Incompleteness

Symbolically, once God made Eve out of Adam's side or rib, he would no longer be whole, nor self-sufficient like he was before she arrived on the scene. Now Adam and Eve have needs that they cannot fulfill by themselves. Now they must bond together (in covenant) to have their needs fulfilled; the process of becoming one must now begin. The time for sacrificing and giving has arrived.

Adam never had to give or sacrifice before Eve arrived! Keep in mind, there is no indication that Adam and Eve will have identical needs and, like us, it is highly unlikely. This will become evident when we address needs later in the course. At this point, among other things, they need communication skills, they need companionship, they now have a sex drive to become one flesh and fill the earth, and they must have negotiation skills in order to make good decisions. They must learn to live in peace and harmony together and with God, who is meeting with them in the Garden to help them succeed.

One Flesh

That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

Genesis 2:24

It is vital to know this scripture in context, God proclaimed this truth that husbands and wife must leave their parents' home and their oversight and control even though at this point in time even Adam and Eve had no parents.

He deemed it so important that this was to be passed on to their children that life after marriage was to be separate and distinctly different from that experienced with a father and mother. This was to ensure that His people in the future would know what God required of them in the Marriage Covenant, and to know that the marriage bed was designed to be pleasurable, pleasing to God and holy in both design and in the act itself.

This is vital information and an essential element in the institution of marriage. So vital that Jesus himself quotes it again to make sure His followers know that it is for them, and at the same time condemns Israel's culture (like ours) that permitted divorce. Now making sure His people of the future (Christians like us) would know that he "hates divorce" because of the damage it does to humanity. God wants His church divorce proof!

"Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So, they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate."
Mathew 19:4-6

Please note in verse six, "what God has joined together". This declaration, originated with God and includes God as party to the covenant of marriage. This scripture means so much more than just the fact that sexual intimacy should exist only in the context of a marriage. It also declares that this sexual "coming together" is a gift from God, and as a result is beautiful and honorable. He has chosen this act of love as the post-ceremonial act that formally enacts the lifelong covenant in which He acts as witness .

Please meditate on this concept of God "joining together" because it raises the level of sexual intimacy throughout marriage to a place of wholesomeness and in some ways even holiness in that God plays a part in it.

This very fact, if for no other reason, should keep us from feeding our eyes and polluting our minds on Hollywood's, or readily available pornographic portrayal of all things sexual. It also should free us from the low opinions of sexual

fulfillment within marriage that have historically come from non-biblical teachings that actually continue this day within portions of the church. Remember sex was God's idea, and He said it was good, no "very good!"

Stop here for Day 3's Lesson

Covenant Marriage: Its importance to God

In our modern western culture, both the understanding of what a covenant is, and the recognition of its importance is not commonly understood. Every Christian should fully understand the importance of covenant and the seriousness that God assigns to all covenants, especially those that pertain to His children. The New Covenant, the covenant that provides for or salvation and our adoption into God's family is of course the most important. The second most important covenant that we can make in our entire life is that of the Marriage Covenant, which is not only important to us, but in God's eyes is indissoluble, and cannot be broken, except for very well-defined reasons. God hates divorce, just as He hates the breaking of any covenant.

"The man who hates and divorces his wife," says the Lord, the God of Israel, "does violence to the one he should protect," says the Lord Almighty.
Malachi 2:16

Covenant Marriage: God's Plan for Discipleship

Key: God established marriage as a covenant, not a contract. It is important to understand the difference between these two. Three important differences exist:

1. A *covenant* is based on trust between parties. A *contract* is based on distrust.
2. A *covenant* is based on unlimited responsibility. A *contract* is based on limited liability.
3. A *covenant* cannot be broken if new circumstances occur. A *contract* can be voided by mutual consent.

Covenant Marriage, In Relationship with God:

Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.
Ecclesiastes 4:12

A three-stranded rope is the perfect number of strands for a cord or rope. In a three-stranded rope, each strand is in contact with the other two throughout its entire length. As long as one cord keeps strong, the cord will sustain its load. The

cord is the symbol of Covenant Marriage, and with strands representing Husband, Wife and Christ. How much comfort this is, no matter what stress comes upon your marriage, your Lord is willing to carry the brunt of the load.

*For two are better than one
If one falls down the other one
Picks him up
So if you'll become my wife
I'll promise you I will be yours
For the rest of our lives*

*How do I love thee? Let me count the ways
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height my soul can reach
I love thee to the level of every day's most quiet need
I love thee with the breath, smiles, tears of all my life*

*Then between God, me and you
There's nothing that we cannot do
We'll form an unbreakable
Cord of three strands*

From, the song *Cord of Three Strands*, © Copyright - Michael John Jackson / Jinx Avenue Records

*Carry each other's burdens, and in this way, you will fulfill
the Law of Christ.
Galatians 6:2*

Party to a Covenant:

I do not want to dwell on the negative, but it is necessary before we go on that we have a deep conception of how God feels about all covenants and the marriage covenant specifically.

There are a large number of instances when Israel broke covenant with God. The punishment for doing this was severe and lasted from decades to hundreds of years! In addition, God punished them for breaking of man-made covenants they made with other people.

The results of breaking the marriage covenant by divorce are no less severe. It is important to understand fully that in divorcing a spouse, a person is also divorcing God from the covenant relationship. Although God's people did not adhere to His standards for marriage, it has always been God's intention that a husband and wife live in a life-long covenant relationship with Him.

Another thing you do: You flood the Lord's altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer looks with favor on your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. You ask, "Why?" It is because the Lord is the witness between you and the wife of your youth. You have been unfaithful to her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.
Malachi 2:13-14

Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?" "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So, they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate." "Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?" Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard, but it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery." Matthew 19:3-9

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.
James 1:17

These verses clearly show that Jesus returned marriage to the original standard that God had in mind for Adam and Eve, "in the beginning" before the fall. This higher standard comes with a promise of a supernatural change that enables us in the New Covenant to adhere to Christ's standards and requirements for His followers. He knew that "Born Again Believers" with a new heart would have the Holy Spirit's power to resist or overcome every difficulty in marriage if relying on God's help. Ezekiel the prophet, looking forward to the day of Christ and the giving of the Holy Spirit to dwell in each believer's heart prophesied:

I will give you a new heart and put a new Spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.
Ezekiel 36:26

I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh
Ezekiel 11:19

Both of these scriptures look forward to Christ for this “change of heart” which only happens in “regeneration”, new birth, and salvation through the atoning sacrifice of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. This is the New Covenant and it provides us power to change and power to love.

Seeing what God Sees, and What We Should See

- God designed marriage to be life-long, an unbreakable covenant.
- Marriage was designed to serve as a model for shedding light on the highest covenant of all, the New Covenant
- Divorce damages the culture
- Divorce cannot be done in love (We are to do all things in love)
- Divorce hardens hearts
- Divorce undermines the institutions of family and church
- God hates it
- Divorce damages children even into adulthood and in their own marriages
- Divorce is financially disastrous, especially for single mothers

Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins”.

Matthew 26:27-28

For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.

Ephesians 5:32-33

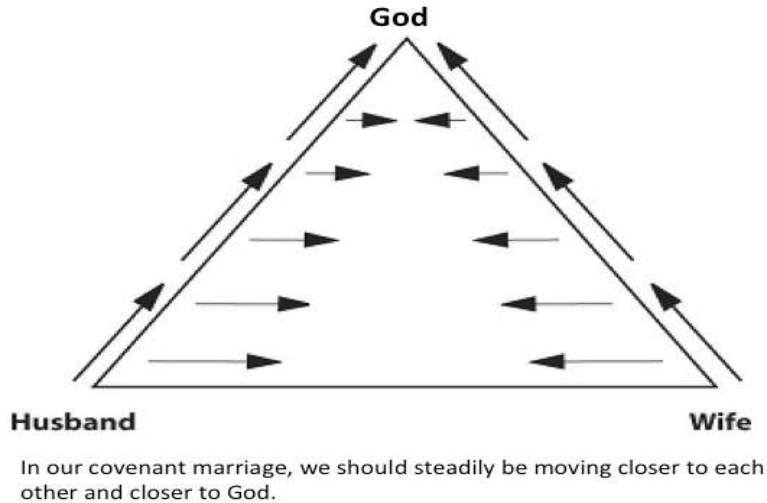
To have a relationship with God you must enter into a covenant, but the covenant must be based on a sacrifice. No sacrifice, no covenant. No covenant, no relationship with God. The New Covenant, the New Testament, is based on the sacrifice of Jesus. He is the final, all-sufficient sacrifice for our sins. His blood is the emblem, and the giving of the Holy Spirit is the seal of the covenant.

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

Ephesians 5:25

A covenant is never a temporary contract. In God’s eyes marriage is an unbreakable life long bond. It is not subject to the other’s performance but obligates

us as individual husbands and wives to a life-long relationship with exclusive rights; a relationship that is far above all other earthly relationships including your relationship with your children and your parents.



Action-answer the following questions:

In the last three scriptures above, God clearly raises the institution of marriage to a high level by using it as an illustration for the New Covenant between God and Church. What does this mean to you?

So far we have seen that marriage is a life-long covenant that is exclusive of all others, and requires a heart with the ability to love sacrificially. Using your own words, write out a prayer, asking God to provide you the wisdom and power you need to fulfill your role in your marriage covenant.

Stop here for Day 4's Lesson

Submission

Submission should be the “way” of Christian life. In fact, submission lessens our load, it acknowledges that another has responsibility for my welfare. The best example, of course, is submission to God.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.

Proverbs 3:5-6

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Ephesians 5:21

Key: Submission switches responsibility to the shoulders of the one who is most capable of carrying the load and fulfilling the responsibility.

Rebellion Separates Us



In a discussion of submission, it would be wise to include a short discussion of the enemy of submission, rebellion.

...for rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king.

1 Samuel 15:23 King James Version (KJV)

Rebellion destroys marriages because it isolates us from God's protection and blessings. Rebellion simply means I will live my life the way I want to, rejecting God's authority (His design for marriage and His Word). In a sense, you raise yourself up to be your own god, a self-idolater, and remove yourself from the protection that is afforded by being under God's authority.

There is no evidence that God differentiates between rebellion within marriage, or any other form of rebellion. Rebellion is not a sin against your spouse but an assault on the authority appointed by God, as a result an assault on God Himself! That is why it is so serious.

Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. God has established the authorities that exist. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.

Romans 13:1-2

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Ephesians 5:21

in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight. Proverbs 3:6

Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

James 4:7-10

Action Required:

If you have been guilty of any form of rebellion in your past or are presently in rebellion, stop what you are doing now and do the following:

In your past - Tell God of your sorrow for not submitting to His authority. Tell Him that you recognize that His authority is necessary for your well-being and for fulfilling His will for your life and marriage. Declare that you are breaking any ties that have formed with “Evil” as a result of this rebellion. Be specific!

In the Present - Tell God that you are willing to turn away from your acts and attitude of rebellion and want to submit your life totally to His loving authority and plans for life. Declare that you are breaking any ties that have formed with “Evil” as a result of this rebellion. Again, be specific.

In your Marriage – In addition to the above, ask forgiveness of your spouse for not fulfilling your particular husband’s or wife’s role in your marriage, explaining that you now realize that in not fulfilling that role you have been in a state of rebellion against God and it has placed your marriage in jeopardy outside of God’s protection. This applies to both husbands and wives.

Together – Declare your commitment to your spouse that you will now submit to him or her, by fulfilling your roles in the marriage. It is when doing this, that you clearly understand that the role of wife and that of a husband are equal in God's eyes. The goal of marriage is oneness, not individuality. There should always be a striving for equality with all decisions becoming, "Win-Win solutions" to issues and problems that life brings.

In a Past Marriage – If there was anything that you were responsible for in your past marriage that was destructive towards the relationship, it probably had an element of rebellion. Tell God specifically what it was and ask forgiveness.

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us. 1 John 1:8-10

Life's Plan

Marriage was God's first institution and since God is omniscient He cannot do anything in vain, thus He has a "Purpose" for marriage. It is clear that God's ultimate plan for Adam and Eve was that they would eventually mature and be adopted into His family. In using a human illustration, God has now put the cart before the horse.

We are now adopted before fully maturing and our marriage is the institution in which that maturing is to take place. If we fail in marriage, we stop our growth in God's eyes.

Continuing on, logically, God's intention was that Adam and Eve would be adopted into His personal family after a period of growth into maturity. Also, that they would accomplish this maturity through interaction with each other within their marriage. Then we can assume that marriage was instituted to function as a catalyst and the environment for the task of "perfecting" them and us.

He predestined us for adoption to "son-ship" through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will.
Ephesians 1:5

Our study thus far has shown us that Jesus Himself clearly indicated that marriage, for us as His followers, has been put back to the original plan of being life-long, and that we are to dedicate our lives towards the goal of maturity and perfection (holiness) and in submission to God and His ways. Ultimately His desire is for us to bear the likeness of our Lord Himself. We have already determined that God is love and all that He does within His children's lives demonstrate this.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16

*But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
Romans 5:8*

I will not try to make human comparisons because there is none that could be made or used even to serve as a shadow of these lofty majestic words that reach to heaven itself. Words that have cried out throughout the last two thousand years, "GOD LOVES US"! Why would we not want to become more like Him, He is perfect.

*Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.
Matthew 5:48*

Time out:

If you have had any question of how much God loves you, settle it now. God could not have given you more than His Son. Then He promised you that if you receive Jesus as Savior and turn to Him as Lord by declaring your submission to His authority, all is settled for you. Now you can begin this journey towards maturity and fullness that adoption as God's child can bring you. Take a moment and commit or re-commit your life to such a loving God.

It is with this understanding of the prime purpose of our marriage, that we determine to use every opportunity from pleasant to painful, to make our marriage successful, so that it pleases God. Marriage is the place in which God wishes for us to experience all that is necessary to learn to love. It's as simple as that: love is what God's family, reflecting Him, should be doing.

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. 1 Corinthians 13:13

Role of Discipline and Adversity in Marriage

*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.
Romans 8:28*

Adversity is part of our lives. Sometimes things happen that are so heartbreaking, and many times can be extremely evil. At some point in all of our lives, we will have experienced pain and suffering. Most times if we hold onto the

belief in the above scripture we will see that there was purpose and meaning in what we have experienced. In other times, we must just trust in the All-Loving-One.

I can attest to the reality, with full surety that everything that has come into my life was measured first by my Heavenly Father, and fully approved for my good. My hope is that it blesses others.

How much energy do we expend trying to evade difficulties, and avoid the pain that life brings. Unfortunately, our culture even within the Christian community encourages the belief that we should not be subject to trials and difficulties, but the truth is that all of us, Christians or not, will encounter difficult times and seasons. The assurance that we have as believers is that there is not anything that can happen to us that will separate us from His love. Attitude and trust are so important in those times of trials and discipline, they will insure that God is glorified and you are maturing and becoming more “Christ-like”.

Something I have heard many times over the years is that “it is OK to be mad at God” when things do not go “right”, the way you think they should. This saying may be popular but it is a long way from being true. As a Christian, God never does or allows anything in our lives that merit our anger to be directed at Him. Anger at God stops and delays your growth and maturity.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? Romans 8:35

*Neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Romans 8:39*

It is in God’s design for our “education and growth” and for His glory that we triumph over adversity!

One day the angels came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came with them. The Lord said to Satan, “Where have you come from?” Satan answered the Lord, “From roaming throughout the earth, going back and forth on it.” Then the Lord said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil.”

“Does Job fear God for nothing?” Satan replied. “Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he

has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. But now stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face.” The Lord said to Satan, “Very well, then, everything he has is in your power, but on the man, himself do not lay a finger.”
Job 1:6-12

If you have read the book of Job, you know that God eventually allowed Job to be physically attacked with excruciating pain of disease, and to lose everything, including his family. However, ultimately Job was restored and increasingly blessed both spiritually and materially, because he maintained his faith in God. Incidentally, the book of Job is the oldest book in the Bible, indicating to me that it must be important, and foundational to understanding what is reality (truth). Unfortunately, the Book of Job is also probably the least read and preached about in all of the books of the Bible. I have been a Christian for many years and never heard even the name of Job mentioned from a pulpit. That tells a lot about our culture, doesn't it?

Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father?
Hebrews 12:7

Joy Unspeakable and Full of Glory

Earlier, we discussed how it seemed impossible to fulfill the requirements Jesus laid on us as His followers. The reality is that it is impossible to live as Jesus lived except for one important fact.

Christianity is different from all other religions in one extremely important way. All other religions require man to attain to some level by human ability through striving. However, in Christianity, God himself, as party to the “New Covenant” provides all that is required. First, He gives us new life by sacrificing His Son and then He adopts us. He gives us a new heart, which gives us a desire to please Him. He then gives us His Holy Spirit to empower us and give us wisdom. All other religions you see are “do it”; Christianity is “done for you”. That way God who deserves it gets all the credit and the glory!

Another important fact is because God gives all of the resources, we are left with no excuse to succeed in becoming mature and honorable, especially within our marriage, true "Children of God"

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.
Ezekiel 36:26

The remaining weeks of this course will now be focusing on cooperating with the Holy Spirit to receive empowerment and wisdom to have a “fruitful and fulfilled marriage,” one that will bear the imprint of God’s love.

I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.
John 15:5 I

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.
Galatians 5:22-23

Final Thoughts

I hope that you have discerned, the greatest thing we can do in marriage is to learn to love to become like our Father. As we already have learned, forgiveness is the pinnacle, the lofty peak of all the types of love. It stands out far above all else that is good. This kind of forgiveness we speak of is divine, and God will give it to us to use, to bring glory to Him. Extending “unmerited forgiveness” is the highest privilege that we have as believers.

In this way extending unmerited favor to our spouse creates an atmosphere that can allow God to work in a marriage. What is most important is not what it accomplishes, for it may not do that which we wish it would, what is most important is what it does to our own hearts, and above all else how it pleases our Father. Oh, what joy to know, that the Father is rejoicing over you with singing because you have forgiven your spouse for some wrong!

The first step of forgiveness has to do with our attitude. Forgiveness requires that we “embrace” the situation, the wrongness and the hurtfulness of it, as an opportunity for God to work in us, and through us.

This course was named *A Marriage Made in Heaven*, not to attract glib attention, but as I hope you are beginning to understand, heaven is where most of direction and empowerment comes from. It should be in prayer and supplication that a great deal of the work in your marriage is done.

Don't forget your Couples Prayer!

Time Out: *As your first week's lesson comes to an end, take a few moments to ask your Heavenly Father to empower you by His Holy Spirit to successfully complete this course, and to order your marriage so that it is full of love and joy, and brings honor and glory to our Heavenly Father.*

Final Session 1 Questions:

1. **Ephesians 5:25** *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,*

a. *Husband only- What does scripture mean to you?*

Ephesians 5:24 *Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.*

b. *Wives only- What does this scripture mean to you?*

2. *After reading about forgiveness in the study this week, how has it affected your understanding of its importance, how might it affect your marriage in the future?*

3. *After completing Session 1, how will what you have studied affect your future personal relationship with God and your spouse?*

End Notes

ⁱ Wiki Encyclopedia, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augustus>