

Growing Marriages (Eph 5:31-33)

Session #14

The marriage covenant binds a person to his/her spouse until death (Rom 7:1-3), enabling couples to deeply enrich their marriage relationship. As spouses strengthen their faith in God, their marriages grow, being further enriched by God’s loving presence.

❖ A Biblical Picture of Marriage (Eph 5:31-33)

31 For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh. 32 This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church. 33 Nevertheless let each individual among you also love his own wife even as himself; and let the wife see to it that she respect her husband (Eph 5:31-33).

31: Marriage is directive: The essence of marriage (1+1=1).

32: Marriage is a design: Marriage’s design reflects the eternal pattern between God and His people.

33: Marriage is doable: The concepts of marriage must be translated to our earthly lives.

• A Framework for Marriage

God’s design for marriage leads to the beauty of intimacy. The two become one flesh physically, yes, but also in one’s soul and purpose. Marriage oneness’s deep beauty and joy increases to full bloom as the two blend into ‘one flesh.’ Actions or thoughts intimating ‘twoness’ are to be rejected.



❖ The Makings of a Great Marriage

Marriage is this ongoing refining experience offering great rewards, something like making a great meal!

A variety of chosen ingredients + Blend of flavors and tastes
+ Cooking requires heat + Heat/closeness/troubles => Creates unique blend; the two become one.

This growing process of marriage is largely fixed to our own personal spiritual development. We can look at it negatively (the losing) or positively (the gaining and refining). Marriage, then, is this permanent relationship offering ongoing refining experiences bringing great rewards. When we consciously lose our old selves as in a genuine discipleship relationship (i.e., dying to ourselves), we then can work on our growing needs rather than blaming our spouses, God or others for the trouble. Instead, we eagerly look forward to that designed oneness for our relationship. There are 3 levels of this development:

❖ Level 1 - Honeymooners: Commitment and Openness

Vision: I want to be with him/her!

Think of the financial costs, pressures, changes of roles, living locations that occur when a couple gets married, and yet they still want to be married! Remarkable!

Characteristics: Committed • Desirous • Big expectations

Challenges: Unstable • Hopes dashed • Hopes regained (make-up) • Gives up • Lower expectations • Drops kindness and begrudges

Christlike Responses: Excitement • Commitment • Learning spirit

Summary: The early stage of marriage can often be seen as an expression of 'eros' love. Although this fatuous love is committal in nature, the commitment tends to be based upon one's expectations and dreams (what one receives). When the expectations do not pan out, then great ups and downs shatter the dreams but at the same time provide opportunity to deepen one's commitment.

❖ Level 2 - Young Married Couple: The Challenged Marriage

Vision: Pursue God's goals of marriage despite temporary setbacks

Marriage hopes are charged by a deepening faith and commitment to God's design seen in His Word, trusting God for grace to suppress the ugly disagreements, arguments, problems, etc. and regain the oneness, joy, love, and happiness hoped for.

Characteristics: Love's initial luster gone • Lost temper • Lost vision: Is this all to marriage?

Challenges: Compromise! Willing to put ambitions ahead of relationship • Devious—fake genuine love to get what one wants • Adulterous: Entertain thoughts of other relationships as better.

Christlike Responses: Allow God's Word to retain that vision and commitment • Prayerfully work through difficulties and impasses • Persistently forgive one another • Trust God to meet one's deepest needs.

Summary: God's Word radiates hope and direction for the troubled couple. Marriage works when one allows God to work through the misunderstandings and make-up times. The young married couple typically lives out a worldly 'phileo' love, "As you treat me, I will treat you."

❖ Level 3 - Mature Couple: Responses from God's Love

Vision: A steady growing devotion towards one's spouse

Christ's love is a maturing love that refines our attitudes, words, and touches thus enabling us to increasingly love our spouse despite how differences normally cause insecurity in our marriages.

Characteristics: Consistent Love • Make sacrifices • So busy serving spouse, I forget myself • When wronged can usually quickly forgive • Willing not to get my way • God teaches through one's spouse • Discovering the needs of my spouse so that I can delight him/her.

Challenges: Increased age and pain • decreased function • enduring death of loved ones • complacency • depression • troubled family members.

Christlike Responses: Able to work through misunderstandings, disappointments, and different expectations • Increasingly intimate times with one's mate are not based on beauty but devotion • Treasure heart oneness more than physical intimacy • A deeper relationship with God unfolds deeper insights into God's love, enabling a further refinement of one's love • Content with one's own spouse despite imperfections.

Summary: An enriching 'agape' love enables the mature believer to avoid selfish binges and demands, and instead focuses on building up one's mate through consistent kind acts and words, delighting in the resulting oneness of heart and mind bringing peace, joy, and love.

Questions

1. Think of a troubled marriage and point out how personal/spiritual problems affect their marriage.
2. Have you ever seen a great marriage? What characteristics have you seen in these good marriages?
3. Identify one or more personal qualities in your life to love people better.