

The Marriage Oneness System

A marriage discipleship resource for couples and small groups

DAVID & LINDA HALSE

rsm
resuming life



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"God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them." Genesis 1:27

TO GOD BE THE GLORY!

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Using this Course

ORIGIN OF THE COURSE

We have developed this course over the past 25 years of coming alongside people in our living room. God has called us to help restore marriages in crisis in the comfort and safety of our home. Hurting husbands and wives find the trust they need to open their hearts to the Lord and to our coming alongside coaching. We help people to receive biblical teaching and to grow in God's truth, love, and power. This is a deeply personal ministry led by God's Spirit.

WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT

Led by the Spirit you will learn God's design for your marriage in eight different areas of real-life experience. You will identify problems or barriers in each area by exploring the roots of your personal and relationship crisis. You will learn biblical principles and practices that provide solutions for breaking through barriers and lead to oneness. Finally, you will learn to apply biblical solutions as steps of correction, healing and restoration, personally and in your marriage. You will discover biblical principles and practices for preventing future marriage crisis. You will reach a new level of trust and deep communication with one another. In our coming alongside sessions you will learn the value of knowing your personality type encouraging your communication and oneness. The Holy Spirit knows our deepest needs and desires. "For we are God's **masterpiece**. He has created us **anew in Christ Jesus**, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." Ephesians 2:10 NLT

GOALS OF THE COURSE

We believe what couples need and want in their marriage is oneness. Why? God created us, male and female, with the design and desire for intimate connection leading to oneness. This requires transformation, moving from self-centeredness to selflessness, from unbiblical thinking patterns to renewed minds, from controlling to submitting. The course encourages deep healing and transformation, personally and in relationships.

HOW TO USE THE COURSE

This course is designed for personal study, as husband and wife together as two couples working together, or in small groups. By receiving these insights we are empowered by God's word, by His Spirit, and for each other. When a couple has experienced this transforming work in their marriage they may feel led by God's Spirit to come alongside another couple with this course. You may also want to introduce the course to couples in your small group at church.

WHERE TO GO FROM HERE

As you read, think, pray, and connect with the course and communicate with your spouse you begin to experience spiritual and emotional growth. Changes will be happening in your mind and heart and behaviours. Be sure to spend time sharing in oneness with your spouse. You will be amazed at the transforming power of God's word and the power of His Spirit. Your marriage will grow in intimacy and oneness with God and with each other.

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Marriage Oneness System

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Marriage is a great idea. In fact, it's a perfect idea because it's God's idea.

This course has the potential to transform your marriage because it's based on biblical solutions. God's word works for us if we apply it to our lives with the help of the Holy Spirit.

There are lots of marriage resources today that offer good information, but we believe that to transform a marriage we need more than information. We need to be moved by the transforming power of God's Word and His Spirit. We also know that God uses a close relationship with another person or couple to help disciple us. God's plan involves connection. We give and receive God's truth through person-to-person or couple-to-couple encouragement.

The *Marriage Oneness System* has grown out of real-life relationship with couples in crisis in our living room. We know these principles and insights will work for you because we have proven them in our own marriage and in many other marriages. This is not theory; it's God's truth in action.

Our guiding principle in coming alongside marriages is achieving oneness, or unity.

Jesus prayed for our oneness and for our complete unity in John 17:20-23 just before His arrest. In His prayer He said that our oneness and unity will draw the world to know He is the Son of God.

We call this course the *Marriage Oneness System* because a system is created to achieve a purpose. It has a design and it has component parts to accomplish that purpose. If each component is running properly according to the design, the system is successful and the purpose is achieved.

It's the same with marriage. We see the biblical design for marriage as a system made up of these 8 Components. We live in God's design for marriage as we work through each of these components.

1. Renewed Minds - re-parented by God
2. Unity – breaking through our barriers
3. Forgiveness – freedom in families
4. Healing of Souls – going deep, growing strong
5. Personalities – celebrating our differences
6. Leadership – authority and submission
7. Communication – love and respect
8. Intimacy – spirit, soul, and body

The truth of these 8 Components will build oneness in our marriage and accomplish God's purpose in our lives.

Design

God created us male and female and gave us His design for marriage in the pages of the Bible.

Marriage is given by God to the world. It is God's design for uniting a man and woman for their mutual support, for populating the world, and for providing social structure for family and society.

A **spiritual** marriage is a union of a man and woman who put Christ first in their marriage. It has

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a holy quality empowered by God's Spirit. A Christian is a son or daughter of God brought into His family through faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. A personal relationship with God commits us to His marriage design, a covenant marriage in which husband and wife enter into a sacred promise of union with one another for life.

This union of spirit, soul, and body is an abundant, fulfilling, and transforming, real-life experience. Spiritual marriage is a relationship of learning and growing in submission day by day. It is the most intimate, interpersonal relationship in which humans participate. Spiritual marriage is a visible and tangible expression of the intimate and holy relationship of Christ, the Bridegroom, with his bride, the Church.

Equipped with the guidance of God's Spirit, His Word, and the gifts and encouragement of believers, the spiritual marriage expresses a unique quality of oneness that draws the world to Christ. (John 17:21-23)

***CREATION* - Marriage is God's creation design. Guiding principles of marriage come from a creating God.**

God has clearly given us a creation design, His blueprint for marriage. We live in an age of relativism which tells us it's good to ***"Do your own thing."*** People live by ***"I'll do it my way."*** The creation design declares that God's way is the only way that works. Creator God gives the marriage design as an essential piece of His eternal will and purpose.

God is the LORD. As LORD, He can bless only the marriage that follows His will and design. If we manage our marriage in obedience to God's design, we will enjoy the blessing of oneness. God designed marriage to fit perfectly with the nature and needs of people, men and women, whom He created in His image.

Can a marriage deviate from God's design? Many of us have driven our car with the parking brake on. That innocent mistake violates the car's design and will cause negative consequences. What if I completely ignore the idea of regular maintenance on my car? A friend was driving his car with the front end about to fall out. His mechanic blamed the problem on a lack of proper maintenance.

If we ignore God's design and drive our marriage according to our own thinking it will lack God's blessing and eventually break down. To be truly effective, every form of marriage enrichment, coaching, counselling, or therapy must line up with God's design.

Early in his faith journey, a friend was concerned that parts of the Bible were out of touch with modern thinking. He was bothered by the verses in Ephesians 5:21-33 on submission. He argued that ***"the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church"*** is an out-of-date idea and people today would reject it. However, he was misinformed about the biblical meaning of submission and the nature of servant leadership taught by Jesus. He was struggling with the gap between the authority of God's word and what people think today.

So, is there only one design? Do Christians need to insist on the whole Bible being true? Can we change parts of it to suit us? Can we really trust a God whose design opposes popular thinking? Popular or not, the unity we see in a spiritual marriage clearly shows that God's design is the

only design that leads to abundant, fulfilling, and transforming marriages.

1. There is a design, a blueprint for marriage. Can a marriage deviate from God's design? Your thoughts:

2. Are couples today aware of God's design or do most people get married with no design to follow?

3. Why do you think it might be difficult for people to follow God's design?

MARRIAGE IS LIKE A GARDEN

Marriage is like a garden. Both are beautiful and pleasurable, but to be their best they need attention and work. They can always be improved. We can get better at loving and caring for each other. We can learn more, pay attention more, and work a little harder. Gardens and marriages suffer when neglected. Like a garden, marriage is more beautiful with care but deteriorates with neglect. Do you think this is a good comparison, marriage is like a garden?

Six Creation Principles for Marriage – Genesis 1:26 - 2:3

In Genesis 1 and 2, God reveals the beginning of His marriage design in, of all places, a garden. Before the Bible reveals the design 'specs' in Genesis 2, it provides some important messages for us about how God went about his work of creating. Think about how we can use these principles in creating great relationships.

Principle: 1 Creating with Words – Genesis 1:26

"Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

God spoke the heavens and earth into existence. Words have power to both create and to destroy in our relationships. The quality of all our relationships and especially marriage is largely determined by the words we choose to speak to one another. Over time, words can make or break our relationships. With words we build up and we tear down. See Ephesians 4:29, James

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3:3-6. Component 7 is an important study on the power of communication in marriage.

4. What are your thoughts on the importance of how you speak to each other in your marriage?

Principle: 2 Creating with Agreement – Genesis 1:26
Then God said, "Let us make ...

God is revealed here as ***"Us, not "I." God is plural, not singular. "Let us*** ... " Father, Son, and Spirit act in agreement here and throughout the Bible. Jesus always looked to His Father, to speak and act according to His will, not His own. The Spirit acts in agreement and unity with the Son and Father. Jesus is present when we are in agreement. (Matthew 18:19-20) Unity in marriage requires a husband and wife to build on agreement. To achieve agreement, we must learn submission and trust in God, and in one another. See Ephesians 5:21. Disagreement divides us.

A practical application of this agreement principle is what we call the 10 PM Rule. The 'rule' says that we avoid trying to resolve issues or problems at bedtime, and that would keep us awake. This sounds like, ***"Dear, there's something I've been wanting to talk to you about ..."*** Don't do this at bedtime. Save it for tomorrow!

5. Describe how your relationship feels when you and your mate do not agree with each other.

Principle: 3 Creating with Different but Equal Natures – Genesis 1:27
"In the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."

We are made in the image of God, but with different genders. God creates two different kinds of human - male and female, different but equal. If we are created in His image male and female, it stands to reason that masculine and feminine attributes must be encompassed in God's nature. Being created different but equal allows each gender to play a distinct yet complementary role in a relationship. We are created male and female to respect and to value one another as we unite, combining our strengths and weaknesses. Applying this principle is essential in creating opportunities for serving God, others, and each other in love.

6. Can you give examples from your marriage where you need to apply this 'different but equal' principle?

Principle: 4 Creating with Blessing – Genesis 1:28

"God blessed them and said to them, be fruitful and increase in number ..." Notice the **order** here. God blesses them before giving instruction. God's way is to bless before any performing and achieving take place. Blessing precedes work performance. Blessing is always unconditional. Blessing is based on who we are, not what we do. In Luke 3:22, the voice came from heaven: ***"You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."*** Jesus received the Father's blessing at the beginning of his ministry. This is a misunderstood but powerful principle.

Bless one another freely and unconditionally for who **they are**, not only for what **they do**.

7. We are conditioned to bless someone according to performance. How does this hurt a marriage?

Principle: 5 Creating with Purpose – Genesis 1:28

"Be fruitful ... increase ... fill ... subdue ... rule over ..." God gives **blessing** and then **purpose** to his creatures. He commands the male and female to increase in number and **take** charge over creation. He gives us authority to steward what is His. The command is to both the male and female to **share in leadership** over the created order. We are created to be strong, not weak; to be leaders, not victims; to respect, not control, use, or abuse one another. We are created with God's authority and for His purposes. Our relationships ought to demonstrate mutual respect and shared leadership. We are **"purpose driven."** God first gives blessing, then commands us to be purposeful and intentional.

8. How can we become more purposeful in creating our relationships?

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Principle: 6 Creating with Rest – Genesis 2:1-3

"He rested from all the work of creating that he had done." God gave the man and woman everything they needed. ***"I give you ..."*** (Genesis 1:29, 30) He completed creation. He rested from his work. What about us? It seems we're never finished. We're always working, seeking what we don't have. We think we're missing something even when God has given us all we need. See 2 Peter 1:3. We rest when we stop doing and count our blessings. We are blessed when we stop seeking things and give God credit for all He has given. We trust in the Creator when we rest in Him. God blessed the day of rest and made it holy. See Hebrews 4:1-11. We find both His peace and power in our relationships when we enter His rest.

9. Is it hard, to rest in God? How would it help your marriage oneness if you learn to enter into God's rest?

10. Review these 6 creative principles. Describe how applying them can help your marriage.

Understanding The Man and the Woman – Genesis 1:27; 2:7-23

"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." Genesis 1:27. God created the man and the woman in his image and likeness to enjoy oneness with him and with one another according to his design and purpose. Man and woman are created with separate natures and roles but with an inherent design to enjoy oneness and unity.

Understanding the Man - *Created alone in the wild, placed into the garden*

In every man there are two opposing tendencies. A wife can recognize this dualism in her husband.

- Drawn to the wild, danger, conflict, adventure, competition, conquest, and independence
- Drawn to peace, order, serenity, growth, co-operation, cultivation, intimacy, and nurture

The man was created from dust, alone, and outside the garden. The male heart, in part, is untamed. It seeks battle, adventure, risk, and a sense of independence. The drive for significance

is paramount in the male design. God calls the male heart to fight for what matters most. The man needs to make a difference in the world. Males embrace risk. 'Maleness' motivates a man to want to achieve (or over-achieve) in whatever he sees as important – marriage, family, business, politics, sports, ministry, etc.

"the LORD God had planted a garden ... in Eden; and there He put the man He had formed." Genesis 2:8.

"... the LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden ... to work it and take care of it." Genesis 2:15.

God took man from a place of wildness and placed him into the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. This is a different part in the male heart that wants to protect, to nurture, to order, and to fulfill the creation mandate to subdue, to work, and to build. The garden in the heart of every young male makes him want to find a loving wife, work, settle down, and have a family.

"...for the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church." Ephesians 5:23. ***"... the wife must respect her husband."*** Ephesians 5:33. The male is designed for leadership, but to lead well he needs his wife's respect. Men are wired to make their mark in life and in their home. The male is designed to achieve something of significance with his life. He has to know he is his wife's hero. He thrives when she affirms him. A husband without his wife's respect is at odds with his life and relationships. When a man loses his sense of dignity and has no sense of purpose, he is lost; he has failed. He checks out.

11. In building a marriage, why is it important to understand who the man is in God's creation design?

Understanding The Woman – needed by the man, his suitable helper
In every woman there are two opposing tendencies. Husbands will recognize this dualism.

- Tenderness, loving and nurturing, cherishing, protecting, valuing, vulnerability
- Inner strength, able to take control, take charge, survive, decide, override, guard

"... it is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." Genesis 2:18

"But for Adam no suitable helper was found. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib He had taken out of the man." Genesis 2:20b, 22. In the vastness of the animal kingdom there was no creature suitable for the man. It was not good for him to be alone so God did something special. From the side of the man, He created his final and crowning creation. ***"bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh."*** Genesis 2:23. In the perfection of creation, the man and the woman were made to be ***"one flesh."*** Genesis 2:24.

Women are designed for security and protection in the unity of marriage. The essence of the female design is the security of being loved and valued in the marriage and home. The essence of God's image in the female heart is her nurturing, alluring, vulnerability. She longs for her 'knight in shining armor' to sweep her up in his strength and take her on their life adventure. ***"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her."*** Ephesians 5:26.

Feeling loved and knowing the family is safe are core needs in the heart of the female. A wife who feels unloved will feel insecure and threatened. She begins to exercise control. She withdraws the affirmation and respect she once felt for her husband. His sense of significance is threatened. He will either aggressively fight her for control, or he will comply, bow to her control, shut down, and check out. Oneness is destroyed when a husband and wife do not fulfill their different gender needs and roles.

In working with many couples we hear a hurting wife say she doesn't feel loved and hurting husbands say they are not respected. Respect and love are required to work God's design into a marriage. Is she willing to make him her knight, not through control, but by affirming the strength God has put into him. His need is to be encouraged by the one person in the world for whom he wants to be a hero. Does he deserve her respect? Has he earned it? Has he let her down? Yes, but he needs his suitable helper. That's God's design. She offers her trust in submission to God, and in time, her husband hears the voice of God and turns his heart to her. The blessing of oneness is the reward of living in God's design.

Proverbs 31 Marriage

We might ask whether there is a place for wives to follow their own dreams. Proverbs 31:10-31 is a beautiful picture of a wife and husband who enjoy both personal fulfillment and marriage oneness. ***"Her husband will trust her, and she will enrich his life. She brings him good not harm, all the days of her life."*** Proverbs 31:11-12 NLT. ***"Her children stand and bless her. Her husband praises her"*** and ***"a woman who fears the LORD will be greatly praised."*** Proverbs 4:28, 30. The biblical marriage design is honoured here. Both husband and wife have fulfilling lives. Their marriage is built on God's marriage design.

12. A woman is strong, but her desire is to be one with her husband. What are your thoughts?

Problem

When we sin the unity in our relationship with God and with one another is broken.

The man and woman sinned, causing separation from a holy God and dysfunction in human relationships. Their sin brought a curse on all humanity. God's only Son, Jesus, gave his life on a cross for us. He became the curse, paid the penalty of our sin, became our justification, and allowed us to be restored to fellowship with God and one another.

What happened to us, to our marriages? When and how did life and marriage become contaminated by sin? How do we restore oneness in our marriage? Do we understand that the cross must have a prominent place in our lives and relationships to bring us to wholeness again?

Freedom and a Boundary – Genesis 2:16, 17

What are the first recorded words from God to the man? ***"You are free to eat from any tree in the garden."*** God identifies a core need in His creation – the need in man for freedom of choice. Man is made for freedom of choice. Free will is a powerful and significant drive in men and women. Free will makes love possible. Love isn't love unless it is given freely. The man is **free** to eat from any tree.

In the context of free will, God sets a boundary on the man. He commands, ***"but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."*** Man must obey this command. He will surely die if he disobeys. This is God giving the man a way to exercise his free will. To submit to God is obedience. Made in God's image means he is not a robot; he can think and choose for himself. Notice the command is given to the man only because it comes before the creation of the woman. The Garden is a place where the man has all his earthly needs and wants met. One last act of creation will be the woman.

13. Why do relationships require both freedom and boundaries? Why is it difficult to achieve them?

The Perfect Marriage – Unity and Oneness, Genesis 2:24, 25

Unity – ***"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh."*** A new marriage requires separation from parents who have loved and raised us. This allows a couple to become ***"one flesh."*** Marriages that are successful in leaving and uniting establish a strong foundation. Marriages in which parents are still too involved have a weak foundation. Unity demands freedom from past authority patterns in order to set up a new family authority structure.

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Oneness – *"The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame."* Becoming one flesh means that we give ourselves in trust and vulnerability at every level of our being. The first man and woman knew total oneness in spirit, soul, and body. This is the picture of a perfect marriage. God created the male and female for one another with the need to give and receive intimate connection in every level of human experience. Spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical nakedness is the ultimate expression of unity between man and wife.

14. How would you describe your marriage in terms of unity, oneness and intimate connection?

The Fall – The Perfect Marriage Falls Apart, Genesis 3

"In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." Genesis 2:9b. In our marriages, we choose from either of the two trees on a regular basis. When we choose the fruit of the tree of life we choose to feed on eternal food. Jesus said, ***"I am the bread of life.... If a man eats of this bread, he will live forever."*** John 6:48-51. ***"I have come that they might have life, and have it to the full."*** John 10:10b. When we choose Christ in our day-to-day experience we choose life and unity.

The other tree brings death. God gave a prohibition to the man ***"... but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."*** Genesis 2:17. When we choose to partake of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, we sin. Eating of that tree indicates our tendency to take God's place in knowing good and evil, right and wrong, to take His place as Judge. When we take the control that is rightly God's, we bring death into our relationship.

"The LORD God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever." Genesis 3:22.

15. We choose between the two 'trees' every day in our lives – what does this mean for your marriage?

"Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?***" Genesis 3:1. Notice that the serpent questions the woman. Why? She wasn't born when the command was given to the man. Notice also that the serpent twists God's command – "***you must not eat from any tree in the garden?"

"When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it." Genesis 3:6. The woman was beguiled by all the benefits of the forbidden fruit. Her husband was with her and when she gave it to him he ate it. He disobeyed God. He did not speak up to protect her from this sin. He withheld his strength and his leadership from his wife.

Their disobedience broke their unity with God and each other and it brought the curse of sin upon the human race. The perfect creation design for marriage was destroyed by sin. The woman takes control, the man betrays her, and sin and death invade their lives and marriage.

16. Your thoughts: wife takes charge, husband caves - is this a pattern we still see in marriages today?

_____

_____

_____

Solution

In Christ, we find forgiveness and freedom to re-build our marriages according to His design.

Marriage is empowered by the CROSS - Salvation leads to mutual submission in our relationships.

TRANSFORMED MARRIAGES

The spiritual basis for restoring God's design in our marriages is our redemption in Christ. Through faith and obedience we receive His grace and all the benefits of a living relationship with our Creator. Being led by His Spirit in obeying His Word opens our marriages to His transforming power.

"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. When we believe in God's Son He saves us from the deadly consequences of disobedience and we receive eternal life through Jesus, the Tree of Life. The death of Christ on the cross pays the price of our sin and frees each believer to re-connect with God, the Father.

"For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ." Romans 5:17. Through the sin of the first man death

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reigned. Through faith in Christ we ***"reign in life"*** and the image and likeness of God are restored in our lives and relationships. We are in a position of spiritual freedom again. Our unity with God and each other is restored and we are empowered to ***"Be fruitful ... increase ... fill ... subdue ... rule over ..."*** Genesis 1:28.

Transformation happens when salvation and God's love touch every part of our being.

On page 8-9 we described a spiritual marriage. Empowered by Christ, our marriages really ought to be radically different. If we know we have received an ***"abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness"*** our marriages will be transformed and reflect the love and power of our Creator. The oneness we grow to enjoy through submission to Christ transforms us daily.

17. Marriage unity is not restored just by our own effort but by the power of Christ in us. Do you agree? Why?

Application

Christ is on the throne. We have a Saviour and King to rule us in love and righteousness daily.

How do we live every day in marriage oneness? We acknowledge that Christ is on the **throne** of our life. We have a King to rule us in love and righteousness every day. He is our sovereign LORD.

Marriage is governed by the KING. Obedience is our love response to our sovereign LORD.

The THRONE – Revelation 4
Jesus is on the throne and He is our King.

"After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." 2 At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. 3 And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby. A rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne. 4 Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. 5 From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. In front of the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God. 6 Also in front of the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.

8 Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under its wings. Day and night they never stop saying:

"'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come."

9 Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives forever and ever, 10 the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say:

[11] "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."

"Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." Matthew 6:33.

As we manage our marriages and families it is empowering to reflect on the vision of Christ on the throne. He is the King and we are His Kingdom. As we seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, all these things, including our marriages and families, will be given to us. So often we ignore what we should pay attention to, or we look in the wrong places for help. We lose sight of the fact that Christ is Lord of all and He is the One who can heal and restore our marriages.

18. How does the vision of Christ as King help us in fulfilling our roles as husband and wife?

"They never stop saying" (Revelation 4:8)

Around the throne they never stop praising the King. As married couples, we often move along from one day to the next largely unaware of the desire of God to enrich, or possibly to rescue, our marriage. On our wedding day we acknowledged God but do we acknowledge him now in the routine of our lives?

Component 1 reminds us that marriage is God's design. We are blessed as we invite the Spirit of God into our marriage, moment by moment.

Where do we go from here?

As you read and apply the principles in the following eight components of the *Marriage Oneness System* you will find yourself drawn closer to Christ and to your mate. Each of the Components describes the design, the problem, the solution, and the application in important aspects of marriage. Each Component has been carefully selected to address the most pressing issues in marriages today.

19. Having worked through this Introduction, how are you feeling about your marriage?

When we receive salvation, obey the creation design, and submit to Christ our King, we are blessed.

God bless you with increasing unity and oneness as you join us on this Marriage Oneness journey.

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COMPONENT 1

Renewed Minds

Overview: building oneness in marriage

requires ***renewing our minds***

rsm
resuming life

Design

The family unit is God's design to prepare us for mature biblical thinking as adults. We will then be equipped to build unity in our marriages.

Problem

Generational sin creates strongholds of unbiblical thinking and damaged relationships.

Solution

The cross provides the power to renew our minds in obedience to Christ. As we change our thinking, we are empowered to build unity in our marriages and families.

Application

We learn how to renew our minds by changing our thinking. We replace generational thinking with biblical thinking.

Overview Question: *Think about the family you grew up in. Can you recall any strong family behaviours or 'rules' that are embedded in your thinking now about how your family should be?*

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Design

The family unit is God's design to prepare us for mature biblical thinking as adults. We will then be equipped to build unity in our marriages.

"Numerous external forces may shape us, but the family we have grown up in is the primary and, except in rare instances, the most powerful system that will shape and influence who we are." The Emotionally Healthy Church, Peter Scazzero, page 87.

FAMILY – We are conditioned to think in patterns learned in our family of origin. We receive thinking patterns from previous generations and we pass them on to our children. God's design is that parents, from generation to generation, will teach and model thinking patterns that are biblical. God designs the family to produce mature spiritual adults who think biblically and create great marriages.

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1. The family is God's design for parents to teach and model biblical thinking patterns. Your thoughts?

Problem

Generational sin creates strongholds of unbiblical thinking and damaged relationships.
The second commandment reads, ***"You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to thousands who love me and keep my commandments."*** Exodus 20:4-6.

In the second of the Ten Commandments God states that He punishes the children for the sin committed by fathers for three and four generations, except for those who love God and keep his commandments. How does it work? How are children impacted by previous generations? There is a generational cycle of sin we are called upon to break by loving God and keeping his commandments.

Generational sin causes unbiblical thought strongholds to grow through childhood and into adulthood. We carry these destructive strongholds into our marriages and families.

A Bible Family: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob
We see generational sin in the Bible. Abraham, his son Isaac, and grandson Jacob all resorted to lying and deceit at times in their lives. Fathers favoured certain of their children and sibling hatred led to severed relationships.

"Like everyone else in the human race, I too descended from the family tree of Adam and Eve. Their intent after they disobeyed God was to shield and defend themselves from God and from each other. This aim of protecting ourselves from God and others manifests in certain ways – ***controlling, fixing, fear, withdrawing, ignoring, denying, pacifying, or in conflict, loneliness, anxiety, frustration, resentment, blaming, and more."*** Peter Scazzero page 89.

2. What are your thoughts about how generational sin impacts families, others and your own?

Jerry's Story

Though we are shaped by our past, we are not meant to be permanent victims of it.

Jerry and his wife struggle with severe long term marriage problems. Their fighting creates a toxic environment for their children. Jerry has a history of alcohol and drug abuse. He has trouble finding and keeping a job. Jerry's wife works to keep the family going. In his family of origin, his self worth was never affirmed. He craved approvsal from his father but Jerry could never measure up to his dad's strict standards. His heart is engraved with the message, 'You're a failure.' Jerry's dad passed on his own unresolved father-son issues to Jerry.

Jerry grew up in a Christian home. His dad is a retired church leader. Jerry's Bible says God loves him; his distorted thinking says the opposite. Now in his late 40's, he admits he still has no idea who he really is or what his purpose is. Sadly, he dulls the pain with alcohol and blames others for his troubles.

Jerry's mind can accept only those messages that agree with his stronghold of self-contempt. He will be controlled by damaging thoughts and behavior unless he changes his habitual thinking pattern.

3. What strikes you about Jerry's story? Is his story similar to those of other men and women you know?

Is there hope for a person like Jerry who is trapped in destructive thinking and despair? The answer is yes. God's only Son, Jesus died on a cross to take our punishment, to pay the penalty of our sin, to justify and to redeem us. Christ is the power we need to break the chain of generational sin. Salvation touches and heals every part of our being. Salvation is the way to forgiveness, freedom, and a new beginning.

With salvation in the proper place in his thinking, Jerry's life can be transformed. This transformation will require Jerry to learn the discipline of renewing his mind daily. He needs a vision of Jesus who loves him unconditionally.

Understanding the Transfer of Generational Sin

Relationship patterns learned in our families of origin are embedded in our hearts and emerge in our adult lives and relationships. This is how it happens:

ONE - From the womb through childhood our heart is like a blank screen. It is open to every good or bad impression; it has no defense. Messages are fixed in place as **'strongholds'** in our hearts.

TWO - What is deposited **in the heart** is ultimately manifested in words, actions, and relationships. Jesus states that good or bad words have their source in the good or bad stored up in our heart. (See Matthew 12:34b, 35)

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THREE - Strongholds **direct** our thoughts, feelings, and actions. By mid-life, we find ourselves repeating the marriage and family patterns we absorbed in our family of origin. Good messages fill the heart with good impulses. Bad messages contaminate the heart with toxic impulses.

4. Does this explanation make sense to you? How strongly does this pattern affect your family?

Solution

The cross provides the power to renew our minds in obedience to Christ. As we change our thinking, we are empowered to build unity in our marriages and families.

Strongholds of unbiblical thinking that block marriage oneness are difficult to remove. However, the power of the cross can demolish strongholds and set our minds free from destructive thinking. (Review Transformed Marriages, page 16.) The second commandment finishes with the good news, ***"but showing love to thousands (of generations) who love me and keep my commandments."*** Exodus 20:6.

The solution is the power of the cross, but how does it work? How do we break the chains of sin? How do we set ourselves, our children, and their children free to love and serve God and each other in love?

We first believe the message of the cross and receive Christ into our heart. However, it is a mistake to think that accepting Christ means we do nothing, expecting Him to heal our minds. We are responsible to learn and apply a biblical discipline. Paul writes, ***"Do not be conformed any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."***

Romans 12:2.

"Renewing of the mind" is called in modern day brain science, 'neuro-plasticity.' God created the brain so that thinking patterns can be changed; its neural pathways can be reconfigured. Renewing the mind means rewiring the brain, the process by which we transform our thinking.

Here's our battle: a thought comes to mind. I allow it to stay in my mind if it lines up with my stronghold. Even a biblical truth will be rejected if it goes against my family-conditioned stronghold. Bible truths cannot penetrate our stubborn strongholds. This explains why we get stuck in unbiblical thinking. We are slaves to our strongholds unless we decide to intentionally 'demolish' them.

We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." 2 Corinthians 10:5.

God has created us as mature adults with the ability to discern our thoughts and shape our thinking. We choose to accept or reject our impulses. I am solely responsible for the content of my habitual thinking.

5. What are your thoughts on the 'renewing your mind' process we have outlined for you here?

Application

We learn how to renew our minds by changing our thinking. We replace generational thinking with biblical thinking.

Hit Bottom - We might need to run out of options, come to a dead end, and 'hit bottom.' We can then admit we've been wrong and let go of our unbiblical strongholds. It's hard to change habitual thinking. We can't change habitual thinking until we repent. 'Repent' is from the French word, 'penser' which means 'to think.'

Identify with Christ - Christ died to take our sins and our sinful thinking to death. He buried them. He rose from the grave to new life. In His death, burial, and resurrection, we are freed from the past and empowered with the Spirit of new life. See Romans 8:2. Paul writes that ***"anyone who has died has been freed from sin."*** Romans 6:7. We use our minds to **identify** with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. We visualize Christ dying on the cross and we take our burden there.

Daily Discipline - Renewing our minds must become a daily discipline. In Christ, we put our old thinking patterns to death. We are careful to ***"take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."*** 2 Corinthians 10:5. We choose to guard our heart. We choose what to think, what to look at, and what to read. We choose to stop destructive self-talk and negative conversations. We choose to stop name calling, gossip, and swearing. By doing these over time, we starve destructive thinking patterns.

Feeding My Mind - In creation, God gave us the ***"tree of life."*** Jesus called Himself ***"the bread of life." "...if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come."***

2 Corinthians 5:17. Research has shown that reading a passage of Scripture four times a week changes our behaviour. Prayer, Scripture, good books, and choosing who we spend time with reinforce God-centered thinking.

Re-parented in God's Family

We love our parents, but they weren't perfect, just as we are not perfect parents. We need to embrace a new paradigm in which we consider ourselves **adopted children** in God's family. We focus our thinking on God as our perfect Father. We get rid of the idea that God is distant or cruel. We reject any thought that we are not worthy of His love because Scripture says that IN CHRIST, we are made worthy.

When I know and feel I belong in the family of our Father, I don't question my self-worth. When I feel loved by God, my thinking, my words, my actions, my life and my marriage are transformed.

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God is My "Abba" (Hebrew word for Dad)

I must allow this thought to penetrate and fill my mind: **God is my Dad**. A song says, "He knows my name." He loves me as His child. He is bringing me home to His heart. He knows what is happening in my life and He is changing me through my circumstances. He invites me onto His lap and wraps His arms around me. We need to bathe in thinking about the Father love of God.

A powerful place to go in Scripture is Romans Chapter 8. This chapter captures God's heart of love for us. Meditate in it and slowly drink in the heart of God. ***"... there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."*** Romans 8:1.

Becoming a Christian does not automatically erase the power of the past. We enter the family of God with wounded hearts and wrong thinking. God's plan is to ***"bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release for the prisoners."*** (Isaiah 61:1) ***"He restores my soul."*** Psalm 23:3. We cooperate with God in our willingness to renew our thinking.

6. What are your thoughts on this truth—God is re-parenting us in His family as our loving Abba, Father?

Conclusion

"Even the worst and most painful family experiences become part of our total identity. God has a plan in placing us in our particular families and cultures. And the more we know about our families, the more we know about ourselves – and the more freedom we have to make decisions about how we want to live." Scazzero, Daily Office, page 40.

We honour our mothers and fathers. We don't like to be critical of them. However, we need to identify family strongholds that are embedded in our hearts. You probably don't know this, but your thought strongholds may be fighting against God's word and opposing God's design in building your marriage.

The generations before us carry the sin of the first parents, Adam and Eve. This is why Scripture asserts that we leave our father and mother and be united to our spouse. Then we can agree together to break generational patterns that resist God's design. In Christ, we are empowered to break the chains of the past. In renewing our minds we are transformed each day into the image of God.

7. Will you consider exchanging your family strongholds in favour of adopting God's family patterns?

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Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
And lean not on your own understanding;
In all your ways acknowledge Him,
And He shall direct your paths. Proverbs 3:5, 6

All my thinking patterns need to be transformed to thinking God's way. In other words, I take captive every thought and make it obedient to Christ. Success in my marriage is guaranteed because He is directing my steps. I will think, act, and speak biblically, and enjoy God's blessing in my relationships.

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COMPONENT 2

Unity

Overview: building oneness in marriage requires ***a selfless attitude***

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Design

God's design for marriage is unity. ***"... a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh."*** Genesis 2:24. We are created for oneness with God and our mate.

Problem

Our independent nature blocks oneness. We sin through our individuality, ego, control, and independent thinking. We need to break through these barriers to achieve unity.

Solution

The work of Christ on the cross breaks ego-centric impulses. Salvation frees and empowers us to love and to ***"in humility consider others better than yourselves ..."*** Philippians 2:3.

Application

Unity in marriage means breaking barriers. When we are free of the barriers we learn to enter deeply into the love of God and into the heart of our marriage.

Overview Question: *Write your thoughts about the following statement: when we are self-centered the unity God intends for our marriage is blocked.*

Design

God's design for marriage is oneness. "... a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." Genesis 2:24. We are created for oneness with God and our mate.

When we began coaching couples, we asked God to show us what to focus on. With all the different problems couples deal with we wanted a core goal to work toward with each couple. God gave us one word: ***oneness***. We have made that the vision, the big idea that guides our coaching.

Two important passages on oneness, one in Genesis, the other in John, are quoted in

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1. What do you think? Is oneness with your spouse what you want but difficult to achieve? Why?

ONENESS – In the Beginning - Genesis 2:23, 24.
"This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh, she shall be called woman, for she was taken out of man. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh."

2. According to these passages, what does the world see in our oneness?
   Why is our unity so important?

Problem

Independence blocks unity. We sin through unhealthy control, individuality, ego, and independent thinking. We need to break through these barriers to achieve unity.

Barriers to Oneness

"Where did our love go?" "What happened to our dreams?" "Did he / she ever really love me?"

Good marriages build on selfless thinking and actions that result in vulnerability and trust. Troubled marriages struggle with barriers that stop the flow of oneness. We damage our relationship by getting stuck in self-centeredness, not knowing how or being willing to enter into the **inner world** of our spouse.

Here are four unity killers in marriage relationships.

Barrier – Unhealthy Need to Control

Control is a barrier to marriage oneness. Controlling behaviour happens when we've been hurt by people we have trusted. We've been wounded, even broken-hearted. We allowed ourselves to be vulnerable and we became victims. To stop the pain we made vows to never again be vulnerable. We learned to erect emotional barricades of control.

When we feel threatened or unsafe in a relationship we automatically move to control it. Fear

makes us protect our wounded heart. Control leads us to either exert power or to retreat into passive aggression. Control blocks oneness. We don't merge with our mate. We can't interact freely. The Bible says that if I keep my life (control) I will lose it. This is the challenge of trusting Christ and it's also the challenge of moving into marriage unity. It's opposite to ***"... (they) were naked but felt no shame."*** Genesis 2:25.

We dream of a perfect marriage and at the same time we fear being betrayed again. Trying to give up control is like driving a car with one foot on the gas and the other on the brake. We try to move ahead but fear holds us back. Putting the brakes on feels safe but it blocks the flow of trust. It's no wonder we don't feel the closeness we want. Taking control destroys God's design of oneness in marriage.

3. Control is a barrier to oneness. How common do you think it is? Is it a barrier in your marriage?

Barrier – Unhealthy Individuality

We come to our wedding day with the dream of a great marriage but we come as individuals. We assume we can stay that way, ***"have our cake and eat it too."*** This doesn't work in marriage.

The root word of 'individuality' is 'divide.' If we think and act as individuals we divide the relationship in two parts – mine and yours. There's no 'we.' If we individualize our needs and wants we don't unite.

Individuality is a barrier because it makes us think and act selfishly. We pursue our own interests: we make decisions, plans, and purchases, neglecting our mate. The essence of marriage, unity, is lacking.

Paul writes, ***"In this same way, 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."*** Ephesians 5:28, 29.

"Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others." Philippians 2:4.

A key insight by Oswald Chambers: Individuality versus Personality. Giving up our individuality does not mean giving up our uniqueness, personhood, or personality. In My Utmost for His Highest, Oswald Chambers offers profound thoughts in his December 11th and 12th devotionals. He explains the difference between individuality and personality.

"Individuality is the hard outer layer surrounding the inner spiritual life. Individuality shoves others aside, separating and isolating people ... our individuality must be yielded to God.

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Personality is the characteristic mark of the inner, spiritual man just as individuality is the characteristic of the outer, natural man. Personality merges, and you only reach your true identity once you are merged with another person. When love or the Spirit of God come upon a person, he is transformed. He will then no longer insist on maintaining his individuality."

4. What are examples of unhealthy individuality we might see in marriages today?

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Barrier – Unhealthy Ego

A third barrier is ego. In essence, ego is not a bad thing. It is part of the 'self' God created in our core. God is transforming our unique self into His image and likeness. Led by the Spirit, our ego is being conformed to the image of Christ. Our ego doesn't cease to exist but it is changed. See Romans 8:29.

So what's our problem with ego? The problem is what we do with it. When I make ego the center of my thinking, I have a problem. Being ego-centric means ***"It's all about me."*** I put myself ahead of others. 'Egoism' is a philosophy that says my life experience is built on self-interest. An egoist is self-absorbed, speaking and acting in his or her own interest as a general rule. Our immature and unhealthy egos create a false self, a cover-up for insecurity, self-gratification, unhealthy pride, and failing to love well.

In Two Become One, Donald Joy says that our deepest motivations are hidden from us. This is because our ego-centrism is an expression of original sin. In our fallen human state, we over-value our own interests. We make

an idol of self, often without knowing it. Unhealthy ego in marriage produces lack of awareness of others and inconsiderate, self-absorbed words and actions.

We begin life as helpless infants. Our early life is only about getting our needs and interests met. Ideally, if we are properly nurtured, disciplined, and taught, we mature into responsible adulthood, learn to live in our true self, and express appropriate and healthy self-love. By the time we are married we are sufficiently secure in our egos to love others well. Mature ego development makes oneness in marriage possible by allowing us to enter the inner world of our mate and consider their interests first.

Paul gives us 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 to help us identify what it means to love others well as mature, secure adults. ***"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres."***

5. Is unhealthy ego a problem in marriage? What does "love your neighbour as yourself" really mean?

Barrier – Unhealthy Independence

The essence of sin is thinking and living independently. Independence isolates us from God and from one another. The first man and woman sinned by thinking and acting independently of God. They hid from Him. Independence and self-sufficiency go hand in hand. In my independence, I don't need God.

Independent thinking blocks the marriage design. Our selfish needs for nurture, intimacy, significance, security, and personal comfort dominate our thinking. Independence inevitably leaves our marriage empty because having my needs met must be in harmony with meeting my spouse's needs.

God designed us for oneness, not for independence. We have a problem here because many of us were taught in our family of origin to value independence. Remember the childhood story of the ***"little train that could?"*** Many family strongholds include 'rules' that say I can succeed if I just try harder, and that getting help is a sign of weakness. No wonder so many struggling couples resist getting help.

For decades Christians have been conditioned that believing in Christ is a 'Jesus and me' experience. Yes, scripture teaches that I encounter Christ, repent and ask Him to enter my heart in a personal way. Redemption and regeneration is personal. However, salvation is not just about Jesus and me. The Christian life is communal, not independent. We are a community in Christ, His body. We are to live in Christ as members of the body who ***"belong"*** to each other. See Romans 12:5.

6. Do you think that independence is sin? What does an independent nature do to a relationship?

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Solution

The work of Christ on the cross breaks through unhealthy barriers to unity in marriage. Salvation frees and empowers us to love well and to "in humility consider others better than yourselves ..." Philippians 2:3

Breaking the Barriers – He restores my soul - Psalm 23:3
The problem is in our heart. A wounded heart finds a way to survive by erecting barriers. Trust has been replaced by deep fear. We construct a false self, afraid to be the person God has made us to be. We need healing in our hearts so we can trust again. Trusting God opens our heart to trust our mate.

"The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame." Genesis 2:25.

Intimacy is when we dwell in one another's heart. This is the Garden of Eden that satisfies our soul. One wife said that intimacy with her husband was like being in paradise. That marriage is alive and well.

In Note 4, page 40, we read these words of Oswald Chambers, ***"... you only reach your true identity once you are merged with another person."*** We are not designed to be individuals. We are designed to merge with others.

James W. Fowler, quoted in the book Two Become One, writes, ***"There is no personal fulfillment that is not a part of communal fulfillment. We find ourselves by giving ourselves."***

A Key Breakthrough Passage –
Being ***"united to Christ"*** is where breaking through barriers begins

"If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from His love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus". Philippians 2:1-5.

This passage gives us keys to the breakthrough. Follow its logic through to the solution. It begins with ... ***"If you have any ..."*** Breaking though begins with what you have ... if you have ... **any** encouragement from being ***"united with Christ."*** If you have **any** comfort from His love, if you have **any** fellowship or presence in you of the Spirit, and if you have any tenderness and compassion ... then what?

If you do have any of these, then you are able to do the next part ***"... then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose."*** Being united to Christ is the power to change our selfish ways. Christ brings our unhealthy barriers down.

"United with Christ," we experience a new confidence through His Spirit in our healed hearts. The Spirit empowers us to let go of our fear-based barriers. When the barriers are down our heart is softened and strengthened by the Spirit and we grow in selfless behaviours that lift others up.

Then I can let go of selfish ambition and consider others better than myself. In my marriage, I can become ***"like-minded"*** and ***"one in spirit and purpose."*** Oneness flows again in my marriage.

Our selfish nature dies away to be replaced by the love and power of Christ. We give *control* to His Spirit. We let go of *individuality, ego-centric thinking, and independence* because we are united with Christ.

Maintenance Program – Vulnerability
This breakthrough passage opens the way to being vulnerable with others. That new found vulnerability produces unity in all our relationships. Jesus calls us to lose our life in trusting Him. Staying vulnerable is the mark of a person who completely trusts the Spirit of God to control his life and marriage. Vulnerability replaces control and produces the wonderful fruit of complete unity – spirit, soul and body.

7. In your words, how does being "united with Christ" produce vulnerability and unity in our marriage?

Application

Unity in marriage means breaking barriers. When we are free of barriers we learn to enter deeply into the love of God and into the heart of our marriage.

My Personal Theology - When I read the Bible do I really personalize the transforming power of God's word? Do I get that I am made in His image and I'm created ***"a little lower than the angels?"*** Psalm 8:5. Do I feel God loves me intensely? Do I feel the power of Christ living in me? Do I know God as my Abba (Daddy) Father?

Before I can love well I must know the power of God's love in me. I must connect intellectually and emotionally with Father love and let it heal me, His child. Then I can love myself in the same way He loves me and let His love flow through me to others. Loving others well can only happen in proportion to loving myself with God's pure love. How I humbly value my worth in God's sight determines how I value others. Application means accepting the truth about the power of the love God feels for me.

Life in the Spirit - ***"... those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by Him we cry, "Abba Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children."*** Romans 8:14-16.

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In my personal theology, the truth of God's Word is married to the reality of His Spirit dwelling in me. It informs me that He is actively working in my life. The Spirit of sonship means God is my Dad. Oneness with the Father is the foundation of the oneness we build in our relationships.

"... you only reach your true identity once you are merged with another person. We are not designed to be individuals. We are designed to merge with others." Oswald Chambers.

Entering the heart - When I submit to the truth of God's Word and to the indwelling Spirit I am able to enter the heart of God for me. However, to do this I take the most difficult journey into my own heart where I confront my own responses to God's love for me. Few of us dare to enter the depths of our own core. When I dare to go down into my heart I find two things: my core identity, who I really am, and God, who He really is. I find out that living with my sinful self is the God of mercy and truth.

When I accept His grace deep in my heart I am able to accept my true self, to begin to surrender self-interest and to truly love others, especially my mate. Now I can learn by the Spirit how to enter into the heart of my mate. I commit myself to seeing life as he or she does. I enter mentally, emotionally, and spiritually into their world of thinking and feeling. This is unity. We become ***"one flesh."***

8. What are your thoughts about journeying deeply into your heart and then your mate's?

Conclusion

God is a Trinity - three Persons in one. The three Persons of the Trinity are distinct, but not independent. Jesus spoke and acted in prayerful response to His Father. He taught and modeled their relationship: ***"I and the Father are one."*** John 10:30. The three persons of God model unity for us. God's design is that in marriage the two are united. It's a journey made possible through our union with Christ.

Paul wrote, ***"... until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of fullness of Christ."*** Ephesians 4:13.

We are all on a unity journey into the "fullness" of Christ. Marriage is an important part of this journey as we learn to travel into oneness with God and with one another.

"May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." John 17:23. The world sees Jesus in our unity.

9. Marriage is God's training ground to teach us about unity with Him. What are your thoughts on this?

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COMPONENT 3

Forgiveness

Overview: marriage oneness builds

*on **freedom through forgiveness***

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Design

Unity in marriage requires freedom in Christ. In relationships, we enjoy freedom through grace, acceptance and forgiveness.

Problem

Freedom is blocked when we can't give forgiveness, acceptance and grace.

We live in emotional debt and crisis.

Solution

Freedom is restored when we are set free through the power of Christ and His

work on the cross.

Application

To gain spiritual freedom we learn to give grace, acceptance, and forgiveness

to each other.

Overview Question: *Write your thoughts about the following statement: every marriage requires forgiveness, grace and acceptance.*

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Design

Unity in marriage requires freedom in Christ. In relationships, we enjoy freedom through grace, acceptance and forgiveness.

God's nature is freedom. He has created us to be free. We are not to be slaves in either our religion or in our relationships. The first words spoken by God to the man were ***"You are free ..."*** Genesis 2:16. In Luke 4:18 Jesus defines His mission. ***"He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners ... to release the oppressed."*** Paul says, ***"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."*** Galatians 5:1.

The spiritual and emotional freedom we enjoy in Christ should touch every part of our lives and

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relationships. Freedom to serve God and one another in love is God's will. Freedom is not license to do whatever we want. Spiritual freedom always respects others and their boundaries.

Freedom is the product of successfully integrating grace, acceptance, and forgiveness in relationships. Freedom comes through learning to work through conflict, especially when we offend or are offended by another person. Marriage and family are boot camp training in learning to set people free.

Grace is our first impulse as Spirit-led Christians. Through grace we accept each other, deal maturely with an offense, and forgive the offender. The Bible very clearly instructs us in forgiveness. Granting forgiveness demands emotional and spiritual maturity but the reward is priceless - freedom to restore unity and to set each other free to grow in Christ-likeness.

1. Does your marriage relationship give you the freedom to be who God made you to be? Explain.

Problem

Freedom is blocked when we don't give forgiveness, acceptance and grace. We live in emotional debt and crisis.

Jane and Bob

Jane and Bob are unhappy in marriage but they want their marriage to work. They have had extensive counselling, individually and as a couple, however they are unable to resolve their conflict. Jane wants to feel cherished by Bob. Over their 34 years, on many occasions, Jane has been hurt and disappointed by Bob. Bob wants to be a good husband and provide for her emotional needs, but he can't. He feels he is scolded by Jane about his shortcomings as a husband. The more she demands, the more he feels attacked and helpless. She feels unloved; he feels disrespected.

When we ask if Jane is willing to forgive Bob, she feels she can't. She has shut her emotions down. Bob has often asked for forgiveness, but Jane can't let go. Regularly, they talk about improving their communication and ***"working on their relationship"*** but they remain in emotional turmoil.

The Problem of Loving One Another - "You Always Hurt the One You Love"

In marriage, sometimes the hardest thing to do is to love your spouse. As the old song says, ***"You always hurt the one you love, the one you shouldn't hurt at all."*** In a relationship as intense as marriage, hurt and pain will occur. We say and do things in everyday married life that are inconsiderate and cruel. We are wired to protect our hearts, so we shut down when we are hurt.

We put walls up to avoid more pain.

A person in pain will strike back in one way or another. Some will react aggressively, others will use passive aggression. Some will be loud; others silent. It's 'fight or flight.' When we feel unloved we can't love back. Love must be drawn from some reserve. If I am empty, I have no love to give.

In our humanity, even committed marriages will begin to fall apart when love is not FELT.

2. What role does forgiveness play in healing your marriage? Why is it so hard to forgive our spouse?

Solution

Freedom is restored when we are set free through the power of Christ and His work on the cross.

Freedom Through Forgiveness - Forgiveness is a big part of the solution for building oneness in relationships. Forgiveness brings freedom and healing for damage inflicted on one person by another.

The last half of Matthew 18 is devoted to forgiveness. It is Christ's solution for restoring unity in the face of significant wounding done to one person by another.

"If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector." Matthew 18:15-17.

3. It takes two to make forgiveness work. Does this Matthew principle work in your marriage? Discuss.

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Understanding Emotional Debts, Debt Collecting, and Forgiveness

I feel guilt when I wrong someone. I put myself in a position of owing them an emotional debt because I have taken something from them. The words ***"I ought to"*** literally mean ***"I owe it to."*** When I hurt someone I owe it to, or ought to, make it right. To be free of the debt, I need to repay the debt. If I owe $10 I am in debt till I repay it. A criminal ***"owes a debt to society"*** and must make restitution to repay the debt. When I hurt someone unjustly I owe them an emotional debt. As with any kind of debt, only when you pay back the debt are you released, you're set free.

If I am in emotional debt to you I only have one solution – to ask your forgiveness. You will choose to forgive me or not to forgive me. If you forgive me you're releasing me from the debt I owe you, setting me free. If you refuse to forgive, you keep me in debt. You might refuse because you're not emotionally ready. In your pain you may choose to keep me in debt, but you make yourself an emotional debt collector. In our story, Jane is doing this. She refuses to forgive Bob. She persists in collecting on the debt she feels he owes her. If she forgives him, he is free of his emotional bondage to her.

Should Jane forgive Bob? How does this affect their marriage? If Jane forgives Bob and he is set free, will he then be able to love Jane as she wants to be loved?

4. Who benefits from the giving of forgiveness? Write your thoughts about why forgiveness is freeing.

5. Take a moment to think these key principles through. How have they applied in your relationships?

God Rewards Forgiveness

"I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." Matthew 18:18. When I ***"loose"*** or release a debt I am releasing it to God to avenge the offense. I let Him be Judge. When I don't forgive, I am binding God. I take control away from God and I shut Him out. I make myself judge and I am left with heart damaging guilt.

"Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them." Matthew 18:19, 20. Forgiveness is agreement. We build unity in our marriage on agreement because Christ is with us when we agree in His name. Agreement is the basis for forgiveness and freedom to love each other well.

Emotional Turmoil – The Painful Penalty of Not Forgiving

What happens to us when we refuse to forgive? ***"Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, 'Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?' Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything. The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go. But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded. His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.' But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened. Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."*** Matthew 18:21-35.

6. Think through this parable to understand the self-destruction that happens when we don't forgive?

_____

_____

_____

_____

In this parable on forgiveness, who does the king symbolize?
Do you think the servant who owed 10,000 talents and was forgiven is you and me?
What did the king do for the servant who had the enormous debt?
What did that servant do to the servant who owed him a small debt?
What did the king do to the "wicked" servant?
How does our heavenly Father treat us if we do not forgive our brother **from our heart?**

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The King (God) through Christ has forgiven our sin, an overwhelming debt we owed. When we refuse to forgive our "brother" we are put into a prison of emotional bondage and turmoil. The penalty in the parable is clear. The unforgiving person is turned over to the jailers. The emotional pain is unbearable until we, **from our heart**, forgive our brother.

This is why people are in emotional torment in their marriage and can't get relief. Forgiveness from the heart is the only way to find peace. Jane and Bob are in constant turmoil. They are always ***"working on their relationship"*** but change doesn't happen. Biblically, their relationship is bound in a prison of emotional debt and torment. Only forgiveness will set them free.

To say ***"I'm sorry"*** is not the same as forgiveness. I can feel remorseful and apologize but that does not bring release. Granting forgiveness to the offender is a **choice** that requires humility and grace.

The 'LORD's prayer" contains these words, ***"forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors."*** Matthew 6:12.

Application

To gain spiritual freedom we learn to give grace, acceptance, and forgiveness to each other.

GRACE AND ACCEPTANCE

Granting forgiveness to your debtor requires grace but grace is foreign to fallen human nature. There is no hint of grace in our hearts apart from God. Grace is given to us when we obey and trust Him. We say "an eye for an eye." Grace says "turn the other cheek." Grace flows from God's Spirit working in us. Grace repays the offense with kindness and love. Grace replaces revenge.

Here's an illustration of grace. Your son's baseball game is scheduled for 7:00 pm. The other team is ready to begin the game on time. You look at your watch; it's 7:00 and your son's team is depending on him to get to the game. His team will forfeit the game if they can't field a full team and it will be your fault. By rights, the full team should be declared the winner. However, the league has a 'grace' period of 15 minutes. You arrive at 7:14. The 'grace' period allows the game to be played. In effect, your guilt is covered by grace. Ironically, your son scores the winning run. That is the power of grace; you deserved to lose, but you won.

Grace is the attribute displayed by the king in the parable. The servant had no way to pay the debt and no right to be forgiven the debt. All he could do was beg for sympathy. In kindness, the king cancelled the debt. ***"In Him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that He lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding."*** Ephesians 1:7, 8.

We have been ***lavished*** with enough grace to forgive. Grace is poured into our hearts through the power of the Spirit. Grace is undeserved; it is a gift. In marriage, we draw on God's grace to release one another from the guilt of daily incidents in which we offend and are offended.

"Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you." Romans 15:7.

Just as Christ accepted me I must accept others. We all need to be accepted. Acceptance is

an attitude. God makes a way for our acceptance through grace and forgiveness. We accept one another by an act of our will when we are **ruled** by grace. When we discipline a child we correct the act but accept the child. Acceptance tells a person they are loved unconditionally. Our capacity to accept others flows from the acceptance we receive in Christ.

"Guard your heart" Proverbs 4:23. In God's design for oneness in marriage we need Christ's attitude to extend grace and acceptance to one another in all circumstances. At the same time, we love one another by setting and respecting appropriate **boundaries**. Accepting does not make me a doormat.

Marriage in Debt

We made a wedding vow to love, cherish, and care for one another for better or worse. When we realize we have received God's forgiveness, grace, and acceptance, we can forgive, show grace, and accept others. In Healing for Damaged Emotions, David Seamands writes that spouses who fail to forgive are like tics on a dog. Each one bites away at the marriage until it is devoured.

"If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other." Galatians 5:15.

Sadly, married people who are emotional debt collectors play a dangerous ping pong-like game with their relationship. It's revenge in perpetual motion. It's what Emerson Eggerichs calls the 'crazy cycle' in his book, Love and Respect. One person has to be the bigger person, stop the debt collecting, and grow up spiritually. Holding onto our "rights" and trying to force the other person to change is not what we meant when we said "I do." What happened since the "I do?" If we try to analyze and unravel the mess, we find there is no way to fix it. It is truly a vicious circle.

This is why the Bible says, ***"Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellow man has fulfilled the law."*** Romans 13:8.

"The world is made for forgiveness; it is made for grace; it is made for love in all of life. The need for these has been built into the structure of nature, of persons. It is in every cell of our bodies, in every relationship. We are made for grace and love and acceptance." Healing For Damaged Emotions, David Seamands , page 27.

7. Is there emotional debt collecting in your marriage? Is it time to ask for and give forgiveness?

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8. What examples of grace and acceptance have you seen in your marriage recently?

Conclusion

Prayer: *"Thank you, Father, for your abundant grace in forgiving and freeing me through your Son. Thank you for the freedom you give me through forgiveness. May I know I am forgiven, and in Your grace be always ready to forgive, show grace, accept, and free others."*

Before we leave this discussion of freedom, forgiveness, grace, and acceptance we need to get personal. We may have forgiven everyone else but there remains a feeling of inner torment and lack of freedom.

If this is true, please consider two important questions:

Have you forgiven God? Are you holding a grudge against Him because you think He either allowed something bad to happen or He didn't answer your prayers to remove a bad situation from your life?

Have you forgiven yourself? Many people internalize hurt and anger to avoid hurting someone else. They turn blame and guilt inward and hold their own heart hostage. We may need to give grace, acceptance, and forgiveness to our own self. To live in victory we need to live moment by moment in the power and grace of Romans 8:1. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ.

9. Ask yourself if you need to forgive God or yourself. This will be a spiritual breakthrough for you. Write your prayer here and look at it often.
   My prayer:

COMPONENT 4

Healing our Soul

Going Deep, Growing Strong

Overview: Building oneness in marriage

requires ***deep personal healing***

rsm
resuming life

Design

Salvation meets our need for deep inner healing. Relationships are healthy when our souls are healed and restored.

Problem

We are all wounded by the hurtful effects of sin. Wounded people damage their relationships through hurtful words and actions.

Solution

Salvation touches every part of us, including our broken hearts. We open our hearts to the deeper work of healing by God's Spirit.

Application

The deep healing of our soul frees us to love well in marriage. We take this difficult journey in the power of God's Spirit.

Overview Question: *Think back to times when you were hurt deeply by damaging words and actions of other people. Describe what you did with the emotions you felt in those times?*

Design

Salvation meets our need for deep inner healing. Relationships are healthy when our souls are healed and restored.

"The purposes of a man's heart are deep waters, but a man of understanding draws them out." Proverbs 20:5.

Our behaviours, good and bad, are the fruit of deeply rooted patterns of very personal experience.

Oneness in marriage requires healed hearts. Opening my wounded heart to the healing of God's Spirit is the most profound and courageous thing I can do for my marriage.

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This Component explores a marriage essential that is commonly overlooked. It's unfamiliar territory and it's uncomfortable. It calls us to journey with God's Spirit deeply into our hearts. It calls us to become vulnerable. Why do we need this? A healed heart is essential to unity with God and with others.

Our inner healing connects us with the heart of God. It ushers us into the abundant life Christ promises. The Proverb says, our heart's purposes are ***"deep waters."*** Our ***"deep purposes"*** are drawn out, the verse says, by ***"a man of understanding."*** God uses healed helpers to come alongside us in our emotional pain and need.

"Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back; lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes." Isaiah 54:2. Towering buildings require deep foundations. The deeper we go in healing and trust, the greater capacity we have to love God and one another.

Our own personal story is that of transformation through inner healing. Through the ***"valley of the shadow of death"*** (Psalm 23) my heart and our marriage have been healed and changed forever. Our dark journey is the spiritual foundation of this ministry. God's Spirit ministers to others out of our wounding.

1. What do you know about the idea of wounded hearts and inner healing? How does it affect marriage?

Problem

We are all wounded by the hurtful effects of sin. Wounded people damage their relationships through hurtful words and actions.

"The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul." Psalm 23:1-3.

"He restores my soul." 'Soul' is defined as ***"the principle of life, feeling, thought, and action in man"*** and ***"the essential part or element of something."*** He restores my soul implies that it has been damaged or broken, as in the term ***"broken-hearted." "He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted ..."*** Isaiah 61:1.

God wants to restore my heart, my core, my soul (mind, emotions, and will) – all of my authentic self.

2. If God wants to restore our soul why are many people and marriages unhappy and hurting today?

In his important book, Healing for Damaged Emotions, David Seamands, a pastor, wrote,

"Early in my pastoral experience, I discovered that I was failing to help two groups of people through the regular ministries of the church. Their problems were not being solved by the preaching of the Word, commitment to Christ, the filling of the Spirit, prayer, or the Sacraments."

"The denied problems went underground ... later to appear in all manner of illnesses, eccentricities, terribly unhappy marriages, and sometimes even the emotional destruction of the children."

"During this time of discovery, God showed me that the ordinary ways of ministering would never help some problems. And He began to enable me to open up my own heart to personal self-discovery, and to new depths of healing love through my marriage, my children, and intimate friends." Excerpts, page 9.

He restores all of me! Geri Scazzero, in The Emotionally Healthy Woman, writes that unresolved feelings are **buried alive**. People hide their deep thoughts and feelings for years on end. As Christians, we are 'good' people who are Bible-smart and steel-willed, but emotionally stunted. Sunday morning, we are all ***"doing great"*** but we don't know how to deal with deeply embedded emotions - anger, fear, confusion, sadness, disappointment, and more.

Does this happen to you? We leave the church after a great service on Sunday morning still not knowing deep peace and joy in the gospel. Why? Many pastors have neither the time, gifting, nor training to work through the many-layered, emotionally - rooted personal and relationship crises that plague our hearts and lives. Marriages are sliding into crisis. Divorce and family breakdowns multiply as we search for a solution.

In Emotionally Healthy Spirituality, Peter Scazzero writes, *"We attend church, we clean up our lives, we begin to pray, and even share Christ with others. But the roots of who we are continue unaffected and unmoved."* page 16. He compares humans to icebergs. We focus on the visible ten percent above water but like the iceberg, our true self is deeply hidden, from God, from others, and from ourselves. Who I really am hides and remains untouched by the healing power of Christ.

The effects of sin are the problem. Over the generations, hurtful words and actions have impacted and damaged our hearts causing us to put up walls that separate us from intimate, vulnerable connection with God and with each other. We are disconnected emotionally from God, others, and from our own hearts. Our souls have been ravaged by the enemy in all of this

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damage. We see the fruit today in marriage and family devastation caused by the unhealed effects of sin committed in unhealthy relationships over many generations.

For a reminder, look back at Component 1, 'Renewed Minds'.

The Story of Jack, Just an 'Average' Guy

Jack is a guy you might work with or play softball with. He's a regular guy. What we might not know is that he's in a battle. Jack and his wife struggle with serious marriage problems. Their fighting creates a toxic emotional environment that has done terrible damage in his marriage and in the lives of his teenage daughter and son.

He has a history of alcohol and drug abuse. He has trouble keeping a job. He has almost zero self-worth. He has always craved approval from his father. He is a victim; he feels criticized and helpless. He can never measure up to his dad's standards. He has never felt accepted. His heart is engraved with the words, "You're a failure."

3. "The denied problems went underground." What do you think this statement means?

Solution

Salvation touches every part of us, including our broken hearts. We open our hearts to the deeper work of healing by God's Spirit.

Going Deep, Growing Strong – This parable of Jesus takes us into the solution.
"A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop – a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown." Matthew 13:3-8.

The seed was scattered on different types of ground, the ground representing our souls. The seed, the message of the Kingdom, was only as productive as the type of ground allowed. Some seed fell on ***"good soil."*** In verse 23, Jesus described good soil as the man ***"who hears and understands the word. He produces a crop"*** because his soul understands and nurtures the seed.

Later in the passage Jesus said,***"... this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them."*** Matthew 13:15.

Our calloused hearts need to change so we can see, hear, understand, and turn, and be healed by Jesus.

Salvation and Healing our Heart

The Gospel of Christ is the good news of our salvation. In salvation His purpose is to restore us to a right relationship with God and to conform us to the image of God in us. Salvation is meant to touch and heal every part of our being, to extend and bring light into every dark corner in our heart. God's Spirit does not sit idly by while His children suffer in defeat from the damaging effects of sin.

"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. God pursues each of His children to deepen His work of restoring our soul. He will get our attention, even if it takes the form of marriage or family crisis. In our despair He is saying, ***"Pay attention, I have more to give you of Myself." "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."*** John 10:10b.

"Bind up the broken-hearted"

On our own, we are incapable of fixing the wounds in our souls. We are only capable of weakness, not any weakness, but a weakness that forces us into submission to the healing touch of the Spirit of God. The Spirit gives gifts to the body. The 'coming alongside' ministry is one of the essential gifts. (Romans 12:8) God sends a healed helper, a ***"man of understanding,"*** (Psalm 20:5) one who has been through the healing of the heart to prayerfully guide, led by the Spirit, into the healing process.

"The Spirit of the sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion – to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor." Isaiah 61:1-3.

What a passage! What a description of our need and the power of God's Spirit to transform lives. The phrase ***"those who grieve in Zion"*** is a description of the emotional and spiritual need of the church today. The transformation process described in these three verses is what we need. Jesus identified his mission with this Isaiah passage when He read part of it to those attending the synagogue in his home town. ***"Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."*** Luke 4:22

"The Spirit of the sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me ..." God anoints and gifts members of the body to come alongside those who are in need of inner healing. Hurting people are able to get to the place of healing with the encouragement of a 'healed helper.' God will provide someone gifted in coming alongside to help the person sincerely seeking healing for a damaged heart.

"... to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of

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righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor." Isaiah 61:3.

The beauty of the Spirit of God healing our heart is the joy-filled experience of transformation. When He heals our heart we are transformed to become ***"a display of his splendor"*** and we are called ***"oaks of righteousness."*** Salvation in Christ has touched every part of our being.

The Spirit Knows our Heart

"In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness [i.e., 'infirmity']. We do not know what we ought to pray, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And He who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will." Romans 8:26, 27.

"... there is another realm of problems that requires a special kind of prayer and a deeper level of healing by the Spirit. Somewhere between our sins, on the one hand, and our sickness, on the other, lies an area the Scripture calls "infirmities." Healing For Damaged Emotions, David Seamands, page 10.

God's Spirit knows our wound and what must be done to heal it. The way into the healing of the heart is through deep prayer, meditating on His word, and trusting God's Spirit by opening our hearts to Him. The Spirit searches and knows the depths of our heart in a way we, nor anyone, ever could.

The enemy knows the area in our soul where we are weak. The term 'infirmity' means weakness, not firm, feeble, not steadfast, not solid or stable. It is the negative form of the word 'firm' which means compact, hard, solid, fixed, steady, constant, stable, unshaken in purpose or will, resolute, not easily moved. Other positive forms of the word are 'affirm' and 'confirm.' The enemy attacks through our infirmities, but Jesus understands our deep need because He has gone there before us.

"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." Hebrews 4:15, 16.

The Father or Mother Wound

"The boy is the father of the man." Wordsworth means that a man is the product of his childhood.

As a child, my dependence was on my father and mother. In God's design, my father and mother are to be the representatives of God in the formation of my heart. God designs the family as a place of protection, nurture, affirmation, and discipline for the tender soul of each child.

Learning from the modelling of our heavenly Father, our earthly father is meant to convey this message. "Son, I love you. I am pleased with you. You have what it takes to be a good man." For daughters, this message is needed, "My daughter, I love you. I am pleased with you. You are my delight and you are worthy of being protected and cherished."

Whether male or female, if my parents were silent about helping me know who I am, or worse, if the message was I'm not good enough, or a failure, or I don't measure up, my soul is deeply

wounded. John Eldredge in Wild at Heart writes that every boy needs the message, "You have what it takes to be a man." Not having their parents' blessing leaves a man or woman searching for identity and purpose. We stumble into adulthood with strongholds that lock us into a thinking pattern that destroys any attempt to succeed in life and relationships. This is Satan's weapon to tear apart marriages and families. ***"Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour."*** 1 Peter 5:8.

In a woman, Satan's message destroys her self-worth and convinces her she will not be cherished, that she is not desirable. This is the wound that declares to her that her husband is not capable of loving and leading her. She can't trust or respect him. This is the wound that drives her to take control because her husband is failing her. Satan's message for the man is you don't have what it takes, you're a failure. Marriages are damaged when we listen to Satan.

4. Looking back as an adult, what are your thoughts on the father or mother wound in your life?

Our Wound and the Path of Emotional Healing

"Whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." Matthew 18:18b. Our emotional and spiritual bondage must be broken by a journey into our wounded heart to heal painful memories. The Spirit of God gently takes us into our wound. In deep prayer He shows us that He has always been present with us in every hurtful moment of our past. Knowing He was with us in our pain is the beginning of healing.

Do I dare face my true self, my fear? Do I make the journey into my soul? Will I risk going into the unknown reaches of my deepest heart and let His gentle Spirit heal me in a place deeper than I know?

What are the steps of this healing journey? We borrow insights from John Eldredge as he describes the healing process in Wild at Heart, pages 127-132. He identifies these steps:

Surrender - we sincerely come to Jesus and in humility invite His Spirit into our wound.

Grieve - we stop saying it doesn't matter – it does matter. Your wound was not your fault. Trust God to help you experience the truth about the one who hurt you. Weep if you must. Your tears are healing.

See God - He's present with you in your pain. Ask God to reveal Himself to you in your wound.

Forgive - the one who hurt you. The one you will set free is really yourself.

Thank God - know you are His child. Let your Abba Father embrace you.

Identity - Ask Him to show you your true self in Christ. Who are you to Him? (Pages 132-136)

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If you are married, enter your wound with your spouse by your side.

A song: "For Those Tears I Died"

You said you'd come and share all my sorrows, You said you'd be there for all my tomorrows,

I came so close to sending You away, but just like You promised You came here to stay,

I just had to pray.

And Jesus said, "Come to the water, stand by my side,

I know you are thirsty, you won't be denied,

***I felt every tear drop when in darkness you cried**, and I strove to remind you that for those tears I died.*

Let the words of this song speak to you about the heart of compassion Jesus has for your "sorrows."

5. Every person has memories that need to be healed. What are your thoughts about this statement?

Application

The journey of deep emotional healing frees us to love well in our marriages. We take this difficult journey in the power of God's Spirit.

We emphasize again that healing our soul, though biblically an integral part of salvation in Christ, has been largely overlooked. It is an aspect of our journey in Christ which many have never heard of. As we wrote earlier, "It's unfamiliar territory and it's uncomfortable. It calls us to journey with God's Spirit deeply into our hearts. It calls us to become vulnerable." However, it is one of the most powerful factors in enjoying unity in our relationships.

"He restores my soul." God pursues each of us to complete His healing work in us.

Pay attention - Crisis in marriage and family is a signal that God is calling us to engage with Him in growing up into the wholeness and fullness of Christ. He calls us to go deep and grow strong in His Spirit.

Get help - The Spirit gifts certain members of the body, 'healed helpers,' to come alongside and guide us on the journey from broken-heartedness to healing.

Trust God intentionally - Focus your mind on the healing of your heart in prayer and open your heart to the gentle probing of God's Spirit.

Conclusion

Our own personal story is that of transformation from ***"the valley of the shadow of death"*** Psalm 23, to life in the Spirit through inner healing. The joy and peace of Christ is at home in our hearts. There is room for the fruit of the Spirit to grow in a heart that is cleansed and healed.

Oneness in marriage is possible, in fact it is guaranteed. The two will become ***"one flesh"*** when Jesus is not only our Saviour and our Lord, but our Healer as well.

Opening my wounded heart to the healing of God's Spirit is the most profound and courageous thing I can do for my marriage.

He stands, waiting at the door of our heart. He asks to come in and gently cleanse and soothe our wound. Only I can decide to open my heart and let Him shine the light of his truth and love into every darkened corner of my heart. Like spring cleaning, He opens wide the windows of my heart to let the fresh air flow in. My burden is lifted; my soul is restored; I'm healed and free.

6. Do you have painful memories of deep wounding? Would you write a prayer to express your heart?
   My prayer:

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COMPONENT 5

Personalities

Overview: Unity in marriage requires

acceptance of personality types

rsm
resuming life

Design

Different personality types are God's design. Marriage unity demands knowing and honouring personality types.

Problem

When we don't understand and accept the differences in our personality types we fail to love well and we damage our relationships.

Solution

Understanding and honouring personality differences helps us accept and value each other and build unity.

Application

We learn to know and accept who we are in God's design. To become one, we honour our differences.

Overview Question: *How would you describe your personality types – you and your spouse?*

_____

_____

_____

_____

Design

Different personality types are God's design. Marriage unity demands knowing and honouring personality types.

Unity: In the big picture, God is calling His creation to unity under the headship of Christ. In Ephesians, Paul says that God's plan is for all creation to be in unity under the headship of Christ.

"He purposed in Christ ... to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ." Ephesians 1:9-10.

Diversity: Unity is not sameness. In music, just as harmony requires singing or playing different parts, unity requires diverse types of people. The submission we learn, especially in our marriages and families, allows the richness of our differences to produce exquisite unity to God's

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glory. In God's design, both uniqueness and diversity are celebrated. Ultimately, unity under the Head, Christ, is God's great plan.

Jesus prayed for oneness and unity, so we strive for unity in the church. In marriage, unity does not mean being the same as our mate. It means that husband and wife empower each other to grow in their own identity no matter how different they are. Differences combine in unity.

In God's design for marriage the old adage is true, opposites do attract. Husband and wife are very different in both gender and personality type. It's a mystery how we choose a mate for life so different in personality. One is analytical, the other is emotional. One is a people person, the other is task-oriented. One is reserved, the other is more outgoing. One is neat, the other is messy, and so on.

Does our differentness cause conflict? Yes.
With patience and effort couples work through differences by learning to accept and celebrate their differentness. We have individual strengths and weaknesses in different areas of life. When we learn to work interdependently in our strengths and weaknesses, we complement and complete one another. We generate a synergy and wholeness that surpasses what can be achieved by the effort of two independent persons. The key in building unity through diversity is accepting each other unconditionally. ***"Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God."*** Romans 15:7.

Unity does not mean changing the other person to be like we are, though that would be the comfortable way to live in a relationship. It means empowering our mate to grow in their own core identity. In living our differentness, through commitment to one another in mutual submission, we learn to become one.

In God's design, the diversity with which He created us will lead us to submit to one another and to celebrate the wisdom and glory of unity. In marriage, the two will become ***"one flesh."*** This is God's will.

1. Write your thoughts about the idea that our differences in marriage can make us stronger together.

Problem

When we don't understand and accept the differences in our personality types we fail to love well and we damage our relationships.

Why do people find it so difficult to understand and accept others in a relationship?

SIN, and the FALL

In their disobedience, the man and woman sinned and caused separation from God and from each other. When Adam and Eve sinned they covered themselves and hid. Sin does this, it leads people into isolation and self-contempt. It steals our self-worth as creations made in God's image. We begin to distrust and lose our identity. We fear being ***"naked."*** (Genesis 2:25) We take control to avoid opening ourselves to others in vulnerability. We hide behind a wall or wear a mask. We are diminished.

When we lose our identity we lose our sense of the personhood God gave us. We are aware only of how isolated we are and the frequent conflict that causes. We don't try to understand, let alone accept each other. Though we are created in God's image, sin robs us of our sense of identity, purpose, and belonging. In the end, we withdraw from relationships. The toll on marriages and families is horrific.

2. What do you think – how does sin cause us to lose our sense of our identity, purpose, and belonging?

Solution

Understanding and honouring personality differences helps us accept and value each other and build unity.

The CROSS – The sin problem in our lives has to be dealt with. Jesus gave His life to take our curse, to pay the penalty of our sin, to justify and to redeem us, and to restore us to our identity, purpose, and place in Christ and in His body. Salvation frees us from the hiding place.

"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Romans 8:1.

Christ has set us free to be whole and to serve God and one another in love. ***"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."*** Galatians 5:1.

As Christ frees us, He also gives our life purpose. ***"We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works."*** Ephesians 2:10.

We belong in His body, the church. ***"So in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to us."*** Romans 12:5, 6.

3. Explain in your words how it is that Christ's death sets us free to find our purpose in Him.

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DIVERSITY, TYPES, and UNITY

Salvation and Design

Salvation restores every part of our being, transforming our lives and bringing oneness into our relationships by giving us identity, purpose, and belonging though our personality and gifting types.

God created life in His world with a design. In His design, every life form is unique, every tree, flower, animal, and human. At the same time, each life form has characteristics in common with other entities. Together, they form a kind, or group, or type. Each type is sufficiently different from other types. In this way, there are many different kinds or types in God's creation design.

In science, we make sense of the vast array of unique plants and animals by grouping them in a classification system. Each plant or animal shares characteristics that are like and unlike others. We can use categories or type descriptions to make sense of the diversity in the plant and animal world.

So, God creates with both uniqueness and likeness. Being unique is God's way of making each of us special to Him, the core of our unique self-worth. At the same time, He uses types to give us the sense of community, belonging, and ultimately, to unite creation under the headship of Christ. ***"And He made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which He purposed in Christ ... to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ."*** Ephesians 1:9, 10.

People Types

In the human population, diversity is not random. God creates differences within His design that can then be gathered in as types. The various types are distinct, yet they complement one another and form a unified whole in creation. Each type captures some aspect of the image of God.

These types have special functions. Paul writes, ***"from him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."*** Ephesians 4:16.

The body, the whole, grows together in love ***"as each part does its work."*** Each part works in it's own design but interdependently with other parts. This is unity. The force in this uniting process is the Holy Spirit. ***"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."*** Ephesians 4:3.

Understanding Personality and Gifting Types

The word 'individual' has as its root the word 'divide.' Individually, we are divided from each

other. How do we become one? Individuals cluster in homogenous groups by way of personality and gifting types.

The more we understand and accept our own identity as well as the different identities of others, the more we can grow both in our own sense of purpose and in community with one another in unity.

The Bible teaches ***"though it cost all you have, get understanding."*** Proverbs 4:7b. Around 400 BC, a doctor in Greece, Hippocrates (Hippocratic Oath) noticed four different 'types' of people as he treated his patients. He named the types choleric, phlegmatic, sanguine, and melancholic. His four 'temperament' types became the foundation of all the personality systems developed since then. The notion that personalities divide into types has expanded into a number of personality classification systems. In the 1950's, Myers and Briggs identified four types, each with four sub-types, resulting in their popular system of 16 distinct personality types.

A working understanding of personality types is a key piece in helping people understand and accept each other. We can more fully appreciate how we are made and how we fit together in relationships. In the context of being God's creations, we gain important insight into the basis of our unique self-worth. We learn the details of our identity and purpose in Christ and the way in which we belong and function within our marriage and family. This understanding is effective in resolving conflict, in building a caring marriage, and in creating unity.

There is a connection between personality types and spiritual gifting. God has created us with certain personality attributes that support the functioning of the different gifts in the body of believers. By understanding the attitudes and behaviours of gift types we develop a sense of our interdependence in the body. Knowing our place and value in the body affirms the work of God's Spirit in our lives. In Christ, we are aware of our value and purpose. We are empowered to contribute rather than criticize. In Christ-like self-acceptance, we are better able to accept others. Again, God's objective is unity.

4. Give your thoughts on the idea that God uses personality and gift types to bring us into unity.

Application

We learn to know and accept who we are in God's design. To become one, we honour our differences.

Personality Types, Communication, and Resolving Conflict

One morning I said something to Linda and as soon as it came out I thought it was careless

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and hurtful to her. She didn't react right away but I noticed she was thinking and then she said, ***"Dave, I'm going to ask you a 'Green' question"*** (explained on page 69). I knew I was guilty and deserved rebuke so I was surprised by her reply. In a few seconds, she had strategized about how to help me receive words I didn't want to hear. She wanted to let me know this was not an attack, but she did need to respond. She had to set a boundary and guard her heart. ***"Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life."*** Proverbs 4:23.

This kind of thing happens often in every marriage. Without considering our mate's feelings we do or say things that are hurtful. In building unity it's essential to know how to resolve conflict with clear communication.

Linda used a 'disarming' strategy (See Component 7, Communication) by using the words, ***"green question."*** We use the True Colours Personality System in our marriage and in coaching others. We both know what a 'green' question is. Her thoughtful response helped me receive the rebuke and not feel attacked. I could hear her without defending myself, which is a negative emotional reaction we use to deflect culpability. We could calmly talk through and resolve the conflict.

It's interesting that neither of us can now remember what I had said because it was dealt with properly, but I clearly remember how Linda handled a difficult situation. By knowing my personality type Linda avoided what could have been an embarrassing and angry exchange. In the end, I was able to ask her forgiveness, she forgave, and we both walked away in freedom. (See Component 3, Forgiveness)

This true story is a great example of combining an understanding of personality types, good communication skills, and the biblical principle of meekness. Meekness is the principle of giving up our rights to bless another person.

Linda was willing to move out of her own comfort zone (her personality type) and enter into my world. In an act of meekness and trust, she gave up the right to stay in her personality strength. By identifying the question as a 'green' question she had my full attention.

In this kind of conflict situation, most people take control and stay in their own strength which causes the offender to take a defensive position and escalates the conflict. Small unresolved conflicts add up over days, weeks, and months. One small offense can ignite a firestorm of pent up anger.

Learning to communicate and resolve conflict through personality types is essential in building unity.

5. What are your thoughts on learning more about personality types? Can this enrich your marriage?

More about 'True Colours' Personality Types

'True Colours' is a popular personality system. It identifies four personality 'types' by using colours. Each colour symbolizes a set of powerful personality attributes, attitudes, and behaviours. Every person is unique, but at the same time, displays characteristics that fit into a specific personality profile.

For instance, Linda's profile is, from high to low, Gold, Orange, Blue, Green. Dave's colour profile is almost the opposite - Blue, Green, Orange, Gold. It's important to see that when Linda asked a 'Green' question she chose to use her weakest type to speak to Dave's second highest type. Not only that, her strongest colour is Gold, which is Dave's lowest. If she had reacted in her strong Gold she would have overpowered Dave's weak Gold, putting her in control and him in a poor place to respond well.

The attributes of the four types are charted in **Appendix 1, Personality Attribute Sets – True Colours**, page 73. Look at the traits listed in the 'Green' column. We can see the wisdom in Linda's approach. She entered into my thinking through the gate (Green) that engages my strengths in explanation and analysis. She also avoided my high Blue, which is a more emotionally driven impulse. She turned off my emotional defence mechanism and appealed to my non-emotional ability to explore her reply logically. People become frustrated or irritated or feel attacked when they are confronted. Understanding our own personality structure and that of others provides powerful insight into good communication, conflict resolution, and building one another up.

Other Personality Systems

In our coaching work with individuals, couples, and groups we use True Colours as our first personality indicator because it is uncomplicated and gives us insight into the balance of thinking versus feeling in relationships. Typically, one mate is a thinker, the other, a feeler. When appropriate, we combine insights from True Colours with other personality systems including The Enneagram, Myers Briggs, D.I.S.C., and Temperaments. On their own or in combination, these systems are invaluable in improving our understanding of who we are and how we relate. They are accurate **predictors** of how members in a relationship consistently think, feel, and behave.

They help us build unity through better communication and conflict resolution. They help us love well.

Spiritual Gifts

"We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouragement, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully." Romans 12:6-8.

The Bible teaches that spiritual gifts are given by the Holy Spirit for the functioning and building up of the church. Like personality types, each of the 7 functioning gifts of the Spirit listed in Romans have attributes that we observe in the way people think, feel, and behave. We believe

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these ***"functions"*** (Romans 12:4) are spiritual gifts given to people and that they display embedded personality distinctions.

As we use our gifting we gain a sense of our worth and our place in the body. However, to use our gift we must know what it is. We gain affirmation and spiritual confidence when we know our gift and identify with other believers who have the same gift. It gives us a sense of identity, purpose, and belonging. In other words, there are other people who see life and ministry as I do. That is a comfort. We are empowered to build unity in the body when we all identify, understand, and use our gift types.

Gifting and My Story

I, Dave, relate my story only because it may help others. As a young man I realized that I saw life quite differently than most other people and it was unsettling. I would often think and feel and speak in ways that seemed oppositional to others. My thinking and my passion provoked a lot of what felt to me like rejection by others. Today, my thinking style might be termed "outside the box." In my early years of spiritual growth I got the distinct impression that I was not understood or appreciated.

Knowing the characteristics of my personality and my gift type have helped me understand myself now. I see that my probing, relentless 'Green' personality type challenges others and creates conflict. At the same time, my strong, highly sensitive 'Blue' personality leaves me feeling alienated. I now get it, but years ago I thought my motives were pure so why was I causing such emotional distance with people? I needed to feel I belonged. I accused myself of being either a misfit or bad. All this led to more conflict within myself and with others. I began to dislike my thinking and myself but I couldn't change my core – the way I saw life and faith. Outwardly I battled; inwardly, I lost trust in myself.

God used a Spiritual Gifts seminar to rescue me. The leader outlined the characteristics of the spiritual gift types listed in Romans 12:6-8. We identified our gift type and gathered with others who identified themselves in the same type. I will never forget the impact of hearing my group members describe their thinking. It was me. For the first time in my life I knew I was not crazy, or bad. I was looking into a mirror. I finally saw my true self in Christ and it was actually not bad, but good. I could be my true self and belong to Christ and the church. I was affirmed by God through a group of strangers who were just like me. The burden lifted; I could understand and appreciate my differentness and finally accept myself.

A summary of the Romans 12 gift attributes is charted in the **Personal Functional Gifts, Appendix 2.**

Even though we know our personality and gift type, it's still a struggle because being honest with our true self is a battle. Resisting the pull to comply with the crowd and please people is a daily challenge. Being who we are in Christ and led by the Spirit takes faith and courage when others are different.

Spiritual Gifts and Setting Boundaries – Romans 12:3

In Romans 12:3 we read a warning about how we regard gift attributes. ***"For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather***

think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you." Paul reminds us to use good judgment when we think about spiritual gifts. We are not to think too highly of ourselves, but to think within the limits of the faith received from God. At the same time we need to understand that to belittle one's self is not honouring to the Creator in whose image and likeness we are made. Using ***"sober judgment"*** allows me to confidently but humbly present my God-given personality and gifting to the body of Christ in which ***"we serve one another in love."*** Galatians 5:13.

6. Give your thoughts on knowing and using your spiritual gift. Is it important to know where you fit?

Conclusion

Unity through diversity is God's plan. In order to turn diversity into unity we all must accept one another even in our differentness. Types have edges. We have discovered that neither the personality types nor the spiritual gift types easily merge. Sometimes, love is a choice we make. Unity demands the submission we read about in Ephesians 5:21: ***"Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ."***

The beauty of unity is that when I understand how my gift and personality type fit with others in the community of faith I am comforted and energized. We all belong; we all have a place by virtue of our faith in Christ and the gifting of His Spirit. Our God-given design is proof that our sins are forgiven at the cross and we are guaranteed identity, purpose, and belonging in the family of God.

In other words, we are all unique persons but as we gather in relationships our design allows us to play a role of significance as we do our part. In our design, there are built-in strengths and limitations. Where I am weak you are strong, and vice versa. This means that if we all admit our weaknesses and accept others' strengths, we become strong together. Each one of us embodies a piece of the diversity that God has designed in the body of Christ. As we learn to identify and appreciate ourselves and each other in the community of faith and as we understand the important design and function of each member, we are empowered to submit to one another in the unity of the body. This is the unity to which we are called as God's people through faith in Christ.

Personality and Gift Types and the Personhood of God

The way we are all grouped according to personality and gift types gives us insight into the personhood of God. Since we are made in his image and likeness, these personality and gift types are glimpses of the nature of God. Through understanding the attributes of our types we

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then better know the attributes of God. He becomes more personal. We learn better how to be like him as we see Him displayed in the different personalities in the body of believers. In knowing the details of our personality and gift types as we operate in the body of believers, we are empowered to grow up in our knowledge of Him

7. Describe how this Personalities Component helps you understand yourself and your mate better.

The Purpose of Your Personality

Salvation restores us to God and to our true self. We don't have to hide. In our personality and gifting we see proof that we are loved by God.

Knowing ourselves brings unity into our relationships by healing our lost sense of identity, purpose, and belonging. Your personality and gifting are God's way of providing for each of his children a unique place and purpose in His will and purpose within His family and in His creation.

8. Does this Component help grow your understanding of ***your*** place and purpose? Your thoughts?

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PERSONALITY ATTRIBUTE SETS – TRUE COLOURS

Green	*Gold*	*Orange*	*Blue*
Knowledge	***Work***	***Action***	***Emotion***
Intellect	***Duty***	***Results***	***Relationships***
Planning	***Organized***	***Fun***	***Empathy***
Idea-centered	Task-centered	Action-centered	People-centered
Thinker	Right and wrong	Starter	Compassion
Problem-solver	Order	Decisive	Relationship
Ingenious	Traditions	Just do it	Transparency
Expertise	Organized	Impact	Sensitivity
Analytical	Steadfast	Spontaneity	Creative
Individualist	Dependable	Skillfulness	Idealistic
Complex	Punctual	Zest for life	Seek significance
Abstract thinker	Prepared	Freedom	Notice nuances
Competence	Work ethic	Excitement	Affection
Intelligence	Heritage	Negotiator	Identity
Invents Structure	Avoids risk	Trouble shooter	Authenticity
Precise wording	Reputation	Adventure	Meaning is key
Global thinker	Reserved	Performer	Enthusiasm
Truth	Maintains	Opportunity	Personal growth
Accuracy	Security	Optimism	Harmony
Explanation	Service	Risk taker	Empathy
Efficiency	Dedication	Bored easily	Encouraging
High standards	Responsibility	Open-minded	Belonging
Technology	Loyalty	Social	Recognition

Your Profile: _____ _____ _____ _____

Most like you | Second | Third | Lowest

Your Mate's Profile:

_____ _____ _____ _____

Most like them | Second | Third | Lowest

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PERSONAL FUNCTIONAL GIFTS - ROMANS 12:6-15

Spiritual Gift / Function Verses 6-15	Characteristics, Personality/ Behaviour Style	Identify your Gifting
Prophesy - verse 6 *"love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good"* v. 9	- focus: sin & salvation - preacher, evangelist, orator - unemotional, black & white - harsh, rigid, bold, fierce - OT prophets, John the Baptist - tunnel vision, demanding	***Circle your number*** 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Low High
Serving, ministry (KJV) - verse 7 *"be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honour one another above yourselves"* v. 10	- focus: meet practical needs - action louder than words - helpers, not emotional - need to be appreciated - fixers, background, doers - serve others by doing tasks	***Circle your number*** 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Low High
Teaching - verse 7 *"never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord"* v. 11	- focus: guard the truth - skilled learner, knowledge - need to study, research - detailed, precise messages - feelings are suppressed - Scripture 'experts'	***Circle your number*** 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Low High
Encouraging, exhorting (KJV) - verse 8 *"be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer"* v. 12	- focus: spiritual growth, unity - passionate, deep, emotional - problem solvers - steps to correct - must see change, results - need recognition, be loved	***Circle your number*** 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Low High
Contributing to the needs of others, giving (KJV) - verse 8 *"share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality."* v. 13	- focus: giving to meet need - emphasis on money, thrift - see obscure needs - blessed with money, trusted - business for God's work - simple lifestyle, buy quality - individualistic, introvert	***Circle your number*** 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Low High
Leading, ruling (KJV) - verse 8 *"bless those who persecute you; bless and curse not"* v. 14	- focus: project management, natural organization leaders - overseers, *"rulers"* (KJV) - delegate, or do it myself - can be overbearing - task oriented, impatient - quality, high standards	***Circle your number*** 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Low High
Showing mercy - verse 8 do it cheerfully – *"rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn"* v. 15	- focus: people and feelings - emotion, sympathy, caring - tasks can wait, not detailed - soft, thin skin, sensitive - becomes crusty when hurt - take on others' burdens	***Circle your number*** 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Low High

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COMPONENT 6

Leadership in the Home

Overview: Building unity in marriage requires ***biblical leadership***

rsm
resuming life

Design

Biblical leadership is essential to unity. The biblical principle of authority demands maturity, trust, and submission.

Problem

Unhealthy leadership patterns based on power and control, rather than Jesus' leadership model, destroy our oneness.

Solution

Jesus taught and modeled 'servant' leadership that honours, empowers, and frees us to love each other.

Application

Healthy leadership patterns result when we follow God's will by living in submission and trust to His authority design.

Overview Question: *What are your thoughts on 'authority?' How should it work in a marriage?*

Design

Biblical leadership is essential to unity. The biblical principle of authority demands maturity, trust, and submission.

Biblical leadership in the home is an essential part of the marriage design. God's leadership design is based on the principle of authority and it requires us to grow in maturity and submission. Godly authority must operate in our families to create a safe place of nurture for our souls and freedom for our dreams.

We are reminded again of the design imperative given in Genesis 2:24. ***"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh."*** In God's design, we leave the authority structure of our parents and unite to our mate. In a new marriage, we need to build our own new leadership structure as a couple, understanding that we each bring with us an authority pattern from our families of origin.

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Understanding Authority

The primary relationship principle in Scripture is authority. We call it 'loving authority.' God is the source of love and authority. In the beginning, God created the man and woman and gave them free will but communicated to them in commands and gave them boundaries. Biblical leadership is a combination of freedom and responding to loving authority.

God first speaks to the man and woman with authority, commanding them to take authority over His creation. ***"God blessed them and said to them, "***Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea ..." Genesis 1:28.

"The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil..." Genesis 2:15-17. Notice the use of the title 'LORD God' in the passages detailing his commands to the man. As LORD, He commands and sets boundaries.

In God's design, authority is our protection. Authority is the structure in which the love of God thrives. As creations of God, made in his image and likeness, He knows what is best for us. In responding to His authority over us and in enacting His loving authority in our homes, we are loved, protected, and blessed by His Father love. Authority requires our loving obedience through trust and submission.

The enemy attacks how we think about authority. He knows our independent nature seeks control. This explains the power struggles in our homes between male and female and between child and parent.

1. What are your thoughts about authority being the biblical structure for God's love and blessing?

Authority and Gender Differences – Significance and Security

We are made for responding to loving authority. That authority integrates security and significance. In Wild at Heart, John Eldredge notes that God places his image in our hearts at the level of gender. The maleness of God's image is deposited in boys and men. God calls males into battle at every age to fight for what matters most to them and to venture out to make a difference in the world. This wildness could motivate a man to achieve (or over-achieve) in business, politics, sports, or ministry. It demands risk-taking. When a man is not pursuing a dream and feeling significant he is diminished. His heart is sad. He checks out either physically or emotionally.

The drive for significance is paramount in God's design of the male. Men are wired to dream of making their mark in life, in the home and marriage, and in the world. A man is designed to achieve something of great value. He is wired to be his wife's hero. He is at his best when he is affirmed by his wife. A man that doesn't have his wife's respect and admiration will feel lost and at odds with his life and relationships.

Women are designed to enjoy security in relationships. Wives want to feel safe in their marriage. Feeling loved, feeling valued, feeling secure financially, and knowing the family and future are secure are among the core needs of women. The part of God's image placed within the female is the nurturing, alluring, and vulnerable sense that provides balance to the 'wildness' of her man's spirit. A woman is the proverbial 'damsel in distress' waiting for her 'knight in shining armor' to sweep her up on their life adventure. She wants her husband's strength and she wants to be his heartbeat.

God's design calls for the spiritual leadership in the home to be the primary responsibility of the man. A woman wants the security of his Spirit-filled leadership; she is created to be her husband's ***"suitable helper."*** Genesis 2:18. In God's design, a wife asks her husband to step up and lead the family.

2. Write your thoughts on the idea that women need security and men need significance.

Problem

Unhealthy leadership patterns based on power and control, rather than Jesus' leadership model, destroy our oneness.

Various patterns of leadership emerge in marriages. Some people are 'born leaders.' Others are followers. Some act like dictators determined to have their way. Others are passive and have victim tendencies. People may appear weak in a marriage relationship but they resort to a passive aggressive style. Some marriages are a perpetual power struggle.

When a woman feels unprotected by her husband she reacts by taking the leadership and control of the marriage and home to protect her family. A woman who feels insecure in her marriage finds it impossible to encourage her husband. A wife will fight for security.

His significance is undermined. He will either comply, accommodate, accept her control, shut down and check out, or he will fight her for control and become aggressive and intimidating. Unity is destroyed. This inverted leadership pattern with the woman overpowering her husband is not God's design for marriage and family. God's authority design is not in place and the blessing of unity is impossible.

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Couples sometimes get advice from outside their marriage. Friends or in-laws might interfere, leaving either a husband or wife frustrated and angry. Any type of triangulation, bringing others' opinions into the marriage to reinforce one's position, is destructive. Marriages benefit from healthy intervention by a counselor or coach, but never by interference from an outside party taking a side.

3. Describe the leadership pattern in your marriage. Compare it to your parents' marriages.

Solution

Jesus taught and modeled 'servant' leadership that honours, empowers, and frees us to love each other.

BIBLICAL LEADERSHIP

God has designed us for giving and receiving leadership. What is biblical leadership? In Mark 10:41-45, Jesus clearly taught and modeled the essence of spiritual leadership - servant-hood.

"You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Leadership in God's design means following the example of Christ in serving the needs of others. Being the ***"head"*** (Ephesians 5:23) of the wife demands the husband commits to first serve the interests of his wife. Leadership is an act of love in which I make sure that the one whom I lead is empowered and lifted up. Leadership is selfless.

Since leadership is lifting others up, the servant leader must be comfortable in his own personal self-worth. In his walk with God he knows deeply that he is loved by and belongs to Abba Father. He is free in Christ to reach out to others to lift them before God without feeling threatened or diminished.

4. How does a marriage benefit when a husband follows Jesus as a servant leader in the home?

Control is not Biblical Leadership

What is the difference between leadership and control? Control is using power. It's like the way Jesus described the rulers of the Gentiles. They 'lorded it over' their subjects. They lord it over their mate and use personal power to protect their self-interest. People take control when they feel unsafe, victimized, and vulnerable. Control is the enemy of trust, freedom, and oneness in a marriage relationship. Control is selfishness in action. It stops oneness and destroys unity in relationships.

Grace and Fred

Grace was raised in a family with a controlling mother and a quiet, passive father. She learned from her mom to be a decisive, take charge person and not to trust a man to take care of her. As might be expected, her husband Fred is quiet and passive. He expects Grace to be in charge of the family. Is it possible Grace married Fred with the idea she could change him? Now in their late forties, neither has changed. She feels unsafe, unappreciated, and unloved. Their marriage is surviving but there is no intimacy. As a younger wife, Grace liked being in charge but now she is tired of running the family. She demands that Fred step up and be strong for her. Fred spends his free time working in his woodshop.

5. How does Grace and Fred's marriage violate God's design? How common is this pattern?

Satan Subverts Biblical Leadership in the Home

Many marriages today are plagued with confusion about how leadership should work in the home. The enemy deceitfully influences our thinking by feeding our prideful desire for control to the point now that many people don't like to even hear the word 'authority.'

Here's how he twists Gods' design in our thinking. Read the following statement carefully. This is how Satan wants us to hear this statement.

"Wives, submit to your husband, for the husband is the head of the wife."

Does this look like a scriptural statement? Yes. Is it what the verse says? No. What is missing?

Generations of men and women have heard it this way and acted on this misrepresentation in unbiblical leadership patterns.

The precise wording is:

"Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which He is the Saviour." Ephesians 5:22.

How does ***"as to the Lord"*** affect a wife's thinking about submission? How does ***"as Christ is the***

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head of the church" affect the way we see the husband as ***"head of the wife?"*** Submission and headship are directly connected to the lordship of Christ. These attitudes are only possible in the power of Christ.

As God's people we must practice the absolute truth found in this powerful principle.

6. What are your thoughts about submission and headship being connected to the Lordship of Christ?

Understanding Submission – Ephesians 5:21-33

In Two Become One, Donald Joy calls a marriage in which the wife is subservient to her husband the "Vertical Marriage." It is a marriage where the husband is above his wife as a boss is above a worker. This is not God's design for leadership in marriage. His design means mutual submission.

Ephesians 5:21 commands, ***"Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ."*** Mutual submission is the overriding principle in leadership in the home. What is mutual submission?

We need the Spirit of God to teach and guide and fill our spirits in this essential aspect of the marriage design. Getting this principle right is so difficult because it defies what seems rational and it challenges our natural bent for independence. How can two people submit to each other?

Responding to the authority of this Bible principle demands obedience. Only when we submit to the command will we understand its meaning. Submission to the Lord is achieved in our hearts. We humble our minds and hearts before God and receive the mind of his Spirit. Submission requires meekness. Meekness is the attitude of Christ in which we surrender control and are led by the Spirit into truth.

We can only understand biblical leadership in marriage when we practice submission. The word literally means to put under. The idea is that I voluntarily put myself under a person in order to lift up that person whom I put myself under. We willingly sacrifice our personal interests for the interests of the one to whom we submit. Paul helps us when he writes this.

"As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love." Ephesians 4:1.

If I am truly a ***"prisoner for the Lord"*** I can then become submissive to Him and to others. ***"Out of reverence for Christ"*** I can adopt the attitude of submission. I can become ***"poor in spirit"*** and ***"meek."*** (Matthew 5:3, 5). Submission is intensely spiritual; it is not found in the natural will of a human. It requires one to have suffered a season of brokenness of the will in order to experience authentic submission.

Oswald Chambers writes in My Utmost for His Highest, *"All I do should be based on a perfect oneness with Him, not on a self-willed determination to be godly. This will mean that others may use me, go around me, or completely ignore me, but if I will submit to it for His sake, I will prevent Jesus Christ from being persecuted. We pay such close attention to our own interests and desires that we stay out of the mire and say, "I won't submit; I won't bow or bend." And you don't have to – you can be saved by the "skin of your teeth" if you like."*

In mutual submission out of reverence for Christ, we bow to one another because we bow first before Christ as Lord. The way to achieve biblical leadership is only through practicing submission. God's design for marriage is built on the foundation of loving authority, leadership, and submission.

7. How does this discussion help you better understand mutual submission and why it's so important?

Wives and Submission

How does mutual submission work? It works in two ways, **respect** for husbands and **love** for wives.

"Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which He is the Saviour. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything." Ephesians 5:22-24.

Though you are equal to your husband, give up the right to control him with your strength. Instead, give him your trust as if you are trusting the Lord. Submit to him as you submit to the Lord. Wives need to know that a primary need God has placed in man is to know his wife trusts him to lead her. The act of submitting her will is an act of trusting the Lord through her husband. By her submission and trust, a wife helps her husband grow up as a spiritual leader. Without her trust, a man can't grow.

Here is a key verse to help wives understand that the Lord will protect them. ***"The heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord; He directs it like a watercourse wherever He pleases."*** Proverbs 21:1. God can and will change a husband's heart on behalf of his wife when she obeys this principle. In your obedience, you have the promise of God to protect you. Another very important passage to help women understand this principle is found in 1 Peter 3:1-7.

One further point should be expressed here. The Bible clearly exalts the woman. Proverbs 31:10-31 describes the ***"wife of noble character."*** It is a powerful description of the life and accomplishments of a ***"woman who fears the Lord."*** (v. 30). ***"Her children arise and call her***

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blessed; her husband also, and he praises her." (v. 28). This Proverbs 31 marriage relationship is a wonderful example of how leadership roles play out in a union honouring God's design.

Husbands and Submission

It's helpful to note the roots of the word 'husband.' The original meaning identified the husband as a male who was responsible to protect and care for crops and animals. (Source: Random House Dictionary).

Historically, the male was responsible for oversight in the home. He was expected to lead and protect in domestic affairs. The word 'husband' combines the elements of care, responsibility, and protection, with the element of good management. This reminds us of the Genesis 2:15 passage that describes how God put the man in the garden to work it and take care of it.

Paul describes how a husband is to love his wife. ***"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her … husbands ought to [i.e., 'owe it to'] love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife, loves himself. No one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it."*** Ephesians 5:25-29.

What does submission look like for a husband? A husband submits to his wife by loving her sacrificially. He is to provide servant leadership by adopting the same unconditional love that Christ demonstrates for His church. A husband is to love his wife as he loves and cares for his own body. To love her well a husband must learn to enter her world of thought and emotion and hear her heart. This kind of emotional connection and empathy is not natural for most men. It is, though, how a biblical husband leads and serves his wife in love. He leads by serving her in her way, not his.

"The Husband is the Head of the Wife" - Head and Body Symbiosis

Paul describes the husband as the head and the wife as the body. The head and body metaphor is not meant to express a vertical arrangement. Picture a person lying down; the head and body are level. This is a symbiotic relationship. The head cannot function without the body because the body supports and feeds the head. In turn, the body depends on the head to meet its needs for direction and protection. Here's an example. If you injure your foot your head will be sensitized to avoid any further damage to the foot. The foot can't see and know how to protect itself. It depends on the head. The head is conscious of protecting the parts of the body; the body supports and feeds the head.

In this relationship, the wife has the complete attention of the head all the time but especially when the body is in need, is hurt, is hungry, or is uncomfortable. The head responds to the needs of the body with protection and care. It 'husbands' the body. Ironically, because the body is vulnerable, it exerts a powerful influence on the head to be its protector and security. In turn, the body nourishes the head.

Application

Healthy leadership patterns result when we follow God's will by living in submission and trust to His authority design.

How does this head and body relationship work in a decision-making situation?

Ron and Sue

Ron and Sue have been married for eight years and are a committed Christian couple but their marriage is moving into a crisis. Ron has an excellent teaching position but at age 30 he wants to resign and go to Bible College to become a pastor. They have a 3 year old daughter, a mortgage, and a comfortable life.

They are in authority conflict. Sue understands Ron's frustration and that he wants to ***"do something more with his life"*** but she can't get peace about this life change. They have grown impatient with one another and it's affecting their oneness in marriage. Their intimacy is suffering and Sue is feeling guilty that she is not responding to Ron's needs. Ron thinks that Sue is no longer attracted to him.

After two years of debating, Sue relents, saying ***"he has to do what he has to do."*** Both sets of parents express their concern about the decision. Ron thinks they should go ahead and 'trust' God. After all, Ron's desire is to become a pastor and serve God. Interestingly, his dad made the same life change.

8. What are the leadership and submission, love and respect issues in this true story?

In decision-making, God's blessing is on a wife when she expresses her heart to her husband on a matter, engages in discussion, sets her boundaries, and then if need be, defers to him. In doing this she hands the matter over to the Lord through her husband. She does this ***"out of reverence for Christ."*** If a woman wants to win her husband, she adopts the quiet and trusting attitude described in 1 Peter 3:1-6. The Lord is then able to speak to a man's heart on behalf of his wife.

In his God-given position of **authority** in the home, the husband will be blessed in his loving care for his wife. He will listen to her attentively. When a wife feels cherished and valued, she is more able to respond to him with trust. Husbands will find that by carefully considering their wife's point of view on any decision, they will avoid poor decisions because God speaks to men through their wives. When I hear my wife, I hear God. When a husband considers his wife, his wife can trust him ***"as to the Lord."***

Wives are to respect their husband ***"in everything"*** (Ephesians 5:33) and understand that a man is energized to lead by knowing he has his wife's trust. His need for significance is in balance with her need for security. The mutually submissive couple will listen to and consider one another, and find unity in their marriage.

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9. What are your thoughts on this discussion of how biblical leadership works in a marriage?

Conclusion

Biblical leadership in the home is essential for establishing the unity God has designed for our relationships. His leadership design is based on the principle of authority and it requires us to grow in maturity, character, and godliness.

God designs us for trust and freedom in our relationships. ***"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."*** Galatians 5:1. Biblical leadership empowers couples to grow in trust and in freedom.

The husband gives his wife the protection she needs to trust and submit to him; the wife gives her husband the trust he needs to grow as a spiritual leader.

10. In what ways are you now more encouraged to carry out your biblical leadership role?

COMPONENT 7

Communication

Overview: Building unity in marriage requires ***communication***

rsm
resuming life

Design

Learning to communicate with love and respect is God's design and brings His blessing into all our relationships.

Problem

Sin divides people and causes us to wound and devalue each other by the words we use. Careless words destroy unity.

Solution

Loving communication requires learned skills and habits rooted in healed hearts and renewed minds.

Application

Using Bible-based communication principles and skills build and sustain oneness in marriage. Words shape relationships.

Overview Question: *In your marriage, how would you describe your communication?*

_____

_____

_____

_____

Design

Learning to communicate with love and respect is God's design and brings His blessing into all our relationships.

The theme running through this entire course is that God has created us male and female with a specific creation design. If we manage our marriage and family in obedience to God's design we enjoy the blessing of oneness. Biblical marriage is designed to fit perfectly the nature and need of divinely created men and woman. Though our lower nature would prefer the wide path of ***"I'll do it my way,"*** it's the narrow path of trusting and obeying God's design that leads to abundant life and blessing.

This component is an extension of Component 6, Leadership in the Home. Based on biblical leadership patterns we move to a discussion of the principle of **respect and love** as core elements of everyday communication patterns in marriage and family.

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RESPECT and LOVE

God demands our love and respect. He communicates His will to us - that we honour the worth and dignity He is due. It follows that we, made in His image, require love and respect as well.

"What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honour." Psalm 8:4, 5.

The Order – the man and the woman

The man is created in God's image and likeness. The woman is then taken from the side of the man. It's significant that she is taken from his side, not his head or feet. From the side implies equality. We see the same order in these passages on husband and wife roles. In Ephesians 5, Colossians 3, and 1 Peter 3, wives submitting to their husbands is stated first; husbands loving their wives second.

A marriage will be blessed with unity when love and respect are present. A husband is designed to feel his wife's respect, admiration, and praise just as God requires our respect, admiration and praise. A wife is designed to feel loved, considered, and valued just as God commands us to love, consider, and value Him.

1. What are your thoughts on the importance of respect and love in your own marriage?

Problem

Sin divides people and causes us to wound and devalue each other by the words we use. Careless words destroy unity.

Love and respect are key relationship pillars in God's design for marriage. Without them, the relationship crumbles. Why are love and respect difficult to achieve? What stops men from loving their wives sacrificially? What blocks a wife's respect for her husband?

In his book, Love and Respect, Eggerichs writes about what he calls the *"Love and Respect Connection." "When a husband feels disrespected, he has a natural tendency to react in ways that feel unloving to his wife. (Perhaps the command to love was given to him precisely for this reason!) When a wife feels unloved, she has a natural tendency to react in ways that feel disrespectful to her husband. (Perhaps the command to respect was given to her precisely for this reason!) Without love, she reacts without respect. Without respect, he reacts without love."* Page 16

When a couple finally arrives at the door of the pastor, counsellor, or coach looking for help for their marriage, their communication is toxic, their thinking is confused, and their behaviours are in opposition to God's design. They are committed only to their own agenda and are convinced

their spouse is the enemy. Eggerichs calls this the ***"crazy cycle."*** This cycle is a relationship killer. A couple in this stage absolutely must have help from a third party. They both have to make significant changes in order to renew the respect and love lost in the marriage.

A retired family court judge in a radio interview described his dismay that couples once so much in love could spiral into such rage and hatred for each other in the court room as they tear apart their once beautiful marriage. Tragically, this disturbing picture applies to Christian couples as well. How do we turn it around and get back into God's design? The journey to get back on track is painful and difficult. It challenges our strongholds and stretches our faith.

Sin and the Loss of Respect and Love

The serpent used craftiness to deceive the man and woman. They fell into disobedience to God and their sin made them hide from God. Their communication with God and each other became toxic. Through the generations we have inherited unbiblical communication patterns. The enemy continues to undermine through our words the love and respect God designs for our marriages.

Obstacles - What is it about giving respect that is so hard? Consider the abundance of sermons, books, and greeting cards that express the theme of love. Compare that volume of influence with the relatively few messages we hear about respect. How strong is the message of love; how faint the respect signal we hear?

What about media and culture? TV commercials and sitcoms disrespect men just for laughs. How many men think it's funny? Men are not created in God's image to be made fools. The point is simple but profound. In media, women are smarter than men. Women have it together, men are disorganized, unaware, uncaring, and selfish. Men are either brutes or wimps. How are we to respect them?

Gender differences are also a factor. Men are generally stronger physically but are required to submit their physical strength when in conflict with a woman. Women are typically stronger emotionally than men. Most men are conditioned in their family of origin to defer to the 'weaker sex.' When a power struggle erupts in a marriage, usually men will back down. His physical power is of no use in marriage conflict. Most women are capable of taking control in a crisis.

One other gender factor is sexuality. Men are sometimes taken captive by their sexual urges. A wife has the ultimate power – denying sex. This power imbalance in sexuality has produced a derogatory label for some husbands: 'whipped.' There is no room for self-respect when a man finds himself with that label.

As Eggerichs wrote, *"When a husband feels disrespected, he has a natural tendency to react in ways that feel unloving to his wife."* It's not hard for a woman to lose respect for her husband and a man to withdraw his love for his wife.

One final factor here is the fact that in marriage we have **expectations** of each other. After they sinned and were banished from the garden, God cursed them. Part of the curse on the woman was ***"Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."*** Genesis 3:16b. In coming alongside couples we hear a hurting wife say that her heart's desire is for her husband. Many women agree – they long for their husband to be their 'knight in shining armor.'

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In so many ways, he disappoints her. Most wives could write a book about their unmet expectations. How can she regain respect for him? The fact remains that in the Garden of Eden, God said it was not good for the man to be alone. In love, God gave him a suitable helper. This is God's plan: The man's role is to honour, love, and cherish the woman. The woman's role is to honour, respect, and affirm the man. Together, they are a team, living the adventure of serving God in His kingdom.

How long will it take? Will her knight show up for her? Yes, if she is willing to make him her knight, not through controlling, but by affirming the strength God has put into him. His need is to be encouraged by the one person in the world for whom he wants to be a hero. Does he deserve her respect? Has he earned it? No, but he needs his suitable helper. That's God's design. She offers her trust in submission to God, and in time, her husband hears the voice of God and turns his heart to her. She is finally rescued.

2. Discuss how loss of respect and love happens so easily in a marriage? What about your marriage?

How Sin Twists our Thinking Patterns

The following material is adapted from Feeling Good, by Dr. David Burns. It helps us recognize some of the twisted thinking patterns that lead to unhealthy communication. Twisted thinking patterns are often learned in our family of origin. Notice any items you and your spouse might want to work on through prayer and renewing the mind. (Romans 12:2)

1. All or nothing – extremes, black or white, total failure - "I've blown it now."
2. Over-generalizing – an event becomes an ongoing pattern (careless use of "always" and "never")
3. Negative filter – one negative thought outweighs many positives (see Philippians 4:8)
4. Discounting the positive – refusal to receive positive feedback
5. Conclusion jumping – making false conclusions, predict failure without facts
6. Magnify and minimize – exaggerate, inflate situations / minimize, deny or not acknowledge
7. Emotional decisions – make decisions on feelings rather than facts
8. 'Should' statements –"I should" – I should do something excuses actually doing it
9. Labelling – thinking "'I'm a jerk, he's a jerk" rather than "I made a mistake. Everyone does."
10. Personalization or blame – It's all my fault / all your fault.'

These twisted thinking patterns lead to dysfunctional communication patterns.

1. Judging right and wrong – ("do not judge or you too will be judged" Matthew 7:1)

2. Blame, fault finding – transferring what I can't accept about me to someone else
3. Poor me – I'm the victim, martyr complex
4. Put-downs – imply someone is a loser, a failure, doesn't measure up
5. Hopelessness – "what's the point? I've tried, I give up"
6. Demanding – you believe you deserve better so you demand it from the other person
7. Denial – you ignore, overlook the truth, insist you don't feel hurt when you do (martyr)
8. Self-blame – instead of dealing with the issue truthfully, you take the fall (martyr)
9. Passive Aggressive – pout, withdraw, stonewall, check out, silent treatment – the goal is revenge
10. Enabling, rescuing – you try to protect or save the person from appropriate consequences
11. Sarcasm – words or tone convey tension or hostility which is being concealed
12. Scapegoating – you lay the burden on another person, you relieve yourself of your responsibility
13. Defensiveness – put up a wall of words to deflect responsibility
14. Counterattack – you react with anger, criticism, escalate conflict like a ping pong game
15. Diversion – rather than deal in the present you rehearse past grievances, deflect, change the subject

3. Do you recognize any of these communication patterns in your marriage? Discuss as a couple.

Bert and Lois: What Communication Denial Looks Like

Bert and Lois have been married for twenty-two years and have never acknowledged that their communication isn't healthy. They think their communication is as normal as most couples they know. However, they do agree that their lack of intimacy is a problem.

They have two teenage sons and a ten year-old daughter. They are concerned about how their kids speak to one another and are even more concerned about the lack of respect they get from their kids.

Bert works half an hour from home. Lois is a homemaker. There are changes at his work and Bert is working longer and less regular hours. Lois worries when he is late. Every day she gets more and more anxious as she waits for him to come home. Her mind goes back and forth between imagining him in an accident and wondering if he is paying too much attention to his secretary.

Bert arrives home tired and stressed most days. He is fed up with hearing the words, "You're always late. I get so worried. Why can't you phone me from work?" Lately, Lois is saying that because Bert leaves his empty coffee cup in the living room he doesn't care about her needs.

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Bert's reaction is to withdraw. He admits he is not as attentive to Lois as he once was.

They need help with their marriage, but who do they go to? As leaders in their church, what are they to do? Bert is being voted onto the Board of Elders this Sunday. He is reluctant, but the pastor is asking him to let his name stand because the church is in a building campaign and the board is already short two elders. Bert thinks he is not spiritually fit to be an elder; Lois says he should do his duty to the church.

4. From the lists above, what twisted thinking and speaking patterns do you see in this story?

Solution

Loving communication requires learned skills and habits rooted in healed hearts and renewed minds.

To give and receive respect and love in communication is intensely spiritual. It is possible through submission to God's Word and in the power of His Spirit. Healing a marriage by re-building respect and love will take:

1. Repentance, literally re-thinking according to God's Word
2. Humility, bringing down the walls of pride
3. Forgiveness, for hundreds of wounds to our hearts
4. Grace, for the times when we still hurt one another
5. Discipline, to re-learn biblical habits
6. Determination, to see it through and not give up

Boundaries - ***"Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life."*** Proverbs 4:23
Setting healthy boundaries in communication is essential in establishing love and respect. One of our most common communication problems is not setting and respecting boundaries with one another. Few of us have been taught how to set boundaries or limits. Consequently, our conversations become power struggles with one person overpowering or hurting the other. The one who wields the power is always resented; the one with less power becomes diminished and resorts to passive aggressive behaviour.

Boundaries are like emotional fences. Good fences make good neighbours; good boundaries make good relationships. Boundaries are set up to help, not control the other person. They are words we use to guard our own hearts. Here's how a boundary sounds: ***"When you do that or when you say that it hurts me."***

We're not telling the other person what to do; we're telling them how they are hurting us and

hurting the relationship. We are respecting the other person by giving them freedom to choose to respect our boundary. Boundaries lead to communicating respect in a relationship.

About Fighting

1. Remember, the fight is not about the original issue. People forget what started the fight. The fight is all about the hurtful words we hurl at each other as we battle and escalate the conflict.
2. Remember, the other person is not responsible for my anger. When my buttons are pushed, I become responsible for my emotional reaction.
3. The more we fight, the more we wound each other and spiral out of control. Get help!

Communication and the Bible

The word 'communication' originates with the word 'common.' Good communication happens when we experience being in common with our mate, when we're on the same page. Good communication requires agreement and agreement requires love and respect. However, as we know, achieving love and respect requires that we work at communicating well.

Our words are powerful for building and tearing down as we learned in the Introduction. We often overlook the impact of everyday communication patterns. James talks about this. ***"The tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts."*** James 3:5.

We improve our communication in marriage through knowing and applying the truth of God's word and by learning and practicing good communication skills and habits. The Bible has many powerful communication insights for us. These are five of them.

Maturing in our Communication

Paul writes, ***"When I was a child I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me."*** 1 Corinthians 13:11. Communicating well is a matter of growing up in Christ-like expression. It is a sign of maturing in our spiritual experience with the Lord.

Complaining and Arguing

"Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life." Philippians 2:15, 16. The Bible makes tough demands on our common tendency to fall into harmful patterns of arguing and complaining in our conversations.

Building One Another in Communication

"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God ..." Ephesians 4: 29, 30a. We build up and tear down with our words. We are reminded to choose our words in response to the needs of the other person. Our words can grieve the Holy Spirit.

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The Heart of Communication

"For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him." Matthew 12:34b, 35. Communication comes out of our hearts. Our words reflect the state of our relationship with Christ in the deep parts of our heart. Change the heart, change the words.

Judgment and Communication

"But I tell you that men will have to give account on the Day of Judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned." Matthew 12:36, 37. Do we really get this? God will judge us according to every word we speak!

Application

Using Bible-based communication principles and skills build and sustain oneness in marriage. Words shape relationships.

This section is a collection of skills we can learn in improving communication. Take some time and work through the lists with your spouse. Use these lists to refer to when you are spending time together.

Communication Builders and Blockers

COMMUNICATION BUILDERS	COMMUNICATION BLOCKERS
"You are amazing."(about the person)	***"You did a good job ..."***(about performance)
"You have what it takes "	***"You don't measure up"***
Talk about the other person	Talk about yourself
Empathy: ***"How do you feel about ..."***	Opinion: ***"You should..."***
Boundary: ***"When you say that, I feel..."***	Attack: ***"You never, you always..."***
Asking – questions open communication	Telling – closes communication

Think Before You Speak

A communication skill God has blessed all of us with is the ability to preview our next words before we say them. Unfortunately, we don't always use this skill. We tend to blurt before thinking. Think before you speak is an important skill to achieve in disciplining our communication. Here are some guidelines:

- Speak only positives whenever possible
- Make sure your words are going to build the person up
- Speak the truth in love even when it's not easy
- Don't judge, show empathy and humility in your words
- Communicate both ***"I love you"*** and ***"I like you"***

- When confronting a person other than a child, ask their permission first
- Decide – in this conversation, do I want to be right or have a relationship?

Listening and Responding Skills

1. ACTIVE LISTENING – listen to each word, to the tone of the speaker, listen with your body, eye contact, lean in, nod, use 'hmm-hmm' and align your body posture with respect to the other person.
2. RESPOND / REACT – before you speak, think about what was said and offer a thoughtful response rather than blurting a gut reaction.
3. REPEAT – "so what you're saying is ..." The person will know they're being heard.
4. DISARMING – begin your response by agreeing with what was said before you make your point.
5. EMPATHY – see life through the other's eyes (wisdom) – why does he / she think or feel this way?
6. INQUIRY – ask gentle probing questions to learn all the facts before you give your opinion.
7. SUPPORTING – Find something genuinely positive to say about what the other person is saying. Avoid saying "You're wrong" or contradicting them outright.
8. FEELING and THINKING - depending on their personality type (feeling vs. thinking) say: "I feel that ..."or "I think that ..." or "How do you feel about that?" or "What do you think about that?"
9. "PUZZLED" – If you want to confront your mate, start with "I'm puzzled about something..."

5. What are some of the skills listed in this section you can use to improve your communication?

_____

_____

_____

_____

An example from the **Communication Builders** list is when a spouse brings up a problem and his or her spouse asks, "How do you feel about that?" or "What do you think about that?" He or she is opening communication, showing empathy, and building oneness. Blocking communication in this example would be a reaction beginning with the words "You should ..." In this case the spouse is not opening communication but is shutting down communication.

This blocks feelings that need to be expressed. Often we don't want to be told what to do but we do want to talk ***with*** our mate and know our feelings are being heard.

In the **Listening and Responding Skills** list, #9 is about using the words, "I'm puzzled about ..." when you need to confront your mate. Instead of "John, I have a problem and we need to talk about it," try this: "John, I'm puzzled about something." John doesn't feel attacked. "Puzzled" is a neutral word so he can reply, "What are you puzzled about?" Then you can have a calm conversation about your concern.

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Growing up in our responses - Try this exercise to help you work on your responses to one another. Notice how this feels as you do it.

1. She says "...	2. Unhealthy Communication	3. Healthy Response
Write something one of you might say that is upsetting	**Defending response. Why is it unhealthy?**	**Substitute a healthy response**
Mary says, "You always criticize everything I do." (over-generalizing, use of "always" and "everything")	John says, "I do not." (reacting) "That's a stupid thing to say." (defends himself and puts her down)	John says, "It must seem like I do."(disarming) "I do get angry when I feel I'm not part of your life." (feel) "I criticize you to get back at you (disarming). I know it hurts you (empathy). Maybe we should talk about it"

(Respond)

Try your own example here:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Conclusion

Being able to give and receive respect and love is a spiritual matter. Communicating love and respect in your marriage is possible through submission to the Lord, His word, and the power of His love.

Ephesians Model for Building Respect and Love in Marriage

The 'Ephesians Model' outlines a powerful biblical path to center your marriage on God and build respect and love first for Him, and then for others. Check out this list.

1:3 **Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has:**

1:3 blessed us, 1:4 chosen us, 1:5 adopted us as his sons, 1:6 given us his grace

1:7 redeemed us with his blood, 1:7 forgiven us, 1:8 lavished on us grace

1:13 sealed us with the Holy Spirit, 2:6 raised us with Christ

We are:

2:10 His workmanship, 4:1 a prisoner for the Lord, 5:18 filled with the Spirit

We should:

6:10 be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power, 6:11 Put on the full armor of God,

6:18 pray in the Spirit

Loving communication builds oneness in marriage. It requires learned skills and habits rooted in healed hearts and renewed minds.

May God help each of us to renew our communication so that we all receive the love and respect that is essential to God's perfect design for marriage.

6. Describe one thought or skill you can use now from this Component.

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COMPONENT 8

Intimacy

Overview: Building oneness in marriage requires intimacy

rsm
resuming life

Design

An essential part of God's marriage design is total intimacy - spirit, soul and body. Godly intimacy heals, restores, enriches, and builds unity in a marriage.

Problem

Sin leads us to hide, to erect barriers, and to withdraw from intimacy with God and with each other. Sexual problems block intimate connection.

Solution

Biblical intimacy has its source in our spiritual life and flows into our mental, emotional, and physical responses. Sexual intimacy is how two become ***"one flesh."***

Application

We are created as sexual beings for procreation, for intimacy, and for unity. Uniting in spirit, soul and body reflects God's intimate heart for our marriage.

Overview Question: *Think about the family you grew up in. What were the messages or rules about sexuality that were imprinted on your mind from your family of origin?*

Design

An essential part of God's marriage design is total intimacy - spirit, soul and body. Godly intimacy heals, restores, enriches, and builds unity in a marriage.

Intimacy and sexual union are part of the marriage design because of how God created us, male and female, with the desire for intimate connection an *essential* part of our human experience.

How we embrace and express our desire for sexual oneness varies from couple to couple but generally, it indicates how vulnerable and trusting we are in our relationship.

Couples engaging in intimate connection have the advantage of healing, enriching, and restoring oneness in their relationship.

What do we mean by 'intimacy' and 'sexuality'? Intimacy is a special kind of closeness. It's

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the glue that bonds us. It is fully expressed in our union, spiritually, mentally, emotionally, and physically. It is how the two become ***"one flesh."*** Intimacy strengthens unity in marriage.

Sexual union is the outward expression of inward connection. God – given sexual urges draw us together. Biblical sexual union is fulfilling and is meant to bond a couple for life.

The finest picture of intimate life is found in Genesis 2. ***"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame."*** Genesis 2:24, 25.

In the garden, the first man and woman were united in the innocence of their nakedness - spirit, soul, and body. There was no shame, no guilt, no barriers, just oneness.

The marriage union God has in mind is the joining of man and wife in spirit, soul, and body. Total intimacy is a powerful reminder of the spiritual union we have with Christ, the bridegroom of the church.

We have positioned this study of intimacy and sexuality as the finale of the *Marriage Oneness System*. Why? Intimacy in marriage grows as we work on our oneness in the other components:

1. **Renewed Minds**
2. **Unity**
3. **Forgiveness**
4. **Healing of Souls**
5. **Personalities**
6. **Leadership**
7. **Communication**

1. God has designed marriage so that intimacy, including sexuality, is an important part of enjoying a healthy marriage. What are your thoughts, what does intimacy do for a marriage?

Problem

Sin leads us to hide, to erect barriers, and to withdraw from intimacy with God and with each other. Sexual problems block intimate connection.

Sin and Sexual Dysfunction - The first man and woman sinned, breaking their intimate relationship with God and with one another. Shame overcame the oneness they had enjoyed.

Sin creates sexual problems that damage oneness in a marriage relationship. Satan attacks marriage by twisting our thinking about our sexuality or by tempting us in sexual matters.

"He who sins sexually sins against his own body." 1 Corinthians 6:18.

What are the most common sexual problems in marriage?

Unsatisfied Urges - A common problem is feeling sexually unsatisfied. Resentment builds and the relationship grows cold. The tendency to shut down sexually is common and it happens when one is not feeling loved. Sex can become a burden when needs and feelings go uncared for. Unsatisfied urges destroy unity and lead some into affairs and pornographic bondage.

Unbiblical thinking - Generations of Christians have misunderstood what the Bible teaches about the sacredness of sexuality in God's creation design. Most of us go into marriage without a clear biblical understanding of our own sexuality. Our expectations aren't in sync with reality. We're not prepared for what will happen in the bedroom. We might enter marriage with negative thoughts like "Sex is bad or dirty" or "Sex is a duty." Often these thoughts are modelled by parents who have been unfulfilled in experiencing their own God – given sexuality.

Pre-marital promiscuity and sexual relationships – Sex with other people creates damaging emotional bonding outside marriage that causes long term sexual problems in a marriage.

Giving Birth - We're not aware of this beforehand but starting a family interrupts the sexual pattern we enjoy as young couples focused only on each other. A husband needs to adjust his expectations as he discovers the reality that he is now sharing his wife's body with their infant.

Pornography - Sexual arousal by viewing images outside marriage is a monstrous problem today.

Not Paying Attention - The natural world works on the principle of decay. Our bodies and our attitudes are also subject to the law of decay. Left uncared for, passion and intimate relationship begin to seep out of a marriage if we don't pay attention.

What about the problem of withholding sex in marriage?

"The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer." 1 Corinthians 7:3-5.

This passage is clear about the power and purity of sexuality in marriage. Our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. He is our Authority in how we steward His temple. God's design is that we not withhold but that we share our bodies with our mate in intimate love and trust. This passage is meant to encourage our intimate life; it is not to be used as a club to hold over our mate to meet our needs. We submit our bodies through the Spirit to one another in an act of faith and trust. With His presence in us we are free to love and be loved in every part of our being.

Can a marriage function without sexual intimacy? Marriages that lack intimacy can survive on tough-minded commitment but they miss the emotional connection of intimate union.

A special note here: a man or woman may be hindered in their experience of intimacy due to past sexual abuse. This deep trauma causes barriers to vulnerability and intimacy. A victim of sex abuse must be led by God's Spirit to deep healing in that part of their mind and heart. This couple must get emotional and spiritual help. The spouse of an abused person can feel defeated and hurt in his or her attempts to achieve intimacy. God's Spirit can bring truth and healing into the heart of the abused.

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2. Looking back over this section, what are your thoughts on the importance of resolving sexual problems in order to build unity in a marriage?

Solution

Biblical intimacy has its source in our spiritual life and flows into our mental, emotional, and physical responses. Sexual intimacy is how two become "one flesh."

We believe a major cause of sexual sin is not knowing how to love each other in biblically appropriate ways that meet our deep needs for connection as males and females. Sexual union brings healing, nurture, and restoration to stressed and wounded souls.

God created our male and female bodies with pleasure centers that are stimulated by sight, by touch, and by emotional connection. The powerful 'love hormone' oxytocin is released during sexual connection, drawing husband and wife into intimacy with each other for their lifetime.

The exquisite delight of biblical intimacy is the ultimate expression of union in the spiritual marriage. The union God has in mind is the joining of man and wife in spirit, soul, and body.

The Solution is Submission

Biblical intimacy through sexual union depends on the trust and vulnerability that come by way of submission. We first submit ourselves to Christ and through Him, to one another. Submission to Christ by His Spirit moves His love and energy into our spirit, into our soul, and into our body.

Spiritual Intimacy – Protection and Prayer

Prayer is deeply communicating with God. Intimacy is deeply communicating with each other.

Wives desire spiritual protection in their marriage. They respond intimately to their husband when he demonstrates his humility. A wife wants to know her husband is connecting to God.

A man can hide secret thoughts from his wife, but not from God. When a husband prays and opens his heart to God his wife feels safe and her heart opens to him. This kind of intimate prayer builds the bond of trust that opens her mind and heart to mental, emotional, and physical union. God gives His presence and blessing to their intimate love-making.

As a young husband with no understanding of biblical sexuality I thought that God must be embarrassed or angry or disgusted with me when we made love. I associated sexual desire and gratification with guilt. My desires and my understanding of holiness were in conflict. I had to learn that holiness means God longs to be present in everything. Sexual intimacy is His gift to us. Prayer together in the quietness of an intimate moment brings an awareness of the presence of the Spirit and sets our spirits free to enter a paradise of complete oneness.

3. What are your thoughts on the connection between praying as a couple and making love?

Soul Intimacy: Mind, Emotions, and Will

The spiritual connection of a husband and wife in generating intimacy then flows into our souls. What is my part in building intimacy? The soul is the 'me' consciousness that involves the mind, the emotions, and the will. As our oneness grows by paying attention to all the components in the *Marriage Oneness System* we find that God has provided all we need to build intimacy.

He helps each of us take responsibility in creating biblically appropriate thinking, feelings, and actions that lead to quality intimate life. In other words, my experience of sexual intimacy does not just depend on my spouse. It starts in my mind, my heart, and my will. My thinking will determine my intimate life. This is why intimacy connects us with God. God resides in my heart and my relationship there with Him is the foundation of my intimate life.

It has been said that our most powerful sex organ is our brain. When my mind is filled with the knowledge of God's will for my marriage and my emotions are at peace, the way is open for me to embrace intimacy with my spouse. My spirit, my thoughts, my feelings, and my body are in sync. I am safe and I am free to offer myself to my mate. In Christ, I can let go of fear and the need for control. I am free to experience my nakedness before God and my mate. We are "one flesh."

Physical Intimacy – Men

We asked a group of wives to list their husbands' needs and the room exploded with one word, ***"Sex."*** It's no secret that men are thinking about sex more than women. Younger men have a powerful sex drive. Testosterone drives their sex urge. Toward mid-life and beyond, a man's desire for sex becomes more governed by his mind and emotions. As with women, thinking and feeling become more important in our intimate experience.

At every stage, a husband needs to understand that sex on demand doesn't work with his wife. If a man is looking forward to making love in the evening he needs to be aware of his wife's need to enjoy a good day with him emotionally. He needs to build mental and emotional closeness to her. So much of what is thought and felt and said and done between them in many small ways throughout the day will either block or unlock sexual responsiveness in women. Spending time together, him picking up his underwear, or filling her car with gas are examples of the kind of appreciation and connection a wife needs to fuel her thoughts about making love.

In creating intimacy we all need to be aware of the power of our thinking. A man is visual and the sight of his wife's body triggers his desire for her and his urge for sexual connection is aroused. However, a man can be shut down sexually when he feels disrespected by his wife. Intimate connection requires mutual respect. If, during intimate moments, a husband senses his wife is

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not united with him in his passion he will lose his desire and his ability to engage with her.

Growing in intimacy is all about growing in maturity together as a couple in spirit, soul, and body.

4. Write your thoughts about male sexuality? How should a man create intimacy with his wife?

Physical Intimacy – Women

Women respond to the love they feel from their husbands in the everyday rhythm of married life. They desire to be treasured for who they are, not just for what they can do for their husband in bed. In his book, Five Love Languages of Love, Gary Chapman emphasizes the importance of feeling loved in a marriage. He explores five "Languages" by which love is communicated – Words of Affirmation, Quality Time, Act of Service, Receiving Gifts, and Physical Touch. All of these are important and it's helpful to identify our particular 'Love Language.' However, we find that all women generally value and need quality time with their husband.

Our sexuality is about our body and how a woman feels about her body affects her attitude about intimacy. If a wife expresses negative thoughts about her body it affects her husband's ability to make love to her. A wife needs to know her husband is attracted to the unique beauty he sees in her. He wants his wife to appreciate her body so that when she offers herself to him he feels blessed by her. He will treasure what she treasures. A woman who wants to feel wanted must learn to see herself as captivating to her husband just as she is.

In building intimacy she must be comfortable in expressing her God – given sensuality and invite him to enjoy intimacy with her. God gives a wife the ability to seduce her husband. He will lavish passionate love on her if she feels a sense of her own loveliness. Where does she get the proper message about her beauty? She gets it from two sources: her Abba Father, who has made her captivating, and her husband who desires her just as she is.

Sexual intimacy is a gift. By offering herself to him she is his gift. His desire for her is her gift. She is alluring. He wants only her. This is how God wants us to think about intimacy. Will a husband notice another woman? Yes. Does he want another woman? No. God designs a husband's heart to want only one woman in all her God-given beauty.

No husband can read this passage and not feel a stirring for the beautiful wife of his youth.

"May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer – may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be captivated by her love."
Proverbs 5:18, 19.

5. Write your thoughts about female sexuality? How should a woman create intimacy with her husband?

6. As a couple, how do you build your intimate connection - spirit, soul, and body?

Application

We are created as sexual beings for procreation, for intimacy, and for unity. Uniting in spirit, soul and body reflects God's intimate heart for our marriage.

How do we apply these biblical principles on intimacy and sexuality? We suggest three areas:

1. **Renewing our minds**
2. **Reading our Bible**
3. **Re-visiting our conditioning**

Renewing our minds

"They will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame." Genesis 2:24, 25.

In our approach to understanding and experiencing biblical sexuality we need to renew our minds. In his book, Sexy Christians, Ted Roberts argues that of all people, Christians ought to be the most fulfilled sexually. He also writes, *"As believers, we absolutely must have a framework to help us examine our marriage and our world ... we must give believers a clear vision of the God-given gift of their sexuality as followers of Christ."* page 23.

In their seminars, he and his wife ask this question, *"How many of you had a mom or dad who talked to you in depth about sex as you grew up?"* The response is 1 – 2%. Most of us have grown up with destructive ideas like "Sex is bad or dirty" or "Sex is a duty."

How you and your mate received your first messages about sex can have a harmful impact on your intimate life unless you renew your thinking about what the Bible really says. Breaking through our unbiblical strongholds frees us to embrace God's truth.

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Why is biblical thinking on sexuality so vital? Thinking God's way will affair-proof our marriage!

We need to recognize that we are made for receiving and giving intimate love. Intimacy, experienced in sexual unity, is the glue that bonds our souls and completes us. Our God-given desire in marriage is essential in a loving relationship and reflects our bonding with God. ***"Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart."*** Psalm 37:4.

John Eldredge sees Christianity in terms of an invitation to desire at our heart level. *"This may come as a surprise to you: Christianity is not an invitation to become a moral person. It is not a program for getting us in line or for reforming society. It has a powerful effect upon our lives, but when transformation comes, it is always the after effect of something else, something at the level of our hearts. At its core, Christianity begins with an invitation to desire. Look again at the way Jesus relates to people. As he did with the fellow at the Sheep Gate, he is continually taking them into their hearts, to their deepest desires."* Waking the Dead, John Eldredge, page 230.

Reading our Bible

Passages in the Bible contain important truth about intimate love. Earlier we referenced the passages in Proverbs and 1 Corinthians. Another is Song of Songs. Why not read this book as a couple? Make it your next devotional. As you read, notice your thoughts and feelings. How do its words of purity and passion draw you to your mate? Remember, this is God's inspired word. He has designed us with sexual feelings. King Solomon falls in love with Shulamith. In the 8 chapters and 117 verses, she speaks about 60% of the time. Most of the time, she is telling Solomon how she desires to be loved. Some examples are:

"Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth – for your love is more delightful than wine." 1:2.

"My lover is to me a sachet of myrrh resting between my breasts." 1:13.

"Let my lover come into his garden and taste its choice fruits." 4:16.

Roberts writes, *"This woman is every husband's dream: deeply virtuous but also outgoing, confident, and sexually free."* Ted Roberts, Sexy Christians, page 40.

Re-visiting our conditioning

For generations, sincere Christians have held distorted ideas of biblical sexuality. Fathers of the faith got it wrong. In response to Matthew 19:12, Origen of the third century, castrated himself. Augustine declared marriage acceptable, but singleness preferable. For him and countless others, sex was only for the purpose of procreation. In our twisted thinking we still battle with inherited strongholds that block healthy sexual expression and fulfillment. Our God-given desire for sexual intimacy has been damaged.

Many of us are conditioned to think that no matter what is written here, sex is a problem. It has no place close to God. We do it under the covers to hide from God. Engraved on our hearts is the lie that there is something wrong with thinking that spirituality opposes sexuality.

However, in Sacred Marriage, Gary Thomas offers a powerful perspective on how God views the sacredness of our sexuality. *"He (God) doesn't turn away. He wants us to run into sex, but to do so with his presence, priorities, and virtues marking our pursuit. If we experience sex in this way, we will be transformed in the marriage bed every bit as much as we are transformed on our*

knees in prayer." Sacred Marriage, Gary Thomas, page 226.

In Wild at Heart, John Eldredge vividly captures the profound meaning of human sexuality. This is a word picture of the sexual union God created us for, male and female. *"Our sexuality offers a parable of amazing depth when it comes to being masculine and feminine. The man comes to offer his strength and the woman invites the man into herself, an act that requires courage and vulnerability and selflessness for both of them. Notice first that if the man will not rise to the occasion, nothing will happen. He must move, his strength must swell before he can enter her. But neither will the love consummate unless the woman opens herself in stunning vulnerability. When both are living as they were meant to live, the man enters his woman and offers her his strength. He spills himself there, in her, for her; she draws him in, embraces and envelopes him. When all is over he is spent, but ah, what a sweet death it is. And that is how life is created."* page 185.

7. Describe how you think or feel about what we have said in this Application section.

Conclusion

Transformed sexuality sets us free from the chains of wrong thinking and sexual dysfunction. How do we transform our intimate life according to God's design for marriage? We learn to simply submit to the Bible. We re-learn God's truth so that we can clear up our misconceptions. God's design calls us to think biblically about every aspect of marriage.

God's design calls us to renewal. Where we have made our mistakes in life and marriage, God knows we need the opportunity for renewing our thinking and behaviour. Read these inspiring thoughts that assure us of God's commitment to making us new again.

"He who was seated on the throne said, I am making everything new!" Revelation 21:5.

"He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord." Psalm 40:2, 3.

"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.

"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" 2 Corinthians 5:17.

Our prayer is that together as a couple in Christ you will renew your intimate life as you follow the Spirit in living God's design for marriage.

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8. Share with your spouse how this study has renewed your thinking and your desire for a more intimate marriage?

Final Thoughts

THANK YOU for taking The *Marriage Oneness System* journey with us. Marriage is a great idea. In fact, it's a perfect idea because it's God's idea.

In the Introduction, we wrote that this course has the potential to transform your marriage because it's based on biblical solutions. God's word works for us if we apply it to our lives with the help of the Holy Spirit.

There are lots of marriage resources, but we believe that to really transform a marriage we need to do more than just get information. We need to be changed by the transforming power of God's truth and His Spirit.

We asked you to read, respond, and grow, and then to encourage others with your new insights. Your marriage will grow in intimacy and oneness with God and with your spouse. You will be sharing the transforming power of God's word, and you will be blessed as you see others growing in oneness in their marriages.

Jesus prayed for our oneness and for our complete unity in John 17:20-23 just before His arrest. In His prayer He said that our oneness and unity will draw the world to know He is the Son of God.

Our prayer is that through The *Marriage Oneness System* you have been encouraged in your personal growth in Christ and in your growth as a husband and wife, embracing God's perfect marriage design.

—Dave and Linda Halse

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About the Authors

Dave and Linda Halse are directors of Relationship Support Ministries. We are bible-centered, Spirit-led coming alongside teachers / coaches. Our spiritual gifting is exhortation / encouragement. God called us from teaching careers into full time ministry. We have been married for 57 years and have 2 married children and 5 grandchildren. Dave has his B.A. and Master's degrees in Education and in Divinity and is a certified Biblical Life Coach. We are authors of The Marriage Oneness System, Ephesians Essentials Parenting Guide, Oaks of Righteousness for Men, and God's Story in Us, our personal story of God's healing. We live in Oshawa, Ontario, Canada.

RELATIONSHIP SUPPORT MINISTRIES (RSM) is a 'not for profit' charity incorporated in the province of Ontario. Our mission is 'Restoring God-centered unity in marriages and families.' We do this through coaching in our living rooms and teaching in seminar, workshop, and retreat settings.

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Testimonies

"Today God, you hugged me tight. My heart feels safe in your hands and even though I struggled and wanted to pull away, I heard your voice in Dave as he was reading words of your son Jesus. I heard you tell me how much you love me, how much you want me to let go of my hurts, my sins." —YOUNG WIFE

"I don't have words to express how grateful I am for all your advice, support and patience. Many times I went to see you without hope and sad, and I always left encouraged and with new strength. You are amazing and I see Jesus and His love in you both."
—YOUNG WIFE

"I would like to thank you for our meeting the other night. Being able to finally be open with someone felt like a huge weight lifted off my shoulders." —HUSBAND AND FATHER

"They have been used by God to restore broken relationships to wholeness and unity. As a team, they are highly insightful and can quickly identify roadblocks to healthy relationships. They have come alongside many hurting families and couples and I have seen growth and healing take place in these relationships."
—MINISTRY DIRECTOR

"As we have worked through the bondage and betrayal that addiction to pornography brings, they have given us the acceptance and freedom to be honest and transparent with each other. Their wise counsel has opened the door to healing in our personal lives and in our marriage." —PASTORAL COUPLE

"Dave and Linda are an experienced team that have successfully applied biblical principles on marriage and can energetically and creatively present them to others." —PASTOR

"I am at a loss for words to express the gratitude and appreciation we have for you. I never understood how faith could move mountains until I met you. Both of you can move mountains." —MOM

"We can never thank you both enough for all the love and support you have given us over the past couple of years. There are no words to express our gratitude for your grace and willing hearts to be there for us."
—AFFAIR SURVIVING COUPLE