

Resolving Marital Conflict (In Christ)



Bill Loveless
Christ Is Life Ministries

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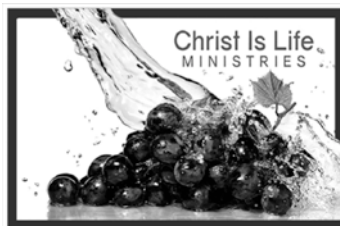
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Website: www.christislifeministries.com

Email: bill@christislifeministries.com

Table of Contents

Chapter One

What Is The Source Of All Marital Conflict?	3
--	----------

Chapter Two

Which Marriage Are You Experiencing?.....	23
--	-----------

Chapter Three

A Christ-Centered Marriage.....	32
--	-----------

Chapter Four

God's Part and Your Part In Resolving Your Marital Conflict	50
--	-----------

Chapter Five

Practical Application To Resolve Your Marital Conflict	57
---	-----------

Chapter Six

Is Marriage More Than Resolving Conflict?	75
--	-----------

CHAPTER ONE

What Is The Source Of All Marital Conflict?

Defining Marital Conflict

The word “conflict” is defined in Webster’s dictionary as to be different, opposed, or contradictory. To fail to be in agreement or accord. When it comes to marriage conflict This is how I define marital conflict:

The result when a husband and wife react to one another’s flesh when their needs, desires, and expectations are NOT met.

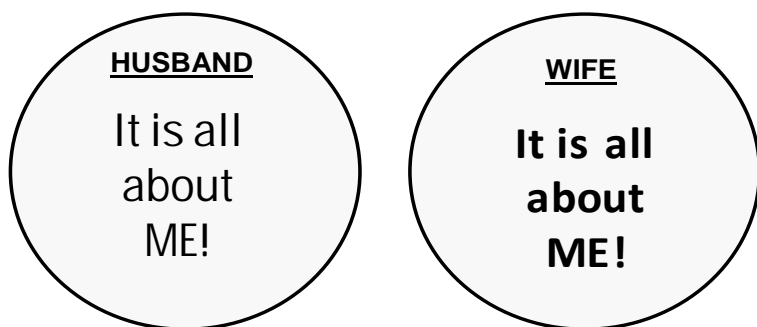
The Source of All Marital Conflict

When I came in to the marriage relationship, my subconscious expectation was that it would be all about me ME. By this I mean:

Getting MY needs met, my spouse fulfilling MY expectations, and my spouse conforming to what I believe that marriage should be about.

But I quickly discovered my wife was not all about me. She came into marriage also thinking about herself and her needs. In other words, I came into marriage as the “lord” of my ring, and she came in to marriage as the “lord” of her ring.

How We Came Into The Marriage Relationship



The Lord Of MY Ring

So, right from the beginning we both had what I call the "It's all about me" syndrome.

The Bible has a name for this syndrome: **The Flesh**

*"For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my **flesh**; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not." Romans 7:18*

*"For we know that the Law is spiritual; but I am of **flesh**, sold into bondage to sin."
Romans 7:14*

THE FLESH is our desire to live life with OURSELVES as the SOURCE, INDEPENDENTLY OF or APART FROM God as our Source.

Prior to salvation we had no choice but to depend on ourselves (our flesh) as the source for solving our problems, dealing with life, and becoming a success. We

were living life out of our own resources (such as, education, IQ, personality, looks, talents, abilities, capabilities, self-discipline, and self-strength) **apart from** God as our Source. As we continued to depend on ourselves, this reinforced our desire to be the source for life.

[**Note:** It is worth noting, at this point, that God gave every one of us our IQs, talents, abilities, etc. However, God never intended for us to live from those talents and abilities **independently** of Him. As we talked about in the last lesson, our part is to participate with Christ. As we do, His life and power will flow through us making use of the talents, intellect and abilities He gave us.]

Even though you have trusted Christ for salvation, you still have the influence of your flesh on your life and in your marriage. There is, and will always be until the day we die, the desire within us to live independently of God.

Question: Do you struggle in your marriage with the “It’s all about me” syndrome? If so, has this produced conflict with your spouse? What has been the outcome for your marriage?

The Source of ALL Conflict In Marriage Is The FLESH.

“For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.” Galatians 5:17



Living from the flesh is the cause of **all** conflict in marriage. How can I be so sure? Think about this question: "If both of you were walking by the Spirit every moment versus walking by the flesh, would you experience conflict?" We find the answer in

Galatians 5:16:

"But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will NOT carry out the desires of the flesh."

It is crucial, therefore, to understand there is a non-stop battle going on within us: the battle between the flesh and the Spirit. If the flesh is in control, there is conflict within you and the overflow of that will be conflict between you and your spouse. In the areas where marital conflicts occur, you will discover the source of those conflicts is the **flesh**.

I hope that you look at living from the flesh as Paul does:

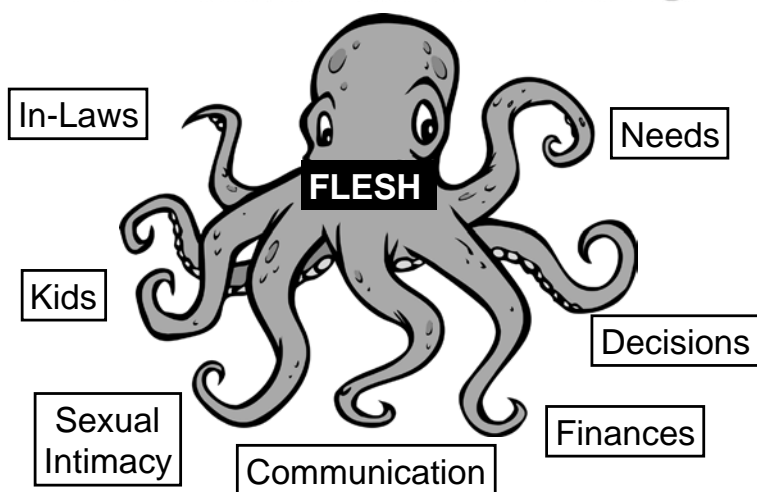
*"I don't really understand myself, for I want to do what is **right**, but I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate."*

Romans 7:15.

"Right" in this verse means living from the truth. When Paul says, "I don't do what is right," it is because the flesh is impeding him from doing it.

Look at the next diagram of an octopus. The tentacles represent some of the areas of conflict in marriage: finances, communication, sexual intimacy, etc. As you can see from the diagram, the head or source of the conflict in these areas is the flesh.

The FLESH Manifests Itself In Marriage



Question: In which of these areas are you experiencing marital conflict? In what other areas of your marriage not listed above are you experiencing conflicts?

What is your conflict robbing you of in your marriage?

Characteristics of The Flesh

*"For we know that the Law is spiritual; but I am of **flesh**, sold into bondage to sin." Romans 7:14*

Living from the “**flesh**” in marriage is an **independent attitude** that says:

- **I** can be in control of myself and my spouse.
- **I** can get my God-given needs met from my spouse.
- **I** can, in my own ability, fix, solve, or overcome all of my marital problems/conflicts.
- **I** can change myself and my spouse.
- **I** can produce a fulfilling and happy marriage independently of God.

Question: Do any of these fleshly attitudes apply to you? Write down the ones that apply.

Our DEFAULT attitude in the flesh is wanting to be in control, getting our needs met, trying to change our spouses, etc.

Key Truths About The Flesh and Marriage

*“Now the **works of the flesh** are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these...”*

Galatians 5:19-21a

The “works of the flesh” in Galatians 5:19-21a are fleshly behaviors that flow from living from the flesh.

1. Flesh Primarily Falls Into Two Categories: NEGATIVE and POSITIVE

Negative Flesh:

Negative flesh is pretty easy to spot because it produces negative fleshly behaviors or attitudes. Look at the following examples to better understand what I mean.

Examples of negative flesh: angry, insecure, unforgiving, manipulative, abusive, controlling and critical.

Positive Flesh:



Positive flesh is more difficult to recognize because it looks very appealing, especially in our culture. The problem is positive flesh is flesh that looks good but it is either done with the focus on yourself or independently of God. Let me show you examples of both.

Examples of positive flesh: self-confidence, self-reliance, self-sufficiency, people-pleasing, success, self-righteousness, and competent.

Do you see the common word in most of these examples of positive flesh? **SELF**. This is what is appealing yet deceiving about positive flesh. It looks very attractive, but it still focuses on self.

Exercise: Go to end of this booklet and pick out five fleshly behaviors that you are experiencing as they relate to your marriage.

2. We Push Each Other’s “Flesh” BUTTONS.



What happens in a marriage where a couple is living from the flesh is they push each other’s “flesh” buttons. You know what I mean, don't you? This is how conflict starts. For example, when your spouse says something and pushes your “rejection” button, you respond by trying to also push his or her “rejection” button. Your flesh is triggered when your spouse pushes your flesh buttons, and then you retaliate by pushing your spouse’s flesh buttons. What do you imagine will happen if you don't stop pushing each other’s buttons?

If you CONTINUE pushing each other’s FLESH buttons, it will create an ongoing “SQUIRREL cage” of ONGOING CONFLICT.

Are you experiencing any “squirrel cages” of conflict in your marriage?

Are You an *EXPRESSER* Or A *SUPPRESSOR*?



We tend to function in our flesh in two different ways either as a suppressor or as an expresser. As spouses, we can be both depending upon the situation, but there is a tendency to primarily live from one or the other.

1. **A SUPPRESSOR** is one who internalizes his/her fleshly behaviors. For example, a people-pleaser may not get overtly angry at his/her spouse because they want to be affirmed or accepted. So, they just “stuff” or internalize their anger. The problem with suppressors is they can deceive themselves by thinking suppression is Godly behavior. However, if the fleshly behavior is not repented of, you have internalized sin. The key truth about suppression as a fleshly behavior is that while it may be suppressed in one area, inevitably it will be expressed in another area.
2. **An EXPRESSER** is one who externalizes or verbalizes his/her fleshly behaviors. Frustration, anger, and sarcastic or rejecting remarks are examples of an expresser’s fleshly behavior. Expressers don’t hide their feelings or their fleshly behaviors.

If both spouses are suppressors, then there will be minimal overt conflict. As a result, you can convince yourselves you are doing okay since your flesh appears to be under control. But, what is the truth?

THE TRUTH

***Whether you are a SUPPRESSOR or an EXPRESSER,
your flesh is POISONING your marriage.***

Are you a primarily suppressor or an expresser?

Engaging God: If you are a suppressor, ask the Spirit to reveal the fleshly behaviors you are suppressing or internalizing and the consequences of that choice. If you are an expresser, ask the Spirit to show you the damage you are causing your spouse by your negative outbursts.

Your Flesh Is Like A DEFENSE ATTORNEY.

I liken your flesh to a defense attorney. By this I mean when you and/or your spouse are acting in the flesh, your tendency will be to justify, defend, excuse, blame or otherwise make a case for continuing to live in the flesh. For example, whenever I get frustrated with my wife, I will have thoughts like, "Why can't she see my way is better. She doesn't understand I know best."

A friend of mine once said "the resourcefulness of the flesh is never exhausted." We can always look for new and ongoing ways to justify and defend our fleshly behaviors. Sometimes our fleshly behaviors are so entrenched we can mistakenly think they are necessary survival tools.

Question: Write down the fleshly behaviors that you tend to justify, defend, or build a case around.

*The flesh loves to **JUSTIFY, DEFEND, and BUILD A CASE** for itself.*

What Is The OVERFLOW Of Living From The Flesh In Marriage?

What I have seen in my work with married couples are five things that result from living from the flesh.

1. Living From The Flesh Produces DEATH In The Marriage.

a. What Kind Of DEATH Are We Talking About?

If you continue to live from the flesh, it will create what Paul calls in Romans 8:6: "**DEATH.**"

*"For the **mind set on the flesh is DEATH**, but the **mind set on the Spirit is LIFE and peace**, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God..."*



What kind of death is referred to here? It is not spiritual death because we know that as a result of trusting Christ for salvation, we have eternal life in Christ and can never die spiritually again. The death referred to in Romans 8:6 is defined in Strong's Lexicon as "**the misery of the**

soul as a result of sin.” In other words, if you and/or your spouse continue to live from your flesh, the inevitable result will be internal misery.

b. What Are Some Examples of INTERNAL Misery?

Below are some examples of internal misery that is caused by living from the flesh:

Condemnation	Stress	Rejection
Unforgiveness	Anger	Self-sufficiency
Bitterness	Guilt	Self-pity
Inadequacy	Fear	Worry
Frustration	Blame	Shame
Insecurity	Hardened heart	Aloneness

Exercise: Write down any of the examples above “internal misery” that you are experiencing in your marriage.

Engaging God: Ask the Lord to expose any areas of “death” that your flesh is causing you in your marriage. Seek the Lord to reveal how your own misery of the soul is harming you, your spouse and your marriage.

c. How High Can Your MISERY Index Go?

I have discovered all human beings have a “misery” index. What amazes me is how much misery Christians can bear. Actually, I am not surprised because my personal and marital misery index was off the charts. Our tolerance for misery is very high. I have witnessed many couples who live in misery that only seems to escalate the longer they stay married. That was the case for Paige and me by the end

of our first ten years of marriage. If your misery index continues to escalate, there will come a point where one or both spouses have had enough. Separation and/or divorce will be the only options left.

Question: How would you evaluate your misery index in your marriage on a scale of 1-10? Are you satisfied with that?

d. WHERE Does Your Misery Take You?

Living in the misery of the flesh takes you to what I call “prodigal pigpens.” Remember the prodigal son who decided to live independently and ended up in a pigpen? This is what happens to us when we go to the flesh. We end up like the prodigal son “wallowing” in the mud and muck of our flesh. Peter addresses this truth in 2 Peter 2:22:

*“Of them the proverbs are true: ‘**A dog returns to its vomit**’ and, ‘**A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud.**’”*



The dog returning to its vomit or a pig returning to wallowing in the mud are great pictures of what going back to the flesh is like. If this is the case, why do we keep going back to the flesh? Here again, it is what we are used to.

As sick as it sounds, we have learned to be at home and to be comfortable with the misery of our flesh. This is another definition for “coping.” Does that sound troublesome to you? I hope so.

Question: Can you identify any of your “marital” prodigal pigpens?

Engaging God: Seek God to reveal to you the prodigal pigpens that you may be stuck in but may not be aware of. Ask Him to reveal your marital relationship patterns that make you miserable yet you still repeat them.

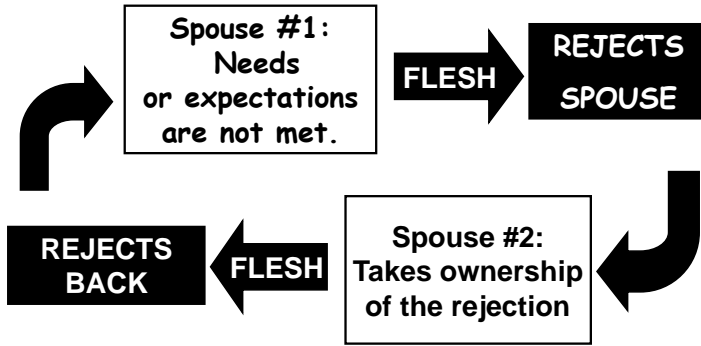
***Living from the flesh produces INTERNAL MISERY
which GROWS over time and keeps us in our
PRODIGAL pigpens.***

2. You and Your Spouse Are Living In The “REJECTION CYCLE.”

When you are living from your flesh, there will be a point in your marriage when you will reject your spouse. It may be as a result of your unmet needs or unmet expectations. Rejection can come in many forms such as anger, being critical, being demanding, or withholding sexual intimacy.

In the next diagram let's assume Spouse #1's needs and expectations are not being met which leads him/her to reject Spouse #2. When Spouse #2 takes ownership of Spouse #1's rejection because he/she is living from the flesh, Spouse #2 feels he/she has the right to reject back. This creates what I call the “rejection cycle.”

The Rejection Cycle



OVERT OR COVERT REJECTION

As you see at the bottom of the illustration, the rejection can either be overt or covert. An example of overt rejection is verbal rejection while covert rejection could be giving your spouse the silent treatment.

Question: Are there any areas of your marriage where overtly or covertly you may be in a rejection cycle?

Engaging God: Ask the Holy Spirit to expose any areas in your marriage where you may be experiencing a rejection cycle that you are not aware of. Seek Him to reveal a rejection cycle whenever you tell yourself, "Here we go again!"

What do you believe will happen in your marriage if you both CONTINUE living in the rejection cycle?

3. Belief That YOUR Spouse (Not You) Is The Problem



*"The man said, 'The **woman** You put here with me, she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.'"*
Genesis 3:12

We can see from the passage above that the "blame game" in marriage started at "the Fall" and is still alive and well in marriages today. When I disciple couples, I ask them to tell me the problem, and they point their fingers at each other and say, "He/she is the problem." I often hear this comment, as well: "If you can fix my spouse, I will be happy." The problem is magnified when I hear the same complaint from the other spouse, too. What is the truth?

THE TRUTH:

Your spouse is NOT the problem.

The REAL problem is your lack of UNDERSTANDING and/or APPPLICATION of Christ as THE Life.

I will unpack this truth in Chapter Four. However, I want you to start thinking about whether or not you believe this statement is true.

Two Kinds of Conflict: OVERT and COVERT

OVERT Conflict

Overt conflict is easy to spot. It is felt and experienced. You are overtly reacting to each other. Ongoing overt

conflict is always a sign that you have a troubled marriage or are moving toward one.

COVERT Conflict

I define covert conflict as conflict that you try to keep under control or at least under cover. It may come out from time to time but it is like a tiger in a cage that sometimes escapes (but you still have the ability to force it back into the cage). There are a several problems with covert conflict:

1. If you can keep your fleshly behaviors under some degree of control, then you can convince yourself that there is no real deterioration of your marriage.
2. If you feel that you are in control of your flesh (or your spouse's flesh), then you can convince yourself that your marriage is a "good" marriage, especially when you compare it with other marriages that are worse off than yours.
3. At some point covert conflict can turn into overt conflict. At that point the tiger is "out of the cage," and there is no putting it back in the cage.

The problem is that in COVERT conflict you can be DECEIVED by believing that your marriage is doing well since you are MANAGING your own flesh and each other's fleshly behaviors.

Question: Is it possible that you have covert conflicts in your marriage?

Engaging God: Seek the Lord to expose any covert conflict that you may be experiencing but may not be aware of.

Your Fleshly Conflict Will Create PATHWAYS, Then RUTS, And Then CANYONS In Your Marriage.

As you continue to live from your marital conflict caused by your fleshly behaviors, “relational pathways” will form. Your ongoing fleshly behaviors will create a “beaten” path that you will repeat or default to. Let me give you an example.

Let’s use one of the fleshly behaviors you wrote down previously. Insert that fleshly behavior here_____. Do you find yourself going back to this behavior over and over again? If so, you are creating a pathway that you default to every time your flesh is triggered. Unfortunately, it doesn’t just stop there. As you keep on living from your fleshly behaviors, over time your pathways will become “ruts,” and ruts can eventually become canyons. When you get to the “canyon” stage, your marriage is in real trouble.

Question: Do you have pathways, ruts, ditches, and/or canyons of fleshly behaviors in your marriage? If so, identify which fleshly behaviors are pathways, ruts, ditches, or canyons.

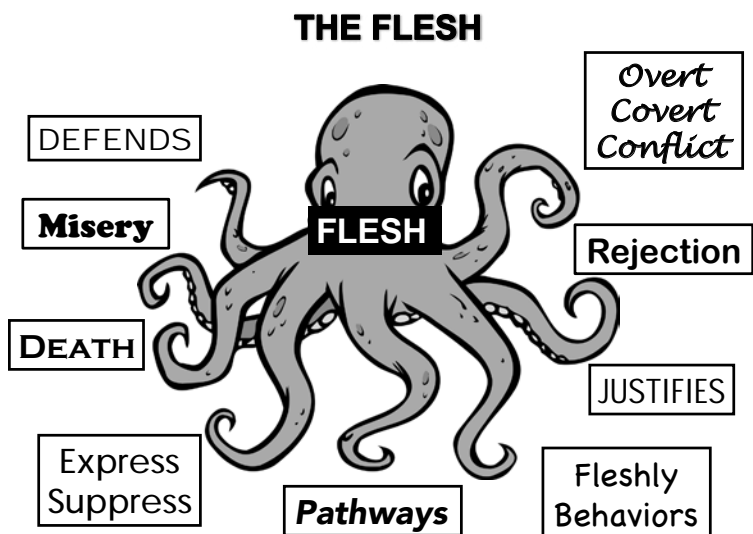
Engaging God: Seek the Holy Spirit to reveal or to expose your fleshly pathways, ruts, or canyons in your marriage. Remember, there is no canyon deep enough that He can’t fill in and make level ground.

If your marriage is in ongoing marital conflict: you are definitely at the “canyon” stage.

***Continuing to live from the flesh will produce
PATHWAYS, RUTS, and CANYONS.***

The FLESH Octopus

Let’s bring our octopus illustration back and sum up all the manifestations in marriage of living from the flesh.



Exercise: Go to the end of the booklet, pick out the fleshly behaviors that you exhibit when you experience stress, differences, or conflicts in these areas of your marriage.

Communication

Intimacy – Emotional and sexual

Finances

Needs/Desires

Children – discipline, values, training

In-laws or extended family members

Conflict

Spiritual issues

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

CHAPTER TWO

Which Marriage Are You Experiencing?

In my years of ministry and marriage discipleship, I have found that marriages among Christians usually fall into three categories:

- A Troubled marriage
- A Christian marriage
- A Christ-centered marriage

As you read through the characteristics of these marriage categories, determine which category you believe your marriage is in. In this chapter we are going to look at the first two categories.

Category 1 - A TROUBLED Marriage

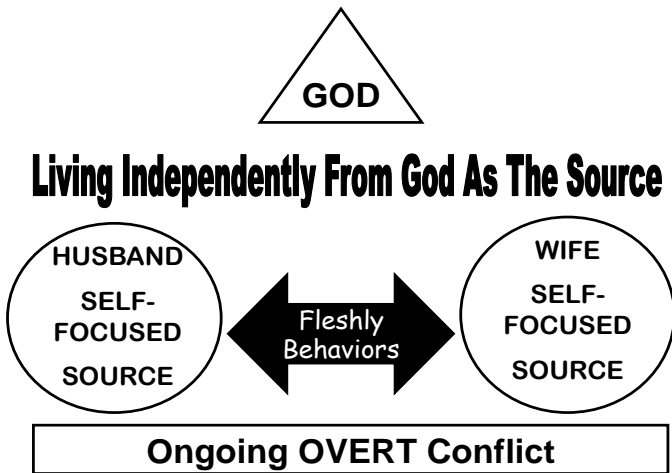
A troubled marriage is pretty easy to spot. Here are some of the characteristics of a troubled marriage:

- **Overt conflict that is ESCALATING.**
- **Trying and failing to COPE with one another's fleshly behaviors.** (I will explain the word "coping" in the next section)
- **Ongoing conflict that results from needs and expectations NOT BEING MET.**
- **Fleshly behaviors are getting WORSE and creating more conflict.**
- **No internal SPIRITUAL transformation.**
- **MOVING TOWARDS emotional separation, physical separation, or divorce.**

The diagram below illustrates why marriages become troubled.

1. They are living independently from God as their Source. (We will talk about the “source” in the next chapter.)
2. They are focused on themselves.
3. They are the source to produce happiness and fulfillment.
4. The result is fleshly behaviors being expressed between them.
5. Which leads to ongoing overt marital conflict.

A TROUBLED Marriage



Before we go on to the second category of marriage, think about the following statement.

In a troubled marriage, the tendency is to BLAME your spouse for your misery when in fact the real source of your misery is that you are living from your FLESH and are not living from Christ as your SOURCE.

Category 2 - A CHRISTIAN Marriage

I define a Christian marriage as one where both spouses are Christians. It is a couple who may be attempting to do all the right “Christian” things, such as, reading their Bible, praying, and going to church. Their marriage appears to be doing well on the outside, but it is a marriage where:

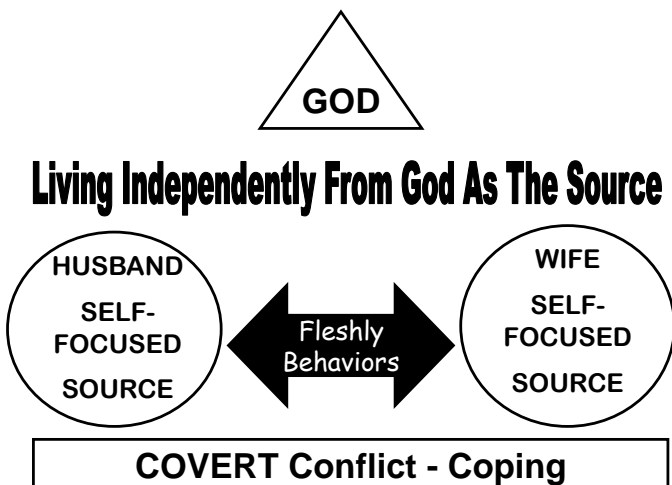
- They are experiencing ongoing unmet needs or expectations.
- They are trying without success to fix or change each other and each other’s fleshly behaviors.
- There is more “covert” conflict than “overt” conflict in the marriage. (Their covert conflict doesn’t get above the surface and hasn’t been dealt with.)
- There is little or no spiritual transformation.
- A couple is using their own strength and ability to try to produce happiness and fulfillment in their marriage (though they may be asking God to help them try).
- Each spouse has learned to employ coping mechanisms in response to the other spouse’s fleshly behaviors.

Look at the differences and similarities of a troubled marriage versus a Christian marriage in the diagram on the following page.

1. They are living independently of God as their Source.
2. They are focused on themselves.
3. They are the source to produce happiness and fulfillment.

4. The result is fleshly behaviors being expressed between them.
5. Which leads to covert marital conflict and eventually overt conflict.
6. They are coping in their marriage versus being transformed.

A CHRISTIAN Marriage



The Meaning Of COPING In Marriage

Let me now define what I mean by "coping."

What Is COPING?

It is what married couples TRY to do using their own ability and willpower to deal with their UNRESOLVED conflict, UNMET needs, or ONGOING fleshly behaviors.

In a Christian marriage, couples use different coping mechanisms to deal with—and in some cases avoid, protect or insulate themselves from—unresolved conflict, unmet needs, and ongoing fleshly behaviors. Here are a few examples of some common coping mechanisms in marriage:

- Silent treatment
- Anger
- Controlling
- People-pleasing
- Manipulation
- Avoidance
- Emotional withdrawal/isolation

Other examples of coping mechanism or strategies that spouses use to deal with negative marital situations are:

- Learning to put up with the struggles and conflicts.
- Overlooking your spouse's fleshly behaviors.
- Do whatever it takes to go along in order to get along.
- Tap dancing around overt or covert conflict instead of resolving it.

If you and your spouse have learned how to cope with each other's fleshly behaviors and are, for the most part, just getting by in your marriage, then you may be DECEIVED into thinking you have a Christ-centered marriage.

Coping is the human “substitute” for true transformation. Instead of allowing the Holy Spirit to transform our behaviors, we just learn to live with them.

Coping says, “We will figure out some way to make it work.”



It is like learning not to step on your spouse's toes while dancing. Some couples, like us, for the first ten years, learned how to cope very well.

Another way of coping is what I call “flesh management.” An example of flesh management is the term “anger management.” Secular psychology teaches you ways and techniques to manage your fleshly anger. Do you believe that managing your flesh is God's objective? Not according to Romans 12:2a:

“Be not conformed to the world (coping, flesh management), but be transformed (into Christ-like behaviors) by the renewing of your mind...”

God promises is that if we engage Him by faith, He will replace our fleshly behaviors with Christ-like attitudes. (We will explore what Christ-like attitudes are in Chapter Four)

God does NOT want you to MANAGE your fleshly behaviors. He wants to TRANSFORM you to live from Christ-like behaviors.

However, simply coping in the marriage relationship will eventually create death in a marriage because the fleshly behaviors are not being transformed. The key truth concerning coping is this:

Simply learning how to cope in marriage will NEVER produce TRANSFORMATION.

It can only produce MORE coping.

I hope this truth is startling to you because if you are coping instead of allowing Christ to transform your marriage, your marriage is no different from that of a non-Christian. Christian couples can even develop coping strategies that will see them through “till death do us part.” With that being said, now might be a good time for you and your spouse to ask yourselves this question:

Do you want to CONTINUE coping or SEEK God to transform your marriage?

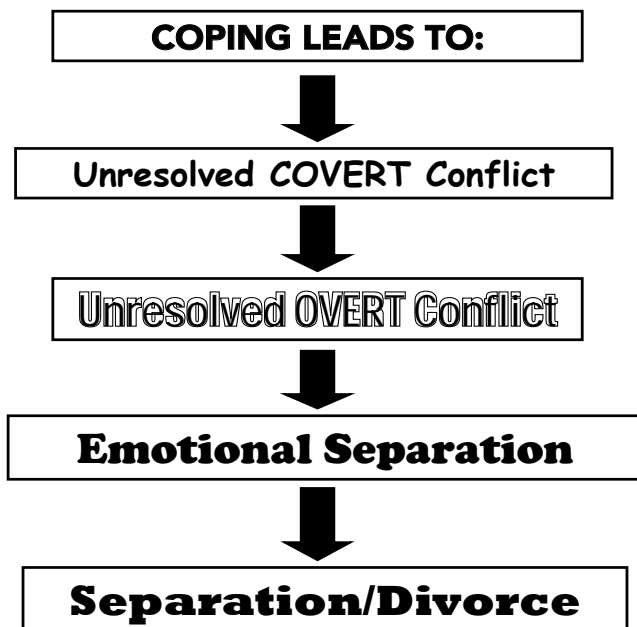
Question: Would you be willing to seek the Lord individually (or as a couple) and ask Him to reveal to you whether or not you are simply coping in your marriage and in what areas you are coping?

Engaging God: If so, ask the Holy Spirit to expose any areas where you are coping in your marriage.

**Troubled and Christian Marriages Will
EVENTUALLY Lead To UNRESOLVED Overt and
Covert Conflict**

“For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.” Galatians 5:17

Over the many years I have discipled hurting Christian couples, I have discovered that troubled and even Christian marriages can end up in the same place over time. Here is the pattern that I usually see.



Moving to the place of physical separation or divorce generally happens over time. It usually happens after a number of years of living in unresolved conflict. Couples first try to cope with one another's fleshly behaviors. When that fails, they become locked into the rejection cycle which produces further frustration, unforgiveness, and even bitterness.



From there, they move into creating emotional distance between themselves or develop ways of self-protection or insulation from each other's flesh. This will eventually lead to emotional separation that may end with physical separation* and/or divorce. The key truth to remember is:

***UNRESOLVED OVERT and COVERT conflict
will eventually lead to emotional or
physical separation or divorce.***

Engaging God: Seek God to reveal to you and your spouse if your marriage is in any of the stages listed on the diagram on the previous page.

Summary

I hope this chapter has given you insight into the first two categories of marriage. In the next chapter we will look at the third category of marriage called a Christ-centered marriage.

CHAPTER THREE

A Christ-Centered Marriage

Now that we have looked at what a troubled and Christian marriage is and the results of living from those categories of marriages let's look at the characteristics of a Christ-centered marriage.

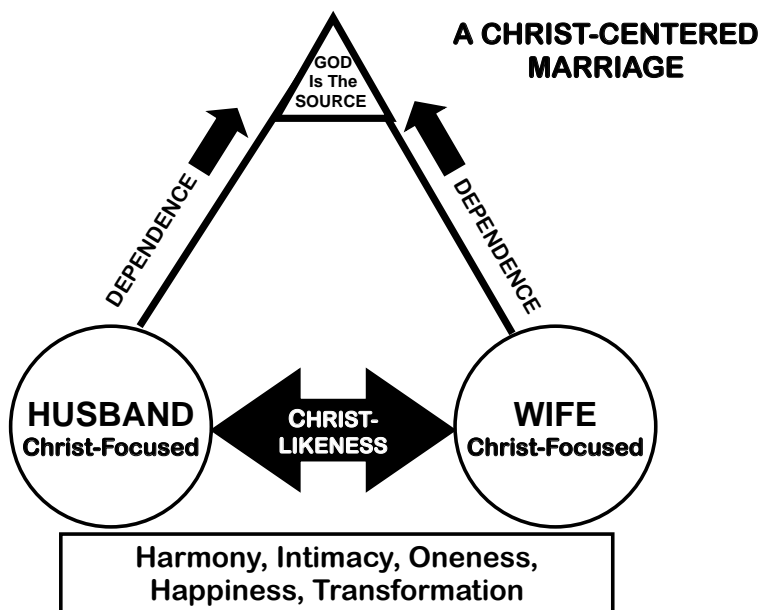
Category 3 – A Christ-Centered Marriage

Below are some of the characteristics of a Christ-centered marriage.

- **NO longer desiring to use coping mechanisms or settle for unhappiness.**
- **Both spouses EXPERIENCING victory and freedom from fleshly behaviors.**
- **Each spouse is becoming more SELFLESS and OTHER'S-FOCUSED.**
- **Each spouse's needs ARE being met in Christ.**
- **Spiritual resolution to overcome overt and covert conflict.**
- **Both spouses are being transformed into CHRIST-LIKENESS.**

When you look at the characteristics of a Christ-centered marriage would you say that is the kind of marriage you are experiencing?

On the following page is a diagram illustrating a Christ-centered marriage.



In a Christ-centered marriage:

- The husband and wife are both **Christ-focused** instead of self-focused.
- They are living **dependently** upon God as their **Source** instead of living independently of Him.
- They are **experiencing Christ-likeness** flowing between them instead of fleshly behaviors.
- The result is increasing **harmony, intimacy, oneness, happiness, and**

Two Key Words That Separate A Troubled and Christian Marriage From A Christ-Centered Marriage

The two key words that separate a troubled and Christian marriage from a Christ-centered are: source and Christ-likeness. I would like to look at the meaning of those two words and how important they are to not only experiencing a Christ-centered marriage but how they will resolve marital conflict.

SOURCE

***"He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption."**1 Corinthians 1:30*

Who your "SOURCE" is will determine whether or not you will resolve your conflict and experience Christ-centered marriage. There are two sources from which we can live life.

GOD as your Source

OR

YOU and YOUR spouse as your source

From which source are we to experience God's design for a Christ-centered marriage? To answer that question, let's go back to the Garden of Eden and look at the first marriage. There are three key truths we need to understand about God and Adam and Eve in the garden before the Fall.

1. GOD Was The Source To Meet ALL of Adam's and Eve's Needs



“And the LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food.”

Genesis 2:9

Let me ask you a question, “Who was the Source to meet Adam’s and Eve’s needs?” **God**

was the Source and provider to meet every one of Adam’s and Eve’s physical, spiritual, and emotional needs. Why did Adam and Eve need another source other than themselves? The reason they needed God to be their Source is they could **not** meet their own needs. God designed them to need someone greater than themselves to meet their needs.

TRUTH #1

Before the Fall, God was Adam’s and Eve’s SOURCE to meet their PHYSICAL, SPIRITUAL, and EMOTIONAL needs.

2. For God To Be Their Source, They Had To Live DEPENDENTLY Upon Him.

“And the LORD God commanded the man, ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; ¹⁷but 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 2:16-17

For Adam and Eve to experience God as their Source, they had to walk in moment-by-moment **dependence** upon God. We see this in Genesis 2:16, 17 above. When

they walked in dependence upon God, they continued experiencing eternal life, and God continued to meet all their needs. Once they made an **independent** choice to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, then they went from eternal life to spiritual death, were separated from God and no longer had their needs met by God. Dependence as we see in Genesis 2:16, 17 was a matter of spiritual life or death for them. Equally important is this key truth:

TRUTH #2

***God created man as a DEPENDENT creature.
Prior to the Fall, Adam and Eve walked in
moment-by-moment DEPENDENCE upon
God to meet ALL of their needs.***

3. The RESULT Of Adam's and Eve's Dependence Upon God As The Source

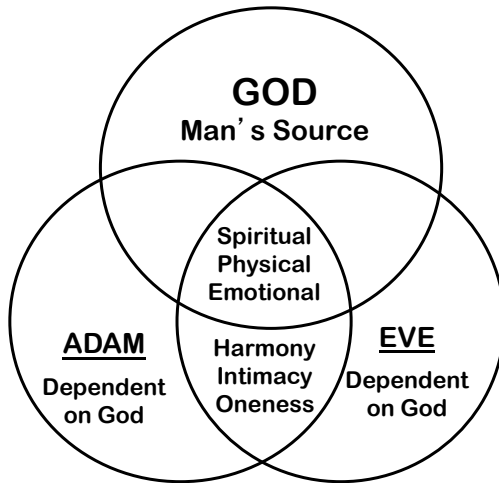
What were the results of Adam and Eve living dependently on God as their Source?

TRUTH #3

***The RESULTS of living from God as the SOURCE
were perfect intimacy between Adam and Eve,
perfect harmony within Adam and Eve, and
perfect oneness with each other and with God.***

The diagram below illustrates these three truths.

God As The SOURCE For Adam and Eve



We see from the diagram that:

- God's design for marriage from the beginning was for God to be man's Source.
- The result of God's being the Source was He met every physical, spiritual, and emotional need of Adam and Eve.
- Adam's and Eve's part was to live in moment-by-moment dependence on God.
- The overflow of living dependently on God is that Adam and Eve experienced harmony, intimacy, and oneness in their marriage.

Since it was God's DESIGN for Adam and Eve to live in moment-by-moment DEPENDENCE on God as their Source, is it possible this is also God's design for you and your spouse?

Question: Does God's design for marriage make sense to you? Is it possible that this is what God designed for your marriage? Hint: Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8).

The DIFFERENCE Between You Versus God Being the Source

1. God As Your SOURCE

"He(God) is the SOURCE of your life in Christ Jesus, ..." 1 Corinthians 1:30 (RSV)

1 Corinthians 1:30 tells us that God is the SOURCE for living your life in Christ. One of the definitions for the word "source" is "the one who produces." This may be a new truth for you because so many Christians have been taught falsely like I was that they are to be the source for living the Christian life with God's help. You see, there can only be ONE true source from which to live the Christian life.

The truth is that God, NOT you, is the SOURCE from which to live life.

Look at two other verses that reveal that God is your Source for living the Christian life:

"In Him we live and move and have our being." Acts 17:28

"For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things....." Romans 11:36

These are just two of many verses in the Bible that reveal to us that God is to be our Source for living the Christian life. You may be wondering what it means practically that God is your Source. Let's look at four examples of what it means for God to be your Source.



- **God is your Source to meet your needs. Philippians 4:19**
- **God is your Source of power over your sin. 1 John 3:6**
- **God is your Source to renew your mind to believe His truth. Romans 12:2**
- **God is your Source to make all His promises of transformation for you an experiential reality in your life. Philippians 1:6**

Have you tried to be the source to accomplish any of the four things listed above? If so, how is that working for you? If we are honest with ourselves, we would have to say that it is not working.

The truth is that if we try to be the source for living the Christian life, then we are destined to **fail**. If He is not the Source in our Christian walk (and in all other areas of our life), then we will never experience God's truth and His promises in our lives.

God as your SOURCE for living THE Christian life means that ONLY God can make His truth and His promises an EXPERIENTIAL reality in your life.

What does it look like for God to be your Source in your marriage:

- He will resolve your conflicts.
- He will move you both away from living from your fleshly behaviors that cause your conflict.
- He will produce Christ-like attitudes in your both.
- He will produce a selfless attitude in both you and in your spouse.
- He will grow your marriage to experience a deeper intimacy and oneness.

What might be the results in your marriage if you and your spouse try to be the source?

2. YOU and YOUR spouse as the source

You and your spouse being the source in your marriage means:

It is up to YOU both to RESOLVE your conflicts, MEET each another's needs, FIX or CHANGE your fleshly behaviors, and PRODUCE happiness and fulfillment in marriage.

If you believe that you and your spouse are the source to resolve your conflicts, meet each another's needs, fix or change fleshly behaviors, and produce happiness and fulfillment in your marriage, how is that working for you?

Look at what Jesus says at the end of John 15:5

*“....apart from **ME** you can do **NOTHING.**”*

When Jesus is referring to “Me” in this verse it refers to Christ as your source. What does the word “nothing” mean? In terms of your marriage “nothing” means:

- You can’t change/transform your or your spouse’s fleshly behaviors that are causing your marital conflict.
- You can’t change/transform yourself or your spouse to prevent marital conflict.
- You can’t move from being selfish to being selfless.
- You can’t produce Christ-likeness.

“Nothing” might be summed up like this:

You can’t produce what God PROMISES to produce in you and in your marriage.

In addition, apart from God being your Source there will be:

- **NO power** over sin.
- **NO victory** over the flesh.
- **NO freedom** from defeating sin patterns.
- **NO healing** of woundedness.
- **NO supply** to meet your needs.
- **NO transformation.**
- **NO Christ-centered** marriage.

You see, I have met with many couples who attended conferences, read books, and heard lots of sermons on how to transform their marriages. They were given a “marriage tool pouch” which had “tools” they were to use, being their own source, to try to transform their marriages.

I remember one couple who came to me after attending a 13-week course where they were given several “tools” to use to improve their marriage. They raved about the course but when I asked why they came to see me, they confessed that none of the tools they tried resolved the deep-seated problems in their marriage.

Please don’t hear me wrong. I am all for any tool or technique that can improve your marriage. All I am saying is that these tools, apart from depending on the life and power of God, will never truly transform you and your spouse.

My wife and I can bear witness that “nothing” means “nothing” because we tried in vain using all the tools, but none of them worked to transform our marriage.

***You can use “tools” to IMPROVE your marriage,
but only God as your source can TRANSFORM
your marriage.***

Here is another key point concerning living from Christ as your Source:

***If you are trying to make your marriage work
independently of God, God will bring you to
the place of “I CAN’T.”***

The place of “I can’t” in marriage is where you and your spouse come to believe that neither of you, as the source, can produce what only Christ can produce. Here are some examples of my “I can’t” that God brought me to in my marriage:

- I can't change or fix myself or my spouse.
- I can't meet my own needs or my spouse's needs.
- I can't produce harmony, intimacy, and oneness in my marriage.
- I can't resolve the recurring conflict in my marriage.
- I can't make my marriage a success.

Question: Are you and your spouse at the place of "I can't?" If so, what are some of the areas where you have reached "I can't" and given up trying to fix your own marriage?

Let me leave you with this sobering thought:

Unless you come to the place of "I CAN'T," you will NEVER experience a Christ-centered marriage.

Engaging God: Ask God to examine your marriage and to reveal to you the areas where you, as the source, are trying to make your marriage work using your own resources. Is what you are doing working?

CHRIST-LIKENESS

Let me begin by looking at two scriptures that reveal our spiritual destiny in regards to Christ-likeness.

Transformation into Christ-likeness is part of your SPIRITUAL DESTINY.

You and your spouse have a spiritual destiny according to Romans 8:29 and 2 Corinthians 3:18.

*"For whom He foreknew, He also **predestined** to become **conformed to the image of His Son**, that He might be the first-born among many brethren." Romans 8:29*

*"And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, **are being transformed into His likeness** with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." 2 Corinthians 3:18*

This is a tremendous promise from God. His destiny for you is to be transformed into the likeness of Christ. Now I want to share with you what Christ-likeness means.

CHRIST-LIKENESS

***SUPERNATURAL, Christ-like ATTITUDES
that can ONLY be supplied by Christ.***

To give you a better understanding of Christ-likeness, let's look at some verses that show us some of these Christ-like attitudes: (Focus on the words in bold-face type.)



*"But the fruit of the Spirit is
(Christ's) **love, joy, peace,**
patience, kindness, goodness,
faithfulness, ²³ **gentleness, and**
self-control...."
Galatians 5:22, 23a*

*“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with (Christ’s) **compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.** ¹³ Bear with each other and **forgive** whatever grievances you may have against one another. **Forgive as the Lord forgave you.** ¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on (Christ’s) **love**, which binds them all together in perfect unity.” Colossians 3:12-14 (Parentheses mine)*

The following is an expanded list of Christ-like attitudes:

Unconditional Love	Hope	Gentleness
Victory	Worth	Acceptance
Faith	Freedom	Patience
Strength	Christ-control	Humility
Selflessness	Peace	Respect
Power	Adequacy	Forgiveness
Security	Surrender	Wisdom
Understanding	Fearlessness	Rest
Discernment	Christ-confidence	Courage
Righteousness	Compassion	Boldness
Kindness	Joy	Grace

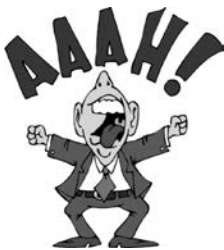
Question: Is there anything in the list above that you would like to experience more of in your personal life? In your marriage?

What Is The Difference Between CHRIST-LIKE Attitudes and HUMAN Attitudes?

To better understand the meaning of Christ-life attitudes we need to first understand there is a **human** connotation to these attitudes as well as a **spiritual** one. We know in the human realm we may experience temporary, situational peace, patience, security, etc. But what we are talking about in the spiritual realm is not human but Christ-like attitudes. Let's look at the difference between the two.

HUMAN Attitudes – feelings or experiences (internal or external) generated by man CAN be changed by our circumstances and/or our relationships.

For example, let's assume you are having a good day. You are feeling **human** peace, joy, and security. But then you come home to find someone has broken into your house which is flooded due to a broken pipe and your two-year old son is throwing a temper tantrum.



What happens to your human feelings of peace, joy, and security? They evaporate quickly! What would this same situation look like living from Christ-life characteristics? Before I answer that question, let's define Christ-life characteristics.

CHRIST-LIKE Attitudes – SUPERNATURAL attitudes that are supplied by Christ and CANNOT be changed by circumstances or relationships.

The key word in this definition is “supernatural.” In the context of Christ-life characteristics, supernatural means it is a characteristic only Christ can supply. To understand better what a supernatural “Christ-like”

characteristic is, let's look at the words of the apostle Paul, in Colossians 1:24:

"I am overflowing with JOY in the midst of all our suffering...."



In Paul's walk of faith, he arrived at a place where he was experiencing great joy even in the midst of his suffering. This was not a human joy because it is nearly impossible to experience human joy when we are suffering. Paul was experiencing a supernatural, Spirit-produced joy that even suffering could not steal.

Using the same example as above, let's assume when you are faced with the robbery, the flooding, and the crying child, instead of walking away in anger, frustration, impatience, etc., you are able to draw on the Christ-like characteristics of peace, joy, and patience. We will talk about what this practically looks like later in this lesson. For now the key truth to understand is:

The KEY difference between a HUMAN characteristic and a CHRIST-LIKE characteristic is that NOTHING or NO ONE can ROB you of experiencing Christ-like characteristics.

Let's look at an example that applies to marriage. Let's assume that you struggle with impatience toward your spouse. What Christ-like attitude is it that you need from Christ as your life? **His** patience. Have you tried in your own strength to produce patience? How well did that work out? How long did it last? Most likely it did not last

long. In contrast, if you are living from Christ's patience, it means that nothing or no one can rob you of His patience. Trying to live from human patience will result in someone or something robbing you of that patience.

Engaging God: Begin seeking God to give you deeper understanding of the difference between a human attitude and a Christ-like attitude.

As Christians, You and Your Spouse Contain ALL Of The Christ-Like Attitudes

Look at the following verse that bears out this truth.

"For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority."

Colossians 2:9, 10

These verses are telling us two incredible truths:

1. You have the fullness of the GODHEAD in you. You contain ALL of the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.
2. In addition, since you have the fullness of Christ in you, you contain ALL His Christ-like attitudes.

This means that you contain ALL of Christ's peace, joy, patience, forgiveness, etc. If you and your spouse contain all of the Christ-life attitudes, what does that mean for you?

Since Christ dwells in you, you contain all of His Christ-like attitudes which means you do NOT need to TRY to and PRODUCE Christ-like attitudes in your life or in your marriage.

Think about the above statement for just a minute. Since you have all of the Christ-like attitudes in Christ who is in you, then it is NOT necessary (nor is it possible) for you to try to produce them in your life or in your marriage. Have you thought, until now, that it was up to YOU to produce more unconditional love, more patience, more selflessness, etc.?

The good news is you DON'T need to TRY to and produce the Christ-like attitudes that you already POSSESS.

Here is the key question for this chapter. In what ways would it resolved the conflict in your marriage if you both were living from Christ-like attitudes?

CHAPTER FOUR

God's Part and Your Part In Resolving Your Marital Conflict

Before we go into the practical application to resolved marital conflict there is one other key truth you need to understand

God's Part In Resolving Your Marital Conflict

1. God Is The CAUSE And EFFECT

As your source, God is the INITIATOR and The CAUSE and EFFECT of resolving conflict transforming your marriage. We see this in Philippians 1:6:

*"For I am confident of this very thing, that **He who began (INITIATOR)** a good work **in you...**" Philippians 1:6a*

What is Paul telling us in the first part of this verse? He is saying that God began the work that He wants to accomplish in you. He began or **initiated** this work in you at salvation. The Father accomplished this work by sending Jesus to die on the cross to save mankind from his sins. However, God promises to do much more than just save you. Look at the second part of Philippians 1:6:

*"...He who began a good work in you **will carry it on to completion** until the day of Christ Jesus." Philippians 1:6b*

We see in the second part of Philippians 1:6 that God not only began the work, but He also WILL complete the work that He began in you at salvation. This verse reveals to us that God is the **initiator** and the **cause** and **effect** for real change in your life and in your marriage.

Based on this verse, I have a few questions I would like you to think about. Where do you find yourself in this verse? Are you the initiator or cause and effect? Or are you the one who is the recipient of what God wants to accomplish? How do you think, “apart from Me you can do nothing” from John 15:5b applies to this verse?

Let’s look at some examples of what it means in your marriage for God to carry to completion what He has begun.

God as the CAUSE and EFFECT will:

- Give you a DESIRE to live from Him as your Source. Philippians 2:13
- Transform your fleshly behavior into Christ-like attitudes. Romans 12:2
- Produce the joy and fulfillment that you want in your marriage. 1 Peter 1:8
- Produce a marriage that is INCREASING in harmony, intimacy, and oneness. Philippians 1:6

2. God’s POWER In You Will Transform You and Your Spouse



Since you have the fullness of God in you, then you also have all of God’s power in you.

*“you will receive **power** when the Holy Spirit has come upon you....” Acts 1:8*

*“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the **power** will be of God and not from ourselves.” 2 Corinthians 4:7*

a. What kind of power is God's power?

To get a better sense of God's power in you, look at Ephesians 1:19, 20:

*"I pray that you will begin to understand the **incredible greatness of His power** for us who believe him. This is the **same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead** and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms."*

Think of it!

**The SAME power that RESURRECTED Jesus
from the dead is IN YOU!**

b. God's power in you is the same power that:

- Created the heavens and the earth.
- Opened the Red Sea.
- Is holding the universe together.

c. Why was it necessary for God to put His power in us?

**God put His POWER in you to do what He promises
and to do what you CANNOT do by your own
WILLPOWER.**

d. Isn't your willpower enough without needing God's power?

If your answer to that question is “yes,” let me ask you a few questions:

1. Can your own willpower consistently stop yourself from behaving from your flesh?
2. Can your willpower set you or your spouse free from your fleshly behaviors?
3. Can your willpower transform you or your spouse’s fleshly behaviors into Christ-like attitudes?
4. Can your willpower transform you or your spouse to think, choose, believe and behave like Christ?

Have you tried to do any of the above things using your willpower? How well did that work for you? I think it is safe to say that apart from God’s power we can accomplish none of those things.

Questions: What is it that you are trying to do in your own willpower to change you, your spouse, and to resolve your conflict?

e. What are some things that ONLY God’s power can accomplish in your marriage?

- a. RESOLVES unresolvable conflict.
- b. MOVES you and your spouse away from living in the flesh.
- c. TRANSFORMS your fleshly behavior into Christ-like attitudes.
- d. TRANSFORMS you and your spouse experience God’s design of harmony, intimacy, and oneness.

Question: If only God's power can accomplish those things listed above, doesn't it stand to reason that we should draw on His power and not try to use our own willpower?

YOUR Part In Resolving Marital Conflict

To understand what your part is in resolving marital conflict, let's look at the first part of John 15:5:

"I AM the VINE, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit..." John 15:5a



Jesus is saying that as the physical branch is designed to be totally dependent upon the physical vine for life, you and your spouse, as spiritual branches, are designed to live totally dependent upon God, the spiritual Vine, for life. The word "abide" means "to remain." The key point to understand is that **the branch receives life from the vine**. When the branch is separated from the vine it dies. So, we too as Christians are designed to live DEPENDENTLY upon the vine for life.

It is important to understand at this point a very key truth:

***God's design for you and your spouse is to
DRAW FROM, DEPEND ON, and LIVE FROM
God as your SOURCE.***

The key word is “design.” Remember that in our first lesson we learned that God’s design from the beginning was for Adam and Eve to live totally dependent on Him to meet their every need. God’s design has not changed. You and your spouse, too, are designed to live totally dependent upon God.

Doesn’t it stand to reason that if God is our Source, our part is to depend on Him to be our Source?

This is why Jesus uses the perfect example of the branch being totally dependent on the vine for life. So, it follows that God’s design for you in Christ living His life in you is:

***Living with an ATTITUDE of TOTAL DEPENDENCE
upon God as your Source***

In marriage, you and your spouse depend on God:

- To change you and your spouse.
- To resolve the areas of conflict.
- To move you away from living in the flesh.
- To transform your fleshly attitudes into Christ-like attitudes.
- To produce harmony, intimacy, and oneness.

Side note: The word “bears” in John 15:5 does not mean “produce.” The word “bears” means “to carry.” The key point is that **the branch does not produce the fruit.** The vine is the source for producing the fruit while the branch is the agent through which the fruit is produced.

As you walk with an ATTITUDE of DEPENDENCE upon God as your Source, He will not only resolve your conflict but He will transform you and your spouse to live from Christ-like attitudes and PRODUCE a Christ-centered marriage.

Do you believe that you have been living in a branch-vine relationship with God by depending on Him to be the Source?

Meditate: on John 15:5 and think about how an attitude of dependence is the key to a Christ-centered marriage.

Engaging God: Ask God to give you a deeper spiritual understanding of the implications of the branch-Vine relationship as it relates to you and your marriage.

CHAPTER FIVE

Practical Application To Resolve Your Marital Conflict

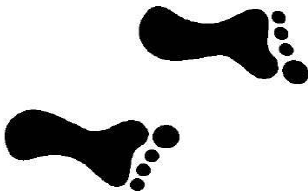
The Journey To Conflict Resolution Begins With A STEP of Faith.

*“The mind of a man plans his way, but the **Lord** directs his steps.” Proverbs 16:9*

Imagine that you have moved from your home to Indonesia. You would be moving from a very familiar culture to one that is 180 degrees different from the one that you have been living in. You will now have to learn how to live in this new culture.

In the same way, God is moving you away from the “self” culture of living from your own abilities to a new “spiritual” culture of living from His infinite ability. It too is a very difficult transition. However, God promises that as we take steps of faith, He will make real to us the transformation and abundant life that He promises. Therefore, let me begin by defining a step of faith:

A STEP OF FAITH is a MOMENT in time where you ENGAGE God by faith.



If you have been a Christian for any length of time, you know that the Christian walk is a walk of faith. However, there are two key things that I want to emphasize about our walk of faith. One, I would like for

us to look at what happens when we take a step of faith. The second is to take a look at the object of our faith.

1. What Happens At That Moment When You Take A Step of Faith?

Remember from Lesson One the truth that at this very moment within you is ALL of God's life and power according to Colossians 2:9, 10:

*"For **in Christ** all the **fullness of the Deity** lives in bodily form, and **you have been given fullness IN Christ**, who is the head over every power and authority."*

Since you contain all of God's life and power, what happens when you take a step of faith?

When you take a step of faith, ALL of God's POWER is RELEASED in you to transform your thinking, your beliefs, and your behavior.

Look at how Paul ties faith in with the power of God:

*"so that your **faith** would not **rest** on the wisdom of men, but on **the power of God**."* 1 Corinthians 2:5

*"To this end also we pray for you always, that our God will count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and **the work of faith with power**."* 2 Thessalonians 1:11

When you take a step of faith, God is not giving you just a part of His life and power. He releases the full force of His power in you to transform every area of your life.

2. The Problem Is That There Is ANOTHER Object of Our Faith.

I know that if you have been living the Christian life for some time, you know that the object of our faith should be Jesus Christ. As a result of ministering to many Christians (who have been Christians for 10, 20, 30+ years), I have personally experienced and witnessed that there is another object to their faith. That object is **their own IQ, ability and willpower**. Think about this statement:

*If you believe that it is up to you with God's help to live the Christian life, is it possible that the **REAL** object of your faith is **YOUR IQ, ability and willpower**?*



Let me give you an example. If you believe that it is up to you with God's help to try in your own ability and willpower to resolve your marital conflict, then who is the object of your faith.

The truth is that you have put faith in yourself, and you have asked God to help you be the source for making those promises real in your life.

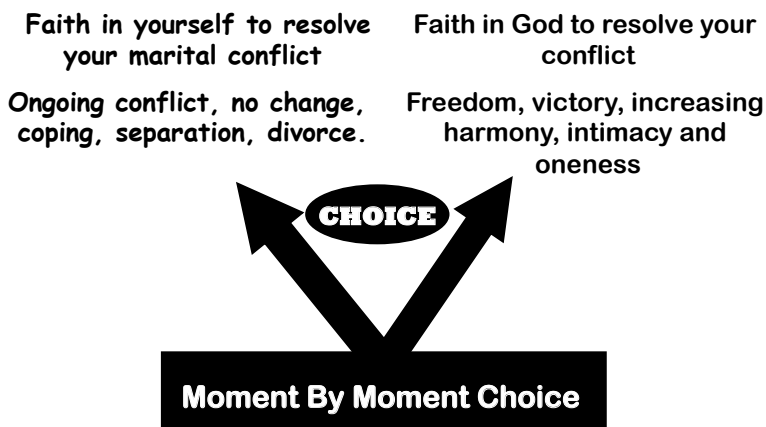
However, what do we know is true? We know from 1 Corinthians 1:30 that God is the Source for living life in us and that He is not going to help us be the Source.

So many Christians today have been taught as I was that we must "apply" God's truth to our lives. While that sounds very spiritual, how I see it interpreted is that I must take God's truth and try to make it work in my life using my own IQ, ability, self-discipline and willpower.

The problem with this is that if it is up to me to make it work, and I will **fail** because I will not be able to make it work!

The truth is that we are TOTALLY dependent upon God for Him to take His truth and make it work in our lives.

Look at the following illustration to see the results of you versus God being the object of your faith when it comes to resolving marital conflict.



What Choice Will You Make?

Engaging God and His POWER To Overcome Your Fleshly Behaviors

1. Engage God to give you the willingness to move away from living from your flesh.

The first step in moving away from living in the flesh is to be willing to engage God to give you that willingness.

Before we look at an example, let me share one more key truth



If you are a Christian, you know the usual “faith” words such as trust, ask, etc. However, there is another word that I believe is one of the most active faith words available to us, and that is the word “**entrust**.” What does entrust mean?

ENTRUST

Giving over to God for safekeeping a struggle, a fleshly behavior, or unwillingness that you are holding on to.

Jesus is our perfect example because He continued to entrust Himself to the Father as we see in 1 Peter 2:23.

*“and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept **entrusting** Himself to Him who judges righteously”*

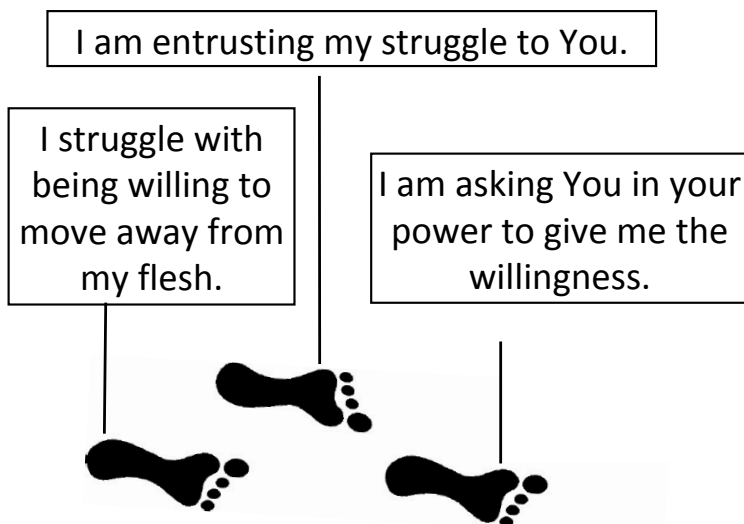
Just as Jesus kept entrusting Himself to the Father in 1 Peter 2:23, we are to entrust/give over our struggle, unwillingness, etc. to God for Him to deal with.

The problem with many Christians is they are holding on to relational conflicts and circumstantial struggles that God never intended for them to carry. This results in ongoing pain, suffering, and heartache. God never intends for you to take ownership of your struggles. His desire is for you to entrust every struggle, every conflict, and every adverse circumstance to Him.

Why? Because He is the only One who can truly deal with your struggles.

A frequent example I use to illustrate this point involves my favorite Mexican restaurant. When the server brings my food, she is wearing oven mitts and warning me my plate is hot. But one day I forgot and grabbed the plate and instantly felt pain. Imagine this hot plate represents every internal and external conflict you are experiencing. What if you hold on to the plate? You will continue to experience the pain and misery that goes along with that conflict. The point is you must treat every struggle or conflict like that hot plate. God does not want you to hold on to it. He wants you to **entrust** it to Him to resolve.

That being said, let's look at an example of what it looks like to engage God concerning your unwillingness to move away from living in the flesh.



Through these steps of faith you are acknowledging to God, in humility, that you are unwilling to move away from living from your flesh. You are “entrusting” that struggle to Him and trusting Him by faith to transform you and to give you the willingness to do so.

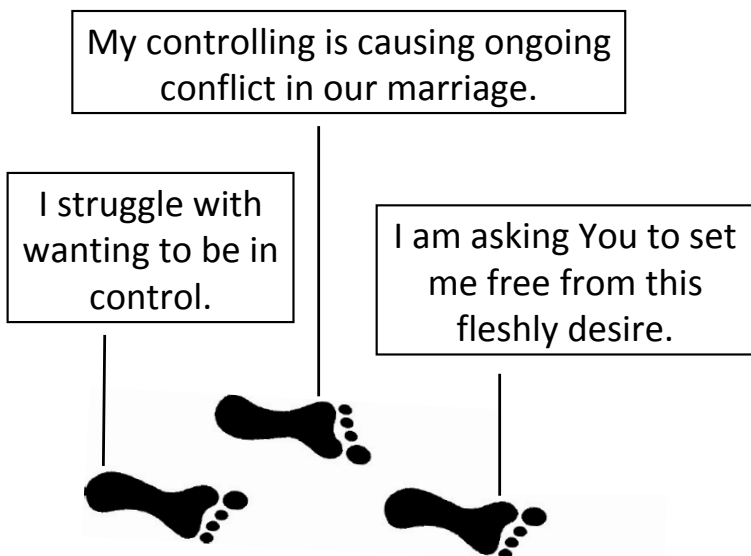
What if you hold onto that struggle instead of entrusting it to God?

It will produce DEATH in your marriage and will INCREASE your conflict.

2. Engaging God to set you FREE from your flesh.

*“It was for **freedom** that **Christ set us free**; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.” Galatians 5:1*

Our flesh and resultant fleshly behaviors have a grip on our lives. The longer we live from our fleshly behaviors the stronger the grip they have on our lives and the greater conflict they create. God wants to see you free from those behaviors so let’s look at an example of what that looks like.



What your acknowledging from these steps of faith is that you can't set yourself free from this fleshly behavior. By faith, you are seeking God and His power to set you free.

3. Engaging God to be set FREE from your spouse's fleshly behaviors.

Let's assume that your spouse continues to reject you. What is a key Christ-like attitude that you can draw on when that happens? Your acceptance in Christ. Here is a key truth when your spouse is exhibiting fleshly behaviors towards you.

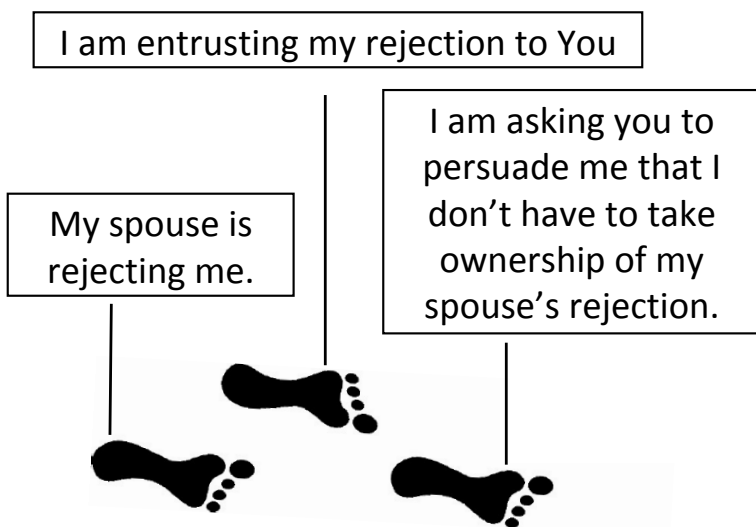
In God's strength and power, you do NOT have to take OWNERSHIP of your spouse's fleshly behavior.

Refer back to the rejection cycle on page 15. How could the cycle be averted? What if you were being

rejected by your spouse but you chose to not take ownership of their rejection. Answer: There would be no need to reject back. This is a very crucial truth because if you didn't take ownership of your spouse's flesh you could stay in the Spirit and not get in the flesh yourself. We see this in Galatians 5:16.

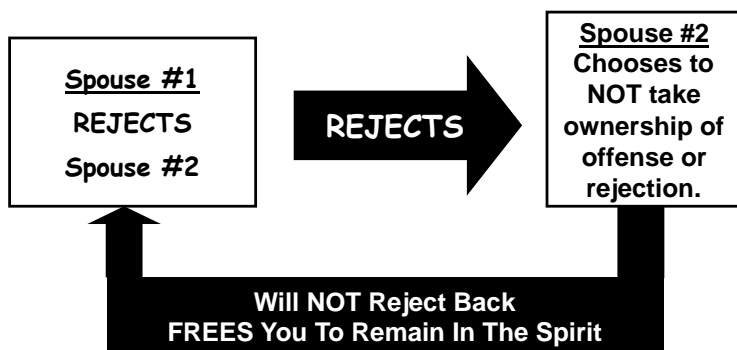
“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will NOT carry out the desire of the flesh.” Galatians 5:16

Let's take steps of faith using the example of rejection.



Now look at the rejection cycle if you don't take ownership of your spouse's rejection.

Not Taking Ownership Of Rejection

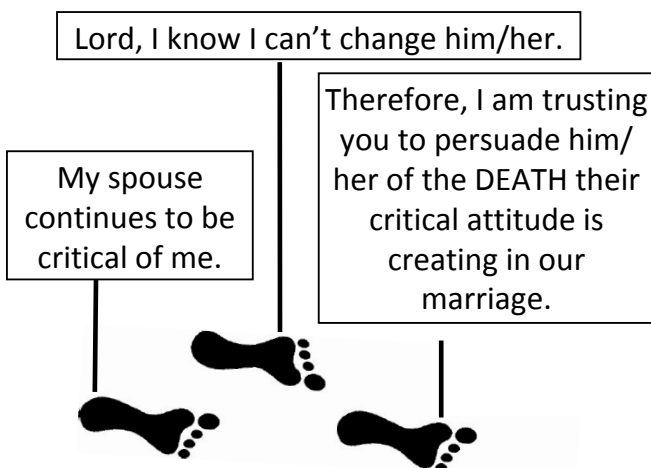


Take a good look at this diagram. If you choose not to take ownership of your spouse's rejection you will not feel the need to reject your spouse. Therefore, you stay in the Spirit and you don't go to your flesh. (Galatians 5:16) That sounds like freedom to me.

How much marital conflict do you think would be averted if you didn't take ownership of your spouse's flesh?

4. Pray for God to move your spouse away from living from their flesh.

What if your spouse wants to keep living out of his/her flesh? You can't persuade them to not do so but God can. Therefore, seek God in His power to show your spouse the "death" their flesh is causing in them personally as well as in your marriage. Here is an example:



Depending on how strong a grip your spouse's flesh has on them will dictate how long it may take the Lord to set them free from it.

Exercise: Concerning the areas of your marriage listed below, begin taking steps of faith in seeking God to set you free from the fleshly behaviors that you struggle with in these areas.

Communication

Intimacy – Emotional and sexual

Finances

Needs/Desires

Children – discipline, values, training

In-laws or extended family members

Conflict

Spiritual issues

5. Be the first one to forgive

How would it change your marriage if you were the first one to forgive after a conflict. Let's look at some key truths about forgiveness.

Truth# 1 - In The MIDST Of Your Sin God Forgave You.

"And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions"
Colossians 2:13

God did not wait for us to confess and repent of our sins before we were forgiven. How does this apply to your marriage?

You do NOT have to wait for your spouse to repent BEFORE you forgive him or her.

Truth #2 - Since God Forgave You, He NO Longer Holds Any Sin Against You.

"But God, being rich in mercy because of His great love with which he loved us made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved) and raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." Ephesians 2:4-5

Ensure that you NEVER have any offenses in your OFFENSE box. Forgive IMMEDIATELY when offended.

Truth #3 - You Have NO Excuse For Holding An Offense Against Your Spouse.

***"He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west."** Psalm 103:12*

*"I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and **remembers your sins no more**." Isaiah 43:25*

When we read the passages above, we can see that God has not only removed our sins, but He also no longer remembers them. In other words, He no longer holds the offense against us. If He no longer holds the offense against us, doesn't it stand to reason that we are to get rid of all offenses against our spouse? Paul answers this question in Ephesians 4:31-32:

Truth #4 - When God Forgives, Forgiveness Is COMPLETE.



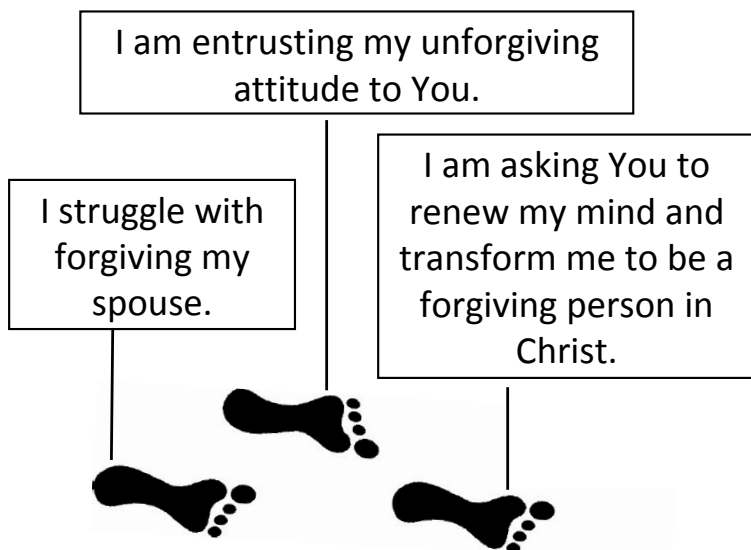
***"It is finished."** John 19:30*

When Jesus said on the cross "It is finished," He was saying, "I have paid everything in full." Therefore, when you forgive you must TOTALLY

forgive your spouse.

Steps Of Faith Concerning Forgiveness

In the diagram on the following page, you will see an example of how you can engage God to move you from unforgiveness to forgiveness.



What Are The RESULTS of Forgiveness?

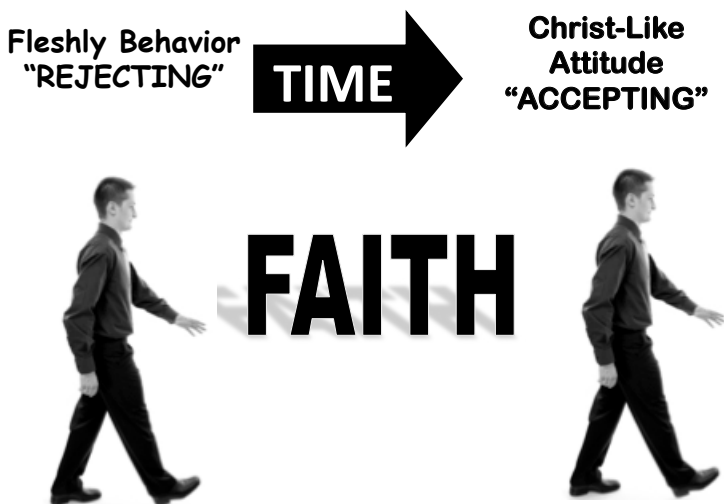
1. First and foremost it **RESTORES** Christ's life flowing through you and your spouse.
2. Forgiveness is the first step in **RESOLVING** your conflict.
3. Forgiveness allows you the **FREEDOM** to unconditionally love and accept your spouse.

Key Truths About The Walk Of Faith

1. **You may have to take SEVERAL steps of faith to be transformed**

*"for we **walk by faith**, not by sight."*
2 Corinthians 5:7

2 Corinthians 5:7 tells us that it is a walk of faith. This means that it will take several steps of faith over a period time to move from living from your fleshly behaviors to living from Christ-like attitudes. The problem is that we want change and we want it now. However, depending on the grip of your fleshly behaviors will determine how long it will take you to be transformed.



Transforming Fleshly Behaviors Into Christ-Like Attitudes

The key is to continue taking steps of faith until you experience freedom and transformation.

2. The process of transformation s SUPERNATURAL

A word that is crucial to understand concerning God's work in our lives is the word "supernatural." The reason that it is so important to understand the word "supernatural" is because everything that God accomplishes in your life is a "supernatural" work.

Therefore, before we go any further let me define a “supernatural” work:

A “SUPERNATURAL” WORK

is a work that God accomplishes in and through us as we walk by faith for which there is NO natural or man-made explanation.

3. It is a walk of faith NOT feeling.

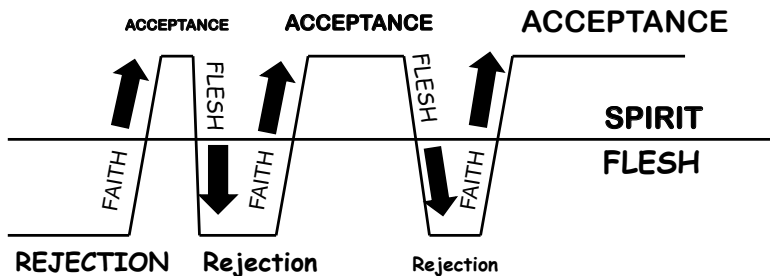
Supernatural also means that God is working in you as you walk by faith even though you may not be experiencing the change. Therefore, as you take steps of faith to be transformed early on you may not feel or experience change. However, you can know by faith that God is working even though you cannot feel or experience it. Here is a key truth to remember.

You will have to “FAITH” it for some time before you EXPERIENCE the Christ-like attitudes that you are wanting to experience

4. You will fail many times in the process but the key is to KEEP WALKING by faith.

Look at the illustration on the following page.

Moving From The Flesh To Christ-Likeness



Let's assume you struggle with rejecting your spouse. When you first start out in the walk of faith, you have logged more time in the flesh than in the Spirit. Therefore, when you take those initial steps of faith, you will likely go above "the Line" for only a short time and walk in Christ's acceptance. But, then you will find yourself choosing to walk in the flesh again and drop below "the Line" and reject your spouse again.

As you continue walking by faith, you will find yourself staying above "the Line" longer and staying below "the Line" a shorter amount of time. Why? It is because you are "seeing" the death of your rejection sooner, and you are beginning to experience Christ's acceptance. It is a process, but, over time, the Spirit will replace your rejecting behavior with a Christ-like attitude of acceptance.

5. The good news is that eventually you will EXPERIENCE freedom and transformation.

I can bear witness in my and my wife that as we took steps of faith, over time, God set me free from my controlling, my anger, and my manipulative behavior. I failed many times in the process but I kept taking steps of faith until the Lord set me free.

Engaging God: Begin taking steps of faith for God to transform your fleshly behavior. Ask Him to encourage you in this process should you find yourself wanting to give up. God will be your patience and perseverance if you ask and trust Him by faith to act. The key is to keep walking in spite of failing or not feeling the changes along the way. Like it says in Matthew 7 below, keep walking in spite of the resistance from your flesh that you face along the way.

“Ask and keep on asking and it will be given to you; seek and keep on seeking and you will find; knock and keep on knocking and the door will be opened to you.

For everyone who keeps on asking receives, and he who keeps on seeking finds, and to him who keeps on knocking, it will be opened. Matthew 7:7-8 (AMP)

The Signs of Spiritual Resolution of Your Conflict

- 1. Your desire and willingness will grow to live from the Spirit rather than your flesh.**
- 2. You will recognize the “death” your flesh is causing in your marriage more quickly.**
- 3. Your desire to move away from conflict will grow.**
- 4. You will be more willing to seek to love your spouse than get in conflict with them.**

CHAPTER SIX

Is Marriage More Than Resolving Conflict?

God's Ultimate Objective

What we need to understand is that God's ultimate objective is not just to resolve your conflict. As we said earlier, God wants to transform you to live from Christ-like attitudes. As a result, you will experience a Christ-centered marriage. We see this in Philippians 2:5

*“Have this **attitude** in yourselves which was also in **Christ Jesus**.” Philippians 2:5*

Study this diagram for a moment.. Above the line are your Christ-like attitudes. Below the line are your fleshly behaviors that create conflict in your marriage. Where do you want to live?

Unconditional Love
Secure
Forgiving
Compassionate
Adequate
Sacrificial
Free
Joyful

Righteous
Acceptable
Fearless
Discerning
Thankful
Sufficient
Victorious
Peaceful

Humble
Patient
Complete
Wise
Confident
Selfless
Strong
Good

THE SPIRIT = Christ-Like Attitudes

THE FLESH = Fleshly Behaviors

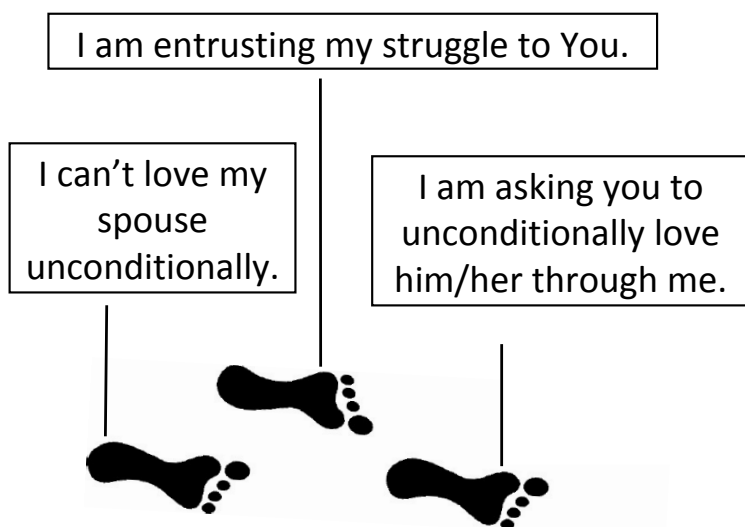
Fear, frustration, controlling,
unforgiveness, impatience, selfishness,
bitterness, pride, critical, judgmental,
anger, guilt, rejection, blame



Where do you want you and your spouse to live? Above or below the line? I trust your answer is ABOVE the line. This is where God wants to take you if you will depend on Him to do so. When I saw this diagram for the first time I realized where God can take me and what I can experience. Let me share with you some examples of what that looked like for me.

1. Becoming an unconditional lover in Christ

I struggled with loving my wife unconditionally. (Don't you?) I could not produce Christ's unconditional love so I began to seek the Lord to unconditionally love her through me. Here are some steps of faith that I took.



As I continued to take these steps of faith, something began to change. I found myself loving her more and more without conditions. I realized it was Christ loving her through me. Here is a key truth

The good news is that as you take steps of faith and continue walking dependent on God, He will transform you to live more and more above the line.

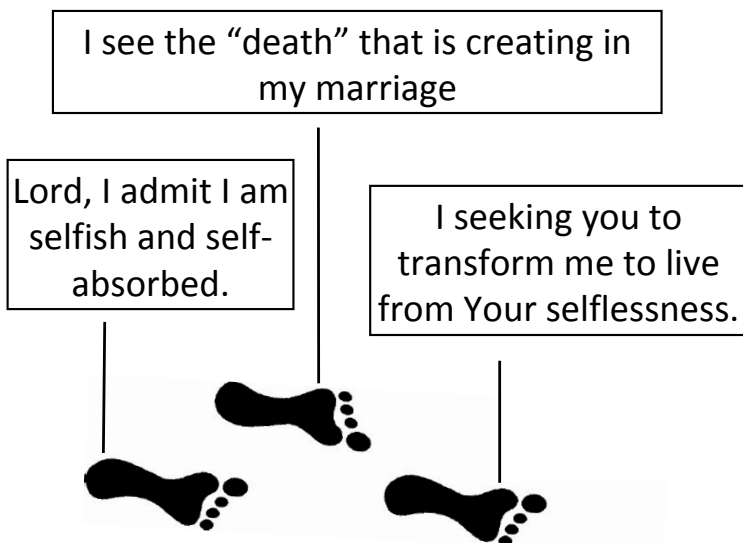
***God never does a work **THROUGH** you that
He doesn't do **IN** you.***

By this I mean that Christ was not only loving my wife through me, He was transforming me to become an unconditional lover. Can you imagine how that changed our marriage? The supernatural part was that she became more spiritually attractive to me and vice versa. As we both took these steps of faith, we became more and more unconditional lovers.

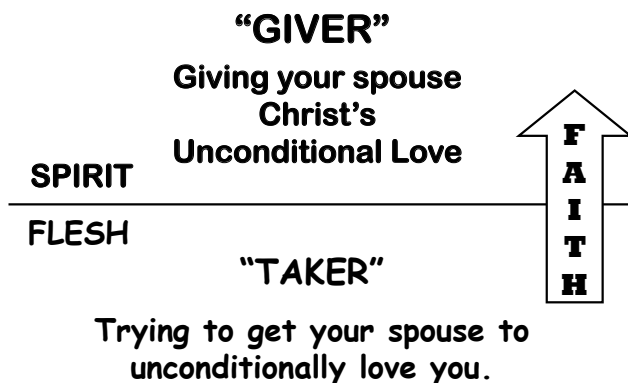
2. Becoming more selfless and sacrificial

Think about this question for a moment. How would it change your conflict and your marriage if you were both totally selfless and sacrificial? I believe the answer is: radically. I was a self-absorbed, totally focused on me person.

That created all kinds of problems in our marriage. As God began to show me the “death” my self-absorption was causing, I began seeking him to transform me to be selfless and sacrificial. On the following page are steps of faith I took until God began to transform me in moving from selfishness to selflessness.



As I continued to take steps of faith I found myself moving from being a “taker” to becoming a “giver.” Which do you think God wants you to be: a “taker” or a “giver?” For example, instead of “taking” by getting my wife to unconditionally love me, I began “giving” her Christ’s unconditional love. The deeper the Spirit worked in my heart the more I became a giver rather than a taker. Just this alone made major changes in our marriage and greatly reduced our conflict. The diagram below illustrates this.



As You Are Being Transformed Into Christ-Likeness God Will Transform Every Area of Your Marriage

What we began to witness in our marriage as God was transforming us is:

- Christ's love replaced our desire to fight.
- We pray more for each other's transformation.
- We look for ways to selfless and sacrificial.
- We began to hate when we got into conflict.
- More quickly we would forgive and repent when it came to our conflict.
- We are seeking God's solutions to our areas of disagreement or conflict.
- Our love is growing ever deeper.

Final Word

Transformation is a life-long process but it is worth it. If it were not for understanding that only God can transform us by a moment-by-moment dependence on Him as the Source, we would have eventually gotten a divorce.

However, by God's grace, He revealed to us what I am sharing with you now that Christ and Christ alone is the Source to transform you to live from Christ-likeness. The result for us is that we are experiencing a growing harmony, intimacy, and oneness.

My prayer for you is that you will seek God, and God alone to transform your marriage. If you do, I can promise that you will experience a marriage that will far exceed your desires and expectations. It will be a marriage that continues to grow in your love for one

And it will be a marriage where you will seek a moment by moment intimate relationship with God.

My wife and I proclaim this verse to others when it comes to transforming our marriage.

“Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us.” Ephesians 3:20

Do You Want To Learn More?

If you have been encouraged by what you have read and want to know more, my suggested next step for you is to go through a curriculum I have written called *The Key To A Christ-Centered Marriage*.

It is designed for you to learn more about the truths of experiencing a Christ-centered marriage and how to practically apply them to your life. In this curriculum,

When you go to our website (www.christislifeministries.com), you may either download *The Key To A Christ-Centered Marriage* for free or purchase a written copy of it which will be mailed to you. There are also video lessons on the website that go with this study that you can either watch for free or purchase on DVD.

I hope you will take advantage of this study and seek the Lord for a deeper understanding of what it means to experience a Christ-centered marriage.

FLESHLY BEHAVIORS

Be self-absorbed

become overly introspective

feel sorry for myself get depressed beat up on myself play the role of victim/martyr

focus on my suffering to get

attention and sympathy be jealous of another's success and happiness

Withdraw (isolate myself) be aloof (pull away) distance myself from others

avoid others (be a loner) go into a shell become unapproachable give them the silent treatment

refuse to communicate

Escape (pain/pressure) by using:

promiscuity carousing drugs and alcohol talking staying busy school hobbies/games reading computers fantasy

television pornography

overeating work/career

movies sleep religion

sex

Be anxious (worry and fret) be fearful (apprehensive) lack peace and rest become paralyzed (numb) be paranoid (overly suspicious)

refuse to see the positive assume the worst

Seek guidance from: astrology/horoscopes, fortune telling and/or the occult

Be self-disciplined (self-reliant)

base acceptance of self and others on performance become a perfectionist

try hard so as not to fail fear making mistakes be legalistic:

live "by the book" feel obligated (have to,

should, ought to) be too hard on myself/others set unrealistic standards for myself/others

Become obsessed with: accomplishments

recognition/status acquiring material things what others think of me how I look physically my physical health the past (especially past hurts and failures) a devotion to a cause structure, order and

Stay in control through: blackmail (making threats) manipulation (use of guilt, pity,

silence, flattery, etc.) coercion (physical threats) profanity (swearing) passivity (playing helpless) not eating

(anorexia/bulimia)

Lack compassion, gentleness understanding, kindness, love,
become defensive

Be self-righteous (self-justifying)

make excuses (rationalize) cover up and hide mistakes have
to prove my point assume I am never the problem

blame someone or something else as the problem

regulations

Become dominant

be dictatorial (bossy) be demanding (pushy)

be overbearing (controlling) intimidate others refuse to give
in

avoid taking responsibility for failure or problems

have difficulty: apologizing, admitting I was wrong,

asking for forgiveness, asking for help, and/or expressing
gratitude have a superior attitude

(saying in effect): "I know what is best "My way is the right
way"

Be critical (judgmental) find fault with others,

myself and everything around me nit-pick things to death be

prejudiced (intolerant) complain a lot (nothing is ever good enough)

Be self-assured (self- confident)

- depend on myself instead of God or others

become proud (haughty)

be egocentric brag (be boastful) become arrogant (cocky)
become conceited (smug)

Come across as insensitive,

uncaring, unsympathetic, indifferent or unconcerned

Be complacent (nonchalant) say things like, "it's okay" or "it doesn't matter."

Be pessimistic (negative) lack confidence and optimism be skeptical (suspicious) distrust others, myself, God, church and/or government expect the worst never pleased with self or others never be satisfied or content

Become hostile

be unfriendly be sarcastic (caustic) be cynical (contemptuous) be hateful (mean-spirited) be cruel (malicious) have a quick temper rant and rave to vent my anger be physically abusive be verbally abusive break things

Hold a grudge (be resentful) become moody (sulk)

harbor bitterness be unforgiving

keep a scorecard of offenses try to get even (seek revenge)

want others to fail or get hurt punish myself or others

Fight unfair

misrepresent the situation gossip (talk behind their back)

engage in passive-aggressive behavior: use humor to hide real feelings, forget things, refuse to communicate, be late, procrastinate, etc.)

Be self-depreciating

assume I am always the problem become overly apologetic be too hard on myself uncomfortable with success have difficulty receiving: love, compliments, forgiveness

be unable to forgive myself

Challenge others

resist authority be uncooperative (inflexible) be unteachable (close-minded) cause dissention (strife) be irritating (aggravate others) be argumentative be stubborn (unyielding) be unreasonable

Deny reality

ignore problems and hope they will go away

deny anything is bad or wrong be subjective deceive others and myself lie to self and others exaggerate (overstate

matters) play games to hide real intent

Put up a front

hide what I really think pretend try to impress others and/or
get attention fake it (act like I know something) be
pretentious (phony, unreal)

be superficial (never let anyone get too close)

Be passive (lack initiative) quit too easily (give up) don't take
chances wait for someone to tell me how to think and what to
do

vacillate (be too changeable) be indecisive avoid failure at all
costs procrastinate (put things off) be irresponsible
(unreliable) be lazy (apathetic, lethargic)

Be tense ("on guard") find it hard to relax be restless become
impatient

be easily agitated

Become emotionally insulated

avoid intimacy have difficulty expressing feelings and
opinions

suppress (stuff) emotions be inhibited (restrained)

Live by my feelings

believe that truth is what I feel be too sensitive to criticism

be hypersensitive be touchy (irritable) be controlled by fear, anger, doubts and insecurities automatically read in rejection

Be a pleaser (be nice) try to keep everyone happy avoid conflict/keep the peace say what I think others want overly submissive have difficulty saying "no" can't stand up for myself afraid to disappoint others give in to others too easily

Be a caretaker (rescuer) be overprotective be overly responsible become too involved with other's affairs/concerns be possessive (too invested) talk too much and listen poorly make decisions for others

Be too serious (intense) be overly analytical not be able to have fun **lack joy or life**

Resolving Marital Conflict (In Christ)

There is no way to escape conflict in marriage. It is inevitable. However, is there a way to resolve that conflict? If it is not resolved then it can lead to more conflict, emotional separation, physical separation, and eventually divorce. Therefore this booklet focuses on answering the following questions:

- ∞ What is the source of all marital conflict?
- ∞ What are the results of that conflict?
- ∞ Who is going to be the source to resolve it?
- ∞ How does God transform your marriage so that conflict either ceases in some areas or is reduced?
- ∞ How does living a Christ-centered marriage reduce marital conflict?

We will be looking at biblical truths that will answer these and other questions. The good news is that there is a way out of marital conflict. The key question we will be answering is: Who is going to be the way out?



Bill Loveless is the director of Christ Is Life Ministries (CILM). CILM is a non-profit, non-denominational ministry that focuses on discipleship. We teach Christians that Christ is our only Source for living the Christian life and what it looks like to be transformed into Christ-likeness.

For further information, see the ministry website at: www.christislifeministries.com

