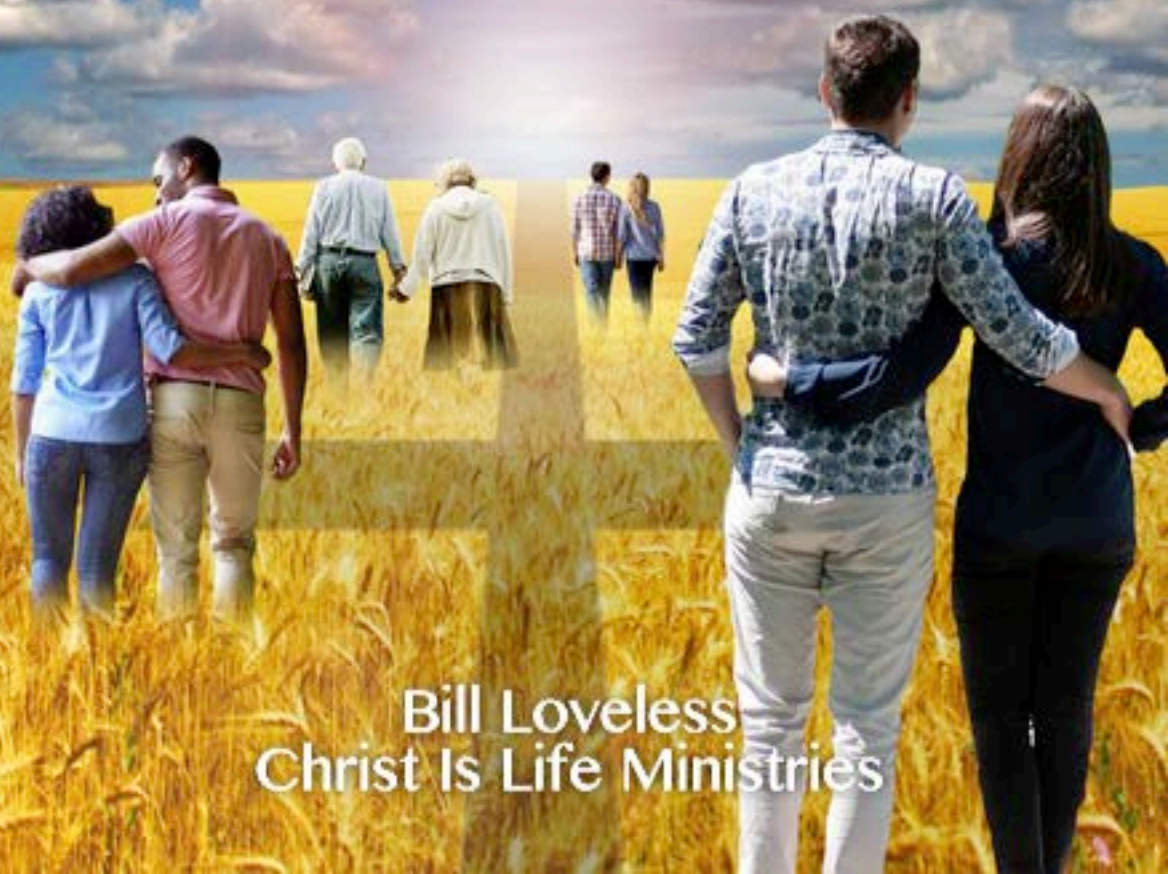


Your Marriage

(Christian? Or Christ-Centered?)



Bill Loveless
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Your Marriage

**(Christian? Or
Christ-Centered?)**

**Bill Loveless
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CHAPTER ONE

Christian? Or Christ-Centered?

Introduction

I have discipled many married couples over the last 16 years in ministry. I realized, over those years, that many Christian couples struggled in their marriages because they were missing some key Biblical truths about the Christian life and how it ties into their marriages.

In this booklet, I will touch on some truths I believe will transform your marriage into a Christ-centered one, not just a Christian marriage. Before we look at the difference between the two, let me ask you the following question:

Do You Want Your Marriage IMPROVED or TRANSFORMED?

I ask this question for two reasons. First, you may have only thought about your marriage in the context of being improved rather than being transformed. Second, you may think improvement and transformation mean the same thing. Let me share with you how I define the difference between the two.

Improved Marriage – You and your spouse, using your own intellect, self-discipline, ability, and willpower, try to improve or change your marriage

As you probably know (and may have read), there are many Christian books on marriage (as well as, marriage seminars, videos and studies) that give you

tips and techniques on how to improve your marriage. They assert that if you apply their particular techniques your marriage will improve. In light of this, I have a question: Couldn't a non-Christian read the same books and using their own ability and willpower improve their marriages as well? If so, what differentiates Christian "self-help" marriage techniques from those that are not Christian?

Christian marriage improvement materials that are no different in their techniques from secular self-help marriage materials and can apply equally to Christians or non-Christians, leave out a very critical component for the success of the Christian marriage: Christ! In light of this truth, how does an improved marriage differ from a transformed marriage?

Transformed marriage – A supernatural work of the Holy Spirit to transform you and your spouse to experience God's design, His promises, and His truths concerning marriage.

All the couples I have met with discovered they wanted more than just improvement for their marriages. They wanted (and needed) their marriages to be transformed. How about you? Look at one of God's key promises of transformation in Romans 12:2:

***"Be not conformed to this world, but be
TRANSFORMED by the renewing of your mind...."***

The promise in Romans 12:2 for you and your spouse as Christians is that God will transform both you and your spouse, as well as your marriage. The truth is God is **not** in the marriage "remodeling" business. He wants

to transform your marriage as opposed to just improving it. Think about this statement:

Without God's transformation from the INSIDE out, Christian couples will NEVER be able to experience God's design for a CHRIST-CENTERED marriage and to experience the HAPPINESS and FULFILLMENT that they so desire.

Accordingly, the focus of this study will be on your and your spouse's internal spiritual transformation. Whether you are newly married or have been married for a number of years, God is willing and able to use His truths to take your marriage to levels exceeding your expectations.

Therefore, as we take a look at the following three classifications of marriage, I want you to determine which one most resembles yours.

Three Kinds of Marriages

In my years of ministry and marriage discipleship, I have found that marriages among Christians usually fall into three 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.**
- **Ongoing conflict resulting from needs and expectations not being met.**

- **Fleshly behaviors getting worse and creating more conflict.**
- **No internal spiritual transformation.**
- **Trying and failing to cope with one another's fleshly behaviors.**
- **Moving toward emotional separation, physical separation, or divorce.**

Before I go to the next category of marriage, let me define what I mean by the word “cope.”

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.

Some examples of coping are being controlling, people-pleasing, and/or manipulative.

Category 2 - A CHRISTIAN Marriage

I define a Christian marriage as one where both spouses are Christians. It is a couple who may be trying 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 trying to fix or change each other and each other's fleshly behaviors without success.**
- **There is more “covert” conflict than “overt” conflict in the marriage. (Covert conflict is conflict that doesn't get above the surface but has not 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.
- A couple is not experiencing increasing harmony, intimacy, and oneness in their marriage.
- A couple has learned to cope with one another's fleshly behaviors.

Category 3 – A Christ-Centered Marriage

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

- No longer desiring to cope.
- Experiencing victory and freedom from fleshly behaviors.
- Each spouse is becoming more selfless and other-focused.
- Each spouse's needs are being met in Christ.
- There is resolution to overt and covert conflict.
- Continually moving into a deeper experience of unconditional love, oneness, intimacy, and harmony with each other and with God.
- Both spouses are being transformed into Christ-likeness.

Which of these three marriages most characterizes your marriage? If you are experiencing a troubled or Christian marriage, would you like to experience a Christ-centered marriage?

What Did You and Your Spouse Bring into the Marriage?

When Paige and I got married, we had no idea what we were getting into when we said, “I do.” What I mean by this is we had no idea we were bringing “baggage” into the marriage. What do I mean by “baggage?” Here are five examples of baggage that we brought into our marriage:

- We had FALSE beliefs about marriage, about relationships, and even about living the Christian life.
- We had NEEDS that needed to be met (such as unconditional love, acceptance, respect, value/worth, security) that we thought the other would meet.
- We both had UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS about what marriage should look like and how we should function as husband and wife.
- We both brought our FLESHLY BEHAVIORS into the marriage that created ONGOING conflict.
- Finally, we brought our past WOUNDEDNESS caused by our parents, and others into the marriage.

I believe the vast majority of Christian couples bring similar baggage into their marriages. Imagine each of you coming to the altar dragging all your baggage with you. The pastor says, “Before you say, ‘I do,’ I want you to open each other’s baggage so you know what you both are bringing into the marriage.” As I look back on that day and knowing what I know now, I may have been tempted to say, “Let me think about this a little while longer.” I don’t believe any of us really knew what we were getting into when we got married. As a result of this baggage, on some level, we all struggle in our marriages.

For some of you going through this study, your baggage has so compounded itself that your marriage is in real trouble. That is what happened to Paige and me. First of all, we didn't realize what baggage we brought into the marriage, and second, we didn't realize our baggage was the source of our ongoing conflict.

CHAPTER TWO

The Foundation For A Christ-Centered Marriage

WHO Is the Foundation For A Christ-Centered Marriage?

*“For no one can lay any **foundation** other than the one already laid, which is **Jesus Christ**.” 1 Corinthians 3:11*

Being a former builder, I know the importance of constructing the proper foundation. If you don't have a good foundation, there is no way you can build on it. It is the same way in living the Christian life and experiencing a Christ-centered marriage. So what is the foundation for building a Christ-centered marriage?

***The FOUNDATION for experiencing a
Christ-centered marriage is understanding
and living “THE” Christian life.***

Let me further explain what I mean by “THE” Christian life.

Is “THE” Christian Life a WHAT or a WHO?

I ask this question because for so many years I was told the Christian life is all about what I needed to do to live the Christian life. The following are examples of what I was told to do:

1. Take what I learn from the Bible and to go out and do it.
2. Stop sinning.

3. Keep God's rules and commands.
4. Change myself with God's help.
5. Become more righteous.
6. Transform my fleshly behavior into godly behavior.

The problem was the more I tried, the more I failed to accomplish any of these things. After 30 years of trying and failing, I was about to give up on my Christian life. However, the Lord brought a speaker to our church one day and the speaker said this:

"God never intended for you to live THE Life that only Christ can live in and through you."

When the speaker used the term "THE" Life, I had no idea what he was talking about. I realized that the form of the Christian life I was taught to live was not working for me personally, for our marriage and for me as a Christian business owner. Why wasn't it working? I had missed the key truth about living the Christian life and that was negatively impacting my marriage. The key truth is this:

THE Christian life is NOT about WHAT are we to do for God.

Rather, THE Christian life is a WHO.

WHO Is THE Christian Life?

Jesus says in John 14:6 and John 11:25:

"...I AM the way, the truth, and THE LIFE..."
John 14:6

“...I AM the resurrection and THE LIFE.”
John 11:25

What is Jesus saying in these two passages? It is clear Jesus is saying that He Himself is **THE** Life. What does He mean when He says He is **THE** Life?

“THE” Christian Life is a PERSON:

It is Christ HIMSELF!

Have you understood before now that Christ Himself is THE Christian life? Think about this for a moment. If “THE” Christian life is a Person, does that mean “THE” Christian life is not about completing a checklist, trying to keep a set of rules, trying to keep from sinning, or trying to do your best to live for God? The answer is “yes.” If Christ is THE Life, then THE Christian life is not a life that we can produce. It is a life only Christ can produce.

What Paul Says About Jesus Being THE Life

Paul confirms this truth in Philippians 1:21:

“For me, to live IS Christ....”

What Paul is saying is THE Christian life is Christ.

Paul took the truth of Christ as “THE” Life to a more personal level when he said in Colossians 3:4:

“...Christ who is YOUR life...”

What is Paul saying in this verse? He is saying the life of Christ is more than the eternal life He gave you at

salvation. He is saying Christ is **your** life every moment of every day.

Let me ask you a question. How many people have lived a perfect Christian life?

***There is only ONE Person who truly lived “THE”
PERFECT Christian life, and that is Christ HIMSELF.***

Do you agree with this statement? If this is true, what makes us think we can, in our own strength and ability, live a perfect Christian life? The truth is we can't. Therefore, Christ put His life in us to live THE Christian life in and through us that we alone could never live.

What Does It Mean That Christ IS Your Life?

The next question you may be asking is: “What does it mean that Christ is my life?” I believe God sums up the meaning in 1 Corinthians 1:30a (RSV):

“He is the SOURCE of your life in Christ Jesus....”

God gives us the answer in the first part of the verse when He says He is the SOURCE of 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, as I was, that they are to be their own source for living the Christian life with God's help. You can see this is a lie because there is only ONE true Source from which to live the Christian life: Christ Himself.

The truth is that CHRIST, NOT you, is the only SOURCE from which to live THE Christian life.

Look at two other verses that reveal Christ is your only 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

You may be wondering what it means practically that God is your Source. Let me give you two examples.

1. Christ Is Your Source to Meet Your NEEDS.

We all have needs, especially in our marriage relationships. Philippians 4:19 tells us Christ is the Source and supply to meet our needs.

"And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus."

Christ as your need-meeter will meet your need for:

Unconditional love	Victory	Worth
Acceptance	Faith	Freedom
Patience	Strength	Peace
Power	Forgiveness	Understanding
Security	Fearlessness	Wisdom
Discernment	Adequacy	Humility
Christ-confidence	Boldness	Righteousness
Selflessness	Rest	Compassion
Courage	Hope	Christ-control

Are there needs from this list that you feel are not being met in your marriage? Is it possible Christ is the only One who can truly meet the needs you may be trying in vain to get met from your spouse?

2. Christ Is Your Source to Make ALL His Promises an EXPERIENTIAL Reality in Your life.

As part of Christ's being your Source, He will make His promises an experiential reality in your life. Let's look at four of those promises:

- **Promise of VICTORY** – God will give you experiential victory over the power of sin, the flesh, the world, and the power of Satan.

*“... but thanks be to God, who gives us the **victory** through our Lord Jesus Christ.” 1 Corinthians 15:57*

- **Promise of FREEDOM** – God will set you free from your false beliefs, your defeating sin patterns, and your ongoing inner struggles.

*“So Christ has really set us **free**. Now make sure that you stay free, and don't get tied up again in slavery to the law.” Galatians 5:1*

- **Promise to HEAL** - God will heal you of your past or present woundedness.

*“He **heals** the broken-hearted and binds up their wounds.” Psalms 147:3*

A Final KEY Promise Concerning Your Marriage

I believe the greatest promise concerning your marriage is this:

Being CONFORMED to the image of Christ.

*“For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become **conformed to the image of His Son...**”*

Romans 8:29

*“My children, with whom I am again in labor until **Christ is formed in you.**” Galatians 4:19*

Being conformed to the image of Christ and Christ being formed in you means that you and your spouse will THINK, FEEL, CHOOSE, BELIEVE and BEHAVE like CHRIST.

How would it change your marriage if you both were thinking, feeling, choosing, believing and behaving like Christ? We will explore what this looks like practically in Chapter Five.

These are just a few of the promises for you as a Christian as you let Christ live His life in you.

Are the above promises an experiential reality in your life and in your marriage? Are you experiencing God's promises of freedom, victory, healing, and transformation? If not, would you like to experience them?

Have you tried to be the source to meet your own needs or to experience God's promises? If so, how is that working for you? If we are honest with ourselves, we would have to say it is really not working.

The truth is if we try to be our own source for living the Christian life, then we are destined to fail. If God is not the Source in our Christian walk (and in our marriage), 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.

Examples of What It Means for God to Be Your SOURCE in Your Marriage:

- He will resolve your marital conflict.
- He will give you victory over, and freedom from, your fleshly behaviors that are causing conflict in your marriage.
- He will transform you and your spouse to think, feel, choose, and behave like Christ.
- He will produce joy and fulfillment.
- He will grow your marriage to experience a deeper intimacy and oneness.
- He will produce a selfless attitude in you and your spouse.

In Addition to Christ's Life, You Contain ALL the POWER of God.

Since you have the fullness of God in you, 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*

1. 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!

2. 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.

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 in your own WILLPOWER.

What is it you are trying to do in your own willpower to change you, your spouse, and your marriage? Is what you are trying working?

What Are Some Things ONLY God's Power Can Accomplish in Your Marriage?

- a. RESTORES a hurting and a broken marriage.
- b. MOVES you and your spouse away from living in the flesh.
- c. TRANSFORMS your fleshly behavior into Christ-like behavior.
- d. PRODUCES a Christ-centered marriage.

Have you tried to do any of the above things using your own willpower? How well did that work for you? I think it is safe to say that apart from God's power we cannot accomplish any of those things. Could this be true because of what Jesus said in that last part of John 15:5:

*"Apart from Me you can do **nothing**."*

Now that we know what God's part is in producing a Christ-centered marriage, let's end this chapter by looking at what your and your spouse's parts are in experiencing a Christ-centered marriage.

You and Your Spouse's Parts in Living a Christ-Centered Marriage

Let's look at the words of Jesus in John 15:5:

*"**I [Jesus] am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit for apart from Me you can do **nothing**."** John 15:5*

Through this verse, Jesus is showing us how to live THE Christian life. He says in the first part of this verse that He is the vine and we are the branches. The first

thing we need to understand is the relationship between a physical branch and a physical vine.

The physical vine is the **source** for everything the physical branch needs to live and eventually bear fruit. We know this because when a branch is cut off from the vine what happens to the branch? It dies. Therefore, the physical branch lives as it receives what it needs from the vine.

How does this verse apply to you and me? Jesus is saying He is the spiritual vine and we are the spiritual branches. As the spiritual vine, Jesus is the Source to supply every one of our needs and to be the Source to make His promises to us an experiential reality.

The second part John 15:5 says, “*he who **abides** in Me [Jesus].*” The key word in this verse is “abide.” Let me give you some other words that mean to “abide”:

- Remains
- Draws from
- Lives from
- Participates with

Just for a moment, re-read the phrase “*he who abides in Me*” inserting each of the words from the list above for the word “abide” (e.g., “he who remains in me.”). All of these words can be summed up into one word and that word is “**dependence**.” Abiding in Christ can be summed up this way:

As spiritual branches, our part in living THE Christian Life is to live in total DEPENDENCE on Jesus, the spiritual vine.

Before we look at the verse further, let's talk more about the word "dependence."

Let's Take a Deeper Look at the Word DEPENDENCE

Let me give you a simple definition of "dependence" as it pertains to living THE Christian life.

DEPENDENCE is putting your confidence and trust in God to accomplish what He promises to accomplish in your life.

God promises to accomplish many things in your life. The key for Him to make those promises an experiential reality is for you to depend on Him (the Vine) to do what He promises to do in and through you (the branch). Let me give you examples of some of God's promises and practically what dependence looks like in order for you to experience those promises.

Example #1: As spouses, we want to be loved unconditionally. However, the only one who can love unconditionally is Christ. Therefore, instead of loving your spouse with your human love, draw on Christ to unconditionally love your spouse through you. Here is what a prayer for this may look like:

*"Lord, I can't produce unconditional love for my spouse. I am **depending on** You by faith to love my spouse through me with Christ's unconditional love."*

Remember: As you begin praying this prayer, it is unlikely you will feel Christ's love flowing through you, but know by

faith that it is happening. Remember as you walk by faith, God is truly supernaturally loving your spouse through you.

Challenge: Take this step of faith as many times as it comes to mind in the next thirty days, and take note of any changes in how you see your spouse and/or how your spouse responds to you. You will begin to see a supernatural change in your marriage relationship.

Example #2: Let's assume there are things your spouse does that you react to with impatience. At those moments, you can depend on (draw on) Christ's patience. Here is an example of what that may look like:

*"Lord, my spouse is trying my patience. I am **asking** You to BE my patience toward my spouse."*

Note: Do you see I am not saying, "Jesus, help ME be patient?" or "Jesus, give me patience." Jesus does not want to help YOU be patient nor does He dole out attributes apart from Himself. He is your patience.

In Chapter Five, we will look at more examples of what it looks like to live from Christ and experience His promises. In the next chapter, I want to look at some areas of conflict I see most often in marriage.

CHAPTER THREE

The Source of All Marital Conflict

Introduction

No matter how good our marriages are or how long we have been married, we all experience marital conflict. It may vary in length and intensity but no marriage escapes it. Why is there conflict? What is the source of it? This is what I want to discuss in this chapter. In the Chapter Four, we will look at how we practically depend on Christ to resolve our conflict.

The Source of ALL Conflict in Marriage

The source of ALL marital conflict is our FLESH.

This may seem like an oversimplification to you but I believe every conflict is based on our living from our flesh. You may already have a biblical understanding of the flesh. If you don't, let me define it.

THE FLESH

is man's desire to live life with HIMSELF as the source, INDEPENDENTLY OF or APART FROM God as his Source.

When we are living from ourselves as the source to live our lives (i.e., personally, in marriage, as a parent, etc.), we are living independently of God as our Source. God

calls this the flesh. Let's look at a few passages that refer to 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*

Before we go any further, let's take a deeper look at the flesh. Prior to salvation we had no choice but to depend on ourselves (our flesh) as the source for solving our problems and dealing with life because we did not have Christ as our Source. 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 upon ourselves, it reinforced our desire to be the source for life.

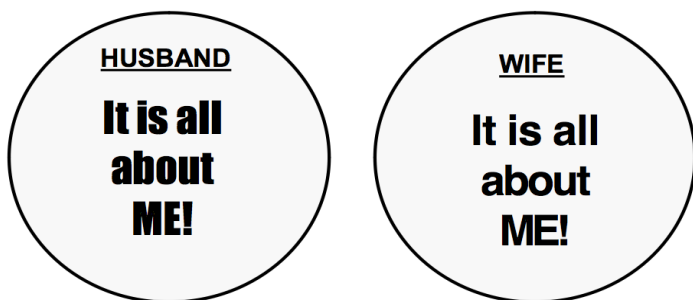
[**Note:** It is worth noting at this point that God gave every one of us IQs, talents, abilities, etc. However, God never intended for us to live from those talents and abilities **independently** of Him. As we talked about in the last chapter, our part is to participate with Christ. As we do, His life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

Even though you have trusted Christ for salvation and Christ is your Source, 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.

Another Way to Define the Flesh: It Is All About ME!

When I came into the marriage relationship, I did not realize I expected our marriage to be all about ME. My expectation was that Paige would be all about me. The problem is Paige came into the marriage with the same attitude. In other words, I came into marriage as the “lord” of my ring, and she came into 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.

“It’s All About Me” Syndrome

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

Another way of saying this is we were both “takers.” We were trying to “take” from one another by trying to get our needs and expectations met from one another.

What Does the Flesh Look Like in Marriage?

Living from the “**flesh**” in marriage means:

- **I** can be in control of me and my spouse.
- **I** can get my God-given needs (love, acceptance, respect, value, etc.) 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.

What is the key word in all these phrases? If you believe any of these statements are true for you, would you say you have been successful in accomplishing them?

What Is the OVERFLOW of Living From the Flesh?

**The OVERFLOW of living from the flesh is
FLESHLY BEHAVIORS.**

Here are some examples from Galatians 5:19-21a of fleshly behaviors:

*“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...”*

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, resentful, abusive, fearful, and critical.

Positive Flesh:

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

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

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.

Here are some common negative fleshly behaviors I have witnessed in marriages:

Rejecting	Controlling	Critical	Blaming
Frustrated	Angry	Manipulative	Unforgiving
Guilt	Shaming	Condemning	Uncaring
Judgmental	Insensitive	Resentment	People-pleaser
Envy	Jealousy	Selfishness	Self-righteous

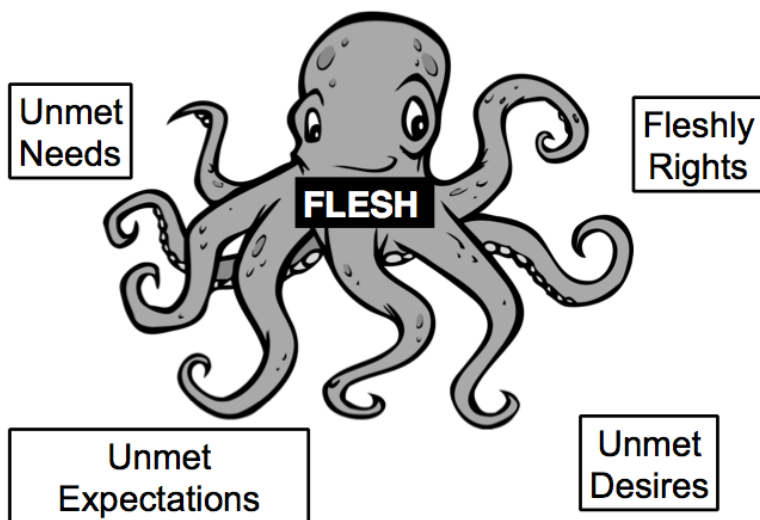
Deceit	Overbearing	Demanding	Passive
Fear	Insecurity	Inadequacy	Unworthiness

Can you identify some of the fleshly behaviors you are living from in your marriage?

What Are Some Sources in Marriage That Produce Fleshly Behaviors?

Let me give you a diagram to explain. We all have needs, desires, and expectations concerning our marriages. We also have fleshly rights. If we act out in the flesh in response to unmet needs, desires, expectations and fleshly rights, the result will be fleshly behaviors.

Sources Of Fleshly Behaviors In Marriage



Examples of Sources of Fleshly Behaviors

1. Unmet Needs

We are all hard-wired by God to have needs for such things as unconditional love, unconditional acceptance, value/worth, security, and respect. As a result, those needs have to be met. When I got married, I believed Paige was supposed to meet those needs. When she didn't meet them, I exhibited the fleshy behaviors of being frustrated, angry, and, over time, resentful.

During my years of discipling married couples, I have concluded that the number one source of conflict is unmet needs.

Are any of your needs not being met? Are they creating inner or external conflict in your marriage?

2. Unmet Desires

In addition to needs, you may have desires to have a fulfilling and happy Christian marriage. Such desires may include things like you and your spouse praying together, going to church together, or being in a small group Bible study together.

But what can result when those desires are not being met. You can become self-righteous, frustrated, critical or judgmental if your spouse is not meeting your desires.

Are any of your desires not being met? Are they creating inner or external conflict in your marriage?

3. Unmet Expectations

In addition to desires, we all bring expectations into marriage. Let me give you some examples:

- Expectations about the ways you want to be loved by your spouse.
- Expectations about how you are to be valued and accepted as a spouse.
- Expectations about how you should behave as a husband or wife.

What are the results of unmet expectations if you are living in the flesh? Fleshly behaviors such as frustration, controlling, anger, unworthiness, or unforgiveness can result.

Are any of your expectations not being met? Are they creating inner or external conflict in your marriage?

4. Fleshly Rights

We all come into marriage with fleshly rights. Let me define what I mean by fleshly rights.

FLESHLY RIGHTS are SELF-CENTERED, sinful DEMANDS toward your spouse that are produced by your FLESH.

Here are some examples of fleshly rights:

- I have the right to be in control.
- I have the right to be right.
- I have the right not to forgive.
- I have the right to change my spouse.
- I have the right to withhold sexual intimacy.

When your fleshly rights are not getting the desired result then you can exhibit fleshly behaviors of being critical, demanding, manipulative, or unforgiving.

What Are the Results of Unresolved Marital Conflict?

If your marital conflict is not spiritually resolved, this is where it can lead.



If you don't allow Christ to be your Source to resolve your marital conflict (or any conflict for that matter), then your conflict will continue and your fleshly behaviors will be reinforced. You may try to "cope" with one another's flesh but that will fail over time and produce at least an emotional separation. This can eventually lead to a physical separation or even a divorce.

Therefore, continuing to live from the flesh will negatively impact your marriage with potentially severe consequences. I hope you feel like Paul concerning his flesh.

*"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.*

I hope you have the same hatred for your flesh that God and Paul have because the ongoing problem is this:

*"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*

There is a non-stop, life-long battle between the flesh and the Holy Spirit. The good news is that God offers you, as a married couple, another option than living in the flesh: to live from the Spirit (i.e., living dependently on Christ).

In this next chapter will see how living from the Holy Spirit resolves marital conflict.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conflict Resolution IN Christ

Introduction

Let me start this chapter by asking you a question: If you and your spouse were both walking in moment by moment dependence on the Holy Spirit versus walking in 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.**”*

What Paul is saying is you can't walk in the flesh and the Spirit at the same time. It is either flesh or Spirit. If both of you are walking in the Spirit then you can be free of conflict. In yourselves, all you can do is cope or create more conflict. What we are going to learn is how to resolve conflict IN Christ. (i.e., through His life and power).

The Source of Conflict Resolution Is CHRIST

Look at a verse you may be familiar with:

*“I can do **all** things through **Christ...**” Philippians 4:13*

Another way of saying this is that Christ can do all things through me. Would all things include resolving your marital conflict? If you believe you are the source to resolve your conflict, look again at what Jesus says in the last part of John 15:5:

*“....apart from Me you can do **nothing.**”*

What does “nothing” mean as it relates to your marriage? “Nothing” as it pertains to your marriage means you cannot be the source to defeat your flesh, to resolve your conflict, or to produce a Christ-centered marriage. That said, let’s look at the four areas of conflict in the previous chapter and see some practical examples of what it looks like to resolve your conflict in Christ.

Conflict Resolution Concerning Your UNMET Needs

The key truth we need to understand about our God-given needs for unconditional love, acceptance, value/worth, security, and respect, is these needs can only be met in Christ. Remember, it says in Philippians 4:19 that Jesus will supply or meet all your needs. This includes these God-given needs. You see, all you can produce on your own is conditional human love, acceptance, etc. What you need and want is the unconditional love, acceptance, etc., that only Christ can produce.

Consequently, the first thing you need in order to move away from the conflict that results from your unmet needs is to understand and believe that Jesus, not your spouse, is going to meet those needs. Here are some prayer examples of what it looks like for Christ to meet your needs.

“Lord, renew my mind to the truth that only You can meet my need for unconditional acceptance.”

“Lord, transform me to believe that only You can meet my need for unconditional love.”

As you pray these and similar prayers, the Holy Spirit will supernaturally meet your needs. You will find, over time, that you are experiencing your needs being met in Christ and you are, therefore, moving away from trying to get these needs met from your spouse.

Conflict Resolution Concerning Your UNMET Desires and Expectations

This is a more difficult issue because your marital desires and expectations may be realistic and even spiritual. But when you are dependent in vain on your spouse to meet them, you have a choice to make. Either give in to your fleshly behaviors or choose to walk in the Spirit. What does it look like to walk in the Spirit concerning your unmet desires and expectations?

- Seek Christ to be your patience and unconditional love when your desires or expectations are not met.
- Ask the Lord to give you the willingness to give grace to your spouse rather than reacting in your flesh.
- Pray for your spouse's willingness through Christ to eventually meet those realistic and spiritual desires and expectations.

Conflict Resolution Concerning Fleshly Rights

The truth is you have NO fleshly rights. You can't have fleshly rights and walk in the Spirit at the same time. You do have a spiritual right concerning your fleshly rights.

Your have the RIGHT to DIE to your fleshly rights.

By dying to your fleshly rights, I mean you turn away or choose not to exercise your fleshly rights. Here are some practical prayer examples of what it looks like to die to your fleshly rights in Christ.

“Lord, persuade me I have no fleshly rights because to exercise them will only produce death in my marriage.”

“Lord, transform me so I will no longer demand my right to be in control.”

“Lord, I am asking you to renew my mind so I will die to my fleshly rights.”

Summary

I hope you see through this chapter that you need someone greater than yourself to resolve your conflict. That is why God put His life and power in you. Therefore, the key to resolving marital conflict and minimizing future conflict is this:

***Learn to live increasingly in a moment by moment
DEPENDENCE on the LIFE and POWER of Christ.***

CHAPTER FIVE

Experiencing A Christ-Centered Marriage

Introduction

Even though resolving marital conflict is crucial to experiencing a Christ-centered marriage...

The KEY to experiencing a Christ-centered marriage is for both spouses to be TRANSFORMED into the LIKENESS of Christ

We see this in 2 Corinthians 3:18:

*“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 what the likeness of Christ looks like:

Unconditional love	Victory	Worth
Acceptance	Faith	Freedom
Patience	Strength	Peace
Power	Forgiveness	Understanding
Security	Fearlessness	Wisdom
Discernment	Adequacy	Humility
Christ-confidence	Boldness	Righteousness
Selflessness	Rest	Compassion
Courage	Hope	Christ-control

Let me define Christ-likeness.

***Christ-likeness is made up of SUPERNATURAL
ATTITUDES that result from being
TRANSFORMED by the Holy Spirit.***

The key to these Christ-produced attitudes is nothing or no one can rob you of them. Let me give some examples to explain.

Christ-Like Attitude of UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

“Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

We talked earlier about taking steps of faith to draw on Christ to unconditionally love your spouse through you. Let me repeat the prayer.

“Lord, unconditionally love my spouse through me.”

At the moment you pray that prayer, all of Christ’s unconditional love is pouring in you and through you to your spouse. You may not initially feel that love flowing in you but we know by faith God is answering that prayer. Over time not only will you experience Christ’s love flowing through you but, more importantly, the Holy Spirit will be supernaturally producing in you an **attitude** of unconditional love.

Christ-Like Attitude of Being ACCEPTED in Christ

*“Accept one another, then, just as **Christ accepted you...**”
Romans 15:7*

Christ accepts you unconditionally whether you are living dependently on Him or you are rejecting Him. (i.e., walking in the flesh). That being true, shouldn't acceptance be your attitude toward your spouse in Christ?

Rejection is a major problem in marriage. We are all guilty of it on some level. The question is if I am living from a Christ-like attitude of acceptance, do I have to accept my spouse's rejection? The answer is “no.”

Think of it for a moment. Your spouse is rejecting you in some way but you are not taking ownership of his/her rejection because you believe you are accepted in Christ. If you live from an attitude of Christ-like acceptance, you don't have to take ownership of your spouse's rejection. If your spouse is rejecting you, he/she is functioning in the flesh. If you take ownership of your spouse's rejection then you will react back in the flesh. Living from an **attitude** of Christ's acceptance will prevent that.

Christ-Like Attitude of Being ADEQUATE/WORTHY

*“Not that we are **adequate [worthy]** in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but **our adequacy [worth] is from God.**” 2 Corinthians 3:5*

Many people feel or believe they are unworthy or inadequate. We look at ourselves and believe we don't measure up to the world's standards of worthiness. We may seek our worth in our spouse, other relationships,

our job, or in “things.” However, these things will never bring us the adequacy or worthiness that we can only find in Christ.

Knowing and believing your worth is in Christ relieves you of the pressure of trying to find your worthiness in your spouse or in someone or something else. This is Good News! Living from a Christ-like **attitude** of Christ’s worth means you can value yourself and your spouse in Christ.

Christ-Like Attitude of SECURITY

*“Because he has loved Me; therefore, I will deliver him; I will set him **securely** on high because he has known my name.” Psalm 91:14*

Does your spouse do or say things to make you feel insecure? The good news is you no longer have to feel insecure because in Christ you are totally secure. As you seek Christ to give you a Christ-like attitude of security then no one can rob you of that security. Since God is sovereign and is the only One Who is truly in control, we can live from an attitude of security in Him.

Christ-Like Attitude of FORGIVENESS

*“Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, **forgiving each other**, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”
Ephesians 4:32*

It is important you know that unforgiveness in marriage is one of the top issues that, over time, will destroy a marriage. Accordingly, the Holy Spirit wants to produce in you a Christ-like attitude of forgiveness.

You may have been offended by your spouse and feel you don’t have to forgive him/her (or you believe you have the

right **not** to forgive). The truth is you have no excuse for not forgiving your spouse. Why? First, Christ forgave you unconditionally.

Second, you have all of Christ's forgiveness in you and available to you. Therefore, as you walk dependently on Christ, He will grow within you a Christ-like attitude of forgiveness with the result that forgiveness will become easier.

What Is the Ultimate Outcome of Becoming Christ-Like?

You will become SELFLESS and SACRIFICIAL

"Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind **regard one another as more important than yourselves**" Philippians 2:3

The first question I ask couples when I meet with them is this: How would it impact your marriage if you were both totally selfless and sacrificial? (You may want to answer this question for yourself.) I ask this question because this is the ultimate outcome of being transformed into Christ-likeness.

Jesus was never about Himself. He was always about others. Consequently, the more you are being transformed into Christ-likeness the more you will find yourself being more selfless and sacrificial.

Think About This

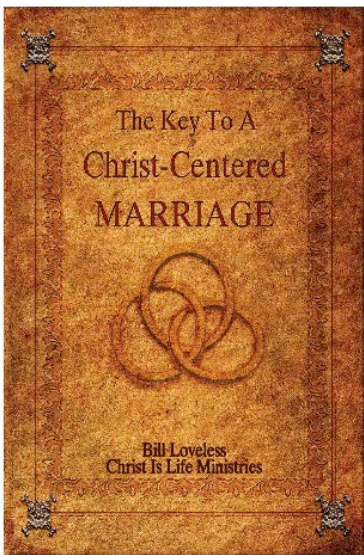
Think about key areas of your marriage like:

- Communication,
- Sexual intimacy,
- Conflict resolution,
- Finances, and
- Parenting.

How do you think it would change your current attitude about each of these areas if you were experiencing Christ-likeness? Take a few moments to think about this.

Would you not be experiencing more love, more grace, more selflessness, etc.? This is why being transformed into Christ-likeness is how you will (over time) experience a Christ-centered marriage.

In Conclusion



I wish becoming Christ-like was like a light switch. I could just turn it on and I would be Christ-like. However, becoming Christ-like is more like a dimmer switch. As you turn it, the light gets increasingly brighter. Becoming Christ-like is a lifetime journey not a sprint. However, if you don't know where or who is the starting line to be transformed into the likeness of Christ, then you will never experience it

The starting line is Christ Himself. Running the race means you live in moment by moment dependence on Christ just as the physical branch lives from the vine.

What you have just read are some basic truths I hope will help you understand and experience a Christ-centered marriage. However, I have written a complete curriculum that will take you much deeper into understanding these truths and applying them to your marriage. The title of the curriculum is *The Key To A Christ-Centered Marriage*. In addition to the written curriculum, I have filmed a video series for this curriculum. You can download the curriculum for free and watch the video online by going to our website: (www.christislifeministries.com). On the home page, you will see the marriage icon. Click on that icon and it will take you to the video and curriculum.

You can either download this curriculum for free or purchase a written copy that we will mail to you.

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.

*Blessings in Christ,
Bill Loveless*

Christ Is Life Ministries

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Your Marriage

(Christian? Or Christ-Centered?)

What I have discovered over the years about marriage among Christian couples is that they don't understand the difference between a Christian marriage and a Christ-centered marriage. Knowing the difference will make all the difference in experiencing the marriage that God intends for us to experience. I have discipled hundreds of couples through the spiritual truths presented in this booklet. As with them, I trust that they will encourage you and transform your marriage to experience a deeper harmony, intimacy, and oneness.

We will be exploring the following truths:

- The difference between a Christian and Christ-centered marriage.
- What is the foundation for a Christ-centered marriage.
- The four main areas of conflict in a marriage.
- The key to resolving marital conflict.
- What it looks like to experience a Christ-centered marriage.



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

