

THE LOSS & RESTORATION OF DIGNITY IN MARRIAGE



WEEK THREE

INTRODUCTION

A SERIES ON MARRIAGE AND DIGNITY

Thanks for joining in the third week of the series on marriage. Our first and second messages and booklets can be downloaded on the **compasssouth.org** website. Julie and I have been married for 30 years, and we are not experts, but we do care. We're learning just like you are. We want our marriage relationship to be growing and healthy and full of love. As we continue this message series on marriage, we would like for you to come along with us each day by having conversations, taking time in prayer, and interacting with the content in this booklet.

The theme of this week is the fallenness and indignity of self-focus. During the third sermon, we will consider the disorder and disintegration of the person and how these things affect the marriage relationship.

This booklet will also be a kind of focus group. So, you are encouraged and welcome to give feedback, ask questions and share testimonies of how God is working in your marriage as you hear the messages, seek the Lord, and participate in this guided material.

Email us your thoughts to chadlangraves@gmail.com.

Dig Deeper In A Couples' Group

We are praying for you both as you open your hearts up to one another. Recently, Julie and I went on a weekend marriage retreat where we were privileged to be led by Dr. Kenneth Sanderfur with the Created for Connection ministry. It was during that weekend and counseling that we found a new level of intimacy and understanding that we have never had before. We were given a tool to help us when we get stuck in negative patterns, and we were reminded of how common it is for couples to get into a cycle of hurts and offenses.

During this series, I will be addressing what it feels like to lose your dignity with each other and how to find your way back to restore your dignity as an individual and as a couple. During this series, Julie and I will offer an 8 week small group for couples who would like to dig deeper into this material and the process found in the book Created for Connection.

This small group will meet on Wednesday nights at the Triangle Cafe from 6:15 to 7:15 PM starting on February 28. Follow the link below:



DAY FIFTEEN

THE INDIGNITY OF THE CURSE: CURSING THE LANGUAGES

What happens when we curse each other with what we were supposed to bless one another with?

Figuring out who you are and why you are doing what you do can take a lifetime. Marriage, when done right, will help accelerate the process.

Gary Chapman's *Five Love Languages* provide a helpful framework to couples trying to figure out who they are and who they're married to. Because our nature is sinful and we live with brokenness, we can take what God meant for blessing one another and curse one another instead.

Nothing that your spouse can do will completely meet the need of your heart. In the famous line from *Jerry Maguire*, Tom Cruise said, "You complete me". That may sound great in a romantic movie, but it is dangerous thinking for an individual to believe their spouse can be completely what they need to feel loved.

There simply is not enough sex to make a person feel loved. If they pursue sex as the ultimate way to help them feel loved, they will become sick. Self-focused sex is a sinful, lonely dead end.

There are never enough gifts and provisions to make a person feel safe and loved. Security is not found in material things. Although receiving is a part of every relationship it cannot be what the relationship is all about.

Time spent with another person is beautiful but it will not be enough to meet the loneliness of the soul. One person is not sufficient and will be smothered and crushed under the weight of such responsibility.

We all need words of affirmation. Every good relationship has affirmation as a part of its conversation and vocabulary. Even so, there are not enough words for the person whose heart is filled with pride to convince them of their worth.

Scripture says two are better than one, and it is true that in a marriage we are positioned to be helpers and comealongsiders. God wants married couples to see their role in each other's lives as helpers but we cannot replace the work of the Holy Spirit in another person's life. Everyone must learn the dignity of competence and dependence on the Lord.

The love languages reveal something about our needs and our needs reveal something about our wounds. Our woundedness reveals the raw spots in our lives that desperately need the gospel applied to us.

Sex is about feeling better - being intimate. Gifts are about value and worth and safety. Help is about companionship, value, and competency, Words of affirmation are about identity and acceptance. Time spent is about pursuit, loneliness, and relationship. The gospel secures our identity, affirms that we are known and accepted, places value and security in our lives and releases anxiety through worship and the presence of God.

"God expressed His love towards you in that while we were yet without strength, he sent Jesus to lay down His life for us" is the good news Romans teaches us.

When we are selfish, we take what God meant to bless and we curse with it.

CONVERSATION AND PRAYER

What happens we curse the love languages?

Physical Touch becomes abusive. Sex becomes weaponized. The one who wants love physically is despised, and the one who doesn't feels used.

Time spent becomes exhausting. Companionship becomes a chore. The one who wants time is seen as needy, and the one who doesn't feels trapped.

Words of affirmation become flattery. Needing honor is seen as egotism. The one who longs for affirmation feels pathetic, and the one who doesn't can't see the point.

Gifts given become transactional. Givers feel used.

Provision and care become tools for manipulation. The one who feels considered by gifts is characterized as materialistic, and the one who doesn't resents giving.

Help becomes resented. Supporting becomes negative. The one who feels loved when helped is criticized for incompetency. The one who doesn't need much help is bothered and inconvenienced.

Marriage is a social contract. When you promised to love your spouse, you were promising to express love to them in ways that make them feel loved. Take a moment to pray through the list above and consider unloving patterns and responses you have had towards one another.

DAY SIXTEEN

THE INDIGNITY OF MANIPULATION AND ULTIMATUMS

As long as we need our life to go a certain way it produces vain attempts to maintain control through manipulation, bullying, hurt, and domineering of others. We will never become people of love, joy and peace, and inner freedom.
-John Mark Comer

We all lose it from time to time. There are circumstances that even the most composed person has a hard time accepting. We can “lose our dignity” meaning that we allow ourselves to cross a line that we know is outside the bounds of our character, or should be outside those bounds. The desperate can denigrate themselves trying to force others to love them. We lose sight of the narrative of our lives that we want to be true. What we do during those moments under stress can set patterns in the way we treat ourselves and others.

The Cycle of Manipulation

Over the years in counseling people and dealing with families, I have found a recurring pattern. This pattern of behavior is what I have come to call the cycle of manipulation. Let me preface this with the disclaimer: we all struggle at times when we do not get what we want from others. We all have to keep ourselves in line when it comes to respecting the agency and dignity of others.

Step One: Acting as if everything is normal.

If you have ever dealt with someone in a negative interaction

(conflict, disagreement, offense, mistreatment, etc.), this can be hard to process. Healthy people do not mistreat others and then pretend it did not happen or act as if everything is normal.

Step Two: Flattery

Most people know that flattery is empty words. Flattery is excessive and insincere praise, given especially to further one's own interests. Someone who is a manipulative person will, with smooth talk and glowing words, deceive innocent people (Romans 16:18). Proverbs 29:5-6 says, *"A person who flatters his neighbor is spreading a net for him to step into."*

Step Three: Acting pitiful.

Healthy people do not give ultimatums. When someone who is emotionally unhealthy does not get what they want, one approach is self-pity. This kind of manipulation is an emotional plea. Weeping and self-hatred becomes a tool to get what they want. Healthy people can be disagreed with and can accept not getting what they want without personalizing it.

Step Four: Insulting and Disproportionate Anger

This is particularly unfair and to be honest the most counterproductive. "You are a terrible mom." or "This is your fault". You know you have been manipulated when you agree to things under pressure with a person but regret those things once you are no longer around them and the pressure. This kind of bullying is a clear sign of a relationship that is abusive.

Step Five: Threatening

What a person does when they are disagreed with really says something about the relationship. Beware of the person who threatens you with physical harm, social embarrassment, relational retaliation, or trying to get you in trouble at work or legally. It may be hard, but this must be confronted.

Step Six: Accept this as normal and start the cycle over.

CONVERSATION AND PRAYER

Take a moment and reclaim what is true in prayer with one another. This can feel heavy, but this is actually burden lifting. We all have disappointments. Ask God to mature your responses and help you address any cycles of manipulation that need to be repented of and abandoned.

DAY SEVENTEEN

AN INDIGNITY OF HARSH WORDS

How we talk to our spouse and how we listen to them when they talk to us is so important when it comes to establishing the health of our marriage relationship.

One study from the University of Washington found that they could predict with 93% accuracy who would divorce. The key predictor was the way the couple talked to each other.

The study found four responses that every couple should be aware of.

1. *Having a critical spirit*
2. *Treating one another with contempt*
3. *A defensive response*
4. *The practice of stonewalling*

The first two have an impact on what we say and how we say things to our spouse. The last two have an impact on what we let our spouse say to us and how we respond.

A Critical Spirit

Do you have a critical spirit? Let me ask it another way: are you quick to criticize your spouse? Do you find yourself complaining about them and speaking ill of them or to them. Are you their faultfinder? Ephesians 4:29 says, *“Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.”*

There is a way in which a person can set a pattern in their lives to collect evidence and build a case against their spouse. Love covers sin and does not keep a card catalog of offenses. Galatians 5:15 says: *“you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.”*

Contempt

Contempt is sometimes hard to see in the mirror because we tend to be blinded by a self-righteousness. The act of despising is the act of dismissing someone’s thoughts and actions as without merit. Contempt is having indignity for your spouse and devaluing them. It is an improper response to anger. When the Bible tells us to be angry and sin not, this is one of the sins we so easily justify.

Ephesians 4:25-26 says, “Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil.”

When we talk to someone with contempt, we belittle and talk down to them. Contempt is rooted in a heart of pride, and we all must set some rules on how we will speak to our spouses. Contempt is evil thoughts that come from the darkest part of our heart. They are slander and we all know that a spouse is suppose to use their words to help us, not wound us.

Defensiveness

A defensive heart says, “But look at what I did right!” A defensive heart says, “But look at what was done to me!” A defensive heart says, “It wasn’t that bad”. The defensive spouse reacts with excuses and blame. They cannot just say, “I was wrong”. Proverbs 12:15 says, *“The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.”*

If you are constantly keeping score in a relationship, you are the

loser. Jesus said, in Matthew 5:23-26 *"So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him..."*

Notice where the responsibility lies. If your spouse has something against you and you know it, the responsibility is on you to pursue them, seek reconciliation, and come to terms quickly. The Christian spouse cannot say, "well, that is your problem".

Stonewalling

When we tell our spouse that they cannot have access to an area of our lives and that it is off limits to talk, about we are stonewalling. Paul David Tripp encourages married couples to admit, "I am my biggest marriage problem," because we can get nowhere in our relationships if we ignore our contribution to the problems and focus entirely (or significantly more) on our partner's downfalls. Stonewalling is passive aggression and emotional abandonment. When we refuse to understand our spouse or open up ourselves so they can understand us, we are forfeiting the intimacy God intended for our marriage. We are also resisting the help of the helper God sent us to encourage our spiritual growth.

James 1:19 tells us, *"My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry"*.

CONVERSATION AND PRAYER

Proverbs 10:19 says, *“In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refrains his lips is wise.”*

That means when we talk, we will eventually stick our foot in our mouths. We tend to excuse ourselves; especially when we are under pressure, don't we?

We excuse ourselves when we are offended. We excuse ourselves when we think we are in the right. We excuse ourselves when we are having a bad day. We excuse ourselves when we are going through trials. Our disciplines can go out the window. Our convictions can be set aside. Our high standards can be lowered. Our circumstances do not give us a license to say whatever we want to say however we want to say it.

Here is where we can make mistakes.

We can be guilty of the right words said the wrong way. We can be guilty of the right words said at the wrong time. We can be guilty of the right words said to the wrong people. Take a moment to ask forgiveness for any harsh words you have said to one another.

Pray Psalms 19:14 together, “ Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.”

DAY EIGHTEEN

THE INDIGNITY OF THE CAROUSEL

In her work on *Emotion Focused Therapy*, Sue Dawson describes a pattern that couples can get into that is like a carousel. It goes round and round over and over and up and down. Some couples have had the same arguments over and over for decades and can not seem to get off the carousel.

One study found that “69% of all marital problems are perpetual.”

Do you keep arguing over frequency of sex? How about division of labor? Do you go round and round over finances? How many times has family and children come up?

Welcome to humanity. It will be helpful to first figure out the pattern. Dr Dawson suggests a simple exercise.

When I _____, she _____ . Then I _____ .

Then she _____ .

When He does _____ . I feel _____ .

Then I _____ and he _____ .

Pick an easy one that is not inflamed with emotions and resentment to start off with.

When we can identify the patterns and put language to them, we can understand what is happening. Next, discuss when you get on the carousel. What triggers this back and forth.

Finally, pray about why you respond the way you do.

I know my heart, and I know how prone it is to seek something to nurse my wounded feelings. When my pride is hurt, when my stability is threatened, and I am anxious, when arguments and rejection come, or stress makes me want to escape, my overwhelmed heart is an idol factory. It will run to something to pacify my bruised ego and restless soul.

How about you? Where does your mind go to find identity, establish security, and seek peace?

Let me introduce you to a pattern I have experienced.

1. Something unpleasant happens, such as unsettling arguments, stressful human interactions, or mistakes and unmet expectations.
2. A feeling of helplessness comes, and fears trigger obsessive thoughts that jump to conclusions and map out worst-case scenarios.
3. This emotional pain and crisis leads me to two options: take my heart to the Lord and find stability and comfort in Him, or turn to something else that will fill the emptiness with a sense of security.
4. I can escape into my thoughts and respond to helplessness with anger or with resignation. I can blow up or shut down. When I can't cause change, I feel upset.
5. I can pursue a place that does not require vulnerability and dependence or mutual submission and humility. I insulate myself from the fear of what could happen in the future by overworking or an overemphasis on how much I can acquire.

Why do I do this? One thing has helped me is to think back to a catastrophic fear or incident that was hard on me. When I was a little boy, my dad would beat my mom. Another memory that is painful is when my dad was drinking and grabbed a puppy out of my hands and slapped it dead against a tree. It has been decades since those traumatic moments, and yet the emotion is still there right beneath the surface. I hate the feeling of helplessness.

CONVERSATION AND PRAYER

Maybe you have a memory of embarrassment or a painful fear that has buried itself into your soul. It is what Dr. Dawson calls the raw spot. Let me encourage you to spend time thinking about those attachments that are still with you and are showing up in your relationship and responses.

The body has a nervous system that governs these emotions. Chemicals like adrenaline, serotonin, cortisol, and endorphins are a part of this complicated network. Serotonin functions to regulate appetite, sleep, memory and learning, temperature, mood, behavior, muscle contraction, and function of the cardiovascular and endocrine systems. It has a role in depression, depressed patients are seen to have lower concentrations of metabolites of serotonin in their cerebrospinal fluid and brain tissue.

The body has a way of replenishing these naturally. Rest, touch, exercise, and proper eating all contribute to a chemical make up that is healthy. Even being out in the sun can be restorative.

Chronic stress is the primary contributor to neurotransmitter imbalance. Physical and emotional stress from a job or a ongoing stress. Over time, the stress wears out the nervous system and depletes neurotransmitter supply.

When prolonged stress happens, several things can happen:

- 1. We stop sleeping or wake up very early.**
- 2. We feel anxious or upset.**
- 3. We start avoiding interaction with people.**
- 4. We start avoiding making decisions**
- 5. We self medicate with food, sex, and other things.**
- 6. We lose desire for work and calling.**
- 7. We lack self-confidence.**
- 8. We struggle with disillusionment or despair.**
- 9. We get disproportionately angry.**
- 10. We stop laughing or smiling.**

Relationships are stressful. Take time to have a conversation about the carousels that you have and are experiencing and the stress it is causing in your marriage and your own soul. Pray for one another and ask God to help you identify what the pattern is, when the pattern is triggered, and why you both respond the way you do.

You are on your way to learning to identify it sooner, de-escalate to more often, empathize with your partner's responses to you, and bring peace in areas of your life that you may never have experienced before.

DAY NINETEEN

THE INDIGNITY of PAIN

In John 5, Jesus asked the strangest question ever: Do you want to be well?

- 38 years of relationships
- 38 years of identity
- 38 years of routines
- 38 years of the same story
- 38 years of doing the same thing over and over.
- 38 years of blaming and shaming

The lame man does not have an answer. He has excuses. He has an explanation. He blames others. He is defeated and has lost hope.

Jesus did not give the man an option of pain or no pain. The day after he was healed, this man had a whole new set of problems.

In life, the choice is not pain or no pain. Sometimes when we go through pain, we make the mistake of thinking, because of our situation, that if we could just get out from under the pressure, we could avoid pain. No, the choice is not to go through the pain or not to go through pain. The choice is which pain. We get to pick.

Jesus said that in this life you will have trouble. It's unavoidable. The human condition is painful. But you and I get to pick the poison. Proverb says that the way of the transgressor is hard. Let me encourage you, choose the right pain.

- Choose the pain of fidelity.
- Choose the pain of discipline.
- Choose the pain of accountability and community.
- Choose the pain of self denial.

- Choose the pain of forgiveness.
- Choose the pain of love.

1 Peter 4:12&19

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

CONVERSATION AND PRAYER

J.I. Packer writes, "God uses chronic pain and weakness, along with other afflictions, as his chisel for sculpting our lives. Felt weakness deepens dependence on Christ for strength each day. The weaker we feel, the harder we lean. And the harder we lean, the stronger we grow spiritually, even while our bodies waste away. To live with your 'thorn' uncomplainingly—that is, sweet, patient, and free in heart to love and help others, even though every day you feel weak—is true sanctification. It is true healing for the spirit. It is a supreme victory of grace."

There is no other time like when we do not get what we want to treat the other person with value. It is during these times we get to display our own dignity.

Colossians 3:13

Bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

You're in a holy process when you are being stretched. Don't abandon each other when things heat up. Take a moment and thank God you have someone to go through life with and ask God to help you handle each other well through painful times in your life.

DAY TWENTY

THE INDIGNITY OF ACCUSING AND ATTACKING

Charlie Shedd wrote often about his wife Martha and their marriage. One time they had a big argument that left both of them sore. The next morning he found a note on the table that said, "Dear Charlie, I hate you. Love Martha."

Doctor Henry Cloud warns against what he calls Mutually Assured Destruction. This term was used in the Cold War. It was an approach that each action required an equitable response. So, if one nation built a bomb, then the other had to build a bomb. He warns that every relationship will be destroyed without grace.

Proverbs 24:29

"Do not say, "I will do to him as he has done to me; I will pay the man back for what he has done.""

People who are happy in marriage are saying, "I want to hear what you say. Tell me what I'm doing wrong. Help me do this better. You have the freedom to tell me whatever you want." Couples who will not succeed are those who won't accept input from each other. That's an unteachable spirit. An argumentative attitude drives others away.

Satan is the accuser of the brethren. God did not put couples together for the purpose of accusation. If you are married, you are an advocate. Are you caught up in a spirit of accusation or are you caught up in a spirit of advocacy?

God has not put you together to attack one another.

Take time to look over 1 Peter 3:1-12 and consider the encouragement from scripture to live with one another in an understanding way.

1 Peter 3:1-12

“Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear. Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel— rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him Lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror. Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered. Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing. For “He who would love life And see good days, Let him refrain his tongue from evil, And his lips from speaking deceit. Let him turn away from evil and do good; Let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, And His ears are open to their prayers; But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.””

CONVERSATION AND PRAYER

No one marries a perfect and whole person. Everyone is damaged by their own sin. Everyone has been damaged by the sin of people around us. Some in big ways. Some in small ways (benefit of a godly home). Some in consistent small jabs that wear them down. So if sin is the stripping away of our dignity. Christ laid aside his dignity momentarily in order to purchase us back from sin. Through the sanctification process, Christ addresses the indignities that we carry with us. Marriage is the opportunity to walk with each other and support each other through that process. As opposed to trying to fix each other.

Turn these ten encouragements in I Peter 3:1-12 into prayers. Ask God to make these true in your relationship.

1. Put your spouse's needs ahead of your needs.
2. Be the example instead of a critic.
3. Be gentle and patient.
4. Treat them with dignity and give them room to grow.
5. Live with them in an understanding way.
7. Have compassion and be tenderhearted.
8. Do not return evil for evil.
9. Watch how you talk to each other.
10. Remember God has His eye on you.

DAY TWENTY ONE

THE INDIGNITY OF DECONSTRUCTION

Where are you headed?

Amos 3:3 asks, "how can two walk together unless they be agreed?" It is an age old warning."

Proverbs 27:12 says, "a prudent man sees danger and turns aside; but the simple pass on, and suffer for it."

Genesis chapter three tells us the first story of mankind and every story of man since then. It is the story of creation, fall, and restoration. Adam and Eve began in the garden, and all hell broke loose. What does that kind of disintegration and deconstruction look like?

1. **The loss of Innocence** - The Fall begins with the introduction and knowledge of evil. As they were exposed to evil, their innocence was forfeited.
2. **The Stripping away of Holiness** - The choice to operate independent of what God wanted separated them from the Lord.
3. **The Stealing of Confidence** - The questioning of the Word of God stole their confidence and resulted in trying to make things happen on their own.
4. **The Deceiving Of Love** - This isolation was a separation and abandoning of the presence of God. They went into hiding, and traded God's loving presence for shaming regret.

5. **The Robbing of Peace** - The fear that came upon them and the consequences of the relocation turned their world into naked exposure and harsh pain.
6. **The Killing of Joy** - The curse of sin is the loss of enjoying God and what He wants for us.

So, How can the curse be reversed? The gospel is the answer, over and over.

Let's end this week together assessing our lives and marriages and asking ourselves how we are doing. Are we integrating or disintegrating? Are we cultivating a life of flourishing, or are we being lost in a chaos. God asked Adam and Eve, "Where are you?" How about you; where are you?

What was lost in the garden was restored on the cross. As a couple, you can make it your aim to put God in back into the center of your relationship. You can commit to restoring your household. Clean house if you must. Get rid of things that have no place in a Christian home.

CONVERSATION AND PRAYER

Joshua 24:15

Choose for yourselves today whom you will serve ... but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

Lot pitched his tent near Sodom, and before you know it he lost his children. There are a thousand ways of living away from the Lord. Do a deep dive into politics, and you will despair in ethical fatalism. Chase after security in cash and stuff, and you will end up hoarding in paranoia. Nurse the wound of life with pleasure and hedonism, and it will leave you always wanting more. Drink in constant skepticism and cynicism, and your faith will die of thirst. Cast off the restraints of conservative biblical standards, and you will unravel the strength of God's authoritative Word.

John Mark Comer recently said, "Progressive Christianity is just a stop-over on the way to post Christianity."

Take a moment together and reaffirm that your marriage is a christian marriage and your house belongs to the Lord. Ask God to help you set the boundaries of godliness again and return to who and what God wants in your lives.

