

**THE LOSS &
RESTORATION
OF DIGNITY IN
MARRIAGE**



WEEK FOUR

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 carousel and indignity that conflict produces. During the fourth sermon, we will consider the difficulty and disruption of disagreement and its impact on 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 chadalangraves@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 are offering 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 TWENTY TWO

THE INDIGNITY OF LONELINESS

“Suffering is a given; suffering alone is intolerable.”

– **Sue Johnson**

“When we are lonely we not only react more intensely to the negatives; we also experience less of a soothing uplift from the positives.” - **John T. Cacioppo**

There is such an indignity to abandonment. Scripture tells us that Jesus hated the putting away of women. This was the practice of turning away from their spouse and casting them aside. It was common in a polygamist society for women to be assumed like property. This was why the scripture taught in Deuteronomy 24:1 a three-step process for legally releasing a spouse from such a marriage. The husband must (1) write his wife a bill of divorce, (2) place the bill in her hand, and (3) send her away so that she was free to go and marry another. The whole reason for the allowance was because their hearts were hard and women were being mistreated. A man could leave his wife legally obligated to him but not love her and take care of her. This would cause her to be destitute or to commit adultery if she were still married to her husband who did not want her and with another man who would want her, but was not her husband.

Jesus hates the mistreatment and putting away of people. This kind of indignity is the devaluing of a spouse. The Hebrew word for adultery means to turn away from your spouse.

Consider **Malachi 2:14-16**.

The LORD (Yahweh) has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously. Yet she is your companion, the wife of your covenant. Did He not make you one?... And why one? So that He might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth. For the LORD (Yahweh), the God of Israel, hates your "putting away".

Matthew 19:8

"Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because of your hardness of heart; but it was not this way from the beginning. "

God's plan for couples has been, and is now, togetherness. The two leave their mother and father and cleave together and they become one. The root of almost all marital conflict is in some degree a departure from oneness. What a sad indignity it is for a spouse to feel all alone.

CONVERSATION AND PRAYER

Years ago I was in the pool playing with my boys, and my wife noticed that I was just standing in the water with my mind not present. I was thinking about work. I was physically present, but my mind was not there. In what ways do you need to be careful to be present when you are together? Do you have a policy when it comes to the use of phones at the dinner table or at night when you are together? Do you intentionally prepare for time together so that you will have enough rest and emotional reserve to be enjoyable with one another?

One of the ways we can protect ourselves from turning away from each other is to renew our commitment to pursuing quality time with each other.

Take a moment a pray together and ask God to help you keep your attention on one another. If you have made one another feel lonely, express that to each other and pray for God to help you set aside some undivided time for one another.

DAY TWENTY THREE

KABOD & ICCABOD

Kabod is a Hebrew word for dignity and honor.

Recently, I was reminded of the intrinsic beauty of the human spirit and soul. Etymologically, hospitals are places where strangers who suffer come to be cared for. Why? Because of *kabod*. The value of someone is not hung on a peg in thin air. It is rooted deeply in God's relation to and intention for them.

A patient who suffered and was bedfast spent time telling me her story. It was one of brokenness, loss, and disability. Her pain had been compounded by over a year in Covid lock-downs in the isolation of a nursing home. As I listened, I was drawn into the beauty and tenderness of her soul and an intellect that cared and considered deeply. Though weak, her abiding faith was earnest and without guile. Before her accident, she was an athlete. The value and meaning of her life was in her physical appearance and abilities. Don't let the values of this ungodly world sway you into believing a lie. Her soul is still a treasure. Her spirit still has much dignity. Her mind is still fully capable of loving and being loved.

Don't write *ichabod* (the glory has departed) over her life. For that matter, don't write *ichabod* over your own life. As long as you are here, you are worth being treated with care and dignity by yourself and others. We should live our lives with a deep sense of *kabod*. What a treasure life is.

1 Corinthians 6:20

For you are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

"There is a danger that you will mislive—that despite all your activity, despite all the pleasant diversions you might have enjoyed while alive, you will end up living a bad life. There is, in other words, a danger that when you are on your deathbed, you will look back and realize that you wasted your one chance at living. Instead of spending your life pursuing something genuinely valuable, you squandered it because you allowed yourself to be distracted by the various baubles life has to offer."

- William Irvine

CONVERSATION AND PRAYER

Jesus told the story of the woman who lost a coin. It was the tradition that she would have had 10 coins as a part of her dowry. She lost one, and Jesus said she lit the lamp, searched the house, and stayed up all night.

Levi Lusko suggests 10 coins every spouse doesn't need to lose:

- 1. Have you lost curiosity with each other?*
- 2. Have you lost unity with each other?*
- 3. Have you lost generosity with each other?*
- 4. Have you lost intentionality with each other?*
- 5. Have you lost humility with each other?*
- 6. Have you lost passion for each other?*
- 7. Have you lost vulnerability with each other?*
- 8. Have you lost levity with each other?*
- 9. Have you lost responsibility with each other?*
- 10. Have you lost communion with each other?*

Take a moment and pray through these 10 questions and search your heart, and ask God to shed light on the dark areas. Pray for the value of your relationship to be fully restored, if that has been lost. Pray for the treasuring to be restored.

DAY TWENTY FOUR

THE LOSS OF DIGNITY

The first time Kabod is used in the Bible is in Genesis 31. Jacob is mistreated by Laban. His father-in-law did not regard him or favor him and God told Jacob to leave.

There is a time in some relationships that separation is the only way to stop the abuse. With that said, I wholeheartedly believe the way forward for most everyone is not divorce. The way forward is to restore dignity.

1. *Hear from the Lord and make changes.*
2. *Start with yourself and set new personal boundaries.*
3. *Re-establish and affirm self control.*
4. *Change the way you treat yourself and your spouse.*
5. *Talk with your spouse about this loss of dignity*

Many times a spouse will allow things for the sake of the relationship that can destroy the relationship over time. Every person will need to change when they get married. Selfishness and immaturity are unavoidable casualties in a healthy marriage. Most of us have made wrong turns and ended up in places we don't want to be, looking at someone in the mirror that we don't recognize. There is good news; you and your spouse can find your way back. There is grace for both of you, and it is worth it.

We lose our dignity sometimes when we react to others harshly.

We find ourselves behaving in a way that is not who we want to be or who we know we can, and should, be. This kind of misliving, if left unchecked, will put us in a posture that is out of character with who God made us to be.

We will find ourselves petty instead of kind, isolated instead of engaged, or unsure instead of confident. A strong-willed child can push an easy-going mother out of her normal personality tendencies. A harsh boss can bully a fun-loving personality out of their typically lighthearted demeanor. A couple can mishandle each other in a way that causes both of them to regret who they have become. It is unavoidable; we are impacted by others. Sometimes, there is an unhealthy line that can be crossed. When we lose our self, dignity must be restored.

The gospel can restore our dignity as we let scripture speak over our lives. When someone does not treat us with value, scripture can stop us from accepting a lesser appraisal of ourselves.

CONVERSATION AND PRAYER

How did Sarah handle being married to Abraham? It must not have been easy.

1. Abraham said, "Pack up. We are leaving everything we know." Sarah asked, "Where are we going?" Abraham replied, "I don't know."
2. The infertility and shame over years must have been brutal.
3. Abraham said, "When we get to Egypt, tell everyone you are my sister so they will not kill me and take you."
4. Abraham said, "Isaac and I are headed up the mountain, and God has a plan. "

Yet, how did Sarah make it? (1 Peter 3)

She put her hope in God.

She obeyed God and waited on Him.

She believed God over her fears.

She followed Abraham as he followed the Lord.

She obeyed Abraham as he obeyed the Lord.

She trusted Abraham as he trusted the Lord.

She wasn't perfect and neither was he, but God made a promise to them and He was a Jehovah Jireh.

In the process of their lives, God changed them from Abram and Sarai to Abraham and Sarah. Sarah waited on the Lord to mature her man. She hoped in the Lord when it was hard to see how things were going to work out.

Don't give up, dear sisters. The Lord is not finished with your men. Don't give up, dear brothers. God is not finished with your wives.

Take a moment and pray together and confess to God ways it is not always easy being married to you, and thank God for your spouse. Pray for God to teach you to make room for each other as you grow in Christ.

DAY TWENTY FIVE

PAUL'S STRANGE MARRIAGE COUNSEL

You and I don't need a different marriage. We need a different approach to marriage.

I Corinthians 7:1-9, 17, 29-33

"Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. But I say this as a concession, not as a commandment. For I wish that all men were even as I myself. But each one has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in that. But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am; but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion. But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk. And so I ordain in all the churches. But this I say, brethren, the time is short, so that from now on even those who have wives should be

as though they had none, those who weep as though they did not weep, those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice, those who buy as though they did not possess, and those who use this world as not misusing it. For the form of this world is passing away. But I want you to be without care. He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord—how he may please the Lord. But he who is married cares about the things of the world—how he may please his wife.”

Paul says, “I wish you wouldn’t get married and you would pour your whole life out for the cause of Christ. But, if you have to get married, then live like your not married.”

What is Paul saying? It makes me think of the semester we had 22 students get married. Their focus was so inward. They quit serving. They quit caring about lost people on campus. At one point, we led 50 students in one semester to the Lord, but that semester all they wanted to do is go home and snuggle up and have some “me time”.

CONVERSATION AND PRAYER

Did you know that you can be a perfect little family that is happy and at the same time be completely useless for the kingdom of God. A self focus can settle in that overshadows the intensity and focus that is needed to please the Lord. The way to a God-pleasing marriage is not selfishness. Read Paul's list of what selfishness produces.

2 Timothy 3:2-7

For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Take a moment and pray through the text and use the passage as list of things to ask God to help you avoid. Pray to make honoring Christ the aim of your marriage.

DAY TWENTY SIX

THE INDIGNITY OF BEHAVING OUTSIDE OF OUR CHARACTER

We all act out of character at times.

I think of it as losing our dignity. Personality paradigms like the enneagram call it disintegration. It is the moment when we are under pressure, and we allow someone or something to push us outside of our personality.

Maybe you are, at your base, a very controlled person, and something has you screaming. Maybe you are naturally an outgoing person, but conflict has you avoiding and isolating. Maybe you pride yourself on being self assured, but pressure has rocked your confidence. Live long enough, and you will have a crisis of self. Deep down, we are all contradictions. We are sinful in that we miss the mark. The character of God is without contradiction. His nature is unchanging and His reactions are consistent. What does it mean to be godly? It means to be whole and dignified.

Don't become enslaved to what other people do or don't do. Let the gospel restore your dignity. Don't be enslaved to what you have done or not done, let the gospel give you what you need today to be who God made you.

There has been much work lately on the subject of emotional intelligence. Psychologist Daniel Goteman lists his 5 core components: self awareness, self regulation, internal motivation, empathy, and social skills.

Colossians 3:12

“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

Let’s be honest. In our bare naked form we are not always kind. This is why scripture says we must “put it on”.

What do you want to be when you grow up?” “Kind”, said the boy.
-Charlie Mackesy, The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse

CONVERSATION AND PRAYER

A proper view of God is what sets the foundation of our lives and relationships.

Consider this verse in **Exodus 34:6-7**:

“The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands,[a] forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.”

Tim Mackie says that the Hebrew word for anger is “hot nose”. (The Hebrew terms are *ḥaron af*, literally, “the burning of the nose”—that is, “the kindling of anger”;)

God is patient. So God is “Long of Nose”. It takes a while for his nose to burn. Aren’t you thankful?

Take a moment and thank God that his character never changes. Ours fluctuates but He is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Ask God to stabilize your character and responses to each other in His character. Let His mindset become yours.

DAY TWENTY SEVEN

A KID-CENTERED HOME

Having children changes the marriage forever. It is the most thrilling, wonderful, upsetting, frustrating thing Julie and I have ever been through together.

The findings of a study by Brian Doss, PhD, of Texas A&M University published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, studied 218 young couples (about 26 years old), 132 of which had their first child in the first eight years of marriage and 86 who had no children. Marital satisfaction declined in both groups, but more suddenly among those who had children.

Dr. Adrian Rogers used to say that children are like arrows:

Psalm 127:3-5

Behold, children are a gift of the LORD, The fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth. How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them;

He would say that arrows had to be straightened, sharpened, and shot in the right direction. Children come into the world with natural bents. They are crooked as a result of sin. Parents have to help straighten them out. They also are naturally dull in some areas. It is the job of the mom and dad to help sharpen them. Arrows are made to be directed. Children are as well.

We have begged God for help. No other experience has driven me to depend on God like having children. This experience also has

created a bond between Julie and I that no one else on the planet shares. If we could go back and not have kids, we still would not miss this experience for anything. In just a few short years we have stuffed our lives full of some amazing memories.

I want to remind you that you need to set God as the aim of your marriage. He put you together so that by being together He might be first. People will say sometimes, my family comes first. Your family will be crushed under the weight of that kind of idol worship and expectation. God first, your spouse second, your kids next; that is the right order. Your children will see your example and have a chance to follow it.

CONVERSATION AND PRAYER

The tension that is experienced between couples over the stress of raising children can be hard to know how to deal with. One thing to remember is that you are on the same team. You need a united front. Your children do not need to hear you complaining about your spouse. Your children do not need to be a sounding board as you vent. There are just some things a child should never hear from a parent. Make some commitments not to fight in front of the children. Set a rule that you will not let your kids speak ugly about your spouse. Don't allow them to defame your spouse in front of you. If you have already made mistakes like this, return to honoring one another and tell your kids that you are re-establishing this honor for one another if they are old enough to understand.

Take a moment to talk about the right order in your home and ask God to give you help in establishing a godly home with honor for one another. Ask God to help you be on the same team.

DAY TWENTY EIGHT

THE LOSS OF DIGNITY

My hope and conviction is that it is not too late for you. It is possible to restore you sense of self-respect and your dignity. This book is an attempt to honestly look at marriage, maturity, and the journey along the way.

Through three decades of pastoral care and counseling, an understanding of reality surfaced that has been helpful to my own marriage and those who I have had the opportunity to encourage. It started with a prayer meeting and a college student that was desperate. She told me that she felt like she was losing her relationship with the young man she had dated in high school. She loved him, but it seemed that the more she gave, the less he was attracted to her. She had lost her dignity with him. She had, out of fear of losing him, become pathetic. My counsel to her was that she had to risk losing him and restore her dignity. I asked her what a typical weekend looked like, and she said that she had quit making plans other than to tag along with him. My suggestion was that she change that pattern of life. So, instead of arriving on Friday night to whatever his whim might be, she planned to go out with her friends to the movies. At some point in the evening he called her wondering where she was. She told him she could not talk because they were walking into the theater. The next morning with he called to see where she was and what she was doing, she was with her mom and sisters headed to the mall to go shopping. By this time, he was aware of a noticeable difference in her behavior. He asked her what she was doing on Sunday and made arrangement to come get

her. When he arrived, he did not sit in the car as usual, he came to the door to receive her. One week later he put a ring on her finger.

I formed a theory: Her lack of dignity had become a repellent. When she regained her composure. He was immediately able to respond and was attracted to her dignity.

A friend of mine was a 30-something year old grizzly bear hunting guide in Alaska. He was a good looking man's man. He spent his twenties chasing thrills and living the life of an adventurer. There was a moment, though, that he was ready to marry and wanted a wife. He met an equally impressive woman who ran an orphanage. She was competent and attractive. Because her work was so meaningful, he decided to move to where she lived before they got married. For the sake of the relationship and love, he started making life-changing concessions. Unknowingly, he made decisions that stripped him of his dignity. His life was lost in an orbit around hers. He gladly surrendered himself for her, but something bizarre happened. With each step he took, she was less and less attracted. Eventually, she called off the wedding and broke his heart. He groveled and pleaded with her. He told her that he would do whatever he needed to do. The more he tried, the more the relationship deteriorated.

What had happened? He lost his dignity.

Dignity is a sense of self worth and a quality of character that creates a context for mutual respect and attraction. It is the way we hold ourselves, and affects the way we handle one another. Simply put, it is the practice of esteeming and treasuring someone else without exploiting or losing one's self worth and agency.

Biblically, dignity is rooted in who we are in Christ. A proper estimation of self is neither inflated with pride and arrogance nor is it deflated with humiliation and inferiority. There is an indignity to dominating someone else and using them. And, there is an indignity to being mistreated and abused by someone else.

As I think about the work of the Holy Spirit, I think this is the primary work. To restore what was lost in the fall. The world in disarray and men and women stripped of self control. Flourishing is the work of the spirit to restore dignity and agency. Personal agency is the ability of a person to have control over their own actions and reactions to life's circumstances. It can feel like we are in a current of circumstances and duties, and that we are not really in control of our lives. A person can feel deep regret over a loss of agency or a deep sense of resignation with the forces around them.

After years of pastoring, I believe one of the great results of the Holy Spirit in a person's life is the restoration of self control. When we read the list of the fruits of the Spirit, we find His empowerment resulting in or crescendoing in a restoration of self control in our lives.

Galatians 5:22-23

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

Personal agency is freedom in Christ is the ability to choose wholly and freely and joyfully what is good and best and tends to flourishing. It is the Spirit's work in us to not be enslaved by others or our own vices.

CONVERSATION AND PRAYER

Ways To Improve A Relationship

1. Attention
2. Affirmation
3. Affection
4. Acceptance

The simple decision to turn our **ATTENTION** to another person can improve understanding and empathy. Philippians 2:4 *Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others. Relationships function off the currency of attention.*

AFFIRMATION is like a muscle, if we exercise it, it can grow and function effortlessly. Words are powerful according to Proverbs 18:21. When used to express admiration, appreciation, and respect they can add value to any relationship.

Expressing **AFFECTION** to another person is really about pursuing them. It can be eye contact, finding a seat beside them, a pat on the back, or a hug. Affection is embracing another person and expressing you care. Romans 12:19 says, *Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.*

ACCEPTING someone and valuing them acknowledges their dignity. No one is perfect and accepting a person is not agreeing with everything they say or do. Relationships are ultimately about dignity and acceptance is the respect for another person's agency. Romans 15:7 says it plain, *"accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us..."*

Take a moment and acknowledge that relationships are how God advances the kingdom and are His plan for our good. Is there a way that you have mistreated one another that God has brought to your attention? Pray for forgiveness and freedom from patterns of sin.