

THE LOSS & RESTORATION OF DIGNITY IN MARRIAGE



INTRODUCTION

A SERIES ON MARRIAGE AND DIGNITY

Thanks for joining me and my wife, Julie, on this journey. We 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 start 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 God's good plan for our lives together. During the first sermon, we will consider the purposes God has for marriage and be reminded of the beauty, joy, and wisdom of God's design.

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 at chadlangraves@gmail.com.

We are praying for you both as you open your heart 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*.

If you would like to register for this small group follow the link below:



DAY ONE

THE DIGNITY OF THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE

He who finds a wife finds a treasure and obtains favor from the LORD. Proverbs 18:22

Modern academia, social engineers, and political activists rage against traditional marriage and scoff at an archaic patriarchy that supposedly subjugates women.

"Patriarchy imposes masculinity and femininity character stereotypes in society which strengthen the iniquitous power relations between men and women. Feminism is an awareness of patriarchal control, exploitation, and oppression at the material and ideological levels of women's labour, fertility and sexuality, in the family, at the place of work, and in the society in general, and conscious action by women and men to transform the present situation. Overcoming the belief and practice of patriarchy is termed as Eve empowerment." - Utter foolishness

Don't buy what they are selling. It is at best naive, and at its most sinister, demonic.

God has set forth a plan where women and men are protected, treasured and cared for.

Studies like one by Waite (1995); Kim and McKenry (2002); and Waite and Gallagher (2001, p. 37), "demonstrate that cohabiters who are not engaged to be married, that is, who do not have definite marriage plans, such as a ring purchased or a date set, do not gain the same benefits in terms of physical and mental health as those who are married."

If you want to restore the dignity of your marriage, you need to restore your commitment to not only your relationship but also your commitment to the institution of marriage.

Marriage is good for morality of a society.

Marriage is good for sexual fulfillment of a society.

Marriage is good for the dignity of women in society.

Marriage is good for the health of children.

Marriage is good for the needs and care of orphans.

The sexual revolution in the 60s did not free women. It subjected them to greater exploitation. From casting couches to dead beat dads to the constant demand for sexual objectification, when women are not daughters or sisters, they are used and mistreated. It should not be so among Christian people.

Genesis 2:18-25

And the Lord God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him." Out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name. So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him. And the Lord God caused a

deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said: "This is now bone of my bones And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man." Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed."

No matter what you think about this Genesis account, there are universal truths in this ancient passage. There are relational dynamics that are just as relevant today as they were when Moses wrote the Pentateuch.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

And the Lord God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him."

"This word in Hebrew is ezer. It is used for God Himself throughout the rest of Scripture to describe Him as a military aid or a rescue, a help who comes in at the time of need. When God said, "This man needs a helper," He wasn't saying, this man needs a servant. He was saying, "This man needs a partner, this man needs a powerful aid to do the mission I have given him." - -

Phylcia Masonheimer

Companionship is intimate safety. Marriage is God's general will for humanity. God made it as the means for procreation, community, and social stability.

Psalm 68:4-6

*Sing to God, sing in praise of his name,
extol him who rides on the clouds;
rejoice before him—his name is the Lord.*

*A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows,
is God in his holy dwelling.*

*God sets the lonely in families,
he leads out the prisoners with singing;
but the rebellious live in a sun-scorched land.*

What a contrast - a garden with intimacy, safety, and husbandry, cultivating and flourishing vs. a sun-scorched land consumed, drought-stricken, exposed and unsustainable.

God has intended to meet one of the deepest needs of the soul by the means of the family. He sets the lonely in families.

CONVERSATION AND PRAYER

Nearly half of today's 20 somethings will choose not to marry. In a post biblical culture, we see an increasing number of young people without any conviction of the importance or morality of marriage. It is having a disastrous impact on our society.

"Research from The Marriage Foundation reveals that 47% of women and 48% of men aged twenty will never marry. The report reveals a generational shift away from marriage as couples increasingly cohabit without ever taking the decision to commit."

Why is it important for you and your spouse to believe in the importance of marriage and work to preserve marriage?

Take a moment to pray for your own marriage. Thank God for each other and ask God to strengthen your relationship during this next few weeks of studying and learning together as a church.

DAY TWO

THE DIGNITY OF COMPANIONSHIP

We read this passage from Ruth at weddings for a reason:

Ruth 1:16 -17

"But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the Lord do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you.""

When a couple gets married, they are committing to prefer one another and pursue one another. There is a dignity to companionship and an indignity to loneliness. Being single is lonely, but being married and lonely is an unbearably painful loneliness.

*Jesus told the Pharisees, "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Matthew 19:6). Marriage is of God. He joined (Greek *sunezeuksen*, "yoked") male and female together.*

Together socially.
Together emotionally.
Together sexually.
Together spiritually.
Together intellectually.
Together prayerfully.

Early on in our marriage, I was taught that love is a decision. If someone comes to me and says, "I don't love my spouse anymore." I respond, "then start loving them again." Love is not something you accidentally step in. Love is a conscious decision. It is an act of the will.

The Hebrew words for love are:

Ahavah is Commitment love: Song of Solomon 8:7
"Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it."

Rayah is Friendship love: Proverbs 17:17 "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity."

Dode is Proverbs 17:17: Intimate love
"May he kiss me with the kisses of his mouth for love is better than wine." Song of Solomon 1:2

I once heard a pastor refer to these as flames. Flames have to be stoked. Fires have to be fueled or they go out.

Harley writes, *"More often than not, being right or wrong for someone depends not on some mysterious compatibility quotient, but on how willing and able you are to meet that someone's needs."* Harley, Willard F. Jr. (2011-02-01). *His Needs, Her Needs: Building an Affair-Proof Marriage* (p. 23).

Studies show that when a person is healing, it takes 80% less glucose to heal when they have a spouse caring for

them than when they are trying to mend on their own. Research tells us physical wounds heal faster when we are in a caring relationship.

Giving attention to your spouse is the highest of dignities. Jesus said it this way, if you even look at another woman you have committed adultery in your heart. (Matthew 5: 28 - 29) At the root of this teaching, Jesus is addressing the role of what or who has our attention. We even use language that affirms this truth when we say that someone is not "paying" attention. What are we saying? Refusing to give someone our attention is the act of not valuing them.

We advance our own personal sense of self respect and restore our dignity when we recapture our ability to govern and control what we allow to have our attention.

There is only so much real estate in a person's heart. You and I have only a limited amount of bandwidth when it comes to our minds.

Friends, stay face to face. Pursuing your spouse is about keeping your attention on them. I think every marriage is tempted to go from face to face to shoulder to shoulder. That is, when we live in the same house and have our signatures on contracts together, but we stop being friends, something is wrong. This does not always happen intentionally. Sometimes work and life circumstances separate us. Sometimes demands wedge between us. Relationships naturally tend to drift apart.

The Hebrew word for adultery is to turn your back on your spouse. If we stay face to face, then we will never turn our back on each other. It is not too late to turn back.

Sometimes pursuing a spouse will require forgiving them. Sometimes pursuing a spouse will require asking them to forgive you. Sometime pursuing a spouse will cost us our selfish desires.

1 Corinthians 16:13-14

“Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men (or grow up), be strong. Let all that you do be done in love.”

CONVERSATION AND PRAYER

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, writing to a young bride and groom from his prison cell in Nazi Germany in 1943, wrote: *“It is not your love that sustains the marriage, but from now on, the marriage that sustains your love.”* Promised love is the most romantic thing I can think of. Promised love says, “I love you now, but I also promise to love you in the future when times are uncertain and circumstances may change. I give you my future love when you may be sick or may be going through hard times. I am loyal to you.”

How does the security of faithful, covenanted love help a marriage weather hard times and reinforce stability in the relationship? Take a moment and pray for your companionship and commitment to one another. Pray for God’s strength to help you keep your promise to one another.

DAY THREE

A LEGACY OF TREASURING

Kabod is a Hebrew word for dignity and honor. It specifically has to do with the weighty value of love.

I thought about this word while at the hospital one day. 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 *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 their story. It was one of brokenness, loss, and disability. Her pain had been compounded by over a year in Covid lockdowns in the isolation of a nursing home. She had been cast aside and forgotten. 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. We should not let the values of this ungodly world sway us into

believing a lie. Her soul is still a treasure. Her spirit has such dignity. Her mind is still fully capable of loving and being loved. We dare not write *ichabod* (the glory has departed) over her life. For that matter, we should not write *ichabod* over our own lives. 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, and what a treasure we have to share life with our spouse. Recently, I wanted to frame my responses to my wife. So, I edited her contact information in such a way that when I call her or she calls me, the first thing I see is "Treasure Her". When we treasure someone, we handle them with care.

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."

Dignity is a sense of self worth and a character that creates a context for mutual respect and attraction. It is the way we hold ourselves, and it effects the way we respond to 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 of restoring what was lost in the fall. We live in a world in disarray with men and women stripped of dignity and a profound loss of worth.

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 with 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 since 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 to restore her own 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 when 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 and asked her to marry him. 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.

We must restore the dignity in our own lives and treat each other with dignity if we are going to have the kind of marriage that honors God and treasures one another.

CONVERSATION AND PRAYER

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 and grieve over this mistreatment.

Many times a spouse will allow things for the sake of the relationship that actually will ultimately destroy the relationship. We know that God has given us one another

so that we might treasure each other and maintain our own dignity.

Take a moment and pray for God to show you ways to experience this restoration.

DAY FOUR

THE CELEBRATION OF DIFFERENCES AND THE MINGLING OF SOULS

Marriage is meant to be the mingling of our souls together. God did not play a cosmic joke on couples by causing them to be attracted to each other even though many times they are very different. God made it where couples attract to one another in ways that compliment His mission for their lives.

It is called Complementarianism. God made day and night, land and sea, and God made man and woman. This is his creative design. This is healthy and fruitful and balanced.

Let's do a little assessment and consider our differences by using a simple personality test. This is a tool to get you thinking about how you and your spouse are wired. I believe you can learn about what God wants you to do by leaning about how God has made you.

THE FOUR TEMPERAMENTS AND THEIR STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

CHOLERIC

They are the type of people who get things done. Figuratively, they drive a steam-roller because they have strong personalities. They don't mind being confrontational when things are needing to be accomplished. They are driven and they can struggle with suspicion. Their responsive tendency is anger. Their self talk is "I will". Their bad theology is that God is not just, so I have to settle this. Their need is humility. The strength of having a Choleric in your life is their productivity. The challenge of having a Choleric in your life is that they can overwhelm you.

SANGUINE

They are the type of person who draw people together. Figuratively, they drive a hippy van full of people because they are the life of the party. They don't mind being impulsive when things need to get accomplished. They are expressive. They struggle with being overly sensitive. Their responsive tendency is foolish impulse. Their self talk is "I want". Their bad theology is that God is not enough, so I

will seek. Their need is wisdom. The strength of having a Sanguine in your life is that they are life-giving. The challenge of having a Sanguine in your life is that they can distract others.

PHLEGMATIC

They are sensitive. Figuratively, they drive an electric car because they are practical. They don't mind being pessimistic when things need to be accomplished. They are measured. They are clean and ordered. They struggle with anxiety. Their responsive tendency is fear. Their self talk is "I can't". Their bad theology is that God is not in control. Their need is to trust. The strength of having a phlegmatic in your life is their consistency. The challenge of having a phlegmatic in your life is they can frustrate others.

MELANCHOLY

They are refiners. Figuratively, they drive a motorcycle because they are loners. They don't mind being condescending when things need to be accomplished. They are creative. They are workers. They struggle with loneliness. Their responsive tendency is doubt and despair. Their self talk is "I doubt". Their bad theology is God is not good. Their need is hope. The strength of having a melancholy in your life is they are thoughtful and loyal. The challenge is that they can be perfectionists with others.

Most of us have a couple of these that are prominent in our personality. Being aware of this can help us mature and grow in interpersonal relationship.

PERSONALITY COMBINATIONS:

1. Sanguine Married to Sanguine = Influential Couple
2. Sanguine Married to Phlegmatic = Flexible Couple
3. Sanguine Married to Melancholy = Balanced Couple
4. Sanguine Married to Choleric = Productive Couple
5. Phlegmatic Married to Phlegmatic = Stability Couple
6. Phlegmatic Married to Melancholy = Sensitive Couple
7. Phlegmatic Married to Choleric = Complimentary Couple
8. Melancholy Married to Melancholy = Considerate Couple
9. Melancholy Married to Choleric = Strong Willed Couple
10. Choleric Married to Choleric = Power Couple

CONVERSATION AND PRAYER

God is committed to our spiritual maturity. The letter of 1 Thessalonians teaches us what the will of God is for our lives: 1. our sanctification (4:3) and 2. that we give thanks in all circumstances; (5:18). When we believe that God has a plan for our lives and that God has had a hand in our marriage, then we can trust that He has put us together in such a way that will add to our maturity and growth. We can also trust His providence in orchestrating the events of our lives to bring us together and be thankful for who God provided and how they are uniquely wired as a helpmeet to join us in His will for our lives.

Take time to marvel in prayer at God's sovereign plan for your lives and ask God to help you both be an encouragement to one another in your spiritual growth.

DAY FIVE

THE DIGNITY OF ENJOYMENT

Do you know the story of King David and his wife in 2 Samuel 6?

David had a moment of joy before the Lord and danced and stripped down out of his kingly attire and put on an ephod with all the other worshippers in an uninhibited moment. His wife's response is interesting.

1. She was not able to rejoice.
2. She did not involve herself.
3. She had contempt for her husband.
4. She questioned her husband's motives.
5. She was last on David's list to be blessed.
6. She mentioned the other women.
7. She saw everything through a lens of disrespect.
8. She diminished what he had done with criticism and sarcasm.

9. She cut David with words, and he fired back.
10. She has her concern dismissed and David notes that other women think he is dignified.

Read the text and consider how she is responding to him. Remember that David had a problem with other women and Michal had surely been hurt by him.

"Then David danced before the Lord with all his might; and David was wearing a linen ephod. So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting and with the sound of the trumpet. Now as the ark of the Lord came into the City of David, Michal, Saul's daughter, looked through a window and saw King David leaping and whirling before the Lord; and she despised him in her heart. So they brought the ark of the Lord, and set it in its place in the midst of the tabernacle that David had erected for it. Then David offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord. And when David had finished offering burnt offerings and peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord of hosts. Then he distributed among all the people, among the whole multitude of Israel, both the women and the men, to everyone a loaf of bread, a piece of meat, and a cake of raisins. So all the people departed, everyone to his house. Then David returned to bless his household. And Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David, and said, "How glorious was the king of Israel today, uncovering himself today in the eyes of the maids of his servants, as one of the base fellows shamelessly uncovers himself!" So David said to Michal, "It was before the Lord, who chose me instead of your father and all his house, to appoint me ruler over the people of the Lord, over Israel. Therefore I will play music before the Lord. And I will be even more undignified than this, and will be humble in my own sight. But as for the maidservants of whom you have spoken, by them I will be held in honor.""

II Samuel 6:14-22

When we are bitter, it taints everything we see. When we are hurt, it builds a shell around us that stops us from enjoying anything or appreciating what is honorable.

Michal did not appreciate David. She could not join in his joy. Every couple will have times in their marriage when they can't laugh and smile or make eye contact. Woundedness sets in like sepsis; shutting down the whole system.

Let's be clear, Michal is not the villain in this chapter. David knew that he had not cultivated a good relationship with his wife. She was not a well-watered vine. The chapter ends with a final word: barrenness. That is what resentment brings. Nothing fruitful comes from this kind of indignity with each other.

The highest form of love is enjoyment. When we stop enjoying our spouse, we stop treating them with dignity.

The Proverbs tell us to rejoice with the wife of our youth: *"Drink water from your own cistern, And running water from your own well. Should your fountains be dispersed abroad, Streams of water in the streets? Let them be only your own, And not for strangers with you. Let your fountain be blessed, And rejoice with the wife of your youth. As a loving deer and a graceful doe, Let her breasts satisfy you at all times; And always be enraptured with her love."* Proverbs 5:15 -19

Can a couple return to enjoying each other? Yes, but it will take effort. If we do what love does, we will feel what love feels.

How do we restore joy in our marriage? Dance together. Start celebrating good things. Worship together. Get “naked” before the Lord and restore transparency and honesty. Serve others together and serve one another. Lay off the criticism and sarcasm. Believe the best about one another. Be respectful of each other’s concerns and set boundaries so that you can restore trust.

All relationships follow a cycle:

1. Enjoyment, harmony and closeness
2. Woundedness and disruption
3. Forgiveness and repair
4. Return to closeness and enjoyment

Get back to putting enjoyment on the top of your priority list. It is far more important than you may have ever realized.

CONVERSATION AND PRAYER

Did you know the average couple who starts dating spends around 70 minutes a day talking in the first year? By the tenth year together, that number drops to around 10 minutes of conversation a day.

David prayed to have a renewed spirit, a restored joy, and a clear conscience in Psalm 51. Take some time to pray for God to increase, or if necessary to restore, the joy in your marriage. It might be that you need to ask for forgiveness about something in order to renew a right spirit between each other. Take some time and say the following words if you need to.

I love you.

Forgive me.

I am sorry.

DAY SIX

THE DIGNITY OF MUTUAL SUBMISSION

A good practical definition of mutual submission is when the one spouse who wants more takes less and when the other spouse who wants less gives more.

My pastor once said, "Two people just acting like Christians can make a good marriage."

The Christian spirit is to:

"love one another with tender affection and outdo one another in showing honor" Romans 12:10.

Ephesians 5:21 offers this gentle appeal,

"Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ."

If we want to restore dignity to ourselves, our spouse, and our marriage, then we must make it our aim to out-do each other in showing honor and meeting each other's needs.

What a better way of life and marriage! Instead of keeping score so that we always benefit more and no one disrespects us or mistreats us, we intentionally give more

than we take. We work to out-do our spouse in serving them, praising them and meeting their needs. It becomes our policy in life to not only pay our way, but do our best to cover others.

When I was in seminary, I had a professor ask a question in a leadership class. He asked, "When you lay your head down at night, if I were to ask you, Did you serve your wife today?, what would be your answer?" Of course, immediately I began to make a list of ways and justifications in which I defended my case that I served my wife. He then asked another question. He said, "Turn to your wife now, and let me ask her the same question - Did your husband serve your needs today? What do you think her answer would be? Would it be the same as your answer?" Then he told us, "Men, you need to move the goal post. At the end of the day you don't win if you can defensively argue your answer. You win if your spouse says yes, I have been served well and loved and my needs have been met."

Early in our marriage both of Julie's parents passed away. I remember standing at her dad's funeral and thinking, "if anyone is going to take care of her now it is going to be me." When her mother died, a sense of responsibility came over me. Children call their parents when they need affirmation, want to share their struggles, or when they just want someone to listen. It became clear that I was now the one who would carry the baton of care. Julie was mine to love and provide for.

The dignity of mutual submission is a return over and over to the commitment of exclusively meeting each other's needs.

In the book, *Every Man's Battle*, the author's illustration on bowls is a helpful and wholesome teaching. He wrote that satisfaction of sexual appetite is like sipping from bowls. A spouse has multiple bowls they could choose from. They could sip from the an attractive co-worker. They could sip from a sexually-driven TV show. They could sip from the flirtation of someone who is not their spouse. They could sip from pornography. Or, they could limit their total sexual fulfillment in life to their husband or wife, and faithfully seek their sexual satisfaction from them.

When we pull the sheets off the marital bed, we find a consistent inequity in sexual appetite. It is not always true, but is it usually true, and the by-product of the Fall has been a source of continued tension throughout the history of marriage.

When one spouse hungers for sex and the other does not have the same desire, it exposes all kinds of indignities.

1 Corinthians 7:3-5

"The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife. Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control."

God gave us sex, and it is like a fire. When placed correctly in the marriage relationship, it can be like a fireplace that warms the house for a lifetime. Outside the correct place, it can burn the house down. Do not give Satan a foothold in your life or the life of your spouse. Protect them by taking care of their needs.

CONVERSATION AND PRAYER

When we tell our spouse that they can not 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 on our partner's downfalls.

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.

Take a moment and pray for the humility to give one another permission in each other's lives. Pray for transparency, accountability and grace.

DAY SEVEN

THE DIGNITY OF UNDERSTANDING

We love someone well when we care about their experience and point of view, and want them to be heard.

Proverbs 18:13 punches with these words:

"A person who answers without listening is foolish."

Sometime we don't want to ask questions because we don't want to hear the answers. I heard someone say one time that we can get more accomplished in 2 months being interested in someone else than we can in 2 years trying to get them interested in us. When we get married, we should become students of our spouse in a life-long pursuit of knowing and understanding them.

Let's pray like the Psalmist:

"Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults. Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me..." (Psalm 19:12-13)

What a prayer! Lord stop me from the sin of presumption. Don't let me be ruled by foolish impulses, blinding pride, or unnecessary ignorance.

Counseling others has been one of the best things that has ever happened to me. As a pastoral counselor and chaplain, one of the primary things I do is listen to people. Being an extrovert kind of puts me at a disadvantage. My kind of personality requires intentional active listening. Even after years of training and experiences, I catch myself talking when I should be listening. It is a strong compulsion and the way I am naturally wired. Being assertive is both a strength and a weakness.

God has used counseling other people to work on my heart. As I listen to other people share about their decisions, conflicts, and struggles, something happens. I am able to listen without being guarded or defensive. In my own circumstances and when I am dealing with myself, I can come at it with self interest and a biased perspective. In counseling, though, something significant has happened many times. Like a curtain being pulled back and light shining in, there have been moments that hearing someone else's words has caught me off guard enough and vulnerable enough to expose areas in my life that I was unable or unwilling to see.

Philippians 2:4-5 says,

"Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had."

THREE TESTS FOR THOUGHTS:

1. Test them against scripture.
2. Test them against reality.
3. Test them against objective counsel.

Drag those thoughts out into the light of the day. If they are true, pure, loving, virtuous and honest, then they will hold up under scrutiny.

False thoughts are the devil's handy work. He is a liar. He is the father of lies. He wants to deceive you and sow discord in your marriage relationship. He asked Eve, "Has God said?". He has concocted lies from the beginning. He has a spirit of accusations. Christ's spirit is the spirit of advocacy. When we sin, we have an advocate in Christ. This is so important: we are not supposed to be the accuser of our spouse, it is our role to be their advocate.

How is it living on the other side of you? Are you easy to live with?

1 Peter 3:7 says, *"husbands live with your wife in an understanding way."*

My son left the light on in his truck and ran his battery down. It was the last straw for me. I immediately made a list in my mind of all his accumulated trespasses. It was time for me to unload. Enough was enough. I went over to get my car to boost his, and the battery was dead. Hahaha.

Good grief. Life lesson: Check your own battery before you begin your lecture.

We all do it, don't we? We build cases in our minds. The problem with that kind of prosecution is that no one is

allowed to punch holes in our arguments. We must pull our thoughts out of the dark places in our hearts and into the light of scrutiny, and let them be tested. Sometimes just saying something we are thinking out loud to another person can help us to see how unfair we are being. And sometimes presenting our claims to a reasonable friend can provide a better perspective. We are all tempted to ignore inconvenient truths and inflate other details that support our preconception.

Seek to understand each other and find ways to listen and be listened to, especially in moments of disagreement. Give your spouse permission to question you and disagree with you and this will place a high priority on the dignity of your marriage.

Peter writes, *"live with each other in an understanding way and treat each others as fellow heirs of the grace of God."*

CONVERSATION AND PRAYER

When my son was little we went bike riding, and he did not want to go. He lagged behind, and I started barking at him to stop being disobedient and just come on. For two miles, he did not just catch up with us and get his attitude correct. At the turn around we waited for him to catch up with us and realized both his tires were flat. I felt like the worst dad ever. The poor little guy was peddling as hard as he could but I was giving him grief.

It is so important to not assume we understand everything someone else is going through. It is so important to do the good work of empathy.

We restore our own dignity when we understand someone else's point of view. We restore dignity to our marriage and treat our spouse with dignity when we pursue peace and refuse to rupture the relationship over disagreement.

Take a moment and pray for each other. Ask God to give you a greater empathy for each other and discernment as you seek to know and be known. Ask God to open the eyes of your heart.