

# THE LOSS & RESTORATION OF DIGNITY IN MARRIAGE



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WEEK FIVE

# INTRODUCTION

## A SERIES ON MARRIAGE AND DIGNITY

Thanks for joining in the fourth week of the series on marriage. Our previous messages and booklets can be downloaded on the [compassouth.org](http://compassouth.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 dignity of understanding. During the fifth sermon, we will consider the shift in direction that comes when spouses respond to one another in an understanding way.

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 [chadalangraves@gmail.com](mailto:chadalangraves@gmail.com).

## **Dig Deeper In A Couples Group**

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, scan the code below. We meet this Wednesday night at the Triangle Cafe from 6:15 PM to 7:15 PM.



# DAY TWENTY NINE

## THE DIGNITY OF RESPONSIVENESS

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Responding is all about the dance of dignity. There is a choreography in relationships that are in step with one another. The back and forth volley of love and respect affirms and reaffirms these three truths over and over:

1) you matter to me 2) you can rely on me 3) I am here for you.

The unforgivable sin is not disagreement. The offense that tears down and destroys is unresponsiveness. When we are hurt and our spouse does not pursue us, or when we offend and there is no grace, we feel unloved. And just as importantly, when we withdraw instead of pursuing, we send a message that we do not value our spouse. When we leave them lonely and uncared for, we spiral the relationship downward into the worst assumptions. When we get angry and shut down, we tear each other down.

Rewiring our own response/coping mechanisms can be a maturing process. We all bring previously learned patterns into our relationships which need to be addressed and adjusted.

The difference is worth it. I call it the spirals. One spiral is when the back and forth loops downward which cause the relationship to disintegrate into indignities. The other spiral is when loving responsiveness moves the relationship upward and results in dignities and strengthening the bond. It is in this intersection of responsiveness that relationships can heal and be restored or lose their dignity.

**Consider the following Bible verses:**

*A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. Proverbs 15:1*

Can you see the spiral on Proverbs 15:1 moving up or plunging downward depending on how you respond?

*Matthew 18:15-20*

*If someone hurts you, go and tell him—work it out between the two of you. If he listens, you've made a friend. If he won't listen, take one or two others along so that the presence of witnesses will keep things honest, and try again.*

God puts the responsibility on us to respond even when we are the one who is hurt or offended.

God doesn't just tell us where to go, he gives us the vehicle and gas to get there. God will change our hearts/ inner responsiveness.

*Ezekiel 36:26*

*"And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart."*

We have to respond.

*2 Chronicles 34:27*

*Because your heart was responsive and you humbled yourself before God when you heard what he spoke against this place and its people, and because you humbled yourself before me and tore your robes and wept in my presence, I have heard you, declares the LORD.*

*Galatians 5:16*

*But I say, walk habitually in the [Holy] Spirit [seek Him and be responsive to His guidance], and then you will certainly not carry out the desire of the sinful nature [which responds impulsively without regard for God and His precepts].*

Our need for responsiveness in life is crucial to the health of all of our relationships and especially with our spouse.

# CONVERSATION AND PRAYER

## SIX REASONS WHY WE COMMUNICATE:

1. **BASIC INFORMATION**
2. **PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS**
3. **CONFLICT RESOLUTION**
4. **CONNECTION FOR BONDING**
5. **REVELATION ABOUT SELF**
6. **INTIMATE DESIRES**

Are you taking the time you need to communicate? Couples need to schedule time together to talk about important things. They need undivided attention and enough time to find agreement and work out conflicts. Part of marriage is prioritizing time together for communication and connection.

**Take a moment and talk about each of these and discuss a time you can schedule each week and each day for conversation that is not competing with something else. Pray for a greater bonding and better communication.**

# DAY THIRTY

## THE DIGNITY OF WALKING BACK INTO THE ROOM

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If we plan to follow Jesus, that means sometimes He will call us to follow him back into the room.

Jesus restores relationships.

Jesus pursues people.

Jesus doesn't give up.

Jesus humbles himself.

Jesus takes the first step.

Jesus told the man who had been possessed to go back home. He didn't want to walk back into town and go back to the people who hurt him and the places where he had been hurt. He wanted to walk away, and yet Jesus told him to walk back into his hometown and show them the difference that Jesus had made.

*Luke 8: 38-39*

*The man from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, "Return home and tell how much God has done for you." So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him.*



We live in a throw away culture where we are tempted to write people off and be done with them. We withdraw when we are hurt. We are filled with shame when we misspeak or get messed up. Jesus went after Peter even after Peter had been so two-faced. Jesus hung on a cross and said, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do". Maybe you have been legitimately offended. So was Jesus. Maybe you are the maniac, and it would be easier if you just went away, Jesus calls you to walk back into rooms and make things right. The heart of God is for reconciliation.

## CONVERSATION AND PRAYER

### **Ways to respond to your spouse.**

1. Respond with the right tone.
2. Respond with enough time.
3. Respond with atmosphere of trust.
4. Respond with truth spoken in love.
5. Respond with the heart of an advocate.

How has your tone been lately with one another? The tone we take expresses how we care for one another.

**Take a moment and pray for the right tone with one another so that you would treasure one another.**

# DAY THIRTY ONE

## THE BAGGAGE WE BRING

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You have baggage. I have baggage. We all have baggage. The way we react to one another is attached to what we have been through in the past. Our family culture and our previous friendships can inform what we expect and how we think about our current relationship.

*“Research in marriage and family therapy suggests that approximately 80 percent of the emotional conflict between couples is rooted in events that predate the couple knowing each other. That’s why one of the questions I commonly ask in marriage counseling is how much of each spouse’s reaction to the other is his or her “80 percent.” In other words, how much of the conflict is not so much a direct outgrowth of a current event as something that flows from parts of their minds that are remembering?”*

-Curt Thompson, Anatomy of the Soul

Figuring out what we carry into a relationship will help us know what to be on the look out for. This is true especially when it comes to past hurts.

Past problems have a way of showing up in the present and then messing up our futures. In marriage counseling I like to ask couples to write down some good things they bring from their past into the marriage and also write down some difficult things from their past that they wish they did not have to bring. Talk about these things. Think about how they impact you now.

Hurts, fears, failures, and traumas weigh us down. Like at the airport; sometimes we need to get rid of some stuff to get on board and be able to move forward.

**Psalm 38:4, 9**

*"For my iniquities have gone over my head; like a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me. O Lord, all my longing is before you; my sighing is not hidden from you."*

What did David do when he was weighed down? He unloaded on the Lord.

Drag that stuff out and deal with it. May God give us all the grace to leave some of it behind.

# CONVERSATION AND PRAYER

## **A Women's Typical Needs**

Security through provision

Trust through honesty

Affection through kindness

Leadership through initiation

## **A Men's Typical Needs**

Respect through affirmation

Release through sex

Friendship through fun

Help through support at home

***Take a moment and pray together and discuss the needs listed. Ask your spouse which needs come to mind and pray for God to help you meet each other's needs.***

# DAY THIRTY

# TWO

## A CHRIST-CENTERED HOME

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Someone recently asked how to start making a Christ-centered home. The first step is to pray together. Where two or three are together in His name, He is in the midst.

1. Prayer welcomes an awareness of God into our marriage and home and draws us closer together.
2. Prayer communicates our needs to one another and positions our whole house to seek the Lord for each other.
3. Prayer orients each of us to set aside what we want and focus on what God wants and this humility reduces pride and conflicts.
4. Prayer sets our hope in the Lord and builds our faith as we depend on Him and see Him at work in our family.

Talk to God about your spouse. A personal faith

Talk to your spouse about God. A growing faith

Talk to God with your spouse. A shared faith

At its purest, a Christian relationship is God-focused and the first step is to pray together. Start today, Be consistent, Don't over complicate it.

# CONVERSATION AND PRAYER

## **A practical approach to praying together.**

It might be helpful to have a guide when you pray together as a couple. Let me suggest using Donald Whitney's technique of "praying scripture".

1. Read the verse and emphasize different words or phrases in the text.
2. Consider key phrases as prayers and turn them into exhortations and prayers.
3. Let your mind be provoked by the text and the Spirit prompt you.
4. Pray about what comes to mind and share with the group to benefit from one another's insight.
5. Find a theme or common thread in the passage you've read and break up into small groups and share and

pray with one another. Spend time praying for others and being prayed for.

6. Search the text for how it speaks to your current situation and hear from the Lord.

7. Finish the time together praying over the group one final time to end the time with grace and gladness.

**Take a moment and grab a passage like the Lord's prayer in Matthew 6 and pray through it together and make it personal.**

*Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.*

# DAY THIRTY

# THREE

## THE DIGNITY OF FRIENDSHIP

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Over the years I have used the following in my pre-marriage counseling sessions. Every married couple would benefit to make the following commitments to one another. There is a correlation between being able to love someone and being spiritually healthy. Here are 10 commitments to Biblical friendship.

### **1. Be Friendly - Pro 18:24**

*A man that hath friends must show himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticks closer than a brother.*

You can accomplish more in 2 months being interested in someone else, than you can accomplish in 2 years trying to get some else interested in you. Proverbs says, "A generous man will prosper and he who refreshes will be refreshed."



## **2. Be Present - Pro 27:10**

*Thine own friend...forsake not; don't go into thy brother's house in the day of thy calamity.*

Friends share burdens. When you are present in times of need, you build your friendship. When you are absent in times of need, you bankrupt your friendships. Philippians says, *"Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others."*

## **3. Be an Advocate - Pro 27:9**

*Ointment & perfume rejoice the heart: so does the sweetness of a friend by hearty counsel.*

You have to realize that if you are building a case against someone, you are no longer acting as their friend. Jesus is our example - He was a friend of sinners. The Gospel prepares us to be friends. Friends speak to each other instead of speaking about each other.

## **4. Be Gracious - Pro 22:11**

*He that loves pureness of heart, for the grace of his lips the king shall be his friend.*

The number one indicator of divorce is the way people talk to one another. Colossians says "*Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person.*" Friends who keep score lose at relationships. Friends cut each other some slack.

### **5. Be A Contribution - Pro 28:24**

*Whoever robs father or mother and says, "It's not wrong [a crime]," is just like someone who destroys things [or friendships].*

A good friend does not dominate, manipulate, or degrade you. Friends add value to your life. If you are a constant taker in someone else's life, then you are using them and not really acting like you are their friend. Proverbs says, "*whoever walks with the wise will become wise and a companion of fools will suffer harm.*" People who are wise friends influence their friends to be wise. They enhance the lives of people around them.

### **6. Be Intimate - Pro 18:24**

A man with many friends can still be ruined, but a true friend sticks closer than a brother. Invest deeply and go long. A friend to everyone is a friend to no one.

*The truth is everyone is going to hurt you, you just have to find the ones worth suffering for. – Bob Marley*

We live in a time of shallow relationships. I call it crowded loneliness. Friendship requires vulnerability. We need real friendships, not social media followers.

### **7. Be Forgiving - Pro 17:9**

*Whoever covers an offense seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates close friends.*

Forgiveness is required in real friendships. Do not keep cataloging offenses. If you are constantly building a case against someone, you have stopped being their friend.

Repeating a matter to others. - Gossip

Repeating a matter to yourself. - Obsessing

Repeating a matter to your friend. - Nagging

Friends move past mistakes.

### **8. Be Trustworthy - Pro 16:28**

*A dishonest man spreads strife, and a whisperer separates close friends.*

It is the basic nature of most people to talk about others. Duplicity is talking about someone when they are not in the room differently than you would if they were in the room.

*The words of a whisperer are like delicious morsels; they go down into the inner parts of the body. Proverbs 26:22*

*Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceases. Proverbs 26:20*

## **9. Be Valuable - Pro 27:17**

*As iron sharpens iron, So a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.*

Friends sharpen one another. They have permission to push against what you are saying. Friction and tension are good. Friendship that is dull will not last. A lasting friendship adds value to life, sharpens you.

*The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit. Pro 18:21*

## **10. Be Honest - Pro 27:6**

*Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.*

Friends care enough to have hard conversations. Conflict, when handled correctly, produces greater intimacy. Every problem, if handled right, leads to possibility. Every crisis, if handled right, is a catalyst. Every obstacle, if handled right, is an opportunity. Just because you need a new marriage does not mean you need a new spouse. What is needed is renewed commitment to our primary friendship.

A marriage is primarily a friendship that over time has incredible benefits. Don't give up. If you haven't been a very good friend, then start now and build your friendship. The best things happen over time.

# CONVERSATION AND PRAYER

*AW Tozer once wrote, "there is a strain of loneliness infecting many Christian's, which only the presence of God can cure."*

God intend marriage to be a friendship. Look over the list and pick one of the ten that you might say needs your attention.

**Take a moment and ask God to help you be committed to building your friendship with one another. Hold hands and thank God for your friendship with each other.**

# DAY THIRTY FOUR

## THE DIGNITY OF BLENDED FAMILIES

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My mom married a man named James Steen. I like to say that he was a good stepdad but he became a world class Pawpaw to my boys. He died of lung cancer, and we miss him terribly. We miss coming home and him anticipating us being there and putting "Peppers" in the freezer so that we would have cold drinks when we arrived. We miss his amazing ability to be totally present, as if we were the only people in the world that mattered. We miss his love. He became the heart of our family.

Not all blended families are alike. There are many variations. Some have come up with 67 possible combinations. Blended families are common, in fact one study shows that 40% of married couples are step couples and 90% of divorcees choose to remarry. - Larry Fincher

In the Bible, Abraham had two sons that were "brothers from another mother" named Isaac and Ishmael. Jacob had a complicated family dynamic with two wives and two handmaids and 12 sons and one daughter. Many families in the Bible were blended. Jesus was raised in a blended family.

As we all know, Joseph was a step dad to Jesus. Therefore, in Luke 2:41-52, when Mary and Joseph confronted Jesus in the temple to address his separation from the family, notice that Mary did the talking (vs 48).

The only text we have of Jesus with his mom and stepdad as a child reveals some very interesting dynamics.

Mary, as the biological parent, took a role in Luke 2 of oversight while the text does not record Joseph addressing Jesus. We don't have enough information to know why. But, it is interesting that scripture records this interaction for us to learn from it.

Stepparents can fall in two ditches. They can disconnect and not parent the stepchildren or they can go overboard with a disproportionate amount of control and emotion. It is common for us all to choose the fight or flight reactions. The better approach is to team up as parents and partner in the care and oversight of the children.

It may be that the stepchild wants to be left alone, but scripture says that a child left to themselves is a shame. Don't go "a day's journey" without connecting and communicating as a family.

Ron Deal says, "It takes a long time to "blend". One study shows 5-7 years." One of the great enemies of a

blended family is the fact that we live in the age of instant everything. It's natural for Mom and Dad to assume that they'll have "instant success" with their new marriage and the new family it creates. Sometimes they naively assume that because they love each other so much and because they've found the "right" mate "this time," marriage is going to be so much more wonderful the second time around, and the kids will gladly come along for the ride."

Blended families must have the right relationship priorities.

1. God first (Gen 1:27)
2. Spouse second (Gen 2:24)
3. Children third (Gen 4:1)

One of the questions in scripture about Jesus' stepfather is his noticeable absence. Did he die? Did he leave them? Jesus was known as the son of a carpenter. He was known as a carpenter (Mark 6:3). Indeed, Matthew 13:54-55 tells us where Jesus learned his trade. I would speculate that Jesus probably received some training from his stepdad.

God knows what we need, and it is by Providence that we find ourselves in the places we are and under the supervision that we have. No one probably felt more awkward as a stepdad than Joseph. Just from the one passage in Luke 2 we can see the tensions of blended families.

Kollar wrote in his book on counseling that we should co-create a solution and be careful to not see people as the



problem. It is tempting to see our spouse or a child as disruptive or problematic. In Jesus' case in Luke 2 we know that Jesus had not done anything wrong. He was without sin. We also see that in the text he stayed behind (vs 43). His actions caused His parents to feel stress (vs48). He questioned his parents (vs 49), and He said things and did things that His parents did not understand (vs 50). This happens in every family.

Let me encourage you if you are in a blended family. Your situation is common. Your struggles are probably common. Don't give up.

60% of second marriages fail within the first two years. *"The first step to a healthy remarriage is you. Life wounds all of us. The losses, disappointments and hurts of life will not heal themselves—you must choose to heal. In fact, you will not grow until healing has taken place—and this takes time."*  
- From the book, "Looking Before You Leap ... Again!" by Jeff and Judi Parziale

Dr Kevin Leman says, "When two families unite, they don't blend—they collide."

I am praying for all those families doing the work and plowing hard ground. Galatians says, "Don't be weary in doing the right thing. If you faint not you will reap a harvest in time."

Take it from a stepson, it is worth it.

# CONVERSATION AND PRAYER

Here are 11 talking points that every blended family can use as they work through this passage.

1. Managing Obligation and Responsibilities.
2. Raising Children and Understanding their stages of development.
3. Communication.
4. Developing Practices and Rhythms.
5. Creating a Community of Relatives and Friends.
6. Intentionally pursuing one another.
7. Spiritual formation.
8. Distribution of Responsibilities.
9. Addressing Correction and Misunderstandings.
10. Treasuring and appreciating the gift of family and parenting.
11. Pleasing God and providing an example.

**Turn these ten encouragements into prayers. Ask God to make these true in your relationship.**

# DAY THIRTY FIVE

## THE DIGNITY OF WORK

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Work/life balance is a constant struggle in married life. If you work all the time, then you neglect your family relationally, and if you don't work enough, then you neglect to provide for your family.

If we think of the balance like a seesaw with work on one side and family on the other, then adjusting the fulcrum is a helpful way to understand. When the farmer has harvest, he leaves early and comes home late. The work side of life is a heavy load. In order to balance life, he must move the fulcrum of his focus towards his job. The fulcrum moves back towards family when work load lessens. The same is true when family needs arise. The fulcrum moves toward focus on spouse and children, and work responsibilities must take a back seat.

It is important to recognize that life is dynamic and a 50/50 work/life balance is never really possible. The better approach is to learn to manage the work and to be responsive to the needs of both without neglecting either.

When we are able to work, and we contribute to the provision of the household, we behave in a dignified way and we add value to our spouse. This labor will be both outside the home and inside the home. A proper division of labor is a significant commitment to our own dignity and our spouses dignity.

We need a Christian view of the home. It is not a selfish fortress of solitude. It is meant to be an outpost for the kingdom of God. It is the call of scripture for the marriage to be the base of Christian hospitality. Our working together is not just supposed to provide for us and our spouse but for others. It is not enough to only work for self.

1. Our work becomes a platform of influence for God to use. Our skillful diligence is what God will use to open doors and bless our house.

Ephesians 4:28

*Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.*

2. There is a dignity that is gained from learning to be consistent and productive in our work. Our lives should not be constant consumption without contribution.

Proverbs 22:29

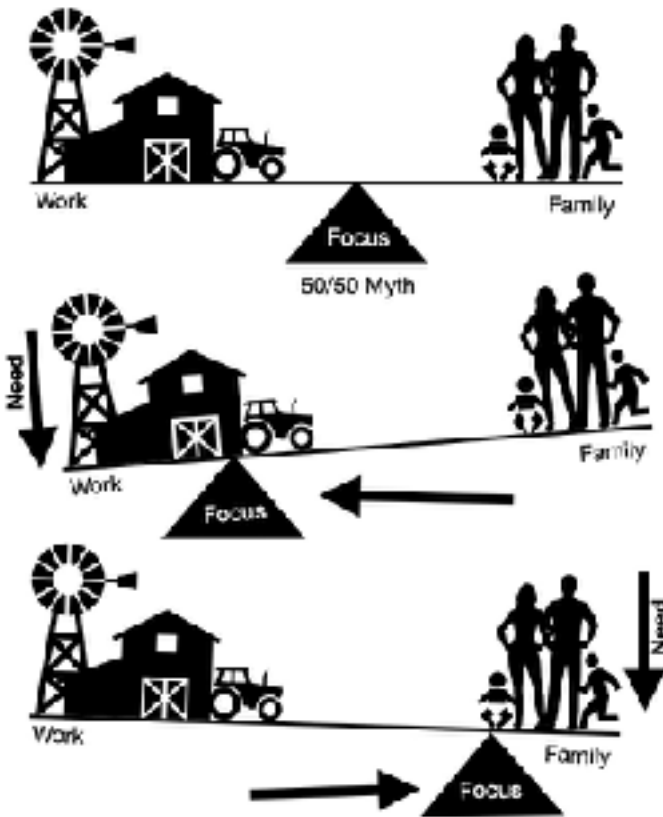
*Do you see a man skillful in his work? He will stand before kings; he will not stand before obscure men.*

3. There is a dignity to working and living a sustainable lifestyle that does not create a burden on others.

Proverbs 12:11

*Whoever works his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows worthless pursuits lacks sense.*

4. God put work in place as something for all of us, and it is a "GOOD" thing. Thus we are all "called" by God to do our work in a way that brings honor and glory to His name and serves others. God gives each of us talent and intellect and in His grace "calls" us to the work we do.



1 Thessalonians 4:11-14

*Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.*

## CONVERSATION AND PRAYER

Colossians 3:23-24

*"Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.*

Married couples who work together to establish their home, pay their bills, invest in the kingdom, and overflow with generosity to those within their reach create a fruitful union that is dignified and godly.

The dignity of work is healthy and holy.

**Take a moment and ask God to help you learn to be responsive to moments and give you wisdom to know when to move towards what is needed and how to set appropriate boundaries.**