

Week 2

Small Group Study – “Do I?”

Until death? No return. No warranty.



The Big Picture

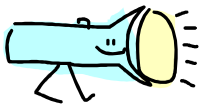
Last week we talked about the reality that we all come into marriage with desires for our marriage – and we discussed how those desires can become unhealthy expectations of “debts” that we believe our spouse “owes” us.

This week we will discuss God’s design of permanence for marriage – marriages that last and stand the test of time. Whether you had this expectation when you started your marriage, your marriage vows probably included language such as, “as long as we both shall live” or “until death parts us.”

The marriage relationship is God’s creation. The relationship is characterized by oneness – God takes two individuals and they become one – experiencing unity.

God intended marriage to be a lifelong, monogamous union. "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). When this is quoted in Matthew 19:5, a Greek word for united is used that means "to be glued to, be closely bound to."

If you are not married, last week we noted that the biblical principle “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Ephesians 5:21) applies to all believers – and that mutual submission is a principle that you can apply in your significant relationships. Likewise, the discussion of faithfulness and unity in relationships this week is a principle that you can apply as you exercise patience that keeps the body of Christ unified (Galatians 4:2-3).



Spotlight

Take a moment and let one person or couple in your group share one of the following:

- Who is the closest friend you’ve ever had (other than your spouse, if you are married)? Describe that relationship.
- Do you enjoy a good debate or prefer to keep the peace? Explain.
- What is one regret that you live with?
- What memories do you cherish from the past, or what is your most treasured heirloom? Why?



Discussion

A recent study led by a University of Chicago sociologist asked whether divorce makes people happy. The study found the following results:

- Unhappily married adults who divorced or separated were no happier, on average, than unhappily married adults who stayed married.
- Two out of three unhappily married adults who avoided divorce or separation ended up happily married five years later. Just one out of five of unhappy spouses who divorced or separated had happily remarried in the same time period.

Do the results of the study surprise you? Why or why not?

If the results of the study are true, why do so many Americans get divorced?

Prayer

Great and merciful God, you have united us in marriage – grant us grace to live according to your design for marriage. Strengthen us in constant faithfulness and true affection toward each other. Sustain and defend us in all trials and temptations.

Lord, help us grow in faith with you, and demonstrate that faith through unity and loving service to one another. Allow us to realize your purposes in marriage as we rely on you. You alone are worthy of honor and glory – may our relationships bring honor to you. Amen.

— adapted from a traditional prayer during the marriage ceremony



Read Mark 10:1-9

1. Read Genesis 2:24. What are the characteristics of God’s “ideal” for marriage? What is marriage as God designed it to be?
2. Read Deuteronomy 24:1. One ancient school of thought interpreted this passage to mean that a man could divorce his wife for any cause, even burning his toast! If marital unity is God’s ideal, why did Moses permit divorce in this passage? Was Moses wrong to allow divorce?
3. Jesus took the marriage ideal in Genesis 2:24 a step further in Mark 10:9 – he indicates that the issue is not the *right* to divorce, but God’s original *intention* for marriage. If we have a biblical *right* to divorce, should we pursue it? Why or why not?



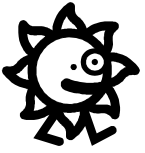
Living it out

One biblical scholar has suggested that Jesus' teaching on marriage "goes beyond opposing divorce; it opposes marital disharmony altogether." Let's look at five principles from Ephesians 4 that will tend to reduce disharmony and encourage marriages that last:

Principles from Ephesians 4	What are some practical actions I can do this week?
1. "No more lies, no more pretense.... In Christ's body we're all connected to each other, after all. When you lie to others, you end up lying to yourself." (4:25 MSG)	What are the ways that I am not honest with my spouse? Think of examples like diplomatic hedging, stretching facts, not telling the whole story, staying silent when I should speak, whitewashing motives, flattery, twisting the truth, adding false details, or contriving stories.
2. "In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold." (4:26-27)	Do I brood in anger and nurse it rather than deal with it promptly and responsibly? What are practical ways I can express anger in a way that allows for reconciliation?
3. "He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need." (4:28)	Do I withhold my fair share of the work in the household? Do I give my best at work and leave nothing for my spouse at home? Do I use household money selfishly?
4. "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen." (4:29)	Do my words build up or tear down my spouse? Do they affirm or assault? Am I more careful in my speech with others in public than I am with my spouse?
5. "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." (4:31-32)	What simple gestures can I extend to my spouse to make him/her feel loved, appreciated, and affirmed? Is there something that I admire in my spouse that I could share with him/her?

Pray together as a group using your small group prayer guide for the "Do I?" series

Gather specific prayer requests for the group that you will pray about this coming week:



Getting the word in you

Memorize this week:

Ephesians 4:32 "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."

A Point of View – “When Marriage Gets Tough”

from Dawn Yrene

"Divorce isn't the unforgivable sin," a friend hinted, not so subtly, after hearing my remorse over marrying a man with whom I had so little in common... Nearly 13 years and 5 children later, I've found that my difficult marriage has blessed me with great happiness as well as the strength to endure great pain.

Kevin and I are still more like black and white than gray. We need Christ to hold us together. But our roller coaster ride has shown me that, contrary to worldly opinions, there are good reasons to stay in a difficult marriage...

Staying married teaches us how to forgive. If there's one thing marriage has taught me, it's how to seek and grant forgiveness. Kevin, who'd suffered two divorces as an unbeliever, recently told me how freeing it is to be able to ask forgiveness and receive it. He said in his previous marriages, the word forgiveness was never mentioned. I've also learned firsthand the truth of Christ's words in Luke 7:47: "Her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little."...

Feelings that are absent now may not be in the future. Some couples find bitterness and resentment have made it impossible to love each other. Yet Jesus said, "With God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26). Both Kevin and I have reached low points where it seemed we could never love each other again. Miraculously, we later found our union had become such a team, a friendship, and a wonderful romance, that we felt unworthy and amazed at God's ability to restore. Utter hatred can become passionate love when we submit those feelings to God and let obedience override the desire of the moment...

I can choose to see the good in my spouse. In every situation or person, there are good and bad aspects on which we can focus. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 says to give thanks in all circumstances. When I wanted our yard fenced a few years ago, Kevin and I disagreed. He didn't feel we could afford it. I wanted protection for our kids. Finally, he put up a six-foot chain link fence, even though I told him I didn't like chain link. Years later, when I look at that fence, I can feel angry at his choice, or thank God that Kevin sacrificed time, sweat, and money to keep our kids safe...

Help is available. Studies show that couples who take positive steps toward resolving conflict... have happier marriages. While Kevin and I found there were plenty of people willing to counsel us during our challenging years, some gave more helpful advice than others. We sought professional Christian counseling, where we learned how to listen, repeat, and understand each other. We also attended weekend marriage seminars, which helped us shed some of the masks we wore to hide our faults, fears, and feelings from each other.