



MARRIAGE IN CHRIST SEMINAR FOLLOW UP GATHERINGS

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Simple Instructions

Schedule about 1 – 1½ hours

- Gathering
- Opening prayer
- Food and conversation
 - Simple, e.g., potluck, dessert and coffee, wine and cheese, simple brunch, etc.
 - Sharing about how things have gone for the past several weeks.
 - Share bright spots
 - Highlights of the last week or two
 - Changes that have occurred over time
- Break into discussion groups
 - Read the discussion topic (topics can be found on the alumni page of the website)
 - Discuss the questions
- Get back together
 - When do we want to meet next?
 - Agree to keep praying, talking and acting in your marriages
- Final Prayer

Ordinary life in Christ: “It’s about the little things.”

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. ¹³ Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴ Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.
Colossians. 3:12-14

In the Holy Spirit, we have the power to do acts of love for each other, regardless of the feelings of the moment. In the Holy Spirit we can change how we feel by acting in new and loving ways. Daily acts of love and kindness, giving and receiving forgiveness, and presuming the best of our spouse are the antidotes for falling out of love or for letting our love grow tepid. More importantly, acts of love are the ways in which friends treat each other. *Marriage in Christ seminar manual.*

I was having coffee with a woman who had been married for 55 years. She and her husband had raised three children and now when they could have been enjoying their grandchildren in a comfortable and well-earned retirement, she found herself caring for her husband who no longer even recognized her. He was suffering from dementia caused by recurring tumors and multiple brain surgeries. He now required round-the-clock nursing care. That morning we were talking about the Marriage in Christ seminar and she said, “Tell them it’s about the little things. My husband was a very successful business man and he gave me many very nice things, but my most precious memories are about his kindness and the little acts of love he did for me, even when he was very busy.” She continued, “My favorite gift was a picture he cut out of a magazine and put in a two dollar frame. It was a picture of a man and a woman climbing a mountain and he wrote on it, ‘It’s not how or even, if you get to the top, it’s who you take with you. Love, John.’” She went on to say, “It was all the little things he did for me and that I did for him that kept our marriage going.

For your discussion:

1. What are your favorite small acts of love?
2. What small acts of kindness that your spouse does for you are you most grateful for? Have you told him or her that?
3. What practical steps can you take to be more intentional in your acts of love?
4. What bright spots can you point to that indicate the work of the Holy Spirit deepening your affection for your spouse?

Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ.
1 Peter 5:14

Protecting Unity by Negotiating Differences

“Make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” Ephesians 4:3

Two women were visiting with each other. One was a physical therapist who was helping the other through a series of exercises designed to help her regain her range of motion after a recent shoulder surgery. The therapist had been married for seven years, and she had two children, ages 4 and 2 months. She and her husband had just moved into a new house. Her patient was a woman who had been married for over 25 years and had four children of her own. And as often happened in their sessions, they were talking about their families.

The younger couple was planning to host a housewarming party. Keep in mind that this couple has a very busy life, two full-time jobs, and two young children, one a newborn—and they had just moved into a new house. She also admitted that her husband did not much care for entertaining—he isn’t very social. But he was trying to be a good sport about it. So as the day for the party approached, the husband said to his overwhelmed wife, “What can I do to help?” She rolled her eyes, threw her hands in the air, and said in an exasperated tone, “Just look around!”

The frazzled young wife thought that her husband would see the same list of tasks that she saw and would begin to check them off. It was not the case.

As she was telling the story, her long-married patient said, “Wait; let me guess. He went into the garage and swept up the sawdust that was under the workbench.”

The younger woman said, “How’d you know?”

That brought a smile. The more experienced wife said, “My husband and I have had similar experiences. He’s a good man, and he tries hard to see things, and I’ve tried hard to ‘train’ him—but now I know better than to expect him to ‘see’ all of the things that seem so ‘obvious’ to me. So rather than my trying to change him, we agreed that it would be better if I wrote out those things that I thought needed to be done. He could add his items and we would both work at them until they were all accomplished. That way he did not have to guess what was on my mind, and, just as important, he knew when he was done. It has saved us a lot of frustration. It’s a great way to care for each other.”

Caring for the practical aspects of our homes is a good way to express our love. But projects can be a source of conflict. Husbands and wives don’t always prioritize life’s details in the same way. In the story, the wife’s writing out her list was a relatively small act of kindness that went a long way toward preserving their unity. Living with another person requires lots of communication, charity, forgiveness, and sometimes, humor (which all include learning how to live with each other’s quirks).

For your discussion:

1. What are the ways in which you try to change your spouse?
2. What practical steps can you take to only attempt to change yourself?
3. What bright spots can you point to that indicate the work of the Holy Spirit protecting your unity?

“Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another,
A tender heart, and a humble mind.”

1 Peter 3:8

Thinking the Best: Part One

If you are uncertain about the meaning of your spouse's actions or words, it is wise to ask before you judge, act badly, or say something you will regret. Presuming the best is an act of love and is essential to maintaining our friendship.

Read this story out loud:

Joan heard about the family reunion from another sibling and was hurt that she had not been invited. Joan was whipped this way and that by her emotions and she was sorely tempted to express her hurt and anger in ways that would have ruptured the family. Fortunately, Joan did not say anything negative to her sister, but years of poor communication, unresolved hurts, real and perceived slights and the mischief of our ancient enemy the devil caused a lot of emotional turmoil within her.

But Joan has a choice, she can choose to believe that it was an intentional slight, or assume that it was a simple mistake. How should she think about this and what should she do?

Take a few minutes to write down answers to the following questions:

Do you agree that she has a choice about how she feels? How she could think the best? How she could act out of thinking the best? Why or why not?

Should she call her sister? Why? Why not?

If she called, how would you advise her to start the conversation?

Make it clear how upset and justifiably hurt she is and say, "This has been going on for years, why do you always treat me so badly? You guys never invite me. You always leave me out of the family stuff."

or

I heard from John that there was going to be a party. Was it for the whole family? I didn't get an invitation. Was that an oversight?

What can Joan do to prepare for these kind of situations in the future?

Talk about your answers as a group.

Now read the next page.

Thinking the Best, Part Two

Here is the whole story.

Margaret intended to send the email invitation to everyone in the family, but her finger slipped and instead of inviting her sister Joan, she invited the person whose name happened to be right next to Joan's name in her address book. Joan heard about the party from another sibling and was hurt that she had not been invited. Joan was whipped this way and that by her emotions and she was sorely tempted to express her hurt and anger in ways that would have ruptured the family. Fortunately, Joan did not say anything negative to her sister, but years of poor communication, unresolved hurts, real and perceived slights and the mischief of our ancient enemy the devil caused a lot of emotional turmoil within her. What is truly remarkable is that this painful drama could have been entirely avoided by good communication and by choosing to think the best of each other. Joan had a choice between believing that it was an intentional slight or assuming that it was a simple mistake. A phone call would have revealed that she was the victim of a simple typo.

In marriage, the power of the Holy Spirit makes it possible for us to choose to think the best of our spouse and of his/her intentions. But how we think about one another *also* depends on how we have strengthened our friendship before the inevitable disagreement. Storing up positive thoughts about your spouse and loving actions can be compared to making deposits in a bank account. If you have stored up good will, developed habits of love and regularly reflected on the positive qualities and things you love about your spouse, it will be much easier to think the best of your spouse all the time. On the other hand, if you have been keeping track of hurts, it will be far too easy to think and act badly.

For your discussion:

1. How does the bank account image change how you think about protecting your friendship with your spouse?
2. How do you build and store positive thoughts about your spouse?
3. If you respond badly to your spouse based on thinking the worst of his/her motives, how do you resolve the quarrel?
4. What practical steps do you plan to take to grow in your ability to think the best of your spouse?

“Any fool can start a quarrel, but an honorable person will refrain from one.”
Proverbs 20:3 (*paraphrased*)

The Story of Mother Gerda

In week four of the Marriage in Christ seminar, we examined three words for love: *philia*, “friendship”; *agape*, “commitment, service and sacrifice”; and *Eros*, “delight, passion and affection.” *Agape* is love that has matured. It’s the love St. Paul wrote about in 1 Corinthians 13. It is self-giving, not self-seeking. It is ready and willing to sacrifice. It seeks the good of the other more than the good of self. It keeps promises. It forgives. Scripture uses this word, *agape*, often translated as “covenant love,” to describe the faithful love of God who never gives up on his people. Jesus’ death on the cross is the most moving example of committed, sacrificial, covenant love. He loves without limits.

“The pastor who performed the wedding ceremony for my husband and me had seven children,” she began. “After thirty years of marriage, his wife became very sick. She had a brain tumor. This meant that sometimes she could not think clearly. A strange desire would cause her to run away from home. So her husband had to watch over her day and night.

“As her sickness grew worse, she could walk and talk only with great difficulty. Her husband had to help her with everything. He had to feed her, wash her, dress her.

“This went on for fifteen years.”

An audible expression of amazement and compassion went through the church. Ingrid continued: “Whenever his friends suggested that he put his wife into a home or hospital for incurable patients, the pastor always refused. ‘She is my wife and the mother of our seven children,’ he would say. ‘I cannot give her into a home or hospital.’

“Shortly before her death, I visited her. She could talk a little bit on that day. And this is what she said to me: ‘Ingrid, whenever you and Walter talk about marriage, I want you to tell the people that my husband loves me today just as he loved me when I was a bride.’”

To these last words the audience responded with deep silence. Ingrid and Esther then sat down in the front pew. After a few moments, I continued from the pulpit: “This is love which reflects the love of Christ to his church. It is like looking into a mirror. When we look at Christ’s love, we can see a picture of how God wants husband and wife to live together. When husband and wife live together according to God’s will, their marriage becomes like a mirror, a reflection, of Christ’s love.”¹

For your discussion:

1. What are the ways in which you experience or express this kind of love?
2. What practical steps can you take to grow in it?
3. What are the ways in which you understand or experience the “mirror” that Trobisch was talking about in the last three lines?

This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church.
Ephesians 5:32

¹ In his book *I Married You*, Walter Trobisch recounts the story of Mother Gerda, told here by his wife, Ingrid, at a retreat for married couples. Trobisch, Walter (2009-04-04). *I Married You* (Kindle Locations 3905-3930). Quiet Waters Publications. Kindle Edition.. Used by permission of Quiet Waters Publications, www.quietwaterspub.com