
MARRIAGE MATTERS (1)

GOD'S PLAN FOR MARRIAGE!

"For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh." [Genesis 2:24, NASB]

"Through skilful and godly wisdom is a house [a life, a home, a family] built, and by understanding it is established on a sound and solid foundation. And by knowledge shall the chambers of its every area be filled with all precious and pleasant riches." [Proverbs 24:3-4, Amplified]

1 INTRODUCTION

Marriage is the most fundamental, wonderful, beautiful, incredible – and challenging – adventure that can ever be undertaken!...

But marriage and marriages are under unprecedented pressure. The 'broken family' is becoming the normal family; the UK has the highest divorce rate in Europe (almost 50% of all marriages), with devastating, long-term consequences. Many other 'marriages' are unfruitful, unhappy and unfulfilling: two people sharing a house and a parenting task, but little else.

Think about some of the common complaints about marriage...

- "I don't feel appreciated or valued the way I used to"
- "If we argue and fight- it's usually about money!"
- "I don't feel 'in love'?"
- "We don't talk like we used to"
- "Where's the romance gone? He's not taken me out for months!"
- "He never seems to notice things around the house"
- "She talks more to her mother than she does to me"

Tragically, many couples don't overcome these difficulties, and their marriages fall apart. Did you know?...

- 32% of adults would consider their life a 'success' if they were able to have a strong family unit, a solid and lasting marriage or if they had done a good job of raising their children.
- Rates of depression are more than 3 times higher in cohabiting couples than married ones.
- Half of all children in the UK will witness the breakup of a parent's marriage (that's 400 children every day). Of these, almost 50% will also see the breakup of a parent's second marriage - and a tragic 10% will live through *three or more* parental marriage breakups.
- 50% of fathers lose all contact with their children within 3 years of a divorce.
- Children living with both parents are up to 35% more physically healthy than children from broken homes.

Thankfully, the Bible paints an altogether different picture of marriage and tells us that **"MARRIAGE IS TO BE HONOURED BY ALL!"** (Heb 13:4). We can "honour marriage" by investing time in it and ensuring we are faithful in it for the rest of our lives!

This short course is in honour of marriage! It is for all who recognize the importance of investing in the future; for all who will invest time in building healthy, happy, God-honouring marriages.

Over the next few weeks we shall look at the nature of **LIFE-LONG LOVE**, some of the vital differences between **MEN AND WOMEN**, effective **COMMUNICATION SKILLS**, dealing with **CONFLICTS** and common pressure-points, and (last but not least!) ways of keeping the **ROMANCE AND INTIMACY** alive!

We will – through godly wisdom, understanding and knowledge – give attention to building our marriages the way God always intended (Pr 24:3-4). It's an investment worth making!

2 GOD LOVES MARRIAGE!

God loves marriage! The Bible begins with a marriage (Gen 1:27-28¹) and ends with a marriage (Rev 21:1-3). And, everywhere in between, marriage is woven into the fabric of God's purposes. The marriage of Adam and Eve gives us a model for God's design for human society. The marriage of Christ and His Church becomes a prophetic picture of God's desire for everlasting intimacy with His people.

Throughout the Old Testament marriage is consistently used as a picture of God's relationship with His OT people, Israel:

- God speaks of Israel as his bride (eg Isa 54:5-8, 62:5, Jer 2:2) and the covenant with Israel is depicted as a marriage covenant.
- Tragically, though, Israel was "adulterous" and "unfaithful", prostituting herself with other gods and nations and provoking God to heartache and holy jealousy (eg: Jer 3, Ez 16, Hosea² ch 1).
- However, in the midst of her unfaithfulness God still promised a new husband-wife relationship with His people (Hosea 2:16, 19-20).

In the New Testament, the marriage metaphor continues to be used to describe the relationship between God and His NT people, the Church:

- Jesus refers to himself as the bridegroom (Mk 2:18-20, Mt 9:15, Lk 5:34); John the Baptist described the disciples as attendants at the wedding with himself as the best man! (Jn 3:29).
- Significantly, Jesus begins His miracle-ministry at a wedding (Jn 2:1-11).
- Paul he speaks of having promised (NASB: "betrothed") the Corinthian church to Christ in marriage³ (2 Cor 11:2).
- In Ephesians the image is again used to describe Christ's self-sacrificial love for His bride (Eph 5:27).
- John foresees the church's destiny in terms of a wedding in which the church (bride) has made herself ready - beautifully dressed for her husband (Rev 19:7, 21:2).
- The Bible ends with "the Spirit and the Bride" inviting us to come and drink from the water of life! (Rev 22:17).

It should be obvious from the above that God highly esteems marriage! That's why He hates divorce (Mal 2:16); that's why Paul described those who preached against marriage as promoting "things taught by demons" (1 Tim 4:1-3). And that's why the Bible instructs us that "marriage should be honoured by all" (Heb 13:4).

◀ **rewind**

Before we proceed....think back to your wedding day! Can you recall the dreams and expectations you had at that time about your forthcoming marriage? Spend a few minutes recounting these together...

"The whole of history may be described as the story of a Father looking for a Bride suitable for his only Son"

¹ Genesis 1 gives a 'summary' of the creation order including a description of the creation of the man and woman [Ge 1:27-28]. Genesis 2 gives a more detailed account of the creation of Adam and the later creation of Eve to be his wife [Ge 2:18-24]

² The OT Book of Hosea is a prophetic account of God's relationship with Israel. The prophet Hosea is told to find a wife (Gomer) but is forewarned that she will be unfaithful to him (ch 1). Gomer's unfaithfulness and adultery become living, prophetic examples to Israel (ch 2). But Hosea (whose name means "salvation") finds her again, redeems her and brings her back home, fully reconciled (ch 3). The book vividly and dramatically illustrates God's love for His people, and the mercy and hope extended to them, even in the midst of their unfaithfulness and immorality.

³ Betrothal was far more binding in Jewish law and custom than it is for us today; hence Joseph considered whether to "divorce" Mary, even though they weren't actually married (Mt 1:19)

3 MARRIAGE: GOD'S DESIGN FOR MANKIND

Marriage is God's design for addressing mankind's fundamental, God-created need for companionship and intimacy. Made in God's image (Ge 1:27), mankind has a basic need for intimate companionship and fellowship⁴.

The Godhead Himself exists eternally in Divine intimacy and relationship. Likewise, people everywhere crave relationships with one another. This inner desire begins with a longing for a right relationship with God.

"Marriage is God's best way of explaining Himself"

*Martin Luther
(1483-1546)*

However, it is also clear that in some ways even this relationship is not enough: even before the Fall, when Adam enjoyed unbroken fellowship and intimacy with God, there was an 'alone-ness' in his life such that God declared that it was "not good for the man to be alone" (Gen 2:18). Can you imagine? Something in God's creation that was "not good"!?

To meet this legitimate and God-created need, God made Eve and instituted marriage to provide Adam with a means of *horizontal* fellowship as well (1 Cor 11:9; Gen 2:24). Eve was placed alongside Adam to be his companion, helper and co-ruler (Gen 2:18); they were joined together in such closeness and intimacy that they became "one flesh" (Gen 2:24) - the pattern for all marriage that followed. Marriage is God's idea - *we need one another*. Marriage provides us with the proper context for companionship and fruitfulness. Indeed, it enables us to become 'complete'.

In other words, God has created us with some needs that He meets directly, and with others that He desires to be met through intimate human relationships – and primarily through marriage. Marriage is a divinely-provided relationship to remove our alone-ness!⁵

"Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: if one falls down, his friend can help him up...though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken."
[Eccl 4:9-12]

God loves marriage and He wants us to have a really good one! So, how can we make the most of the adventure? Let's begin by defining what we mean by marriage!!...

4 WHAT MAKES A MARRIAGE?

How can we best define marriage? Some people describe or define marriage as a legal contract, and economic arrangement or a biological act. However, a Biblical view of marriage not only includes these things, but goes way beyond them as well, affirming that in marriage there is a DIVINE ELEMENT as well!

"Therefore, what God has joined together, let man not separate" [Mt 19:6]

In marriage, God joins two people together. In order to understand the roots of marriage, there's no better place to look than in the Bible's description of that first-ever marriage:

"For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh." [Ge 2:24, NASB]

Gen 2:24 (which is quoted in four times in the New Testament - Mt 19:5, Mk 10:7, 1Co 6:16 and Eph 5:31) therefore defines marriage as comprising three vital ingredients:

1. **"LEAVING"** In order to make a new home/life/family with a marriage partner it is essential that a person first 'leaves' their old home/life/family. This is far more than just a physical house-move! It means moving away from some of the emotional (and maybe physical) ties of parental relationship, especially where these would hinder the building of a new intimate relationship with a spouse.

⁴ The Greek word for fellowship is "koinonia" meaning sharing, communion, a reciprocal relationship of trust

⁵ Family and Church are other divinely-provided relationships that meet our human needs

When a man leaves his parents in order to marry, he is – as the head of the family (Eph 5:23) – both continuing the parental family line, and also establishing a new family unit within it.

2. **"CLEAVING"** As well as this 'leaving' there must be a uniting/joining (NASB: "cleaving") with a marriage partner; that is, entering into a new intimate relationship with a spouse.

The Hebrew word used is *dabaq* which carries the sense of "clinging to someone in affection and loyalty" (it is the word used to describe the way Ruth "clung to" her mother-in-law Naomi in Ruth 1:14). It is used to describe the way that "skin and bones" stick together (Ps 102:5, Job 19:20). 'Cleaving' therefore has an essential underlying sense of belonging and commitment.

A marriage ceremony which publicly attests to the couple's exclusive, life-long love and commitment to one another is therefore a vital aspect of a (Biblical) marriage. This marriage ceremony is nothing less than the making of a covenant (see below).

3. **"BECOMING ONE FLESH"** A marriage also involves consummating the joining together through the act of sexual intercourse. Although marriage is more than having sex with a person⁶, sexual intimacy is a vital element. The wedding ceremony makes public the couple's love and commitment; but the private act of intercourse is also essential in completing the union⁷.

However, "becoming one flesh" means more than having intercourse. In Hebrew thought 'flesh' was not seen as being somehow separate from 'soul' or 'spirit'; rather, it represents the *entire person*. In this sense, therefore, becoming one flesh means a unity of body, soul and spirit. In marriage, a husband and wife are no longer two people – they become one flesh, one spirit, one person!

All 3 elements are essential for a healthy marriage – and absence of any one of them puts strain on the marriage. Also, there is a God-given 'order' in marriage (Leave, then Cleave, then become One Flesh) which – when violated – can so easily undermine the foundations.

A marriage is therefore best defined as a life-long and exclusive relationship in which a man and a woman are wholly and publicly committed to live with one other, and in which – by a divine act - the two people become joined together as one.

5 THE MARRIAGE COVENANT

Marriage is a covenant - a binding agreement entered into under oath, with clearly defined responsibilities, obligations and privileges. In marriage husband and wife pledge themselves to each other for life. Marriage vows are not merely statements of intent, hopes or optimistic sentiments. In Christian marriage a covenant is made before Almighty God! Couples promise: "to love, honour and obey, in sickness and health, for richer or poorer, for better or worse....until death parts us".

Thus in marriage we find a human covenant functioning within the framework of the divine covenant. In fact, for Adam it was only by maintaining his marriage covenant that the objectives of God's covenant with him - multiplying to fill the earth - could be fulfilled.

Keeping the lateral marriage covenant was fundamental to God's broader covenant purposes. As such, marital unfaithfulness amounts to covenant-breaking.

Malachi 2:14-16 the LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. Has not [the LORD] made them one?....So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth. "I hate divorce," says the LORD God of Israel....So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith.

Within the marriage covenant therefore we find clearly defined roles and responsibilities that enable the husband and wife to express their new covenant obligations within a suitable framework. Thus:

⁶ In this respect, neither fornication (sex outside marriage) nor adultery (sex where one or both parties is married to someone else) makes a "marriage".

⁷ That is not to say that a marriage is invalid if a couple are unable to physically consummate the relationship.

- Both partners are responsible for physical oneness (Gen 2:24, 1 Cor 7:3), faithfulness (Ex 20:14, Mk 10:11-12) and honouring the marriage as a priority over all other human relationships (Heb 13:4).
- Husbands are responsible for loving their wives with care and respect (1 Peter 3:7, Col 3:19), protecting and providing for their wives (Eph 5:28-29) and giving godly leadership in the marriage and family (Eph 5:23).
- Wives are responsible for respecting their husbands (Eph 5:33) and for godly submission to them (Col 3:18, Eph 5:22).

The marriage covenant is the foundation for family. It is the only proper place within which procreation should take place. The family, operating within the context of an honoured marriage relationship, is a secure micro-society within society at large, giving a stable basis and a setting in which its members can be trained in covenant-keeping. The keeping of the command "marriage should be honoured by all" (Heb 13:4) has a profound effect on the welfare and prosperity of society.

Finally, as we've seen, the marriage covenant is used in scripture as an illustration of the consummation of the new covenant itself! The relationship between husband and wife is a "mystery" and a shadow of the relationship between Christ and His bride the church (Eph 5:23-32). The fulfilment of God's purpose for the church will be expressed in the great "wedding of the Lamb" (Rev 19:7-9) - the Body of Christ is also the Bride of Christ! Ultimately, we will be joined with Him in a oneness that even the best of human marriage can only give us glimpses into!

The good news is that God enables willing and responsive couples to keep these sacred vows. Expect success! Be realistic about the challenges, but anticipate a wonderful marriage - God's kind of love never fails!...

|| pause

Based on the above, do you think that your initial dreams and expectations for your marriage were too big? Or too small?! What has gone to plan? What hasn't? Has the dream lost its excitement? What aspects of God's plan for your marriage are you not really experiencing at the moment? Begin to chat about this now (and continue alone together in the next few days...)

6 GOD'S KIND OF LOVE

Consider each of these statements and say whether you think it is TRUE or FALSE:

- it is easy to distinguish real love from infatuation
- 'love at first sight' occurs between some people
- people who love each other will not fight or argue
- if a man and woman genuinely love each other, then hardships or troubles will have little or no effect on their relationship
- it is better to marry the wrong person than to remain single and lonely throughout life
- if a couple are genuinely in love, then that condition is permanent and will last a lifetime
- short courtships (less than 6 months) are best
- teenagers are more capable of genuine love than older people

Of course, it really all depends what we mean by "Love"?...

There are three kinds of love described in the Bible:

1. **'Eros' love** – physical love; need love; sensual, sexual love; romantic love. Most couples begin marriage with a predominance of eros love. Certainly, it is essential for a successful marriage; it provides the motivation for couples to touch, explore and know each other. But eros love can be short-lived, and will not sustain a marriage.
2. **'Philia' love** – companionship; interest in someone for who they are not what they can give you. Philia is a dynamic word implying the overcoming of forces that work for separation in a marriage.
3. **'Agape' love** – self-giving, unconditional love. A commitment of the will in which one decides to love. It is the way God loves; the highest love one can experience! It is

spontaneous and unmotivated. It is indifferent to a person's value or worth – rather, it *creates* value and worth!

Agape love is the dynamic in a wonderful marriage! It has the power to revive or resurrect *eros* love and *philia* love when they have diminished or died.

Agape love is an *attitude* and a *decision* - not an emotion. Emotions are the result - not the cause - of our attitudes. In marriage, we must take responsibility for making a decision that we will love our partner and for developing the attitudes of agape love.

What does this involve? The well-known verses of 1 Corinthians 13 describe *agape* love wonderfully:

⁴Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud ⁵or rude. Love does not demand its own way. Love is not irritable, and it keeps no record of when it has been wronged. ⁶It is never glad about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. ⁷Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance. ⁸Love will last forever...¹³There are three things that will endure--faith, hope, and love--and the greatest of these is love.

Above all, agape love means **laying down our lives for one another** (Jn 15:13) – dying to ourselves and living for our partner!

Expressing agape love like this is only possible when we die to ourselves: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20). Agape love like this is the hallmark of the crucified life: "we know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers" (1 Jn 3:14)

Agape love is the very opposite of self-centredness and self-will. It is self-sacrificial. It's the love we express when we've embraced the cross and died to self (Lk 9:23). It prefers others. It loves practically even when it's not convenient. We must be crucified, dead to our selves. Only then can we start to live for God; to live for others! Only then can we start to love God and others the way He intends. "Greater love has no-one than this: that he lays down his life for his friends" (Jn 15:13).

Love like this is no longer living for "ME" – in the new covenant we must die to self-centredness; die to own agendas; die to independence; die to pettiness. Little things stop affecting us as they once did! How dead are you??

Love like this provokes the blessing of God (Ps 133:1) – for how can brothers dwell together in unity without the glue and cement of agape love? How can there be a great harvest unless the seed falls to the ground and dies? (Jn 12:24).

7 YOU CAN DO IT!...

Does it all sound too good to be true? It really isn't!! **God is more committed to your marriage than we can ever understand! HE IS WITH YOU** to help you and empower you to make it work!

Enjoy the next few weeks – they will contain transformational keys for you!...

II pause

Review the AGAPE LOVE characteristics contained in 1 Cor 13.

Which of these do you most appreciate in each other? And which do you need to work on? (discuss this together more over the next few days)

► forward

Plan a 'date-night' alone together over the next week or so! Spend time openly (and vulnerably) reviewing your marriage against the ideals discussed today. Then come together before God and recommit yourselves and your marriage to Him. Ask Him to breathe new life into your marriage and to give you the grace and power to change in any ways that He wants!...

MARRIAGE MATTERS (2)

VIVE LA DIFFERENCE

(OR: WHO IS MAN'S BEST FRIEND?)

Recently forwarded from a website: a woman marries a man expecting he will change, but he doesn't. A man marries a woman expecting she won't change, and she does.

The purpose of this session is to:

- Learn to appreciate each others' differences as a strength to marriage
- Consider and understand roles in marriage
- Know the sense of completeness in marriage as we recognise and accept God's purpose and pattern for it.

1 Introduction

God is the Master of variety.

- There are more than 5,000 species of mammals known on earth.
- There are 10,000+ species of birds.
- There are in excess of 20,000 species of fish (ranging in size from 1.25cm to 20m).
- There are over 1,000,000 named species of insects and the number of unnamed species has never been estimated: it is unknown.

Yet in all this variety, when the domestic animals, wild animals and birds were paraded before Adam to be named by him, 'There was not found a helper suitable for him' Gen 2:20. So God removed a piece of Adam and made another being which He then presented to Adam. Scripture does not record Adam's immediate comment on seeing this new being, but it was probably the equivalent of, 'Cor!', 'Wowee!' – whatever that was in the ancient tongue. Then there was a moment's pause while he pushed his eyeballs back into place, wound in his tongue and wiped the drool from his chin and God was heard to say, "Yes!" in a very emphatic way. (Stuart's Amplified Version.) Adam's next words are recorded: he said,

'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, for she was taken out of man' Gen 2:23

Genesis sums up this episode with the words, 'God created man in His own image, - - - -male and female He created them.' (Gen 1:27)

Consider this: God Himself is a Trinity, 3 persons yet One God; He made man a duality, clearly intending that the two, male and female, should become one flesh. (Gen. 2:24)

2 We are Different

'Male and female He created them.' When God did this He 'built in' some fundamental differences; but there is a second kind of difference between male and female that we can call 'learned differences'. These differences can vary widely and are based on upbringing, experience, teaching and culture. They may be acquired consciously or unconsciously, but either way they can have a great influence on the things we do, the values we hold and generally the person we are. They form a part of our uniqueness.

Think about a computer program. It has a purpose and to achieve this it has a variety of options, tools, procedures which are fundamental. These are the in-built differences. But when you begin to use the program it can be made to perform in certain specific ways according to the options you set. You can 'teach' it to perform in a way which is not identical to the way that another user of the program might decide. These are equivalent to the learned differences. It is the first type of differences that we are considering rather than the second, although the two will overlap in many instances. The inbuilt differences have a great impact on our other differences but whereas our other differences can be

changed or modified, the inbuilt differences usually cannot be changed. It is well worth remembering this when we are confronted with differences. More will be said about this later.

Task: Without consulting each other, write down 2 ways in which you think men and women are fundamentally different. (These should not be obvious physical differences). Now share with your partner what you have written and together formulate a definition of the word 'DIFFERENT'.

DIFFERENT simply means: 'not the same'; 'dissimilar'; 'not identical'. The word by itself does not include any judgement of value or worth, it only indicates a comparison. If we say, "Your car is different from mine," we are not stating a judgement as to worth, we are simply making an observation as to variations between the two. So to say something is different is not saying that it is superior or inferior, and we must avoid the trap of thinking that to say something is different is somehow wrong.

What would the world be like without variety? All the trees identical; all flowers exactly alike; only one type of animal. How do you feel about a housing estate where all the houses are identical? Imagine a world in which every human being was a clone.

God made each one of us different!

Billions, maybe trillions of individuals have populated the earth, yet to the best of our knowledge no two have ever been identical; even identical twins are never completely identical. Each one of us is unique.

So, praise God for the differences you find between you and your partner.

Look at this equation where U = Unique:- $1U + 1U = 2U$.

Take two unique persons; put them together and they form a unique couple. That is God's wonderful plan. Your marriage is not the same as our marriage. But also think of this: I am not the same as I would have been if I'd married Carol instead of Mary because only Mary and I can be the unique couple, the one flesh that we two are. However, we remain different as individuals and it is when we allow these differences to become irritating that we act like Henry Higgins and want the other to be like us. This is where God calls us to be different from the world: the world says, "You can always divorce." God says, "Love one another as I have loved you."

God intended that marriage should be a completion NOT a competition. A husband is incomplete without his wife – part of him is missing! But equally a woman is only part of the whole that God made and so without her husband, she also is incomplete. Only when the two parts come together and join to become one flesh (marriage) does the whole become complete. This is where our differences can come into play to be a very constructive element in marriage. Think like this regarding your partner:

- What I cannot do, you can.
- What I do not think, you often do.
- What I miss, you pick up.

It now becomes much clearer that our differences are complementary. God says:

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labour. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no-one to help him up. Again if two lie down together they will keep warm; but how can one be warm alone? Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken. Eccles 4:9 – 12

Task: Take a moment to write a couple of sentences saying WHY you can be thankful for the differences between you and your partner.

One of the fundamental keys to marriage is to appreciate our differences as a real strength when they are brought together in marriage. 'And the two shall become one flesh'.

3 What About Our Roles

As already stated; 'different' does not mean superior or inferior.

In the beginning God gave equality of rule to male and female. He blessed them and said to them.

Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground. Gen 1:28 (See also Ps 8:4 – 8)

They were co-equals. But then as a result of the Fall, God pronounces the following judgement on the female:

Your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you. Gen 3:16

With these words God establishes a hierarchy in marriage with the husband being the ruler of his wife, and the wife being subordinate to her husband.

Sadly this is the cause of much friction and even conflict within marriages and it is used widely by Satan to hinder the implementation of God's perfect plan. It has been used to 'justify' unspeakable atrocities against woman and this has led to a backlash of women's so-called liberation, doing much harm to the God-given perfect plan of marriage. This is not God's doing and it is evil in both its origin and in its working out.

Just as in the Garden of Eden Satan tempted Eve with the words, "Did God really say" so now he continues to tempt with the words, "Did God really say that the man would rule over the woman?" To the man he whispers, "You have the rule from God over the woman; exert your authority!" So it is easy to see how we get blinded to a wonderful, amazing and marvellous truth of what God did in the Garden.

Task: Fill in the missing words in the following passages of Scripture. The quotations are from the NIV.

'Wives, _____ to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the _____ of the wife as _____ is the head of the Church, His body, of which He is the Saviour. Now as the Church _____ to Christ, so also wives should _____ to their husbands in everything. Husbands, _____ your wives, just as Christ _____ the Church and gave Himself up for her to make her holy ----- In this way husbands ought to _____ their wives as their own _____. He who _____ his wife _____ himself. ----- -- Each one of you also must _____ his _____ as he loves himself, and the _____ must _____ her husband.' (Eph 5:22 – 32)

'Wives, in the same way be _____ to your _____. ----- ----- Husbands, in the same way be _____ as you live with your _____, and treat them with _____ as the weaker partner and as _____ of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your _____. (1 Pet 3:1 – 7)

These passages clearly reveal God's intention when He subordinated woman to man in the Garden. **He did not invest man with a dictatorship; He gave man a responsibility. This was the responsibility of the stronger to care for the weaker** and in fulfilling this role correctly a man protects woman and (I believe) covers over her sin, just as Christ rules over the man, protects him and covers over his sin. And yet man is still totally dependent on woman and without her he would, of course, cease to exist.

God, therefore, has assigned the basic roles in marriage and it is not up to us to choose whether we adhere to this pattern. Neither is it up to us how we see the roles. God makes it VERY clear that a husband's responsibility is to 'Love his wife as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her.' That is sacrificial love where the good of the beloved is put before self-interest. **A wife's role is to respect her husband's position as ruler and submit to him - - - -in everything!** This makes it so much easier for the husband to love his wife, and marriage becomes a joy. God actually says, in the book of Proverbs, that 'a quarrelsome wife is like a constant dripping'. (Prov. 19:13) Also He says that it is 'better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife'.

(Prov. 21:9, and Prov. 25:24) On the other hand God says, 'A wife of noble character is her husband's crown', and if you want to know more of what a wife of noble character is like then read through Prov. 31:10 – 31. God's perfect plan is for woman to be a crown not dripping!

Task: Give a response to the appropriate question:

- MEN - Can you think of anything in your life that might hinder your wife in her respect for and submission to your leadership?
- WOMEN – Can you think of anything in your life that might hinder his loving, respecting and honouring you?

You may collaborate on this. But you may not criticise or accuse!!!

As in the previous section on differences, we are not here talking about who washes the dishes or who puts the children to bed. These are tasks, not roles, and as such must be sorted out amicably in the light of 1 Corinthians chapter 13. This passage applies to both partners; **God did not grant the husband a dictatorship and He certainly did not assign the wife to slavery.**

Summing up this section: **The marriage full of joy, is the marriage where God's allocated roles are accepted and where tasks are mutually agreed upon with love and consideration for one another.**

4 Complete at Last

Meeting each other's needs is an important part of marriage, and perhaps the greatest need is to be loved as we are. God fully meets this need for us, but remember that Jesus commanded us to love one another as He has loved us. This applies to the love between His disciples so how much more should it apply to a husband and wife. Let's remind ourselves that God told husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the Church. (Eph 5:25) This love is the same love with which God meets our need to be loved as we are. So we have no defence if we find ourselves irritated by differences in our partner. This is where we daily need to be full of the Holy Spirit in our marriage, because only by Him can we fulfil this requirement. Trying to do it in our own strength will not work so **we must always pray for our marriages.**

Acknowledging that God is the One who has made us different and that His plan is to make us complete in marriage is a big step towards being able to accept each other's differences. The obverse of, 'It is not good for man to be alone' is, 'It is good for man to have a companion'. We have all heard that a dog is a man's best friend, but if nothing else, you should by now know that this is untrue. A dog cannot complete a man! There is no doubt that, in making woman, God intended her to be man's best friend, and in spite of everything that has happened in the world, God's plan has NOT changed. Man cannot complete man (homosexuality); dog, cat, budgie cannot complete man (bestiality); little green aliens can't complete man (alcoholism!). **Nothing else can become one flesh with man except woman.**

Then to recognize that we have both strengths and weaknesses will be a great help to a successful marriage: strengths can support our partner's weaknesses and our weaknesses can be met by our partner's strengths. In this way we truly complement each other. (Remember Eccles 4:9–12) There is security in this for us and an opportunity to meet each other's needs and expectations.

Marriage is not so much about my needs being met as meeting the needs of my husband/wife. If we are willing to accept that when God made us different He gave us different needs we are on the way to meeting those needs. Let's be clear about this. Love is not just a feeling or an emotion; love is a choice. If this were not so, then God would not have commanded us to love. Men may often act as if they don't need love but they will melt under its warmth! Women sometimes pretend that they can manage very well on their own thank-you, but underneath they are crying out, 'Love me and help me!' The following may be an aid to putting love into action and meeting some of the needs of each other:

Look at this list of 5 ways in which we express love; each way is referred to as a 'Language':

1. Time
2. Touch

3. Words
4. Gifts
5. Actions

If two people are going to be together then they need to have an understanding of the 'language(s)' of each other.

- Time: giving undivided attention and enjoying each other's company – TIME TOGETHER
- Touch: giving pleasure and security – TOUCH ME TOUCH MY HEART
- Words: building up confidence and self-esteem by what you say – WORDS WARM HEARTS
- Gifts: giving to your partner in love and appreciation for them – THE GIVER IS IN THE GIFT
- Actions: doing (sometimes sacrificially) for your partner – DOING IS LOVING

Task: Read through the list of 'languages' and, without any discussion with your partner, place them in order of preference first for yourself and then what you think your partner would prefer. Now share and discuss with you husband/wife what you have written. (Note: It would be worth repeating this exercise from time to time as a reminder)

Coming back to 'built-in' and 'learned' differences **it is important that we be willing to change ourselves yet not be demanding of change in our partner.** There is room for discussion and agreement in this, but at the same time it needs to be appreciated that the inbuilt differences are there as part of God's pattern for each unique individual and to struggle to change these is to fly in the face of God's purpose. For example, the woman often is more intuitive than the man; the man is often stronger than the woman: the woman tends to group with others whereas the man generally is more of an independent streak; there are also the much more obvious physical differences. Notice that none of these are absolutes and there are very wide variations between individuals. Learned differences are generally more to do with values. There is obviously much more scope to change ourselves in the area of learned differences, and changes in this area are sometimes actually desirable. However, even when this is so, the change should not come about because of pressure from our husband or wife. God says, 'Rejoice in the wife of your youth.' (Prov. 5:18) **That clearly speaks of being happy with who you marry and not becoming 'bored' as the years go on.**

Remember to respect each other. God actually implies through Peter that if we do not respect our marriage partner then our prayers will be hindered. What an amazing thought that by showing respect to one another we remove hindrances from our prayers.

Look it up in 1 Pet 3:7

Finally: LOVE ONE ANOTHER

***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 by her love.***

Prov. 5:18 – 19

The following book is recommended as a good resource for instruction on marriage:

'The Highway Code For Marriage' (Michael & Hilary Perrott; published by CWR; Price £6.99)

MARRIAGE MATTERS (3)

CLEAR COMMUNICATIONS

INTRODUCTION

We live in a world today where communication is so readily available for many of us. If you are under 25 years old - you probably couldn't imagine life without mobile telephones, laptops and the internet. Today we can call China from the middle of a cornfield, transmit massive amounts of data at the push of a button and the possibilities of the Internet are vast.

And yet with this huge leap forward in communication technology, the human race, and more importantly, relationships, seem less connected and more distant from one another than ever before.

"If there is any indispensable insight with which a young couple should begin their life together, it is that they should keep open at all costs, the lines of communication between them" Ruel Howe – Herein is Love.

Good communication is the life-blood of any relationship. In fact, **poor communication is the number one cause of difficulty in marriage.** Marriages struggle when we start taking each other for granted and stop talking about things that matter. When that happens a 'creeping separation' starts to set in.

But communication is complex. It comprises words (7%), body language or actions (55%) and tone of voice (38%) – no wonder we call it an 'art'!

Communication is the life blood to any relationship, it covers every aspect of the marriage relationship. In fact I don't see it as a coincidence that this session is the middle one of five – communication umbrellas the marriage relationship.

Communication: Dictionary definitions:-

- *The act of imparting*
- *To transmit or pass on*
- *To share*
- *To contact or touch*
- *To reach out to*
- *One mind*
- *In tune*
- *Same frequency – or wavelength*
- *Evoking understanding*
- *Administer Holy Communion*

STAGES IN THE RELATIONSHIP - THE "ALL TOO COMMON SITUATION."

A four-year-old girl was relating the story she had just heard at the playground. The prince's servant found that the glass slipper fitted Cinderella's foot. And do you know what they did next?

They lived happily ever after, said grandma

No! They got married.

Why does the glow seem to fade in the majority of marriages outside of Christ, and in not a few among Christians?

Enchanted Ground – From Courtship to the First Pregnancy

The courting couple have fallen in love – and dropped out of circulation to some degree. When together on the telephone and in letters they refer to "our restaurant", "our song", and "our lake in

the county" – all leisure interests you will note. Their communication is often made in subtle symbolic expressions.

After marriage, although many practicalities of daily life demand their attention, a lot of their communicating still centres on leisure and social interests: friends, Friday evenings, parties, they shop together, do the gardening together – since both parties are working and earning.

But with the arrival of their first child she leaves her outside job and becomes absorbed in her child, while his energy and attention goes mostly into his career. Less of life is common ground and most of that will now be on essential practical matters.

The language of companions is largely replaced by the talk of two business partners. Unless they consciously work on their communications they could drift slowly apart without realising it for the next twenty years, until the last fledgling flies the nest.

Disenchantment – Routine Domestic Life

At home face-to-face encounter can easily become mask-to-mask small talk. At work, either partner may find a heart to heart rapport with a colleague of the opposite sex who, looking at their best, seems to understand and support his or her interests. Emotional entanglement can only be a short step away.

In the evenings and weekend, frequent domestic conflicts may flare up. "You're not the girl I married". "And you aren't the man who once courted me with chocolates and red roses". In practice; neither is likely to have altered. In those former enchanted days each was either blinded to the other's faults or glamorised them. "He's the strong silent type", she said then, but now she bleats, "You never talk to me".

Drifting Apart – Middlecence

About twenty five percent of all divorces occur after fifteen years or more of marriage. Other couples remain legally joined together but without intimacy, respect or tolerance at the very time they need each other most. The family are leaving for career and marriage; their own parents' health may be starting to give problems; the husband has reached the top of his profession but they find themselves strangers to each other.

Dropping Out

At this point, feeling that time, energy and opportunity are running out, they are tempted into workaholics, alcohol addiction, an adulteress affair, or even psychosomatic illness.

Mid-term Revival

The cry of Habakkuk, in another context, it is necessary and appropriate prayer in such circumstances:

"O Lord, revive thy word in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make it known." Habakkuk 3:2 (NASB)

"We have painted the picture in sombre shades not because this is what eventually happens, but to show how seriously we must take the subject of communication in marriage. It may be true, as Shakespeare said, "that marriages are made in heaven, but they come in self-assembly kits" School of the Word – Hugh Thompson.

Cliff Richard.

WE DON'T TALK ANYMORE - 25/08/1979
4 weeks at Number 1 - 14 weeks on chart

Used to think that life was sweet
Used to think we were so complete
I can't believe you'd throw it away

Used to feel we had it made
Used to feel we could sail away
Can you imagine how I feel today

Well it seems a long time ago
You were the lonely one
Now it comes to letting go
You are the only one
Do you know what you've done

It's so funny how we don't talk anymore
It's so funny why we don't talk anymore
But I ain't losing sleep
And I ain't counting sheep
It's so funny how we don't talk anymore
Oohh we don't talk

THE COMMUNICATION GARDEN

The best bit of advice I was given on the eve of my wedding day was, "always cry together, laugh together, and pray together". In other words don't let there be any area in your lives that is a no-go area, with regard to discussion or the expression of feelings.

The same person also said that a marriage should not be worked at, but rather tended like a garden.

If you were given a plot of land, flat just soil, you would make plans, both physical and mental regarding its development. First you would move great amounts of earth, fit in physical structures, and lay foundations.

Next you would start to plant trees, bushes and then bedding plants; the result would be in anyone's opinion a beautiful garden. I always enjoy the programme – "Ground Force", but the question I always ask is, "I wonder what it will look like in twelve months' time.

If left unattended, the plants would continue to flourish, and for a time look even better than when they were first planted, but as time goes on they would start to look overgrown, and some areas would die, in other areas bigger plants would choke smaller ones. Storms may damage bedding plants, and cause larger plants and trees to fall down.

Yet despite all that, there is one thing that a garden must have to survive, and that is water, and for a marriage, communication is that life-giving water to a relationship.

You see a marriage, like a garden, has to be tended, to cope with different seasons, times of life, un-fortold events. The key to this is communication, because with the constantly changing environments a marriage is involved in and part of, you must keep one another "updated" on the current situation!

Indeed, in my business activities, if I were not to communicate effectively our company's aims and products to our client base, or communicate my requirements to my sales team, the relationship, or business would very quickly crash!

In business, communication must be at every level in order for it to be effective.

THE MARRIAGE VOWS

The marriage vows are a covenant made before God

I, *name*, take you, *name*,
to be my wife,
to have and to hold,
from this day forward;
for better or worse,
for richer or poorer,

in sickness and in health,
to love and to cherish,
till death us do part,
according to God's holy law;
and this is my solemn vow.

The first part of the marriage vows certainly cover all of life's changes, and seasons; children, employment, difficult and prosperous situations, old age.

I give you this ring
as a sign of our marriage.
With my body I honour you,
all that I am I give to you
and all that I have I share with you,
within the love of God,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The second part is also interesting – all that I am I give to you, and all that I have I share with you.

"All that I am" – all means everything, and "All that I have" doesn't just mean material things.

Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?"

God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.' "

God also said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers--the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob--has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation. Exodus 3:13-15

THE FIRST COMMUNICATION FAILURE

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame. Genesis 2:24-25

Verse 24 emphasizes the complete identification of the two personalities in marriage. This passage tells us that God instituted marriage, and that it is to be monogamous, heterosexual, and the complete union of two persons. Jesus added that it is to be permanent.

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." Mark 10:7-9

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?" He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" The man said, "The woman you put here with me--she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." Genesis 3: 6-12

Notice that that God was not involved at this point, the woman "took and ate", and "then gave some to her husband" - no discussion, no conferring.

THE LANGUAGES OF LOVE

There are four 'languages of love' or 'languages of communication' - ways we express ourselves to our partners: Touching, Speaking, Giving and Doing. Communication is not just the vocal.

Remember the definitions for communication:-

- *The act of imparting*
- *To transmit or pass on*
- *Evoking understanding*
- Administer Holy Communion

Important - the four languages for love apply to both Men and Women, even if you don't immediately recognise it.

Touching – Physical Expressions of Affection

Touching is not just sex! It is those little brush passes, hands that slightly touch in a meeting or when nobody will notice, a soft embrace as you squeeze past to get the tea caddy down, running back from the car, when it is raining to kiss them. Holding hands is not just for teenagers and newly weds!

Speaking - Telling the Other That You Love Them

I told her on our wedding day! I've been married for nearly 16 years, and before I ever married my wife I told her that I loved her, and yet she wants to hear it every day.

Faith comes by hearing

"Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ". Romans 10:17

Continue to hear the truth over and over, so that you never lose sight of it. If you no longer hear it, you no longer see it, and there is no longer the performance.

"The entrance of Your words gives light". Psalm 119:130

"A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver". Proverbs 25:11

"Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.

All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water". James 3: 5-12 (NIV)

"Your lips drop sweetness as the honeycomb, my bride; milk and honey are under your tongue". Song of Songs 4:11

So many times we hear and believe and practice Scriptures that talk of encouragement and building one another up, but many times we seem to exclude our partners from these Scriptures.

Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Col 3:16 NASB.

Let the Word of Christ – the message – have the run of the house. Give it plenty of room in your lives. Col 3:16 The Message.

Talking is not just the opposite of silence, and talking for the sake of talking is not good communication. Someone once said "there are many perpetual talkers in the divorce courts as there are silent couples. Some talk too much, some talk too little, and many talk with little or no meaning. Talking with point and purpose is an essential ingredient of effective communication.

Giving - Gifts And Other Expressions Of Love (Material Things)

Once I was in Marks & Spencer's, buying some flowers for my wife, (as I often do) and upon paying the assistant enquired: "what have you done wrong?". I felt most indignant at this question and explained to her that I bought my wife flowers because I love her, and not as a peace offering for misdemeanours.

The giving of gifts shows thought towards the other person when they are not there, because it is usually done in secret. It is the thought that counts, and it does. That doesn't mean you have to buy a new car! Be imaginative: flowers, chocolates, little messages.

Doing - Serving the Other By Doing Something For Them

*"In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he **feeds and cares** for it, just as Christ does the church". Ephesians 5: 28-29*

Wow! Tall order!

- How do you present yourself, your home, what are you communicating in just those two areas?
- Are you as smart, well heeled, and scrubbed up as your wedding day?
- How is your personal hygiene?
- Do you make the effort in your appearance, or will any old thing do?
- Is your home a reflection of the Kingdom of God - what does it say about you?
- Do you show your partner how you feel about his/her environment by the way you keep and look after it?
- Is there order in your life?

DISCOVER THEIR LANGUAGE OF LOVE

Now, which is most important to you? How do you communicate most to your partner? Do you know which language your partner speaks in most often?

We tend to communicate in the language that is most important *to us*. However, one of the keys to better communication is to 'learn another language' i.e. to understand our spouse and communicate in *their* language.

PRACTICAL AREAS OF COMMUNICATION FAILURE – TALKING THINGS OUT

Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. Ephesians 4:15

Dreams and aspirations

Do you have a clear understanding and appreciation of your partner's goals, and aspirations in their lives? What are you doing to help them attain these dreams? Or, are you ploughing ahead with your own plans, while your partner sits back, or even worse, heads off in another direction?

Money

Financially are you one, are you walking together in Gods financial plan for your life? Are you in faith together in the areas of tithing, giving etc? Practically, do you both understand your current financial situation?

Relaxation and rest

Do you understand your partner's needs, regarding rest and relaxation? Are you serving them to achieve their needs? Are you considerate, when you see needs in your own agenda that need fulfilling?

Job and career

Do you understand one another's employment situation, the people that work there, the overall career plans and ambitions?

Church involvement

Are you working together as a couple in areas of serving in the church, or releasing one another to serve in specific areas?

Expressions of affection

Do you discuss your sexual needs, and the areas of affection that you respond best to and that bless you the most?

Domestic needs and DIY

Does your home reflect your goals and ambitions? Is one partner longing for order, while the other finds it a pressure?

Time with family

Have you a common aim and understanding for your children, their potential in God, and their spiritual needs? Have you a common aim in the different ways you need to discipline them? Do you eat at the dinner table together? Do you show a united front in all these areas.

Time with friends

Are your relationships with others 'one sided'? Or are they couple focused? Do you allow time for man on man, woman on woman relationships?

- This takes practice, be patient!
- Don't force things
- Look at your partner frequently
- Learn to ask low-structured questions that require thought and stimulate conversation.

Questions like:

- How do you think our marriage has enriched our lives?
- Do our children know how much we love them? Do we get it across?
- Do I have habits or mannerisms that offend you?

MEN AND WOMEN SPEAK DIFFERENT LANGUAGES!

Men and women tend to communicate in very different ways. For example, have you ever noticed:

- Men communicate *information*; women communicate *feelings*
- Men often offer *solutions* when their wives want *support*. Consequently, wives often feel that they are not 'heard'.
- Men tend to be motivated by feeling *needed*; women by feeling *cherished*. (Cherished means to *treasure, hold or keep dear, prize, foster, tend, cultivate, preserve, sustain, nurture, nourish, nurse, cosset*).
- Men often take personal offence when their wives are expressing their feelings; whereas often the wife is simply calling out to be heard and cherished, rather than expressing any personal criticism of her husband.

KEYS TO BETTER COMMUNICATION - TALKING, LISTENING AND UNDERSTANDING

- **Make time** to communicate. There is never a substitute for 'quality time' together.
- **Never compare** your partner with anyone else.
- Never be deliberately **unkind**. Never criticize in public.
- Try and **understand your own feelings**. The way you deal with them is key. It's vital that we admit our feelings and share them with each other.
- Try and **understand your partner's feelings**. Try and feel what they're feeling; try and communicate that you understand their feelings. We are not good listeners, especially if we are hurt, as we want to get our own point across.
- **Listen between the lines**. Try and listen not just to the words your partner uses but to the feelings behind them

"My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry." James 1:19

"He who answers before listening-- that is his folly and his shame". Proverbs 18:13

"...Then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others". Philipians 2:2-4

- Try and '**listen with your eyes**'
- Spend more time talking to **each other** than you do to other friends
- **Switch off the TV** and the phone and spend an evening just being together

MARRIAGE MATTERS (4)

STORMY WATERS

1 Introduction

'In any relationship – whether it be marriage, friendship, family, work or church – disagreements will occur. This is natural and is not necessarily wrong. **The important thing is how we handle such disagreements:** do we agree to differ and yet remain united, or do we allow our disagreements to lead to division?'

(‘Stand Up and Fight’: Barry Austin, Sovereign World Books)

Task: Group open discussion

What do you think are the things most likely to cause conflict in marriage?

We are going to look at the topic under three headings:

- Where do storms come from – Causes
- Overcoming the storms – Strategies 1
- Maintaining a smooth passage – Strategies 2

2 Where do the Storms come from?

First let's identify what a storm in marriage is and there are two types of storm to recognise:

1. A disagreement between the two partners in a marriage
2. An external circumstance which comes against the couple

The former can be called a conflict and the other can be classed as an adversity. In the first instance there has to be a reconciling of the partners, whilst in the latter case there has to be a united stand against the adversity. An example of conflict could be a disagreement over how some money should be spent whilst adversity could be exemplified in the case of frequent ill-health in the children.

Regarding the first type of storm, we tend to think of a variety of causes:

- finance
- family
- children
- career
- incompatibility (which, of course, is used to justify anything we want to justify)
- health
- circumstances and events
- wandering affection

Probably numerous other ones too; but these are most often not the fundamental cause of storms in our marriages. But because we think they are, we find ourselves dealing with the area around which the storm is raging without actually dealing with the root cause.

Someone has suggested 4 basic causes of conflict:

1. We're different
2. Self-centredness
3. Failure to correctly handle anger
4. Thinking winning means someone losing

These definitely identify much more closely where the storms come from, but they can all be summed up in the second cause listed: SELF-CENTREDNESS (although there are certain times when ignorance and lack of understanding resulting from causes 1 and 4 could be seen as the basic issue).

God identifies the root source of our conflicts in James 4:1 – 2

'What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?'

Almost without exception, conflicts arise through our own selfishness or ignorance (in the sense of being unaware) and heeding this scripture will enable us to focus on our own attitude as the root cause of the first type of storm.

The storms of adversity are a very different matter. Here we are not talking about a conflict within marriage but an external assault on the marriage. Again it might be suggested that there are many causes of adversity. But consider this: we have already established the fact through God's Word that marriage is God-ordained and is His original plan for us. (See 'God's Plan For Marriage' and 'Vive La Difference'). God is not therefore going to attempt to 'strengthen' our marriages by trying to pull them apart. However we do have an adversary who IS intent on destroying everything he can of God's creation and plan and he is the author of adversity against our marriages. **Basically Satan wants to destroy our marriages and he is the root cause of our second type of storm.**

'Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour' (1 Pet. 5:8)

Be aware of this form of storm and realise that this is a spiritual opposition to your marriage and can be fought together as such.

3 Overcoming the Storms

Talking about dealing with anger in marriage, Nicky Lee (The Marriage Course, Holy Trinity, Brompton) identifies two kinds of character which he describes as the hedgehog and the rhino. The one curls up in a defensive ball and won't let anyone near, the other lowers the head and charges! These labels also fit the way we often approach the storms in our marriages.

Task

Take a moment to discuss with your partner which category you think you each of you falls into.

The truth is, of course, that neither of these approaches is likely to help in a storm. So what will help us overcome? There is one word that sums up what overcoming is all about: ATTITUDE! Before a plane can land successfully it has to adopt a certain posture; this prepares it to touch down at the right angle, right speed, right direction. All this is referred to as the 'attitude' of the plane. In the same way **there has to be a certain attitude to overcome any storm.**

Remember what happened in Genesis chapter 4. Two brothers brought offerings to the Lord: one was acceptable, the other wasn't. This led Cain, the one whose offering was rejected, to get very angry, but this is what God said to him:

'Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at the door; it desires to have you, BUT YOU MUST MASTER IT.' (Gen. 4:6,7)

What God said to Cain in simple words was, "Change your attitude, Cain." This is God's word to us when conflicts come in our marriages; our attitude must not be that of a hedgehog OR a rhino.

We must have the attitude to master the storm and not allow it to become a dividing point in our marriage. This responsibility is a shared one belonging to both husband and wife and the first priority is to talk to your heavenly Father about it. Then you should DO something about it.

Storm Type 1

The following is a list of prompts or suggestions for helping to change our attitudes when a storm blows up. They are put roughly in order of priority:

- Examine self
- Listen to your partner
- Recognise and accept that you are different
- Try to understand where your partner is coming from
- Remember your first love (both spiritual and earthly) and sincerely express your love for your partner
- Be prepared to change
- Talk to your partner and discuss the issue – but don't seek to dominate or capitulate and don't try to 'win' the argument: your aim is to find an amicable solution NOT a victory. In talking about the situation, it is a good idea to follow a pattern. The following is one recommended by Nicky & Sila Lee (Holy Trinity, Brompton),
 1. Find the best time (Preferably not late in the evening)
 2. Identify the issues
 3. Discuss the issues (Without attacking)
 4. Work out possible solutions
 5. Decide on the best solution
 6. Be prepared to re-evaluate
- Do not apportion blame (remember Jesus talking to the legalists, "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone") – do not say, "You upset me!" This is blaming or accusing. Rather admit to the effect that the words or action had on you, "I got upset."
- Pray together about the solution (having talked to your Father in heaven about the conflict as a first priority)
- Be prepared to accept responsibility (see the note on 'blame' above) – never use the phrase, "You made me - - - - -"
- Learn to say, "I was wrong" (sincerely)
- Cultivate the phrase, "Please forgive me" (truthfully)
- If all else fails, seek wise counsel from a mediator

In all this remember also:

'God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble. - - - He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth; He breaks the bow and shatters the spear.' (Ps 46:1,9)

Go for the root of the conflict rather than just the circumstances. This will prevent a resurgence of the conflict later. It will mean asking yourself, 'What have I got to do to resolve this situation?' or in other words, 'How do I need to change my attitude to ensure a smooth landing?'

Storm Type 2

Overcoming adversity, the second type of storm, is 'simpler' but not easier. Your first priority is to talk to your heavenly Father together about the situation. ALWAYS seek God's word on the storm – this will be considerably easier if you are in the habit of reading the Bible together and praying together. DO NOT WAIT FOR THE STORM TO BEGIN BEFORE YOU SEEK REFUGE. Daily building yourselves up together in the Word and praying together is SO important. Having sought His help and counsel there may be practical issues for you to resolve. Maintain a united effort as you resolve them and then STAND and resist the Devil, because you know what happens when we do that – He flees from us. (Jas 4:7; 1 Pet 5:9-10)

An important key in overcoming this type of storm is recognising in the first place where it comes from. Again recognition will be enhanced if you are reading the Word and praying together: your spiritual sensitivity will be heightened.

In either type of storm it is very important to keep up your mutual guard even when you have triumphed over a conflict or adversity. Consider that the firefighter has to constantly drench the embers with water, sometimes for days, before he can be certain that the flames will not flare up again and there are often measures to be put in place to ensure that further fires do not happen.

Finally in this section I want you to call to mind the account of what happened on Lake Galilee: the disciples put to sea with Jesus to cross the Lake. A storm blew up. They tried their hardest but at last they had to admit defeat. At this point, in panic, they finally called upon Jesus to do something. Mildly scolding the disciples for their lack of faith, He stood up and cried out, "Peace; be still!". Both wind and waves subsided at His command: the storm ceased.

Remember this same Jesus who stilled the storm on Lake Galilee is, if you are a Christian, living in you and His power is not diminished in the least.

4 Maintaining a Smooth Passage

Storms can actually strengthen a marriage however. Recall what Joseph said to his brothers after all he had been through because of their jealousy: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good." (Gen 50:20). It is not always the easy path that leads to the greatest blessing and sometimes we must go through the difficulties to grow and be mature both as individuals and as couples. Someone named Gary Ricucci once said, '**Success in marriage is not measured by the absence of conflict but by our response to conflict**'. (See also the quote from Barry Austin's book at the beginning of these notes). If we can prevent conflict from forcing us apart it actually serves to bond us together. Consider a storm an opportunity for the husband to refine his leadership skills in listening and determining the best course of action, and an opportunity for the wife to hone her ability to listen and respect her husband.

Having said this, none of us relishes conflict in our marriages so aim to do the following (and this list is by no means exhaustive):

- Always acknowledge God in your marriage.
- Keep the lines of communication open and functioning by talking and sharing with each other
- Be honest with each other.
- Do NOT put yourself in the way of temptation. (this seems particularly applicable to husbands)
- Appreciate one another
- Remember Prov 15:1 'A gentle answer turns away wrath'
- Take captive your thoughts (2 Cor 10:5)
- Consider how you use your tongue (Jas 3:1-12)
- Aim for unity but allow for difference
- Pray and read the Bible aloud together regularly. As a help to putting this most important part of your marriage in order, consider the following steps for prayer:
 1. Aim to have a time each day
 2. Start by being thankful
 3. Pray for each other together
 4. Make your requests known to your partner
 5. Listen and respond to each other's prayers
 6. Accept that some requests will be made more than once
 7. Pray to God and do not pray manipulative prayers (e.g. Please help Mary realise how important it is that we have a new T.V.)
 8. Don't give up – develop your time together as a priority, even a habit
 9. Don't limit what God can do through your praying

- Acknowledge your own failings and weaknesses and recognise your partner's strengths
- One of the most effective ways I know of maintaining the calm is to tell your partner, frequently and sincerely, that you love him/her, and show it by your actions. Remember what God says to us in 1 Pet 4:8, 'Love covers a multitude of sins'.

As a final task consider the following qualities of love that are found in 1 Cor 13. Discuss them with your husband/wife and mark those where you feel you fall short when a storm is brewing in your marriage:

Love is:

- Patient
- Kind
- Not envious
- Not arrogant
- Humble
- Polite
- Truthful
- Unselfish
- Not easily provoked
- Forgiving
- Delighting in righteousness
- Protective
- Trustful
- Hopeful
- Persevering

Let your overwhelming understanding of storms in your marriage be that it is not the absence of conflict but our response to it that measures success. As a summing up of all that has been said here, **'With Christ in the vessel we can smile at the storm' – but without Him we will have a hard time bailing out!**