

GRACE FELLOWSHIP PRETORIA

PREMARITAL CLASS





GRACE FELLOWSHIP

PREMARITAL COURSE

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Premarital: Class Structure and Homework

Required Books:

Your Family, God's Way, Wayne Mack.

Forgiving Like God Forgives, Joel James (free download at gracefellowship.co.za).

Required Sermons: (free downloads at gracefellowship.co.za).

What does it mean to be male and female? (Genesis 1:26-27)

Manhood and womanhood (Genesis 2:18-25 (part 1))

Proverbs on Purity (Proverbs 5-7)

Class Outline:

Week 1: God's Five-Part Plan for Marriage (1)

Homework: High Performance Relationship Evaluation at the end of this notebook.
Listen to the required sermons from Genesis 1, 2, and Proverbs 5-7.

Week 2: God's Five-Part Plan for Marriage (2)

Homework: Read *Your Family, God's Way*, pp. 55-132.

Week 3: Responsibilities of a Husband

Homework: Read *Your Family, God's Way*, pp. 133-176.

Week 4: Responsibilities of a Wife

Homework: Read *Forgiving Like God Forgives*, Joel James.

Week 5: Conflict Resolution

Suggested reading: *Love That Lasts*, Gary and Betsy Ricucci

Final session: Physical Intimacy in Marriage

This session will take place the week before the wedding.
Suggested reading: *Intended for Pleasure*, Ed Wheat.

GOD'S PLAN FOR MARRIAGE

The presupposition of this premarital course:

Marriage is a divine institution created by God.

- Genesis 1:26-28
- Genesis 2:18-25

To have a joyful, enjoyable, God-honouring marriage we must follow God's operating instructions for what He has designed.

The Designer's Five-Part Plan For Marriage:

1) Marriage is permanent.

OT instruction:

Malachi 2:14

The people of Malachi's day were wondering why God did not seem to be answering their prayers or regarding their worship (v. 13). One of the major reasons was their casual attitude toward their marriage vows. God hates divorce (v. 16) and does not honour those who treat their marriage covenant lightly.

NT instruction:

Matthew 19:6

God's plan for marriage is one man-one woman, inseparably joined for a lifetime.

2) Marriage normally includes the bearing and raising of children.

Genesis 1:28

Implication:

One of God's purposes for marriage is the advancement of the human race through the bearing and raising of children.

However:

The focus of the home is the husband and wife relationship. A marriage is a marriage before children come and it is still a marriage after the children leave. Always keep your marriage the central human relationship in your home.

3) Marriage is for companionship.

Genesis 2:18

John MacArthur:

In the Song of Solomon, the wife says of her husband, "This is my beloved, and this is my friend" (5:16) It is not his machismo or his leadership that causes her heart to sing. What is it? She is glad that he is her friend. (Successful Christian Parenting, 170)

Jay Adams:

You may wonder why I speak of the obligation of marriage—in the singular—when, of course, there are many obligations When I speak of the obligation of marriage, I have in mind the basic obligation underlying all others The basic obligation is to meet the other's need for companionship. When a couple takes marriage vows, whether they realize it or not (and they often do not), they are vowing to provide companionship for one another for the rest of their lives Notice, they do not vow to receive companionship, but to provide it for one another. (Solving Marriage Problems, 22)

Six Biblical Descriptions of Marriage Companionship

1. A joyful companionship

Deuteronomy 24:5

A man wasn't relieved from military or civic obligations so he could lie on the couch and watch rugby re-runs all day. God wanted a husband to have plenty of time in the first year of marriage to give happiness to his wife. The verb is stative in Hebrew: so he can put his wife in a state of happiness.

2. A rewarding companionship

Ecclesiastes 9:7-9

Solomon's advice is sometimes delightfully down to earth. "Men, due to sin, life's tough. But work hard, and know that God delights in your work. At the end of the day, go home, take a shower, put some gel in your hair, put on a clean shirt, and enjoy life with the woman God gave you. She is a reward—a gift from God to help you get through the pain, trials, struggles, and difficulties of life."

Charles Spurgeon regarding his wife, Susanna:

Blessed may she be among women. How much of comfort and strength she has ministered unto me it is not in my power to estimate. She has been to me God's best earthly gift, and not a little even of heavenly treasure has come to me by her means. She has often been as an angel of God unto me. (Autobiography: The Early Years, 285)

3. An understanding companionship

1 Peter 3:7

A husband can't throw up his hands and exclaim, "I don't understand her." That's his job. He can't give up. And as he patiently and selflessly asks gentle questions, listens, and draws her out, he is fulfilling the companionship principle of Genesis 2 with an *understanding companionship*.

4. A convicting companionship

1 Peter 3:1-2

Here the husband is disobedient—it doesn't say whether he's a believer or not, and it doesn't matter. He is disobedient: it's a present tense for on-going action. His wife—as is befitting manhood and womanhood—doesn't berate, nag, argue, or fight. She just lives more graciously, more Christ-like, and more lovingly. And that Christ-likeness is what God will use to convict her husband and bring him to repentance.

Marriage is a *convicting companionship*. In a good marriage, neither casual conversation nor deep counsel defines the limits of communication. Biblical companionship also includes gracious *correction*.

5. An encouraging companionship

Proverbs 31:28-29

Words of conviction are *occasional* in marriage. Words of praise, encouragement, and affirmation are *constant*.

Many homes would be happier if men and women would simply speak of their love for one another a little more often. (Duane Garret, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, NAC, 379)

Betsy Ricucci:

Withholding respect or encouragement from my husband has never produced good fruit. My silence or my repeated criticisms have never inspired [him] or our children. (Love That Lasts, 54)

6. A Christ-exalting companionship

Ephesians 5:22-32

- v. 22 *as to the Lord ...*
- v. 23 *as Christ also is the head of the church ...*
- v. 24 *as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives to their husbands ...*
- v. 25 *love your wives, as Christ loved the church ...*
- v. 29 *as Christ does the church ...*

A husband and wife rightly relating are a living parable of Christ and the church: His sacrificial love and our submissive obedience.

Key point:

This kind of companionship requires hard work.

CJ Mahaney:

Let's reject the delusions of effortless relational ecstasy that the entertainment industry tries to sell us. Real, sustained romance, although powerfully enabled by God, is still hard work. (Sex, Romance, and the Glory of God, 38)

Proverbs 14:23

Proverbs 24:30-34

The power of neglect:

The crumbling wall, the weed-choked field—it doesn't take negative input to make a marriage look like that. All it takes is *neglect*.

Marriage is to be our priority *human* relationship, and the companionship of that relationship requires joyful, God-assisted, hard work.

4) Marriage teaches servant attitudes.

Genesis 2:18 Eph 5:25-27

As a wife surrenders herself to her husband as his helper and as a husband sacrificially seeks his wife's best, both become Christ-like in reflecting the servant attitude of our Lord (Phil 2:3-5).

Therefore, some wrong reasons to marry a certain person are ...

- what you believe they can give you sexually
- the "prestige" of marrying such a talented or beautiful spouse
- merely because you have found somebody (anybody!) who will take you

We are to marry our prospective partner, not for what we believe they can do for us, but so that we can serve them sacrificially as a friend and companion.

5) Marriage forms a new family unit.

In marriage, the temporary parent-child authority relationship is exchanged for the *new, permanent* companionship marriage relationship.

Jay Adams:

A whole new relationship with one's parents must be established; nothing can be exactly the same as before. (Solving Marriage Problems, 69)

The new companionship of marriage means that you don't relate to your parents in the same ways as you did in the past.

Recommended reading: *In-Laws: Married With Parents* by Wayne Mack

Genesis 2:24

The Hebrew word translated *leave* usually implied a geographic, physical removal. Although this may not always be possible for a newly married couple, the word *leave* does imply that, with marriage, a new family unit and thus a new authority structure have been created.

Point:

The leaving discussed in Genesis 2:24 is a *relational* leaving, not a *geographic* leaving.

Result:

Although it is appropriate and advisable to consult both sets of parents when making significant decisions (e.g., Moses and Jethro, Ex 18), the new couple must make their own decisions under God's authority and the husband's leadership.

Sixteen principles for handling in-law problems (adapted from *In-laws: Married with Parents*, Wayne Mack, P&R, 2009):

1. Leave behind financial, spiritual, and emotional dependence on your parents.
2. Be willing to give up your families' traditions and ways of doing things.

My mother never made the roast beef that way!

Expect your spouse to have different ways of doing things since he or she comes from a different family background. Neither family's traditions or practices need to determine the way the new couple does things. This includes everything from how you fold the laundry to how you raise your children.

Don't assume that *your* family's way of doing things is best. Instead, identify your spouse's distinct way of doing things, discuss it, and be willing to embrace his or her preferences, considering your spouse before yourself.

After discussing the issue, the couple might come up with an altogether new way of doing things not based on the historical practice of either family.

3. Put off an inordinate reliance on your parents' approval.
4. Be more concerned with fulfilling your spouse's desires than your parents' desires. (*...the one who is married is concerned about ... how he may please his wife ... 1 Cor 7:33*)
5. Avoid having a parent-centred or parent-controlled manner of life—holidays, decision making, child-raising, etc.
6. Your parents are no longer your primary confidants; as your lifetime companion, your husband or wife is.

7. Establish a peer, friendship relationship with your parents.
8. Accept responsibility for jointly making your own decisions in marriage. Your parents' desires are no longer the main factor in decision making.
9. Give your husband's or wife's parents the same respect and honour that you give your parents.
10. Never speak badly of your husband or wife in front of your parents.
11. Positively, look for ways to commend and build up your husband or wife in the eyes of your parents.
12. Do not allow your parents to speak badly of your husband or wife.
13. Make sure that your spouse feels included in family discussions and activities.
14. Believe the best, acknowledging that parents often *unintentionally* put pressure on their married children. (*You are coming to our house this year for Christmas, aren't you?* They mean well—they want to see you. Take it in that way, not as a malicious attack on your autonomy.)
15. When an in-law problem arises, talk about it gently and openly as a couple and determine how to handle the situation so that you can present a unified front against either unintended or malicious pressure from parents.

If parental interference becomes a recurring problem:

- Discuss the issue as a couple.
- Identify and stop any behaviour or attitudes in yourselves that are allowing the parents to cause conflict.
- Agree on a mutually satisfactory plan to avoid parental interference in the future.
- If necessary, speak directly to the parents in hopes of resolving the problem.

16. Don't blame your parents or in-laws for your marriage problems.

Accept responsibility; don't shift blame on to your parents.

Two closing warnings for premarital couples:

1. Purity:

Hebrews 13:4

A sexually pure marriage begins *before* marriage.

2. Idolatry:

Matthew 6:33

Some newly married or engaged couples are guilty of “worshipping” or idolising their relationship or their spouse.

Marriage is not the place where we get all our needs met all the time. No one but God can perfectly satisfy and fulfill us. Although your spouse is to be your priority *human* relationship, your relationship with God supersedes even that.

To be committed to the pre-eminence of God in marriage you must ...

- worship together
- serve in the church together
- pray together
- grow together spiritually
- confront one another
- raise your children in godliness

THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF A HUSBAND

Summarised:

The biblical responsibilities of a husband can be summarised under three general headings: leadership, love, understanding.

Responsibility 1: Leadership (Genesis 1-2)

Genesis 1-3 shows that God made Adam to be the leader in his relationship with Eve. That leadership has three primary aspects: responsibility, initiative, and authority.

1. Responsibility

It is the man who must teach Eve God's instructions about the Garden.

2. Initiative

It is the man who initiates a new family unit by leaving father and mother and cleaving to his wife.

3. gracious, legitimate Authority

It is the man who names the animals and even Eve herself. God spends the whole of Genesis 1 naming things. Adam takes up that role in Genesis 2 as God's representative. He is standing in for God, exercising gracious, legitimate authority.

Extremes: wimp or warlord

- Wimp: The husband who has the backbone, initiative, and decisiveness of over-cooked spaghetti.
- Warlord: The husband whose leadership style is somewhere between King Kong and Attila the Hun.

Obviously, neither the wimp nor warlord approach is correct. What God requires of men is *loving* leadership.

Summary—manhood means:

1. Responsibility
2. Initiative
3. (gracious) Authority

Responsibility 2: Love (Ephesians 5:25-33)

Nothing is more determinative of the peace, stability, and spiritual progress of a home than a husband's loving leadership.

Ephesians 5:25-30

The **definition** of a husband's love:

It is a love of *choice*. Ephesians 5:25

agape the love of choice or will

This love is stronger and more enduring than mere infatuation or romance, because it is a choice. It is not dependent on feelings; it does not slavishly follow the natural inclinations.

Mercy gives better than is deserved, and that's what a loving husband always aims for.

It is *sacrificial*. Ephesians 5:25

Christ's example shows us that marriage is about what you *give*, not about what you *get*.

It is *continuous*. Ephesians 5:25a

The command to love is a present tense or *continuous* tense imperative.

It is *exclusive*. Ephesians 5:25

Although a Christian man is called to love everyone, clearly he is to love his wife as no other.

Gary Ricucci:

No one on earth should experience more of my generosity, respect, kindness, sacrifice, and gratitude than my wife. (Love That Lasts, 36)

The **depth** of a husband's love:

Ephesians 5:25

Gave Himself up was, in this case, a technical term for being handed over for judgment and execution.

The **diligence** of a husband's love:

In biblical marriage, *self*-preoccupation is replaced by *spouse*-preoccupation.

Ephesians 5:28-32

A husband is to care for his wife as diligently as he cares for himself. He is to treat her the same way (or better than) he expects to be treated in regard to:

- respect
- considering her valuable
- words of thanks
- respecting her schedule
- listening when she's had a hard day

A husband serves and loves his wife because *she is he*. They are "one flesh" (5:31). The rib God took out has been reinserted, and they are now one person. Therefore, you are not to look at the time, energy and attention you lavish on her as being directed to someone else. *She is he*, so the best thing you can do is love her.

Ephesians 5:29

nourish: to tenderly care for and feed—used of a mother nursing her infant
cherish: to keep warm or soften by heat

To follow the imagery, a husband is to "baby" his wife, cuddling her to keep her warm and protected.

Jay Adams:

.... *Too many husbands think that, like lifeboats, love is for women and children. (Solving Marriage Problems, 117)*

Twelve Ways To Love Your Wife

1) 1 Timothy 3:2. Love your wife by being *a one-woman kind of man*.

By quality the husband of one wife. Don't look at other women. Don't fool around looking at stuff on the internet.

2) 1 Timothy 3:4a. Love your wife by *providing leadership* for your home.

A husband loves his wife by leading the home—taking the initiative, bearing the responsibility for decisions, and exercising a legitimate, biblical, loving authority.

- 3) 1 Timothy 3:4b. Love your wife by *teaching and disciplining your children*.

There are few things that a husband can do that his wife will appreciate more than spending time with the kids and taking the responsibility to discipline them when they're bad.

- 4) 1 Timothy 5:8. Love your wife by *doing your level best to provide financially*.

- 5) 1 Corinthians 14:34-35. Love your wife by *being involved in her spiritual life*.

1 Corinthians 14 assumes that husbands are to be actively involved in their wives' spiritual growth.

- 6) Deuteronomy 24:5. Love your wife by *making her happy*.

This is your job: don't get fired for a lack of productivity.

- 7) Hosea 3:1-3. Love your wife by *taking the lead in seeking reconciliation* when there is conflict between you.

- 8) Proverbs 31:11. Love your wife by *trusting her*.

- 9) Proverbs 31:10-31. Love your wife by *ordering your life, family, and finances so that she can focus her full and best attention on her home*.

The home is her "queendom," the place where God has designed her to flourish. If at all possible, arrange for her to be a "worker at home" and give her the tools and support she needs to do the job excellently.

- 10) Proverbs 31:28-29. Love your wife by *regularly praising her*.

- 11) Genesis 2:18. Love your wife by *diligently and creatively working at your companionship*.

Things that keep men from working at companionship:

- laziness
- preoccupation with work

If you work so hard at work that you have no time or energy left to be your wife's interested, energetic, and enthusiastic companion, then you're working too hard at work.

- a “divide and conquer” mentality

Every woman's favourite word is *together*.

- an “I came, I saw, I conquered” mentality

Husband: "Okay, I've wooed, won, and wed my wife. Tick that box. Now, she can stay home and do her woman things—cook, clean, conceive—and I'll gallop off to my next conquest."

The covenant of marriage is a covenant to provide active, enthusiastic, enjoyable companionship for a lifetime. There is no "next objective."

12) Song of Solomon 1:2. Love your wife *by giving her plenty of physical affection*.

Women like hugs, kisses, and caresses—that's a great way to love your wife.

Responsibility 3: Understanding (1 Peter 3:7)

For a husband, marriage is a lifetime commitment to study that fascinating creature that God has put beside him.

1 Peter 3:7

Key command: *live with your wives*

Some husbands live with their wives, but their wives wish they didn't. To love his wife, a husband must live with his wife, *and* live with her in such a way that *she's glad he's there*.

Two key words—*understanding* and *honour*:

1) With *understanding*

Literally: according to *knowledge*

Peter's instruction is that a husband must learn, ascertain, find out, understand, comprehend, perceive, notice, realise, and recognise his wife's behaviour, attitudes, and desires.

An understanding husband is *considerate*:

v. 7 *as with someone weaker*

The issue is not whether she is weaker physically, emotionally, or spiritually. But a husband lives with his wife *as if* she were weaker in all those areas, whether she is or not. He treats her like fine china, not an unbreakable plastic cup.

The reason:

v. 7 *since she is a woman (NAU)*

There is something inherent in manhood and womanhood that requires that men treat women with special, gentle consideration.

*Why did God make little girls?
For little boys to treat special.*

Five areas in which an understanding husband can increase his knowledge:

1. Marriage.

Men, not just women, should read books and listen to sermons about marriage regularly.

2. Your wife's moods, desires, goals, joys, and frustrations.

- Draw her out with genuine, interested questions.
- Listen with your full attention when she answers.

Gary Ricucci:

It's easy for husbands to assume (or perhaps simply to pretend) that all is well. If there is no open conflict, there's no problem, right? How quickly we slide into that passive, selfish, deluded condition that believes no news is good news. How easily we forget that the goal of marriage ... is so much higher and better than merely getting along. (Love That Lasts, 67-68)

Listening is a form of love:

I recommend that you not tell her anything, instead take some time to ask questions and listen. Find out what's generating her concern. When you genuinely understand the thoughts behind your wife's words and actions, you can then graciously lead her to evaluate them biblically. (Ricucci, Love That Lasts, 38)

Summarised:

You need to create an environment in which your wife feels safe to share her dreams, desires, plans, joys, and frustrations.

3. Strengths, weaknesses, and pressures.

Strengths: Turn her loose in those areas and let her shine.

Weaknesses: Notice her weaknesses, *not to criticise them*, but so that you can stretch mercy over them and compensate for them.

Pressures:

Now and then it does a husband good to change a half dozen [nappies], if for no other reason than to become a bit more understanding It takes times to wash and dress four children. A husband may decide to lend a hand in such a case, rather than to sit outside in the car fuming and blowing the horn! (Jay Adams, Christian Living in the Home, 98-99)

4. What makes your wife happy.

Principle: Love your wife the way *she* wants to be loved. A good husband is a good *noticer*: notice what your wife likes and do it.

5. The differences between men and women.

Don't treat your wife as if she were another one of your male buddies.

- Women feel loved when they are *pursued*.
- Women feel loved when their husbands *initiate*.
- Women love *affection*—hugs, kisses, and tender touches all the time.
- Men and women have *different senses of humour*.
- Men and women are *different sexually*.
- Men and women *differ physically*—hormones, periods, pregnancy, etc.
- Men and women *communicate differently*.
- Men and women *use words differently*.

2) Giving *honour*

The word *honour* was usually used of responding to someone who is *over* you in authority.

- children to parents
- church members to elders

- citizens to government officials
- slaves to slave masters
- hosts to guests
- believers to God

Point:

Peter says that if a husband wants to know how he should treat his wife, he should treat her with the respect and honour he would give to someone who is *over* him in authority, not under him.

Honour does not:

- raise its voice
- use harsh, abrasive words
- insult
- mock
- lie
- manipulate
- take revenge

Honour does:

- listen
- extend patience
- express appreciation
- say thank you
- act courteously
- act considerately
- give respect

Honor not expressed is not honor. (Ricucci, Love That Lasts, 39)

Three reasons a husband is to be understanding and to give honour:

1. Since she is a woman.
2. Since his wife is equally saved in Christ.
3. So his prayers will not be hindered.

Conclusion:

A husband's biblical responsibilities are summarised in the three words:

- lead
- love
- understanding

THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF A WIFE

Key responsibility: Submission (Ephesians 5:22-25)

Context: Eph 5:15, 17, 18

Submitting to authority is wise, Spirit-filled living.

Point:

As a woman, what you want most out of life—love, stability, and peace in your family—comes through submitting to your husband, not through resisting him.

The assertion of a wife's submission:

Ephesians 5:22

Submission: *hupotasso*

This was a military word used of troops lining up under the authority of a commanding officer.

*While wives are told several times in the New Testament to submit to their husbands, the situation is never reversed: husbands are never told to submit to their wives. (Wayne Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 199)*

Definition of *submission*:

- to yield voluntarily to authority

*Submission is an inner quality of gentleness that affirms the leadership of the husband. (Wayne Grudem, in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 196)*

- to follow or obey (1 Pet 3:5-6 being submissive to their own husbands; just as Sarah obeyed Abraham ...)

*The wife puts all of her talents, abilities, resources, [and] energy at her husband's disposal. She yields and uses all of her abilities under the management of her husband for the good of her husband and family She sees herself as part of her husband's team. She is not her husband's opponent fighting at cross purposes or trying to outdo him. (Wayne Mack, *Strengthening Your Marriage*, 14)*

- *Submission* means that a wife *actively and joyfully seeks and accepts her husband's leadership*.

It is *active*: She *seeks* her husband's leadership. She doesn't submit only if he imposes his authority.

It is *joyful*: she submits in attitude as well as in action.

Question:

Is this requirement oppressive? Demeaning? Slavish?

Only if you call what Jesus did in the incarnation slavish and oppressive. In fact, yielding to the will of her husband is the most Christ-like thing a wife could ever do.

Christ's example: John 5:30, 7:16, 8:28, 8:42

A wife's submission is an echo of Jesus' greatest moment: "Father, not My will, but Thine be done."

The benefits of submission:

1. The glory of Christ.

As a wife imitates Christ's submission to His Father, Jesus is exalted by the fact that she is trying to be like Him.

2. Protection.

"My husband says ..." is a wonderful shield of protection for a wife. Submission to her husband protects her from ungodly, rude, demanding, manipulative men. It protects her from interfering parents or other family members. She submits to her husband, and that's the end of it.

3. Relief from the stress of being responsible for life decisions.

4. Stronger faith.

Faith grows strong in a woman who trusts God to guide her husband, rather than trusting herself to manipulate or dominate him.

The comparison of a wife's submission:

Ephesians 5:22

The best, most revealing test of a wife's spiritual maturity is her submission to her husband. Why? Because she submits to him *as to the Lord*.

How you respond to your *husband* is how you respond to *Christ*. You can't separate the two: *I'll submit to Christ, but not to my husband*.

The *invisible man* principle:

When your flesh is screaming for self-assertion because of your desires or because your husband has failed in some way, what you have to do is look past your husband and see the Lord Jesus Christ standing there. Your husband turns into the invisible man, and you look right through him and submit to Christ.

The illustration of a wife's submission:

Ephesians 5:22-24 Christ and the church

Quality of her submission: *as to the Lord*

Quantity of her submission: *in everything*

- Submission is not occasional.
- It isn't feeling driven.
- It isn't based on how well the husband is carrying out his duty.
- It doesn't vary based on the importance of the decision.

When submission becomes *submission*:

When your husband makes a decision you like, and you go along with it, that's not submission. That's called *getting what you want*.

Submission comes into play when he makes a decision you don't like. That's when you especially need to actively seek his leadership, graciously, lovingly, and supportively surrendering to his decision.

The exception:

A wife is to submit *in everything* unless her husband *asks or tells her to sin*. In that case, she looks past her husband to the higher authority of Christ, as illustrated by the apostles in Acts 5:29, *We must obey God rather than men*.

What submission *doesn't* mean:

It doesn't mean *silence in everything*:

Gary Ricucci:

In a good marriage decision making is focused on the husband, but is not unilateral. (Love That Lasts, 41)

Betsy Ricucci:

My submission does not, of course, make me a passive partner who lives only to carry out his declared will. I will provide Gary with my perspective, counsel, questions, and concerns. (Love That Lasts, 58)

Biblical support:

Matthew 26:39. Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane.

A submissive wife will employ gentle questions.

- Demanding question: *You're not going to do that are you?*
- Gentle question: *Do you think that's best? Can I suggest an alternative?*

Submission doesn't mean slavish silence, but it does shape *how* a wife shares her ideas—asking permission, not demanding, accusing, demeaning, or arguing.

I'm happy to do what you want, but can I share some thoughts?

Having acknowledged her husband's authority and her willingness to submit, now she can share her ideas without her husband feeling threatened.

Principle: Avoid being contentious.

Betsy Ricucci:

I have at times expressed my opinion and asked questions in the form of angry accusations or demands. (Love That Lasts, 59)

Proverbs 14:1. *The wise woman builds her house, but the foolish tears it down with her own hands.*

Proverbs 27:15-16 *A constant dripping on a day of steady rain and a contentious woman are alike; he who would restrain her restrains the wind, and grasps oil with his right hand.*

Proverbs 21:19 *It is better to live in a desert land than with a contentious and vexing woman.*

The *contentious* woman:

The word *contentious* was one of several Hebrew words that meant to lead, rule, govern, and make determinative judgements. In other words, the contentious woman is the evil opposite of the submissive wife of Ephesians 5.

The contentious wife wants to lead, rule, govern, and make the determinative decisions in the home, and as she does so, she makes life unbearable for her husband.

The attitude of a wife's submission:

Ephesians 5:33 *respect*

When a husband does not deserve his wife's respect for his *person*, she can still respect his *position*.

Ten tests of a respectful wife (from Martha Peace, *The Excellent Wife*, 115-117):

- 1) Do you speak to your husband in a put-down or cutting manner?
- 2) Do you in public and in private treat your husband at least as respectfully as other men you highly esteem?
- 3) Does your face or body language express disrespect—angry looks, arm-crossed silence, snorts of disgust?
- 4) Do you interrupt your husband or often speak for him when he or both of you are asked a question?
- 5) Do you try to get your own way by deceitful manipulating, tears, begging, nagging, complaining, anger, or intimidation?
- 6) Do you list your husband's shortcomings in front of others?
- 7) Do you habitually contradict your husband in public conversation?
- 8) Do you compare him unfavourably with other men in public or in your own mind?

Dwell thankfully on his strengths rather than resentfully on his weaknesses. (Betsy Ricucci, Love That Lasts, 54).

- 9) Do you thoughtfully listen to his opinions before you give yours, or is disagreement a race to see if you can get your point of view across first?
- 10) Do you respect his requests by trying to do as he asks, even if it doesn't seem important to you?

Conclusion:

Submission is the plan of the Prince of Peace to bring peace, order, stability and love to a home. What you want out of life comes from submitting to your husband, not from resisting him.

Question: What do you do when your husband fails in his leadership?

1 Peter 3:1-6

The situation: a persistently ungodly husband

The response:

Submission and godly character. A Christ-imitating wife avoids using verbal skirmishes, berating, or nagging as tactics to bring change to her husband. Such tactics bring strife, not harmony (1 Peter 2:23).

Jay Adams:

Conduct, not speech, makes the difference. (Christian Living in the Home, 135)

- Suffer for doing what is right (purity, respect, and gentleness), not for what is wrong (reviling, yelling, shouting, threatening, manipulating, debating, and arguing).
- Don't respond to verbal attacks.
- Don't use threats (*I'll go to my mother's!*).
- Focus on the inner beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit.
- Trust God to judge the situation rightly.

Two motivations

- to win her husband (3:1)
- God's approval (3:4). There could be nothing more precious than being precious in the sight of God.

Other Responsibilities of a Godly Wife

1 Timothy 5:9-10 - description of a godly older woman

- one-man kind of woman
- known for her good works
- raised her children
- hospitable to all
- servant, willing to do the dirty jobs
- always willing to help
- devoted to doing good

1 Timothy 5:14 - description of a godly young wife

- She raises her children, devoting her full and best attention to her family.
- She “keeps” or manages her home.

She is to care for the home as the “queen of the home,” managing it under her husband’s authority. The home is her realm, and she will give an account to God for how smoothly it functions.

Proverbs 31:27. *She looks well to the ways of her household.*

The Hebrew word for “looks well” is the one used of a watchman who guarded a city from enemy assault. Just as you would not want a watchman to come on duty tired and strained from another job, so you don't want the watchman of your home expending all her effort and energy on other pursuits and giving only her leftover attention to her family.

1 Timothy 5:16 - A godly wife looks after those in her extended family who are in need.

Titus 2:4-5 - what older women are to teach younger women:

- love husband
- love their children
- worker at home
- submissive

Proverbs 31:11-31 - A priceless wife is one who is...

- trustworthy (v. 11)
- does good to her husband (v. 12)
- willing to sacrifice (v. 15)
- strong (v. 17)
- industrious (vv. 19, 27)
- hospitable to those in need (v. 20)
- plans ahead (v. 21)
- does not worry about future or things she cannot change (v. 25)
- uses her lips to spread wisdom and kindness (v. 26)

The result: vv. 28-31

praise - from her children
- from her husband
- from her works
- from God

Proverbs 11:22 - A wife should be:

Discerning. Discretion referred to the ability to evaluate a difficult situation and make a wise decision. The Hebrew word meant to taste flavours. Discernment is the ability to taste a problem, determine its flavour, and then choose the proper course of action.

Proverbs 12:4 - A wife should be:

A crown to her husband—a symbol of honour. A wife who is the opposite is compared to bone cancer.

Proverbs 14:1

A godly wife does things that build and strengthen the relationships in her home, not things that tear them down.

Conclusion:

A wife like this is *priceless, worthy of praise, and a blessed gift* from the Lord (Prov 31:10, 28-29; 18:22).

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

(student)

Principle:

The foundation of all peace is a saving relationship with Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace (Rom 5:1). Jesus is the the Prince who *owns* peace and who *produces* peace.

- You have to do what is right, *no matter what the other person does*.
- The husband's decisions ultimately end disagreements, with his wife respectfully supporting his decisions.

Five distinct approaches to handling conflict:

1. Avoiding. You either deny that there is a conflict or simply refuse to deal with it.
2. Accommodating. Hoping to preserve a relationship at all costs, you automatically give in to the wishes of your husband or wife.
3. Competing. You do all you can to win by imposing your will and your solution on your husband or wife.
4. Compromising. Meeting halfway or splitting the difference.
5. Collaborating. Talking to develop a mutually satisfactory solution

Settling disagreements is a mixture of numbers 4 and 5, compromising and collaborating in order to develop a mutually satisfactory solution.

Molehills into Mountains: How disagreements turn into sinful conflict

Disagreements: *disagree: to be of different opinions*

The *sources* of marriage disagreements:

- different family or cultural backgrounds—everything from the kind of food you eat, to when you eat it, to how you fold the laundry
- different economic backgrounds
- different personalities: outgoing/reserved, bold/timid, adventurous/cautious, calm/excitable, optimistic/pessimistic, flexible/rigid, logical/sentimental, loud/quiet
- different styles of decision making: fast and slow, rigorously analytical vs. intuitive decision makers

- male/female differences—this affects both *how* decisions are made and *what* is considered important
- different intellectual abilities
- different information—many a twenty-minute argument has been due to the fact that one person did not have all the information the other person had, and leapt to an accusation, rather than asking a question.
- imperfect communication—we don't always say quite what we mean, nor do we always correctly interpret what the other person said. This can lead to a disagreement when the couple actually agrees.

Two observations about disagreements:

1. Disagreements are expected.
 - The key to avoiding conflict is not perpetual agreement.
 - The unity of marriage does not require an absolute uniformity of ideas between a husband and wife.
2. Disagreements don't have to be destructive.

Carey Hardy:

Our perspective should be to embrace the situation and seek to resolve it for God's glory.

Disagreements *can* stay at the disagreement level; they don't have to turn into sinful conflicts. Unhelpful ways of handling disagreements:

- keeping quiet
- avoiding one another
- changing the subject
- pretending the disagreement didn't happen
- hoping that time will make it go away
- escalating the disagreement to an argument or sinful conflict, usually by attacking the other person, not the problem.

Four sins that turn disagreements into conflicts:

1. **Selfishness** : James 4:1

Conflict's motto: *I want what I want when I want it!*

Conflict often comes from *wanting a good thing too much.*

- respect
- gentle words
- help around the house
- time together
- being on time to appointments

James 3:16 *Where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.*

In short, conflict arises because we want something: *That which our heart deifies eventually destroys our relationships.* (Ricucci, *Love That Lasts*, 102).

Conflict is extinguished and the relationship strengthened when we consider our spouse and his or her desires more important than our own (Phil 2:3ff).

2. Hurtful words: Proverbs 12:18; 15:1

Examples:

- exaggeration *You always ... You never ...*
- minimisation *I'm not angry, I'm just upset.*
- distortion *We haven't spent a weekend with my parents for months! True, but they have been there nearly every weeknight.*
- blame shifting *I wouldn't be angry if you weren't so selfish.*
- accusations *You love your mother more than you love me!*
- slander *I don't want to go because your parents hate me.*

3. Anger: Proverbs 15:18; 29:11

Angry looks, bitter tones of voice, or shouting quickly inflame a disagreement, escalating it into a conflict. (Resource: *Overcoming Anger* by Joel James)

Retained anger or bitterness especially must be dealt with because it negatively influences all subsequent disagreements.

4. Being wise in your own eyes: Prov 26:12

My way has to be right because it is my way and I am never wrong ... or at least not in this case!

When the pride of "My way must be right" is set aside, there can be genuine, helpful give-and-take as the disagreement is discussed, considering the other person's ideas above one's own.

Summary:

Strive to make your communication even about difficult or sensitive subjects *helpful*, not *hurtful*.

Six ways to avoid or defuse conflict:

Principle: Peacemakers carry about with them an atmosphere which causes quarrels to die a natural death.

1) Overlook small offences or things that might not have been sin.

Prov 19:11

In many situations, the best way to resolve a conflict is simply to overlook the offenses of others. (Sande, The Peacemaker, 63)

2) Apply the Golden Rule.

Matt 7:12 *In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you.*

- *Would I want my spouse to treat me the way I am treating him or her right now? If our positions were reversed, how would I feel if he or she were doing or saying what I am?*

3) Be gentle.

Phil 4:5 *Let your gentle spirit be known to all men.*

Eph 4:2 *with all ... gentleness*

Definition:

Gentleness is *strength under control*. Gentleness takes into consideration the other person's weaknesses—his strong affinity for his parents or her desire to spend time alone with him.

Gentleness applied to words:

Prov 15:1 *A gentle answer turns away wrath...*

Gentle words require the gentle *strength* of self-restraint:

Ps 39:1 *I will guard my mouth as with a muzzle ...*

1 Pet 3:9 *not returning ... insult for insult ...*

Prov 15:28 *The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer,*

but the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things.

Note:

The mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart (Matt 12:34). Therefore, gentle *thoughts* must fill your mind before gentle *words* will typify your speech.

Col 3:19. *Husbands, love your wives, and do not become embittered against them.*

Gentleness replaces accusations with gentle questions:

You never spend time with me! becomes, *We have spent a lot of time with your parents recently, and that's a good thing, but could we spend this weekend together rather than at your parents?*

Summary:

The more intense a dispute becomes, the more important it is to control your tongue. (Sande, *The Peacemaker*, 199)

4) Be patient.

1 Thess 5:14 ... *be patient with everyone ...*

Patience applied to **listening**:

One of the fundamental elements of effective listening is simply waiting patiently while others talk. (Sande, *The Peacemaker*, 130)

Four *don'ts* of patient listening (Sande, 130-131):

- Don't jump to conclusions. Jumping to conclusions is an event in Hell's Olympics, not Heaven's.
- Don't interrupt.
- Don't jump in if the other person pauses for a moment. Let your spouse complete his or her thoughts.
- Don't rehearse your response while your spouse is talking.

5) Be wise.

1) Be wise enough to *clarify* and *agree*.

1. *Clarify potentially inflammatory statements.*

Let your spouse explain himself or herself, rather than jumping to an angry conclusion. *What I hear you saying is ...*

2. *Openly agree* to help defuse tension.

Example:

We have spent a lot of time with your parents recently, and that's a good thing, but could we spend this weekend together, just you and I?

Sande:

Agreeing ... will often encourage him or her to talk openly and to avoid unnecessary repetition. Agreeing is also important when you have been in the wrong ... "You're right. I was wrong when I said that..." (134)

2) Be wise in your *timing*.

Prov 15:2 *The tongue of the wise makes knowledge acceptable.*

A large percentage of marriage conflicts start in the five minutes before you are going somewhere, in the five minutes after the husband comes home from work, and in the five minutes before you go to sleep.

Those are *not* good times to raise and discuss sensitive or inflammatory issues. Raise issues when you have time to talk and won't be interrupted.

6) Be humble.

1 Peter 5:5 *God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.*

1) Doubt your ability to see your own sin; therefore, accept your spouse's reproof.

Prov 28:26 *He who trusts in his own heart is a fool.*

Jeremiah 17:9 says that our hearts are deceitful, making us blind to our sin, making us susceptible to overlooking, excusing, redefining, and minimising our sin. In light of that, your husband's or wife's reproof is a gift from God. Embrace it as such.

CJ Mahaney:

Although each of us can display competence in a variety of areas, this is never so in respect to discerning our sin You and I will never develop a competency for recognizing our sin. We'll always need help. (Humility, 133)

Principle for the husbands: When confronting your sin, your wife is always right.

- 2) When confronted, admit you were wrong and ask forgiveness *quickly*.

Prov 17:10 A rebuke goes deeper into one who has understanding than a hundred blows into a fool.

Eph 4:26 Do not let the sun go down on your anger.

- 3) Don't wait to be confronted—identify your own sin and ask forgiveness for it.

Jay Adams:

Christians admit their sins. Because they know the Bible says that no Christian is ever perfect in this life (cf. 1 John 1:8-10), Christians are able to acknowledge the fact and, in time, learn to anticipate and prepare for sin. They, of all persons, should never rely upon rationalizations, excuses, or blameshifting ... to try to euphemize their sins. They do not have to cover up, for all Christians know that all Christians sin. (Christian Living in the Home, 11)

Prov 28:13 He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion.

Matt 7:5 You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

If a disagreement has escalated to an argument or slipped down into cold silence, assume that you have contributed sinfully to it—a selfish action, a hurtful tone of voice, harsh words, an unjust accusation, jumping to conclusions, believing the worst, or whatever. Quickly reflect on what you've said or done that was offensive to your spouse, and immediately ask forgiveness for it.

A husband should especially work at this, loving his wife by providing humble leadership in resolving their conflicts, admitting his own sin, rather than accusing her.

- 4) When asking forgiveness, don't quibble over details.

Mahaney:

Don't be put off when a friend's observations may not be 100 percent accurate Humility doesn't demand mathematical precision from another's input. (Humility, 134)

Four ways to resolve a disagreement:

1. Agree to disagree. This can be done if the matter is relatively unimportant.
2. Compromise—split the difference.
3. Talk until you reach a mutually agreed conclusion.
4. Agree to disagree, with the wife graciously and supportively deferring to her husband's decision.

Conference Table:

Organise life so that you can *regularly* debrief together about life, marriage, work, family, schedules, and so on. This keeps the pressure of frustrations, disappointments, and misunderstandings from building up over days or weeks.

Jay Adams:

Few persons who come for counseling have been in the habit of solving interpersonal problems daily. That is one reason why they are having difficulty. (Competent to Counsel, 231.)

God's plan for failure—forgiveness:

If you fail and fall into a sinful conflict, remember that God has a glorious plan for failure: asking and granting forgiveness. Use it.

The Conference Table

Jay Adams:

Few persons who come for counseling have been in the habit of solving interpersonal problems daily. That is one reason why they are having difficulty. (Competent to Counsel, 231)

The conference table is a regular family meeting designed to improve the family's communication and to help them avoid or resolve conflict *daily*. It provides a practical, structured, daily means for dealing with grievances. The fact that it is *practical* and *structured* gives hope. Something orderly and coherent is being done to address the problem. The fact that it is *daily* keeps bitterness and resentment from building up (Eph 4:26-27).

The Conference Table Rules:

1) The head of the home must lead

As head of the home the husband/father calls and leads the conference. He should open and close in prayer. The conference should be held at the same table each day. Just the habit of sitting down there at the same time every day will help family members assume the right attitudes for a God-honouring discussion.

2) The rules of communication

The husband/father should review a few basic biblical rules of communication. This must especially be done if previous conferences have been shipwrecked by wrong attitudes or hurtful words.

- Prov 15:1 Gentle words and tones of voice must be used. Gentle questions replace angry accusations.
- Prov 18:13 Interrupting is not allowed.

3) One issue at a time

Discussion begins with a list of items the participants believe need to be discussed. The husband/father must determine the order in which the items are to be discussed (considering others more important than himself). Each issue must be handled separately. Mixing issues always hinders problem solving.

4) Begin with what you did wrong

Discussion regarding a conflict situation must *always* begin with each participant acknowledging how he responded wrongly in that situation or what he could have done differently to keep the problem from occurring. Starting with these admissions

and a request for forgiveness means that the conversation begins with humble words, rather than angry accusations.

5) When the rules are broken

Sometimes during the course of a discussion the rules regarding attitude, voice inflection, and dealing with one issue at a time will be violated. If this occurs, any of the participants in the conference table have the right to stand up. This is the signal that indicates that he or she believes biblical communication is no longer taking place. This signal allows matters to be brought under control before tempers flare. This done, the person sits down and the conversation continues.

Arguing over whether a rule was violated is not allowed. The person who broke the rule must revise his words or attitudes (even if he believes he was misinterpreted). He does so because he understands his inability (or unwillingness) to see his own sin, and considers the other person's analysis of the situation above his own.

PHYSICAL INTIMACY IN MARRIAGE

Three preliminary observations:

1. God made sex.

God is not a prude. It seems strange to say it, but God made sex, and He is glorified and delighted when a married couple enjoys a full and exciting sexual relationship.

2. The Bible has much to say about sex.

We are sexual beings made by God with sexual desires, and God made that an important part of who we are and what marriage is. It's one more area in which people need appropriate biblical instruction.

3. The world's influence in this area is almost uniformly negative.

We are being bombarded by the world's wrong perspectives about sex every day. We need biblical input to counteract and correct the world's misinformation.

Four biblical perspectives on marital intimacy:

1) Sexual relations in marriage are holy, pure and good.

Genesis 1:26-28, 31. Sex was created and ordained by God and was part of what God pronounced *good* in Genesis 1:31.

Heb 13:4. *Marriage is to be held in honor among all ...*

2) Sex is important to marriage because it increases and cements the deep companionship of marriage.

In the Old Testament, the word commonly used for sexual relations was *yada` to know*. This suggests that a husband and wife's sexual relationship is one of deep sharing, knowing, and intimacy.

CJ Mahaney:

Sexual intercourse, and those wonderfully intense passions it brings about, are designed to help man and wife form a relational bond of unique, unparalleled richness. (Sex, Romance, and the Glory of God, 74)

3) God intends that sexual relations between a husband and wife be *exclusive*.

Proverbs 5:15-17, 20

4) God intends that sexual relations between a husband and wife be full of pleasure.

Proverbs 5:18-19.

v. 18 *rejoice*

v. 19 *satisfy*

v. 19 *be exhilarated* (to be *drunk* or *intoxicated* (cf. Prov 20:1)

The Song of Solomon illustrates this pure, God-intended sexual intoxication between a husband and wife.

Question:

If God intends marital sex to be full of pleasure, why do some couples find that not to be the case?

Things that diminish sexual satisfaction in marriage:

- wrong goals—self-focus regarding pleasure, rather than spouse-focus
- unresolved conflicts—it's hard to have great sex in the bedroom if you've just had an argument in the kitchen.
- lack of creativity, spontaneity, and variety
- lack of planning
- lack of sensitivity, tenderness, and gentleness in the rest of the relationship
- a lack of communication regarding what each spouse enjoys

Gary Ricucci:

Marriage is the one place you might imagine people could talk freely about sex. How sad then that there's probably no area in marriage that occupies more of our thought but less of our talk than the sexual relationship! (Love That Lasts,133)

- a lack of preparing the mind

Carolyn Mahaney:

... [T]he sexiest organ of the human body lies between our ears. Our brains have a tremendous effect on our sexual experience.

Speaking to married women:

... When was the last time we spent all day looking forward to physical relations with our husbands? If it has been awhile, if we no longer anticipate lovemaking as we once did, it may be that we have stopped fantasizing about our husbands. When we neglect to think sexual thoughts, we should not be surprised by our lack of sexual desire.

On the other hand, fantasizing about our husbands throughout the day will heighten our sexual longing. In case you are wondering, it is perfectly holy to think these erotic, sensual thoughts. Let's take our cue from the wife in the Song of Solomon ... "His mouth is most sweet, and he is altogether desirable" [5:16] God has furnished us with imaginations, and we should use them to "daydream" about our husbands. (Feminine Appeal, 93-94)

- wrong atmosphere—no privacy or romance
- not caring for one's physical appearance.

Carolyn Mahaney:

Often women who meticulously attended to their physical appearance before marriage neglect it once the wedding ceremony is over. I once overheard a woman negatively comment about another woman's appearance: "She looks married." Ouch! That shouldn't be. We should give the same careful attention to our physical appearance after marriage as we did before. (Feminine Appeal, 92)

Note:

This applies equally to men, who, once married, might gradually cease to give attention to personal hygiene, weight, dressing sharply, and so on.

- lack of anatomical or physiological knowledge
- unresolved guilt from previous, sinful relationships

Are there any issues from previous relationships that need to be discussed?

You don't need to spell out the ugly details of previous sinful relationships or experiences. However, if there is something that your

husband or wife should know, it's best to deal openly with it before the wedding.

- physical problems that hinder sexual intercourse

These are rare, but when they do occur, don't be ashamed to seek legitimate medical help to resolve the problem. God wants you to have a full and joyful sexual relationship.

Wisdom from the Song of Solomon

God put the Song of Solomon in the Bible to encourage sexual fulfillment in marriage. Here are seven key principles from that important wisdom book:

1) Godly anticipation

According to the example of the Song of Solomon, husbands and wives are to think about, daydream about, and joyfully anticipate the physical aspect of their relationship.

1:1 2:8 4:9 5:16

Anticipation is a biblical principle for encouraging sexual fulfillment: foster that delighted anticipation—encourage it, enjoy it.

2) Open talk

Many couples avoid the topic of sex: not for *this* couple. This book is eight chapters of, occasionally, down-right-embarrassingly open talk between a husband and wife about their sexual desire for one another.

CJ Mahaney:

Solomon's Song of Songs is an entire book of the Bible devoted to the promotion of sexual intimacy within the covenant of marriage. It's an eight-chapter feast of unbridled, uninhibited, joyous immersion in verbal and physical expressions of passion between a man and a woman. (Sex, Romance, and the Glory of God, 10)

To be wise, married couples must have the courage to broach the subject of sex, in order to talk openly and constructively about this important aspect of their relationship.

3) Free-flowing praise

1:15-16 2:2 7:1 7:6

If biblical wisdom is to be embraced, open talk must include *free-flowing praise*, compliments, and encouragement from both husband and wife.

4) Cuddle time

2:6 1:13 8:3

Married couples should either go to sleep at the same time or wake up at the same time, so that they have plenty of opportunity for cuddle time.

5) Joyful satisfaction

A key aspect of sexual fulfilment, especially with all the temptations of the internet, is a conscious choice to be joyfully satisfied your husband or wife.

5:1

6) Daily friendship

Sustaining a daily, rewarding friendship with your spouse is one of best ways for a couple to energise their physical relationship.

5:16

7) Absolute exclusiveness

The sexual relationship of marriage is a joyful intimacy only when both partners are sure of the exclusiveness of their affection and love.

6:3a 7:10

I am his, and he is mine. His desire is for me! The very thought of it thrills the wife, as it should the husband.

Summary:

According to the Song of Solomon, God's wisdom for increasing and enjoying sexual fulfilment in marriage includes at least *seven principles*: godly anticipation, open talk, free-flowing praise, cuddle time, the joyful choice to be satisfied in your spouse, daily friendship, and absolute exclusiveness.

1 Corinthians 7:1-5

Four guidelines for sexual relations in marriage:

- 1) The satisfaction of God-given sexual desires is a legitimate purpose of marriage (1 Cor 7:1-2).

Apparently the Corinthian feminists thought sex was unspiritual, and to avoid defilement they believed that you should divorce your spouse (especially if he or she was not a believer), or—if you didn't have the courage to do that—you should at least not have sexual relations with your spouse.

Response:

Paul teaches that the satisfaction of sexual desire is a legitimate reason to pursue marriage. It should not be the only reason, nor is it reason to marry the first one who will take you. But the fulfilment of our God-given sexual desires is a legitimate purpose of marriage.

- 2) Both partners are to satisfy their spouse's desires as well as they are able (1 Cor 7:3).

Servanthood applied to the bedroom.

Servanthood and *refusal*:

A spouse who perceives that his or her partner wants to have sex, but refuses to participate in or to initiate sexual intimacy might not be exhibiting a servant's attitude.

Servanthood and *taking initiative*:

Both husband and wife can and should initiate sexual relations. The Shulamite in the Song of Solomon clearly anticipated and initiated romance and sexual intimacy with her beloved.

Servanthood and *using sex as a weapon*:

Neither partner should use sex as a tool to manipulate his or her husband or wife (*I won't have sex with you unless ...*).

Servanthood and *patience*:

Men and women are typically aroused at different rates of speed and by different things.

Often a husband will need to restrain himself to match his wife's pace, thinking of her maximum enjoyment. Correspondingly, a wife may need to concentrate her mind so she can give herself freely and quickly to her husband, not requiring the perfect lead up before she is ready to make love.

Servanthood and *different levels of desire*:

Servanthood in the bedroom means that to solve the problem of different levels of desire, one partner exercises a little more restraint, and the other works to become more willing. One asks less; the other willingly gives more.

Summary:

The other-focused attitude of Christianity dominates everything, even the bedroom.

3) Your body belongs to your spouse (1 Cor 7:4).

Qualification:

Do not abuse your authority. It is wrong to selfishly *demand or coerce* sex from your partner. (Sometimes people really do have a headache!)

4) Do not withhold your body or joyful sexual attention from your partner (1 Cor 7:5).

If you regularly and joyfully satisfy your husband's or wife's sexual desires, it is less likely that he or she will be tempted to seek fulfilment elsewhere.

Reasons couples deprive each other:

- too busy with work, ministry, or hobbies, with the result that they have no time or energy for sex
- fear of pregnancy
- a wrong view of sex
- poor companionship or unresolved conflicts, disguised by excuses, such as, "I've got a headache."

Tips for newlyweds

1. Openly discuss sex with your spouse, as illustrated by the Song of Solomon.

Solomon's Song of Songs is an entire book of the Bible devoted to the promotion of sexual intimacy within the covenant of marriage. It's an eight-chapter feast of unbridled, uninhibited, joyous immersion in verbal and physical expressions of passion between a man and a woman. (Mahaney, Sex, Romance, and the Glory of God, 10)

2. If you have problems with your sexual relationship, it is not shameful to seek counsel.

God speaks of sex openly in the Bible, and when necessary, it is a matter of legitimate biblical shepherding or of legitimate medical intervention.

3. Enjoy the wedding night and the honeymoon, but don't put pressure on yourselves to be Super Man or Super Woman sexually.

Relax and enjoy the discovery without burdensome expectations. Although sex will be fun from the start, be patient with one another: as with most everything else, with sex, practice makes better.

4. Take a tube of KY gel with you on your honeymoon.

Because of nervousness, a woman's body doesn't always respond on the first night the way it normally will, and this lubrication gel can help relieve that problem.

5. Remember that sex is reflective of the spiritual and emotional oneness of the rest of your relationship.
6. Talk with your spouse about what gives you pleasure. Don't expect your husband or wife to be a mind reader.

Have you discussed birth control options?

Three helpful resources on sexual intimacy:

Intended for Pleasure, Ed Wheat
Sex, Romance, and the Glory of God, CJ Mahaney
Feminine Appeal, Carolyn Mahaney, chapter 5.

PREPARING FOR A HIGH PERFORMANCE MARRIAGE

Listed below are some of the most significant attitudes and activities that produce a healthy marriage. Rate yourselves for each element on a scale of 1 (low) to 10 (high). Place your numerical evaluation in the space provided.

1. Do I give myself unselfishly in our relationship?

M____ W____

2. Do we mutually agree on the biblically defined roles of a husband and a wife?

M____ W____

3. Do I always put my love into action?

M____ W____

4. Is my communication designed to build up my partner?

M____ W____

5. Does my response to conflict strengthen rather than weaken our relationship?

M____ W____

6. Do I always forgive my partner when I am wronged?

M____ W____

7. Do we have a common parenting strategy?

M____ W____

8. Do I patiently accept my partner as one who is still "under construction"?

M____ W____

9. Do we periodically sit down to evaluate our relationship and then set realistic goals for improvement?

M_____ W_____

10. Do we nurture loving relationships with our future in-laws?

M_____ W_____

11. Am I able to control my temper?

M_____ W_____

12. Do we share times of spiritual refreshment together (worship, Bible study, prayer)?

M_____ W_____

13. Do I work hard to be an attractive and interesting partner?

M_____ W_____

14. Have I been faithful to limit my expressions of physical affection so that the purity of our relationship is not in jeopardy?

M_____ W_____

PRIORITIES OF A GODLY WOMAN

1. *GOD* - Personal spiritual walk

Mark 12:30

2. *PERSONAL CARE* - Making sure you are ready to serve God and others

3. *HUSBAND*

Ephesians 5:22-24; Titus 2:4; Genesis 2:18

4. *CHILDREN*

Titus 2:4; 1 Timothy 2:15, 5:10

5. *HOME*

1 Timothy 5:14; Titus 2:5; Proverbs 31:27

6. *MINISTRY* - Using your gifts

1 Timothy 5:10; Proverbs 31:20; Acts 9:36-39

7. *OUTSIDE INTERESTS* - Work, community, friends, recreation, etc.

Proverbs 31:24

Am I Dating a Fool?

... *the companion of fools will suffer harm. Proverbs 13:20 (NAU)*

How can you know a fool and avoid him or her as a dating partner? Consider the following checklist of the biblical characteristics of a fool. It will help you determine whether it is wise to pursue a marriage relationship with the person you are interested in.

Proverbs on the fool:

Proverbs 10:18. A fool spreads slander. He or she speaks evilly of other people, saying hurtful things intended to strike at others or to undercut their reputation.

Proverbs 12:15. The fool always thinks he or she is right, stubbornly refusing to be corrected, receive reproof or counsel.

Proverbs 15:20. A fool often has a bad relationship with his or her parents. If someone speaks disrespectfully to or of his or her parents, stay away. How a person treats his (or her) family is how he will treat his spouse, once he drops the facade of dating politeness.

Proverbs 18:6. A fool regularly creates strife between people. His or her mouth is a weapon skilfully used to produce conflict with and between other people.

Proverbs 20:3. A fool often quarrels. Who would want that in a companion?

Proverbs 26:6. The fool is untrustworthy. You can never quite be certain whether he (or she) will do what he is supposed to do (in this case, deliver a message).

Proverbs 29:11. Anger is an ugly and destructive sin. It makes a relationship tentative, fearful, and deceptive. Don't kid yourself, eventually you will be the target of your boyfriend's or girlfriend's anger. The companion of fools *will* suffer harm.

Ecclesiastes 4:5. The "folding of the hands" connects this verse to the sluggard of Proverbs. If a person has never been able to hold a job, often leaves responsibilities unfinished, or does not work consistently before marriage, then he or she will not afterwards either. Walking up an aisle, mumbling *I do* and walking back down an aisle does not transform a person's character.

Summary

If the person you are considering for marriage is exhibiting a number of these characteristics, or even one of them very prominently, then Proverbs 14:7 exhorts, "Leave the presence of a fool." Don't let some good points blind your eyes to who the person really is. If you have to continually defend or excuse your boyfriend or girlfriend to your parents or Christian friends, it might be that he or she is a fool.