

Marriage And The Gift Of Sanctification Part 3

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As always, it's good to be together on Sunday morning to open the word of God and to dwell on the best and finest things.

With that in mind, turn to Galatians chapter 5. That's where we'll be this morning. Galatians chapter 5 as we're closing up this now eight-week series on marriage to the glory of God. Next week, Lord willing, we'll be back in the book of Hebrews in chapter 10.

But today, one final message on this gift of marriage. In his book, *The Complete Husband*, Lou Priolo writes these helpful words: "I can tell you without any fear of contradiction that the root cause of virtually all enduring marriage conflicts is selfishness."

You know, as we've gone through this series now for the past seven messages, I hope that if you've caught nothing else, that you've come away at least with these two key truths. And that is that **A healthy marriage demands that you die to self and live for the glory of Christ.** A healthy marriage demands that you die to the love of self and live for the glory of Christ.

When all is said and done at the most basic level, that is what God calls us to do in the Christian life. And it's what God calls us to do in our relationships and certainly in the supreme human relationship of marriage. That means that we all have to take seriously, then, if we want to have marriages that conform to the will of God, that honor the Lord, that we are pursuing Christ's likeness and conformity to His character with all our might.

In our time this morning, as we close out our series, we're going to discuss how we practically put on Christ as we continue to pursue sanctification. And we'll look at how this should then filter all the way down to some commitments we have on a daily basis towards one another in marriage. Now, just quickly, so far in our series, we've seen that **We exist for the purpose of glorifying God and enjoying Him forever.**

We've seen the gift of marriage on display in Genesis 2 and the corruption of marriage in Genesis 3. We've seen that **The Gospel** is the lifeblood of marriage because it's transformative. **It Transforms us. It Transforms Marriage.**

And we've seen that marriage is a tool in the hand of God for sanctification. We've seen **The Call to Sanctification** and **The Process of Sanctification** whereby we put off sin, renew our mind, and put on righteousness. And then last week we looked at three important principles for pursuing sanctification in our daily lives and in our relationships.

Principle number one came from Matthew 7, **Remove the log before the speck.** The pursuit of sanctification in marriage demands that we are concerned with our own sin at a higher level than we are with the sin of others or the sins of our spouse. That means to practice the process of change, we have to put off, renew our mind, and put on. And we have to do that before we ever seek to confront the sin of our spouse. Jesus, of course, describes that with the helpful illustration in Matthew 7 of this man with a log in his eye that has to be removed and a speck of sin in his brother's eye that we looked at last time.

That led us to **principle number two, Understand the source of conflict** from James 4. In James 4 we learned that the log in our eye is actually a log in our heart and that what has to happen for us to live godly towards one another is to identify the pleasures of the heart that ultimately are behind the sinful conflict that we get into.

That means sanctification is a process that's to be pursued from the inside out and not the other way around. We have to get to the root of the problem, which is **principle number three, Kill sin at its root**. One of the biggest reasons that we fail to make progress in our growth and holiness is because we get tripped up and think that our circumstances are the biggest problem or we get tripped up into thinking that all we need to do is fix the outward manifestations of sin in our relationships. We believe the lie that the real problem is either the other person or this hard circumstance that we're in the middle of. It's really tough at work right now. Finances are tight. My health has been struggling and if I wasn't going through those things, I wouldn't be acting this way. And we can easily blame it on our difficult circumstances, but scripture doesn't let us do that.

We can be tempted to think that the goal is just outward behavioral modification. I just have to speak more softly. I have to not get so angry. But if we do those things while neglecting the heart, they won't last. We won't have real lasting change. The real solution, James says, is to kill the sins of the heart that fester there and then spill over into sinful words and actions. If we can replace those heart sins with righteousness, then that righteous heart will overflow with kind, gracious words that follow.

So removing the log from our eyes, not merely behavioral modification, we're changing our outward words and actions. It's identifying, killing, and replacing the sinful pleasures of the heart with God-honoring righteous desires.

Now that brings us to a fourth biblical principle this morning where we pick up where we left off. And **principle number four is to Walk by the Spirit**. If we're going to pursue sanctification in our relationships, we have to commit to walking by the Spirit. Remember in Ephesians 4, in the process of change, the process does not stop simply with trying to stop sinning. That's step number one, put off. But then we go through the entire process of renewing our mind with Scripture and putting on righteousness.

So to remove the log from the eye is not simply to say, oh, yeah, I sinned. Please forgive me. It is to see where you sinned, yes, but to go through the entire process, removing that log, and also implies putting on righteousness so that we forsake that sin as we cast it away from us. And to do that, we need to look at what Paul says to the Galatians in Galatians chapter 5 on how a Christian is to walk by the Spirit.

You know, there's a lot of confusion about that phrase in Christianity today. What does it mean to walk by the Spirit? Many people think of walking by the Spirit in a sort of mystical way, almost as if the Spirit is like an internal spiritual metal detector. And we just kind of put it down, and as it beeps, we follow it along, and He says go left here, go right there.

That's not what Paul means here. He's not telling us go to Walmart, and then after Walmart go to McDonald's, and after McDonald's go here or there or the other. No, there's something more here.

When Paul tells us to walk by the Spirit, it has a direct influence on the process of sanctification. But to see that, we need to see it in context. So very quickly, we're going to read verses 1 to 15 of Galatians chapter 5. All of this is just to build up to the passage that we're going to be in, but pay attention to the argument that Paul makes.

Galatians 5 verse 1:

It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery. ²Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. ³And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law. ⁴You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. ⁵For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness. ⁶For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love. ⁷You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth? ⁸This persuasion did not come from Him who calls you. ⁹A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough. ¹⁰I have confidence in you in the Lord that you will adopt no other view; but the one who is disturbing you will bear his judgment, whoever he is. ¹¹But I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished. ¹²I wish that those who are troubling you would even mutilate themselves. ¹³For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. ¹⁴For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." ¹⁵But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.

The primary theme that Paul is teaching in the letter to the Galatians is the justification by faith alone. We are not saved by works. We're not saved by keeping the law and faith. We're saved by faith alone. He's calling them not to listen to these false teachers who are telling them, you need to be circumcised and you need to follow these other aspects of the law as well as have faith to be saved. He says, no, that's heresy. We're saved by grace through faith.

And because we're not to walk by the law, but by the Spirit, it changes everything. Look at verse 16. This is where all of this has been leading up to:

But I say, walk by the Spirit..." And notice the result. "...and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh

Walk by the spirit and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. Now that word "desire" there, it's the same word we saw last week in James 4. Those deep, strong desires in the heart, they come from the flesh. And he says, listen, if you're walking by the Spirit, you're not going to carry out the desire of the flesh.

And he goes on to describe how the flesh and the spirit are in opposition to each other.

Verse 17:

17 For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. 19 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy,

outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, 21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. 24 Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. 26 Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another.

Now in these verses, Paul is saying a fundamental change has taken place in the life of every Christian. If you're a true Christian, you no longer walk by the law, you walk by the Spirit, which is another way to say we walk by grace through Christ. In so doing, we end up actually obeying the moral law of God. But not because we're bound to the law. It's because of the Spirit's work within us by grace. So we don't end up carrying out the deeds of the flesh.

Now the deeds of the flesh are what we're to put off. When you think of what is it that springs up in my heart or in my life I need to put off, they're listed there on that list. We won't read through all of them again, but you have the list there in verses 19 to 21.

And notice he does say at the end of verse 21, this is crucial to understand, that those who practice such things, that is those who practice this list of sins of the flesh, will not inherit the kingdom of God. It's powerful language. In plain language what he says is if your life is characterized by the sins on that list and you would say, you know what? That's me. That's how I live. What he says is you're not a true Christian and you will not inherit eternal life in heaven. Because you're evidencing the reality of your heart by the deeds of the flesh.

That's a serious indictment to call to us this morning before we move forward to make sure we understand. Are we truly in Christ? Have you personally come to know the Lord Jesus Christ? Have you confessed your sins and turned to Jesus understanding that His life, death, and resurrection is your only hope? That's where it must begin, is true salvation and turning to Christ.

But moving from there, assuming that you are in Christ, he goes on to tell us that we are to be led by the Spirit or to walk in the Spirit. And what that essentially means is that the Spirit will produce in us the fruit of the Spirit. *Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.* Notice in verse 24, those who belong to Jesus Christ, notice the verb tense here, *have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.* It's a past tense verb. It has been done.

And so, if you're a true Christian at justification, remember we read in scripture reading, we were dead in our sins and then made alive in Christ. We died to that old way of the flesh. And so what we have now, today are temptations to go back to those things, but we're no longer bound by them. We don't live under the bondage of sin, the bondage even of the law.

And so he goes on to say, verse 25 is the culmination:

"If we live by the Spirit, (that is, we don't live by the law. We live by grace, by the Spirit) let us also walk by the Spirit. That is, you say you're a Christian saved by grace through faith.

Live that way. Live according to the fruit of the Spirit. May it manifest itself in every aspect of your life. That's what it is to live by grace.

So the fruit of the Spirit then, when you think about what am I supposed to be putting on? I put off sin. I renew my mind. What should I be putting on? The fruit of the Spirit. These are the things that ought to be coming out of our mouth, shaping our actions.

So putting all this together then, to remove the log from the eye is this whole process. It's identifying and putting off those sinful temptations that fester in the heart. Renewing our mind with Scripture, a la Colossians 3:16, *Let the Word of Christ richly dwell within you.*

We're constantly meditating and renewing our mind with truth. And then finally, we're to use the word of God and the Spirit graciously cultivates a heart that bears the fruit of the Spirit that indwells us. That's what it is to walk in the Spirit, to live out the fruit of the Spirit.

And this is to be holistic. If we're going to have lives and marriages and other relationships transformed by the Gospel, it's got to be holistic. And this is what I mean.

Walking by the Spirit produces three things. It produces **Spirit Saturated Thoughts**. Spirit saturated thoughts. If you want to know where the battle of your heart is raging, what is the stage on which your heart does its warring? It's your mind. It's in the thoughts and your emotions as they go to war and they conflict like this. But your thoughts, the thought life is where the war wages and it's where we must win the war.

That's why Paul would instruct us in Philippians 4 verse 8:

8 Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.

Think like this. Fill your mind with this. This is what it is to walk by the Spirit. Saturated spiritual thoughts. Now, I think we often think about that verse, Philippians 4 verse 8, in reference to the battle with purity of the mind, with sexual purity, and certainly it applies to that. We ought to fight those impure thoughts with this verse, but understand this is a holistic description of our thoughts. Only thoughts that honor the Lord.

This is what I'm getting at. You cannot foster bitter, angry, and vengeful thoughts about your spouse and expect that you will then be able to speak with them with love joy, peace, patience, kindness, so on and so forth. It will not work. You can't do that.

You're losing the battle in the mind, which means really, you're losing the battle at the heart level. And don't think that you can just paste on the fruit of the Spirit words. It won't work, not for long anyway.

In preparation for this week, I was reading through a book by Lou Priolo, which I quoted earlier, *The Complete Husband*, which men, I highly recommend. Very, very helpful book on being a godly husband. In that book, he shared an example that painted this illustration in a somewhat painful way.

He shared a story of meeting with a couple in counseling that was struggling with sinful conflict in their relationship and at one point in the meeting, the wife spoke up and spouted off something towards her husband that was very harsh and very critical with a very angry, heavy tone. To which Lou responded, Oh my goodness, those were very harsh words and not honoring to your husband. Would you please say that again in a way that that's honoring to him in the Lord and say it this way? And he gave her an example of how to express the heart of what she was trying to say, but in a way that actually was God-glorifying.

And so the wife then turned to her husband to try to obey what she'd been asked and she opened her mouth. But the only thing that would come out was sort of a guttural tone. That's as far as she could get.

And she finally admitted, I'm having a really hard time saying those words the way that you said them. And Lou said, would you like to know why? She said, yes, please tell me why. And Lou said, what I asked you to say was quite gracious and humble. The reason you're so speechless is because there's not enough grace and humility in your heart for you to utter those words without choking on them. That's the truth. She'd given herself over to bitterness in her heart towards her husband. So there was no place for humble, kind words.

This is what I'm talking about. Putting on this kind of thinking is where we fundamentally win the battle. If we're going to put on the fruit of the spirit, we've got to put it on starting with the thought level. So ask yourself this morning, how do you think about your spouse? Throughout the day.

If you're not married, think about a person you often have conflict with and ask yourself, how do I let myself think about that person throughout the day?

Do you most frequently dwell on the things you like the least about them or the things you like the most? Do you more frequently dwell on what you'd like to change about them? Or what you would like to emulate in them? In your prayers for your spouse or that other person, do you more often pray that God would change the things in them that displease you? Or do you spend more time giving thanks for them in the things that are praiseworthy?

How do you think about yourself? How often do you dwell on your successes and your strengths? Do you mentally compare yourself with others, finding ways in which you are better at this or that than they are? When you're in conflict with someone, how often do you let yourself dwell on how you're right and how your arguments make sense, and why can't they just understand what you're saying? You often dwell on how you're unfairly treated and overlooked and underappreciated.

Listen, if you do that, you are not thinking in line with Philippians 4:8. You're not thinking Spirit-saturated thoughts, and therefore you cannot expect that you are going to then speak and act in a way that honor the Lord because you are fostering self-pity and pride and selfishness. And so what will come out of your mouth is self-pity, pride, and selfishness. We have to win the battle and walk by the Spirit at the thought level first.

Secondly, if you win at that level, if you win the battle, then secondly, **walking by the Spirit produces Spirit Saturated Words**. Spirit-saturated words, Ephesians 4:29:

29 Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only (listen to that, but only, not most of the time or when you feel like it, it says, but only) such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.

Edification is the word for building up, words that build them up in Christ.

So after cultivating intentionality with our thoughts, we have to proactively cultivate intentionality with our words. Let me ask you, does the fruit of the Spirit characterize your word choices and your tone, how you say it, what you say and how you say what you say? Does the fruit of the Spirit show up in that? We're to put a guardrail over our lips and refuse to let words come out, even one that doesn't match this standard, *only such a word as is good for edification*. But do you see how it goes together? If you're thinking on what's lovely, pure, noble, praiseworthy, it's not going to be so hard because that's what's already going to be in your heart to come out. Those are things that build up. This is how it ties together.

And then finally, of course, **walking by the Spirit then produces Spirit Saturated Actions**. 1 Corinthians 10:31:

Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

Listen, we have to understand as Christians that all of life is ministry. If you're a Christian, you're in full-time ministry. It doesn't matter if you're a pastor, elder, missionary. A Christian is living on mission for the Lord Jesus Christ.

That means your marriage is a ministry. It's an opportunity to serve and love and build up another believer in Christ. But sadly, how often do we think about ministry as what happens out there? Outside of the four walls of our homes. That's what I do at church. Maybe even you're doing it at work. I pray that you are, sharing the gospel and being a light for Christ. But for some reason we come home and we think of home as the haven where I get to indulge myself and do the things that most please me.

Not biblically, though. Marriage is a ministry. That means when we come into our home, we enter into ministry to our family. Loving, serving, caring, building up with our words and with our actions. So are you putting on the fruit of the spirit in your actions towards your spouse so that your life at home is really a ministry to him or her?

Now then, we've removed the log from our eye. When we are walking by the Spirit in thought, word, and deed. And only then can we move to the second part of that instruction in Matthew 7 about taking the speck out of our brother's eye. So we're going to move into another principle here in just a second that's going to begin to work its way towards how we confront sins in others. But I'm going to ask you, please don't forget all that we've said because everything else has to be done first before we ever get to where we're going.

So we've removed the log first with all the instruction we've received and then we're going to come to **principle number five, Foster marital oneness**. Foster marital oneness.

You know, most of the time when we think about working on marriage, this is the area we think of first. You share with a friend that maybe there's some conflict at home and some things you're working through and maybe they with good intentions say, well, when's the last time you've been on a date? Are you prioritizing date night? You know, have you brought her flowers? Have you written him a card? These kinds of things that are not bad things. But notice I've put this at the end of the series. Why? The reason is if you try to foster marital oneness without doing all of the other things that we've already described, it won't work.

In fact, it actually will throw gasoline on the fire oftentimes. When you go out on that date, you find yourself arguing over dinner. And it's because you haven't dealt with the heart issues that we've been discussing. So this really is crucial. Fostering marital oneness is crucial, but it's crucial to do assuming you're doing those other things.

And I want to encourage you to think about your marriage like a garden. If you've ever gardened, planted a garden, it can be a satisfying process. When you plant that garden and you put it in rows and you pull all the weeds and you fertilize the soil and you step back and say, man, that's amazing. So I did that. But if that garden is going to have success, can you walk away and leave it there? No. You know, often on our wedding day, it's like that garden. All the rows are set and we put fertilizer in the soil. We've pulled the weeds and we look at it and think, okay, we're set. We're set for success. But you've got to care for that garden.

You know what I've found is the best way to care for a garden is to do a little bit every day rather than a lot every now and then. If you care for that garden once a year or once every six months, what's going to happen is every year you're going to be tearing out that garden and having to start all over. But if you care for it a little bit of the day, pulling the weed here and there, putting out down water, putting down fertilizer throughout the year, it's much easier to care for.

And so we're going to talk about marriage as a garden. How do we do that? How do we cultivate marital oneness and care for it on a daily basis? And I'm going to give you a few commitments here that I pray will be helpful.

Here's **Commitment number one: Commit to biblical communication.** Commit to biblical communication. Biblical communication is essential to fostering oneness in your relationship. Without it, you really can't have a relationship with anybody if you don't know how to communicate. Not only can you not deal with conflict, you can't deal with just the average things of the day. And so when we talk about biblical communication, we're going to think about it in **two different categories or aspects.**

Aspect number one is quantity, and then we'll talk about quality. So first of all, let's talk about quantity when it comes to biblical communications. Often, we find that we lose a sense of intimacy in marriage, not because we have particularly poor communication, we just don't communicate nearly enough, at least not about things of substance that really matter.

You know, Rebecca and I realized early on in marriage that conflict would often arise between us simply because we hadn't talked about something before it happened. We

found that the weekends, for example, Saturdays ended up being a day where there was more potential for conflict, when really Saturday you would think would be the day you ought to enjoy the most. But the problem was I would spend the week and she would spend the week mentally thinking of a list of things we'd like to do on Saturday, but we failed to tell each other what was on each other's list.

So you wake up on Saturday, one of you has planned a fun outing for you to do together, and the other's planned a long list of chores to do around the house. Right? One of you wants to get up early, one of you wants to sleep in. It's just because we haven't talked, we haven't communicated.

So, I'm going to move into something. I want to be really clear when I move from clear biblical instruction to what I'll call first opinions, and that is these are some applications that we've put together in our marriage and that we've helped counsel others in that have been helpful ways we've found to apply the biblical principles that we've been learning. But I'm going to encourage you to take these things and try them, but you have the freedom to mold them to fit your personal relationship with your spouse.

The key takeaway is be intentional about your communication, both in quantity and in quality. So I want to encourage you in three categories here on this issue of quantity.

One, I want to talk about **daily communication**. Daily communication. And I'm going to encourage you at a minimum to block off 15 minutes of uninterrupted, undistracted communication. It could be far more than that, but at least 15. And when I say uninterrupted, undistracted, I mean cell phones away, TV off, kids in bed or occupied, face-to-face, real communication, real talking, not in passing. This is to be a time where the goal is not to work through conflict, but to connect with one another, to care for each other, and to enjoy each other. It's not to be transactional. It's not just the grocery list and where we got to be on Wednesday. It's about each other, personal relational conversation. Ask about the highlights and the lowlights of the day. How are you doing? How can I pray for you? And pray together. That's daily communication.

Next is **weekly communication**. Now, this is something that we began to do early on, really, as we began to see, why are we having conflict on Saturdays and things like that? We need to put in a way to talk about things. And if I could give you one practical assignment to do in your marriage that's been most helpful to us, it would be this one on weekly communication. What I'm going to recommend is to have a weekly connect, a weekly meeting, a weekly date, whatever you want to call it, that's at least 45 minutes to 60 minutes, 45 minutes to an hour at least. And here's the goal of this weekly communication. One, we pray together. We review the calendar and look at the week each day. What's coming up? Where are you got to be? Where do I got to be? Where do the kids got to be? We look at the month coming up. Who are we having over? Where are we going? So that all of our weekends and everything, it's all planned. We all know exactly what we're doing when.

Just that simple task will keep you from a lot of miscommunication and conflict that can be avoided. We talk about strengths, things we rejoice in over our marriage and over our kids. It's an enjoyable time. Brew coffee, make tea, whatever it is you enjoy. Make it an enjoyable

time together. But here's the other thing that I encourage you to do that we've done that's been helpful to us is we've made that weekly meeting a free zone to bring up any issue that you may have in our marriage or with me that you'd like to address.

We commit to come to that meeting with humble hearts, prayed up, ready to receive if there's something that needs to be brought. And if we need to bring something, we commit to come to bring that thoughtfully and humbly. And it gives us an outlet to talk through things.

And not every one of those meetings is going to be a time of talking through difficult things, but it gives you a way to do that and a set time to do those things, to do it in a helpful way. And then we close in prayer. If that's something you'd like to incorporate in your marriage or just try, I put a sample list on the Connection Center of things that are helpful to talk about in that time. You can use that, add to it, take away from it, but it's there for your benefit.

And then finally, **annual communication**. I'm going to recommend annual communication. Get away together without kids at least once annually. More is great if you can, but at least once a year, get away. It doesn't have to be expensive. If you can't afford a hotel, send the kids to the grandparents and have a staycation. But have alone time for at least a night or two to spend time together, to enjoy each other. But also this is where we think more long term. What are the goals we have for this year spiritually? What are the goals we have for our marriage? What do we want to make sure we do with our kids? Dream together. What's a trip? If we could take a big trip, you know, in our marriage, 25th anniversary, 50th anniversary, what would it be? And begin to plan those things and enjoy it. Foster unity in your marriage through that time.

So daily, weekly, annual communication. That's quantity. Now, let's talk about **quality** in our marriage communication. And I'm going to recommend to you a helpful resource. I have taken these six keys to good communication from Stuart Scott's little booklet, *Communication and Conflict Resolution*. It's a really, really helpful booklet. We don't have it in the bookstore yet, but we're going to order it and it'll be available soon. But I encourage you to look at that.

But here are **Six keys to good communication** and we'll look at where they are in the scripture. But number one, if you want to have quality communication, **You must want to please God more than anything else**. You must want to please God more than anything else. Romans 11:36:

For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

Listen, you have to understand that your communication with your spouse or with your siblings or with your parents or whoever it is, is not disconnected from the overarching goal of glorifying the Lord. We want our speech to glorify Christ with each other. Even when we're locked away in the room and it's just the two of us, it's never really just the two of us.

Secondly, **You must be humble**. You want to have quality communication? It's going to require humility. Proverbs 18:2:

A fool does not delight in understanding, But only in revealing his own mind.

It's the fool who doesn't care what you have to say, but only wants you to hear what he or she has to say. Proverbs 3:7 says

Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the Lord and turn away from evil.

When we communicate with pride in our hearts, the reality is we don't really care about mutual conversation. We care about you hearing me. I care about winning. I see our communication as a battle and I'm going to win the battle. This is pride in our hearts and it kills quality communication in your marriage. No wonder you can't talk about anything if we've got pride in our hearts, but humility in the heart. Now we've got fertile soil for helpful life-giving conversation.

Number three, **You must be aware that you're accountable to God for everything you communicate.** Listen to this verse in Matthew 12, verse 36:

But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment.

That's sobering, isn't it? Every careless word. Listen, how would you talk to your spouse if I or another one of the elders was sitting in the room with you listening to the conversation? Well, the reality is we're just sinners saved by grace like you. The truth about your situation is far more serious. You have the Holy Spirit, if you're a Christian, indwelling you. Literally indwelling you all the time, 24-7. Even if you're not a Christian, God is omnipresent. He is everywhere you go. He hears every thought and every word you say.

Think about that. Does the fact that God is with you ever enter your mind when you're speaking to your spouse? It should. Give an account for careless speech. We're accountable.

Number four, **You must learn how to listen.** You must learn how to listen. Proverbs 18:13, one of my favorite proverbs:

He who gives an answer before he hears, It is folly and shame to him.

When you speak without first listening and making sure you've got all the facts straight, it's foolishness. You know, so much of our miscommunication with others happens this way. You began to speak to me and within three to five words, I'm pretty sure that I know where you're going with this. So I tune out and I start developing my response to what you're going to say. But you may talk for a solid five minutes, but I checked out after word three.

And then when I get a moment, when you take a breath, I jump in with my reply that I've been working on. Now you hear the first three to five words that I say, and then you tune me out and you begin to formulate your response. And when I take a breath, you jump in with your response.

The problem is we don't even know what we're responding to. That's why I respond here when I should have responded there, and then you respond here when you should have responded here. It's the essence of miscommunication and it comes from pride in the heart and an unwillingness to listen. To listen and fully understand before we respond. If you want to have Christ-honoring conversations, you've got to humble yourself enough to really care to listen. Listen to every word and make sure you understand it before you respond.

Number five, **You must know that communication includes more than just words.** It's not just the words coming out of your mouth. James 4:17 says:
Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.

We know one of those right things we know to do is the fact that our body language matters. We know that. We've known that since we were children. Just think about it this way. If someone is speaking to you and the words coming out of their mouth disagree with their body language, which one are you more likely to believe? The words or the body language? The body language. The facial expressions, the slouch, the tone of voice.

We listen to those things. They matter. Biblically, if we want to have spirit saturated conversations, then we've got to even think about the fruit of the spirit when it comes to our facial expressions, making eye contact, our body language, because we want to communicate with words and body in a way that honor Christ.

Number six, **You must be willing to put forth the effort and spend the time it takes to communicate.** Listen, deep communication is not easy. It takes time, it takes effort, intentionality. And so we've got to think about each other according to Romans 12, verse 10 says:

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; 11 not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord

Talking about things of substance is hard. The truth is, men, I'm going to pick on us a little bit here, this is not always true, but more times than not in a marriage, it's the man that is less desirous of long, deep conversations than the wife. Not always, but most often that is true. And the reality is, we work hard all day, maybe you deal with conflict at work all day, and when you get off work, you're kind of ready just to come home and just let things be tranquil and peaceful, and I'm not really excited to dive into deep conversation.

But if marriage is a ministry, then we just can't let ourselves think that way. If marriage is a ministry, it's worth putting forth the effort to show love and care and to serve our family and our wife by being willing to not only serve them physically with our actions, but even being willing to sit down, give them our full concentration, and have a deep conversation. Put forth the effort that it takes. Marriage is a ministry.

So commitment number one, we've got to have biblical communication, but **Commitment number two, We've got to commit to biblical conflict resolution.** Biblical conflict resolution. Now this gets to the heart of how to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

I'm just going to give you some principles here that will be helpful, and I want you to think about what you ought to do before you confront them, and then how to go about confronting them, and then how to respond when you're being confronted. So one, **before you confront your brother, seven things:**

1. Remove the log in your own eye before you initiate the conversation. We've already said that, but I want to restate that. This is assuming that you've done that work.

2. Number two, ask yourself, is the issue over a matter of sin or a matter of preference? Do they really sin against me by doing this, or is it just we don't want the same thing? Because that should change the way you have the conversation.
3. Number three, is this action a pattern or a single occurrence? Ask yourself, you know what, is this really indicative of how my wife is to me every day, or was she having a bad day in a moment, or vice versa, my husband? Is this something, going to the next one,
4. ask, can I cover this with grace? Is this something, you know what, she's a sinner, I'm a sinner, I sin against her, she sins against me, I can freely cover this with grace. We don't have to have a long conversation. I can cover it, and truly remove it, and let it go. Ask yourself, is that the case?
5. Number five, commit to assume the best of the person's character and motives. First Corinthians chapter 13 says, love believes all things. This goes hand in hand with
6. number six, remember that your knowledge is limited. When you're going to address a situation with your spouse, you have to remember, no matter how long you've been married, if you've been married 50 years or more, you will still never truly be able to read their thoughts or know their heart. I know we think we can, but we can't. Only God knows the heart. So you've got to resist the urge to attach motives. Not only you did this, but I know why you did this. No, you don't. You don't. You just know what happened. And so you've got to come to the issue, seeking to resolve it at that level. And you don't know the motives of the heart until they share those with you. So reserve judgment on those until they have a chance to explain.
7. And then number seven, pray and ask the Lord's help. Go into those conversations prayerfully, asking for it to be a life-giving, edifying conversation.

Now here's **The process of confrontation**. After you've done all of that,

1. **Set the conversation up for edification and unity.** This is what I mean. In the spirit of Ephesians 4:29, where he says we're to speak *according to the need of the moment*. Think about that. According to the need of the moment. That means there's an ability to perceive this is what's needed right now. There's a way to do this. What I mean is pick a time and pick a place in which you're able to have a good conversation and it has a good likelihood of going well. If you need to bring up something men to your wife while she's cooking dinner, it's probably not the time to do that. While she's trying to get the kids out of the house to go to school, probably not the time to do that. In the middle of homeschool, not the time to do that. Plan a time where there's time to actually focus face to face without distraction, where you're calm and she's calm and seek to handle it in that way. That's what I mean by setting the conversation up for edification and unity.
2. **Begin with genuine love and affirmation.** Before you get into the critique or the thing that you would like them to work on or that you've noticed, give them genuine words of love and affirmation. This is biblical. Look at 1 Corinthians. You don't have to turn there right now, but later. Go look at the introduction to 1 Corinthians and other letters in Scripture. The church in Corinth was a mess. Paul had every right to be upset with them, and yet he starts that letter with love and appreciation. Before he ever gets into the critiques, and there's some big ones that he has to give them, it helps the conversation to go well and to accomplish the goal of edification if we start

with genuine love and affirmation. Not inflated words that you don't mean, but real love and real affirmation.

3. **Attack the problem and not the person.** Attack the problem and not the person. If you want to resolve conflict, you've got to avoid going at them. This is assuming motives. This is name calling. This is being critical of the person as a person rather than saying, listen, there's an issue between us we need to work out, but we're going to handle it as a team, as one, and we're both desiring to fix whatever this issue is. I'm not trying to defeat you. We're trying to resolve the problem between us.
4. **Avoid hyperbole, dishonesty, and other forms of inflammatory speech.** Refrain from things like, you always or you never do this. Don't lie and say everything's fine just to get the conversation to stop when you know it's not fine. You're just tired of talking about it. That's not truthfulness. That's a lie. Be honest and have the conversation. This goes back into doing the hard work of having a conversation. Don't bring up other hot button topics that don't have anything to do with what you're talking about. That's keeping a record of wrongs. We can easily kind of have this arsenal of things that when the conversation starts to not go my way and I feel like this is not going well, I bring in something from the past and say, aha, and turn the tables. No, it's not a biblical, loving, humble way to resolve conflict.

Those are just a few key biblical principles to keep in mind based on the things that we've studied as you go to lovingly remove the speck and speak the truth in love to one another.

Now, what about **Receiving confrontation**? Well, when you realize, wait a minute, my spouse has asked me to sit down at a quiet time when we're both calm and the kids are in bed and they've just said nice things to me. I think they're going through the list. I think something's coming. Not sure, but I think. Here's how you receive that confrontation.

- **Do not interrupt the other person.** Let them speak. Hear what they have to say. Invite it. Don't make them feel rushed or like they're an imposition.
- **Listen with mind and body.** Put on the fruit of the spirit. Make eye contact. Unfold your arms. Sit up and pay attention and let them know I'm ready to hear and want to hear what you have to say.
- **Ask questions to ensure that you accurately understand the concern.** I would say the more tense the conversation, so the more potential there is for sinful conflict, the more you need to slow down and ask questions before you respond. I know this feels silly, but it will help you if you will actually repeat back to your spouse what you believe they just said to you and say, okay, I think what I heard you say is... is that true? Yes, or no, that's not what I said. Please tell me again because I want to understand. Do that until you can say it back. Yes, that's what I meant. Now give your response. What that does is it shows there's humility. There's a desire here to work this out. We're not just competing against each other. So repeat back to them. Make sure you understand. This goes back to Proverbs 18:13, *He who speaks before he hears, it's folly and shame to him*. Make sure you fully understand before you speak. Also,
- **Remember that humility asks the question, what's true about this critique?** Of the things they're saying to me, what is true? What is legitimate? Yep, that's right. I need to own that. **Pride seeks to self-defend, blame shift, minimize, and poke holes in**

the argument the person's making. Start first with what's true. Let me start with owning that and taking the log out of my eye before I seek to undermine what's being said to me.

- **Ask for forgiveness for any sin that's been revealed and commit to make genuine efforts towards obedience in the future.**

Listen, if you do these things you'll find yourself resolving conflict and therefore having less conflict because you've learned how to speak to each other in a way that honors the Lord and builds up your relationship.

Now finally as we draw this to a close, there's one final commitment I would encourage you to make. **Commitment number three, Commit to biblical companionship.** Commit to biblical companionship.

From the beginning God gave us marriage for the gift of companionship. That was one of the reasons. It's not good for man to be alone. And it's important that we foster that oneness together by fostering companionship. And there's some key ways to do that.

1. **Prioritize quality time together.** Go on walks. Go on dates. Watch a movie. Go to a coffee shop. Whatever it is that you enjoy, foster that. Put it in your routine as a regular thing.
2. **Prioritize prayer for and with one another.** It takes humility to sit together and to pray. And it's an intimate thing to do together. Pray for each other and pray with each other.
3. **Read and discuss God's word together.** In the spirit of Deuteronomy 6, where we're to do this with our children, when we talk as we rise up and as we lie down along the way, I want to do the same thing in marriage. Just as a natural outflow of our conversation. Hey, what are you reading? What did you think about the sermon? How would you learn? How can I encourage you as we talk about the word?
4. **Maximize shared interest.** Maximize shared interests. So, what I mean by this is don't maximize hobbies that pull you apart so that the vast majority of your evenings have you doing different things apart from each other. Now, I'm not saying it's wrong to have a hobby that the other one doesn't enjoy. Like you like to fish, you like to play golf, whatever it is. It's fine. I'm not saying, I'm not being legalistic and saying you can't do those things. What I'm saying is don't be the guy that's on the golf course after work is out from five to nine. You're on the driving range and then from nine to nine fifteen, you say hi to your wife and go to bed. Maximize those things that bring you together.
5. **Proactively learn to selflessly love one another.** Proactively learn it. You know, learn each other. This is why in Titus 2, the instruction from older women to younger women is to train them. The word there is train. To train the younger women to love their husbands and their children. Why? Because it's learned. You learn how to express love to your spouse. What is it that makes them feel most loved as you selflessly care for them? Learn those things. How do you learn those things? You ask. Ask your spouse. Hey, how can I love you better? What of the things I do communicates love to you the most? Maximize those things.
6. **Determine to enjoy one another.** Determine. That word's important. Ecclesiastes 9:9: *Enjoy life with the woman whom you love all the days of your fleeting life which He has given to you under the sun; for this is your reward in life and in your toil in which you have labored under the sun.* Listen, there's vanity in all of life. That is tires go flat. Money

runs short. You plan a vacation and you get to the place you want to eat and it's closed on Mondays. That stuff's going to happen all the time because there's vanity mixed into this life. We've got to choose: I'm going to enjoy my life with the wife or the husband that God's given me under the sun because it's a good gift. In spite of the vanity, you've got to make that determination.

7. **Prioritize the physical relationship in marriage.** And when I say prioritize, I mean two things. One, don't defile it with sexual sin and don't neglect it. We'll talk more deeply about that in the intimacy seminar. I encourage you to sign up for that.
8. **Arrange your life according to your biblical priorities.** Biblically, if we think about our relationships, the Bible would arrange our relationships this way. **God, marriage, kids, others.** God, marriage, kids, others. I want you to think about the way you spend your time, the way you spend your money, the way you spend your thought life and your efforts and ask yourself, does that really reflect that priority list? God, marriage, kids, others? And where it doesn't, put that back in line by God's grace and with his help.

So as we draw not only this message to a close, but the entire series, I'm just going to leave you with three probing questions to take home and to consider.

Number one, **Is the glory of God the goal of your marriage**, honestly? Is that the goal of your marriage?

Number two, **Is the fruit of the Spirit on display in your marriage?** I want you to think about how you speak to each other, how you spend time to each other. I don't want us to fall into thinking like the world thinks, that all of us are destined to grow old together into a bickering, angry couple. When you watch a sitcom, the old couple is always a bickering, angry couple, aren't they? We don't have to be that way, Christian. Not with the Spirit living in us. Is it a battle? Of course, it'll be a battle. It's a battle worth fighting. Honor the Lord and bear the fruit of the Spirit in your marriage, and it'll be the blessing to you that God intends, and it'll be the witness of the gospel that God intends.

Number three, **Is the pursuit of oneness a priority in your marriage?** Ask yourself, how hard are you really pursuing your spouse? How much effort are you really putting in? It's worth the effort. So if you realize that, I just haven't been putting forth the effort I need to, double down today, and we pray that God will bless that, and cause you to grow in your oneness, and your love for Him, and your love for each other.

Let's pray together. Lord God, what a gift Your word is, that speaks such truth to us so clearly and unashamedly, and what a gift marriage is. And I pray for every single one of us in this room, that You would help us to seek to honor Christ, to pursue sanctification, so that it affects our thoughts, so that it affects our words, and so that it affects our actions.

I pray for every marriage in this room, wherever state, whatever stage that marriage is in, of years, or difficulties, or joys, God, I pray that You would be glorified and honored in our marriages, that You would help us to take the Scripture seriously, and to pursue You and one another with selflessness and humility, and that that would bear good fruit, the fruit of the Spirit, as we seek to walk by the Spirit in every interaction, for the glory of Your name. It's in Christ's name we pray. Amen.