

### How Strong Are My Relationships? (Part I)

Colossians 3:13-14: (NASB) <sup>13</sup>Bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. <sup>14</sup>Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.

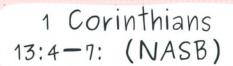


This may sound odd, but, for a moment think about your personal relationships like a car. You depend on your car, though you generally do not think much about it. When you get in it, you are ready to go and if it does not start or it breaks down, it creates issues. A lack of attention and maintenance will inevitably bring trouble. Proper maintenance is key to keep it running smoothly and keeping you happy. Well, our personal relationships are immeasurably more important than our car, so we need

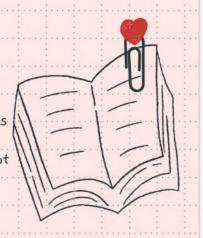
to keep them in good working order as well. Because there are so many kinds of personal relationships, let's start by looking at marriage. What are some basic principles to keep our marriages going and growing?



We are NOT marriage counselors, and we are not pretending to be. But we have been married to our spouses for a combined 102 years, and we ARE focused on contributing to healthy relationships through better biblical understanding. There has been a lot of learning within these years. We will quote from a wonderful, familiar set of scriptures that will guide us as a continual reference point throughout this episode and this entire three-part series about strengthening all of our relationships - not just marriage.



\*Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, 5does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, 6does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; 7bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.





One more disclaimer: We are focusing on <u>functional</u> marriages that have <u>challenges</u>. For those who are in a dysfunctional marriage - one that is just broken - do not give up hope; do not tune out. A broken marriage requires more work and even outside help, but these scriptural principles are still important.



### **OUR QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION:**

- Mow do you measure the health of a marriage relationship?
- What are the most important foundations to build a marriage relationship upon?
- ◆ What are common areas of weakness in marriage relationships?
- ◆ What should I always bring to the table in my marriage relationship?
- Mow can I contribute to my marriage relationship even if my spouse seems distant?

Let's start off with our first question:

◆ How do you measure the health of a marriage relationship?

Measure LOVE and measure RESPECT! What do we mean by "measure"? When we look at ourselves, how full is my cup? How much love (defined below) is inside of me as relates to my relationship? How much does my respect for my spouse show and what is it based on?





The Greek language has several different kinds of love.

There are three closely related words that describe the affection between spouses, parents to children and children to parents.

**Love:** Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #5362 *philandros* (from #5384 *phílos*); fond of man, i.e. affectionate as a wife: - love their husbands

**Love:** Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #5387 *philostorgos*, from 5384 and *storge* (cherishing one's kindred, especially parents or children); fond of natural relatives, i.e. fraternal towards fellow Christians

**Love:** Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #5388 *philoteknos*; fond of one's children, i.e. maternal: - love their children

This is a "give and take" kind of love.

This kind of love is basic and largely instinctive. Titus uses two of these Greek words:

<u>Titus 2:3-4</u>: (NKJV) <sup>3</sup>The older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things— <sup>4</sup>that they admonish the young women to **love** <5362> their husbands, to **love** <5388> their children...

One of the more famous Greek words for love is agape or agapao.

**Love:** Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #25 agapao, #26 agapeto; love (in a social or moral sense):—(be-)love(-ed)

This is a selfless and benevolent kind of love that gives with no expectation or requirement of reciprocation. It is only concerned with the well-being of the receiving person.



<u>John 15:11-12</u>: (NKJV) <sup>11</sup>These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. <sup>12</sup>This is my (Jesus) commandment, that you **love** <25> (selflessly) one another as I have **loved** <25> (selflessly loved) you.



The love we are measuring in marriage is this second type of love, *agape*, or selfless love. The give and take of family love is also important in marriage. However, we are looking at the selfless *agape* love of <u>1 Corinthians 13</u>. We will find *agape* love is a powerful way to build a foundation for relationships, including marriage.

## Revisiting, Refocusing and Reestablishing My Relationships:



Measuring the health of my marriage should begin with measuring what I contribute and what I control in this relationship. I ultimately decide how to love my spouse, so my first question needs to be about how I am measuring up to the kind of marriage I would like to have.

This sounds all well and good to do that. It is important. But what about when life changes? What happens if our spouse becomes disabled, gets ill or loses their job? Whatever it is - life changes. How do we change with it in our marriage?

This is why we asked the question:

◆ How do you measure the health of a marriage relationship?

And we answer, with selfless love and respect. When life changes, we may feel differently. Selfless love, however, does not act differently. This is a way to manage no matter what changes come into our lives. We can be very confident of this, because Jesus taught us to do it this way. This is a scriptural, baseline principle. Selfless love always comes first. No matter what the change, that selfless love tells our spouse they are important to us. How am I reflecting this kind of selfless love?



To be respectful of someone is to show them honor. This is different than selfless love. Selfless love will treat everyone in the same way, as it gives equally to all. Jesus died for all men equally. Honor and respect lift someone to a higher position than others around them for the purpose of having a relationship with them.

The New American Standard Version uses the word *honor* in lieu of "respect."

Honor: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #5092 timé; (from tiō, "accord honor, pay respect") properly, perceived value; worth (literally, "price") especially as perceived honor

 i.e. what has value in the eyes of the beholder; (figuratively) the value
 (weight, honor) willingly assigned to something



Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon: 1a) of the price itself 1b) of the price paid or received for a person or thing bought or sold 2) honour which belongs or is shown to one 2a) of the honour which one has by reason of rank and state of office he holds 2b) deference, reverence

In other words, it is how we fix a value upon someone or something.

<u>1 Peter 3:7</u>: (NASB) You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor <5092> as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered.

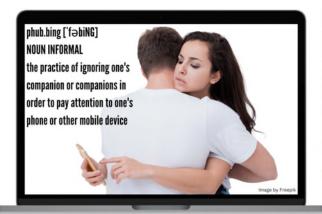
Our next Greek word is a little different and it means to hold in a high position.

1 Timothy 5:3: (KJV) *Honour* <**5091**> widows that are widows indeed.

1 Peter 2:17: (KJV) Honour <5091> all men...

**Honour:** Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #5091 *timao*; to prize, i.e. fix a valuation upon; by implication, to revere: to estimate, fix the value

Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon: 1a) for the value of something belonging to one's self 2) to honour, to have in honour, to revere, venerate



In today's world, one way to honor our spouse every day is to lift our noses from our phones long enough to really focus on them. This even has a name - "phone snubbing," or "phubbing." We are most likely to do it to those closest to us, which can unfortunately make the other person feel rejected, like they do not matter. In public, we see parents doing this a lot to their children. We do not want to be "phubbers"!

The idea of respect is to hold that other person in high esteem because that is where they belong in our life. If we are married, our covenant was made before God. That lifts our spouse higher by

definition. We want to hold onto that respect even if we are having a hard time. Maybe we do not like what our spouse is saying, doing or thinking. Maybe we do not like the direction of our life. The honor of the covenant should still be present. When we say measure selfless love and measure respect or honor, that is what we are talking about. If we put those things in order in our lives, the rest is now able to be handled.



Measuring the health of my marriage needs this follow up question: Is there a visible, palpable, mutual, RESPECT present? This is not the kind of respect reflected in the proclamation of mere words. It is not some announcement to be heard and admired. This is the kind of respect that shows up in the actions, gestures and accomplishments of real life. It is a respect that is woven into the fabric of one's own character that shows itself simply because it is there.



A common complaint is, "My spouse does not appreciate me anymore." We need to turn that around and ask: "Am I or am I not appreciating my spouse in a way they can see it?" The reality is marriage has ebbs and flows.

It is not all rainbows and sunshine every minute. That is okay. We want to put these scriptural foundations in place so we can build from there.

Love in its different forms and respect are profoundly important basics. Realizing that I control how I use them puts me in a powerful role!

We can easily look at our marriage and see it needs improvement.

The question is, how do I go about doing the work?

It is so important to realize that wishing and hoping for things to change is a misuse of our mental and emotional energy. What we need to do is apply that energy to first locating a starting point for change and then actually starting. Every important and fulfilling journey always begins with one step.

When things seem overwhelming, narrow it down so our only responsibility is to take our next, right, small step. This becomes our mission. We do not have to climb a mountain; we just have to take a step.



Now that we have pointed out the existence of issues, our first step is to simply identify the most basic and important things on which to focus our solutions.

If we see we have issues, we have two choices: we can say, "Wow, these issues are big, they are bad, I do not know what I am going to do, this is awful." Or we can look for solutions! This is what we are doing with scriptural principles.

This brings us to our second main question:

What are the most important foundations to build a marriage relationship upon?



Because we know that LOVE and RESPECT are fundamentals, we now need to translate these fundamentals into a solid foundation to build upon - because selfless love feeds everything, including respect.

Let's introduce a few more principles that come from this kind of love.

Three words: COMMITMENT, PATIENCE and KINDNESS.

Respect begins with selfless love and it makes true COMMITMENT possible and foundational. OUR RESPECT MUST FIRST BE FOR GOD if we, as Christians, want our relationships to work.

Truly respecting God is the basis of our ability to truly respect - and therefore have a strong COMMITMENT - to those around us:

1 Timothy 1:17: (NASB) Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor <5092> and glory forever and ever. Amen.



We read this and see such value in God, we want to respect and honor Him - it is easy to commit to that. That same word for honor needs to be applied towards one another.

This respecting of others is most evident in marriage. Going back to the institution of marriage in Genesis, we see the ingredients for this marriage commitment.

When we honor our spouse - when we have a respect that wants to lift them up as valued - it is easy to commit. It is a stereotype that men have "commitment issues." This means they are not willing to lift someone up to that high a level without having an "out." We say, they do not know what they are missing by not elevating their spouse to that basic level of respect! It changes everything.

Let's go back to the very beginning and look at how the book of Genesis shows us Eve's value. God intentionally made her the most valuable part of God's creation to Adam. She was given honor by the fact that she WAS created and by HOW she was created.

<u>Genesis 2:18</u>: (NASB) Then the LORD God said, It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.

We hear *helper* and might think of someone as "inferior," or "in servitude." But the whole idea of a *helper* is not one who is "less than," but as someone who corresponds to the individual needing help.

### We know this for sure because God is our Helper:

<u>Psalm 33:20</u>: (NASB) Our soul waits for the LORD; He is our help and our shield.

Obviously, God is more than, NOT less than. As we go through these Genesis verses, we will see the development of this love and respect without actually saying those words.

There is a natural level of commitment when we are matched with one who suits our needs. The next level of commitment comes when we share things that are common to both of us.

#### Adam and Eve were both direct creations of God:

<u>Genesis 2:21-22</u>: (NASB) <sup>21</sup>So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. <sup>22</sup>The LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man.

### Eve was created to be an exact mate, from Adam and for Adam:

<u>Genesis 2:23</u>: (NASB) The man said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; She shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man.

We see a sense of closeness and attachment when we read this. Adam would have been profoundly thankful that he was given Eve as a helpmate. He could not find a closer, more suitable partner, *bone of my bones*. Both were direct creations of God, made expressly for each other.



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### Complete commitment was the obvious conclusion:

<u>Genesis 2:24-25</u>: (NASB) <sup>24</sup>For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. <sup>25</sup>And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

There is a beauty in the concept that <u>Ecclesiastes 4:12</u> brings out. Rick and Jonathan have both used this verse when performing marriage ceremonies.

It reads: And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken. This means that a husband and wife can support, defend and pick each other up. But if God, the third cord, is not the centerpiece throughout their marriage, it can unravel and fall apart. We think of the hymn, "Blest Be the Tie That Binds." There is that thing that holds us together which is something bigger than we are. This is a beautiful scripture picturing marriage.



This is the ultimate example of respecting God. Respect for God is shown by respecting His work. This respect includes being self-respecting as well. Within this scripture, we find COMMITMENT and family love. The Genesis account is simple but comprehensive. It helps us to see the big picture of what commitment is and what drives it.





QUESTION: What if you lose respect for your spouse? What if they do something or stand for something that contributes to your growing apart?





Any number of sins can cause a spouse to lose respect for the other spouse. Dysfunction destroys honor and trust and can lead to the destruction of the marriage covenant.

respect to and from all who are involved.

God created Adam in His own image to be the father of God's earthly family. Adam was honored above the rest of the earthly creation with this position. Because of this, even before Adam sinned, God planned for salvation and reconciliation through the ransom of Jesus. Through His agape love, mankind was important enough to be worth saving.

Even as sinful humanity now suffers the harsh and just consequences of sin and of God's disfavor, God's plan gives them opportunity for future reconciliation. Therefore, we want to treat our spouse with respect based upon our marriage covenant whenever appropriate, as we deal with the consequences of any inappropriate actions.





Other marriage foundation stones: PATIENCE and KINDNESS

1 Corinthians 13:4: (NASB) Love is patient <3114>, love is kind <5541>...

Selfless, *agape* love aptly begins with patience. God's patience is eternal, and we are called to live patiently as well.

Patient: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #3114 makrothymeō; from the same as #3116; to be long-spirited, i.e. (objectively) forbearing or (subjectively) patient:—bear (suffer) long, be longsuffering, have (long) patience, be patient, patiently endure

#3116 makrothumos; with long (enduring) temper, i.e. leniently

In other words, holding up under pressure; endurance. The Amplified Bible says, Love endures with patience and serenity.

Ideally, marriage lasts a lifetime, so having endurance or "long" patience is definitely required. Patience is more than just waiting around. It also means not collecting on something we are entitled to. In a functional marriage, it means loving our spouse in spite of the immediate situation. We want to calmly explain what we need them to do, say, or not to do and say. We do not just quit when things get frustrating or irritating. It is okay to give ourselves a "time out" to step away from the situation so that we do not do or say something we will regret.

Ephesians 4:1-2: (NASB) <sup>1</sup>Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, <sup>2</sup>with all humility and gentleness, with patience <3115>, showing tolerance for one another in love <26>...

**Patience:** Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #3115 *makrothumia*; from the same as #3116; longanimity, i.e. (objectively) forbearance or (subjectively) fortitude

#3116 makrothumos; with long (enduring) temper, i.e. leniently

Patience or long-suffering is a willingness to be non-reactive and appropriate.

This foundation stone of marriage absolutely implies being communicative. It also tells us to be willing to wait for a situation to completely unfold, to be disciplined in holding back. This "patience" gives the benefit of the doubt and can only truly be displayed by mankind through a humble spirit. Nothing works without humility.





Rick's wife, Tricia: "Being married to Rick is like he's flying and I hold on tight. He's enthusiastic, passionate, has lots of energy, focus and drive. He's a visionary and is 100 percent devoted to following God's direction in his life. He's a great communicator and listener. What makes our marriage work? We balance each other out. He helps me fly and I keep him from spiraling into outer space."

Selfless love is kind:

1 Corinthians 13:4: (NASB) Love is patient <3115>, love is kind <5541>...

**Kind:** Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #5541 *chresteuomai*; to show oneself useful, i.e. act benevolently



Ephesians 4:31-32: (NASB) <sup>31</sup>Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. <sup>32</sup>Be kind <5543> to one another, tender-hearted. forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

What an interesting definition of kindness - "to show oneself as useful." Its full expression is an action of giving. It takes a lot of give-and-take to live with someone under the same roof. Now throw in day-to-day pressures of kids, jobs, money, health, life goals - the list is endless. It is easy to get annoyed and bicker and pick the other person's flaws apart. But that is not living up to the ideals of being patient and kind. It is not enough to just slam the door or walk away. We can make positive changes, like rephrasing things in a calm voice: "I understand we are both frustrated with this, but let's find a way to talk about it without yelling." Or maybe taking a time-out. Try to communicate understanding and grace even when it is not immediately reciprocated.

This usefulness, this benevolence, also implies strong communication. It communicates understanding and grace even if such things are not easily reciprocated. We may be in a circumstance where our spouse has taken a different turn for some reason. It does not mean that we stop communicating; it means we continue to work on having patience and forbearance. It might mean carrying the load along even if they are not able to. It is that kindness - that usefulness - that lets them know it is okay, we can do this. Patience and kindness are foundations of commmitment.



Marriage's most important foundations are commitment based upon respect along with

### PATIENCE & KINDNESS

which are born out of selfless love. For all of these foundations to be functional, they need to be communicated in plain and simple ways.

This does not mean communicating in a way that I think works, but communicating in a way that my spouse can hear and understand. There is often a difference.

A house can only be as strong as its foundation. These foundation stones of commitment, patience and kindness are solid and true.



We are beginning to see where the strengths of marriage are, but what are the areas of marriage in which failure easily occurs?

Unfortunately, we as imperfect human beings are really creative when it comes to inventing new ways to weaken marriages. Our social order leaves God's original design for marriage further and further behind in the rear-view mirror of time. As Christians, we need to pause, consider and label what areas can create weakness.

We talked about measuring the health of a marriage in terms of love and respect, with a foundation of commitment, patience and kindness.

Now we ask:

What are common areas of weakness in marriage relationships?

We have been using <u>1 Corinthians 13</u> as our guide, commonly called the "love chapter," and it is interesting that the texts next lead us right into warning of potential weak spots.

There are eight points mentioned in the verses that set our marriages off course.

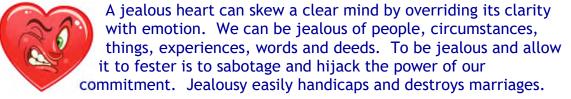
1 Corinthians 13:4-6: (NASB) <sup>4</sup>Love...is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, <sup>5</sup>does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, <sup>6</sup>does not rejoice in unrighteousness...



Selfless love is not jealous - to be heated or boil, in a good or bad sense.

#### Here it is meant in a bad sense:

<u>Philippians 1:15, 17</u>: (NASB) <sup>15</sup>Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will; <sup>17</sup>the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment.



We do not want to test our spouse or intentionally provoke them to get attention - to make them jealous. Conversely, we do not want to put our spouse in a position where they feel they must resort to creating drama in order for us to notice them. For example, we should not be intentionally trying to make them jealous because we end up creating resentment and distrust - this is not the kind of attention we want.

Selfless love is not jealous.



Galatians 5:26: (NASB) Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another.

<u>1 Corinthians 8:1</u>: (NASB) Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love <26> edifies.

corinthian



Bragging and arrogance are just not part of the recipe for a successful relationship. The recipe for selfless love rises above these things.

Bragging identifies a longing for attention and can be an outward manifestation of the character defect of arrogance. Though a marriage can survive such things, its health will be dramatically diminished.

Men have no idea what they are missing by not being vulnerable enough to have someone else be in such an honorable position in their lives. This is not showing weakness; this shows strength.



The same goes for women, too!

Bragging and arrogance tear relationships down - they do not bring them up.

Selfless love does not brag and is not arrogant.



<u>James 1:14-15</u>: (NASB) <sup>14</sup>But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. <sup>15</sup>Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.

This can be a slip up or it can be a symptom of something deeper. In any case, actions in any circumstance that are not Christlike will bring any marriage to a place of doubt and distress.

We are disciples of Christ. If we claim the name of Christ, that is who we are. Acting unbecomingly does not fit the description.

Discipleship is not what you do, it is who you are. If we are married, we are married disciples of Christ.

Selfless love does not act unbecomingly.



# Selfless love does not seek its own - it is not after its own self-interests or desires:

<u>James 4:2-3</u>: (NASB) <sup>2</sup>You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. <sup>3</sup>You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.

Self-interests can be a breeding ground for marriage discontent and dysfunction. While each spouse should be able to have those things in life that they are interested in, the danger comes when these things come at the expense of their spouse.



Rick, what are your thoughts on couples having separate interests - separate hobbies, friends or taking separate vacations?



Thoughts

That can be a reasonable and appropriate circumstance. However, we must be careful - once those separate interests come at the expense of the other spouse or take the place of the other spouse, there is a competition for focus and attention. Now we are seeking our own and not our married interests. Yes, there are

times when we do different things because we are different people, but we do not do this at the expense of our spouse. One of the things that happen in marriages is that one spouse hides behind the raising of children. We do not take time to be with each other because the kids take up all the time. Once the kids are out on their own, we have nothing left in the marriage; we do not even know who we are anymore. It may be hard to do but we must make time for each other - we have to always find time to feed that togetherness.

Selfless love does not seek its own.



### Selfless love is not provoked - it is not stimulated or spurred to (a negative) anger:

Ephesians 4:26-27: (NASB) <sup>26</sup>Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, <sup>27</sup> and do not give the devil an opportunity.

Such beautiful advice - do not go to bed angry at our spouse. If only we could act like this all the time!

One of the easiest pitfalls of marriage is taking things personally and then allowing them to expand from one issue that could be handled with honest communication, into a whole perspective that derails conversation and fans the flames of emotional reaction. To feel provoked is one thing, to act on it is another - a far more dangerous story.



Letting things fester is not healthy. Eventually it leaks out somewhere. It is common to get frustrated over something inconsequential as a result and become annoyed and stubborn. At times like these, we should honestly examine what might be the actual underlying cause and get that resolved as soon as possible.

Selfless love is not provoked.



Selfless love does not take into account a wrong suffered - it does not "take inventory," does not keep score.

Keeping score means there is a winner and a loser. One person is up and the other person is down. That is not a thriving environment. One suggestion for those prone to this kind of negative thinking is to add something positive: "I'm always the one who has to take out the garbage." Now add: "But he or she always does the laundry." This helps reinforce appreciation. Appreciation is an important outgrowth of honor and respect.

### Speaking of counting and keeping score...

Matthew 18:21-22: (NASB) <sup>21</sup>Then Peter came and said to him, Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times? <sup>22</sup>Jesus said to him, I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.



In the case of marriage, if you are still counting, you are still wrong. STOP keeping score!

And remember - "always" and "never" are really big words that are almost "always" "never" true! Use them sparingly!





Because marriage is an all-the-time commitment,

it is easy to accumulate issues over time. The principle of NOT keeping an inventory of wrongs flies directly in the face of what we broken human beings do naturally. It is much easier to remember the bad things over the good things - that is human nature. Keeping inventory

invites ill feelings while communication creates a culture of caring. We want to be clear that we care. Caring is not score keeping. Caring is applying that selfless love because our spouse is worthy of that high level of respect.

Selfless love does not keep count of the wrongs done to it - it does not take into account a wrong suffered.

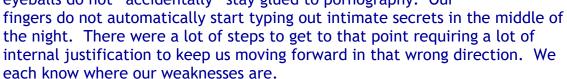


Selfless love does not rejoice in unrighteousness - it is not glad or happy in moral wrongfulness:

1 Thessalonians 4:4-5: (NASB) 4That each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor <5092>, 5not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God.

As Christians, we know right from wrong, but having that knowledge does not keep us from sin. Sin can be enticing, and in a marriage with challenges, this can mean trouble. It is easy to justify a sinful thought under stress, which opens the door to sinful action.

Sins of immorality, and as the scripture says, "lustful passion," can completely blow up a marriage in a way that is unrecoverable. This is a broad category that includes a lot of sins. The good part is, if we are being honest, this type of temptation gives us many checkpoints and plenty of time to turn around and get out of the situation. No one "accidentally" falls into a hotel room with someone who is not our spouse. Our eyeballs do not "accidentally" stay glued to pornography. Our



"Usually affairs are discussed as if they are a single act of betrayal. They are not. Even a one-night stand consists of scores of mental acts, and an ongoing relationship with a third party represents thousands of separate mental acts of deception." - Cheating in a Nutshell, by Wayne and Tamara Mitchell

Action



We have talked about lifting our spouse up to that level of honor and respect - so now we ask ourselves whether we would do this action if our spouse was looking over our shoulder.

Selfless love does not rejoice in unrighteousness.



MARRIAGES HAVE PROBLEMS. LOTS OF THEM. Each and every issue we may face can be most comprehensively addressed by first SEEING IT THROUGH THE EYES OF SELFESS LOVE.

If we let it, this approach can take the edge off of our emotions and allow us to positively address them, rather than emotionally react.

It is easy for things to go wrong in a marriage. We need to pay attention to our hearts and minds as we stand firmly on the scriptural foundations of marriage.

Because marriage has such potential for ups and downs, what things can we learn to focus on to foster strength and growth?

This is a question that should be asked and considered regularly. Having a desire to bring greater health to our marriages can bring us to really strong results, but only if we act. Further, our actions need to be well intentioned, clear and consistent. Working on making a marriage stronger is not some New Year's resolution; it is a life-changing decision!

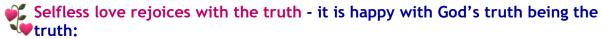
Again, we are focusing on functional marriages - marriages that have challenges but are workable. With dysfunctional marriages, these suggestions might not get us very far, but do not lose hope. Some relationships may still be recoverable.

What should I always bring to the table in my marriage relationship?

Mow can I contribute to my marriage relationship even if my spouse seems distant?

Curiously enough, both of these questions have answers in the same scripture. Let's continue in the "Love Chapter."

<u>1 Corinthians 13:4,6</u>: (NASB) <sup>4</sup>Love...<sup>6</sup>...rejoices with the truth; <sup>7</sup>bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.



James 1:17-18: (KJV) <sup>17</sup>Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. <sup>18</sup>Of His own will begat He us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

Marriage thrives when truth - God's truth - is present and focused upon. We should always have our happiness reside in God's truth, even if our spouse is going through a difficult time.

corinthians



Even if they are stuck, if we can have our rejoicing, that happiness in God's truth, it gives us the strength to be supportive to that spouse going through a rough time. That is what a marriage is supposed to do. It is supposed to reach out and help and hope together, work together, lift up, understand, respect and commit.

Selfless love rejoices in truth!



### Selfless love bears all things - to thatch, cover, protect or preserve in all periences:

Romans 15:1: (NASB) Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves.

There is a sensitivity here and we should not share with others any of our spouse's faults. This is a way to protect them. Marriage is personal. But there is a difference between randomly telling others as gossip versus seeking counseling with trusted spiritual leaders or a trained professional.

The difference is monumental. We can think we can just tell our best 42 friends because it will make us feel better. But we are gossiping about our own spouse. When we seek help with spiritual leaders or professionals, that is confidential and it is for the purpose of seeking help to cope. We must always remember to protect our spouse, especially in hard times.

Strive to have the response to protect, cover and preserve your marriage to develop into an instinctive response. There is a wonderful and caring beauty that your spouse will see when you are protective. What better way to support your spouse if they are having challenges! What better way to show them that you love, respect and care for them than by being protective while they are struggling. They will see it, remember it and it will give them strength.

Selfless love protects in all experiences.



### Selfless love believes all things - it is faithful in all experiences.

Believes all things does not mean we are supposed to be gullible and uneducated. This is about confidently walking through the challenges of life. We give our spouse the benefit of the doubt, assigning as a baseline positive motives to what they say and do and react accordingly.

Habakkuk 3:17-18: (NASB) <sup>17</sup>Though the fig tree should not blossom and there be no fruit on the vines, though the yield of the olive should fail and the fields produce no food, though the flock should be cut off from the fold and there be no cattle in the stalls, <sup>18</sup>Yet I will exult in the LORD, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.

This verse means having faith even when everything is bad. That is easier said than done - this is a challenge.

While we do not always know what God's will and providence will bring to us, we do know that His will is what we want to follow; we just do not know where it will inevitably lead. To have a strong faith in God's will for us is critical for our Christian marriages to thrive. This faith can also be a strong support for a struggling spouse.



If our spouse is weak because life is overbearing, and if we can stand strong and say, "I do not know where this will lead, but we are in this together," it can help them to cope.

When our spouse is struggling, the most important thing we can do when tragedy, illness or hardship strikes is to be there next to them, helping them through it. God has permitted this experience. We cannot fix the problem but we can walk next to them. This shows faithfulness and honor.



Jonathan's wife, Jewel: "About four years after we were married, I started noticing some hearing loss. As the years went on, it progressively worsened due to my inner ear disorder which led to me needing a Cochlear implant. Jonathan adapted to my severe hearing loss, and instead of getting frustrated with me, he always helps me

when I can't hear or understand someone. The implant has been a great blessing, but in certain environments I still can struggle with understanding what is being said. He can just tell by looking at me that I'm not understanding a conversation and "translates" for me. I'm thankful that he has his clear radio voice which helps me to understand him so well. Also, with my condition I lose my balance sometimes, and he is always on the lookout if we are out walking. He makes sure he is close enough to pull me back or let me know if a car is behind me that I may not hear."

This shows appreciation of the core value of that spouse. This puts the mutual respect we feel for each other on the table. What happens when we do this is that respect grows and everything gets stronger, and we become more committed to each other.

Selfless love believes all things.



Selfless love hopes all things - it has positive expectations in all experiences.

We do not give up on our spouse. And again, we are talking about functional, non-abusive marriages.

Romans 8:24-25: (NASB) <sup>24</sup>For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? <sup>25</sup>But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.

To hope is far beyond wishing. Our expectation that God will see us through all of our trying times is a necessary inspiration to keep moving forward. God's plan is great and we are called to serve that plan. We can confidently look forward to God's providence, whatever it may be (and it might be walking through the valley of the shadow of death, we do not know). Whatever it is, walking through that together can be a needed support and example when your spouse seems lost and overwhelmed, when they just do not know what to do.

God's grace gives us a pathway. We have to be receptive to knowing that God will see us through.





When I look at life, even when life is especially challenging, I always say, "It's all good." I understand those words are a reset for my own mind. Whatever is happening, whether it is overwhelming, and I feel like I'm drowning, or whether things are moving right along, and I am getting a lot done, these words mean to me that it is all in God's providence. I am standing here

looking for the next right step because I know He's got it. Even if I am not doing well, it is still all good because it is in His providence.

Selfless love hopes all things - hopes in all experiences.



# Selfless love endures all things - it perseveres under the weight of all experiences:

<u>James 5:10-11</u>: (NASB) <sup>10</sup>As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. <sup>11</sup>We count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.

Sometimes the giving component of marriage is 50/50, but other times it is 90/10. Over time, if we are giving what we can, whenever we can, we should see walls coming down because our spouse will feel cherished, valued and appreciated. Who does not want that?

Life can be hard, and we need to meet any challenges that test our marriages with an "I will never quit" brand of determination. Striving for this level of commitment changes us and helps us mature as a Christian and as a spouse. Notice, we cannot do one without the other. Our experiences will not mature us as Christians if we leave the spouse part out. Both grow together. What better way to help a struggling spouse than to contribute to your marriage the way you want them to contribute!

If we feel like our spouse does not appreciate us, we need to continue to show them appreciation, but also communicate our expectations of how we wish to be treated.

## 1 Corinthians 13:4-7: (NASB)

"Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, "does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, "does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.



Do the work because it is worth it. Simple...but not easy!

Selfless *love endures all things* - in all experiences.

There is amazing and profound value found in this one small section of 1 Corinthians 13!



## Revisiting, Refocusing and Reestablishing My Relationships:

Marriage is the highest and most sacred relationship that God gave to His human family.



For those who are privileged to be in a functional marriage, there are many things we can focus on and attend to that can make that marriage stronger. Selfless love, respect and all that they encompass help us to better live up to this incredible privilege.

Let us take nothing for granted and commit ourselves to being a spouse who exemplifies God's love in all that we do.

Jesus is the prime example of God's love in anything and everything. He said in <u>John 15:13</u>: Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. That is the kind of love we want to build our marriage on. There is also the family love of give and take. All of this comes with time and with effort and it is a beautiful thing. If you have a good marriage based on God and Christ, it is a wonderful way to live.

Work for it - it is worth it!

So, how strong are my relationships?
For Jonathan, Rick, Julie and Christian Questions...
Think about it...!



Join us next week for our podcast on February 20, 2023 Ep. 1269: How Strong Are My Relationships? (Part II) Family and Others

All quoted scriptures are from the 1995 version of NASB unless otherwise indicated.

**Study Questions follow** 



## Ep. 1268: How Strong Are My Relationships? (Part I)

https://christianquestions.com/character/1268-christian-marriage/

See: < CQRewind

All questions are be based on 1 Corinthians 13:4-7:

- 1. How do we measure the health of a marriage relationship? What is a "give and take" kind of love? What is *agape* love? Which of these is important in a marriage? How are you measuring up to the kind of marriage you would like to have, especially in regard to love? (See Titus 2:3-4, John 15:11)
- 2. In what way should we react if circumstances in our life change? How are you exhibiting selfless love as challenges enter your marriage? What could you be doing better?
- 3. What is the definition of "honor" or "respect" in the Bible? How do the actions of selfless love and that of holding someone in respect or honor differ? If there are problems in our marriage, what should keep respect and honor present? How are you showing respect and honor to your spouse? (See 1 Peter 2:17, 3:7, 1 Timothy 5:3)
- 4. On what important foundation is a marriage relationship built? Was Eve a lesser being since she was taken from Adam's rib? What is the definition of "helper"? How do we know this? What were Adam's feelings about Eve? What is the true foundation stone in the marriage in this account? (See Genesis 2:18-25, Psalm 33:20, Ecclesiastes 4:12)
- 5. What are the first two elements of love in 1 Corinthians 13:4? How does "patience" contribute to a marriage? What things are required to succeed at this foundation stone? How can we exhibit "kindness" to combat challenges in our marriages? To ensure that these foundations are functional, what is needed? How are you communicating? (See Ephesians 4:1-2, 31-32)
- 6. What are common areas of weakness in marriage? List and describe the eight points in 1 Corinthians 13:4-6 that can push a marriage off track. What allows us to positively approach these weaknesses instead of giving in to our emotions? (See Philippians 1:15,17, Galatians 5:26, 1 Corinthians 8:1, James 1:14-15, 4:2-3, Ephesians 4:25-27, Matthew 18:21-22, 1 Thessalonians 4:4-5)
- 7. What should we always bring to the table in our marriage? How can we contribute to our marriage even when our spouse seems distant? Explain how each of these elements contributes to the commitment to making marriage stronger: rejoice in truth, bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, endure all things (See 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, James 1:17-18, 5:10-11, Romans 15:1, Habakkuk 3:17-18, Romans 8:24-25)
- 8. What is the greatest example of love we can aspire to? How do you feel you are exemplifying God's love in your relationships as best you can? How could this be improved? (See John 15:13)

