



Nazarene Discipleship International (NDI)



Adult Ministries

Marriage Ministries Handbook - 2024

By **Ángel Rodríguez Gómez**
Mesoamerica Region

Marriage Ministries Handbook

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Church of the Nazarene
Mesoamerica Region



Adult Ministries

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Study Guide for Married Couples

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Presentation

Nazarene Discipleship International (NDI) of the Church of the Nazarene is responsible for developing Adult Ministries, Youth Ministries, and Children's Ministries.

This material is part of NDI's Adult Ministries materials and is intended to help members of the Church of the Nazarene to understand biblical teachings on living a holy life within marriage and to put what they learn into practice in their daily lives in order to grow in the likeness of Jesus Christ.

The areas of these marriage ministry lessons and their objectives are as follows:

A. Spiritual:

- Motivate couples to consecrate themselves under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
- To personally evangelize other couples.
- To strengthen their worship of God and their devotional lives.

B. Ministerial:

- Recognize that married couples have a responsibility for the preservation and growth of God's work.
- Work toward building up the family and the church.
- Facilitate couples serving within the church.

C. Family:

- Build your home on the principles and values of the Kingdom of God that are plainly shown in the Bible.
- Apply biblical principles and values to develop a good marriage relationship.
- Apply biblical principles and values to raising children.

The document contains 12 lessons that can be shared once a month in small group/marriage meetings. Each lesson contains:

Learning Objectives.

They refer to the achievements expected of the students at the end of the lesson.

Introduction.

An initial presentation that contextualizes the topic to be addressed, in order to give the reader some background.

Development of the topic.

These lessons have been written in simple, dynamic language, connected to the ideas of the contemporary world, in order to facilitate their use for teaching.

Conclusion of the teaching.

A brief conclusion of what has been taught is provided at the end of each lesson, which can be used at the end of the class as closure and in the next session to review the topics that have been covered.

Activities:

Individual or group learning activities relating to the topic studied are suggested. These can be reproduced for the participants, although it is recommended that each participant has his own copy of this document.

Lesson 1. *When adversity comes through the door, does love go out the window?*

Author: **Martín García**

Scripture Reading: Genesis 2:18-25

Biblical Text: Matthew 19:4-6

"Haven't you read," he replied, 'that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.'"

Purpose:

- **To rediscover** the importance of the saying, "Till death do us part."

1.1 Introduction

There is a well-known saying that "When poverty comes in the door, love goes out the window". This means that when love is not firm, difficulties, mainly poverty, will kill it.

We must be aware that every marriage will be subjected to adversity throughout life. There is no one that escapes it. For some it will be economic hardship, for some illness, or some other type of difficulty, but we will all face adversities.

Then, the question arises: What can we do to make our marriage resilient in the face of trials? Instead of getting weaker how can our marriage become stronger in times of adversity? That is what we are going to look at in this lesson.

1.2 Development

1.2.1 Trials And Difficulties Come To Every Person, Marriage, And Family

Marriage is a unique and wonderful relationship that requires dedication and perseverance. As children of God, we should reflect His love in all of our relationships and especially in our marriage, in which we have daily opportunities to show it.

A basic teaching is that God's original design is for marriage to be forever. Divorce is not part of God's plan; He wants us to be together until death. So, that should be the norm in marriage.

In Matthew, Jesus admits that Moses allowed divorce *"because your hearts were hard"*. There are borderline situations of abuse or infidelity that require drastic measures, but God's original plan for marriage is for man and woman to stay together until death do them part. (Bible Online, n.d.)

Christ's love for the church should be the model to follow. Jesus gave His life on the cross for each one of us and He did it out of love. Human beings tend to be selfish; we seek our own good before the good of others. But Christian spouses need to be filled with the love of Christ, seeking at all times the spiritual well-being of their spouse, which brings them closer to God and sanctifies them.

In marriage, each person must ensure the well-being of the other, caring for them and helping them. If one falls, the other picks them up, bandages the wound, encourages them to continue. The Bible teaches us this in:

*⁹ Two are better than one,
because they have a good return for their labor:
¹⁰ If either of them falls down,
one can help the other up.
But pity anyone who falls
and has no one to help them up.
¹¹ Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm.
But how can one keep warm alone?*

Ecclesiastes 4:9-11

1.2.2 A Testimony For The Blessing Of Many

In the Bible we find many cases in which married couples faced problems, but they were strengthened by facing those problems together. We are going to share the situation (among several we know of) of a contemporary couple that for years has faced a terrible illness. We are going to learn from the lessons that they have learned during this difficult time that they so generously share with us. They are Pastor Martin Garcia and his wife Marilu. Let's take time to hear their testimony and learn from their experiences. Martin shares with us the following:

Possibly the title at the beginning is not well written, but I thought I would write it like this, trying to encapsulate in that idea all the problems that could arise in a marriage relationship.

Perhaps they could be presented as economic shortcomings, personality differences, infidelity or, simply speaking, one of the partners tells the other "you are not what I expected".

There are endless circumstances that could be the reason for separation or divorce in a couple, but the most important to me, and this because when it occurs many times there is no one to blame, is the disease. Whether it's the husband or wife who suffers from the illness.

I am a Pastor of the Church of the Nazarene in the boarder city of Coahuila, Mexico. Four years ago, my wife was diagnosed with cancer. The first diagnosis showed that it was not a very aggressive cancer, so after an operation, the doctor considered my wife to be clean of all this evil. But, because of the pandemic, no follow-up treatment was given, which caused the cancer to return more aggressively, wreaking great havoc on my wife's physique. When she underwent her second operation, the doctor gave her six months to live because the cancer metastasized in her liver.

I testify that God has been good and it has now been over four years since my wife's diagnosis. It has certainly been a very difficult time for the family, but we continue to trust in God.

1.2.3 Lessons Learned During The Trial

As we have traveled this road full of doctor's appointments, medical exams, chemotherapy, radiation, etc., we know of situations of brothers in Christ who have abandoned their spouses because of this type of illness, because they could not bear the situation they had to face.

Therefore, having gone through this experience, I can share with you what God has taught us in our marriage, and I want to present it to you through the following points:

1st. Let's not look for a guilty party.

From the beginning of man's creation and his relationship with God, whenever man has faced an uncomfortable situation, he has always looked for someone to blame (Genesis 3).

Whenever we read this passage, we conclude that man himself, through his carelessness, is suffering as a result of the situation. Even when I preach about this, the same thing is always implied. But this situation that we're dealing with today is different because who is to blame for my wife's (husband's) suffering from a disease?

Along with this question there are others such as: "Why me?" or "What did I do wrong?" And the dramatic questions like: "Why are you punishing us with this?" Questions that, instead of alleviating our pain, bring more weight to our grief.

It is very natural that we ask these questions when we face these situations; but we have also learned that, in those moments of doubt, God is open to listen to our words that express how we feel in our hearts.

Because God, knowing all things and always being in control, gives us His wisdom to face the situation.

"If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. ⁶ But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind." James 1:5-6

Therefore, when you want to find fault, to go God first and ask Him to give you the insight you need to understand the situation you are going through.

2ND. With God there is always a purpose.

I have been a Christian for many years, since I was nine years old, and I have faithfully attended church. And for many years I listened to preachers who told us: "When you are going through struggles and trials, do not ask God why, but ask what for". For many years this frustrated me, because I always felt that being a child of God is to be a person who conforms and does not seek to delve deeper into the Will of God; maybe we won't be able to understand it immediately, but God gives us the guidelines to discover it in the process of what we are going through.

When the Lord Jesus speaks to the religious leaders in John 8:31-38, He makes them see a great truth, that the one who knows and recognizes Jesus as the incarnate truth of God and makes Him his own in his heart, will be free; perhaps not from physical pain, but from moral pain, which is what mercilessly destroys man in the struggles and trials he undergoes.



We believe in a God of purpose and that is the truth that keeps us free to continue believing that everything He said He will fulfill (Exodus 9:16; Job 42:2; Proverbs 19:21; Romans 8:28).

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." Romanos 8:28

And let us never forget that the heart of God's purposes is that his name be glorified.

3RD. As a couple, let us never stop trusting God.

Let us never forget the beautiful phrase that we were reminded of when we got married: "no longer two, but one flesh". Backed up by what Adam said when God gave him the woman; *"This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh"*.

Let us never forget what the gospels say *"... a house divided against itself will fall"* (Luke 11:14-23).

We know that sometimes the struggles we go through are very difficult but let us not forget what Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 10:13; that God does not give us more than we can bear.

1.3 Conclusion

I don't know what your struggle is at the moment or what you are going through in your marriage, my circumstance is my wife's illness. This process, which is what I call it, has led us to trust God more, to know Him better, to seek more intimacy with Him, to believe Him more, to wait with patience and peace. Something that in our married life has brought strength and foundation.

I invite you to hold on a little longer, because God in His mercy, to the one who remains faithful, will give his reward.

We thank Pastor Martin and his wife Marilu for opening their hearts to us and sharing this advice: a) Don't look for blame, b) Remember that with God there is always a purpose and c) Never stop trusting God, as a couple. We are sure that in the midst of your trials these three tips will be a blessing for you and your marriage as well.

My Commitment to God

Exercises for Reflection and Practical Application

1. Look in the Bible for marriages that faced serious problems and explain how God helped them to overcome their problems. Describe the central problem they faced.

2. Talk to someone else in your group about a problem you are facing in your marriage. Also, have them share with you a problem they are facing in their marriage. Pray for each other.

3. What are the three pieces of advice shared by Pastor Martín and his wife Marilú? Explain them.

4. According to your personal experience, what other advice can you share you're your group that will help their marriages to be strengthened, even in the midst of the big trials they face?

Bibliographical references

Biblia Online. (n.d.). **22 versículos bíblicos para matrimonios (22 Bible verses for marriages)**. https://www.bibliaon.com/es/versiculos_biblicos_matrimonios/

Lesson 2.

Indestructible Love. **Searching for God**

Author: **Rafael Arévalo**

Biblical Text: **Matthew 19:6**

*"So they are no longer two, but one flesh.
Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."*

Purpose:

- **To analyze** the importance of putting God first in your marriage so that your marriage will be lifelong.

2.1 Introduction

Today we live in a society in which marriage seems to have been devalued to such a degree that there are ways to undo it easily and quickly. Thus, divorce in societies such as Mexico's continues to grow in a very worrying way.

Sometimes we tend to believe that this happens only in non-Christian families, but the truth is that divorce statistics between Christian and non-Christian families are not so different. That is why it is important to reflect on the value of marriage and to study some actions we can take to avoid or considerably reduce the risk of our marriages failing.

For this, we are going to study the subject in several lessons. I decided to call this group of lectures "Indestructible Love".

So, I stopped to review the topics, and one thing has become clear to me; the challenge for couples in the coming years will not be to become better at loving each other, or to learn to be better communicators, or to develop better social skills. No, the real challenge will be to endure the blows of a culture that manufactures disposable marriages.

We will talk about that in this lesson and in the lessons that follow.

2.2 Development

2.2.1 The "Use It And Throw It Away" Culture. Disposable Marriages?

I'm not going to talk about statistics, because you don't have to be a lawyer to realize that more and more couples are ending the relationship that they dreamed of and planned to be a part of until the end. What's more, I'm sure you know at least one family that has gone through divorce, and maybe it's your family. We are living in a society that has the idea that when something doesn't work, you don't fix it, you just throw it away.

Some time ago we bought a tablet, it was very advanced, 64 GB capacity, and very fast. One day, as usually happens, it was accidentally dropped by someone in my family. When it fell, the screen was broken and a few weeks later the charger input began to fail, so I took it to get repaired. When the technician checked it, he gave me the price of the repair.... I about fell backwards!

The repair cost was close to what the new product cost, and I thought, "maybe I didn't explain myself well," so I repeated:

— I don't want you to change all the parts, I just want you to change this piece.

The technician answered me:

— Yes, it is the price for just changing that piece.

I replied:

— And what would be the point? I'd be better off buying a new one.

Then he revealed something interesting:

— That's right, this equipment is designed to be replaced every three years at the most.

I stormed out of there, saying:

— Then give me my pieces!

Society is manufacturing disposable marriages, and what you and I must do is be careful not to act the way society has conditioned couples to act. In other words, what I want us to learn is what "indestructible love" couples do, not what "disposable love" couples do.

This phenomenon has discouraged some singles from even wanting to get married or desiring marriage. I want you to know that what you saw in that broken marriage that

disappointed you, that is not the kind of marriage that God designed; not for them and not for you.

Divorce is not God's plan. Even if the couple are Christians, and even if the couple went to mass every Sunday. Marriage the way God designed it is beautiful, it brings you fulfillment, it makes you a better person, it brings you closer to God. So, if you are single, don't be discouraged, you can have a movie love, an indestructible love, you can save your marriage even before you get married.

2.2.2 What We Must Do To Have An Indestructible Love

The key is not to do what everyone else does. In their book "From This Day Forward" Craig and Amy Groeschel tell us the following:

Imagine that in the news it's reported that people who eat your favorite type of cereal have a 50% chance of developing cancer, imagine that scientists have shown that it is your cereal that causes cancer, what would you do, would you continue to eat the same type of cereal?

Of course not! You would try something different.

You would only keep eating the same cereal if you were crazy. My point is that when the odds of failure are so high, you can't just keep doing things "like everyone else does it".

Craig and Amy Groeschel tell us: "The decisions you make today will determine the marriage you have tomorrow." They share with us five commitments that will contribute to developing a failure-proof marriage. If you make these commitments, you can and will have the marriage God wants you to experience. These commitments are:

- Seek God.
- Fight fair.
- Have fun.
- Stay pure.
- Never throw in the towel.

In our lesson today we are going to study the first commitment "Seek God". To do this we are going to look at what everyone does, and then we will see what indestructible love should do.

2.2.3 The First Commitment Of Every Marriage Should Be: Seek God

In our culture, everyone talks about "finding the right one." Influencers, YouTubers, celebrities make us think that happiness will come into our lives when we find "the right one" or "the one". So, when you find "number one" or "the one", everything will be wonderful. In good "christianese" (Christian language) we would say "the right one".

And then we pray: "Lord, you said in your word 'ask and it shall be given to you', and I ask you Lord for the pastor's son, give him to me, Lord, I take him in the name of Jesus, I decree and declare him, and I do not take NO for an answer". This is the fact: for both women and men who are in search of that "one" who will change their lives. It is true, you DO need that ONE to change your life, but here is the key: That ONE is not a partner, that ONE you need is GOD.

One of the foundations of indestructible love is that God must be your number ONE.

Let's look at what Jesus says:

"Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" Matthew 22:37-39

Jesus did not say: Love your spouse with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind", he said: Love God, and secondly: Love your neighbor, that is, your spouse. To be clear, what God says is: I (God) must be your number ONE and your partner must be your number TWO.

2.2.4 Reasons For Us To Make God Our Number "ONE."

Now, I am going to give you some compelling reasons for you to do this in your life. This is not done by everyone, but you don't want to have a marriage like everyone else. I hope that's clear to you.

Reason 1. Putting your partner as number one is idolatry.

Putting God at number ONE means that he has the priority in your life. The Word says:

"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." Matthew 6:33

Reason 2. Putting God as number one prepares you to receive a number two.

For single people: Don't look for a partner, look for God. It's common to think, maybe you've thought this way, (I'm speaking to young singles) that you won't take God into account in your life, or at least not seriously, only from time to time. Maybe you'll try a few beers, have some dangerous friendships, some friends with privilege and then you will have time to settle matters with God later. You don't want life when you get married to be bad, do you? This kind of life is dangerous because it prevents you from finding the kind of person you really want to spend the rest of your life with.

Imagine living like that and one night, you run into the right person at a party, you talk to them, and find that they are intelligent, godly, funny, and they are kind and have a generous heart, the prototype of a good spouse. What makes you think that a person with these qualities would even consider a relationship someone in the condition you are in?

If you want something different from what others have, you have to start by being different from what others are like. If you want to meet someone who seeks God, start seeking God yourself. Your future marriage depends on it.

I will look to my number ONE (God), while I prepare for number TWO (my spouse).

Reason 3. Putting God as number one adjusts your expectations of number two.

For married couples: Look to your number ONE (God), as well as your number TWO (spouse). To place your partner as number ONE is to place them in a position far above their ability to meet your needs, for the only one capable of meeting your needs is GOD.

The problem with idolizing our partner is that when they fail (which they will more often than you expect), you will end up demonizing them.

Here are some Symptoms of marital idolatry:

1. What used to seem like a good quality to you, you now see as a flaw.
2. You feel unsatisfied in your marriage.
3. You think that you give more than you receive.

2.2.5 Three Tips For Putting God First.

- A. Seek God Together.
- B. Start where you are (things are always complicated before they become easy).
- C. Start today.



Let's talk about odds:

- What are the odds that you will insult someone you are praying for?
- What are the odds that you will give in to an emotional affair or flirtation when you are praying for your spouse?
- What are the odds that you will separate from the spouse that you are praying for?

2.3 Conclusion

If you still want to take the risk of doing what everyone else is doing, the decision is yours. There is a small margin of success for someone who chooses to live without Christ. But I'll be honest, I don't like to gamble with those odds, and if while living a life with Christ sometimes encounters difficult situations, I don't know what people who live without Christ do. So, I prefer to be spiritually crazy.

My wife and I are far from being the perfect couple, but I can assure you that, after all we have been through, our love is indestructible.

My Commitment to God

Exercises for Reflection and Practical Application

1. What does it mean to you that God needs to be your first priority?

2. How can we, as a married couple, make God the director of our marriage?

3. How do you describe a Gospel-centered marriage?

4. What changes do you need to make, as a married couple, to make God your first priority?

Bibliographical references

Groeschel, Craig y Groeschel Amy. (n.d.). ***Desde ahora en adelante: Cinco compromisos para proteger tu matrimonio (From This Day Forward: Five Commitments to Fail-Proof Your Marriage)***.

Lesson 3. *Indestructible Love. Fight Fair.*

Author: **Rafael Arévalo**

Biblical Text: James 1:19

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

Purpose:

- **To learn** how to deal with our differences through edifying and marriage-building dialogues that help resolve the conflicts that arise in every marriage relationship.

3.1 Introduction

In this lesson we will continue studying the commitments that we must make before God in order to have an indestructible marriage.

We have already seen in the previous lesson the first commitment which is to put God first in our marriages.

Now we are going to study the second commitment which is to "fight fair". You may ask, what do you mean "fight"? Aren't we supposed to not fight in marriage? Well, what we mean is that we need to learn practical rules for resolving the conflicts that naturally arise in every human relationship.

3.2 Development

3.2.1 Every Marriage Has Differences At Some Point

I want to tell you something that will probably surprise you; my wife and I (Pastor Rafael Arevalo) don't have a perfect marriage. In fact, we argue, now less than when we were first married, but we still do. I am going to tell you the truth: in every relationship in which you live with someone and you really want to share your universe with another person, your values, your principles, your culture and beliefs, you will have disputes as you search to decide what is best. Why? Because both of you will fight for your universe to change as little as possible. Life as a couple is a constant battle against inertia.

Let me share the following story with you. Carlos and Monica had been married for six months, and everything was fine, until that gloomy February 14, Valentine's day, the day for lovers some say. Carlos had a bad day at work, he didn't have time to get a gift or plan something special. He had promised weeks ago that they would go to dinner at Monica's favorite restaurant, but Carlos was not in the mood, so he barely greeted her when he got home. He sat down on the couch and started playing video games to de-stress. Monica came over and threw a card she had been making for two weeks to give to Carlos on this special day. Carlos barely saw her out of the corner of his eye because he was playing his game. So, Monica looked at him furiously and went to her bedroom to cry. Of course, Carlos did not follow her, and five minutes later Monica came out of her bedroom and burst out:

- You are stupid and cynical; how could you think of sitting on the couch and playing games on such an important day. If this is what our marriage is going to be like, I'd rather not be married.
- What do you mean? You just don't understand how frustrated and sick I am, you're so selfish! If you want to leave, then go, let's see if anyone else will put up with your tantrums.
- Frustrated and sick? what are you talking about? In your mediocre job you do nothing but review numbers. I'm frustrated and sick, I have to clean the whole house, wash your clothes, and prepare tomorrow's lunch, hoping that when you come home, you'll pay a little attention to me, but I now realize that's too much to ask of you.
- Well, get out of here then and see who will give you all their money to pay for all your "special" creams and stuff.
- Fine, I'm out of here, any place is better than where you are.

Monica left and went to her parents' house to sleep.

I ask you now, does this scene sound familiar to you? Do you think any married couple you know has gone through situations like what Carlos and Monica went through?

3.2.2 Ways Of Dealing With Conflicts

3.2.2.1 Ways People Want To Resolve Conflict

When facing any conflict, people usually choose one of the following ways to deal with a conflict:

- A. Competition (win/lose)
- B. Avoidance (lose/lose)
- C. Accommodation (win/lose)
- D. Negotiation (win/win)

3.2.2.2 ***Second Commitment. Indestructible love not only knows how to love their partner, it also knows how to argue fairly with them.***

To discuss means to communicate, to show the different points of view on a subject. This is enriching and allows the couple to grow together, learning something about each other and understanding each other's points of view.

Learning to discuss is as important as learning how people feel loved. Viewed objectively, when arguing, more points of view can be revealed, and two things can happen:

1. We are left with the best point of view of either side.
2. We create a better point of view between the two of us.

Arguing may be the most enriching thing for a couple. But arguing badly may be the worst thing a couple can do. Dr. John Gottman, author of books such as "The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work" and "What Makes Love Last" among many others, is an expert on the subject of arguing. He tells us that he can tell how long a couple will last (before they end up separated) just by listening to the first three minutes of one of their arguments. He states that couples who tend to last "till death do us part" are couples who have mastered the art of arguing.

Dr. John Gottman mentions that couples who argue to find a solution to the conflict, and not to justify or offend each other, are more likely to reach the goal.

So, the first principle is: **Argue to reach a solution, not to be right.**

Arguing may be the most enriching thing for a couple. But arguing badly may be the worst thing a couple can do.

3.2.2.3 Elements of A Fair Fight

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

Let's analyze three characteristics that are present in this portion of scripture. What does each imply:

- Active listening
- Speaking wisely
- Being slow to anger

Active Listening	Speaking Wisely	Being Slow To Anger
Listening to reasons, feelings and/or emotions adjacent to the topic of the conflict.	Express my feelings and thoughts, respecting and validating those of my partner.	To avoid getting into the heat of anger, address with problems when you are both calm.
Ask the motives or reasons for the action that bothers you. Do not assume anything and allow explanations.	Never start by blaming and criticizing, concentrate on expressing what you feel and think, without demeaning the value of your partner.	Avoid being controlled by emotions and having them drive the discussion.
Before exploding, ask yourself: Why does this situation bother me so much? What is really bothering me? Don't settle for simplistic answers.	Ask yourself these questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Should I say what I'm thinking?• Should I do it right now?	Set a time and place to practice the "3 x 3 = Blessing" exercise.

3.2.3 Four Biblical Causes Of Conflict And Their Solution.

Now, let's analyze what the causes are and why an argument around a conflict can occur, according to the Word.

3.2.3.1 Causes of Conflict

*"What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? **You desire but do not have**, so you kill. **You covet** but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because **you do not ask God**. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with **wrong motives**, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures."* James 4:1-3

From this portion of scripture, we see some of the main causes for our conflicts:

1. Unsatisfied needs (desire what they don't have versus be thankful for what they do have).
2. Unhealthy comparisons (envy versus contentment)
3. Lack of dependence on God (marital idolatry versus putting God first).
4. Selfishness (having different projects, principles, and values than your spouse.)

3.2.3.2 Eight Rules of Fair Fights

If conflict is inevitable in any relationship, we must learn what to do when we are approaching a discussion about an issue in which we usually disagree or have diverse points of view. Here are some rules that will help move a marriage forward in resolving conflict:

1. Attack the problem not your partner.
 - a. *No insults*
 - b. *No blaming*
2. Don't use NEVER and ALWAYS as negative labels.
3. Don't raise your voice.
4. Don't compare your partner to ANYONE.
5. Don't bring up past hurts.
6. Don't threaten separation or divorce.
7. Don't involve a third party.
8. Avoid blackmail (emotional or silent).



There will be times when we find ourselves at an "impasse" in which we no longer make progress in resolving the conflict. In those cases, it is good to lean on others. It may be the pastor; it may be a Christian counselor or another spiritually mature couple.

We particularly recommend seeking immediate help in the following cases:

1. In the case of infidelity.
2. In the case of chronic problems of insecurity and self-esteem.
3. In cases of Dysthymia (persistent depressive disorder).

3.3 Conclusion

We have learned that, in every relationship, including the healthiest marriages, you will face discussions around a conflict that arises in your relationship. In fact, every time we face conflict, we have an opportunity to come out of it stronger. These are opportunities to grow.

To do this, we must develop the ability to face conflicts in the best way possible, seeking mutual benefit, without violating the precepts that God has established for us.

Developing active listening skills, speaking wisely and being slow to anger (which is a reflection of the proper management of our emotions, and in turn, a product of self-control) are basic to emerging edified in any discussion.

Don't fight over who is right, fight for the Marriage you long for.

My Commitment to God

Exercises for Reflection and Practical Application

1. Together with your partner, do the 3 X 3 = blessing strategy.

Step 1: What three things did I do this week that blessed you?

Step 2: What things can I do to become an even greater blessing to you?

2. How has grace helped you to master your anger in your relationships and particularly in your marriage? How much do you need to keep working on this? How can you do this?

3. How can you improve your communication when dealing with conflict in your marriage?

4. What are some issues that cause conflict in your marriage? Choose one of them and comment: How can you change it, and consequently improve the way you resolve that conflict?

Bibliographical references

- Groeschel, Craig y Groeschel Amy. (n.d.). ***Desde ahora en adelante: Cinco compromisos para proteger tu matrimonio (From This Day Forward: Five Commitments to Fail-Proof Your Marriage).***
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Lesson 4.

Indestructible Love. **Having Fun!**

Author: **Rafael Arévalo**

Biblical Text: James 1:17

"Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows."

Biblical Text: Proverbs 15:13a

"A happy heart makes the face cheerful..."

Purpose:

- **To make** a commitment to plan our activities in such a way that we have fun as a married couple, in order to grow in a healthier way.

4.1 Introduction

In the previous two lessons we have been reflecting on how to build an indestructible love in times when love seems disposable. In the face of so many divorces that seriously affect our family and God's Kingdom, it is of great importance to analyze what those who are at serious risk of having a failed marriage are doing and then to analyze what the Bible asks us to do.

We have already studied in previous lessons two commitments that, as a married couple, we must assume if we want to continue developing an indestructible love. They are: a) Make God our first priority and b) Know how to fight fair when conflicts arise, that is, how to address the issues when we have disagreements, in order to move forward in resolving the conflict and come out stronger.

In this third lesson of the series that we have called "Indestructible Love", we will study a third commitment which is "having fun as a married couple". So, get ready, because this sounds interesting.

4.2 Development

4.2.1 How Does Everyone Do It?

I posted a poll on Facebook, asking: what's the first word that comes to mind when you hear the word marriage? For many people, marriage is: responsibility, chores at home, sleepless nights, teamwork, expenses, love, family, commitment. Some used the word: covenant, but only one of them put "enjoyment".

In the ladies' conversations, I heard the phrase "settling down" a lot when they talked about marriage, and they indicated that they meant that if they married they would be leaving fun behind to assume a serious life, full of responsibilities.

There is a change of attitude when moving from courtship to marriage. Something like this happens:

- My love, we are already married, no more laughing so much and having a good time, we need to take life seriously and be responsible. Let's go to our suffocating jobs from Monday to Friday, let's divide our duties on weekends and spend a monotonous and boring life together.

The truth is that no one has ever fallen in love with anyone expecting to have a boring, monotonous life, but for some reason we think that's what is in store for us when we get married, because we have to "settle down." This mentality reduces marriage to a cohabitation-of-convenience type of relationship. After five years, spouses are so overwhelmed by their responsibilities that they have a hard time laughing together and having pleasurable times together. They become "roomies," partners in the same house, who follow the rules to get along, but whose hearts are no longer in it.

4.2.2 Third Commitment. Indestructible love does not assume fun is a luxury, but a commitment.

May your fountain be blessed,
and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth.

A loving doe, a graceful deer—
may her breasts satisfy you always,
may you ever be intoxicated with her love!

Proverbs 5:18-19

Love, Sex and Romance. Whoever reads the Song of Solomon can see that God is not bothered by sex, on the contrary, He created it. This goes against the common idea that marriage is something dreadful, complicated, burdensome, and difficult to do.

The word Enjoy means "*to experience with joy; take pleasure in*". It comes from the Old French *enjoir* which means "to give joy, rejoice, take delight in." Broken down, *en* - means "make" and *joir* - means "joy".

4.2.3 How Much Do We Enjoy Ourselves As A Couple?

To get a clear idea of how much we enjoy each other as a couple, I invite you to respond to the following poll. For your responses use the following scale from 1 to 5, where:

- 1 = "Strongly disagree" and
- 5 = "Strongly agree".

Now, rate the following items.

Situation	Response
1. When I am away, I long to be with my spouse.	
2. Our relationship is close to my ideal relationship.	
3. We are able to talk for hours.	
4. We laugh a lot together.	
5. When I think of us, I feel joy.	
6. We enjoy time together as much as we enjoy time with our mutual friends.	
7. We help each other maintain a good attitude in times of stress.	
8. We tell each other how we feel about each other on a daily basis.	
9. We have very frequent and special romantic dates.	
10. We have the best sex in the world (only for married people).	
11. My spouse knows exactly how to make me happy.	
12. I don't think I'll ever find anyone better to live with.	
13. We are not afraid to show our love in public	
Total points:	

To find out where your marriage stands, we ask you to consider the following Score Reference:

- 0 to 30: Relationship is at risk, require urgent professional help.
- 31 to 40: Relationship has areas of opportunity, it requires support.
- 40 to 50: Stable relationship, make a plan for growth and stick to it.
- 51+: Healthy and fun relationship.

4.2.4 Three Types Of Fun In A Couple's Life

1. Face-to-Face Fun
2. Shoulder-to-Shoulder Fun
3. Navel-to-Navel Fun

4.2.4.1 Face-to-Face Fun

You need to put aside the devices and commitments that separate you to start seeing each other face to face.

Face-to-face date. A scheduled meeting for spouses to exchange thoughts, feelings and perceptions of personal or couple situations in face-to-face communication.

Here are five tips for face-to-face fun:

1. Have scheduled dates.
2. Have meaningful talks.
3. Watch your body language.
4. The details are in the details.
5. Establish the rules of Face-to-Face dating and respect them.

4.2.4.2 Shoulder-to-Shoulder Fun

Shoulder-to-shoulder fun. These are activities that take place at a set time and recurrence, where both of you as a couple participate for a common purpose.

Some examples of activities that allow us to enjoy shoulder-to-shoulder are:

- Cooking together
- Doing charitable work
- Taking a class
- Doing handicrafts
- Doing home improvement projects
- Spa and massage day
- Composing songs together
- Singing together (Karaoke)
- Playing board games
- Reading together
- Going to the gym
- Shopping together
- Going to the movies
- Having a picnic



4.2.4.3 Navel-to-Navel Fun

In the same survey I told you about at the beginning, I could see that some people were either liars or hypocrites. Because no one told me that the word they relate to marriage is sex. If I ask them: Why do you want to get married? What do you think they'll say? What do married people do that they can't do when they are engaged? They are not going to tell me "food". Some wrote "family", but I'm not going to take that as a sex life. The reason this is not easily said is because we still surround sex with some mystery and foreboding. How strange! Sex is how we all came into the world and that's how God created us to reproduce.

God made us sexual beings for two reasons: for procreation (Genesis 1:28) and for recreation (Proverbs 5:18).

"May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer—may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be intoxicated with her love." Proverbs 5:18-19

A. Spiritual Benefits Of Sexual Relations:

- ***You fulfill the Biblical commandment to be "one flesh".***

"God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'" Genesis 1:28

- ***Protection against sexual immorality.***

"¹ Now for the matters you wrote about: 'It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.'² But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband. ³ The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. ⁴ The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife. ⁵ Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. ⁶ I say this as a concession, not as a command." 1 Corinthians 7:1-6

- ***We fill the world with Christians.***

"Has not the one God made you? You belong to him in body and spirit. And what does the one God seek? Godly offspring. So be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful to the wife of your youth." Malachi 2:15

B. General Benefits Of Sexual Intercourse:

- Assists in relieving stress and anxiety.
- Improves memory.
- Relieves pain.
- Helps you sleep better.
- Protects against heart problems.
- Strengthens bones.
- Reduces incontinence problems.
- Protects against prostate cancer.

How can I improve my navel-to-navel relations?

▪ ***The slower the better***

- Not so fast cowboy! Three times slower than you want.
- Make eye and ear contact.
- Slow touching.
- Don't get to the point, take a few laps around the block.
- Respect your partner's sexual response cycle.

▪ ***The longer the better***

- Flirting begins with breakfast.
- Love continues after orgasm.

▪ ***The more progressive the better***

- Start with the romantic and end with the sexual.
- It starts with the heart and ends with the physical.

Sexual relations in marriage are one of the most beautiful things in life, because you reach the deepest level of intimacy with that person who is also your best friend.

4.3 Conclusion

We all love to have fun, but sometimes we feel guilty because we think we are wasting our time. However, we have learned that fun and entertainment are gifts from God, given to us to bring us closer to Him. We should remember this when we plan our activities, and not forget to thank God for such a good and perfect gift.

Even in the midst of fun, we must have order and beware of excesses. But we are always allowed to free ourselves from the pressure of work through a fun time that fills us with peace. God reminds us that it is very healthy to do so in marriage and with our loved ones.

As Christians we should seek healthy fun, which is far from leading our lives into vices and misconceptions of "having a good time". The world teaches false fun, and we can become so shortsighted that we miss God's intentions for fun, play and celebration.

My Commitment to God

Exercises for Reflection and Practical Application

1. How did you do on the test assessment of how much you enjoy each other as a couple? Are your results similar to your spouse's?

2. Where do you need to improve in order to enjoy "face-to-face" dates with your spouse more?

3. Write down three "shoulder-to-shoulder" activities that you love to do with your partner that you commit to doing every month.

4. Spend time talking with your spouse about how you can enhance your "navel-to-navel" fun.

Bibliographical references

Groeschel, Craig y Groeschel Amy. (n.d.). ***Desde ahora en adelante: Cinco compromisos para proteger tu matrimonio (From This Day Forward: Five Commitments to Fail-Proof Your Marriage).***

Lesson 5. **How to Build a** *Healthy and Strong Family*

Author: **Ismael Martínez A.**

Biblical Text: Matthew 7:24-27

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

Purpose:

- **To know** a series of biblical principles that will allow us to build a healthy and strong marriage.

5.1 Introduction

God designed the family to build a home. It should be a pleasant place to live, a safe place so that each member of the family can experience peace, joy, and calmness, among other things. Sometimes the home will serve as an emotional refuge for everyone, and it is where the family can find support.

I’m sure that if we took a survey everyone would agree that we want to live in a healthy, strong, stable family. As a married couple, it’s our responsibility to provide a loving home, first for ourselves as a couple and then we must extend it to the rest of the family with whom we live.

At all times we must be aware that our children are built on the foundation on which we have built our home. Therefore, it is our responsibility to leave a legacy to the next generations. This is why we must lay a foundation that allows the family to live in an environment where they feel safe, have a sense of belonging, experience the joy of living, and can communicate freely and respectfully.

5.2 Development

5.2.1 The Family Is God's Creation

God created the family, in Genesis 1:27-28 we read:

"So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'"

But there is no such thing as a perfect family. In fact, we see in the Bible that the first family, Adam and Eve and their children, had serious problems. Cain and Abel, their sons, had a big quarrel that ultimately led to the death of one of Abel. The sons of Eli the priest behaved ungodly, making their father look bad and dishonoring the name of God. Abraham and Sarah had marital problems due to Abraham's involvement with his slave Hagar. And David, greatest of all kings, fell into lying, murder and adultery. He was an admirable king, but his family was a total mess.

So, when you think of your family and say: "We're not doing so well," it doesn't mean you can't do better. God wants our families to be strong and in blessing, the proof is in Job 1:10: "Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land."

It's not easy, but it's not impossible either. The purpose of this lesson is to give us the biblical keys to help us have strong families. It doesn't mean that we must have all of these keys, but it does mean that with God's help we should seek to put two or three into practice, because one will lead to the other. No matter what has happened to your family, don't give up, God put you there for a reason.

5.2.2 What Is A Strong Family?

So, what is a strong family?

A strong and healthy family defined by the Ministry of Health of Paraguay is:

One in which its members are in continuous search of their physical, mental, social well-being and maintain favorable conditions to preserve and foster their development, respecting their dignity, expectations and needs; they live adequately resolving conflicts among its members and in a healthy

environment, being responsible for their individual and family decisions, promoting principles, values, as well as positive attitudes for life.

It is the space where a physical and relational environment of the family group can be built, which favors the human development of its members and allows them to reach their optimum potential, respecting their dignity according to their expectations and needs.

For us, we would say that a healthy home is one that is built on the foundation of the Rock which is Christ. This is very much in line with the definition given above.

We would only point out that: 1) The central purpose of a family is to honor and glorify God. 2) That we must nurture the family so that each member can develop all the potential that God has placed in them, and 3) the principles and values on which the family is based are the biblical principles that God has given us.

5.2.3 Characteristics Of A Strong And Healthy Family

In order to better understand the concept of a strong and healthy family we are going to study some of its main characteristics. Let's begin:

1. Parents Who Are Devoted To God

This is the most powerful ingredient. Do you want a strong family?

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts." Deuteronomy 6:5-6.

Some will say, dismiss me, it's impossible. But I want to tell you that it is not. The testimony of many families living in blessing tells us that it is not impossible. And this same principle also applies to families in which the parents are separated, the mother is single or blended families.

One statistic says that divorces have increased 136% in the last fifteen years. But, on the other hand, another statistic tells us that married couples who commit themselves before God at an altar and are active in a church are much less likely to divorce.

2. Parents Who Are Examples

Titus 2:7 says: *"In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness..."*

Then, again Paul says: *"Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do."* Philippians 3:17.

Children do the following: they listen to what we say, but they do what we do. We need to understand that children form habits that we allow, and their character is shaped by what they see at home. Sooner or later, they will definitely follow in our footsteps, for better or worse.

3. Parents Who Discipline With Love

In Proverbs 29:15 and 17 we read:

"A rod and a reprimand impart wisdom, but a child left undisciplined disgraces its mother. ... Discipline your children, and they will give you peace; they will bring you the delights you desire."

We need to recognize that the discipline of our children is our responsibility and no one else's. It's our responsibility to discipline our children. Any justification on our part in this regard does not glorify God and will only harm your children and yourself.

The work of instruction that our Lord commands us must be done in love and persistence. When you discipline, explain why you are disciplining and don't discipline when you're angry. If we do not discipline or restrain our children, their rebellion will grow and bear fruit.

If we follow God's counsel, we will see our children, by his grace, walking in wisdom (v. 15), and this will give us "peace..." and "... the delights you desire" (v. 17). Discipline exercised in God's wisdom, spares us much anxiety, pain and frustration!

4. Parents Who Truly Love Each Other

"However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband". Ephesians 5:33.

When my kids were little, it was funny to see the look on their kids' faces, as if to say "how corny", when they saw me kissing or hugging their mother. Although children may take it as superficial, deep down, displays of affection between parents can have a calming effect on children.

Children may translate those kisses on the cheek, hands held during walks or hugs on the couch as proof positive of a strong relationship as a family. Because seeing their parents really love each other gives your children security, makes them self-confident and strong. They think, "I want that kind of love for myself."

This evidence of a loving connection between us, their parents, can allow children to let go of the worries that children may have about separation and divorce.

5. Parents Who Educate Their Children With Biblical Principles

God's Word instructs us:

"These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up." Deuteronomy 6:6-7.

Who will be more effective in teaching your children to pray and obey God's Word? The pastor or teacher at church who spends an hour with your children once a week, or you, who spends 24 hours a day, 7 days a week with them. You will save yourself a lot of headaches if you teach them the Word of God. Don't preach a sermon, but give them advice based on biblical principles.

- Take them to church.
- Have family devotions.
- Invite them to watch a Christian movie.
- Buy them a book.
- Make sure they each have their own Bible, and above all,
- Teach them to trust God.



6. Parents Who Take Care Of Each Other

In Genesis 13:8 we find the following: *"So Abram said to Lot, 'Let's not have any quarreling between you and me, or between your herders and mine, for we are close relatives!'"*

That's what strong families do! They look out for each other and avoid quarreling with each other. Love is what prevails between them. So, when someone in your family suffers and you don't, something is wrong, because they are part of you. Family should be loved and cared for at all costs.

Maybe you have been a father, mother, son, or daughter who has treated your family badly and you say, "but that was a long time ago." Well, let me tell you, it still hurts them. Reach out to them, tell them how sorry you are. It's never too late to heal the soul wounds of your family members.

This is the family God gave you and He wants to make it a strong and healthy family.

5.3 Conclusion

In this lesson we have learned that a married couple must build a strong and healthy family day by day. Even families with these characteristics will have their problems, but the biblical foundations on which the marriage built the family will allow them to emerge stronger in every adversity and every conflict they face.

Remember that part of the characteristics of a strong and healthy family are: 1) Parents who are consecrated to God, 2) Parents who are examples, 3) Parents who discipline with love, 4) Parents who truly love each other, 5) Parents who educate their children with Biblical principles, 6) Parents who take care of each other.

We give thanks for this lesson. We encourage you to review each of these principles that will enable you to build a strong and healthy family.

My Commitment to God

Exercises for Reflection and Practical Application

1. How do you define a strong and healthy family?

2. What are the main characteristics you have studied that distinguish a strong, healthy family? Can you identify any other important characteristics?

3. If you were to do a self-assessment, how would you rate yourself on each of these characteristics of a strong and healthy families?

4. Choose the two characteristics in which you rated yourself the lowest. What might be some actions you could take to improve these characteristics in your marriage?

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Lesson 6. **Lessons in Nehemiah for** *Your Marriage & Family*

Author: **Magdiel Martínez A.**

Biblical Text: *Nehemiah 4:14*

"After I looked things over, I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, 'Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your families, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes.'"

Purpose:

- **To find** a series of principles that will help us to build a healthy marriage, even in those cases where we find ourselves in ruins.

6.1 Introduction

When we read the book of Nehemiah, we can see how the news of the destruction of his nation was devastating and highly distressing. His land and the city of his fathers was desolate, ruined and in deep crisis. God's judgment through the Babylonian empire had left the city in ruins.

What can we do in the face of the news of ruin, pain, and death that we hear about? We usually complain or struggle to respond appropriately. The effects of the pain and humiliation of the crisis prevents us from responding appropriately. Many people sink into depression, fear, and anguish, but there are a few who react spiritually.

That usually happens in our marriage and family. The Bible warns us that the enemy comes to steal, kill, and destroy. Therefore, in this lesson we are going to learn, based on the book of Nehemiah, some principles of how we can restore our marriages and families, no matter how big or old the problems are that we are facing.

6.2 Development

6.2.1 In Times Of Crisis, Seek Divine Help

Nehemiah faced a time of crisis, but he had a spiritual response. Nehemiah sought God, interceded for his nation, and then acted to see how he could restore the city. And this was his prayer:

"Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name.' They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand. Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man." Nehemiah 1:8-11

I invite you to read Nehemiah 1:1-11. Are you experiencing a crisis in your life or your marriage or your family? How do you react when facing that crisis? How can you apply God's Word to your life right now? Take time to pray for your family, your spouse, your children, your parents, your in-laws; do not limit yourself, God hears your prayers.

The first thing we must learn is to recognize that there is a problem, perhaps at a crisis level, in our marriage and family. The second thing is that we must go before God in prayer to seek the answer.

6.2.2 Let's Not Give Up On Being Restored

When Nehemiah arrived in the city, the first thing he did was an inspection to see visually the situation of the city. What he found was ruin, misery, and humiliation. The picture of crisis was overwhelming, the future did not seem to bode well. Shame and humiliation dominated the city. Nehemiah narrates it this way:

"... so I went up the valley by night, examining the wall. Finally, I turned back and reentered through the Valley Gate. The officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, because as yet I had said nothing to the Jews or the priests or nobles or officials or any others who would be doing the work.

Then I said to them: 'You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of

Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace.' I also told them about the gracious hand of my God on me and what the king had said to me.

They replied, 'Let us start rebuilding.' So they began this good work.

But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official and Geshem the Arab heard about it, they mocked and ridiculed us. 'What is this you are doing?' they asked. 'Are you rebelling against the king?'

I answered them by saying, 'The God of heaven will give us success. We his servants will start rebuilding, but as for you, you have no share in Jerusalem or any claim or historic right to it.'"

Nehemiah 2:15-20.

As a marriage and family, we are not exempt from finding ourselves in a similar situation. Perhaps we even have people who laugh at our current situation. Perhaps a child left home on bad terms, possibly we lost a good job, or maybe we had to sell some property to deal with a crisis.

But what should we do in the face of the dominance of disgrace? Undoubtedly, we must rise up, take action and no longer submit to defeat. Nehemiah called upon the people to rise up and build the city. He became a restorer of fallen walls and a warrior against disgrace.

Let us always keep in mind that God is in control of everything.

The days we live in are days of challenges, ruin, and disgrace, but the children of God do not submit to disgrace. On the contrary, we rise up in faith to build anew what God has for our family and nation.

What should you do to overcome the effects of this crisis in your life or family? Let's remember Nehemiah's statement, "*The God of heaven will give us success.*" We can do it, first as spouses, then we can unite the children, approach Him and ask Him to restore us, to restore our family, our economy, our health. Let's remember that God is in control of everything.

6.2.3 Courage: Let's Get Down To Work

We have just faced a pandemic whose aftermath is still present in many marriages. We face problems due to health issues, lack of work, insufficient economy, loss of a family member, among other consequences. In some homes, this has brought fear, anguish, discouragement, and questioning God, among other things. It is very probable that

discouragement has entered our homes, and the growth of the family's spiritual life has stopped.

We can learn from the way Nehemiah faced his own circumstance:

"Hear us, our God, for we are despised. Turn their insults back on their own heads. Give them over as plunder in a land of captivity. Do not cover up their guilt or blot out their sins from your sight, for they have thrown insults in the face of the builders.

So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart.

But when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the people of Ashdod heard that the repairs to Jerusalem's walls had gone ahead and that the gaps were being closed, they were very angry. They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it. But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat." Nehemiah 4:4-9

Nehemiah faced a voracious attack on his vision to restore the walls from his enemies. They attacked with scorn, contempt, criticism, conspiracy, death threats, discouragement, among other challenges. Nehemiah had to face all this in order to carry out his commission.

What do we do in the face of an outside threat? What are the enemies of our family today? How will you face them? It's time to continue building our families. It's time to build the walls of faith, prayer, biblical knowledge and worship of God, among other things. Let's move forward in building God's plan for his family!

6.2.4 The Army of God

The intention of the enemies of God's people in the days of Nehemiah was clear: to kill them and stop the work. Nehemiah's enemies wanted to stop the building of the walls and to keep the city in ruins. The crisis, the shortage of workers and the attack had this declared intention.

What was the intention of our enemy in using the pandemic? Everything we are experiencing seeks to cause death, not only physical, but above all, spiritual death. That we lose faith and therefore, stopped doing the work of God is the enemy intent. What God has begun to do in our lives, the enemy wants to stop, and end it. How do we face these destructive plans in our life and in our family?

Nehemiah focused the people on the Lord and motivated them to fight for their family and city. Now, we must focus on the Lord and not be dominated by fear. We need to arm ourselves with swords and spears, to fight for our family and nation.

Let us read what Nehemiah and the people of Israel did:

"When our enemies heard that we were aware of their plot and that God had frustrated it, we all returned to the wall, each to our own work.

From that day on, half of my men did the work, while the other half were equipped with spears, shields, bows and armor. The officers posted themselves behind all the people of Judah who were building the wall. Those who carried materials did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other." Nehemiah 4:15-17

If we organize ourselves as a family and stand up to fight for our family and for our faith, God will destroy the plan of darkness.

6.2.5 His Word, Our Sword

After the restoration of the physical walls, came the spiritual restoration of the people in Jerusalem. This is when Ezra, a priest, came into action. Ezra was a man with a deep knowledge of the Word of God. Ezra's function was to bring spiritual restoration to the people and one of the first things Ezra did was to restore the Word of God to the people.

In Nehemiah chapter 8 we can see the relevance of the law in the midst of a nation that was in ruins. Let's read a few verses:

"So on the first day of the seventh month Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand. He read it aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law.

Ezra the teacher of the Law stood on a high wooden platform built for the occasion ... Ezra opened the book. All the people could see him because he was standing above them; and as he opened it, the people all stood up. Ezra praised the Lord, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, 'Amen! Amen!' Then they bowed down and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground." Nehemiah 8:2-4a and 5-6

The result of reading the law was humility, worship of God, holiness, and deep surrender to the Lord, among other things.

"They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people understood what was being read.

Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and teacher of the Law, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, 'This day is holy to the Lord your God. Do not mourn or weep.' For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law." Nehemiah 8:8-9

In these days of crisis, we must not neglect the word of God, it must be our source of inspiration and guidance. That is why it is very important for use to be able to read God's Word, meditate on it and live it out in these troubled times. What do we need to do to love God's Word more?

6.3 Conclusion

Let's go before God as a couple and as a family, as Nehemiah did, and ask forgiveness for our sins. Let's honor God and remember His promises to grant us good success if we put Him first and lovingly obey His commandments. It's written that He will pour out His grace upon our life, our marriage, our children, our parents, our in-laws and our siblings. He knows the circumstance we are going through and can restore what the enemy and what we have damaged.

Let's pray, asking the Eternal God, who rules over all that exists, to restore our lives, our families, and everything that our current crisis has stolen or damaged. May He help us to make the necessary changes.

God of heaven, we thank you that we can live life without fear, we remember your promises and declare that we are warriors fighting for our family and our community. In the name of our Lord Jesus, amen.

My Commitment to God

Eternal God, thank you for revealing your will to us through the Bible, for your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. You will give us life in the midst of distress, though we are in danger, we will not forget your Word. In the name of our Lord Jesus, Amen.

Exercises for Reflection and Practical Application

1. Do you identify any problems, new or old, that are hindering the healthy growth of your family? What are they, in order of importance?

2. God offers us enough of His grace to move forward, even in very critical situations. What situation will you, as a couple, ask God to help restore you from (finances, health, relationships, etc.)? What part would you be responsible for doing?

3. How did Nehemiah react to the crisis and the attack of his enemies? What could we learn from him?

4. What is the Word of God's place of importance in your marriage? What do you need to do to love God's Word more?

Exercises for Reflection and Practical Application

Lesson 7. **Detoxify** *Your Marriage*

Author: **Magdiel Martínez A.**

*Biblical Text: **Psalms 51:10***

“Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.”

Purpose:

- **To recognize** that there are emotions, actions and relationships that can harm our marriages.
- **To develop** a plan to detoxify ourselves from emotions, actions or relationships that might harm our marriages.

7.1 Introduction

When we decide to get married, we are always full of illusion. We often imagine an ideal world, but over time things can go wrong. Today there are marriages that have deteriorated because of some practices that are not healthy for their growth.

In common terms we can say that we have acquired habits, made friendships or cultivated beliefs that harm us, because they take us away from fulfilling God's purpose for our life. Sometimes we are not aware that it is something harmful to us, so we do not seek to eliminate it.

In this lesson we are going to identify some things that, as a married couple, we must detoxify ourselves from by cutting them out.

7.2 Development

7.2.1 Stop Being Toxic

In any toxic relationship, it takes the people involved to work together to make that relationship low or high in toxicity. Let's be quite honest, we are all toxic in one way or another, and making excuses for ourselves does not help. We must start being responsible for those areas in our personality and temper that damage our relationships, and that is the first step to grow, to be better and to be a blessing to those around us.

All relationships begin with the first impression, and little by little we overcome it and get to know who we really are. One of the obstacles we must overcome is the awareness that we all have areas in our lives that are a clear expression of our shortcomings or weaknesses. We usually try to hide them, and always show the pleasant aspects of our tempers and character.

But soon we get tired of pretending, and then, in an oversight, our true self emerges, and the other person ignores us. There are three possible paths left:

- We can live in constant tension, trying to forget what they have discovered about us, or what we have discovered about them,
- We can end the relationship and never spend time together again, or
- We can learn to overlook each other's faults, and at the same time, be ourselves, inviting the other person to do the same, until we love each other in such a way that we help each other to grow. But I must make it clear that there must be co-responsibility, otherwise it will be hell for the one who is trying.

The Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, and made a request, let's read it now:

"Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry. 2 Timothy 4:11

What is interesting is that several years before this request, Paul had rejected Mark, after his first missionary journey through Asia Minor. The reason being that after Mark had started the trip, he abandoned them to return home, he wanted to be brave, but it seems that he still suffered from "mommitis" (unhealthy attachment to the mother). But as the years went by, he understood the importance of walking with others even when there are things we do not like or when they do not share our values as a whole.

At this point, it is worth reflecting on the following: How flexible are you with those who are different from you? How do you help to overcome tensions in your relationships?

7.2.2 Areas Where We Can Detoxify Our Marriage

1. The Scoring System

Many times, we live with the "scoring system", believing that if we behave well, we will be loved, if not, no one will love us. This system is considered fair by many. This system causes anxiety, rejection, comparisons, fears, jealousy, and the like. We get used to living with the idea that "we get what we deserve".

And we think that this is how our relationship with God is. He loves us if we behave in a certain way. And we live with a feeling of condemnation and sadness. We see life's challenges as "God abandoned us because we failed Him." This is a lie. To detoxify ourselves from this misconception, we need to understand the biblical concept of "Grace". We use this word in many ways: we use the word in hospitals and in works of kindness, we sing it in church, and we read it in the Bible. But do we understand it?

A deeper question would be: Has grace changed you? Has it shaped you? Have you been softened by it? Max Lucado explains what grace is in his book "Grace".

"God's grace is like a great flood, like rushing waters that sweep everything in its path, and it goes after you, it seeks you out. That grace disconnects you from insecurity and connects you to security in God, from deep overwhelm to a sense of freedom, from fear of dying to being ready to fly."

The grace of God can best be understood in these points.

1. Grace is something we do not deserve that God does for us anyway. We do not deserve to be forgiven or blessed or loved. God does what He does by His grace because He loves us.
2. It is not that our sins don't matter and for that reason God overlooks them. The truth is that there was One who came and paid for all our sins. His grace allows us to confidently approach God, because Jesus Christ paid our way into His presence.
3. God's grace enables us to live without masks.

The Apostle John tells us, *"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness"*¹ John 1:8-9. When we least deserve God is when we need him the most. When we deal with sin, when we feel discouraged, when we're in relationship or financial crises. That is why God tells us to come to Him when we are weary or burdened because He has the grace to help us overcome in spite of our weakness.

The best example can be found in the parable of the prodigal son. In spite of the fact that the son offended the Father in so many ways, the Father looks forward to his return and rejoices to see him come home. Would you do the same with your children? Would you do the same if it is your spouse who has failed? Let's practice grace and assume the responsibility that is ours to walk worthy of the One who called us.

2. Detoxify The Soul, Goodbye To Resentment

When God created us, He made us with three interrelated elements, which positively or negatively affect each other. Before Adam's fall, the relationship Adam and Eve experienced was harmonious and balanced, but when sin entered the scene, everything lost balance and harmony, leaving us in chaos and a process of constant deterioration.

The foods we eat nourish our bodies, muscles, bones, tendons, etc. However, there are also thoughts, emotions and feelings that nourish our soul and affect our reasoning, will and decisions.

We have all been betrayed, let down and hurt one or more times in life, whether by enemies or, in the saddest cases, by those we consider friends, and the feelings and emotions that arise in us are toxic food for our soul. The desire for revenge, resentment and hatred try to establish themselves in us, and little by little bitterness arises, which can lead us to lose our salvation.

Detoxifying the soul is a lifelong task, and we will need to carry out every recommendation day by day, until it becomes a habit in our lives. What emotions or feelings are intoxicating your soul? What stands in the way of you experiencing the emotions and feelings that God created for you? We can live with freedom in our souls, if we learn to get rid of those feelings and emotions that enslave and intoxicate us.

The Lord Jesus taught his disciples the following:

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that

you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."
Matthew 5:43-45

To love, to bless, to forgive, are voluntary actions, that implies that we can and must still exercise dominion over our soul, avoiding that it becomes enslaved by feelings and emotions that go against God's will. How do you react to the wounds that are inflicted on you? Are you ready to forgive and free your soul from resentment? Doing so is a decision that is ours to make, as we obey God.

3. Detoxify Yourself From Hurtful Words

Some of us were marked by our parents or loved ones, with their hurtful words when they called us "dumb", "lazy" or said "you're useless", etc. Because of these hurtful expressions, our heart and soul have lived with a feeling of rejection and deep resentment. Now we are unable to show love and affection to our loved ones.

So, we need to detoxify ourselves from those words that dwell in our memories and allow God to heal our souls, so that we can create a different story with our family.

It won't be a perfect story, because we will still remain limited and imperfect, but a better story. Words can hurt and the right ones can heal. There are words that crush and hurt you, they are known as toxic words. Toxic words are incredibly dangerous, not only when they are said to us, but even more so when you say them to others.

What are the toxic words infecting your life right now? Solomon understood the importance of words and the effects they can bring. He wrote: *"The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit"* Proverbs 18:21.

Our words are powerful. They have the power to kill and the power to give life. Throughout the book of Proverbs, Solomon often writes about the destructiveness or life-giving power of our words. He was well aware of this truth. As a result, Solomon encourages us to be aware of the words we speak and the positive and negative effects they can have.

What kind of words do you speak more, toxic or life-giving? Let us try to speak words of affirmation and love. Even when correcting, let's do so with the right words and making it clear that our motivation is love. Speak words of appreciation, of encouragement, of restoration, that always add value to those who listen to us and let's avoid creating a new generation that grows up with souls intoxicated by hurtful words. We need to forgive the people who hurt us, understand their humanity and limitation for the times they did not choose the right words and the right way to communicate their love and correction.

You will not forget the words, but by detoxifying yourself you will make the memory lose its power to generate resentment.



4. Detoxify Yourself From Bad Friendships

We are social beings, so we need to be in contact with other people. We need their company, correction, encouragement, and celebration. We are all valuable to God and to others, but we must also recognize that there are people around us who are toxic, who poison our environment and keep us from growing. Many of these people are people we love and with whom we have grown up, but little by little they rob us of our peace, energy and above all our desire to achieve God's design for our life.

How do we know if we should continue with those relationships? Or if it's time to continue on our way without them? The reality is that we are all can be a little toxic or very toxic to someone else. So let's ask a deeper question: What kind of influence do others exert on you? And what kind of influence do you exert on them?

- If they influence you in a positive way, you should value them even if you feel they make you tired, but you will have to have a sincere conversation with them to establish some kind of boundaries, which will allow you both to enjoy your relationship.
- But, if they exert a negative influence, if they are preventing you from growing and being transformed by God, then you must ask them to give you time and space, so that their toxicity stops influencing your life. If you exert a negative influence and you are the one hindering them, you have to decide if you will change to be a

blessing in their life. Paul wrote, *"Do not be misled: 'Bad company corrupts good character.' Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God—I say this to your shame."* 1 Corinthians 15:33-34

The Corinthian Christians had the wrong idea about Jesus. The reason was because they had maintained a friendship with the Jews who tried to influence them to deny the resurrection of Jesus, and because of their maintained friendship with the pagans, who also rejected the death and resurrection of Jesus, because a "god" would never die in such a vile and miserable way. That is why Paul points out that bad friendships spoil good habits. Who is exerting a negative influence in your life? How long will you allow them to prevent you from achieving God's design for your life?

7.3 Conclusion

Let's go before the Father and ask Him to help us detoxify our minds from the idea of trying to earn His love (as if it were a scoring system). May He help us to receive His love and live our lives as a token of love and gratitude, in the name of our Lord Jesus, amen. And may He also help us to avoid using this scoring system with our spouse and children.

Let us also ask the eternal God to help us, through His Holy Spirit, to forgive and free our soul from all the toxin that has filled it. Let us ask Him to guide us to overcome resentment and bitterness.

Likewise, let us ask our beloved God to give us the strength to forgive the offensive and harmful words that live in our memories. And, at the same time, may He give us the words of blessing for those around us, to edify and restore.

Let us ask our Heavenly Father to give us wisdom to recognize people who are a negative influence on us and help us to set limits or distance ourselves from them, until we can be a positive influence on them.

My Commitment to God

Exercises for Reflection and Practical Application

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4. Make an inventory of the friendships or marriages that you regularly spend time with. Which of them exert a good influence on you, so that they contribute to your growth? How can you improve these friendships and in so doing improve those relationships as well? Which friendships are a bad influence on you and you should avoid them?

Lesson 8. **Marriage** *Grows in Grace*

Author: **Oscar Gámez De León**

Biblical Text: 1 Corinthians 13:2

"If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing."

Purpose:

- **To understand** that marriage is a gift from God to man to grow in His Grace.

8.1 Introduction

Christian couples, like most couples in the world, are not exempt from the pressures that come from various circumstances. At times, various pressures will be heaped on our heads and will require a lot of our attention. In other cases, they will come with a crushing blow and pass us by, leaving damage in their wake. Still other times, those pesky pressures will settle over us like a dark cloud that will hang over us for months or even years. No couple is immune to the kind of pressures that have the potential to be a threat to a marriage. It is sad to know that many Christian marriages have separated violently under the same pressures.

The apostle Paul writes to the Corinthian church 13:2 "... **but [if I] do not have love, I am nothing...**" This love to which the apostle refers is agape love, which lends to the idea of a love feast, that is to say, an extravagance of love, making the other participate in our love, giving ourselves to the other. If our marriages were to experience triumph, prosperity, success, etc., but we were to lose our love for each other, it would be a partnership, not a marriage.

It's necessary to recognize that marriage is a gift from God for men and women to accompany and strengthen each other during these crises, growing together in Grace and love. Here are six ways to cultivate a love that perseveres.

8.2 Development

8.2.1 Grace In Our Marriage

Marriage is a work in progress that must be built every day, based on the Word of God. This requires that we always put forth our best effort to reach the end in harmony. However, our human effort is not enough. We need His grace to fill our hearts and direct our actions.

Since marriage is God's perfect design, when we focus on building it on the Rock, putting God at the center of it all, we can be sure that He will pour out His grace every day.

Ryan and Selena Frederick (2018) tell us about Grace in marriage:

A husband and wife in a gospel-centered marriage will never expect each other to be perfect. Instead, they expect to be insufficient, trusting that Jesus is more than enough to meet all their needs (2 Peter 1:3).

They also expect to experience repentance regularly, from both sides of the equation. That is the beauty of grace-fueled sanctification within the security of a covenant marriage: both spouses see their imperfection as they value repentance as the character-refining work of the Holy Spirit.

As God pours His grace into our marriage and family, it is up to us to do our part. In the following section we are going to study some things that are within our power to do to facilitate God's pouring of His grace into our marriage.

8.2.2 Principles For Growing In Grace

1. ***Total Commitment***

We must develop a total commitment to our partner, to the point of being a refuge for each other. A couple's relationship must be stronger than any pressure that threatens the emotional stability of either of them. We must commit that neither of us will face pressure alone.

Love that perseveres says, "I will stand up to this pressure with you, not because I have to, not because I promised, but because you are the most important thing in the world to me".



Ryan and Selena Frederick (2018) tell us about the love of one who has experienced the grace of God. Experiencing God's love in Christ forever changes the way we love, in three tangible ways.

First. Jesus shows us that real love is far more powerful, worthwhile, and gratifying than anything the world has to offer.

The gospel shows us God's incomparable love, empowers us to love in a similar way, and assures us that loving one another according to God's design, while not always easy, will always be worth it.

Second. The gospel shows us exactly what it means make a covenant, and what we hope to accomplish when we submit to loving one another within the confines of that covenant.

The more you experience grace, the greater your ability to give it.

Your marriage can be amazing when you both decide to love each other not based on each other's performance but based on the promises you have made.

Third. The gospel can transform the way you love by flooding your heart with grace, empathy, patience, and the ability to forgive.

2. Unconditional Acceptance

This action is an expression of love for our partner, no matter how good or bad he or she looks, no matter how much he or she wins or loses, how smart or dumb he or she is perceived, we will still love each other.

Marriage requires the couple to express their vows of unconditional love for each other, during good and bad times, during wealth or poverty, during sickness or health. Unconditional love decides to keep on loving even though the world throws us a lot of reasons to stop loving.

3. Deep Trust

Trust does not grow overnight; it must be enriched over time, as each person proves that they are trustworthy. From the courtship stage, trust begins to grow until it becomes an inseparable part of our marriage vows.

Trust must be born, grow and be maintained throughout a couple's relationship. What are each of us doing to nurture that trust?

4. ***Resilience***

Every crisis in married life presents an opportunity for love to persevere. Resilience is the capacity that helps us stay connected to our partners through crises until we reach the other side. Resilience is a service to our partners.

5. ***Enduring Faith***

For marital love to truly withstand the pressures of life, it must be founded on a sincere and abiding faith in God who designed marriage. Each of us can go our own way as we see fit, but we will live apart from God. Sometimes crises will throw us into the arms of God to reconsider His will in our marriage, allowing us to correct our ways before Him. Faith in God is vital to the marriage relationship.

6. ***Diligent Preparation***

For people who live in hurricane zones, being prepared long before the storm arrives is the right attitude; because once the wind picks up and begins its destructive work, there will be no more opportunity, only time to lament and take it as a hard lesson. So it happens in married life, we all live in a "storm zone", and as the crises and problems of life are never unleashed with prior warning; the time to prepare is during the calm, between one storm and another. Love that perseveres is founded on devotion and friendship that strengthens the couple before a storm breaks.

"In addition to giving us the strength to endure hardship, the gospel brings us an incomparable joy as we do so. Why? Because our hope is eternal, and the story we are part of is not about us. It's about Jesus. Every aspect of your marriage is designed by God for His eternal glory and your supreme joy. Through the gospel, your marriage has infinite power and purpose because it points to an infinite and powerful God."

Ryan and Selena Frederick (2018)

8.3 **Conclusion**

Marital love is about the two individuals who shape it. The decision to cultivate a crisis-proof love comes from the deliberate judgment and assent of the will of each individual in the marriage, as a matter of principle, duty and propriety according to the function of each. The man must love his wife, and the wife must honor her husband, and both must submit to God.

My Commitment to God

Exercises for Reflection and Practical Application

1. Can you identify some problems that could put your marriage and family at risk? What can you do to eliminate these problems?

2. How much trust do you think your spouse and children have in you? What are each of us doing to nurture that trust?

3. How can we be prepared for the "storms" that hit every marriage or family?

4. Are there any current "storms" that you are facing? How can you work together as a couple and as a family to "make it to safe harbor" without suffering loss?

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Lesson 9. *Managing Stress in the Marriage*

Author: **Ángel Rodríguez G.**

Biblical Text: John 16:33

*"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace.
In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."*

Purpose:

- **To understand** that when faced with any situation that causes stress in marriage, **we must first turn to God** to bring peace and give us wisdom to know how to act in each situation.

9.1 Introduction

Marriages face different circumstances on a daily basis and are confronted with events that create stress. Sometimes it may be because their environment at work is not very healthy. It may be because of job loss. Sometimes it's because the income is not sufficient to meet the needs of the family. It may be the lack of arrangements to take care of household chores, especially since many women today also work outside the home. It may be due to the illness of someone in the family or someone close to us. These and many others can be triggers of stress in marriage.

Poorly managed stress can bring many harmful things to our lives such as: illnesses, affected relationships, loss of our ability to concentrate, a decrease in our performance, among other harmful effects.

Therefore, we must learn what stress is. What produces stress. And is it possible to stop stress? What does God's Word say about living under stress? What can I do to stop stressing? We will study the answers to these and more questions in this lesson.

9.2 Development

9.2.1 Stress and the Bible

According to the World Health Organization, stress "...is a state of worry or mental tension generated by a difficult situation. All people have some degree of stress, as it

is a natural response to threats and other stimuli. It is the way we react to stress that determines how it affects our well-being.”

The National Library of Medicine defines stress as the body's response to physical, mental, or emotional tension.

It is good to know that there are two types of stress (Government of Mexico, 2020):

- **Positive stress:** is stress where the individual interacts with their stressor in an optimal way, helping their mind and body to feel joy, well-being and balance. It is one in which the tensions experienced are rewarded in some personal or professional way. The person who experiences it is characterized by being creative and always motivated.
- **Negative stress:** is stress that produces an overload of work that causes a physiological or psychological imbalance that decreases the productivity of the individual, causes diseases, and accelerates aging.

The problem of stress is so old that we can find references to it in the Bible. The Got Questions Blog (n.d.) shares the following:

Stress is a common human experience, particularly in a world where the demands on our time and attention seem endless. Our jobs, health, family, friends, and even ministry activities can overwhelm us. The ultimate solution to stress is to surrender our lives to God and ask for His wisdom regarding priorities, as well as His empowerment to do the things He has called us to do. He always gives enough, so we don't need to be defeated by stress.

Sometimes we get stressed out because of finances. But we must learn to trust that God will provide for the basic necessities of life. Jesus says:

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? ... Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?” (Matthew 6:25, 27).

As Got Questions puts it (n.d.), no matter what kind of stress we face, the starting point for handling it properly is Jesus Christ. Jesus encourages us greatly in John 14:1:

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me."

One of the passages that best reflects the idea on how to handle stress is:

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:6-7

At times, we may become stressed when facing a difficulty or trial. In this regard James 1:2-4 advises us as follows:

"Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything".

We see repeatedly that, in the face of stressful events, what we should do is to turn to God first. Here we share other passages in this regard.

The ultimate solution to stress is to surrender our lives to God and ask for His wisdom regarding priorities, as well as His empowerment to do the things He has called us to do. He always gives enough, so we don't not be defeated by stress.

- *"Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."* 1 Peter 5:7
- *"In my distress I called to the LORD; I called out to my God. From his temple he heard my voice; my cry came to his ears."* 2 Samuel 22:7
- *"When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought me joy."* Psalm 94:19
- *"Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress."* Psalm 107:6

Ultimately the Bible teaches us that if we do not address this stress, nothing good will come from it. On the contrary, we can get sick, see our relationships affected, lose the ability to concentrate, see a decrease our performance, as well as other harmful effects.

- *"Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?"* Matthew 6:27
- *"Anxiety weighs down the heart, but a kind word cheers it up."* Proverbs 12:25

9.2.2 Stress in Marriage

We must recognize that members of every marital partnership have always faced difficulties and problems that affect their relationship. Psychologists refer to these difficulties as marital stressors.

A marital stressor is any type of external influence, circumstance or event that strains or threatens the marital relationship. It can cause tension and discord between spouses, and even fuel bitterness that can destroy a relationship. But there can also be more subtle effects. Certain marital stressors cause both spouses to simply walk away from each other, even if the conflicts in their marriage are minimal or nonexistent. (Sweat, 2014)

Dr. T. (n.d.) mentions in this regard,

*No relationship is perfect. It is common knowledge that every couple, no matter how unique, goes through delicate moments. At the end of the day, that is what a relationship is: a connection between two people that is maintained over time. **Therefore, problems and stress are part of any normal couple relationship.***

9.2.3 Stressful Factors in Marriage

There are aspects that families face that we can assume influence the higher divorce rate:

- ***Due to economic necessity both spouses must go out to work*** and they don't have time to share with each other.
- ***Intimacy problems in marriage.*** Sometimes, because of the fatigue of all the activities (work, housework, etc.), you can end up tired and not have the desire to have that intimacy with your spouse.
- ***Financial problems and job loss that increased during the pandemic.*** The lack of money to cover basic needs is one of the main causes of stress that can lead to separation.
- ***Long work days.*** This leaves us exhausted, makes us more irritable and does not allow us to enjoy our spouse or children.



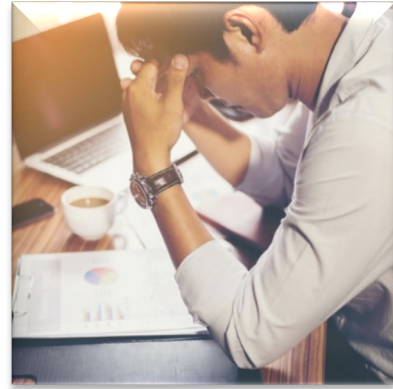
- ***The fast-paced lifestyle.*** Many couples fill their calendars with work, parenting, and housework, in addition to leisure projects and social activities. (Sweat, 2014).
- ***Electronic distractions.*** In many homes today, more and more time is spent watching the Internet, T.V. series or playing electronic games. This is detrimental to the quality of the relationship between the spouses and the rest of the family. "Nowadays there is a lack of undivided attention between a couple and that happens mostly because of all these electronic distractions," says Barbara Koppe, who is a marriage and family therapist. "People are plugged into their electronic devices virtually every minute of the day." (Sweat, 2014).
- ***Fear of breakup.*** It means feeling anguish that leads to recurring adverse thoughts. This is because fear is a source of stress that puts the body on alert. Thus, facing a possible breakup of the relationship is a painful moment of great tension, as well as fear. (Hello Lyfeestyle, 2020).
- ***Ethical and moral deterioration.*** Dr. Craig says that the factor that most influenced this rise in divorces was the ethical and moral deterioration.
- ***Infidelity on the Internet.*** Becky Sweat (2014) states that:

The Internet not only steals the time couples should be spending with each other, but it can also be a source of pornography, erotic fantasies, illicit relationships, cyber affairs, and ultimately the cause of the destruction of many marriages.
- ***Selfishness trumps commitment.*** In our postmodern society, many people have no inhibitions about leaving their marriage relationship if it becomes "too difficult" and is not meeting personal needs. (Sweat, 2014).

9.2.4 Consequences of Not Handling Stress Well

- The relationship wears down, causing fights and conflicts.
- It can lead to a number of illnesses.

- Being stressed can cause depression, sleep disturbances, sexual dysfunction, deterioration in family, work or social relationships, or violence towards others or oneself. Whoever suffers from it as a particular cause, so if you want to control it, you must identify the root or origin of such stress (Gov. of Mexico, 2020).
- It affects the healthy development of children.



The couple's arguments with lack of emotional control exacerbate the confrontation and make the problems grow in number and intensity. They inevitably end up damaging the family's function and the well-being of the children, to a greater extent when they take place in the children's presence. (Fariña, 2023)

9.2.5 Actions to Implement to Manage Marital Stress

Now, let's consider what we can do to adequately manage stress in our marriage. First, consider the following story presented by Larry Morris (2009).

A woman accompanied her husband to the doctor's office. After a checkup, the doctor called the wife in to talk to her alone.

He said, "Your husband is suffering from a very severe stress disorder. If you do not follow my instructions carefully, your husband will surely die."

"Every morning make him a healthy breakfast," he continued.

"Be indulgent all the time. For lunch, make him a nutritious meal. For dinner, prepare a good, special meal for him. Don't burden him with complaints."

"Don't discuss your problems with him; this will only make him more stressed. Don't nag him. And most importantly, make love to him regularly."

"If you can do this for the next 10 months to a year, I think your husband will recover his health completely."

On the way back to the house, the husband asked his wife, "What did the doctor say?"

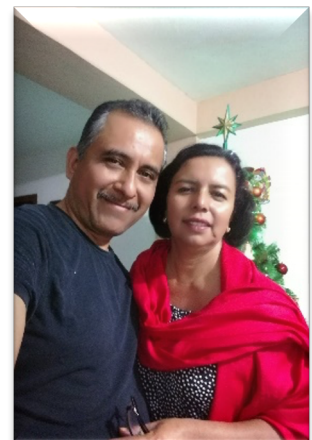
She replied, "He said you're going to die."

Well, don't take it too seriously. Actually, there are many things we can do to properly manage stress in our marriage. It just requires that we refocus on what God wants for our marriage and then implement a series of actions. Larry Morris (2009) himself suggests the following method for stress management: a) Anticipate, b) Admit, and c) Adjust.

Becky Sweat (2014) invites us to learn to face storms together. To do so, she suggests a series of steps we can take to decrease stress in marriage.

No matter what kind of stress we have in our lives, the starting point for managing it is Jesus Christ.

- ***Start lightening your schedule.*** We must restructure the way we use our time. Surely, we will find many areas of opportunity for activities that we can eliminate because they are not contributing anything to the growth of the marriage, according to God's will. Maybe we are wasting time watching the Internet, or too much television, or spending excessive time on social media. Maybe we are playing too many computer games. By cutting back on or eliminating some of these things, we will be in a position to spend more time together.
- ***Improve communication.*** It's important to talk about what is causing us stress. For example, maybe we are having financial problems. Well, it's time to sit down and talk about it and try to restructure our finances. If there is a need, ask for advice from a married couple who has experience in the subject.
- ***Be affectionate.*** Undoubtedly, being more affectionate, like in the earlier story of the doctor, and the advice he gave to the wife to reduce the husband's stress level. It should be clarified that the recommendation applies to both spouses.
- ***Plan time together.*** As a couple you should plan to spend time together as a couple. Also spend time with mutual friends, but don't fail to include time to serve together. I can tell you that, at times, I become very stressed. (I particularly remember one time where I was in danger of losing my job.) But when we went out to visit church families, we were able to leave stronger and more rested and we could also count our blessings.
 - Pray together.
 - Seek help.
 - Learn to emerge stronger from conflicts.
 - Discuss your expectations of each other.
 - Maintain intimacy.



9.3 Conclusion

We have learned that there is stress that produces harmful effects on our health and relationships. We explained that there are multiple stressors such as lack of money, our jobs, an illness, the loss of a loved one, among many others.

But the Word has taught us that no matter the cause or level of stress, the first step to start managing our stress properly is to focus on God and His purpose for our life.

Additionally, we have a series of practical recommendations that will help us to stop being stressed. Among them are: planning time together, lightening your schedule, seeking help for managing stress (if necessary), discussing our expectations of each other, learning to resolve conflicts, among other actions that, as a married couple, we can undertake together.

My Commitment to God

Exercises for Reflection and Practical Application

1. How can you improve your relationship with yourself? Can you identify "old wounds" that prevent you from relating healthily with others? What is the process of healing?

2. How has Grace helped you to fight pride in your relationships? How much do you need to keep working on this? How can you accomplish this?

3. How does a person's spiritual state affect their relationships?

4. What is your current spiritual state? How can you improve it and thus improve your relationships?

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Lesson 10. *A Grateful* Marriage

Author: **Ángel Rodríguez G.**

Biblical Text: Ephesians 5:20

*“...always giving thanks to God the Father for everything,
in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

Purpose:

- **To learn** as a couple to live with gratitude to God for all that He grants us.

10.1 Introduction

Every marriage faces good things, but there will also be times when there will be trials and difficulties.

How do we receive good things? Are we also expected to be thankful when we receive bad things? What can we say about the person who is not thankful for what he/she has received? Is it important for God to receive our gratitude? What does the Bible say about this?

10.2 Development

10.2.1 What Does It Mean To Be Grateful

Grateful is an adjective whose definition is: one who is grateful, who expresses or declares with deeds or words his gratitude and gives thanks for some privilege or benefit. One who feels gratitude for something.

The Bible teaches us a lot about being thankful. Thankfulness is the only appropriate response to God's generous grace. Our life and all that is good in it are gifts from God.

Gratitude is a feeling of appreciation and thankfulness for the blessings or benefits we have received. By cultivating an attitude of gratitude, we will be happier and stronger spiritually. We should express our gratitude to God on a regular basis, for the blessings He gives us and to other people for their acts of kindness towards us. (Compelling Truth, n.d.)

10.2.2 What Does the Bible Teach About Being Grateful

A. The main reason for our gratefulness is Christ's sacrifice so that we can have salvation.

"But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Corinthians 15:57

B. The Bible teaches us to be grateful (thankful) for everything.

"...give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."
1 Thessalonians 5:18

"...always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." Ephesians 5:20



C. The Bible teaches us to recognize that every blessing comes from God.

"Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows."
James 1:17

D. Gratefulness (Thankfulness) is part of our worship of God.

"I will praise you, Lord, with all my heart ... I will bow down toward your holy temple and will praise your name for your unfailing love and your faithfulness." Psalm 138:1a and 2a

I will praise you, Lord my God, with all my heart; I will glorify your name forever." Psalm 86:12

"He who brings thanksgiving as his sacrifice honors me..."
Psalm 50:23 (RSV)

E. Let gratefulness move us to prayer.

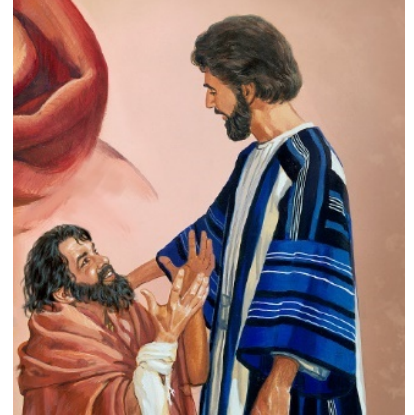
"Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful."
Colossians 4:2

10.2.3 What Being Thankful Produces.

It allows us to continue receiving new blessings.

Luke 17:11-19 describes how ten lepers met Jesus and His disciples. They stood a little way away and raised their voices, saying: "***Jesus, Master, have pity on us!***" Jesus directed them to go and stand before the priest, and as they went on their way they were healed.

The Bible tells us that only one of them returned to show his gratitude, at which Jesus asked about the other nine. "***Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?***" He was a Samaritan. "***Then he said to him, 'Rise and go; your faith has made you well.'***"



What a tremendous gift the man who had been a leper received! Now, besides being healed of his leprosy, which was already a great gift, he also received the gift of salvation. This is how God reacts to those who show their gratitude to Him.

From the attitude of the Samaritan and Jesus' reproach of the nine who do not return to show thanks, we can draw another conclusion: that our thanksgiving gives glory to God and prepares us to receive more of His blessings.

It makes us happy.

It is not happiness that makes us thankful; it is gratitude that makes us happy. We all know people who have everything they need to be happy, and yet they are not happy, simply because they are not thankful for what they have. On the other hand, we all know people who are not fortunate at all, and yet radiate joy, simply because even in the midst of their misery they are grateful. Thus, gratitude is the key to happiness. (David Steindl-Rast)

It enables us to worship God at all times.

Not even the hardest trials changed Paul's attitude. It is very interesting to study the time that Paul and Silas were flogged with rods and imprisoned in Philippi. Acts 16:23-25 describes that at midnight they sang hymns to God. Many in those circumstances would perhaps be lamenting, but Paul and Silas refused to allow circumstances to determine their attitudes.

10.2.4 Attitudes That Prevent Us From Being Grateful

When we think that we deserve something based on our merits.

Possibly this is what happened in the case of the ten lepers healed by Jesus. What is the cause of the Samaritan's thankfulness to Jesus? Seeing that God's mercy alone had healed him. He saw himself as unworthy of receiving God's grace. God had no obligation to heal him. Many people were lepers and were never healed. But God showed mercy to him and healed him. The others may have thought they deserved it, but this man, by God's grace, saw what they did not.

This can be extrapolated to things we may receive such as a job, a promotion, the ownership of some property, etc.

But we run the risk of thinking that everything we receive from our spouse is because "I deserve it" and "that was the least my spouse can do for me".

Believing oneself to be self-sufficient

This attitude, which corresponds more to an ungrateful person, is because a person attributes their accomplishments to themselves alone. These are the type of people who think only of themselves and talk as if they grew up alone. They forget what the Bible says in Psalm 100:3 *"Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture."*

Not knowing how to be kind

This type of ungrateful person never gives by grace what by grace he received, because he never sees it as a favor from God. He forgets the exhortation that Jesus makes to us:

"Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give." Matthew 10:8

In other words, we should give what we have received out of gratitude to God for what he did in freeing us from slavery and giving us a better life. The one who is grateful to God always extends favor to others.

10.2.5 How Can I Be More Grateful?

Count your blessings.

"Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits." Psalm 103:2

As mentioned in Biblia work. (n.d.) "this Psalm contains no petitions, only rejoicing! No complaints, no petitions, no supplications, no expression of disappointment, no expression of sorrow, no expression of fear, just pure, passionate, personal, perpetual praise pouring from David's heart!"

When we are facing problems, we run the risk of becoming pessimistic. However, the Bible invites us to meditate on all that God has already granted us and not let the difficulties we are facing or what we have suffered in the past make us forget the blessings that God continually gives us.

Meditate on all that God does.

We can see Joseph's grateful life when he chooses the names of his sons:

- Manasseh was his first son. The name Manasseh means "the one who makes one forget," for Joseph said, ***"It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household."*** (Genesis 41:51). Recall that because of the jealousy of his brothers Joseph was sold into slavery and separated from his father for many years.
- Ephraim was his second son. The name Ephraim means "fruitful," for Joseph said, ***"... because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering."*** (Genesis 41:52).

Evidently, Joseph was able to forget his suffering and move on to become fruitful and productive in a foreign land.

Even if you are not at your best now, be grateful.

Gratefulness is so crucial to the Christian life that it is one of the things we are commanded to do always and in all circumstances. When Paul was imprisoned in Rome, he wrote the letter to the Philippians to which he declares:

"I have received full payment and have more than enough. I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God."
Philippians 4:18

Paul was in prison, and he said he was happy, grateful and declares that he has plenty. What did he mean since he was in prison? To have his books to study the Scriptures? To have a basic meal? To have a cloak to cover himself from the cold? To have the basic items for his personal cleanliness? Could you as a married couple express the same gratefulness as Paul?

Meditate on the fact that what God does is for our good

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." Romans 8:28

Paul had the conviction that even all the trials he went through were allowed by God for his growth and for the growth of the Kingdom of God.

10.2.6 Showing My Appreciation To My Spouse

According to Panamerican Life (n.d.)

The gratitude that one spouse feels for the other lays the foundation for a strong and happy marriage. This was the conclusion of a University of Georgia study...To the scientists' surprise, the primary sign of marriage quality was gratitude. "Feeling valued directly influences how one feels about one's partner...." Lead author Professor Allen Barton added that this demonstrates "the power of giving thanks".

In this article from Panamerican Life (n.d.) the following is recommended for showing gratitude between spouses:

- **Express gratitude today.** If you feel you haven't expressed enough gratitude to your spouse, there's still time. It's never too late to start. Tell your spouse you're grateful for a gesture, a meal, a moment, the fact that you share life together.
- **Say thank you in writing.** This is a beautiful, romantic, and lasting gesture: surely that card will remain in a diary, a book, or a drawer for years.
- **Verbalize your thanks.** Many times, we think that gratitude is implicit, and that's why we don't make it explicit. Tell your partner that you are grateful for having them as your partner.

- **Develop the habit of expressing gratitude.** Expressing gratitude helps to consolidate deep feelings you have for the other person. It also makes the other person happy, which is reason enough to express it out loud.
- **You are not fragile because you are grateful.** The person who can express gratitude to his or her spouse, not only shows love, but also interest in making that relationship last in a harmonious and healthy way.
- **Don't only be grateful on anniversaries.** Thankfulness should be a daily practice. Thankfulness should be part of daily life. It will create a positive atmosphere, even in difficult times.
- **Yes, thank your husband if he does the dishes/or your wife if she does a carpentry job.** Any gesture that indicates that the spouse is helping you, relieving you of chores, is a reason to be grateful.
- **Notice how you feel if your spouse is traveling.** If you find it hard to be thankful because it's not a habit you have practiced often, notice how you feel when your spouse is away for work or an event. Maybe during that time when they are away, you realize how much you have to be thankful for. And when they return... tell them!
- **Teach your children to be thankful.** Knowing how to be thankful is something that can be learned and passed down from parent to child. From a young age, they can learn to say thank you, to understand that there are many things in life that are worth saying thank you for. That will help them to be better people, and perhaps to be more grateful to their own spouses.

Your marriage and your family are two of the most precious gifts God has given you. Take care of it! Biblia Work tells us:

Let's begin today a campaign of permanent thanksgiving for all we receive, starting with thanking God for what we have and for what we lack. Let us call it the Therapy of Gratitude. It will surely bring abundant blessings to the lives of many and to ourselves. It will restore relationships and strengthen the ones you already have.

It will produce enthusiasm and connect you with the right people and give you the opportunity to evangelize many to the glory of Jesus Christ.

10.3 Conclusion

Gratefulness is the only appropriate response to the generous grace we receive from Christ. Our life and all that is good in it are gifts from God. We should be grateful because God is worthy of our gratitude. It is only right to give Him credit for ***"Every good and perfect gift"*** that He gives us (James 1:17).

Every true Christian should practice being thankful to God first, then to one's spouse and to others with whom one interacts.

We should be grateful at all times, in all circumstances and even in the midst of sickness or trials. We must learn as a married couple to count our blessings instead of counting the daily problems we face.

It is important to emphasize that being thankful is much more than just saying thank you. To God it involves living a lifestyle that shows our authentic worship of Him. Likewise, thankfulness towards our spouse should be reflected in concrete actions, which when put into practice will improve the loving relationship between the two of you.

Thank your spouse for being your partner in life's adventure, for the love you have received, for hugging you, for listening to you, for being there when you have needed them, for providing for the home, for every detail or gesture that has benefited you, for helping you in your daily chores, for every prayer they pray for you, etc.

My Commitment to God

Exercises for Reflection and Practical Application

1. How can you improve on your gratefulness to God? Can you identify ways in which you can show your spouse your gratitude to them?

2. From the list given in the Panamerican Life article about showing thankfulness between spouses: How do you rate yourself on each point on a scale of 0 to 100? Can you identify other ways in which to show your spouse your gratefulness to them?

3. How does not being thankful affect a person's spiritual state?

4. Make a list as a married couple of the things for which you are thankful to God. What are you willing to do to show that thankfulness?

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Lesson 11. *A Model of Service* as a Married Couple

Author: **Ángel Rodríguez G.**

Biblical Text: Romans 16:3-5a

“Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. Greet also the church that meets at their house.”

Purpose:

- **To learn** how to serve together as a married couple by adding our gifts, talents, and vocations to disciple others.

11.1 Introduction

Sometimes we tend to read too quickly when a list of names appears in a Bible passage like in the letters of the apostle Paul. Sometimes we do not stop to meditate on the characters that appear there. Today, we will study how, in those passages, sometimes short and sometimes long, we can find precious treasures that we can learn from today.

Particularly we will be learning about a married couple in the times of the early church. They are Aquila and Priscilla.

11.2 Development

Aquila was a Jew native to Pontus, a region of northern Asia Minor. He and his wife, Priscilla (in some versions referred to as Prisca) had settled in Rome (Acts 18:2).

Jim and Elizabeth George (2014) note that Aquila and Priscilla left Rome when Emperor Claudius expelled all Jews from Rome because of strife that arose between Jews who had converted to Christianity and those who did not accept Jesus as the Christ.

From Rome they went to Corinth where they continued to in their trade of tentmaking, mainly for the Roman army and also continued to serve others. It was A.D. 50 when they met Paul in this city. Jim and Elizabeth George (2014) point out that:

Since Aquila and Priscilla were believers in Christ, it was easy for them to not only work with Paul in their common profession, but also in ministry alongside the apostle. They did so for the next year and a half, supporting and helping him as he preached the gospel. The Bible does not say, but it is possible that this devoted couple began to teach others as well.

11.2.1 What The Bible Tells Us About Priscilla and Aquila

The Bible mentions them in the following passages:

- **Acts 18:1-3**

¹ "After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. ² There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, ³ and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them."

- **Acts 18:18-19**

¹⁸ "Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time. Then he left the brothers and sisters and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. Before he sailed, he had his hair cut off at Cenchreae because of a vow he had taken. ¹⁹ They arrived at Ephesus, where Paul left Priscilla and Aquila. He himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews."

- **Acts 18:24-28**

²⁴ "Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. ²⁵ He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. ²⁶ He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately."

²⁷ "When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers and sisters encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. When he arrived, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed. ²⁸ For he vigorously refuted his Jewish opponents in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah."

- **1 Corinthians 16:19**

¹⁹ "The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house."

- **Romans 16:3-5a**

³ "Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus. ⁴ They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. ⁵ Greet also the church that meets at their house."

- **2 Timothy 4:19**

¹⁹ "Greet Priscilla and Aquila and the household of Onesiphorus."

Note some details:

- They knew and accepted Jesus Christ in their hearts, while they were in Rome. Possibly, they learned about and accepted Jesus during the trips that, as Jews, they made to Jerusalem for the religious festivals of the people of God.
- Whenever they are mentioned, they are referred to as "Aquila and Priscilla" or in reverse order, but always as a married couple. That is, they were both serving in the work.
- They serve in different places: Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, and then Rome again.
- They establish a church in their house in Ephesus and then in Rome. They were disciples making disciples.
- They show us that, if we set our minds to it, our marriage can be centered on Christ.
- They teach us that it is possible to combine our secular work and our ministry.
- In ministry, as in daily life, husband and wife are equally important. Note that they are always mentioned together.



11.2.2 Lessons For Us From Priscilla And Aquila

A. Disciples Who Are Discipled.

When they left Rome, because of Claudius' decree expelling the Jews from Rome, Aquila and Pricilla went to Corinth. There they met Paul. It is very probable that they met in the synagogue where Paul taught Jews and Greeks (Acts 18:4). Then, because they had the same trade, which was tentmaking, they met.

The Bible teaches us that Paul spent 18 months in Corinth. Imagine Aquila and Priscilla everyday learning from Paul. Whether it was during the days they spent together making tents or when they met in the synagogue, or when they met in the house of Justus because some in the synagogue did not accept the teaching about Jesus as the expected Christ.

Have you ever had the opportunity to have a pastor or a worker of God in your home? I invite you to host one. It will bless you greatly to hear not only their teaching about Christ, but also to learn about their testimony.

B. Disciple Leaders (Acts 18:26).

The Bible describes that Paul left Corinth with Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:18,19). They went to Ephesus where they stayed for a while. Then Paul left, for he intended to spend the next feast in Jerusalem (Acts 18:21).

Aquila and Priscilla remained in Ephesus, where later a man named Apollos arrived. The Bible describes him as an eloquent and fervent preacher. He taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John the Baptist.

Then Aquila and Priscilla took Apollos aside and corrected him in his teaching. They taught him what they had learned from their trips to Jerusalem while they were in Rome, but also what they had learned from Paul in Corinth, about the redemptive work of Christ and salvation by grace.

It is very important to see how Aquila and Priscilla helped Apollos. They called him aside and as loving parents and with great patience they taught him the part of the gospel that Apollos did not know. They did not rebuke him in public, they did not present themselves to Apollos as "great teachers," but as teachers learning to perfect themselves in discipleship in grace.

Jim and Elizabeth George (2012) wrote:

The sympathy, hospitality and advice of Aquila and Priscilla had a profound effect on the church at Corinth through Apollos: "When he arrived, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed. For he vigorously refuted his Jewish opponents in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah (Acts 18:27-28). The Church throughout history has benefited from a faithful couple who gave themselves to Jesus and to the service of their neighbor.

It also emphasizes the sound doctrine that was taught to Apollos. This is due to the correct teaching of the doctrine of salvation by grace that he received from Priscilla and Aquila. As a discipler, it is a priority that we are correctly trained. It is not enough to be eloquent and speak boldly as Apollos did before he met Priscilla and Aquila. Discipleship in grace requires lifelong learning.

Not only did they do that, but they introduced him to the church in Achaia where Apollos wanted to go to preach boldly. If we reflect on this, we can see how the influence of these servants, Aquila and Priscilla, extended beyond a local church through the disciples formed and the leaders developed. The Word teaches that the later preaching of Apollos was of great benefit.

C. They Established A Church In Their House.

It is very interesting to note Paul's expression *"the church that meets at their house"* when referring to Aquila and Priscilla. He does this in the following passages:

- *"...the church that meets at their house."* Romans 16:5
- And in 1 Corinthians 16:19: *"The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house."*

Aquila and Priscilla had a church that met in their house both in Ephesus and then in Rome, to which they returned, when the persecution of the Jews intensified. We see this in Paul's letter to Timothy during his imprisonment in Rome, when he was about to be executed by the Roman Emperor.

Have you had the opportunity to meet in a small group to disciple others or to be discipled? I can guarantee you that those who are part of a small group have the great possibility of not only remaining in Christ, but of continuing to grow in His grace. Now imagine serving by offering your home as a meeting place for a small group.

D. They Served Where They Were Needed (2 Timothy 4:19)

Jim and Elizabeth George (2012) point out that this couple was willing to change homes whenever necessary. And on most occasions such as Rome, Corinth, and Ephesus, they were willing to serve.

Jim and Elizabeth describe it this way "This dynamic duo had played a pivotal role in three important ministries of the New Testament church-Rome, Corinth, and Ephesus."

- They were with Paul in Corinth.
- They were in Ephesus with Timothy.
- They were in Rome.

It is very edifying to see how Paul, in his last writing, ends by saying goodbye to this married couple. 2 Timothy 4:19: "*Greet Priscilla and Aquila....*" That was the farewell of this great servant who by the grace of God was used in a great way to take the gospel to the Gentiles.

11.3 Conclusion

We are all called to make disciples according to the universal priesthood that every Christian should exercise. Paul Navarrete (2019) points out:

Aquila was not an elder or deacon, he was a simple tentmaker, he understood that discipleship is the work of each member of a congregation, he arranged with his wife, his gifts, his resources, his own marriage in servitude for others, that is true disciple-making service.

Now, we must emphasize that it is of utmost importance to have a good doctrinal basis of the gospel of Grace in Christ Jesus. And it is equally important to put His Holy Word into practice. We should continually be discipled by others even as we disciple others.

Whenever we read that the wife is the ideal helper of the husband, we usually think only of forming the family. Today we can learn that she is often the ideal helper in developing our ministerial life as well.

My Commitment to God

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Exercises for Reflection and Practical Application

1. As a married couple, how much time, money, service, and sacrifices have you made for those you consider your brothers and sisters? Who have you currently been serving through discipleship?

2. Are you taking advantage of all the opportunities at hand to be discipled? What are you doing to take advantage of how to learn to grow as a couple? Who is currently discipling you?

3. Have you had the opportunity as a couple to disciple or mentor others? How could you prepare to do so? Make a list of three couples or people you might propose to disciple or mentor.

4. If you would like to offer your home as a place for yourself and others to be discipled in grace, what requirements should you meet? How could you prepare to welcome a group into your home?

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Lesson 12. *Preventing and Healing* Rejection

Author: **Ángel Rodríguez G.**

Biblical Text: Psalm 27:10

"Though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me."

Purpose:

- **To find out** if there are any wounds of rejection in your marriage.
- **To work** to heal the wounds in your marriage.
- **To work** together to prevent your children from suffering rejection.

12.1 Introduction

All people, including God's children, can experience rejection from friends and family or from people not so close to us. Sometimes we are not aware that we carry deep wounds because of rejection and so we bring them with us to our marriage.

But these wounds hinder our spiritual development and consequently affect our marriage, our family, and our relationships in a serious way.

Therefore, it is important that we are able to identify the symptoms that can let us know if we are suffering from a wound of rejection. How can we heal from rejection? And how can we prevent our spouse and children from growing up with that kind of wound? That is what this lesson is about.

12.2 Development

12.2.1 What Is The Wound Of Rejection

Sara Sanchis (2023) states that:

The wound of rejection is a wound provoked at an emotional level inside a person who has suffered a certain experience of rejection in his relationship with one or more significant people in his environment and that has caused him a great deal of emotional pain. Although these wounds can be provoked by different people, in most cases the wound of rejection has its origin in the primary experience with parents and is subsequently reproduced in other types of future relationships such as a partner, friends, bosses, etc.

Gema Sánchez (2022) says that:

To reject means to resist, despise or deny, which we can translate into "not wanting" something or someone. This injury arises from the parents' rejection of their child or, on occasions, from feeling rejected by the parents, without there being any intention on their part.

12.2.2 Biblical Characters Who Suffered Rejection

In the Bible, we find several examples of biblical characters who experienced rejection and how God helped them to overcome it.

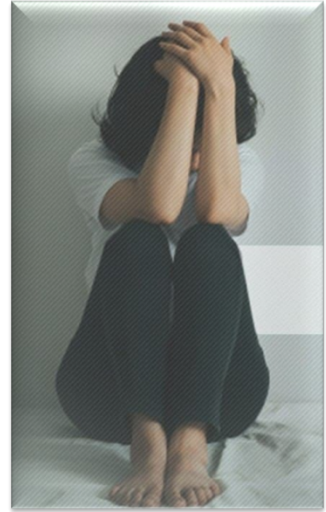
- David suffered the rejection of his brothers and King Saul.
- Joseph suffered the rejection of his brothers.
- Jesus suffered the rejection of the Jewish people, the religious leaders, and the rulers themselves. Jesus Himself expressed His pain in the face of rejection. We find reference to Jesus' pain in the Bible:
 - Luke 13:34: *"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing."*
 - Mark 12:10: *"Haven't you read this passage of Scripture: 'The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; ...'"*
 - John 15:18: *"If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first."*
 - Isaiah 53:3: *"He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem."*
- Paul suffered the rejection of the Jews.

12.2.3 Symptoms of the Wound of Rejection

Estela Lovo (n.d.) and Sara Sanchis (2023) identify the following symptoms produced by the wound of rejection:

- **Low self-esteem:** People who have experienced rejection often have a negative self-image and a sense of inferiority.

- **Fear of rejection:** Fear of rejection may lead to avoidance of social situations or isolation from others.
- **Insecurity:** Lack of confidence in oneself and others may be a consequence of rejection.
- **Depression:** People suffering from rejection may feel sadness, discouragement and hopelessness.
- **Fear of people** and great distrust in their relationships with them.
- **Personal inhibition** and lack of natural expression in one or more areas of life, due to the fear and distrust they've experienced.
- **A more or less continuous state of alertness** in personal interactions in order not to experience such unpleasant situations again.
- **Impulsivity, dependence and/or avoidance and flight** to avoid possible future situations of rejection. In this article you will find information on how to control impulsivity.
- **Difficulty in initiating personal relationships** or maintaining them over time.
- **Accumulated resentment** that can manifest itself on certain occasions in the face of possible personal interpretations of rejection.



12.2.4 Consequences of the Wound of Rejection

Sara Sanchis (2023) identifies some serious consequences of the wounds of rejection:

- **Trying to run away.** It is possible that as children they invent an imaginary world (Sanchez, 2022).
- **They create defense mechanisms that allow them to "forget" and avoid,** as much as possible, the pain caused by such a situation. The problem with these defense mechanisms is that they form "masks" that surely protect, but at the same time, they limit the natural, spontaneous, and joyful development of the person.

- **They create a shell that protects them from being rejected.** However, this prevents them from experiencing the positive aspects of relationships with others at the same time.
- **They become incapable of commitment** as they try to avoid possible and feared rejection later on.
- **They develop impulsive and sometimes aggressive behavior.** They do this to defend and protect themselves against the irrational perception of distrust in people.
- **They live with great distrust towards people,** great fear of life and have great difficulty in living a natural, happy and calm life within their relationships with others.

Gema Sánchez (2022) says that the rejection that a child may feel from their parents may trigger long-term internal and external consequences. She then cites Gracia, Lila and Musitu (2005), who emphasize that:

- **Among the internalized behaviors are:** passivity, apathy, social withdrawal, depressive feelings, self-destructive behaviors, nervous alterations and sleep problems.
- **Externalized behaviors include** impulsivity, hyperactivity, disobedience, destructive behavior, lack of self-control and violent behavior.



12.2.5 How To Heal The Wound Of Rejection

Estela Lovo (n.d.) describes the following actions to follow to heal from the wound of rejection:

- **Seek your identity in Christ:** remember that your identity is not in what other people think of you, but in what God says about you. Search the Bible for the truths God has said about you and believe them.
- **Seek God's approval:** Although rejection from people can be painful, remember that the most important thing is God's approval. He loves us unconditionally and will always be with us.

- **Seek professional help:** If the rejection you have experienced is very deep, do not hesitate to seek professional help. A therapist or counselor can help you process your emotions and find healthy ways to deal with them.
- **Talk to someone you trust:** Sometimes, we just need to talk to someone who will listen and understand. Find someone you trust, a friend, family member or spiritual leader, and share your feelings with them.
- **Forgive:** Forgiveness can be difficult, but it is essential to healing. Forgive people who have rejected you and free yourself from the pain and bitterness you have been carrying.
- **Seek opportunities to serve others:** Sometimes, rejection can make us feel worthless and useless. Seek opportunities to serve others and discover your purpose and value in life.

12.3 Conclusion

Let's be aware that sometimes we live with wounds caused by rejection. We have seen that these wounds can cause serious consequences such as fear of trusting people, disabling us to establish healthy relationships with others, diminishing our self-esteem and ultimately affecting our spiritual life.

We should not only take time to review our lives and identifying if we have symptoms that we are suffering because of rejection. We must be vigilant to prevent our spouse and children from suffering from rejection on our behalf.

We must first be honest with each other to see if we have any previous wounds from rejection or because we are currently feeling rejected. Then, we must monitor the status of our children's fear of rejection.

If we identify that one of our children is suffering from the wounds of rejection, we have seen a series of measures that we can implement to help bring healing.

- a) Seek our identity in Christ,
- b) Seek God's approval and not that of men,
- c) Seek professional help, if necessary,
- d) Talk to your spouse about what you are experiencing,
- e) Learn to forgive so that God can heal, and
- f) Serve others to discover our purpose in life.

My Commitment to God

Exercises for Reflection and Practical Application

1. How can you improve your relationship with yourself? Can you identify "old hurts" that keep you from healthy relationships with others? What is the process for healing?

2. How has Grace helped you to fight pride in your relationships? How much do you need to continue to work on this? How can you do this?

3. How does a person's spiritual state affect their relationships?

4. What is your current spiritual state, how can you improve it, and as a consequence improve your relationships?

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