

Adult Ministries

Lessons for Married Couples 2021

By Ángel Rodríguez Gómez & Patty Rodríguez Rubio
Mesoamerica Region



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Church of the Nazarene
Mesoamerica Region

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Presentation

The Church of the Nazarene's Sunday School and Discipleship Ministry (SDMI) is organized and developed by Adult Ministries, Youth Ministries and Children's Ministries.

This material is part of the Adult Ministry of SDMI and aims to help members of the Church of the Nazarene get to know the biblical teaching on the holy life of marriage and put it into practice in their daily lives, in order that they might both grow more like Jesus Christ.

The areas and objectives for this Couples' Ministry are the following:

A. Spiritual area:

- To encourage couples to be consecrated under the direction of the Holy Spirit.
- To share the gospel with other couples.
- To strengthen the worship of God and the devotional life.

B. Ministerial area:

- To recognize that couples have a responsibility for the preservation and growth of the church.
- To fortify the building up of families and the church.
- To offer help and encouragement for married couples in the church.

C. Family area:

- That couples learn to build their homes on the principles and values of the Kingdom of God as manifested in the Bible.
- That they learn to apply biblical principles and values for good marriage relationships.
- That they put into practice biblical principles and values for raising children.

The book contains 12 lessons that can be shared one per month in the meetings for couples. Each lesson contains:

Learning objectives.

These refer to the expected achievements of the student at the end of the lesson studied.

Introduction.

An initial presentation that contextualizes the topic to be addressed, in order to put the reader into the picture.

Development of the topic.

For didactic purposes, these lessons have been written in simple, dynamic language and connect with the ideas of the contemporary world.

Conclusion of the main teaching.

At the end of each lesson, a brief conclusion of what has been learned will be made. This conclusion can be summarized at the beginning of the next class.

Dynamics or activities:

Individual or group learning activities or dynamics related to the topic studied are suggested. These can be done in the group, although it's recommended that each participant have their own book.

Biblical text: 1 Cor. 13:4-8

“Love is patient, love is kind. It doesn’t envy, it doesn’t boast, it isn’t proud. It doesn’t dishonor others, it isn’t self-seeking, it isn’t easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love doesn’t delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.”

Learning Objectives:

- **Explain** the characteristics of agape love.
- Get each couple to **carry out** an initial self-evaluation of how many of these characteristics are present in them.
- Encourage them to **decide** to improve those areas where they detected deficiencies.
- Get each couple to **plan** where they can improve in these areas.



2.3 1.1 Introduction

We’re always hearing different attempts at definitions about what love is. People sing about it, write poems and make films about love, etc. However for the Christian, the guidelines must be given by the Bible. In the Bible, we have the correct parameter to judge what true love is.

In this lesson, we’re going to make a general introduction aimed at answering the question about what the characteristics or indicators are that show that we’re loving others as Jesus asks us to. We’ll take the passage from 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 as the basis of our study. This isn’t, of course, the only biblical passage which points to the concept of Christian love.

2.4 1.2 Development

1.2.1 Different types of love that we find in the Bible

In the Bible we’ll find four types of love:

- **Eros** which refers to romantic love. Eros is a word of Greek origin that means sensual, romantic and erotic love. In the book of the Song of Songs 7:6-9, reference is made to this type of love between couples signifying that it must be present within the marriage.
- **Storge** which defines love in a family. It describes the intimate and affectionate union that originates in the family between parents and children or siblings. We can find it in Romans 12:10.
- **Philia** refers to filial love. That’s the love for our friends, highlighting the affection between loved ones, something we Christians can reflect with their neighbors. Proverbs 17:17 says that a friend is loving at all

times. We see it in the friendship between David and Jonathan, king Saul's son (1 Samuel 18: 1-3 and in chapter 20) as well as in the following New Testament passages: 1 Thess. 2:7, 1 Cor. 4:17, Philemon 1:9.

- **Agape**, represents the divine love of God. It's an enriching, perfect, absolute, sacrificial and pure love that God gives us. This love can be summed up in John 3:16. In 1 John 4:10, the apostle also refers to this kind of love. Paul describes it in Romans 5:8 when he talks about Jesus going to the cross out of love for us.

1.2.2 Characteristics of agape love. Part 1.

Based on 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 we're going to describe a series of characteristics briefly. In the following lessons we'll delve into some of them:

1. **Love is patient.** In other words, it knows how to wait despite difficulties and setbacks. For example, someone who gives their spouse the opportunity to correct a defect that they have already discussed together must have the patience to await the outcome. Maybe a wife has had to limit herself in some things due to her husband losing his job. Both of them must have patience to wait until they can have a regular income from him. A patient person perseveres to achieve their goal.
2. **Love is kind.** It's inclined to do good. This implies being nice to other people. By enjoying doing good, a person will seek to meet the needs of their spouse. That is, they'll always seek to be helpful.
3. **Love doesn't envy.** In marriage, couples shouldn't be competing. They should rejoice if, for example, one of them gets a better job than the other one. If we don't control envy, it can lead to serious consequences, as in the case of Cain and Abel. Rather than competition between spouses, there should be collaboration.
4. **Love doesn't boast.** Let's look at the negative aspect. To be boastful is synonymous with arrogance. When someone boasts, they believe themselves to be superior to others. They praise themselves. They are proud of having certain qualities. They think that life revolves around them. In short, they're conceited.
5. **Love isn't proud.** In other words, we're talking about humility, simplicity of spirit. A humble person doesn't attribute to him or herself what they may have achieved. On the contrary, they recognize that it's God who helps us achieve things. They also know how to give credit to other people where credit is due. On the other hand, someone who is proud has an excess of self-esteem and is conceited. We must be careful not to be proud, since that would distance us from God and our neighbors.
6. **Love doesn't dishonor others.** This refers to being nice, polite to other people. We can all treat our spouses well, that way, both will feel good. This will improve the relationship. Other versions translate it as not doing the wrong thing, that is, being careful not to offend, humiliate, or mistreat the other person.

1.2.3 Characteristics of love. Part 2.

7. **Love isn't self-seeking.** This means not putting our own needs or desires first, but being aware of the needs of our spouse.
8. **Love isn't easily angered.** This speaks to us of having self-control; knowing how to control ourselves when things don't go as expected. It also implies accepting other people's mistakes.
9. **Love keeps no record of wrongs.** In other words, we should not keep track of the offenses we may have received. This stops differences from making cracks in our relationships. The opposite is the person who, when faced with a conflict, begins to list all the mistakes and offenses of their spouse.

10. ***Love doesn't delight in evil.*** To love like this means always being fair in our treatment of others.
11. ***Love rejoices with the truth.*** Couples won't base their relationship on lies.
12. ***Love always protects.*** Couples will always watch each other's backs.
13. ***Love always trusts.*** In marriage we must trust each other. Without a doubt, communication plays an important role to help trust grow, and with it, the relationship is strengthened.
14. ***Love always hopes.*** Love always believes in a bright future
15. ***Love always perseveres.*** Many times in the middle of a relationship, problems such as job loss, illness, etc. will arise. Love will have the ability to withstand all these tests, bringing greater resilience to the relationship.
16. ***Love never fails.*** Through thick and thin, true love endures to the end, passing through the high moments and low ones that we have to face in this life.

1.2.4 How can we achieve this?

We can see that the standards that the Paul apostle sets us have "similar" characteristics to the love that God professes for us, remembering that He is God and we're humans. Somehow God wants us to practice *agape* love too. But we need to understand that with just human effort, we cannot achieve this high standard.

This is the standard of love that God asks of us Christians. He has given us the means to achieve it, the filling of His Spirit. We must develop the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5: 22-24):

- Love
- Joy
- Peace
- Forbearance
- Kindness
- Goodness
- Faithfulness
- Gentleness
- Self-control.

We observe that there is a "coincidence" between the characteristics in the definition of love in 1 Cor. 13:4-7 and the elements that make up the Fruit of the Spirit. In both lists appear: patience, kindness, self-control. Meekness describes a characteristic similar to humility.

In order to develop the fruit of the Spirit in our lives, we must first die to sin. We must leave the old carnal man behind. This is possible if we ask the Father to fill us with His Holy Spirit (Rom. 6:22).

As we "die" to the old man, we'll have better thoughts, express better words, perform better actions, and thus become more just and holy. (2 Peter 1: 3-9)

1.3 Conclusions

Love is the essential foundation of marriage. However, it isn't just any kind of "love." We must develop with God's help the characteristics mentioned in 1 Cor. 13:4-7.

This kind of love is only possible in us when:

- 1) We have made Jesus our personal savior and
- 2) We have asked God to fill us with His Holy Spirit.

That's what enables us to love as God calls us to love.

By taking care that this kind of love is the one professed within marriage, we reduce the possibility of failure. Furthermore, this love must be the engine that drives us to achieve God's purpose in our lives. It will also help us to be a model so that other couples who may not know Jesus will want to come to know him through what they see in our marriage.

Questions to meditate together:

1. If Jesus was going to evaluate you according to how you're loving, what aspects do you think He would ask you to improve?
2. What would you have to do to fix those things?
3. Why didn't you fix those things before? What can you do differently this time to improve?

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Forgiveness in marriage

Bible text: Col. 3:13

Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

Objectives:

- **Recognize** the importance of forgiveness to improve our marriages.
- **Decide** to apologize for our offenses in our marriage.
- **Learn** to forgive offenses, as Christ forgave us.

2.1 Introduction

As human beings, we'll never be exempt from offending our neighbors. This also includes failing our spouses. Sometimes these offenses are minor and it isn't hard to apologize. But unfortunately, sometimes the offenses can be more serious, and then it's difficult both to ask for forgiveness and to receive it. Lack of forgiveness causes deterioration in relationships and can often lead to divorce.

However, forgiveness is something God asks us to grant our offender. The Bible sets out the consequences for not forgiving. In this lesson, we're going to study these consequences. We'll also aid those who need to forgive an offender.

2.2 Development

2.2.1 *Reasons why we must forgive*

There are compelling reasons why the Christian should forgive. The main ones are as follows:

1. **God commands it.** When Peter asked Jesus how many times he should forgive, Jesus replied, up to seventy times seven. This implies that we must forgive as many times as necessary. Matthew 18:21,22
2. **It's a condition for receiving forgiveness.** When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, He shared with them the pattern of prayer that we know as the Lord's prayer. It includes the following statement: "*And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.*"

This implies that to receive God's forgiveness, we must be willing to forgive those who have offended us. Matthew 6: 9-15, particularly in verse 15, clearly says: "*But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.*"

3. **Our prayers can be blocked.** Jesus commands us to pray by bringing every need to the Father. He challenges us to do so in faith, but at the same time He warns us:
"And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins." Mark 11:25

2.2.2 Health consequences when we don't forgive

Many studies have shown that when a person doesn't forgive, they accumulate anger, frustration and resentment. This will cause serious health problems. Some of the health disorders that can be caused by unforgiveness are:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Hostility
- Raised blood pressure
- Migraines
- Sleeplessness
- Neuroses
- Higher possibility of having a heart attack

2.2.3 What we have to do to be forgiven

If we have failed to forgive our spouse or even another person, we must not take long to take the necessary measures before this begins to increasingly hamper our relationship with God and with the person we have offended. Therefore, in a simplified way, we can think of the following actions to take to solve the problem.

1. **Ask God to help us see our fault or sin.** We need to carry out an in-depth reflection so that the Holy Spirit can show us what we may not have seen or have not wanted to recognize. We need to ask ourselves, What's in my heart? Is there envy, aggressiveness, pride ... in me?
2. **Acknowledge that we have sinned.** Sometimes we can see sin in others, but not our own. Jesus had to tell Simon everything he didn't do: "You did not give me water for my feet ... You did not give me a kiss ... You did not put oil on my head" (Lk. 7: 44-46). This showed Peter that there are also sins of omission. On another occasion, Jesus told those who were about to stone the adulterous woman, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her" (John 8: 7). So, let's be careful because it isn't always easy for us to recognize when we've sinned.
3. **Repent of what you've done.** "If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them" (Luke 17: 3)
4. **Make the decision to ask for forgiveness.**
5. **Talk to the offended person to ask for forgiveness.** To be reconciled, you must express that you're sorry and ask for forgiveness.
6. **There will be a change in behavior** if the repentance is really genuine. Paul called them "works worthy of repentance" (Acts 26:20).

2.2.4 It's hard to forgive.

On many occasions, people can accumulate a lot of pain in their hearts for not knowing how to forgive the offenses received. We must be careful that this doesn't happen within the marriage. As we've seen, unforgiveness will affect us greatly because we'll be distanced from God and from the people we offended. In addition as mentioned before, it can cause a series of diseases.

We must recognize that at times, the offenses have been great and it's difficult for us to forgive. But surely in Christ we can do it. As we look forward, we'll be convinced that it will always be better to forgive than to accumulate resentment in our hearts. Not forgiving will put our spiritual life at risk. So, we encourage you to say like Paul, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13). Trust that God will give you the strength to forgive and the Holy Spirit can bring that much-needed peace to your heart.

As you're asking God to help you forgive, I invite you to think about the model of Jesus. He decided to suffer the worst of punishments - crucifixion, just out of love for us. We deserved to receive all that suffering, but He decided to put himself in our place and pay the price for us. But you know, he also did it for the person who has offended you. Perhaps one would humanly wish to cause suffering to that offender, but it turns out that Jesus also took their place and paid for their offences.

To aid in the forgiveness process, consider the steps suggested by G. Smalley (1998) to make it easier for us to forgive our offenders. Those who need to forgive should:

1. ***Identify what really bothered you (the offense).*** Sometimes we're experiencing discomfort, but it isn't clear to us what the root cause is. Let's ask God to help us clarify what exactly is the reason.
2. ***Give yourself permission to experience pain.*** It's normal to feel pain when we've been hurt. But the important thing is that we don't get stuck in that pain.
3. ***Try to understand the person who offended you.*** Remember that God asks us to: 1. Love our enemies and 2. Pray for them. (Matthew 5:44). Ultimately, our spouse isn't supposed to be worse than our worst enemy.
4. ***Freely forgive whoever offended you.*** In James 3:2, we're asked to be understanding because we all tend to make mistakes.
5. ***Learn something from this painful experience.*** There will always be lessons to be learned in every situation. Try to see what this experiences you've been through can teach you.
6. ***Communicate clearly what it is that has hurt you.*** Ask God to give you serenity as you approach the matter. Describe what your feelings are.
7. ***Reach out to the one who offended you.*** This can express what change you're expecting.

2.2.5 What forgiveness means

- Forgiveness doesn't mean that you agree with what the offender did. God hates sin. Let's remember what he said to that woman accused of adultery: "*Go and sin no more*" (John 8:19).
- It doesn't mean that you must necessarily continue being best friends or associating with the offender. Sometimes there may be serious repeated offenses. For example, if the problem is that there is violence, the advisable thing is a temporary separation until the offender changes through counseling and changes are observed.
- Forgiving and forgetting are not the same. However, it's about being prudent and aware, knowing that unforgiveness leads us to hatred and resentment.
- It doesn't mean allowing other people to abuse you.

2.6 Conclusions

As human beings, we can make mistakes and offend our spouses. When this happens, we must make the determination to acknowledge before God and before them that we have sinned. Sometimes it can be difficult to do so. But we must think about the consequences of not asking for forgiveness, because with this we deprive ourselves of God's forgiveness and theirs.

If, on the contrary, we have been offended, we have the responsibility not to let the annoyances accumulate in our hearts. This causes anger, and anger could lead to resentment. Various studies show that this can damage us not only the emotionally, but also physically, causing serious diseases.

Both offender and offended must take the necessary steps to correct what has been done wrong. It's extremely important that the offender shows genuine repentance and is willing to make the necessary changes to avoid falling into the same fault or sin. The most serious case of sin is adultery. In this case, the Bible gives permission to divorce. However, there are many cases where God has restored marriage. That is, even there, we must forgive and try to preserve our marriage.

Let's keep in mind that love is patient and kind. Love isn't envious or boastful or proud. It's not rude or selfish, and doesn't get angry easily, or hold a grudge. (1 Cor. 13:4-5). So, decide to forgive today. If we persist in not forgiving, the only one who has won is our enemy the devil, and those who lose out will be you and your spouse.

Questions to meditate

1. Are there things you should ask each other for forgiveness for? Give examples.
2. What things should you forgive your spouse for, even when the offense has been great?
3. Are there things in the past that you still haven't been able to let go of even though they keep hurting you? What can you do differently to achieve this?

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Lesson 3. **Big lessons from** *A small hummingbird*

Bible verse: *James 1:12*

Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.

Learning Objectives:

- **Get rid of** everything that represents "a burden" for our spiritual life.
- **Meditate** to see if we're going in the right spiritual direction.
- **Refocus** our marriage on the purpose that God has given us.

3.1 Introduction

When we get married, we embark on another stage of our lives, full of illusions and big dreams. However, our enemy the devil is going to put up all kinds of obstacles to destroy the family that God has allowed us to form. That's why we must be alert at all times. The Bible says that the devil walks around like a roaring lion trying to devour us (1 Peter 5: 8-9).

But I see marriage as another stage of the long journey that we must undertake to reach the goal, which is to earn the crown of life that Christ has promised us (2 Tim. 4: 7,8). So I invite you to refocus on the Flight Plan that Jesus has for each of our marriages. I think the problem sometimes is that like many, we're so excited to travel that we forget to review our car's manual in case we have a mishap or failure along the way.

But in the spiritual area, we cannot afford "the luxury" of not knowing the "Manual" of the medium that transports us to our final destination. This Manual is essential throughout our "spiritual flight" to reach the final goal. This Manual has already been given by God and is called the Bible. I invite you to reflect on some basic points that will allow us to reach a safe harbor. We'll do it through an analogy with one of the wonders of God's creation: hummingbirds. What can we learn about the spiritual realm from such a tiny bird? Let's keep on investigating.

3.2 Development

Listening to a sermon that gave some details about hummingbirds aroused in me a great interest to know how these birds, so attractive to many of us, can do so many feats. Therefore, through an analogy, we're going to review some coincidences, which I hope will be a blessing for your marriage. The idea is that this little bird can be a teaching instrument to help us learn.

3.2.1 *The hummingbird is a very small and light bird that must fly easily*

On average, a hummingbird measures 7.5 cm., but there are species, such as one that lives in Cuba, whose average size is only 5 cm. Depending on their species, they can weigh between 2.5 to 6.5 grams. The bird must be kept light, otherwise its overweight would demand more than its body could bear. So, it cannot gain weight, because that would cause its death by not being able to fly towards the flowers where it will find its food. It would simply die of starvation or in mid-flight from overexertion.

As a married couple, we sometimes bring hurts from our life before marriage. Maybe we were mistreated, maybe we had great disappointments in previous relationships or we were damaged even by the ones we love. To this must be added the wounds that we may be causing ourselves within marriage.

All of this accumulates and damages our hearts. The enemy turns it into negative emotions that will confuse us. But God always has an answer to every problem. He tells us: "forgive those who offend you." So, when we forgive, we release all those past burdens, allowing us to proceed with our life's journey; although we will meet with difficulties, trials and sufferings, we'll be able to see that we're continually advancing towards the goal. So, we must learn to "travel" lightly and leave all those burdens that threaten our physical, emotional and spiritual health in the hands of God.

3.2.2 It has a flight system that helps a lot, but doesn't completely reduce, the risk of colliding with something.

God designed them in such a way that they have developed a very sophisticated system that allows them to substantially reduce the risk of collisions during their flight. It's much better than that of many insects and also that of many other birds.

We're not exempt from making mistakes and suffering "collisions," crashing into sin. However, if we take the warnings that appear on the road before crashing into it, God will give us the strength to avoid it. *"The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and pay the penalty"* (Prov. 22: 3).

We need to live an intimate relationship with Jesus so that our spiritual life is always alert to all that threat from our enemy. We must also have the determination to reach the goal and not allow ourselves to be seduced by what this world can offer us.

3.2.3 It's the only bird capable of flying in many different directions.

The hummingbird is the only bird designed to fly up, down, and even backward. As we say colloquially, it can fly in reverse. They also use this ability to escape from predators and defend their young.

This leads me to think that sometimes we can fall into potholes in our marriage, from which it costs a lot to get out of. But we're also designed to do a "reverse" and retake the right path that God has for us.

If for some reason our marriage has been out of focus, God in his mercy awaits us, like the father for the prodigal son. There is no longer any need to continue eating the pigs' food in the pigpen. (Luke 15: 11-32)

3.2.4 While it consumes a lot, it also gives a lot.

When we think about hummingbirds going from flower to flower feeding on their nectar, we may think that they only receive from the flowers. But looking more closely at God's perfect design, we find that it's part of a beautiful cycle. The hummingbird not only takes the nectar, but it also takes the pollen attached to its beak and deposits it into another flower. The pollination process then takes place that allows the reproduction of these plants. God uses these tiny birds to bring new life!

How should we be with respect to others? We must be intentional and share with others. As relational beings, we must have contact with other married couples. Every time we're with them, we'll try to find a way to bless them. We'll not only take advice, examples, or other support from them, but we'll joyfully have something to share that will bring them life in Christ Jesus. Doing so will also give meaning to our lives.

A hummingbird visits hundreds of flowers a day. As a married couple, we should set the goal of sharing with a certain number of married couples or people per week, with the purpose that God wants to use us to bring them life (in Christ).

3.2.5 No two nests are the same.

It's perhaps a very trivial piece of information, but I find it interesting to note that each hummingbird builds its nest in a different way from the others. We must learn that, just as each person is unique and unrepeatable, each home is unique. Let's not make life bitter by comparing ourselves with others. God knows why that friendly marriage is very good at certain things. God also knows why this other marriage has perhaps given more material goods than ours. Those are not correct measures of success. (1 Cor. 13: 4)

True success is for us to do the will of the Father and fulfill God's purpose for our lives and our marriage. It's the measure that God is going to use to judge us based on all the resources that He gives us. That's exactly what he will ask of us, no more ... no less.

3.2.6 They migrate to find a better climate and food sources.

In winter like other birds, hummingbirds migrate to other places. They do it because the environment where they live has become adverse. The climate and food no longer allow them to continue developing healthily.

As people, we can see when some relationships are no longer helping us to continue growing. On the contrary, they hinder us. Why don't we make the decision for a change "of scenery" when necessary? There are circles of colleagues or friends to whom we have tried to share Jesus, but over time there is no interest. It only causes us wear and tear and sometimes they begin to have a certain negative influence upon us. If this is the case, it's time to change the environment. (Prov. 16:28; 18:24; 22: 24,25)

3.2.7 They know how to choose flowers that heal some diseases.

I continue to be amazed at every new detail. A hummingbird learns to select those flowers that can bring healing to certain problems that the bird has.

Do we have friendly marriages that we can go to for healing? Are we being humble enough to search for those who can bring healing to our marriage? (Prov. 13:20, 27: 9)

3.2.8 It's capable of flying at great heights and distances.

There is one species, the red-throated hummingbird, that can migrate from the United States to Central America. That distance is 2,200 kilometers. If you think about its size on average being 7.5 cm, and if you compare it to the size of a human being, it would be the equivalent of a person traveling approximately 50,000 kilometers. That's equivalent to going one and a fourth times around the earth ... and they do it every year! As if that were not enough, they face winds, rains and big storms on these great journeys.

In the same way, God has made us with an extraordinary design. We're made for very big things. But sometimes we have fallen into a comfort zone by just getting by. We apply the classic "If it works, don't move it." What if God wants to stretch us to go beyond where we've been these last few years?

I'm not saying that what we're doing is wrong. I'm just saying that God always has something better. When talking about this, I can't help but think of examples:

- The case of Paul who had already planned for his next missionary trip. He began it by visiting the churches he had already planted, while looking to open a new work on the route already covered. But suddenly he had a vision that spoke to him urgently. Paul you must go to Macedonia ... (Acts 16: 6-15)
- The other case is Philip who was in Samaria, where God was using him greatly. (Acts 8: 4-25)

3.2.9 It constantly requires “filling its tank.”

Hummingbirds are the most active birds and they do it in an extraordinary way. That makes them consume all their reserves and it becomes urgent for them to return to the source that nourishes them. If they don't, they fall into a lethargy in which their vital functions slow down, and they would die without realizing it.

Can you imagine living in a marriage that, day after day, gives extra time and effort to building the family that God has given them? Can you imagine a family that participates in the ministry to which God has called them? Without a doubt, at the end of each day they feel exhausted; their energies have been consumed. This is a sign that indicates that they're already in the of the “spiritual reserve tank.” That's when they should immediately go to the source that will give them peace and rest, and listen softly to the voice of God saying: “Well guys, you've tried hard and you've achieved your goals for the day. Now go and rest and tomorrow I will give you new instructions. Ah! And don't forget that I wait for you early in the morning to fill the spiritual tank that will give you renewed strength to continue this beautiful journey, full of adventures.”

It's either that, or living in spiritual lethargy because of not being connected to Him (John 15: 5).

3.3 Conclusions

Jesus said *“Look at the birds of the sky, they do not sow, nor reap, nor gather into barns; and your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than them?”* So, let's learn to look around us and draw valuable lessons from these birds. On many occasions, the simplest people and things will have great lessons for us. The important thing is our attitudes.

We've learned or reviewed some principles that will help us persevere so that one day we can have access to the Kingdom of God for eternity. The most important issue isn't just "knowing" or recalling these principles. We know that learning requires changing something in our lives. If we're not willing to apply what is analyzed here, it will only be like when we go on public transport and listen to inconsequential talk from other unknown passengers.

So, we must check if we're shedding everything that represents a burden on our spiritual life. In the same way, we must observe those friends or colleagues that are hindering our healthy development. And, we must try to have friends who inspire us, advise us and help us heal wounds.

It's urgent that we intentionally and systematically seek the opportunity to share with others. Make it a point to disciple other couples.

But above all else, don't forget that outside of Christ, we can do nothing. So, let's make plans so that our relationship with Him is constant and growing.

Questions to meditate on:

1. Are there things that hinder you that you haven't been able to let go of?
2. Is it time for you to go back to Jesus after being away from Him?
3. Are there groups of friends who are stunting your growth who you should leave behind?
4. In what new ways do you think you can be a blessing to your friends?

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Bible verses: 2 Tim. 1:7; Phil. 4:4-13

“For the Spirit that God gave us doesn’t make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.”

Learning Objectives:

- **Interpret** biblical passages that show Jesus’ emotional health.
- **Contrast** the skills and abilities that distinguish emotionally intelligent people with how Jesus transmitted His message.

4.1 Introduction

Sometimes we observe that some begin their life as Christians with great enthusiasm. However, after a while we see that sometimes they begin to stop participating in the church ministries. Others even leave church, but no longer congregate in any other Christian church. Peter Scazzero (2008) calls them "deserters." He has observed that this happens because sometimes the problems of marriage, of a divorce, of raising children, of managing the home, begin to generate feelings of failure and depression.

If we add the problem of scarce economic resources, they end up overwhelmed. If they observe that part of their problems are also present in the families of the church, they can become discouraged. Then they become deserters after a time of frustration and disappointment.

P. Scazzero (2018) describes how he himself, even as a pastor, experienced something similar. After much analyzing, praying, and asking God to help him find the answer to this, he came to the following conclusion. "Emotional health and spiritual maturity are inseparable." That’s why in this lesson we’re going to study how to identify if we have emotional health.

Emotional health has been approached from various perspectives. For example, the concept of Emotional Intelligence is a topic that in the last three decades has been gaining increasing interest. Given this, as Christians we must ask ourselves if the way of conceiving Emotional Intelligence is compatible with biblical teachings. If not, we should refrain from applying it. If there is some truth in it, but it’s contradicted elsewhere with biblical teachings, then we must analyze in detail what that model says and what the model that God gives us in His Word says. After this, we must stay only with the biblical.

4.2 Development

Cano and Zea (2012) explain that "emotions are sudden and rapid alterations that we experience from our state of mind, most of the time due to ideas, memories or circumstances." Among the most common emotions are:

- | | |
|------------|------------|
| • Anger | • Surprise |
| • Sadness | • Disgust |
| • Fear | • Shame |
| • Pleasure | |

It’s important to note that emotions and feelings are different things. Feelings are of a longer permanence, while emotions are temporary alterations of one’s mood. However, feelings are determined by emotions.

4.2.1 Created as whole beings

God made us as people who are made up of various areas. You can see it when God asks us: *"You will love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength"* (Deuteronomy 6:5). So we must be aware that we have different aspects as people. If we're not aware of it, we can neglect one or more of these areas. The result will be that our development won't be the best and that will atrophy our capacities.

In the case of the emotional area, if we're not attentive to those signals that we experience in our relationships in our family, at work, at school, etc., we're going to face serious problems. Depending on the seriousness of things, we could see outcomes such as divorce, job loss, disintegration with the extended family, as well as serious behavior problems for the children at school that could lead to their expulsion.

Undoubtedly, in ministry we can also have serious problems if we don't take care of our emotional health. We won't be able to move towards God's purpose for our life, and our ministry will stagnate.

"It's impossible to have spiritual maturity if we're emotionally immature" Peter Scazzero

"Without a real integration of emotional health, Christian spirituality can be terrible for yourself, for your relationship with God, and the people around you." Peter Scazzero (2008)

4.2.2 What the Bible teaches about emotions

In the Bible we don't find emotional health as such, but we can observe multiple practical tips to develop an emotionally full life. Let's see some of them to take into account for improving our own emotional health.

- In the Psalms we see repeatedly that the source of our joy is God.
"...You will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand" (Psalm 16:11).
- Christian joy doesn't just come when everything is going well.
"Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior" (Habakkuk 3:17-18).
- The Bible also teaches us that mismanagement of emotions can ruin our entire life (even lose our salvation).
"Those who guard their lips preserve their lives, but those who speak rashly will come to ruin" (Proverbs 13:3).
- Emotions can lead us to a good path that will be reflected in a joyful heart. But if we're not emotionally healthy, we could be wasting away.
"A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones" (Proverbs 17:20).
- We see a clear warning not to be dominated by anger. Whoever doesn't learn to do this will offend the people with whom he relates.
"An angry person stirs up conflict, and a hot-tempered person commits many sins" (Proverbs 29:22).
- We have the Holy Spirit to guide us, instruct us, remind us, and help us become more like Christ (Romans 6; Ephesians 5:15-18).

- The Bible shows us is that God's desire is that we enjoy full health in all aspects.
"Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well" (3 John 1:2).

The Lord Jesus is our role model. He faced many very strong problems in his earthly ministry. But in every situation he faced, he left us an example of how each of us is expected to act. Ultimately, we're expected to grow in accordance with the stature of Christ. Let's look at some examples of how Jesus controlled his emotions.

- Jesus exhorts us to:
"Leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift" (Matt. 5:24).
- Jesus didn't get angry easily. In any case, when He did, it was with those who needed it. This happened when Jesus got angry with the money changers who were at the temple table.
- He forgave even those who crucified him (Luke 23:34).

4.2.3 Examples of mismanagement of emotions in the Bible and the consequences

Perhaps reviewing some cases in the Bible where emotions were mismanaged will help us understand the importance of developing healthy emotional reactions.

- Cain ended up killing his brother Abel. If we continue to be angry or upset, God warns us that we'll end up doing something wrong.
"Then the Lord said to Cain, 'Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast?'" (Gen. 4:6).
- On another occasion, fear caused Saul's army to be paralyzed by the threat that the giant Goliath would defeat them (1 Sam. 17:24).
"David said to Saul, 'Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him'" (1 Samuel 17:32).
- The prophet Jonah became very angry with God when he forgave the people of Nineveh. God had to correct Jonah by telling him that he had no reason to be "fired up with anger." He called him to have compassion for repentant sinners (Jonah 3: 10-4: 1).

4.2.4 How emotional health is reflected generally

If we're interested in developing good emotional health, we must be able to identify by means of some "indicators" if our emotional health is good. It will also serve to see about others, and if possible, be of help to them as well. Next, we're going to give a not exhaustive list of indicators of a person who has a healthy control over their emotions.

- Being usually cheerful doesn't mean that we're not in trouble. We put our trust in God. (Phil. 4:4-7).
- We can have fear but we don't let it dominate us.
- We have the peace of Christ in our hearts, even in the midst of adversity (John 14:27).
- We're usually in a good mood (Prov. 17:22).

Getting angry is easy, but getting angry in the right amount, with the right person, at the right time, is wise.

Aristotle

4.2.5 Self-knowledge of our emotions

For Daniel Goleman, self-knowledge is the ability to monitor our internal world, our thoughts and emotions as they arise. It's about paying attention to our inner state with a learner mind and an open heart. Our mind stores information about how we react to a certain event in order to form a representation of our emotional life. This information is conditioning our mind to react in a similar way when we meet it again in a similar event. Self-awareness then allows us to be aware of these conditionings of the mind.

For example, if you're angry, and you're self-aware, you won't only know that you're angry, but you can also determine the cause of the anger. In this way, you can use this knowledge to decide what to do, avoiding an uncontrolled reaction that can cause problems.

4.2.6 Control of emotions (self-control)

The management or control of emotions gives us the option of selecting the emotion we want to experience at a given moment, in a particular situation. This process requires a lot of practice and a strong amount of self-control to have the control that will allow us to be in charge of our emotions without becoming a victim of other people's actions. It's not about repressing emotions, but knowing how to control them and make use of those energies in something good for the person.

The Bible teaches us that by having the Holy Spirit in us, we can develop self-control. So, it isn't about mastering emotions "with our own strength," but as a result of having the Fruit of the Spirit. To say colloquially, whoever has the fullness of the Spirit has a kind of "thermostat" that allows them to regulate their mood, exercising adequate control over their emotions.

4.2.7 Principles for developing better emotional health

It should be emphasized that the development of good spiritual health should be the basis for later developing emotional health. After that, you can include other measures to improve your emotional health. Rick Warren shares the following principles with us. Although he suggests them for the time of the pandemic, they're applicable for day to day.

- Show grace to myself and others. Ephesians 2:8, 9.
- Begin and end by reading the Bible. During the day we're going to wear out, so we need to refill our "spiritual tank." Matthew 4:3-4.
- Follow a simple routine. That helps us build resilience.
- Be careful of what we look at. Let's not get filled with bad news on television, newspapers, etc. Matthew 6:22, 23.
- Communicate daily with those we love. 1 Thess. 5:11.
- Share what we feel, don't hold it back (Gal. 6: 2). We must help each other carry the burdens. In 2 Cor. 1:8, Paul shares his sufferings with the Corinthian church.
- Ask for advice when deciding something important. Prov. 15:22
- Take breaks throughout the day. Work for a period and alternate with short periods of rest. Isaiah 40:30, 31.
- Control everything you can control and leave to God what you cannot control.

We could add other practical aids:

- It's recommended that to avoid being stressed, exercise regularly. Personally, I have tried it and it has been a great help.
- Another important aspect is learning to be assertive and not take on more workload or responsibilities than we can handle.
- Do an activity that relaxes you. For example, my wife likes to water her garden. Others like to play an instrument. Etc.
- Learn to be peacemakers. Proverbs 17:14 warns us that "Starting a quarrel is like breaching a dam; so, drop the matter before a dispute breaks out."
- Learn to overlook offenses. Proverbs 19:11
- In James 1:19, he tells us to develop better communication skills to avoid many problems that lead us to lose patience.
"My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry."
- In Proverbs 22:24-25, we're warned not to befriend people whenever possible who tend to have outbursts of anger and are always in a bad temper. The danger is that we'll be influenced by them and become the same.

4.3 Conclusions

We are beings designed by God with emotions. We must learn to have a good command over them. If we don't do something fast, our emotions can control us, and that would be very bad. Unfortunately, many people mistakenly think that they were "born that way" and cannot change. Obviously, those people are going from one problem to another.

Even in the church we can find Christian people who, by not controlling their emotions, are going to get into trouble and hinder the development of ministries.

It should be emphasized that the development of good spiritual health should be the basis for later developing emotional health. After that we can include other measures to improve your emotional health.

But the center of everything is that we seek to be transformed by the Holy Spirit, because with this, we're going to learn to develop the Fruit of the Spirit, which among other things includes self-control. Galatians 5:22-24

Questions to meditate on:

1. What do you consider to be the negative emotions that you have not been able to control?
2. What have been the consequences in your marriage of mismanaging your emotions?
3. Plan to improve your self-control and thus avoid those emotions that are negative.

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Lesson 5.

Settings goals Defining the Course

Bible verses: **1 Cor. 9:26-27**

“Therefore, I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.”

Learning Objectives:

- **Design** SMART goals.
- **Develop** a plan to achieve these goals.

5.1 Introduction

Many can see other people achieving various accomplishments: enjoying good health, sending their children to college, participating in church ministries, buying a home, etc. However, they don't stop to think that those people have achieved those things because they purposely proposed it and systematically worked to achieve it. Chris Gardner comments that a basic principle to achieve our life purpose is to have a Plan. But in general, most of us have little training in formulating plans.

It's of the utmost importance that we know how to set goals, because you cannot say that we have a plan if there are no defined goals. Therefore, it's necessary to dedicate a space to the design of goals. With this we'll be able to achieve the objectives with the healthy management of finances.

5.2 Development

5.2.1 What are Goals?

A goal is what we set out to achieve and for which we must establish an action plan. These goals should go in the direction of your great purpose in life. It's important to remember what Paul teaches us when he states:

"I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus"
(Philippians 3:14).

Goals help us not only focus on doing what God has called us to do, but also help us become who God has called us to be.

Michael Hyatt

It's said that there are 3 types of people: those who make things happen, those who observe how things happen, and those who ask, "what happened?" If we want to make things happen, we must hold hands with God, ask Him to increase our faith, and work towards His goals (Heb. 11:6).

5.2.2 Reasons for setting goals

Peter Anderson identifies the following reasons why we should set goals:

- They help us focus on what needs to be done to achieve them.
- They allow us to see how the plan is being achieved.
- They alerts us if we need to make a greater effort to reach our goals.

5.2.3 Reasons why people don't set goals

But why do people in general have no goals? The following represent some reasons:

1. **They don't realize the importance of goals.** No one has taught them about it. God asks us to do everything for the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31)
2. **They don't know the correct way of how they should be established.**
3. **They're afraid of rejection.** Keep your goals clear for the whole family and to those who can help you achieve them. If we're doing the right thing, we shouldn't fear being rejected.
4. **Fear of failure.** If we think of the great inventors like Thomas Edison, we'll see that failure is essential for success.
"So, do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand" (Isaiah 41:10)
5. **They are "satisfied" in their comfort zone.** They're not willing to make the necessary changes to improve. Let's remember that God asks that we:
"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will" (Rom. 12:2)
6. **They're not clear about what they want for their life.** We must ask God to transform our way of thinking. Paul tells us:
"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" (2 Cor. 5:17).
7. They don't think they're necessary. Just doing what they can is enough
8. Perhaps they have tried, but failed. We must check that the goals align with the great purpose that God has given to us: to have Jesus as Savior, grow like Christ, share his message of salvation, and show love to those around us. Doing it this way will help us not to stop, despite the various barriers that we're going to face to achieve each goal.
"I can do all this through him who gives me strength" (Phil. 4:13)

Anyone who doesn't have defined goals or doesn't work to achieve them will end up working for those who

He who fails to plan, plans to fail.

5.2.4 Various types of goals

Goals are usually divided into short, medium, and long-term goals according to how long is needed to achieve them. Each of them will be described with examples.

- a) **Short-term goals:** These are goals to be achieved in a period not exceeding one year. Some examples may be goals related to:
 - Submitting a family member to an operation.
 - Having an emergency fund to face any contingency that may arise.
 - Going on a holiday.
- b) **Medium-term goals:** goals to be achieved over a period of one to three years can be included. Some examples may be goals related to:
 - Paying off all the family's debts.
 - The purchase of land to build a house.
 - Planning to have a child.

c) **Long-term goals:** you can include goals to be achieved in a period of three years onwards. Some examples may be goals related to:

- The university education of your children.
- The construction or purchase of a house.
- Saving for retirement.

5.2.5 Characteristics of SMART goals

There are five basic characteristics of goals. These form the acronym SMART for its acronym in English (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Timely). These characteristics are described below and we'll try to illustrate their correct application. For this we'll rely on Shelley Pursell (2020) and D. Silva (2019).

- 1) **Specific:** Understandable and direct. When two or three people read the goal, they'll understand exactly the same thing, without the need for further explanation.
 - I'm going to improve my health this year. (incorrect)
 - I'm going to lose 8 kg this year. (correct)
- 2) **Measurable:** you must specify the indicator with which you're going to measure whether the goal was fully, partially or not achieved. Peter Drucker, quoted by D. Silva (2019), points out that "what cannot be measured cannot be improved"
 - Be more spiritual this year. (wrong)
 - Take more care of my relationship with God this year, through: a) reading the Bible at least once, b) praying every day in the morning for at least 20 min. C)... (correct)
- 3) **Achievable:** make it challenging and realistic. Consider the various resources available such as talents, time, and motivation. It's also good to have historical data, which will throw light on how a variable has behaved (income, savings, etc.)
 - Save for year to buy a car. (wrong if there is no real capacity)
 - Save for the down-payment on a car and pay it in a maximum of 30 months. (correct)
- 4) **Relevant:** it's something that is worthwhile for the family or organization since it's aligned with the great family purpose.
 - We're going to give our children a good education. (incorrect)
 - Send the children to University X when they graduate from their High School. (correct)
- 5) **Time limit:** specify the time in which the goal will be achieved.
 - We'll improve the education of church families. (incorrect)
 - We're going to give 3 courses for 20 families every semester **this year**. (correct)

Next, we'll give examples of goals that meet each of these characteristics.

Example 1. SMART goal to improve our readiness

S: I will prepare better in my ministry by taking the Healthy Families Diploma

M: which consists of 8 courses

A: Offered in the Church Couple Ministries at a cost of \$10 / course

R: which will be held on Saturdays (my day off)

T: to be done in one year

Example 2. SMART goal to improve family income

S: Increase family income by 20%

M: 20% (from 10,000 to 11,000)

A: doing maintenance work at my friends' houses

R: to save to buy a computer for my children

T: in the next 12 months

Example 3. Goal to increase the number of people in a small group

S: Increase the number of people attending my small group

M: from 8 to 15 people

A: by

R: getting more exposure and improve communication network

T: in the next six months

5.2.6 How to increase the possibility of achieving our goals

1. Include everyone involved. In this case, it's of the utmost importance that all family members participate in its establishment.
2. Make sure you write down your goals and everyone in the family knows and understands them.
3. Continuously review how you're progressing in achieving each goal. It will be of great motivation to see the small achievements in the direction of reaching the goal.
4. Specify an action plan and the activities required to achieve that goal.
5. Be flexible in reaching the goal. If you must implement other changes not originally planned, please do so but be disciplined.
6. Estimate the cost of each goal.
7. Keep in mind the barriers that may arise in order to be ready to implement the necessary actions.

Set big goals, but improve the process that will allow you to achieve them. Only then will you enjoy the trip.

5.3 Conclusions

We have talked about the importance of setting goals in all areas of our life. Only then can we focus on what we long for for ourselves, for our family, and for those whom the Lord allows us to influence.

So, we must assume our responsibility to set goals according to the statutes of God. Only then will we go from having good wishes to having goals that we can achieve. Psalm 20:4 shows us the difference between a wish and a definite plan: *"May he give you the desire of your heart and make all your plans succeed."*

It's clear that our plans and goals must be aligned with God's will. But not only that, we must always be alert, because even though we have good plans, God in his Sovereignty can ask us to do something different. I remember three cases in the Bible that have always impacted me:

- a) Paul changed the route of his missionary journey because of the Macedonian call.
- b) Stephen was asked to leave Samaria in the midst of a great revival.
- c) God didn't allow David to build the temple, but he granted him the privilege to help his son Solomon build it.

As you can see, the original plans were good, but God's plans will always be better. That's why his Word declares: *"Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it's the LORD's purpose that prevails"* (Prov. 19:2)



Questions for meditation together:

1. Define as a couple your five core values.

2. Establish at least three family goals that meet the following characteristics:

S: _____

M: _____

A: _____

R: _____

T: _____

S: _____

M: _____

A: _____

R: _____

T: _____

3. What great goal would you dare to dream of if you knew that God it was God's will?

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Lesson 6. **Building Healthy** *Habits Together*

Bible verses: Rom. 12:2; Phil. 4:13

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

“I can do all this through him who gives me strength.”

Learning Objectives:

- **Reflect** on the importance of living a renewed life in Christ.
- **Evaluate** those areas of our lives that require change.
- **Identify** the habits that we must stop and those that we must encourage.
- **Make a commitment** as a married couple to support us in this decision.

6.1 Introduction

I think everyone has tried keeping new year goals, for example:

- I will exercise regularly.
- I will try to read the Bible daily.
- Let's take time to go out together as a couple once a week.
- We'll try to better manage our finances.

However, on many occasions, we have been frustrated by not being able to achieve them. Sometimes we have tried, and it seemed that things were going well, but sooner or later we give up.

It seems that something holds us back and doesn't allow us to achieve goals that were intended to improve our quality of life, relationships, profession, ministry, etc. This is because we haven't been disciplined and persistent in seeking to achieve new healthy habits.

So, this time we're going to study what habits are, how healthy habits shared in marriage can bring mutual help, and how to achieve this.

6.2 Development

6.2.1 *First, A short story*

It's very possible that you've heard the magnificent short story by Jorge Bucay (2009) called "The Chained Elephant" which is part of his book *Let me tell you*. In an extraordinary way, J. Bucay provides us with a magnificent background on how to incorporate and cultivate habits into our lives.

In this story, Bucay masterfully tells us that when he was little, he liked to go to the circus. The elephant drew his attention in a special way because of its size and strength. In his childhood mind a question arose: How is it possible that with all its strength, size and weight, it can be tied to a small stake buried in the ground to immobilize it? Why doesn't it run away? The little boy grew up without anyone being able to give a correct answer until one day, a wise old man revealed the secret: *the circus elephant doesn't escape because it has been tied to a stake since it was very young.*

J. Bucay narrates the following:

I closed my eyes and imagined the little newborn being tied to the stake. I'm sure that at that moment, the elephant pushed, pulled and sweated trying to get loose. And despite all his efforts, he couldn't. The stake was certainly very strong for him. I would swear that he fell asleep exhausted, and that the next day, he tried again, and also the next, and the one that followed it ... until one day, a terrible day for its story, the animal accepted its impotence and resigned itself to its fate. That huge and powerful elephant that we see in the circus doesn't escape because he thinks – poor fellow - that he CAN'T.

What do you think? Do you find any resemblance to your own life? Similarly, the enemy grossly deceives us by making us think that we cannot stop doing wrong or that we cannot do something new. But the reality is that we can do or stop doing anything if we really put our mind to it. At least, J. Meyer (2020) points out, we can do anything that is God's will.

Sometimes we have tried to break bad habits and start healthy habits, but we have given up. Like the elephant when it was little, we tried, but it was impressed upon us that we couldn't. So, we never tried again after the third or fourth failure.

We go around the world tied to hundreds of stakes that take away our freedom ... conditioned by the memory of "I can't." But our only way of knowing is to try again by putting our faith in Christ. It's time to defeat that enemy that is bending us through plunging us into:

- Indifference
- Passiveness
- Laziness
- Conformism
- Permissiveness
- El negativism (Martínez, 2017)

6.2.2 What are habits, how are they formed, and what types of habits exist?

Now is the time to explain a little more about habits. A habit is something that we learn to do through repetition and that we eventually do either unconsciously or with very little effort. We all develop habits, good and bad, from an early age. However, Christians are challenged to be transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit working in our lives (Rom. 12: 2). Also, in Romans 6:4, we're called to live a new life in Christ. This will involve giving up all bad habits and interchanging them for those that belong to us as new spiritual creatures, with the help of God. As an example, let's cite some cases:

- In Phil. 2:14, we're asked to "do everything without grumbling and quarreling." So it implies a change in the way we behave.
- God commands that "you shall not steal," which implies that we must cultivate the habit of being honest in all things.
- In 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, we find that we must take care of our body since it's the temple of the Holy Spirit.

As human beings, we're whole persons. That includes the social, emotional, spiritual and physical. So, we must think that our habits build up our integral improvement. Therefore, it's important to explain that there are different types of habits:

- ***Physical habits.*** These involve the body and health. They include habits like eating healthy, exercising regularly, etc.
- ***Social habits.*** They are the ones that involve our interaction with others, such as visiting Grandma every Sunday or calling a friend on every birthday.
- ***Spiritual habits.*** These strictly concern the spiritual realm, such as reading the Bible, praying, fasting, getting involved in a ministry, among others.
- ***Recreational habits.*** They are related to the ways we enjoy ourselves. Examples can be given such as playing a sport, watching television, going for a walk, etc.
- ***Affective habits.*** They are those that refer to feelings and their forms of expression. We can give examples such as recognizing the achievements of others, expressing it continuously with words like "I love you," giving flowers to your wife for certain occasions, etc.

6.3 Conclusions

We must reflect as a married couple with all sincerity about what bad habits we have, either personally or as a couple. We must also decide what habits we should begin to promote in our lives that contribute to our personal and marital edification.

Undoubtedly, that will imply that we pray together so that the Holy Spirit will help us examine ourselves more completely. If there are hidden sinful habits like viewing pornography, etc., we must pray for forgiveness and seek the Holy Spirit to help us leave behind everything that separates us from Christ. We cannot let the enemy hold us down like that elephant who, with so much power, had been programmed to believe that it could not free itself from a small stake. I remind you that the power of the Holy Spirit is infinitely greater and can work for us if we seek it with determination.

We must be convinced that we must continually renew ourselves to grow to be like Christ. So that requires effort on our part as well. However, like Paul we can say, *"I can do all this through him who gives me strength."*

Practical activities to do together:

1. What are the bad habits you need to identify and stop as a couple?
2. Determine as a couple what habits you should build together:
 - A. In the sphere of spirituality
 - B. In the area of affections
 - C. In the area of health
 - D. Other habits

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Bible passage: Luke 11:9-10, 13

“So, I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened... If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

Learning Objectives:

Challenge couples to:

- **Examine** their own personal commitment to their marriage relationship.
- **Constantly seek** the filling of the Holy Spirit.
- **Commit** to consistently practicing spiritual disciplines.

7.1 Introduction

In the previous lesson, we talked about the importance of establishing good habits in our married life. We said that a habit is a custom action formed from an initial action that can be polished over time. We explained that there are different types of habits, such as spiritual, affective ones, etc. If someone were to ask us how to begin to change their habits to achieve a fully developed life as Christians, we would say that it's better to start with spiritual habits.

The explanation is that in doing so, we're going to focus on seeking a genuine transformation of our being. Once we're transformed by the Holy Spirit, it will be easier to reflect on the importance of taking care of other aspects, such as our emotional health and physical health, such as having good recreational habits, etc. In this regard, Luis and Hannia Fernández mention that “Spiritual unity in a marriage generates an atmosphere of emotional stability despite the circumstances surrounding the relationship. A good spiritual unity is the essential foundation of a good emotional relationship.”

For this reason, in this lesson we're going to focus on highlighting some habits that are essential so that we can adequately develop our married life.

7.2 Development

7.2.1 The reward that an effort of discipline brings

Many times, we have tried to adopt habits that improve our bodily health. For example, we know that if we exercise regularly on a daily basis, coupled with healthy eating, we'll be healthier. When we come across a person who has healthy physical habits, we can immediately identify them, either because they're lean and muscular, or because they can achieve certain physical things that others cannot do.

It would be interesting to know what the routine of these people is like. Since we cannot ask them personally, we can turn to other sources. In the newspaper *El Clarín* (2017), a very interesting article was written about how seven high-performance athletes train and eat. Other interesting data are provided:

- Usain Bolt works out 3.5 hours a day. That has led him to win eleven world titles and eight Olympics.

- Tennis player Venus Williams works out 4.5 hours a day. She has won twenty Grand Slam titles and has four Olympic titles.
- Athlete Jessica Ennins exercised 6 hours a day. She is an Olympic Heptathlon Champion
- Martial arts artist Conor “The Notorius” McGregor works out 8 hours a day. As a UFC fighter, 85% of his wins have been by Knock Out. He became the first fighter in UFC history to own two belts simultaneously.

Many of them are admired by crowds and many people want to be like them. But why are we talking about this? Because just as the effort of discipline brings great rewards in the physical area, exactly the same happens in the spiritual area. We’ll talk about this in the next section.

7.2.2 Spiritual disciplines

God's Word shows us how we can have spiritual strength. It describes these exercises as spiritual disciplines that allow us to grow, reducing the possibility of being defeated by the enemy. But not only that, it will allow us to reap a lot of fruit, following the analogy of the achievements of athletes.

If we were to have the opportunity to chat with the great spiritual leaders that we know and possibly admire, we would discover that behind what we see with the naked eye is a life dedicated to cultivating the spiritual disciplines. Within these we can highlight the following: prayer, fasting, study of the Bible and service.

So, since married couples are no longer two but one, they need to develop habits together to strengthen their lives by continuously practicing these disciplines. As in sports, others will notice with the naked eye when a married couple is trying to practice spiritual disciplines. That way it will be easier for us to have a strong influence on other marriages and God will use us to bless them.

7.2.3 The filling of the Holy Spirit as a starting point

Our Lord Jesus gave us the promise to send the Holy Spirit to guide us and give us the strength to succeed in the spiritual sphere. Jesus declared:

“If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” Luke 11:13

Paul suggested that the marriage relationship may be the earthly reflection of the relationship Christ has with us. Therefore, God needs to be part of your relationship. We must invite Him to lead and guide our marriage. If we build our marriage on God's commandments and promises, we can weather the storms. So, we should develop the habits of praying for each other, serving together, among others (Rosberg & Rosberg, 2006).

7.2.4 Prayer

God's Word tells us to “*Pray without ceasing*” (1 Thess. 5:17). As we pray:

- We recognize the Lordship of Christ.
- We give thanks for all that He does for us, starting with the gift of salvation.
- We present our needs.
- We intercede for others.

The apostle Paul encourages us to present our needs before God.

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God” (Phil.4:6)

By being in prayer, we’ll be able to know more about the greatness of God and His infinite love and mercy. We’ll recognize ourselves as the sinners whose only chance for salvation can be provided by His sacrifice on the cross. There will be an opportunity to present him with the various problems that we may be facing. He genuinely and truly cares for us.

If possible, have a special place to pray together. Usually this is known as the ‘war room’ or ‘prayer closet’ which will undoubtedly contribute to the habit of prayer. There we can have our requests noted. We can have a special place to write down all the requests that have already been answered and for which we must show our gratitude.

7.2.5 Meditate on the Word of God

In order to try to be like Jesus, we must first know him. A first approach is the Bible. There we’ll know the truths that will help us have eternal life in Christ. We’ll get to know Him and what he calls us to do and be if we want to be part of the Kingdom of God. We can learn about His precious promises for all occasions. We’ll get the ‘weapons’ that He provides us to get ahead.

What does it mean to meditate on the Word of God? Meditating on the Word of God means reading it carefully, digesting it, and applying God’s truths and teachings in our lives. For this we need to read the Word on a daily basis. But after reading several chapters, we can concentrate on a portion of what we read and ask the Holy Spirit to help us internalize what God is telling us. What does He want us to do?

Start developing this habit together. Begin to study the Bible and you will be surprised to see how each time, you’ll have more thirst to know more of His holy will. It will help if you:

- Pray that God will awaken your interest in studying his Word.
- Try to set a specific time to study the Bible; if possible, early in the morning.
- Get a guide to see the order in which you should study the Bible.
- Pray for God to give you understanding. As we study, the Holy Ghost helps us focus our attention in a special way on a part of what we’re reading. Here we need to stop and begin to meditate on what God is trying to tell us in a special way.

It’s of the utmost importance that both of us in the marriage support each other, making sure that we’re obeying God’s Word for us.

7.3 Conclusions

Luis and Hannia Fernández explain that “When there is a solid spiritual unity in a marriage, the couple will have the ability to handle conflicts and differences in a better way; they will have greater tolerance and will be able to forgive themselves more easily.” That’s why it’s important that from the beginning, we establish spiritual habits in our married life. Some of them have been mentioned here: praying together, fasting together, meditating on the Word together, etc.

For those who have not yet developed these habits, it will take some hard work to develop them. We may sometimes have small interruptions at the beginning while we work to make these habits a reality in our lives. Our Lord Jesus was a model in the practice of each of these disciplines.

If we allow these spiritual habits to shape our lives, it will be easier to develop the other habits that comprise the other spheres, the emotional, social and physical ones.

Questions to meditate together:

1. What spiritual disciplines do you need to strengthen?
2. What goals could you both set in this regard?
3. What changes will you have to make in your routines to improve your spiritual disciplines?

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Lesson 8. **Developing** *Good self-esteem*

Bible verse: Romans 12:3

“For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.”

Learning Objectives:

- **Explain** what the Bible says about having healthy self-esteem.
- **Assess** the negative consequences of being or raising a narcissistic person.
- **Discuss** how we can help our children develop healthy self-esteem

8.1 Introduction

Have you ever had to live with people who lack empathy, who are only focused on themselves? If so, what was the feeling you experienced? Usually they try to make us feel bad about ourselves.

These types of people are called narcissists. Many people mistakenly think that narcissists are only prominent people like:

- Famous artists
- Very rich people
- Very successful athletes



However, the reality is that any of us are susceptible to extremely overrated self-esteem. Therefore, it will be convenient for us to review the following points: What traits characterize a narcissist? Am I a narcissistic person? What are the consequences of narcissistic behavior? How can I help our children develop adequate self-esteem?

8.2 Development

According to Nathaniel Branden, self-esteem specialist, cited by Santana (2016), self-esteem is:

1. *"Self-confidence in our ability to think, in our ability to face the basic challenges of life."*
2. *"Self-Confidence is our right to succeed and be happy; the feeling of being respectable, of being worthy and of having the right to affirm our needs and shortcomings, to achieve our moral principles and to enjoy the fruit of our effort."*

However, within the pathologies or disorders that a person can suffer is having low self-esteem or, on the other hand, being a narcissist, which is a person who has extremely high self-esteem.

Those who suffers from Narcissistic Personality Disorder are people who are absolutely convinced that they're superior to other people. Have you ever lived with people like that? In deep reflection, could we be suffering from narcissism?

8.2.1 Characteristics of a narcissist

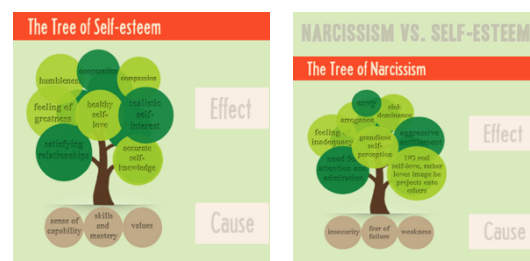
- Their self-esteem is overrated and borders on the extreme.
- They believe they deserve special or privileged treatment.
- They tend to detract from other people.
- They will demerit the achievements of others: “it was just luck that you did it”, “if I had the support that he has, I would do things better.”
- They have little empathy in personal relationships.
- They have a great need to be admired.
- They focus their attention on themselves.
- They tend to be arrogant. Their conversations are about themselves, setting an example in many cases, highlighting their achievements, etc.
- They try to manipulate others towards something that is convenient for them.
- In the family, first they will seek to have everything they think they deserve (brand clothes, car, etc.), and then they will think about the needs of their family.



8.2.2 Balanced Self-esteem

Self-esteem develops over time as children grow older and feel capable of doing things without help. When they can use their new skills, they feel good about themselves. Within the family is the best space for them to develop a healthy self-esteem.

Unfortunately, there may be conditions that contribute to low self-esteem within the family. For example, there are studies such as that of Montoya and Landero (2008) which show that children raised in two-parent families tend to have better self-esteem than children raised in single-parent families.



People with low self-esteem tend to evaluate themselves according to the evaluations of their own environment and not according to their own evaluations.

8.2.3 How to know if someone has low self-esteem?

People who have low self-esteem have the following characteristics:

- They're very indecisive.
- They're afraid of being wrong.
- They tend to have poor school performance
- Even if they have everything to be happy and have a very full life, they always think that it's less than what others have.
- They don't say what they think because of “what will others say.”
- They don't express their problems to others; they don't ask for help.
- They don't need to be overprotected.

8.2.4 Characteristics of a person with a healthy self-esteem

- They're sure of themselves, so they know how to make decisions
- They don't shy away from problems, but rather face them to solve them.
- They develop the ability to manage their emotions, which contributes to having better emotional intelligence.
- They recognize their strengths, but also their weaknesses and seek to overcome them.
- They ask for help when they think they need it.
- They are actively involved in what they participate in.
- They have a more positive outlook on life, so they tend to be happier.
- They develop a high resilience, that is, if they experience some crises they can emerge stronger from them.
- They're grateful people for the blessings that God grants them
- They identify their gifts and talents and put them to work.
- They tend to achieve what they set out to do.
- They tend to be good leaders.
- They recognize the limits in the capabilities of others, and they treat them fairly.
- They know how to forgive others and forgive themselves.
- They are more empathetic and supportive.

8.2.5 How to help build children's self-esteem

Since we've seen that there are a large number of advantages in people with good self-esteem, it will be best to not only develop it ourselves, but also to help others in our family develop it as well. For this we present here several suggestion that you can implement in your home:

- Be a close role model for them.
- Set limits and norms according to each stage of your children's development.
- Show unconditional love and affection for your children.
- Teach them at each stage of growth to do something new.
- Help them to set goals.
- Highlight their strengths. Feel free to praise your children's achievements... in fair measure. Recognize every effort and attitude, even when the desired result has not been achieved.
- Accept as normal for them to make their own mistakes, since even these are learning experiences.
- Criticize wrongdoing without putting negative labels on children.
- Don't compare them with others, and even less with their siblings
- Don't speak negatively of your children, especially in front of them.

- Accept your children as they are. Don't create such high expectations that perhaps even you yourself could not achieve.
- Build trust and space for you to hear what they have to say about what they feel, want, etc.
- Support them when they take on new responsibilities according to their age.

8.2.6 What can I do if I'm the one who suffers from low self-esteem?

- Start facing challenges that depend only on you, trusting that God will help you.
- Face challenges of moderate difficulty and increase the difficulty as you progress.
- Start to change the way you express yourself, avoiding downplaying yourself.
- Do things that help others.
- Start taking more care of yourself, your things, and the place where you live.
- Improve your empathic communication.
- Learn to manage your emotions better.

8.3 Conclusions

Self-esteem isn't something you're born with, but rather it develops throughout your lifetime. As parents, we have a great responsibility to help our children develop healthy self-esteem.

We must be alert because self-esteem is dynamic, that is, it can change over time. We expect that it will always improve, but there are also events or circumstances that can work against it and cause self-esteem to decrease. An example of this is when a family suffers a separation from the parents. In this type of chaos, children experience a loss of self-esteem, and at least one of the spouses may also experience it. If the little ones suddenly start being bullied, it will hurt them. As young people or adults, some failures can also seriously affect self-esteem, such as not getting a job, being fired, not finding a partner, etc.

In marriage relationships, self-esteem is of great help in communication. This in turn is essential to have healthy relationships.

Some questions to consider together:

1. ¿ Can you name characters in the Bible that you think may have had low self-esteem? Explain why. Consider the features we have mentioned.
2. Decide to help build healthy self-esteem in your children and make a plan. Make a commitment to God that you will carry it out.
3. Each one reflect on your own self-esteem. Do you think it's low, adequate, very high, bordering on narcissism? Explain the reason for your answer. What can you do so that your self-esteem continues to develop healthily? Consider what Jorge Bucay says:

"Because no one can know for you. Nobody can grow up for you. Nobody can search for you. No one can do for you what you should do for yourself. Existence doesn't admit representatives."

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Bible verse: Romans 12:15

Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.

Learning Objectives:

- **Explain** what empathy is from a biblical perspective.
- **Describe** the traits of an empathic person.
- **Seek** actions that help us to be more empathetic.
- **Develop** a plan to support our children to become empathetic people.

9.1 Introduction

Although the word “empathy” isn’t found as such in the Bible, we can find dozens of passages in which God in the O.T. and Jesus in the N.T. give us instructions about being people who care about the needs of others.

The On-line dictionary defines empathy as “the ability to understand and share the feelings of another.” That was exactly what Jesus did. He sought us out and saw the great need we had for salvation. So, He took our place and paid for our sins. He did what we couldn’t do for ourselves.

Faced with this, various questions arise such as: Why should we be empathetic? Is there anything that can help us develop empathy? How does being empathetic help us as parents develop empathetic relationships in our families?

9.2 Development

Ana Couñago (2019) tells us that "empathy is the cognitive ability to understand the needs, feelings and problems of others, putting oneself in their shoes and responding correctly to their behaviors and emotional reactions." So, we need to develop empathy to form positive social relationships in life.

9.2.1 What does the Bible say about empathy?

As I mentioned earlier, the Bible doesn’t directly use the word empathy. However, we can find many passages alluding to being empathetic, showing consideration for what others feel, think, meeting their needs and of course acting accordingly.

Some examples of these passages are:

- Matthew 22:39 - “... love your neighbor as yourself.”
- Mark 8:2 - “I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat.”
- Matthew 18:27 - “The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.”
- Romans 12:15 - “Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who mourn.”
- John 15:12 - “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.”

- Ephesians 4:29 - “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.”
- 1 Peter 3: 8 - “Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble.”
- Hebrews 2:18 - “Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.”

9.2.2 Characteristics of an empathetic person

Without a doubt, Jesus is our maximum role model to follow in this regard as well. If we study and reflect on what He did, we can see that:

- He cared for others (Matt. 9:36).
- He asks us to treat others as we would like to be treated (Matt. 7:12).
- It hurt Him to see the suffering of others (Luke 7:11-17, The widow who was going to bury her son).
- He overcame prejudices and traditions to be close to people's needs (The Samaritan woman in John 4).
- He perceived the needs, emotions and desires of the other, and acted accordingly.
- He knew how to listen to others.
- He tended to highlight the attributes of others.
- He managed to create a true emotional connection with his environment.
- An empathetic person doesn't tend to have violent, aggressive or angry attitudes. On the contrary, if they find themselves in the middle of a confrontation, they will try to resolve a conflict as soon as possible.
- An empathetic person detects and perceives sensations in your environment.
- An empathetic person will understand that each person should be treated differently because their needs are different.
- They'll be able to read emotions and detect when a person isn't being honest with him (Case of the Pharisee who invited Jesus to dinner. Luke 7:36-50).
- They'll be able to help others without expecting anything in return (Remember the feeding of the multitudes Matt. 14:13-21).
- Jesus encouraged others to be just as empathetic as He was (Mt. 9:35).
- Empathetic people inspire action and social change.
- They value curiosity to connect with others and learn more about their life.

9.2.3 How can we become more empathetic?

- Ask God to open our eyes, ears, and hearts to remain sensitive to the needs of others.
- Actively listen to people, not just hear them. Then act accordingly.
- Learn to listen before speaking.
- Communicate in an appropriate manner.
- Observe the needs of those around you.
- Use your imagination and put yourself in the other person's shoes and thinking about what you would like them to do for you if you were in their situation.



- Try to understand the other, not only with what they express verbally, but also with their gestures, behaviors and decisions.
- Be more intuitive, noticing the needs of others and seeking to help them.

9.2.4 Enemies that kill empathy

- Lack of care and abuse in our childhood.
- Having or have had absent parents.
- Negative criticism. Avoid comments such as "you are always wrong."
- Judgments that we make about people. Avoid phrases like "they're like this because they deserve it!"
- Self-centeredness that makes us only think about ourselves.
- Giving little thought to other people, including our own family.

9.2.5 How can we help our children develop empathy?

- Set an example, as Jesus did.
- Give them the attention they require.
- Avoid being absent parents.
- Show them love repeatedly.
- Explain to them how we practice empathy with people inside and outside the home.

9.3 Conclusions

Empathy is a very complex skill which is acquired over time. "In childhood there is a tendency to be selfish, but, as one grows up and becomes an adult, in most cases the ability to think and worry about others develops" (Couñago, 2019).

That's why we have a high responsibility to help our children develop their self-esteem. As we have already seen, this will help them develop emotional health, and with it, establish good interpersonal relationships.

We should not only take care of our own needs. Success isn't about winning and having, but being and giving.

Activities:

1. Explain in your own words what empathy is.
2. Think about whether you've been an empathetic person so far. If that's the case, list at least five times you've shown empathy. If not, mention examples where Jesus gave us the example of how to be empathetic that you can imitate for your spouse.
3. Explain how we can be more empathetic and what the benefits are of being so. Consider what Daniel Goleman says about it: "If you don't have empathy and effective personal relationships, no matter how smart you are, you're not going to get very far."

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Bible verse: 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,

Learning Objectives:

- **Understand** the value of active listening and how it aids in the smooth running of your marriage.
- **Identify** the characteristics of active listening.
- **Plan** to improve active listening.
- **Promote** active listening in your family.

10.1 Introduction

Various experts on the family say that many of the problems we currently face are due to poor communication. Personally, I think at least many of the problems converge in poor communication. For example, financial problems arise because we're unable to agree on how to handle finances. Infidelity problems are many times due to the fact that the person no longer feels that they share the same goals and desires as their partner. Differences become conflicts because we didn't know how to dialogue.

Therefore, we must think about questions such as: What are the characteristics of active listening? Am I a person who knows how to communicate actively? How can I improve my active listening skills? What are the benefits of listening, according to the Bible, and why should we improve this skill?

10.2 Development

10.2.1 What it means to listen empathetically

Listening and hearing are not the same. Hearing is a normal function of our body; it's perceiving sounds. Listening is more than hearing; it's paying attention to what is heard and using what is heard. In particular, active listening is the type of listening that requires an effort of our cognitive and empathic capacities.

Pau Forner (2014) mentions that Rogers and Farson in 1979 described active listening as a way of causing changes in the lives of others. Undoubtedly then, Jesus had a lot of this. His encounters were transformative; the people who knew him were greatly impacted.

10.2.2 How to become an empathetic listener

I invite you to consider Elena Bellver's (2020) definition of active listening:

It's obtained by integrating the capacity of reception, understanding and assimilation with those of perceiving and observing the interlocutor. Once implemented, it favors more effective listening based on a broad assumption that overcomes the habit of listening to others in a superficial, often automatic and distracted way.

Therefore, this definition tells us how we can learn to develop active listening:

- Ask questions to make it easier for the other person to **express their need**.
- Paraphrase to see if you **understood correctly**.
- Summarize what the other person said to make sure you've **understood the most important thing**.
- Ask about the **consequences** of what they have just told you. This helps the person come up with a solution on their own.
- Help them **clarify their thoughts and feelings**. Do it with open questions rather than closed questions. For example, "what exactly are you worried about in your current job?"
- Be attentive to **non-verbal communication**. Pay attention to gestures.
- Exercise **empathy** to try to understand the other person and give them genuine interest.
- Use **positive reinforcement**.
- Maintain **eye contact**.
- Maintain a **body posture** that reflects your interest.
- Reflect their **emotional state** with gestures that you understand what the person is communicating to you.
- Give **reinforcement words** during the talk. For example, "You have been very strong."

What to **AVOID** during active listening

- Doing other things while listening to the person. For example, avoid watching TV or the cell phone while the person talks to you.
- Interrupting the person, trying to guess what they want to say. Only interrupt when strictly necessary.
- Judging them and wanting to impose your criteria on them.
- Telling your own story before taking an interest in theirs.
- Disqualifying their story while giving your opinion.
- Pretending that you're paying attention to them when in fact you're not.
- Giving your advice if you haven't been asked. If you think you have a very good idea, it's advisable to ask the person's permission: "*Would you like to hear my opinions about that?*"

10.2.3 God is always actively listening and He expects the same from us

The art of listening is demonstrated in the Bible in various ways. It not only urges humanity to listen to God, but God also listens to humanity.

- Jer. 29:12 - “Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.”
- Psalms 116:1-2 - “I love the Lord, for he heard my voice: he heard my cry for mercy. Because he turned his ear to me, I will call on him as long as I live.”
- Psalm 18:6 - “In my distress I called to the LORD; I cried to my God for help. From his temple he heard my voice; my cry came before him, into his ears.”
- Prov. 6:20 - “My son, keep your father’s command and don’t forsake your mother’s teaching.”
- Prov. 1:5 - “Let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance...”
- Jer. 26:3-6 - “Perhaps they will listen and each will turn from their evil ways. Then I will relent and not inflict on them the disaster I was planning because of the evil they have done. Say to them, ‘This is what the Lord says: If you don’t listen to me and follow my law, which I have set before you, and if you don’t listen to the words of my servants the prophets, whom I have sent to you again and again (though you have not listened), then I will make this house like Shiloh and this city a curse among all the nations of the earth.’”
- Proverbs 18:13 - “To answer before listening—that is folly and shame.”

10.2.4 Examples of good communication through active listening

In this section we’re going to share some examples of how you can develop the skill of empathic listening.

- **Don’t judge:** Imagine that a friend is telling you about their fear of getting close to the person they like because it’s very difficult for her to start a conversation with that person and get to know them. So, in this case, the last thing you should do is start judging her and think or say things like “you’re so stupid,” “how can you be afraid to talk to someone?”, etc. What we have to do is think about how that person feels and how we can support them. Don’t forget that we’re all different and what for some is very easy can be very difficult for others to do.
- **Don’t give advice.** When a friend is telling us how sad they are to have ended their relationship and begins to cry, we usually tend to start giving advice or saying things to try to “lessen their pain,” when that person just wants to be heard. Before offering advice, we must probe if they’re really seeking our opinion.
- **Don’t interrupt the other person:** When someone is telling us something, sometimes we suddenly interrupt them to tell them something that happened to us that was similar to what they’re telling us about. The best thing is to wait for the person to finish speaking and then we can also share our experience with him (or her).
- **Paraphrase:** Imagine that your spouse is telling you how badly they felt when they were still a child suffering physical and psychological abuse from their father. We can paraphrase by saying things like: “So your father used to speak rudely to you when you were a child,” etc.
- **Acknowledge the feelings of the other person:** Maybe your wife is telling you how bad it was when her mother was sick. So, you can say things like: “I imagine you must have felt very sad and helpless”, “how sad it is when our loved ones get sick,” etc.

10.2.5 Benefits of active listening

There are many benefits that knowing how to actively listen to other people brings with it. Among the most important are the following:

- People feel valued, increasing their self-esteem.
- Interpersonal relationships are improved.
- Conflicts arising from poor communication are avoided.
- Misunderstandings are avoided.
- Our level of empathy increases.
- The social skills of the listener are further developed.
- It stimulates teamwork.

10.3. Conclusions

True listening requires giving another person your attention and possibly changing your attitudes when you listen. It's very important because you try to help the person get in touch with their feelings when you actively listen. It seeks to go beyond the surface of the message to delve into the underlying emotions.

Now that we know its importance, we must be able to practice at home and at every opportunity to exercise active listening. It may not be easy at first, but like any habit, repeated practice will help make it something we assimilate and do on a daily basis.

Meditate together on these questions:

1. From a biblical perspective, why is it important to develop active listening?
2. How can we improve our active listening?
3. Carry on a dialogue that exemplifies how to engage in active listening.
4. Write out a plan to improve your active listening and that of your family.

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Lesson 11. **Resolving** *Our Conflicts*

Bible text: Luke 11:17b

"A house divided against itself falls."

Learning Objectives:

- **Take** responsibility for maintaining unity in our marriages.
- **Develop** skills to resolve conflicts that arise within the relationship.

11.1 Introduction

Throughout the life of the family, conflicts will arise in our relationships. More than seeing these as problems, they present opportunities for us to develop a series of capacities that, by integrating them, will help us resolve each conflict that arises. Outside the home, life is full of conflicts, but if in the home we can train and perfect this life ability of resolving conflicts, we'll be better equipped to face conflicts when they arise.

Conflicts come from having differences on a particular matter within a relationship. Since there are multiple factors influencing the marriage relationship, we should mention that it will be common for them to appear. However, we must be vigilant that they're not used by the enemy to divide us and destroy our marriage.

For this, it's vitally important that while maintaining a close relationship with our Lord Jesus at all times, we take care to develop the ability to properly handle such conflicts. If we manage them properly, the necessary changes and growth will be generated. (Arnold, 2012)

Prepare to learn what the common causes of conflict are. How should we prepare to deal with conflict with our spouses? How can we proceed when we begin to resolve the conflict? What are the recommendations for how to relate to our spouse in a way that minimizes the emergence of conflicts? It's time to put into practice what has been learned from the previous lessons on spiritual disciplines, i.e., empathy, active listening, having a healthy self-esteem, seeking emotional health, among others.

2.12 11.2 Development

11.2.1 Family conflicts in the Bible

The Bible describes many conflicts, including some within families. If they're there, it's because God wants us to learn something. If we take the necessary time, we can:

- Analyze in each case what were the **underlying causes that started the conflict**. In the case of Cain, it was out of envy that he killed his brother Abel because Abel's offering was agreeable before God but his was not (Genesis 4).
- We'll realize that sometimes there was **something that detonated it**, but what exploded was something that had been carried for a long time.
- We'll identify that there are **different ways of acting in the face of conflict**. There will be cases where nothing is done and the problem grows. On another occasion, we'll see that nobody wanted to give in, so they didn't find an adequate solution.

- There are also cases where a **third person was used by God to resolve the conflict**, as was the case of Abigail with her husband Nabal in his conflict with David (1 Samuel 25).
- But we also learn the **high cost of not resolving a conflict on time**, for example, when Absalom killed his brother Ammon for raping Tamar (2 Samuel 13).
- We'll learn how **the conflict was properly resolved**. For example, when Sarah asked Abraham to send Hagar away because she broke the harmony of the family. It was a difficult decision for Abraham since he loved his son (Gen. 21: 8-21).

11.2.2 Various sources of conflicts

Gary Smalley (1998) cites two prestigious experts on the subject, Carol Rubin and Jeffrey Rubin, who list the following possible causes or sources from which conflicts arise:

1. When one seeks to have **power and dominance**. It may be that they want to make all the decisions without considering the opinion of others.
2. Due to **insecurity of one regarding the behavior of the other**.
3. When people have **different values**. Maybe the wife wants time to participate in a ministry, but he doesn't agree.
4. Because of **the competition that exists between one or both people**. Perhaps she wants to compete for the affection of the children. In another case, he may be competing because his wife has a better salary.
5. Because of **the natural differences in the design of men and women**. For example, they may have different views on how to educate their children at home.
6. Because at least one person **feels that their feelings aren't understood or that their needs met aren't met**.

11.2.3 Practical recommendations for dealing with conflicts

Various scholars have provided us with practical aids that may be useful to us in dealing with conflicts. Here are some of them. Víctor Ricardo (1989) suggests that we consider the following rules for conflict management:

1. Define exactly **what is causing the problem**.
2. **Don't confront conflict with silence**. That doesn't solve anything and will only build up tensions.
3. **Avoid accumulating past frustrations**. This will help so that when dealing with the conflict, they can focus only on the problem that originated it.
4. Keep in mind **not to get into fights when approaching the conflict**. Don't make a war.
5. Go with firm determination **to find a solution to the problem**; It's not about attacking the spouse.
6. **Be mature in addressing the problem**. Avoid yelling, crying, etc. that won't help with the solution.

7. Be specific when **stating the real problem**.
8. **Don't put your interests first**. Be willing to find a solution that satisfies both of you.
9. Pay special attention to the way **you communicate verbally and non-verbally**. It's about tackling a serious matter.
10. Above all, **pray that God will help you resolve the conflict**.
11. If during prayer or when addressing the conflict **God shows you that it's the other person who is right**, have the courage and **acknowledge it**. Act accordingly. Abraham didn't hesitate to ask Hagar to leave home since he had already spoken with God.

11.2.4 Steps for conflict resolution

First step. ***Understand what the basic causes of anger are.***

When we acknowledge initial anger and pain, we then have options to cope with the feelings and resolve the conflict. The following steps should be considered:

- Identify the hurts from your childhood.
- Identify the reactions in your life that affect your values.
- If the pain and fear associated with the incidents are so intense that you cannot bear them, seek help.
- Focus your attention on growth, which develops character maturity.
- Live, thinking about the future instead of being dominated by the past.
- Determine that you will do everything possible to stop the conduct connected with the injury.

Second step. ***Use all your empathy and give your spouse proper value.***

The Bible asks us not to put our interest first (Phil. 2:4). So it's up to me to listen and attend to the other person's needs.

Third step. ***Tell your spouse how you feel.***

Tell them how you feel, tactfully, diplomatically. Now is the time to practice active listening.

Fourth step. ***Find a solution together.***

To negotiate, the following aspects must be considered:

1. Make sure the goals are clear to both parties.
2. Jointly identify the criteria for reaching a good agreement.
3. Comply with the agreements.

Fifth step. ***Implement and evaluate what has been agreed upon***

It's important to evaluate that which has been agreed upon is carried out. If obstacles arise for any reason that prevent them from being met, they must be negotiated again. For example, if it was agreed that he was going to take a vacation trip to spend time with his family, and if for economic reasons it isn't possible to make the trip in the planned conditions, other alternatives should be sought. Keep in mind that the focus was sharing time together.

11.2.5 Establish healthy relationships that minimize the emergence of conflict

Healthy relationships are built on the foundation of respect and freedom. In the opposite case, if it's based on power and control, that family will tend to destroy itself. The components of a healthy relationship are:

1. **Show love and affection** through appropriate physical contact.
2. Develop an appropriate bond by **giving the necessary emotional support**, caring for each other, listening to each other, and sharing the deepest feelings.
3. **Understand that we have two perceptions** (yours and mine). Talk about it and use empathy
4. **Economic cooperation is vital** to distribute expenses, have a fund, and incur debts only under mutual consent. The needs of both must be covered.
5. **Respect for property**, including respecting the relationship. There are things that each of you can exercise stewardship over.
6. Have **appropriate social behavior**.
7. **Recognize the individualization** of each member of the couple. In the relationship, each one needs space and freedom to develop their individual interests.
8. Have **respectable requests**, which implies being able to identify and communicate your needs.
9. Have **appropriate communication** that allows you to express yourself and be heard.
10. **Establish responsibilities equitably**. That includes sharing tasks, doing activities together, negotiating, and being willing to offer help.
11. **Have healthy sex**. There must be freedom to express to each other your needs, preferences or desires; mutually respect any inhibitions either of you might have due to previous trauma.
12. **Grow spiritually**. Spiritual growth includes our personal relationship with God and the family's relationship with God, family activities at home and in church, our personal expressions of worship, respect for individual worship and denomination, definition of participation, our financial commitment to the faith and the church, the definition of our belief systems and our traditions, and the spiritual empowerment of children. The spiritual direction of the home should be from both parents (Hegstrom, 2001).

11.3 Conclusions

There are conflicts in every human relationship. The important thing is solving them without causing a crisis without resolution. Many people are well-intentioned, but lack the ability to adequately resolve conflicts. There are other people who prefer to address certain important issues for the development of the marriage, but to avoid arguments, they decide that it would be better if they kept quiet.

In a relationship such as marriage, it's necessary that day by day we put into practice what we have learned in previous lessons. For example, emotional health, having good self-esteem, being empathetic, and developing the capacity for active listening as part of the communication process. These elements are essential to better develop the ability to resolve the conflicts that will arise throughout the marriage relationship.

Remember that by not developing this capacity, we run the risk of continually living divided by not being able to resolve our differences. We know that our enemy will seek that in order to destroy us as is his purpose. But if we have the will to go and implement this capacity day by day, it's certain that with God's help we can achieve it. My final recommendation is that you start training by resolving minor conflicts, until both of you have the ability to address those big things that seem irreconcilable between you.

Suggested activities:

1. Answer the " CONFLICT MANAGEMENT TEST FOR COUPLES," (below) which will help you identify problems. Describe the results obtained.
2. What are the main issues that create conflict for you?
3. What would be the steps to follow in the face of any of these conflicts?

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT TEST FOR COUPLES



By Arnolando Arana

Differences and discrepancies are inherent in relationships. Conflicts in relationships are inevitable; they're part of the dynamics of relationships. We could say that they're necessary. Now, conflicts can be resolved and strengthen the relationship, or erode and dissolve it. The issue isn't whether there is conflict or not, since these are inevitable, but whether they're managed properly in order to generate the necessary changes and growth.

This survey is to be done as a couple as a way to explore this issue of conflict, and discover areas for change and enrichment as a couple.

Read the following behaviors. Place the number from zero (0) to four (4). Use the following scale: **0) Does not occur, 1) Rarely 2) Sometimes 3) Often 4) Always.** 4 (always) is the most unfavorable evaluation and 0 (does not occur) the most favorable.

Please indicate how often you observe these behaviors.

No.	Conducts	Your partner with you	It bothers you	You with your partner
1	Criticizes or belittles the opinions and feelings of the other.			
2	When a conflict arises, they tend to prevail.			
3	Argue over trivial things.			
4	When a conflict arises, they become very irritable.			
5	Use hurtful words when arguing.			
6	Ignores the partner when they express their opinion.			
7	Avoids talking about your differences for fear of getting into a conflict (avoid conflict at all costs).			
8	In the middle of a relationship conflict, they tend to maintain a stubborn position, and an attitude closed to the opinion of the other.			
9	Has the tendency to adopt a victim position in middle of conflict.			
10	When the conflict produces emotional distancing, they tend to take the initiative to look for their partner.			
11	Personalizes situations of disagreement, labeling and disqualifying the other.			
13	In the middle of a conflict, they say things that they later regret.			
14	Tends to justify behavior with various allegations.			

Please indicate how often you experience these feelings

No	evaluation	Feeling, sensation, experience
1		I feel inhibited and intimidated due to the aggressiveness of my partner when dealing with a conflict.
2		I feel uncomfortable when conflicts arise with my partner.
3		I feel misunderstood by my partner.
4		I feel undervalued by my partner.
5		I feel incompetent to deal with conflicts that arise with my partner .
6		I experience a sense of hopelessness when dealing with some conflicts with my partner.
7		I fear that if I start to express my feelings to my partner in the middle of the conflict, I will lose control over my emotions.
8		I feel trapped in a vicious circle with my partner and that we're not making progress in resolving our conflicts.
9		I feel that in discussions with my partner, there are no healthy limits for handling conflict (we fall into insults, disqualifications, etc.).
10		After a conflict with my partner I feel very worn out.

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Lesson 12. **Starting over** *Blended Families*

Bible verse: Ruth 3:1

“One day Ruth’s mother-in-law Naomi said to her, “My daughter, I must find a home for you, where you will be well provided for.”

Learning Objectives:

- **Understand** the needs of blended marriages.
- **Explain** the characteristics of blended families.
- **Become aware of** the risks that these types of families have.
- **Discuss** tips for success in blended families.

12.1 Introduction

Sometimes we’re faced with situations where everything seems to go wrong. Someone loses their job, friends, a family member and sometimes even their marriage. This brings great pain into our lives. Many struggle to get ahead, sometimes losing their illusions of a happy life.

Blended families are a latent reality of today's society that the church shouldn't ignore. Blended families are considered those in which at least one of the parties has had children in previous relationships and has now formed a new home.

According to INEGI, recent figures show that in Mexico for example, for every 100 marriages, there were 31.2 divorces (INEGI, 2018). Although the statistics for Mexico aren't clear regarding how many of them form a new home with another person/family, the evidence shows that many of them do so either formally or informally.

Rebuilding a family after going through a loss or breakup isn't easy for adults, much less for children or adolescents. Statistics show that as of 2009, the average divorce rate for couples in their second marriage was around 63% (Divorce Rate Statistics). In other words, less than half of blended families manage to consolidate successfully. Since the construction of this type of family is recurrent in our time, we need to understand the challenges faced by these families, the relationships between their members, and the development of the new family in society. In addition to this, it's vitally important that the church provides biblical foundations and principles that help the blended family be successful in order not to fail (sometimes for the second time), and worse, to further harm the children.

It's important to clarify that the ideal is to fight at all costs for the family you have, but if you're already in a blended family, you have to do it in the best possible way.

12.2 Development

12.2.1 *Characteristics of blended Families*

- Blended families arise as a result of a loss or an unsuccessful relationship, so there is a history of emotional damage. It can bring feelings of usurpation or replacement.
- There is added complexity to the new family structure. In addition to the biological parents, the figure of a stepfather and/or stepmother, biological siblings and siblings of different parents is now added.
- Sometimes the relationship between the parent and the children has more history than that of the new partner.
- Children may now be part of two different households, with different rules, family dynamics, and expectations.
- The stepfather or stepmother assumes roles before they have established emotional ties with their stepchild.
- There is no legal relationship between stepparents and stepchildren.
- There is ambiguity in the roles, since it isn't clear whose the belongings are, and what ties or authority exist.
- At least at first, the new family doesn't feel like a homogeneous unit but rather like a "collage" or assembly of various components without cohesion and without its own identity.

12.2.2 *Stages*

The process that leads to the emergence and growth of a blended family can be described as follows:

1. ***Illusion.*** At this stage, the couple has found a new illusion of a new opportunity in love, so they feel that there won't be any obstacle that they cannot overcome. For their part, the children begin to feel threatened by their father or mother's new partner. At this stage, the family remains divided as two separate entities. Most of the care, authority, and emotional connection occur within each biological unit.
2. ***Assembling.*** It's at this point that the two biological subunits of the family come together. The tension grows as they begin to assemble, since there is still no unity or cohesion between them. The couple intentionally strives to fit in with each other's family, but caring, respect, authority, and emotional ties have not fully developed. In children, the feeling of usurpation and invasion is accentuated, which generates rejection. At times, jealousy, resentment, and frustration may arise, bringing other emotions to the surface.
3. ***Cohesion.*** If the new family overcomes the initial obstacles, it will focus on fusion and cohesion. Old ideals are discarded. Relationships, coexistence, and a sense of belonging is created and established. It's important to start identifying and resolving conflicts, so a lot of communication, patience, and teamwork are required. The family atmosphere relaxes and tension decreases as emotional ties are established. The new family creates its own identity, and the difficulties that arise no longer pose a threat to the couple or to the family relationship.

1.2.3 Challenges

A marriage that brings with it the children of a previous marriage presents many challenges. "Historically, even when it seems romantic, the role of stepfathers and stepmothers is tinged with pain, terror, and contempt; the famous tale of Cinderella in some way precipitates this situation." (Villegas, 2018). Some challenges they face are:

- ***The children's rejection of the new spouse.*** Rejection is a normal and common feeling in these families, either because the children were hoping that their parents would get back together, or because they feel that the new partner or siblings steal their father or mother's attention. Especially the children and adolescents involved at some point will project their rejection not only on the new spouse but on the situation as a whole as well.
- ***Situations of jealousy and competitiveness.*** At the beginning of the coexistence between the children of one party and the other, competitive situations can also be generated. Although less common, this is also a feeling that can develop in adults trying to compete with the biological father or mother of their spouse's children. Competitiveness can generate jealousy and lead to other problems.
- ***False expectations.*** In blended families, it's common to have false expectations. Either an adult expects the new partner to give them everything they didn't get from the previous relationship, or the children expect the new adult in the family nucleus to be more relaxed with discipline. False expectations are generated if the different needs of the members are not known, and if an agreement isn't reached beforehand.
- ***Children's identity crisis.*** Children of blended families generally receive less love, communication, and attention from their stepparents than from their biological parents. These deficiencies hinder their discipline and adherence to the rules of the home. Often it's the biological parents who take on the role of main correctors of their children, and this leads to problems for couples to be congruent with the standards that are established for all, creating an identity crisis in the children.
- ***Wounds from the past.*** In the new marriage, old unresolved wounds from the previous relationship can surface for adults and children. As the family rebuilds, there will be multiple losses and changes to deal with. Unresolved past hurts will hamper the ability to communicate feelings and allow them to be expressed, thus leading to discipline and behavior problems.

12.2.4 Keys to success

There are proven principles that minimize risks, and if you have a rebuilt family, you can have a successful marriage and family. Here are some tips that can help:

- ***Planning.*** There are many areas in which the new family will need to adapt. The sooner planning for these issues begins and agreements are reached, the more realistic expectations will be between the couple and the more seamless the transition will be. Adults must plan issues of responsibilities, whether one or both spouses are going to work, agree where they will live, and decide whether they want to keep their money separately or share it, among many other things. "The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and pay the penalty" (Proverbs 27:12).
- ***Respectful treatment.*** It's important that there is a respectful relationship between all those involved, both adults, adolescents and children. Any past disagreements or conflicts should be left behind. Offending a parent unnecessarily will only strain and complicate things. One way to lower the risk of offending others is to treat everyone with respect. That's what the apostle Peter meant when he wrote, "Honor all" (1 Peter 2:17).

- ***Ask God for wisdom.*** There will be situations that require a lot of wisdom as the blended family begins to fuse and form its own identity. Decisions will have to be made about rules, roles, responsibilities, finances, housing, and coexistence (James 1: 5).
- ***Communication and dialogue.*** Dialogue and communication are essential for adults, children and adolescents to understand what is happening. This will help everyone recognize the emotions and feelings that arise from this process. When things don't go as expected, spouses should discuss the issue with maturity and seriousness. They should discuss the situation objectively and agree on how to approach each issue. Proverbs 15:4 says "The soothing tongue is a tree of life, but a perverse tongue crushes the spirit."
- ***Establishment of parental roles.*** Couples should discuss the role each will play in raising the children of the new spouse; also, new rules, limits, and habits for a healthy coexistence. Parenting, regardless of whether they're hers, his, or mutual, should be an equally shared responsibility. Ecclesiastes 4:9 expresses: "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor." Parents must treat all children as equals. No distinction should be made between any of the children; that requires a lot of emotional balance.
- ***Balance between the new marriage and the children.*** With all the hustle and bustle of blended families, it's easy for new spouses to neglect each other and their children as well. But remember that both parties need attention. New couples with children tend to focus more on the feelings and emotions of their children; however, it's also important that the couple establish a priority time for themselves in order to strengthen and nurture the relationship.
- ***Be patient and make gradual changes.*** In this new stage, the adults and children involved need time. Adults shouldn't rush events. You cannot start a family overnight. Being patient will allow you to spend time building emotional bonds before you start demanding respect. The best thing is to have a family plan and work on it, not make sudden changes, but go from the smallest to the largest, from the general to the particular.
- ***Teach by example.*** Parents may demand respect after they have given it. It's important to know that before harvesting, it must be sown. In the case of parents, but much more so of non-biological parents, they should consider that the advantage isn't in imposing, but in guiding, fostering, an environment conducive to good relationships. Christian parents who have God in their lives can freely say, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ."
- ***Love first and foremost.*** Love must be the indispensable ingredient at all times in all places, and manifested in every ethically and morally viable way. The unity of the family will be a result of work, roles, and above all, mutual affections. Mark 3:25 points out that "if a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand." The success of a family consists of the good relations between the spouses; if the spouses are united and happy, those same experiences will soon bring the children around.

12.3 Conclusion

In a blended family, not only is the family structure different, but there are particular characteristics that distinguish them. It's important to be aware that these types of families have often gone through losses and/or breakups in the past that have left emotional damage that may or may not have already healed completely.

In the formation of a blended family, three stages are identified: illusion, assembly and cohesion. At least at first, the new family doesn't feel like a homogeneous unit but rather an assemblage of various components without cohesion and without its own identity. Some of the obstacles or challenges they face include the rejection of the children towards the new spouse, situations of jealousy and competitiveness, false expectations, identity crisis of the children, and hurts of the past.

As a church, it's important that we educate ourselves and prepare ourselves to minister to blended or assembled families, providing them with biblical principles and keys to success. Such principles include planning, respectful treatment, asking God for wisdom, communication and dialogue, establishing parental roles, balancing remarriage and children, being patient and making gradual changes, teaching by example and love first of all.

Although the statistics are against them, the truth is that there is hope for assembled families. God wants them to be successful. However, this won't be the product of chance, but the joint result of working together, setting priorities, having discipline, patience, respect, mutual love and, above all, permanently invoke God's help.

Questions to answer:

1. If you have a reconstituted family, mention what the main difficulties are that you're going through.
2. According to what you've studied, what could you do to improve the functioning of your family?
3. How could you help a blended family?

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