

BUILDING
SUCCESSFUL MARRIAGES
& FAMILIES

A PRACTICAL GUIDE OF TWELVE LESSONS



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SUCCESSFUL MARRIAGES & FAMILIES

A PRACTICAL GUIDE OF TWELVE LESSONS

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PROLOGUE

TOWARDS A PASTORAL CARE OF MARRIAGE

Marriages today need to be pastored and cared for because we live in times with so many currents and ideas contrary to the unity of the couple, to fidelity, to happiness in marriage and to the permanence of marriage. Significant changes from the postmodern era confuse the marital experience and affect marriages, and therefore the family. However, a question arises, what kind of pastoral care do marriages need?

The first thing in a **pastoral care of marriage** is to build a biblical foundation that serves as a basis for pastoral care. Parts of this foundation include the following truths: **marriage is for life, it is possible to be happy in marriage, the Bible is the manual of married and family life, every marriage transcends the children, and every marriage contributes to society.** We must also establish a series of fundamental themes, which serve to strengthen the relationship and guide couples. And finally, we must present elements that serve for the development and consolidation of the marriage itself.

The first areas on which the pastoral care of marriage should be based are:

1. **THE CARE OF THE COUPLE.** It is to bring to the couple a series of teachings concerning the following four areas of a person's life and marriage:
 - A. **Physical:** it has to do with all those areas of one's physical life: physical care, sexuality, nutrition ... everything that relates to the physical aspects of the couple and the family and contributes to physical health in general.
 - B. **Emotional:** it has to do with the stability of each person, that is, with emotional security and stability.
 - C. **Social:** teaching the couple about how the effects of childhood shortcomings and emotional experiences, good or bad, impact the current marital relationship, contributing to the success or failure of the couple's interaction and development. It also aims to provide couples with tools to resolve their emotional conflicts that result from this interaction, and maintain a healthy relationship. The couple should be taught how to successfully manage individual differences. Another area is teaching the couple to mature emotionally and socially in the relationship. And finally, teaching them how to face the psychosocial changes and crises that occur in today's society.
 - D. **Spiritual:** The couple should be taught how to develop a life based on Biblical principles, such as holiness in marriage, and how to live under the care and lordship of Jesus Christ.

2. **DEVELOPMENT OF THE COUPLE AND THE FAMILY.** One area that should never be neglected in couples is couple development. Changes occur in every living being, and these can lead to development or death. Therefore, we must teach the couple that it is important that they develop themselves in all areas of their lives, growing and maturing, acquiring new knowledge for life so as to improve their income, their social life, their emotional life and above all, their spiritual life. Every couple needs to learn that as living beings, we have to develop ourselves in all areas of our lives. All people and marriages should seek development and fulfillment as a normal part of existence; they should reach personal fulfillment as a couple, as parents, and as a family. In each of these , we should feel fulfilled, satisfied, and joyful with our married and family life. In this way, we will have marriages full of peace which contribute to society with a lifestyle and a culture of harmony and peace. Then, it will be easy to understand that we can live a high quality of married life, which will produce physical, psychological, social and spiritual well-being in the members of the couple and family (Miguel Garita, 1999, definition of quality of marital life).

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Marriage, as a sacred institution that has been instituted by God, together with the family, is facing a series of questions. The distancing and questioning of God by the secularist and humanist currents of this time have led society to think and question the sanctity and importance of marriage and the family. All of these factors have affected couples, because marital relationships, and therefore families, have been weakened, undermining the importance of being married, and leading society to establish relationships based on sexual relations and being together without getting married. They think that it is preferable to test if they get along well before getting married.

This situation makes us see with sadness and pain the increase of divorce, the number of single mothers, children with fathers "on the run" who do not want to assume the responsibility of caring for their children. We are also witnessing an increase in the number of men and women who love each other but live together, to see if they understand each other and get along, without the inherent responsibilities of marriage. This also has led to an increase in abortions. All of this tells us that some men and women today, by turning away from God, have lost the true sense of God's purpose in instituting marriage and family. What are these foundations?

1. God created marriage and blessed it.
2. Marriage is for life.
3. We can be happy in marriage and family.
4. With the power of God, we can heal those areas of misalignment with our partner and in our family.

In addition, other concepts about marriage were created, such as **"it is not worth fighting for the unity of the family. If I don't like it, I can leave it,"** bringing pain and crisis to the children and family, an increase in infidelity, etc. In general, this loss of values about marriage and family affects society in general.

These topics are presented in this **GUIDE TO DEVELOPING MARRIAGES AND FAMILIES** in order to see God's purpose for couple and families. But also, to learn how to resolve areas of conflict in the couple in order to have and develop a successful marriage.

The topics have an order that, in our opinion, will help you.

1. Refocus on the importance of marriage.
2. Improve marriages by strengthening those areas that are weakening the relationship and that may be distancing one from his/her partner.
3. Working on these topics as a group will be enriching for the participants, leading to changes, with the power of God.

Our wish is for you to have a good and successful marriage.

May God bless your marriage and family.

Dr. Miguel & Irene Garita, Family Care Ministry

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

THE GUIDE consists of twelve topics that are important in the life of the couple. Although these topics are not in an exact order, they are related by their importance. The first topics are to analyze and strengthen the institution of marriage, according to the Bible. The first one aims to affirm marriage as God's creation for man and woman. The other themes are about making a life plan within marriage, because many couples get married and never think about the importance of a life plan. The third one tells us about what is brought to marriage that affects it for better or for worse. There are also themes that affect marriages, such as bad communication, routine in the couple's life, the change from "I" to "we". The last one is about building a culture of peace at home.

The topics are based on the Bible. It is important that the facilitator or speaker analyzes and presents the biblical bases of these topics.

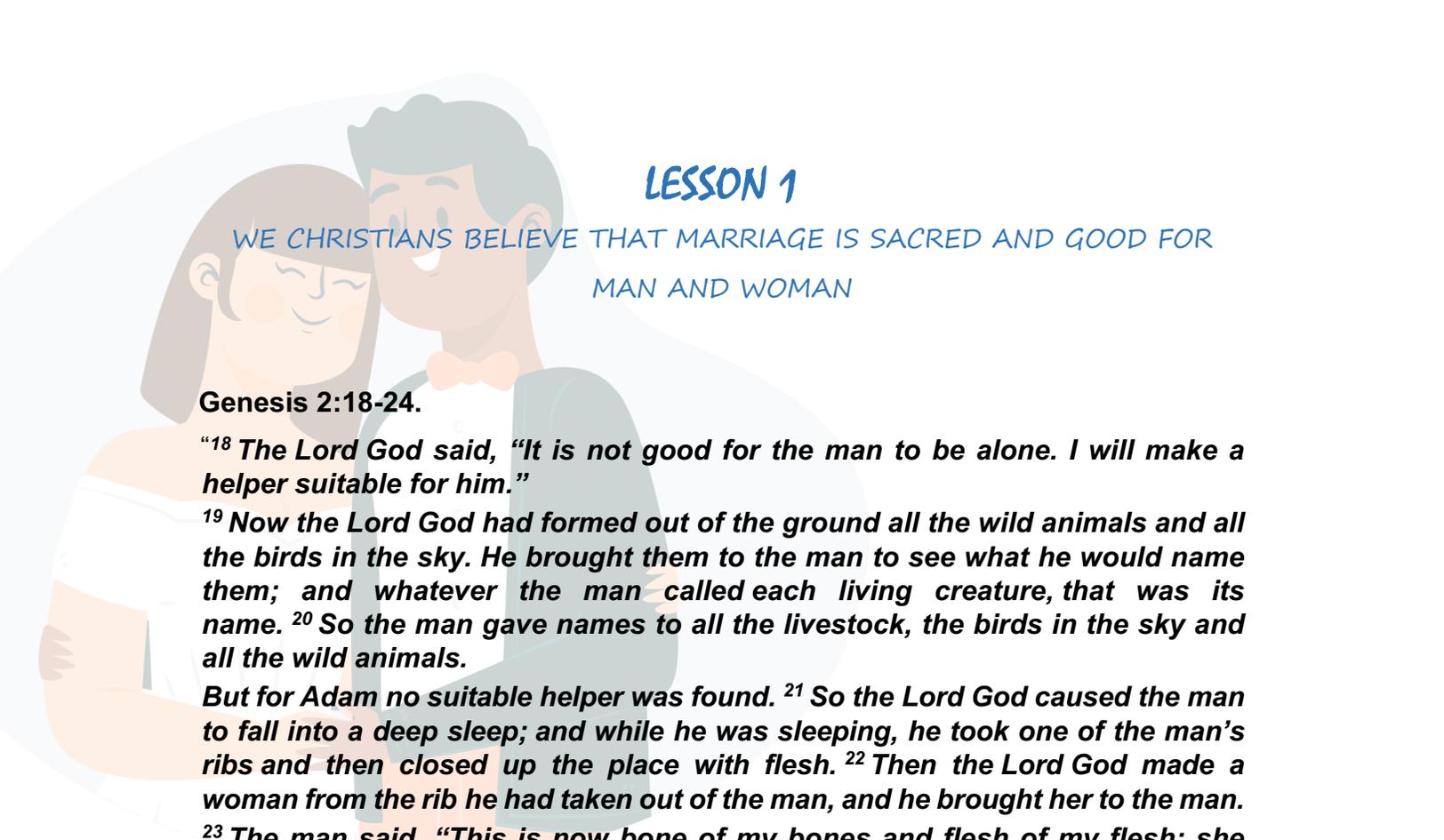
There is a dynamic for each lesson. It should be done first because it helps to break the ice in the group, especially if they are new couples. It is important to do it in a room apart from the main hall of the church, or in a house. If this cannot be done, the chairs should be placed in such a way that everyone can look at each other. We want all of the participants to get involved. The dynamics are also designed to serve as an introduction to the theme. Stay within the time allotted for the exercise, and maintain control of the group.

Make a simple presentation of the topic, encouraging everyone's participation and dialogue. Help the group feel comfortable and happy. Use expressions for the participants like: "very good point, good". After the participation, applaud and thank the participants if they do any of the activities of the dynamic. You can use other supporting materials, such as films, videos, photos, etc.

Always try to lead the couples to make decisions of change, to go to the altar, to put the theme of that day into God's hands, to talk about their marriage, etc. Do not force them, but stimulate a pleasant, joyful dialogue that leads to thinking differently.

In some churches, a small snack is given at the end, some coffee, cookies, etc. This allows the group to continue talking about the topic. Finally, ask the group for help in leaving the room in order.

A final request for you, dear friend whom God has placed in the ministry of couples, always teach a group to pray for each meeting. May our Lord bless you in every meeting, and may you see marriages restored by the power of God. May the Holy Spirit use you with power. We wish you success.



LESSON 1

WE CHRISTIANS BELIEVE THAT MARRIAGE IS SACRED AND GOOD FOR MAN AND WOMAN

Genesis 2:18-24.

“¹⁸ The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.”

¹⁹ Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. ²⁰ So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. ²¹ So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. ²² Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

²³ The man said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.” ²⁴ That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.”

DYNAMIC: This is a dynamic to understand creativity, what it means to create. Each pair or group of two (or four pairs if there are many) is asked to build a robot with different materials provided in the classroom (scissors, cardboard, glue, stapler, etc.) to achieve three things:

1. It must look like a robot, not a person.
2. It must stand on its own.
3. It must have a movable part "a part of the body, etc."

A maximum time of 20 minutes will be given. The couple/group must name it and explain how it resembles the creation of man and woman.

In Genesis, the story of creation includes the creation of man, woman, marriage and the family. It contains a series of important elements to analyze in the marital and family relationship. We can see that the story is short, but it makes two things clear. First, God created marriage and the family, not as something that arose from a sinful state, but quite the opposite. This is the first institution that was made in the state of purity in which Adam and Eve were at that time, and He blessed it. It also teaches us the way we should live in marriage, and that we must learn and take care of its sacredness. Matthew 19:5-6 says, ***“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. ⁶ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together,***

*let no one separate.”” ...” We read in Ephesians 5:31, ³¹ **“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.”** The New Testament affirms the ideas raised in Genesis about the couple and marriage.*

God Himself created the institution of marriage and the family as a complement to what man and woman lacked in their state of loneliness. In this way, the couple complements each other by living together and facing society in a different way. It is not the same to live alone as it is to live with someone who is one’s ideal complement; in this way they will be complete. We see it in Genesis 2:18. God saw that it was not good for man to be alone, stating, **“... I will make a helper suitable for him.”** Creating Eve from Adam’s rib, God said, **“This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh”** (Genesis 2:23). From here, God affirms that the man will leave his family and join a woman to form a new unit. **“That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.”** (Genesis 2:24).

This principle, stated in the garden, was quoted by Paul (Eph. 5:31) and Jesus Himself (Matt. 19:4-6) when they taught about marriage. This truth is supported by the command: **“Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”** Verse 6 teaches us that that which God has made **cannot be changed nor reworked or adapted by man, society or culture, even if man, society and culture, believe that those changes are needed.** In Romans 7:2-3, St. Paul states that this union must remain as long as the spouses live; only the death of one of them breaks the bond.

What God wants with these commands is for the couple to work to stay together. We must find and establish ways to adapt ourselves properly to the marital relationship, learning to adjust each of our areas that conflict with those of our spouse to maintain a healthy, happy, and functional relationship as a couple and family. This will produce the desire to continue together, growing in the relationship, and continuing in obedience to God, pleasing Him with our relationship. Understanding, accepting and obeying this command of the Almighty helps us fight against and reject all the obstacles that our enemy places against the family and marriage to separate them. Our Lord’s command also motivates both the man and the woman to seek to maintain a good, pleasant relationship, and therefore, their offspring will be able to understand the goodness of marriage. A good marriage will produce a better society.

Moreover, we cannot follow the social changes that allow divorce for any circumstance since what was lost was the desire to stay together, to fight for the relationship, to heal unresolved or weak areas that affect the marital and family relationship.

If we analyze the story, it also leads us to understand the essence of what God wanted marriage to be. **First of all, He is a relational God, and therefore desires that man and woman also live in a deep relationship with each other in marriage, as well as with the family.** They are established in this way in a relationship, constituting a lifelong bond.

Moreover, it is a relationship that is blessed by God. When we talk about bonds, we have to define it as a deep link because it is reaffirmed in our inner being and dominates the other areas of life between a man and a woman. This leads them not only to be united by marriage, but it is something deeper. Unity is born from knowing each other, from being united by love, in which each one deepens their knowledge of the other. Both show each other who they really are, with their virtues, defects, and good and bad areas, accepting each other as they are. This establishes and strengthens the bond that grows by the unconditional love of one for the other.

This relationship is of two persons on equal terms. According to the story, man and woman in essence are constituted equal, but with different functions. Adam says: Now I will call you "woman", recognizing the equality in their physical essence of the same physical elements, but at the same time, he makes the differentiation between them at a functional level. We are made for different functions but need each other to complement each other.

This also has great repercussions today, because in this way, the Creator establishes that marriage is the union of two persons of different sexual condition. He reaffirms it when He indicates that the man will leave his family and join his wife to form a new identity. This firmly and absolutely refutes same-sex marriages; they cannot be formed, even if they say they love each other. In this way, God indicates that He does not allow this type of union, although these are times when we hear and see the approval of these types of marriages, driven by laws which are made by those who hold power in the countries. Christians cannot accept that from a Biblical perspective. Although we are called to respect the laws of the land, our beliefs do not allow us to accept what God rejected from the beginning of the world.

In the New Testament, the marriage relationship is compared to Christ's relationship with His church. (Ephesians 5:25-33)

"²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. ²⁸ In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church— ³⁰ for we are members of his body. ³¹ "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." ³² This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. ³³ However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband."

Here the man is told how he should love his wife: with a sacrificial love of surrender, care and respect; always maintaining unity with his spouse. This way of loving can only happen when a man looks to God for strength, purity, consciously being a husband willing to watch over and care for his partner in all areas of her life. I believe that the wife is also asked to have this kind of love for her husband when she is asked to respect him.

From the analysis of the couple in this way, it is important to note:

1. Marriage was made by God.
2. It is a forever union, as long as the couple lives. It is the basis of our belief about marriage, which we must have clear and defined as Christians.
3. God does not accept divorce or separation. Marriage is a complement to face life in a suitable way together.
4. We must maintain and strengthen this bond, with the help of God in our home.
5. As Christians, we cannot accept the marriage bond between persons of the same sex.
6. Although there is talk of different kinds of families today, the ideal family is the one presented by the marriage of a man and a woman, with their respective children.

PRAYER: LORD, MAY OUR MARRIAGE AND FAMILY REPRESENT WHAT YOU WANT FOR OUR LIVES.

LESSON 2

WHY AND WHAT ARE WE TOGETHER FOR?

TOWARDS A LIFE PROJECT IN MARRIAGE

LUKE 5:4-5. *“4 When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.”*

5 Simon answered, “Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.”

GENESIS 12:1.3 *“ The Lord had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. 2 “I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”*

All married couples, when we get married, we go to a new land. How are you doing in this new land?

DYNAMIC:

Hand out papers to each couple with the questions: Why did you get married? What did you get married for? If you had the opportunity to make a change in the person you married, what kind of change would you make? Have them read it and study it for a few minutes, and then share it with the group.

INTRODUCTION

There are many reasons why we desire or look forward to having a partner with whom we can fulfill our many expectations. However in real life, what drives us to live as a couple is nothing more than the search for love, that is, to love someone and to be and to feel loved by someone.

Many married couples spend their lives together just living from day to day; they have no plans for the future because they only live in the present. Even though they planned their wedding, which was very well organized, they did not plan how they wanted to live, nor did they plan their future life. This causes them live like the apostles in the passage, trying to catch something good for life as a couple, but they are very tired of working on it. The project of married life is for the couple and their children to develop a system of life in common towards a goal that they have to build every day in spite of the ups and downs that they must deal with every day. To be a couple is to live together, committing to sharing life together, where personal, spiritual, social, family, professional, and financial projects are planned for the future of the marriage.

AREAS IN WHICH THE COUPLE DEVELOPS

Area of “I” and “you.” We all must change from “I” and “you” to “we” in marriage ... my money is now our money, my desires become our desires, etc.

Reproductive area. It's about becoming fathers and mothers. How many children do we want to have, how are we going to educate them, what do we want them to be like when they become adults, what kind of people do we want them to be?

Social area. It is related to social level, work, study, friends. How do we want to live, keep our family together, etc.

Church participatory area. Our participation in church. What and how would we like to serve in the church? What do we want our Christian life, and that of our children, to be like? What do we want our faith and that of our children to be: strong, light, religious, etc.?

THE IMPORTANCE OF A LIFE PROJECT FOR THE COUPLE.

Couples go through various stages and cycles, both individual and marital. For example, at each age we undergo physical and psychological changes that affect our way of thinking and living. One of them is the midlife crisis, which occurs between 40 and 50 years old. Men start to feel that they are losing their strength, they get tired, and they feel that their ability to conquer is being lost. They try to exercise, they worry a lot about their clothing, they may wear colorful clothes that are tighter to the body, etc. Women may feel that they are losing their beauty. They groom themselves better, they take more care of their body, they look for tight clothing that highlights their body more, they make physical changes. All of these physical changes are accompanied by others that clash with the marital relationship.

This is just an example of many periods that occur in life, together with life situations, that cause stress in their relationship. For many couples, this will affect their desire to continue as a couple or not. It will depend a lot on the married life plans that they have together, so that love and the desire to continue life together are reactivated or maintained.

Making a life project together that gives meaning to the relationship is vital for the couple because it gives them a direction towards a goal to achieve. This direction helps them stay motivated and united towards where they want to go or do in the middle of the stages they are passing through.

It is on the basis of an existing, present love that a life project is built together. In times of stagnation, apathy, or distancing of the couple, the project becomes an element that keeps alive the flame of love and the desire to continue together and

solve existing problems successfully. The projects can be diverse, and short or long term.

In addition, it is not only a matter of building this project, but it becomes a space for communication between the couple in which the objectives of the project and the way to achieve them are set out. For example:

- A trip,
- Preparing for a career or trade,
- A new house,
- Remodeling your current home,
- Having children or more children,
- Starting a business venture,
- A missions trip
- Recreation trip
- etc.

In each of these project ideas or others, three things must be considered:

- 1 How will we carry it out? Make a plan to achieve it.
- 2 What adjustments should we make to achieve this? Review what changes we should make, in finances, as a couple, as a family.
- 3 When do we want to do it, set a date to start doing it and finish it?

THE PRIMARY PURPOSE OF DOING A LIFE PROJECT AS A COUPLE

1. It helps make a successful marriage that lasts over time.
2. It is not only doing or building something together, but also having a wonderful time together doing it.
3. It helps us have a healthy lifestyle, to build a healthy family.
4. It mobilizes us to have an optimistic, joyful, happy relationship together.
5. Above all, it helps us become a couple and build family relationships subject to the power of God. May we love God and may God be the One who unites us.
6. A life project breaks the routine in which many couples live.

HOW TO ACHIEVE THIS:

The main question we want to ask ourselves about our family: How do we want to live the rest of our lives? What do we want to have, to live, to do in five, ten, thirty years?

We must base the relationship on the whole Word of God. To do His will. John 5:30 says, ***“for I do not seek my will...”***

Every life project has to recognize the weaknesses we have as a person and as a couple. Our imperfections will lead us to fail in some things. Therefore, we must firmly decide that we will accept each other unconditionally. Establish good communication as a rule. (James 1: 19) Look for activities and hobbies you can do together; enjoy together things that you like. This gives us confidence to be friends. It helps us take time in planning our future. Committing to the idea that our partner is the priority in our life contributes to developing mutually satisfying sexual relationships.

Seek to laugh at life together. Life is difficult but still beautiful to live. Learn a good way to resolve the conflicts that arise in the couple or in the family. Conflicts help us to grow. When we solve them in a way in which we both win, this helps keep us together. We want to stay together, but if we hang on to those conflicts without solving them, they will eventually separate us. Let's agree on two things: that we love each other and are never enemies, and that God brought us together and our children belong to both of us.

God sees us as a unit that He wants to bless. He sees us with an eternal love, and He loves your partner just as He loves you. God has thoughts and plans for you of good and not evil.

God wants you to prosper in everything as your soul prospers. Let us then walk together this life of marriage with an exciting life project that is good, holy and for life. Christ gives joy and happiness to life.

Luke 5:4-6 “⁴ When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.”

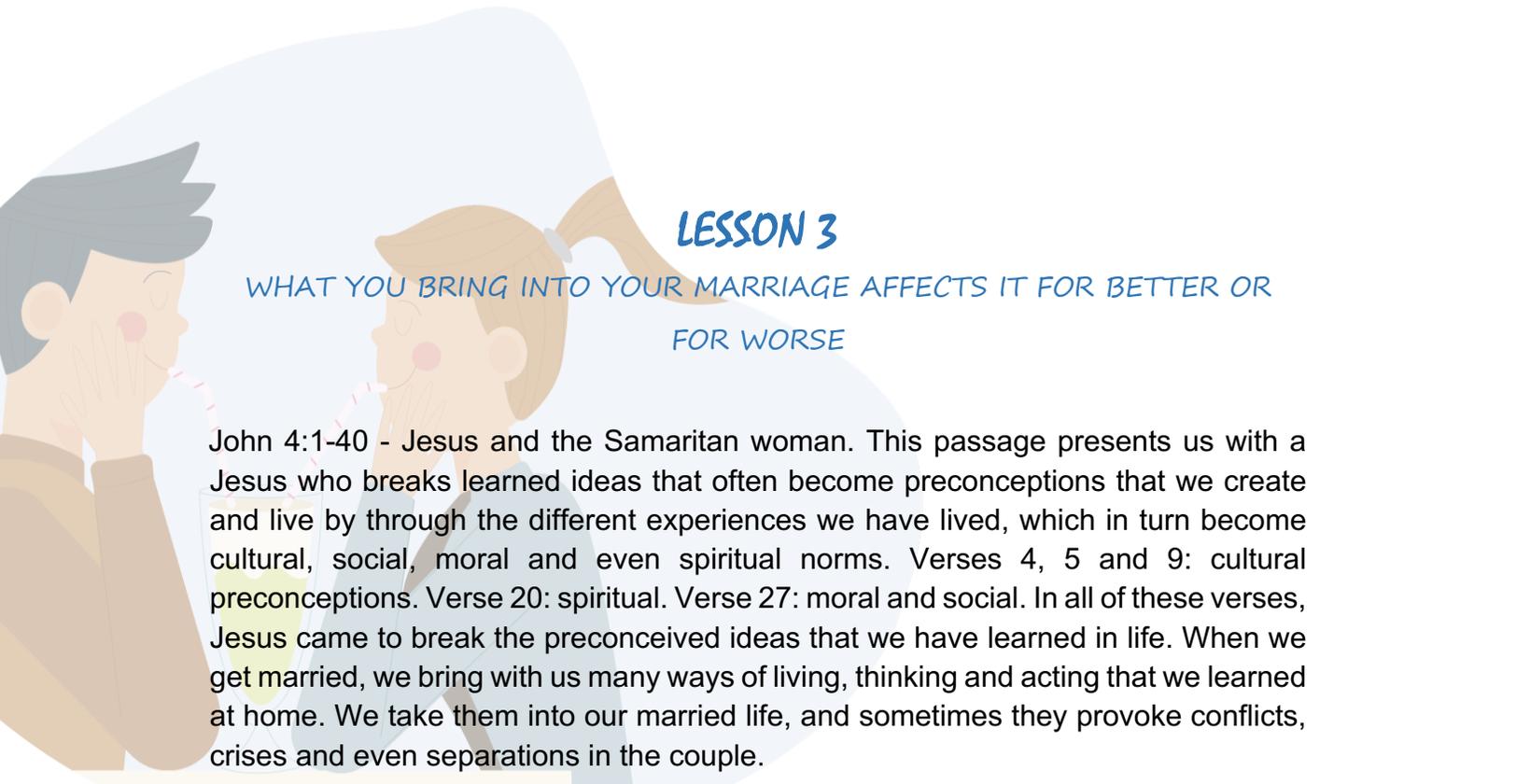
⁵ Simon answered, “Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.”

⁶ When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break.”

Today the Lord wants to tell you to go out into the deep in your relationship. Do not be afraid of failure because all the great thinkers, all the great people of humanity, failed in some of their attempts to achieve their goal, but nothing nor anyone stopped them from moving ahead. Let nothing and no one stop you. If you cannot achieve your goals, you should set new goals. If your dream doesn't come true, dream another dream, even bigger than the one you had before. But don't let limitations stop you; head out into the deep. It is important that you carry out a life project in your marriage relationship; this will help you have a deeper life in your relationship with your family, your spouse, your children, your economic future, and your service to God.

PRAYER

God, please help us so that our life project becomes a reality through You.



LESSON 3

WHAT YOU BRING INTO YOUR MARRIAGE AFFECTS IT FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE

John 4:1-40 - Jesus and the Samaritan woman. This passage presents us with a Jesus who breaks learned ideas that often become preconceptions that we create and live by through the different experiences we have lived, which in turn become cultural, social, moral and even spiritual norms. Verses 4, 5 and 9: cultural preconceptions. Verse 20: spiritual. Verse 27: moral and social. In all of these verses, Jesus came to break the preconceived ideas that we have learned in life. When we get married, we bring with us many ways of living, thinking and acting that we learned at home. We take them into our married life, and sometimes they provoke conflicts, crises and even separations in the couple.

DYNAMICS: Have groups of three couples talk for 20 minutes about things they learned from their parental families that they are repeating in their marital relationship. In four areas: money management, showing affection, how to manage the household, and parenting. Write them down on a large piece of newsprint or poster board and then present it to the large group. The dynamic should last 40 minutes. Then will come the talk about the theme.

We bring to our marriage lessons we learned from experiences we have lived through, such as:

1. INHERITANCES FROM OUR FAMILY.
2. EXPERIENCES OR KNOWLEDGE:
 - A. PSYCHOLOGICAL
 - B. SOCIAL.
 - C. SPIRITUAL.

INHERITANCES AND KNOWLEDGE THAT WE BRING TO OUR MARRIAGE.

- PHYSICAL: Hair color, eye color, height, etc. but we also inherit intelligence and temperament.
- GENERAL INTELLIGENCE FROM OTHERS. We all inherit intelligence from our parents. This is important because it helps us to evaluate different situations in life and choose the most appropriate response for us in a situation. It has been seen that people with low **intellectual capacity or intelligence** find it difficult to

give adequate answers in their relationships; they find it difficult to perceive and analyze all the areas that comprise a situation. This limitation makes it difficult for them to have successful marriages and successful families. Therefore, we must review which elements that we bring to the marriage that are affecting it negatively. If this is one of the areas, the Bible tells us that we can ask God for wisdom and intelligence.

- Another of the elements that we inherit is **temperament**, which we define as a type of behavior that a person is born with, inherited from the parents. It has a psychological component because it helps us to react. This reaction can be of various types: **aggressive, sad, melancholic or happy**.
 - PSYCHOLOGICAL: traumas, abuses, rejections, aggressions that we received in the family, either from our parents or others, that negatively affected our life. We often bring them to the marriage because there is a tendency to repeat the most negative parts of our life history.
 - SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTOR: Economic social class, poverty or wealth. Good or bad habits of personal hygiene, hygiene at home. Practices of order, discipline, treatment of others, etc. Being affectionate or distant.
 - WAYS OF REACTING IN LIFE. In many homes, people talk loudly, or in a bad way, or react only with fights. One learns courtesy, understanding and good treatment or neglect, criticism, to live always active, or passive, cheerful, or not. One learns to be pessimistic or optimistic, to be a fighter, persevering, hardworking, or not. It is at home where we learn almost everything about how to live life. We learn at home about living healthy or sick, about fears or strengths to face daily difficulties.
 - SPIRITUAL FACTORS: If we come from very religious homes or not, or we come from very superstitious homes, or atheistic homes, this will affect us in the marriage relationship and the teaching of our children.

The important thing is to understand that we all bring things from our families to the marriage relationship, and this can affect our marriage. Our spouse also brings their things, and in many cases, they are contrary to what we learned. In many marriages, these differences form conflicts that the couple struggles to solve and can last for many years. They are things that remain at an unconscious level because we saw them repeated many times in the home where we were raised, and they remain as a preconceived idea about a circumstance or situation by one of the parents.

We also learn their way of thinking, which we repeat without realizing it. For this reason, it is important to realize how we learned it at home, and then take it to the feet of Jesus Christ so that He can change it and can put new ways of living,

thinking and behaving into our relationship. FIRST, we must recognize how/what we're thinking, then quit those habits or preconceptions and ask God to give us new ways to live as a couple. We must help the couple make those life-changing decisions, bringing them to the altar so that they leave their negative behavior and receive the change in their lives and relationship.

PRAYER: GOD, WE GIVE YOU THIS AREA OF OUR LIVES SO THAT YOU CAN CHANGE IT AND CHANGE OUR MARRIAGE.

LESSON 4

HONORING THE SEXUAL RELATIONSHIP WITH OUR PARTNER

Hebrews 13:4: *Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.*

Colossians 3:5: *Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.*

DYNAMICS:

Form a circle with all participants. Give the first person a paper figure in the shape of a heart. Each person will pass the heart around the circle, but must first do two things: 1. Say a positive characteristic of sexuality in marriage, for example: Respect, passion, sincerity, love, union, etc. 2. When the person says the characteristic, at the same time they should do some damage to the heart, such as crumple it, tear it somewhere, pinch it, etc. and then continue passing it to each other.

After everyone has done the dynamic, the leader will ask the members: would any of you like your heart to be treated like the paper heart was treated? Many times, as a couple we do not honor sexuality because we say one thing with words, but with our actions we do the opposite. In the process, we may damage sexuality in our relationship, and the results can be so bad in our spouse's heart that it can end up being like the paper heart, damaged, shattered and very difficult to repair again.

WHAT IS MEANT BY HONORING THE SEXUAL RELATIONSHIP?

When we speak of honoring the sexual relationship in the couple, we should understand this to comprise the following parameters:

A) To respect the couple, their body, their dignity. There can be no honor if there is not respect in every sense. To respect is to consider, recognize, appreciate, and value the qualities of a person, in this case the wife or husband, as something we need to protect. This is linked to the love we have for our spouse, and we want to give him/ her the best of ourselves. Not respecting the partner in sexual relations can make the good of sexual relations something vulgar, full of lewdness, and dishonorable. This will lead to a type of sexual relationship more oriented towards a disordered passion where anything is OK, instead of a passion constrained by the love for the partner. If there is no respect, we will not be willing to take care of the limits between what is normal and what is immoral in the relationship. Respect in this way is something that morally and spiritually defines a healthy sexual relationship.

B) Another aspect of what we call honoring the partner sexually has to do with making the partner feel like someone nice, beautiful; it means that we make our partner feel good about having a sexual relationship with us.

C) Part of honoring your spouse is helping him/her feel that you enjoy the sexual relationship when they do. When you both enjoy the relationship, the sexual relationship is seen as a gift from God that is a very important part of marriage because it is for the enjoyment of both.

D) We can also speak of honoring the sexual relationship when it is carried out within the parameters of Christian ethics. For Christians, there is a manual that guides us ... the Bible; it gives us parameters of conduct in all areas of the relationship. These maintain the healthy limits of sexual enjoyment.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SEXUAL PREPARATION:

Many couples seek to have their sexual relationships when one of the two feels the desire to do so. However, in many cases, the other does not feel the same desire, and this is synonymous with conflicts and frustrations in the couple. This is why it is important to prepare or stimulate the other for a sexual relationship. Respect their feelings if they feel that it is a bad time. For example, many spouses come home from work, eat, watch television until late at night, and then at that moment they want to have a sexual relationship. They look for their partner who possibly, tired from housework and children, or outside work, went to bed earlier and is already asleep. It is unfair that this person waits until late at night to look for a sexual relationship. It is the least appropriate time because he/she does not respect their spouse's rest hours. She or he may possibly accept their spouse's advances in the end, but not as pleasantly as if it were at another time. The situation is important to understand, with the concept of honoring each other in the sexual area. Learn to prepare for the sexual relationship. It does not have to be highly structured, but prepare in the following areas, which will allow for greater sexual enjoyment from both spouses.

This preparation is for both and must be mental, when through gestures of affection and love, we stimulate our partner about the possibility of a sexual relationship with some suggestive phrase; understanding that women are stimulated more by words of affection than by other expressions, and men are stimulated more by the visual or by touch than by words. These differences should be taken into account when getting ready for a good relationship.

Another area of preparation is the physical, which has to do with grooming or physical cleanliness; this is part of respect for the partner. When we present ourselves clean and neat for a sexual relationship, we are telling our partner that we respect and love him/her, that is why we present ourselves neat. We should also look for the right place, since for many women, the fear of being heard or seen inhibits them from having a pleasant and satisfactory relationship.

Another element to take into consideration is to take time for foreplay before penetration. This is especially important for men, who have been taught that sexual intercourse is only penetration, and therefore are not willing to give time for the preparation of the wife. But the time before penetration is vital because it is here where we can give gestures of affection and love to the partner. It prepares both to enjoy sexuality more.

WHAT IS UNHEALTHY SEXUALITY?

Unhealthy sexuality is defined as that which negatively affects the relationship itself, or that on which the whole relationship depends. Unhealthy sexuality can be grouped into three areas:

By the frequency

We cannot define what is healthy or unhealthy in terms of the frequency of relationships because this is sometimes affected by age, sexual temperament, physical problems, stress, fatigue, etc. We can say that there are two extremes. In men, one of them is impotence, that is, the inability to have an erection. For this, it is necessary to receive medical help from a physical examination to determine the causes, which may be physical, mental, or both.

In the woman, it is frigidity or inability to have orgasms, therefore she does not want to have sexual intercourse, which in some cases can be painful, and there can also be many causes.

Another problem is the desire to have sexual relations, if possible, every day and even several times a day. This can be problematic for the other partner if she/he does not want it that often, and it becomes a problem of trying to satisfy the partner. In these cases, it is important to get help.

Another aspect about unhealthy sexuality is the lack of desire, which comes from a psychological rather than physical problem that needs to be solved. Many times, it is usually due to anger with the partner, mistrust, self-esteem problems, unresolved guilt, depression, etc. These can be drivers of lack of sexual desire, and affect the frequency of sexual intercourse.

By the form or manner of having the relationship:

We also have as unhealthy sexuality the form or way of having a relationship. Nowadays, many societies are more open sexually; they go out of the so-called normal parameters: Sadism - beating or denigrating the other to feel pleasure, masochism - being beaten or denigrated to feel pleasure, or fetishism - using non-animated images or objects to receive pleasure. Additionally, group sex,

pornography and voyeurism can be included as sexual distortions. These are not ways to honor our partner. The Bible has rules to honor our partner, especially in intimate relationships.

By the purpose of the relationship

Among them we have homosexual relationships, pedophilia, that is, relationships with boys and girls, incest, relationships with close family members, group sex, partner exchange, sex with animals, transvestism, among others.

We must turn away from all this, as the Bible says:

Matthew 5:27-28: ²⁷ “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ ²⁸ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Leviticus 18:23 “Do not have sexual relations with an animal and defile yourself with it. A woman must not present herself to an animal to have sexual relations with it; that is a perversion.”

Romans 1:26-28 ²⁶ ²⁶ Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. ²⁷ In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error. ²⁸ Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done.

1 Corinthians 6:9-10: ⁹ Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men ¹⁰ nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

WHAT AFFECTS SEXUALITY IN COUPLES?

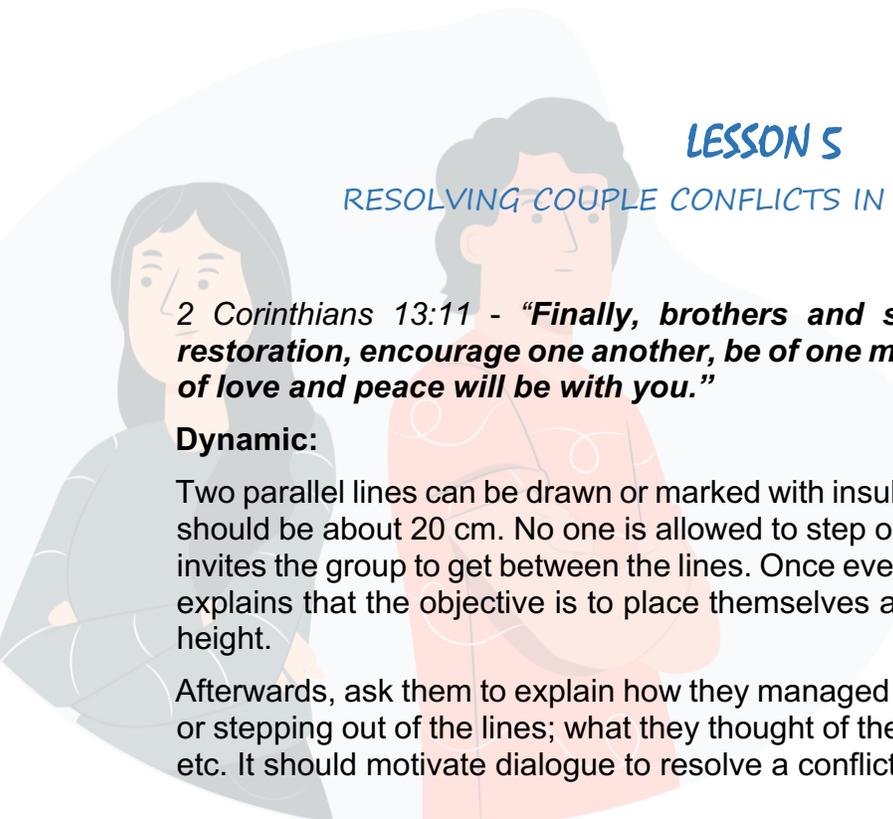
Couples sometimes go through situations of conflict in their sexual relationships. These are produced by various circumstances like **unresolved negative or traumatic experiences**, such as abuse of any kind, mistreatment, self-esteem problems, which affects the sexual relationship, etc. Another situation can be when couples get into a **routine or rut**, which turns off the desire to be with the partner, and therefore, sexual desire is lost.

Unresolved anger between the couple for conflicting situations that have not been forgiven diminishes or removes any desire for sex.

Existing work, family or economic problems that provoke stress in one or both partners can also reduce sexual desire.

Other elements that affect the sexual relationship in the couple is the **age and marital stage of the couple**. **Physical and mental illnesses** also can affect or incapacitate the sexual relationship. Some medicines also have an impact.

Prayer: Lord, may our sexuality be healthy and according to your Word.



LESSON 5

RESOLVING COUPLE CONFLICTS IN A DIFFERENT WAY

2 Corinthians 13:11 - **“Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.”**

Dynamic:

Two parallel lines can be drawn or marked with insulating tape on the floor. The width should be about 20 cm. No one is allowed to step on or over the lines. The facilitator invites the group to get between the lines. Once everyone is positioned, the facilitator explains that the objective is to place themselves according to age, date of birth, or height.

Afterwards, ask them to explain how they managed to move into order without falling or stepping out of the lines; what they thought of the group's support, their proximity, etc. It should motivate dialogue to resolve a conflict.

¿WHAT IS CONFLICT?

Conflict is when the couple or the family argues, fights, has contrary ideas with each other, says something that is against the other, or makes her or him feels threatened or assaulted. Conflicts can be produced by a myriad of actions, ideas, thoughts and attitudes within the couple or family. Conflict is a normal part of families, even if they are Christian, but the way they resolve or face them is what defines them as mature Christians or not.

Negative conflicts are produced by our lack of emotional, Christian maturity, erupting because we have not grown up enough to keep in peace with ourselves and with our spouse or family. We must remember that we have an enemy who is always encouraging us to have conflicts with ourselves, with our spouses, family, and even with God. When we serve and want to live a life of holiness, the enemy seeks to destroy our relationship with God through conflict. In this way, conflict damages the relationship between people and the couple. It dampens the marital relationship, deteriorates trust, and breaks the harmony and peace that should be lived in the family. It also causes people to get sick, and in general causes social violence. It distances us from peace with God.

In general, conflicts are the cause of wars between peoples and countries, of misery, of pain and death of many, as well as of many emotional and physical illnesses because they transcend society, culture and church. They are formers of violent and aggressive societies and cultures. Conflicts are the cause of most divorces and the destruction of many homes because they structure aggressive forms of behavior.

However, people often face conflict in the wrong way instead of according to their emotional maturity, their Christian experience and the intensity of the conflict itself. The most mistaken way is when we refuse to face the real cause of the problem; in

some cases, we minimize it and say: "it is nothing, it is not a problem". We deny it, but we keep it internally and it grows and festers. For example, in many couples, there is an argument over a situation that needs to be discussed and resolved, but they get angry for a few days and do not talk about the problem again, with the idea/hope that after some time has passed, the problem will magically dissolve and be resolved. However, they have not forgiven each other; it is like a thorn that they do not remove from their skin that becomes infected over time. The unresolved circumstance makes us angry and leads us to embitterment.

Therefore, it is important to find ways to resolve conflicts in accordance with our Christian faith. The Word always has teaching on conflict; it tells us that to live wisely is to resolve conflict appropriately.

The Bible tells us to seek peace.

- **Mark 9:50:** *"Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt among yourselves, and be at peace with each other."*
- **1 Thessalonians 5:13:** *"...Live in peace with each other."*
- **Romans 14:19:** *"Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification."*
- **Proverbs 14:29:** *"Whoever is patient has great understanding, but one who is quick-tempered displays folly."*
- **Proverbs 20:3:** *"It is to one's honor to avoid strife, but every fool is quick to quarrel."*
- **Proverbs 17:13, 14:** *"Evil will never leave the house of one who pays back evil for good. ¹⁴ Starting a quarrel is like breaching a dam; so drop the matter before a dispute breaks out."*

They are verses like many others that motivate us to live in peace, to not enter into conflict, and have wisdom.

However, many husbands and wives like to be in conflict because it was what they first learned in their homes, to fight for everything. They take this model into their own marriage relationship. Some men and women grew up with an irascible character and lots of contention in their home that they carry on into their lives, even showing it with pride, saying that they have the character of their father, without recognizing that their father was a rude and spoiled person who lacked the character to solve his own weaknesses and fears. For them, to be a real man or a real woman is to be able to control that which makes us bad and makes others bad.

On the other hand, they have forgotten that the Word says that in Christ we are new creatures, the old has passed away, behold everything is made new, we are new people, wiser, more joyful, the difficult and bad is made new. You are a new man or a new woman, with a different life teaching than the one you learned in the home where you were raised.

Moreover, we enter or live in conflict because we have learned socially not to lose, that we must always win, even if we harm the other. However, God's logic for us is to turn the other cheek. In many marriages, the idea is: **"If he does something bad**

to me, he will pay for it.” This facilitates conflict and prevents us from finding adequate rules to handle it. We don't change our attitude or allow Christ to control our emotions and our character.

It is only when we allow the Lord to control our relationships that we are willing to learn a model for resolving conflicts.

Why do we need a model? To solve conflicts. A model means to learn a way that helps us do something step by step. I suggest you put this model into practice so that you will see with God's help that you can find a new way to solve conflicts in your marriage and family ... a way that is healthier for everyone.

This model has its bases, which are:

1. Being committed to seeking peace in our marriage and family.
2. Letting our guard down. This is never being defensive with our spouse or family or in the home; it is a state of being confident in the home and in the relationship with my family.
3. Being consciously and firmly committed to finding solutions to conflicts that arise in your relationship and family.
4. Renouncing negative reactions from previously learned patterns. React as a Christian redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ and sanctified by His Holy Spirit.
5. Seeking in every way to learn to react maturely, wisely and prudently to conflict.
6. Commitment to peace must always lead us to forgive, to be forgiven, to make restitution if necessary, and to strive to win back trust.

The model leads to several procedures that you should learn. For example:

- a) Express your views clearly.
- b) Hear and speak respectfully. James 1:19 ***“Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry,”***
- c) Examine your fears and concerns regarding the case in conflict.
- d) Analyze the situation from the other person's position.
- e) Analyze and think about the conflict from Jesus' position, from His teaching, from what He would say. It is necessary to pray for the conflict, even if you are angry.
- f) Choose a solution that is satisfactory for both. A win-win for both.
- g) If it is necessary to negotiate, this is an art. The goal is not for you to win while the other loses, but for both of you to win.
- h) Be willing to submit the problem and the solution to the Lord Jesus Christ.

RULES FOR ANALYZING THE PROBLEM:

- a) Choose a suitable time and place to talk. If necessary, choose a neutral place to help you control your reactions.
- b) Do not go off the subject nor mix it with other unresolved situations.
- c) Try to understand the problem rather than react to it.
- d) Be kind to the other person, be merciful, even though he/she may have failed.
- e) Use appropriate language: no sarcasm, no shouting, no insults, no manipulation. Avoid violent reactions.
- f) Do not dig up the past.
- g) Do not threaten with extremes, for example: if you do not do this, I will leave you, I will go away. After this there will not be another chance.
- h) Make plans to implement a solution. Be willing to forgive and start over.
- i) Recognize the need for help from a pastor, counselor, or psychologist if necessary.

Even if the couple loves each other, there can always be conflicts. That is why it is necessary to find and use this tool to help strengthen and work with the couple, marriage, and family. **WE ARE ALWAYS CALLED TO PERFECT OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH OUR SPOUSE AND FAMILY.**

Prayer

May the Holy Spirit lead you to the truth, so that the peace of God may be a reality in your family and lead you to a constant perfection as a Christian couple.

LESSON 6

HOW TO BUILD A CULTURE OF PEACE IN THE HOME?

PSALM 119:165 “*Great peace have those who love Your law, And nothing can make them stumble.*”

DYNAMIC:

Ask three couples to act out in a skit how couples react when they are angry. Ask the group what they think about violence in society, and how they think we can change this violence. Have a discussion on the topic of violence and the need for peace in the home.

God took the initiative to make peace. Jesus Christ gave us peace with God, with ourselves and with others. The family is the ideal place to learn and live in peace. "God blesses those who work for peace in the world because they will be called children of God".

THE WORD “PEACE” (FROM THE LATIN PAX), IS DEFINED AS A STATE OF EQUILIBRIUM AND STABILITY IN THE PARTS OF A UNIT, WHETHER INDIVIDUAL, SOCIAL OR SPIRITUAL. Therefore, it is of great importance for our personal, marital and family life.

In the Old Testament, when the expression shalom ("peace" in Hebrew) is used, especially in greetings, it refers to material and spiritual well-being: "peace be with you" Genesis 26:29. The word "peace" in the Bible has many meanings. In the Old Testament, [shalom] (peace) encompasses well-being in the broadest sense of the word (Ps. 73); even in relation to the ungodly; bodily health (Isa. 57:18-19, Ps. 38:3); contentment (Gen. 15:15, etc.); good relations among nations and among men (Judges 4:17; 1 Chron. 12:17, 18); salvation (Jer. 29:11; cf. Jer. 14:13). The New Testament says He is the God of Peace (1 Thess. 5:23). He calls us to be peacemakers in order to inherit the earth (Mt 5:9).

We find so much violence in the homes of our society, and such violence has become a way of life in many families today. Yelling, psychological, physical, patrimonial, sexual and spiritual violence has come to be established in a real way, with great suffering for wives, husbands and children. And these behaviors last for many years, increasing as time goes by.

The problem has been so real that it is already affecting many Christian marriages and homes. We find forms of violence and mistreatment, disguised as neglect for the spouse, mocking jokes to the couple, disqualification of the abilities of one or the other, mainly by not allowing him or her to achieve professional development. Relationships and the care of the couple and the family are above any form of cultural

life because the Bible tells us how we should act as husbands or wives, regardless of the culture in which we live. The Bible teaches us that the love we should love our partner with is above any type of culture.

HOW TO BUILD AND PRACTICE PEACE IN OUR HOMES:

1. Build coexistence agreements, based on respect, love, trust, healthy relationships and cooperation.
2. Express emotions in an appropriate way. No shouting, no violent reactions, no insults.
3. Live the values of the culture of peace in the family.
4. Resolve conflicts, not violently, but through dialogue, tolerance and negotiation.
5. Establish clear guidelines on how to act at home: no shouting, no uncontrolled reactions when angry, no hitting. Dialogue about the anger.
6. As a parent, do not demonstrate your authority with threats, yelling, hitting, punishments or threats.

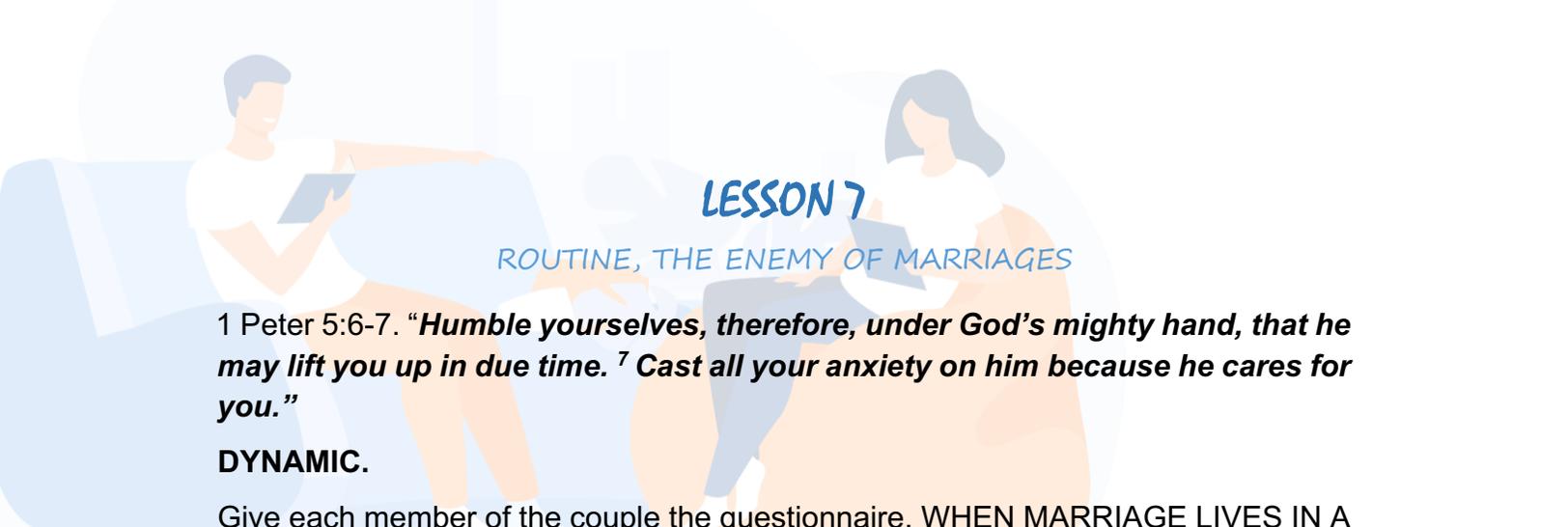
Start by making a poster with the most important values in your family, such as love, respect, peace, caring for each other, love for Christ, obedience, holiness, respect for family relationships, kindness to everyone, be an example of peace, etc. You need to create an atmosphere of peace and joy.

With the whole family make a poster of the rules for living in peace.

This poster will have three areas: what is happening now, what I need to change and a rule to do it. Below is a sample poster to work on with the whole family.

Example Table:

CURRENT SITUATION	/	WHAT I WANT TO CHANGE	/	WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU DON'T CHANGE
There is a lot of yelling	/	No yelling	/	If you shout, you won't get what you want.



LESSON 7

ROUTINE, THE ENEMY OF MARRIAGES

1 Peter 5:6-7. “**Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. ⁷ Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.**”

DYNAMIC.

Give each member of the couple the questionnaire, WHEN MARRIAGE LIVES IN A ROUTINE, to be answered individually by each husband and wife. Then have them compare it, analyzing each other's answers. It is important that they can share with the group the differences or similarities they found about routine areas.

From the French *routine*, a **routine** is a **custom** or habit that is acquired by repeating the same task or activity many times. Routine implies a practice that, over time, develops almost automatically without the need to involve reasoning. Daily life as a couple and family is full of routines, from the time we get up, to the time we go to bed. As a couple, it’s easy to fall into routines in our relationships that cause deterioration.

On the other hand, it should be noted that routine is a mechanism that provides security (minimizes unforeseen events) and saves time (by avoiding infrequent tasks). For some things in life, it is important to maintain a routine. For example, a routine of exercise, healthy meals, habits or spiritual disciplines allow us to maintain a full life, balanced in the face of life's difficulties. However, there is also a type of routine in married life which becomes one of the factors that produces a loss of attention in the couple and leads to the estrangement and cooling of the relationship. Often, this can lead the couple to a loss of love and even separation.

A couple’s life that is too routine can lead the spouses to boredom, causing a feeling of frustration and existential emptiness in the couple. In some cases, it produces depression and a loss of the sense of life as a couple and family. Routine produces a kind of abandonment in the couple's relational life, and all abandonment produces anger, creating frustration in the relationship.

This routine occurs when the couple creates a repetition of acts, actions and behaviors which have the effect of a false "comfort" in the couple's relationships, causing the routine effect. Normally, routine appears in the couple's life when they feel the tranquility of having something already secure. But the emotion that loves produces gradually loses intensity, and when we take for granted that our relationship is secure, we lose the joy and novelty caused by the expectation of visiting or seeing and being with our partner at the beginning. It is the same as when you take the same medicine every day; there comes a point when your body adapts

to it in such a way that it loses its effect on the person. A healthy sentimental relationship has to be in continuous development and movement.

IDEAS TO FIGHT AGAINST ROUTINE IN MARRIAGE.

1. Routine begins with a deterioration of communication, where it is simply reduced to the everyday things of the relationship at home. So, it is important to review how you are communicating, if it is just with gestures, monosyllables, or grunts to say yes or no. Start telling and listening to your partner, with full intentionality and attention. Tell jokes, tell stories from the past, recount pleasant moments that have happened. James 1:19 gives us the basis of how to improve communication by being ready to listen, and very slow to speak. Success is learning to listen.
2. Stop criticizing your spouse, practice complimenting, praise their food, their body, their beauty. Always talk about the good areas that your partner has.
3. Always see your spouse as God's gift of a forever partner to enjoy life with. Yes, you can be happy in marriage.
4. Go out sometimes together, alone, even if it's just for a walk in the park. You don't have to spend a lot of money, just be alone together.
5. Dedicate time together for sex and make it very satisfying so that it brings you together and strengthens your relationship.
6. Surprise your partner with a present for her/him. It can be something very simple; it just needs to show that you thought of her (or him). Dare to call her/him to tell them that you love them.
7. Think about what your partner would like you to do or say. Give her a caress, tell her that she is pretty, that you would never leave her, do it from time to time to maintain the affection and love in your relationship. Love must be cultivated every day, as well as happiness.
8. Break your own routines, such as going to work the same way, or doing the same thing every day. Propose to get up earlier, pray with your spouse and/or with your children, read a biblical text every day in the morning with the children before leaving for work, if possible.
9. Romans 12:1-2 says: be renewed in your understanding. You must renew the concept of relationship that you have been handling in your marriage and family. If you change your thinking, you will change your actions.

Prayer: Lord, please help us break out of the routine that we have unintentionally created. Give us a new relationship, full of joy of being together, something real, where we feel true happiness together.

Thank you, God. Amen

QUESTIONNAIRE: IS THERE ROUTINE IN YOUR MARRIAGE?

Dr. Miguel Garita M., Psychologist

We understand “routine” to be a situation or practice of doing things, of relating to our spouse out of habit, inertia, automatism and monotony. That is, we do the same thing every day, use the same phrases or way of communicating, in our marriage. In general, although routine makes us feel safe because we believe that everything is under control and this allows us to be somehow calm (false security), we are not really happy or joyful. Little by little, married life is losing its charm and we are bored with the relationship because we no longer enjoy being with him or her like we used to. This causes couples to start moving away from each other little by little. Since it is a silent enemy where there are no fights, screams, or big emotions, it quietly leads one or both spouses to start thinking that maybe they would be better off alone or with another person. Routine kills more marriages because it leads to the loss of love in the couple.

Here is a questionnaire that you and your partner can fill out to find out if your marriage is in routine or nearly in routine. Each spouse should fill it out separately. Then compare.

QUESTIONNAIRE TO DETERMINE IF YOU LIVE IN ROUTINE

On each question, circle the letter of the answer that is most true about how you live or feel that you are living.

- 1. Every day I feel that I talk about interesting and joyful things with my partner.**
 - a Yes, very much.
 - b Sometimes.
 - c Never, we always talk about the same things.

- 2. I feel happy when I talk with my spouse.**
 - a Very much. I am happy to talk with my partner.
 - b A little. I don't mind.
 - c Not at all. It bores me to hear him/her.

- 3. When my partner is at home, I feel:**
 - a Happy and cheerful.
 - b I don't care.
 - c I feel like I have more work; it bothers me a lot.

4. **My partner and I talk a lot whenever we are alone.**
 - a. We talk about everything and tell each other everything.
 - b. Hardly ever, we only talk as much as we need to.
 - c. We don't talk because everyone is doing their own thing.

5. **In our married life, every day is the same.**
 - a. No, it is always exciting because different and good things happen.
 - b. A little bit, once in a while there is something new, but not very often.
 - c. Yes, we always do the same thing.

6. **We enjoy doing things together every day:**
 - a. Over time we enjoy many more things together.
 - b. Every day there are fewer and fewer things we enjoy together.
 - c. We hardly have anything to enjoy together anymore, he on one side and she on the other.

7. **Our sex life is:**
 - a. Very good and we enjoy it a lot. We improvise if we can.
 - b. It is good but always the same days, little improvisation.
 - c. Always the same, how boring! I do it just to comply.

8. **My partner always tries to surprise me with something for me.**
 - a. He/she tries to surprise me with something new all the time.
 - b. Occasionally he/she does, but not very often.
 - c. Never, he/she is so predictable with everything he/she does for me.

9. **After we get home from work, greet each other, and do our home chores, we don't share anything we did during the day.**
 - a. Even if we are tired, we talk and tell each other about work or the day.
 - b. We talk only if it is something important to both of us.
 - c. We usually don't talk at all; we just rest and relax.

10. **When my spouse and I go out alone:**
 - a. We enjoy it very much, I love going out alone with my partner.
 - b. We hardly talk at all, or we talk about unimportant things.
 - c. We hardly ever go out; my partner is very boring and doesn't like it.

11. **I feel that my partner and I have nothing in common.**
 - a. On the contrary, I feel more and more attached to him/her every day; I sure love my partner.
 - b. We are united by the children and the debts, but nothing much else.
 - c. Yes, I feel that we are very far apart, that we live out of habit of being together.

12. Sometimes I have thought about what it would be like being alone without my spouse.

- a. Never, my marriage is the best thing that has ever happened to me, despite some difficulties we have had.
- b. Sometimes when I feel so far away from my partner, I wish I were alone.
- c. I live with the thought that it was wrong to get married.

13. In spite of the years together, I find my spouse:

- a. Always interesting; I learn and enjoy being with my partner.
- b. Sometimes boring. Sometimes I feel it gets so boring.
- c. Always boring. I feel like my partner is more boring than ever.

14. I like to be with my spouse, especially when we vacation.

- a. I always enjoy vacationing with my partner.
- b. I very rarely enjoy vacationing with my spouse.
- c. I never enjoy going on vacation with my partner. It is very boring.

WAY OF GRADING THE TEST:

Each answer with the letter a is worth 3 points.

Each answer with letter b is worth 2 points

Each answer with the letter c is worth 1 point

Add up all the a, b and c answers separately.

Total of a x 3 = _____ ÷ 14 x 100 = _____

Total of b x 2 = _____ ÷ 14 x 100 = _____

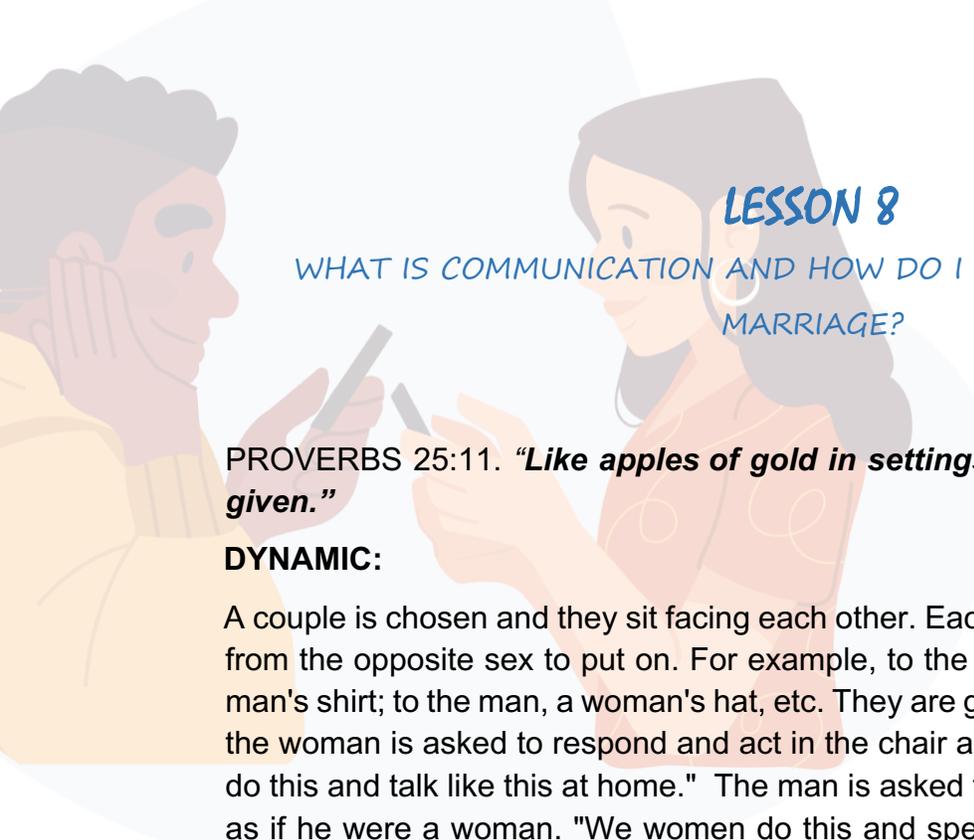
Total of c = _____ ÷ 14 x 100 = _____

Take into account the letter in which you scored the highest:

If the total of “a” is between 192 to 300, your marriage is not routine. Keep it up, you are doing great.

If the total of “b” is between 142 to 200, your marriage is in danger; you are one step away from entering a life of routine. Although your present one is not very pleasant, you must begin to make changes in your married life. Yes, there is hope.

If the total of “c” is between 71 to 100, you are living in a routine that may end your marriage; it is time to make changes to improve the relationship. Analyze in which situations the routine is strongest, and make decisions to change in that and other areas.

An illustration of a man and a woman in profile, facing each other. The man is on the left, wearing a yellow shirt, and the woman is on the right, wearing a red top. Both are holding and looking at their smartphones. The background is a light blue gradient.

LESSON 8

WHAT IS COMMUNICATION AND HOW DO I STRENGTHEN IT IN MY MARRIAGE?

PROVERBS 25:11. ***“Like apples of gold in settings of silver is a ruling rightly given.”***

DYNAMIC:

A couple is chosen and they sit facing each other. Each is given one or more objects from the opposite sex to put on. For example, to the woman give a man's cap or a man's shirt; to the man, a woman's hat, etc. They are given the following instructions: the woman is asked to respond and act in the chair as if she were a man. "We men do this and talk like this at home." The man is asked to respond and act in the chair as if he were a woman. "We women do this and speak like this...". The rest of the men's group is asked to support the woman who responds as a man, saying things that men do or say. The same for the group of women, support the man who acts and responds as a woman. This dynamic lasts about thirty minutes and different pairs can rotate, doing the same thing. The goal is that they will learn to see the different ways men and women think and communicate.

Through communication, we relate to each other and establish bonds, and although we are always communicating, not all forms of communication are adequate. When there are many failures in communication, the couple's relationship deteriorates, causing anger and distancing, which contribute to the lack of love and the separation of the couple. One of the main causes of communication failures is the time that spouses spend doing things alone at home, studying, watching television and other activities. Another has to do with the bad habits we learn, such as speaking without waiting for the other to finish, which can lead us to misunderstand or misinterpret the other. The lack of communication in marriages in our societies is alarming.

Many couples only have a few minutes a week for a pleasant and important conversation, usually about a serious topic or problem that one of the family members is going through. But couples often lack the kind of conversation to express themselves and communicate in situations that bring them together. In many homes, there can be stereotypical conversations which are the same every day. For example: "please pass that to me, what would you like to eat, good morning, goodbye, I'm going to work," etc. Another type of communication is just complaints: "you don't understand me, you don't come home early enough, you always complain, you don't do this or that." Communication is also lost when one of the spouses has

extremist positions where things are seen as either black or white, only extremes. For example: "You are good for nothing, you do not do anything right, etc."

Or when one of the two has inflexible positions in such a way that they must always win every disagreement; this closes communication in the couple. There are also other aspects that hinder communication, such as when we do not accept what our partner thinks, or we get angry and stop talking if our spouse's opinion is different than ours, or when their views or beliefs are not seen as important. Therefore, we do not let them express themselves, and we interrupt and contradict them at every moment when they want to express their point of view, which we disqualify and minimize. This also happens when we manipulate our spouse in some way to achieve what we want, or when we simply answer yes or no, even if we do not agree, nor think of changing or doing what is asked of us.

The result of these behaviors or ways of communicating is to weaken the relationship with the spouse, and can reach the point of rupture in many cases. It must be clearly understood that men and women communicate differently. Men often communicate by actions, and women often by feelings. Therefore, a man may be showing his affection, love and care to his partner and family by buying bread and things for the house, but the woman needs to hear that he loves her, that he is thinking of her. If this is not understood, we establish a barrier in communication.

Good communication must constantly be taking place in the marriage relationship for a healthy marriage and for conflict resolution. Learning to communicate well is an art worth learning and will lead to understanding the other person. When we are dating and then engaged to be married, we spend hours chatting, exploring each other's interests and attitudes, thinking about the future. This initial openness lasts the first years and even the first months of marriage, but then we often lose the ability to communicate well because of routine, of thinking about our daily situations, problems at work, daily stress, problems we need to solve, among others.

HOW TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATION WITH YOUR SPOUSE?

One of the most important aspects to improve communication is to express your feelings and thoughts in an adequate and direct way without being carried away by negative emotions, such as anger, rage, fear, shouting, etc.

- I. Show appreciation for your partner's good qualities.
- II. Accept compliments and tokens of affection, but also be willing to give compliments and tokens of affection to your partner.
- III. Learn to say "No" when it is necessary to do so.

- IV. Ask for the things you want in a direct, but polite and courteous manner. Say thank you for what you are given.
- V. Explain what you think or how you feel.
- VI. Do not excuse yourself by blaming others when it is your responsibility. It is better to apologize.
- VII. In your conversation, use assertive terms, speak positively and of the good, rejecting the bad. For example, say "we are going to get out of this; it will cost us, but we will succeed. It will soon pass", knowing that God is with us and will help us.
- VIII. Whenever you can, express your feelings, words, gestures or actions of joy, peace and gladness.
- IX. Be willing, ready, and attentive to listen first, rather than to respond first. James 1:19 says: ***be slow to anger***. This is the ideal model that the Bible presents to us, and if we practice it, it will help us to communicate well with our partner.
- X. The Word also says that a soft answer takes away anger. Let us learn to respond with responses directed by our mind and not so much with our emotions. Remember that we cannot rely on our emotions.

PRAYER: Lord, please help me to always have good words for my spouse and my family. May my communication always be seasoned with love.

LESSON 9

THE IMPORTANCE OF HONORING MY MATE

1 SAMUEL 1:10-18

10 In her deep anguish Hannah prayed to the Lord, weeping bitterly. **11** And she made a vow, saying, “Lord Almighty, if you will only look on your servant’s misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head.”

12 As she kept on praying to the Lord, Eli observed her mouth. **13** Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she was drunk **14** and said to her, “How long are you going to stay drunk? Put away your wine.”

15 “Not so, my lord,” Hannah replied, “I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to the Lord. **16** Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief.”

17 Eli answered, “Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him.”

18 She said, “May your servant find favor in your eyes.” Then she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast.

What is marriage?

Marriage is a model of relationships that god wants to establish in his people, where both spouses represent god and his work. Starting from this, we will analyze what it is to honor our partners.

DYNAMIC:

Do an activity where women are on one side of the room and men are on the other side. They will gather into groups of three to analyze and answer the following questions about when they have felt that they had been honored (or not) by their mates, expressing their understanding of what it means to honor someone.

Duration – 10 minutes. Then explain the results to the rest of the group.

- What is it to honor someone?
- what is honoring your partner?
- how have you felt honored (or dishonored) by your partner?
- how do you think you honor your partner?

To honor is to understand and protect your spouse, understanding that you are co-heirs and of the same essence of God. What is asked of man is to love and protect: these are not actions assigned or learned by culture. Ephesians 5:25 says: *“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.”* To honor is to have high esteem for the other, which produces security and strengthens self-esteem, because it makes one feel important, valuable, loved and accepted. These are the bases of self-esteem itself. In this way, we fulfill what Saint Paul asks of us in this verse, where he indicates that we are to go further than just loving. It is to be a sacrificial love. It is a way to honor God because God has bound them together and wants them to be one in Christ. Your spouse is the treasure that God gave you, *For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also* (Mathew 6:21). Honor is not really honor until it is expressed and demonstrated. The expression of honor changes our thoughts.

Honoring your spouse helps them respond in the same way; that way you will stay connected in love. Honoring should be at the center of the marriage relationship. God asks it of me as a means by which Christ manifests Himself in our home life. It is only when we are both submitted to God that we can decide to honor God by honoring our partner. I can submit to her/him. In Isaiah 54:5, God reveals Himself with the title of husband to show that He loves and protects the wife (His church).

EFFECTS OF HONORING MY PARTNER

- It helps me to see accurately the immense value each of us is to God, made in His image and likeness, as my partner and I are.
- It strengthens my relationship with my partner. It strengthens me.
- It creates a safe environment where wonderful relationships flourish.
- Paul encourages Christians to love and honor one another. Romans 12:10.

When do I not honor my partner?

- When I do not respect them as a person.
- When I disqualify them in what they do.
- When I do not give them the place they deserve as a partner, whether male or female.
- When I criticize them in front of others.
- When I do not take care of them, do not help them, do not protect them do not pay attention to them.
- When I insult and mistreat them and do not give them what they need.

I honor him/her in the way I relate or communicate with him/her.

- In the way you talk to and treat your partner. Do the things they like.
- By caring for their health and image, I am honoring my partner.
- I honor them when I seek forgiveness if I have offended them.
- Make a list of positive things about your partner.

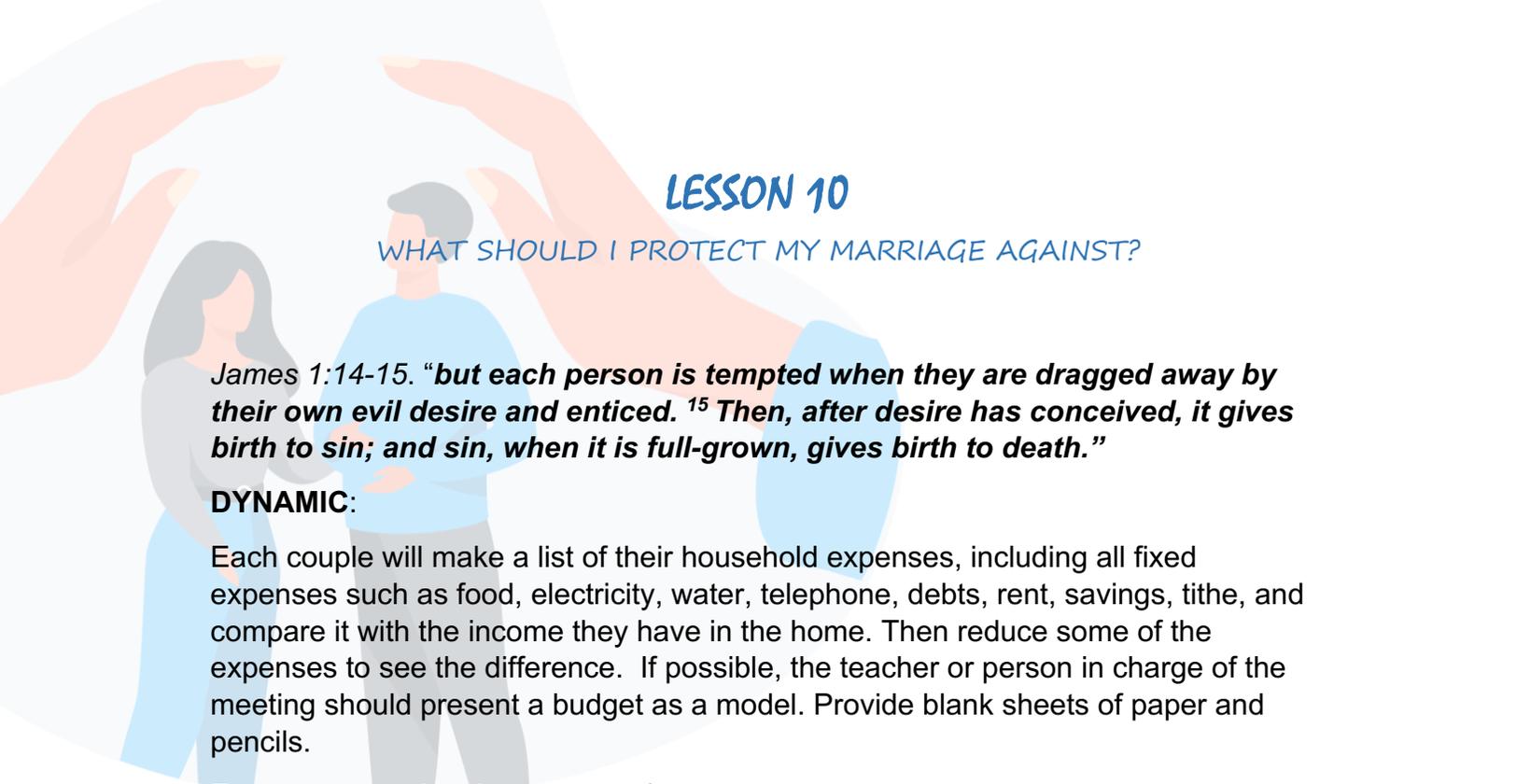
Practical ideas to honor my partner.

- Giving them the place where they should be or deserves to be.
- I should honor them in front of family, friends, co-workers, friends, neighbors. I am responsible for my partner.
- I honor them with goods, taking care of them, supplying their needs.
- I honor them with the idea that we are equal, loving them, respecting their way of being, feeling proud of my partner.
- I honor them by accepting them, admiring them. Be an admirer of your partner.
- Speak well of them everywhere and with everyone.
- Think and see the best in your partner.
- Help them to be better, to develop their potential.
- They can be better every day, with study and support.
- Highlight the good, the pleasant that they have.
- Support what they do or wants to do if it is good for them.
- Highlight and value their beauty, courage, ability, generosity, intelligence, good judgment, humor or cheerfulness, their strength of character, etc. Always highlight the good and tell them often of the good you see in them.

Close the meeting with a call for commitment to change, starting with three new ideas to honor your partner until the next meeting.

CLOSING PRAYER:

God, please help us to honor you by honoring our spouse, to see your glory and blessing in our marriage and family.



LESSON 10

WHAT SHOULD I PROTECT MY MARRIAGE AGAINST?

James 1:14-15. “but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. ¹⁵ Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.”

DYNAMIC:

Each couple will make a list of their household expenses, including all fixed expenses such as food, electricity, water, telephone, debts, rent, savings, tithe, and compare it with the income they have in the home. Then reduce some of the expenses to see the difference. If possible, the teacher or person in charge of the meeting should present a budget as a model. Provide blank sheets of paper and pencils.

Every marriage has its enemies, from which we as spouses must always protect our marital relationship. What should we protect ourselves from? As a main element we must protect marriage from the bad publicity that has been made of it by a secularist and relativist society, which has been promoting sexual freedom, rather than the sanctity of marriage. They are saying that marriage is not good, but difficult, that if it does not work, it is better to separate. That promotes divorce as an answer instead of facing and resolving marital differences. Divorce is seen as the easiest way out; it is better to leave your partner instead of fighting to maintain a marriage for life. This leads to a large number of children suffering from the separation of their parents. This is the main enemy because it breaks with what the Word of God says, that marriage is for life.

However, there are also other enemies, such as infidelity, through which many marriages have suffered separation. How do we protect ourselves from this? It is not as easy as it is believed, but what helps the most as a husband or wife is to make a firm decision before God that we will be faithful to our partner, regardless of the circumstances in which we live. This decision allows us, in an easier way, to take actions to avoid it. One of them is to talk about our partner before others, expressing our love for him/her; this will discourage inappropriate intimacy with people of the other sex. Do not go out or frequent places alone where there are people of the other sex. Infidelity begins with innocent, trusting and close relationships with the opposite gender. Let us flee from any kind of temptation.

Also, we must protect our marriage from all kinds of violence. If you grew up in a violent home, chances are high that you may repeat the violence you experienced as a victim before, but now you are the victimizer. It is important to heal our life from the negative things/habits/ways of doing things that we lived in our younger years. In the case of violence, you must develop a home with a culture of peace,

which is achieved by exchanging yelling for soft and calm words, making a poster of how everyone will live in your home, how they will act. Say: we will solve our difficulties with healthy open discussions without any kind of violence or threats of any kind. Let's teach the children to solve their difficulties with brothers, sisters, relatives, etc. through dialogue. Make a sign that indicates that in this house, we will ask for things politely, giving thanks, because in this home, there is **NO PLACE FOR ANY TYPE OF VIOLENCE**.

Protect your marriage from debts which stifle many households, and are a major source of tension, which leads to violence and bad reactions in the family and the couple. We are in times where the economies of societies are very insecure and fragile, so households must learn to live with a budget of monthly expenses, including a savings line for future eventualities. The children and the family should be taught to live with what is necessary, without excessive luxuries, to live with what is needed and not with what is wanted. Taking care of expenses should be everyone's task. Make a budget that includes tithing, saving, and recreation. And stick to it. Ask for help if necessary to reorganize your finances and those of your household. Do not let what Joel 1:4 says happen in your home: ***“What the locust swarm has left the great locusts have eaten; what the great locusts have left the young locusts have eaten; what the young locusts have left other locusts have eaten.”*** There are homes where there is no blessing because the enemy is destroying God's blessings for you. Turn to Jesus Christ by turning away from sin; you will find God's blessing for your family and your finances. He wants you to prosper in everything as your soul prospers.

We must **guard our marriage from psychosexual misalignments**. Many married couples have problems in this area, either because of inadequate learning, health problems, or bad experiences, or simply because they have learned distorted and unhealthy sexual attitudes and actions.

Thank God, at this time there are people with good professional and Christian training to whom we can turn for healing of these imbalances. There are medications and techniques that can correct some of these problems. If necessary, they should be sought. But the first thing that must be done is that the couple with problems in this area must understand that we must maintain sexual health and holiness. Although now days many ideas about sexuality have changed, the couple must have a clear understanding of sexual holiness according to God's Word. Everything that is defined in the Bible as negative should be avoided. They should avoid pornography or watching programs that promote ideas contrary to the Bible, and must seek out Christian professionals who are clear about sexual holiness. They should talk to their pastor or leader for referrals to Christian doctors or mental health professionals.

Another big area to protect is wrong living. Many couples, through life experience, have learned to live badly, with abuse, abandonment, rejection, bad attitudes towards marriage, etc., and they believe that they cannot have a happy marriage. But the Bible says that in Christ, everything is new, that we are new creatures: ***“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!”*** (2 Corinthians 5:17). We must leave the bad and negative behind; we must strive to go forward. This indicates that we must make a great effort to live according to what the Word says. It is important to decide to make changes with God's help. Yes, it is possible to live well in your marriage.

Conclude by inviting the couples to go to the altar to ask God to help them to protect their marriage, and to heal some of the areas we have raised or others.

PRAYER: Holy Father, may your will be done with my heart, my will, my life, my MARRIAGE AND FAMILY. I want to surrender myself to you to be "new and improved." I do not want to be satisfied with my present; I want my marriage to be changed by you.

LESSON 11

TAKING THE STEP FROM "I" TO "WE"

1 Corinthians 16:13: ***"Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong."***

DYNAMIC:

Make an obstacle course in the room and have the husbands walk through the course with their eyes closed, directed only by the wife's voice. Analyze what we feel as men, being led by our wives.

When between one and three years old, children are very selfish. Even if they have several toys in their hand, if they see another child with another toy, they will try to take it away to have more. But as they mature, the child learns to share toys with others. This step of maturity is called moving from "I" to "we".

Sadly, we often find in marriages husbands or wives who live life with their partner in a selfish way. They want everything to revolve around him or her. They make decisions without thinking about the other. They buy things for themselves, not for the family. They believe that the other is there to make him or her happy, because he or she deserves it. They are so selfish that even in the most intimate relationships, they do not think about the other, but only about enjoying themselves. Sometimes they can seem to be generous in the expenses of the house, of the food, even in vacations, but they really do it all for themselves.

They are people who do not want, and do not allow, their partner to progress or develop or have any kind of success, so they prevent their spouse from developing their own gifts or skills. This makes their spouse frustrated in the marital relationship. Many suffer internal conflicts and suffer from psychosomatic diseases, such as anxiety, gastrointestinal discomfort, esophagitis, gastritis, or depression because they have a lot of anger stored up inside because their partner has not allowed them to be fulfilled as a person.

Basically, it is a very subtle form of aggression, and in some cases so real that the other person cannot defend themselves. Sometimes one spouse asks the other how they are going to study or prepare themselves for something since they should better be at home and the children need them more, etc. They find ways to manipulate their partner so that they do not do it. This situation is sad, but the problem is that the dominant spouse has not been able to understand Adam's words when he saw Eve. Genesis 2:21-24: ***"So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. ²² Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the***

man. ²³ ***The man said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.”*** ²⁴ ***That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.”***

In this passage, we are told that Adam saw her as part of himself, that both were in essence the same, although with different function; for this reason, he called her "woman". If the husband or wife loses this sense of equality with their partner, they will not give the same opportunities to their spouse and will maintain their selfish attitude, thinking that only they have the rights in the home.

This is strengthened when the selfish person comes from a home where they had very overprotective or dominant parents, where the child learns that everything revolves around them. These children grow up with a sense of distrust and insecurity, since this type of parent causes what I call "devitalization" of the person, that is, they take away the strength to successfully face life's obstacles. These people tend to be dependent on their parents, who do not allow them to grow and mature by assuming the responsibility of marriage, and even see their spouse as the father or mother who has to provide everything so that he or she feels good. These weak men and women, when they marry, fight to maintain control of the other, seeing the couple's life in a selfish way. To me, these men or women have not taken the step from "I" to "we."

This type of person, if they are men, can live in one of the extremes: very aggressive, controlling, macho (remember that macho men are in the process of extinction); or weak, unable to make decisions. They like to be directed (remember that women do not like weak men).

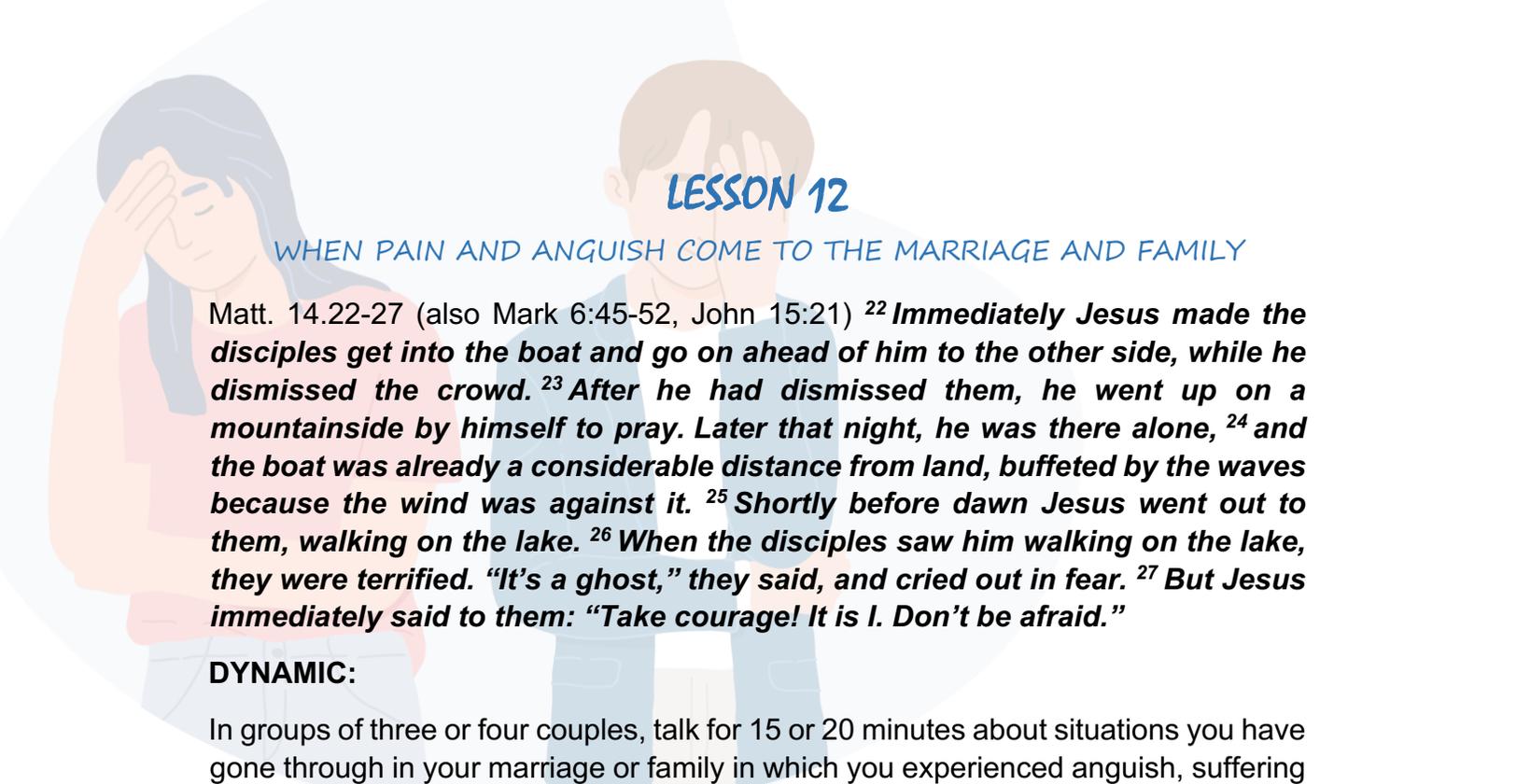
The passage from "I" to "we" is a step of maturity in a person's life. This step must take place in marriage, where mature men and women are required who understand that they are a complement to their partner. They are to be self-confident, manage their homes well, generous, caring for the family and children, and willing to make sacrifices for the good of the family. They are to rejoice in their partner's successes as if they were their own. They should stimulate and allow the other to grow and develop their abilities, and are happy that their spouse shines with success because they are one flesh, they are complete together.

It is very important for your marriage to reach this level of maturity because then you will experience happiness, understanding what it is to be one flesh. Leave areas of conflict and change them into areas of growth with your family. This contributes to peace and harmony in your home, with healthier and more stable children. In general, they will be happier and your family will be more functional.

Today you should analyze how you live, how your marriage and family are doing, and if you have taken the step from I to we. If you have not, we invite to make this decision. If you do, you will learn to live better; your marriage deserves the best.

"Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers" (1 Peter 3:7).

PRAYER: We pray that together with God, our marriage relationship will be characterized by a "we" that removes selfish attitudes.



LESSON 12

WHEN PAIN AND ANGUISH COME TO THE MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

Matt. 14:22-27 (also Mark 6:45-52, John 15:21) ²² **Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd.** ²³ **After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone,** ²⁴ **and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.** ²⁵ **Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake.** ²⁶ **When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. “It’s a ghost,” they said, and cried out in fear.** ²⁷ **But Jesus immediately said to them: “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”**

DYNAMIC:

In groups of three or four couples, talk for 15 or 20 minutes about situations you have gone through in your marriage or family in which you experienced anguish, suffering and pain, and how you dealt with it if you did, or how you faced it or are facing it.

The passage we read teaches about Jesus healing, saving, and serving people who came with pain and anguish. Jesus was fulfilling his mission on earth, bringing near the Kingdom of God and blessing those who sought Him. After helping the people, Jesus sent the disciples out alone. They obediently got in the boat and started rowing against the current, against the strong wind that whipped them. How many times as Christians have we felt alone in the boat of our life, struggling against the circumstances that unexpectedly and brutally confront us and run over us with a crudeness that prevents us from defending ourselves because it paralyzes us. There are situations in which life hits us where it hurts the most, and we struggle, believing that we are alone, feeling total helplessness before such circumstances. Full of confusion, pain, and anguish, we face the agony confronting us.

The same happens in married life; many times, we find ourselves in situations of pain and anguish because from one moment to another, life runs over us with an unexpected circumstance, an accident, a serious illness, the loss of a child, a mother, a father, a husband, a wife, an economic problem in which we lose everything we have, etc. We feel such anguish when we lose our job, or we have a debt we cannot pay, or infidelity comes to our marriage, or our child gets addicted to drugs or is put in prison, etc. These are all moments in which our boat goes against a strong wind and keeps us from advancing, filling us with despair. We ask ourselves, “why us, why me?” and we struggle to find the right answers.

Some such unexpected situations are **the product of bad decisions that we have made** and we have to face their direct consequences on us. For this reason, the Word of God invites us to make good decisions that will lead us to life.

"¹⁵ See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. ¹⁶ For I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess."
Deuteronomy 30:15-16

Another of the causes is that **in this world we are going to have afflictions, and even though we want to, we cannot do anything to avoid them.** We live in a world of sin, and many problems are products of that sin. The wickedness of mankind affects our world.

Sometimes we go through hard **circumstances so that our faith is strengthened and we learn to trust in God more than in ourselves.**

Whatever the cause of our difficulties, it is important to analyze our feelings. In reviewing the passage, we find that the disciples were afraid; they were struggling against the force of the wind, the darkness of the night and the imperious need to go on, in spite of everything. The main problem was that they could not abandon the boat, despite the difficult circumstances they faced. So it is in our lives. Although many times the desire to abandon the struggle and leave everything behind is in our mind, we cannot do so. It is imperative to go on through our pain and anguish, helplessness, anger, and doubt. Overwhelmed or not, we must go on without taking on the attitudes of helpless victims, or of anger and bitterness against everything, even against God, whom we sometimes blame for everything and wonder why He does not help us.

We sometimes feel we are sinking because of the situations we are going through. We may become punishers of those we perceive are responsible for hurting us or causing our difficulties. Or, we try to escape from the pain by taking medications to numb our feelings. Yes, sometimes medications are necessary, however not as an escape, but as a help. In other cases, we may act out in inappropriate behaviors such as rebellion and anger. Sometimes we may say: "Lord, how long will it go on like this? I don't know if I can continue."

To this we must add that many Christians see the difficulties in their life as a punishment from God for some hidden sin. Thus, when help is sought, instead of understanding the pain they feel, they judge themselves as if they had sinned, because in many cases, it is taught that with Christ in our lives, nothing will happen to us. However, the truth is that no matter how we live, God is with us in our boat, not only to calm the wind, but to calm our hearts and help us know that He is with us in our life and our marriage and family.

STEPS TO FACE OUR SITUATION:

First, we must realize that we are in the boat, in the midst of the storm of our circumstance, with our pain and anguish, struggling to stay afloat, rowing with all our strength against the wind, as it says in Jeremiah 10:19 "...it is my turn to face this sickness". When we face the circumstances that overwhelm us, we must open our minds because the pain and anguish do not let us see. Facing our pain and problems does not mean minimizing the pain or anguish; it means that in spite of them, we try to control our feelings and emotions to cope with the circumstances we are going through.

The second step is to ask where God is in the face of my pain. According to the passage, He is in control of my circumstances. He walks on the waters against the wind and the rough sea. He walks on top of all this to meet me and get into the boat of my life which is troubled by my problems. Christ's words to me at this time are "BE CALM, FEAR NOT, IT IS ME". Our fears many times prevent us from seeing that He is coming and is on our side and helping us. This is why it is important to try to calm down and see the action of the Lord in our boat. The Lord sustains us firmly when we feel that we are sinking, Psalm 23:4 ***"Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me."*** When we feel we can no longer go on, His Word will give us the strength to go on. He brings peace to our life. He is the "timely help" in the midst of our most difficult circumstances. Let us invite Him to enter our boat. His presence is what we need. When St. Paul asked Him to heal him three times, the answer was: "my grace is sufficient for you". God's immeasurable grace is enough now to help me to continue facing my pain and anguish; it will produce peace in the midst of the storm. It will sustain me when I am about to faint. Thank You, Lord, for Your grace which sustains us.

We must know that the pain and sadness will probably stay for a while, but as long as this situation persists, but we need to know: THIS SITUATION WILL SOON BE GONE. ITS PAIN AND ANGUISH WILL BE PART OF THE STORY OF OUR LIVES; IT WILL BE A CHAPTER WHERE WE WILL EMERGE VICTORIOUS FROM THE TRIAL. REMEMBER THAT GOD HAS "GOOD THOUGHTS" ABOUT YOU AND YOUR SPOUSE AND FAMILY. AS THE MORNING BRINGS NEW LIGHT TO THE DAY, SO IT WILL BE FOR YOUR MARRIAGE AND FAMILY. A NEW DAWN, FULL OF HOPE AND PEACE, WILL FILL YOU WITH THE PRESENCE OF GOD IN YOUR BOAT.

PRAYER: Lord, help me endure what I'm going through, and may your grace and presence never leave my boat.

Translated from Spanish by: Elizabeth Guevara Cabrera.

These are times to strengthen marital relationships. We present here 12 topics that will help you to heal, improve and strengthen your marital relationship.

- Miguel & Irene Garita



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