



Devotions Week Four

The final component of this week's lesson is a Bible study that enhances the big ideas from the video. There are five days of devotions to be completed during the week. Researchers found that couples who read the Bible and pray together daily have a nearly 100% success rate for their marriages, so we believe that developing that habit is non-negotiable.

If you already are involved in a daily study that includes reading passages from the Bible, please don't feel it is necessary to put that one on hold - these devotions are available to you as an option. The part that is not an option for a successful marriage is doing some form of daily Bible reading and study together.

Day One

Read Genesis 3: 9- 13

This reading comes from the Fall in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve were told they could eat anything they wanted, except from this one particular tree. Being fully human, what do they do but eat from that tree. The section we read comes shortly after this happened. God is walking through the garden calling to them. He is God, so He already knew what happened, but when He finds them He gives them the chance to be honest about it. I find it interesting that the first thing they do is what so many of us do when we are confronted with sin - they start shifting the blame to someone or something beyond themselves.

Adam leads the way in this. When God asks him if he ate the forbidden fruit, instead of

accepting responsibility and confessing his sin, he looks over at Eve and points her out as the cause. That isn't good enough for Adam, probably because he knows in his heart that it was his own choice to eat the fruit, so he goes on to point out that it was God who put the woman there in the first place. It's almost like he's accusing God of setting up the circumstances that caused him to fail.

God doesn't call Adam on that right away, but turns to Eve to ask her what happened. She in turn blames the snake for deceiving her. Now I can only imagine what that encounter must have been like. As for me, I'm terrified of snakes and the idea of one talking to me sure would have sent up a sea of red flags; however, we have to remember that this is the Garden of Eden. Here everything is in harmony with everything else. Sin hasn't entered the world yet, so there is no reason for Eve to be suspicious, even of a talking snake.

The only one who isn't asked for clarification about what happened is the snake, but he does receive God's full attention next. The serpent is the first one to receive the curse, and also the first one to hear that his seeming victory is short-lived. In that curse God also established the way out for us. He promised that One would come who would defeat the serpent. I'm sure that up until that point the serpent thought that he had won.

Next, God addresses the woman with a two-part consequence. Her sorrow will be increased, so childbirth will be painful, and she will constantly battle with wanting to be in charge. The punishment fits the crime in the sense that by eating the fruit she was looking to find greater pleasure than she experienced when she was in the garden that God designed. She was prideful enough to think that she was smarter than God and could actually be in charge. As a consequence, God made her aware of the pain around her and placed her in a struggle with herself to control her pride, particularly as it relates to her husband.

Finally, God looks at Adam and announces his consequence. For him, everything will become harder. It is the man's job to provide for his family, and that has just been made a challenge because the earth won't cooperate anymore. In my opinion, part of Eve's punishment spills over onto him; Eve has to struggle with letting her husband lead her, and any man in that situation knows that when your wife is challenging your position of leadership it isn't very pleasant.

Discussion Questions

- Think about the last time someone questioned you about the choices you made. How did you respond? Were you defensive? Did you blame someone else or the circumstances you found yourself in? Did you take responsibility for your actions? How did you respond to the consequences that followed those actions - were they accepted with humble obedience or an attitude of self-righteousness?
- Part of the consequence of the fall is the tension we feel surrounding control. Ultimately it traces back to a problem with pride. How has pride affected your ability to accept your spouse? In conflict, do you feel you must be right? How easy or difficult is it to admit you were wrong?

Close your time by praying together. You may pray on your own or use this one as a model:

God, thank You for making a way for us to return to You. At the very moment that we were separated, You provided for our restoration. Help us to live that out with each other. At the moment of our conflict, help us to see that restoration is possible. Give us the security with each other to be honest about our actions and to accept responsibility for our parts. Help us give each other grace as we work through the consequences of our sin. In Jesus's Name we pray. Amen.

Day Two

Galatians 5:13-15

In this part of his letter, Paul is addressing the Galatians' concerns about whether they should be concerned about keeping the Jewish laws. He advises them to focus on keeping the law that Jesus proclaimed instead: to love your neighbor as yourself. He has fleshed that out a bit by pointing out that loving others involves serving them. That service to others looks like meeting their needs, helping them be successful, and not hindering them in the living out of their faith. He goes on to warn that attacking each other will lead to the destruction of both.

How often we forget those lessons and fall into the trap of selfish behavior! We want our needs met before the needs of our spouse. We want to be successful and get the praise

for a job well done. We accidentally on purpose throw stumbling blocks in the path of others. Then to top it off, we are prone to pull apart instead of coming together - it even has a social name, the fight or flight response.

If we truly repent of those behaviors we will not only stop doing them, but will start doing the opposite. Think about how different your relationship would be if you were focused on how to serve each other first and worked to protect the other instead of turning life into a competition. Wouldn't it be lovely to know that you could absolutely count on your spouse to be primarily concerned with your needs, success, and faith?

Discussion Questions

- On a scale of 1-10, 10 being high, how would you rank each other in these areas:
 - My spouse meets my needs.
 - My spouse does everything in his/her power to help me be successful in what I am trying to accomplish.
 - My spouse encourages me to live out my faith and makes it easy for me to do that.
- Think about your go-to response to conflict. Which do you each tend to choose: fight, flight, or resolution? How does that style fit with the way God wants us to handle conflict? Why do each of you opt for that style of dealing with conflict? Which style do you think as a couple is the healthiest model for you to follow? What is one way you can move one step closer to that model?

Close your time by praying together. You may pray on your own or use this one as a model:

Lord, You know that we are argumentative children. We apologize to You and to each other for that. We don't want that to be what we pass on to others; convict our hearts of the times that we are acting outside of love for each other. Help us recognize when our pride is getting in the way and causing us to attack each other, then help us move that pride out of the way. Humble each of us to be able to put the other before ourselves and to live in service to each other. In Your Name we pray. Amen.

Day Three

Ezekiel 28:15

We were never created to be selfish, prideful, argumentative, or inconsiderate. We were created to live in relationship with others. We were created to worship God and to enjoy the gifts He has given us. In the beginning, that is how it was; then sin entered the picture and everything changed.

Because everyone is a sinner, everyone has to deal with the consequences that sin brings. One of those consequences is conflict - and that conflict usually stems from poor communication or selfishness. The way any relationship grows is through open and honest communication - it doesn't matter if that relationship is with your spouse, coworkers, friends, or God. When you try to understand what the other person is saying, it validates their feelings and honors their experiences. When you have succeeded in that understanding, you have a choice to make for proceeding - you can shift your plans to accommodate the other person, or you can ignore their known needs/wants and move forward with what pleases you.

We have to fight every day with that choice - we can put God first or ourselves, we can put others first or ourselves. Our sinful humanity screams out that we should be first, that we deserve to be first, that we've earned the right to be first - perhaps you should be, deserve to be, and have earned the right to be - but what does God say? Especially, what does God say when that person that you are pushing to second place is your spouse?

Discussion Questions

- In what areas do you find it hardest to put God first? Why do you think that is such a challenge for you?
- Is that the same area that is hardest for you to put your spouse first in? Is it for the same reason?
- What would happen if for one day you consciously chose to put God's will first in everything you did? Do you think you could do it? Would that be a good idea? What are you afraid of losing if you would put yourself second for an entire day?

Close your time by praying together. You may pray on your own or use this one as a model:

God, thank You for putting us ahead of Your Son. That gift allows us to return to You in Heaven so we can experience the life that You created for us to have before sin entered the picture. Help us to acknowledge and repent of the times we are selfish. Give us Your Spirit to enable us to live a life of putting You and others ahead of ourselves. Help us to see that Your plan is the best plan, and help us to live that out. Amen.

Day Four

Genesis 4:1-8

This is the very first recorded murder; one brother against another all because of sin. The sad part is that Abel (the one who was murdered) didn't even do anything to Cain. Cain killed Abel because Cain's own offering wasn't accepted by God. It isn't even like God was mad at Cain over the offering; he simply explained the way things needed to be, "If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it."

That same advice is pretty good for us too - every day we have constant choices about what to do. We can either choose to do what is right or we can choose to do what is wrong (sin.) The problem is with our reaction to sin. It isn't like God is hiding anything from us - He flat out tells us that sin wants to rule us, but that we must rule over sin. That means that we have to constantly choose what is good over what is evil.

Discussion Questions

- What is your biggest temptation? What is the alternate (right) choice to that temptation? How can your spouse help you make that right choice?
- Make a plan for helping each other with that biggest temptation. Identify one or two concrete things each of you can do to help the other be successful at making the right choice.

Close your time by praying together. You may pray on your own or use this one as a model:

Thank You for showing us the difference between right and wrong. Strengthen our resolve to live lives that reflect the right choices that bring You honor. Fill us with Your Presence so we can stand against the temptations that surround us. You promise to not allow any temptation to come to us that is too great for us to withstand - help us remember to lean on Your Power when those things arise. In Your Son's Name. Amen.

Day Five

John 3:16

At this particular time, Jesus is having a conversation with Nicodemus, a Pharisee. Nicodemus had come privately to Jesus, in the night, to get clarification. He acknowledges that God is in Jesus, but doesn't quite understand that God is Jesus and Jesus is God. After some conversation, Nicodemus wanted to know how someone could be born again. Jesus explains that He means born of the Spirit, but Nicodemus still doesn't get it. Then Jesus draws a parallel between Himself and the incident with Moses, the Israelites, and the snakes. He explains that just like the people were healed when they looked to the statue of the serpent, those who look to Jesus and believe will not die. God doesn't want us to be apart from Him, He wants us to be restored to the relationship we had at the beginning of time.

To have that relationship, all we have to do is believe that Jesus, God's Son, came to earth to live a perfect life, die in our place, defeat Satan, and rise again to rule with God the Father. It is a free gift - we were redeemed, or bought back, with Jesus's blood - there is nothing we have to do other than open up our hearts and accept that gift.

As God's children we want to reflect the nature of our Father. We want to love others the way that He loves us. We want to serve them and put their needs ahead of our own. We want to work to restore the relationships around us, especially the relationship we have with our spouse. We are willing to do the work necessary to grow our communication. We want to be self-less, so others can see God shine through us.

Discussion Questions

- Have each of you accepted Jesus as your Savior? How does that change you from who you were before you did?
- What does it look like to be God's child? How closely do you resemble your Father?
- When you are having conflicts, would you be good with Jesus sitting in the room observing how you interacted? If not, what needs to change so you wouldn't be uncomfortable with Him there? (By the way: He is there - He is with us all the time.)

Close your time by praying together. You may pray on your own or use this one as a model:

Jesus, Thank You for redeeming us with Your blood on the cross. Thank You for making the way for us to be children of God. Send Your Spirit to us to fill us with Your love. Help us interact with each other in ways that please and honor You. Thank You for the gift of my spouse, help us to remember to always treat each other as that precious gift. Keep our words kind and our actions gentle. In Your Name we pray. Amen.