



Devotions – Week One

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.

If you are new to studying the Bible together, be patient with each other. You will want to use an easier to read version - the New International Version (NIV) and the New American Standard Bible (NASB) are both pretty good choices. I would steer away from the King James Version, simply because it is pretty hard to untangle the language and understand what it's saying at the same time. A trip to your area bookstore will show you that there are many versions to choose from. The important part is that you select one that is comfortable for you to read - they all say the same thing, it's just a matter of how it is said. There is a somewhat cryptic code for communicating the location of the passages. The book name (Genesis, Matthew, Philippians, etc.) can be found in the table of contents at the front of the Bible. The books are divided into two groups - the Old (before Jesus) and New (after Jesus's birth) Testaments, so you might need to check both sections. The number in front of the colon (:) indicates the chapter number - those are usually larger and darker than the rest of the type on the page. The numbers after the colon indicate the verse numbers - those are small and usually at the top of the lines of print. The numbering for these start over at the beginning of each chapter.

Day One

Read: Genesis 2:18-25

I find the order here interesting. God said, “It is not good for man to be alone.” Then He gave Adam the task of naming all the animals. So, here Adam is, alone, faced with thousands of animals to name. Just take a second to picture that - kind of like a zoo gone berserk. Naming everyone in and of itself is a daunting task, but then you have to remember that as the animals were coming to him there was always a matching set. So he would have seen two rabbits, two lions, two antelopes, and on and on. As he got to the gorillas and chimps he had to start wishing for someone like himself, but he ran out of animals before he found someone like himself.

You have to kind of wonder about the motives there. I know how my mind works, and I know I'd be feeling pretty left out. Can't you just see Adam kind of kicking the earth muttering about how everyone has someone except himself? I know that's what I'd be doing - I've been there and done that in fact on far too many Valentine's Days, New Year's Eves, and birthday celebrations. I have to wonder if God wasn't mentally preparing Adam for the arrival of the one He was going to create especially for him. Do you think Adam would have been as excited about Eve's arrival if she had been the first on the scene?

There can be no doubt when Adam saw Eve that he recognized that she was his other half. He said, “Now here is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.” In his final naming act he identified her specifically with the identity that stated that she was taken out of man. God knew that it wasn't good for man to be alone, so he created a helper suitable for him. He brought her to Adam and he accepted her for who she was - part of himself and his gift from God.

Discussion Questions

- How do you view your marriage? Have you left your allegiance to your childhood family to become focused primarily on becoming one with your spouse?
- Do you regularly see him or her as actually being a part of you that is grafted together, unable to be removed without destroying both of you? Or do you see each other as an

extra appendage that can be amputated?

- Do you see your spouse as a perfect gift from God? Notice: not a perfect *person*, but a perfect *gift* - our perfect gifts will always contain what we need, not what we necessarily want at the moment.

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

Lord, we come before you today as two sinners. We are trying to understand and accept that each of us is perfectly designed for the other, but we often fall short. Give us your love to enable us to see each other with Your eyes, to hear each other with Your ears, and to love each other with Your heart. We know that marriages are Your design. Open our eyes to ways we can honor that. Amen.

Day Two

Read: Matthew 19:1-10

In these verses the Pharisees are asking Jesus about the Biblical law concerning divorce. Their motivation wasn't to actually hear the answer; they were actually trying to trick Jesus into saying something that was contrary to the texts (Bible) they had at the time. Within the Pharisees there were several different "denominations" and each had a slightly different view of divorce. I love how when they approach Jesus, He takes them back to the original design of marriage - and that means that there isn't divorce. He reminds them that when they get married, a man and woman leave the family they grew up with to become a new and unique family of their own. He reminds them that when they are married they should not separate.

The Pharisees can't leave it alone, so they pull out the laws from Moses and almost quote them correctly. They said that Moses commanded divorce in the case of adultery, which isn't quite right. He allowed for divorce in the case of adultery, but it wasn't commanded to happen. Jesus explains that because of the hardness of people's hearts, that's Bible-code for unwillingness to forgive, divorce was allowed under that specific reason. Marriage by design is to be infused with love and forgiveness. It is meant to be the earthly example to help us understand the relationship we have with God. In light of this, you can picture adultery as idolatry - giving that place to someone other than to whom it belongs. Think about how often

we mess that part up and let something other than God fill His spot. He doesn't divorce us or send us away; He offers forgiveness and grace, and then welcomes us back into His arms.

Jesus goes on to add that remarriage for any reason other than divorce due to adultery, and marriage to one who is divorced, is adultery. I checked several reputable sources for an explanation at this point and here's the consensus: yes, marriage to a divorced person is adultery; however, the marriage is valid and whole in God's eyes and must be treated as such. It isn't like you are committing adultery the whole time that you are married the second time and have to get a divorce to make it stop. I believe that Jesus included that part to show just how much importance God puts on marriage. After all, it is the earthly representation of our relationship with God - we shouldn't just run around having affairs with our faith, neither should we treat affairs in our marriage lightly. Then the disciples, who are listening to this exchange, over-compensate and declare that it's better not to be married at all than to try to live out that standard. Jesus addresses the idea of celibacy, but warns that not everyone can or should live that way.

Discussion Questions

- What are your beliefs surrounding divorce? Is there ever a justification for it? What would be the things that were too big for you, as a couple with God's help, to work through?
- What parallels can you make between believers' relationships with God and your relationship with your spouse? How can viewing your marriage through God's eyes change your belief about what can be overcome?
- The reason Moses allowed for divorce in the case of adultery was because of a lack of forgiveness. What, if anything, are you refusing to forgive that is causing you to have a hard heart? What do you feel that God is unwilling to forgive you for? Do you really believe that there is anything you can do that is too big for God to forgive?

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

God, thank You for forgiving us of all of our sins. Thank You for sending Your Son as the perfect sacrifice for our sins. Please soften our hearts toward each other and make us willing to forgive the things we are holding onto. Help us to demonstrate Your love to the

world through the marriage we have to each other. Grant us the grace we need to function as Your people. In Jesus's name we pray. Amen.

Day Three

Philippians 2:1-4

In this section of scripture, Paul is reminding the Philippians that as believers we need to act differently toward each other. For starters, we are supposed to think alike, not actually have identical thoughts, but have an identical filter through which our actions and thoughts flow. Because this filter is in place, we are to act and react in love. We need to keep an eye on our own perception of ourselves to watch for self-centered behaviors; we need to think more highly of the other person than we do of ourselves. Part of that means putting the other person and their needs ahead of your own. Another aspect of that is respecting others. Each person has something unique and valuable to offer, we simply need to honor what he or she brings.

In this text, Paul is writing to Christians in general, but there is a lot we can and should apply to our marriages. Let's take a look at The Message version of this text. Sometimes pulling the texts into modern-day language can help us see parallels that we might otherwise have missed. You will then spend time discussing this verse with your spouse and relating it directly to your relationship.

1-4 If you've gotten anything at all out of following Christ, if his love has made any difference in your life, if being in a community of the Spirit means anything to you, if you have a heart, if you *care* — then do me a favor: Agree with each other, love each other, be deep-spirited friends. Don't push your way to the front; don't sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. Don't be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand.

Discussion Questions

- Do you think that you meet the qualifications of the “if” statement? Has Jesus's love made a difference in your life? Does being married mean anything to you? Do you have a heart and care? Are you ready to live life the way that Jesus intended?
- In what ways do you try to agree with each other? When is it the hardest to agree? Are there certain things that trigger instant arguments?

- How do you show each other than you love each other? By now you should have taken the Love Languages quiz - are you trying to implement your spouse's love language?
- Are you remembering that you are friends as well as husband/wife? What are you doing that helps to preserve that friendship? How are you getting to know each other better every day?
- Are you willing to step aside to help your spouse get ahead? How are you doing that right now? What could you do in this area? What is one area that each of you would appreciate a "helping hand" in?
- Do you believe that you can give up the pushy manipulations to get what you need? Are you afraid that if you don't push forward for yourself that you won't be taken care of or have enough?

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

Jesus, You were the model for us of how to live a life of servant hood. Help us to lose our self-centered attitudes and focus on the people You have put in our lives. Help us to release the fear of not having enough - enough money, enough respect, enough love, enough whatever - help us to give that to You. Fill us with Your attitude of service to each other and open our eyes to the ways we can step into that role. In Your name we pray. Amen.

Day Four

Read: Colossians 3:12-14

Paul is writing to the Colossians about the conduct and attitudes that Christians should have. In this particular section he is listing the character traits they need to exhibit - traits that are pretty hard to show on a consistent basis. Check out the list: compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, and love. I don't know about you, but as for me I struggle with this. It's not that I never get any of them right, but I rarely get all of them working together smoothly. Usually it goes more along the lines of me grooving along in compassion, kindness, gentleness, and patience; then boom, along comes sin and with it the choice to forgive or not forgive.

You'll notice if you take another look at the list I can usually do, I've left out humility. It's not that I think that I walk around most of the time as a know-it-all or better than everyone else - humility, or the lack of it, strikes most often at the same time as sin and the need for forgiveness. The part I struggle with, and would guess you probably do to, is in forgiveness. What does that have to do with humility? An awful lot, actually - you see, the reason we struggle with forgiving others is that deep down inside we think we deserve to be treated with honor and that thinking turns into a hardening of our hearts (aka the non-forgiveness of sins.)

The big problem with that is that we are to be modeling our lives after Jesus, and God doesn't choose to not forgive our sins. In fact, He sent His Son to die to pay the price of our sins. If God can do that for you and me, can't we forgive others? Really in comparison, we are dealing with small potatoes. Because Christ forgave our sins, we need to forgive other people - and if we choose not to we are really elevating ourselves above God because we've copped the attitude that we don't have to do what He says. You can double-check it - the last half of verse 13 says, "if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do."

Love is the last trait listed by Paul, not because it is the least important, but because it is the most important. He says that above all things we need to put on love. So why list it last? I think he did it that way because love encompasses all the things he's been talking about. Love exhibits itself when we show compassion and kindness, when we live in humility and gentleness, when we offer patience and forgiveness even when it's hard. Love is what will hold us together when everything else seems to be falling apart.

Discussion Questions

- Which trait is the hardest/easiest for you to show? What is your spouse's opinion of your hardest/easiest trait? What can you do to help each other work through the hardest ones? (Just saying it's my hard one and ignoring it won't work - you need them all to get to the end result of perfect love.)
- How easily do you forgive others? A couple of days ago I asked if there was anything you were struggling to forgive - how is that going? How is your heart softening in this area? What can your spouse do to encourage you in this?

- What does love really mean? In our society we have watered it down to include a love of ice cream, shoes, and style. Think about the pure meaning of love. Compare your thoughts with your spouse. Decide one thing each of you can work on that will bring you one step closer to experiencing love the way God intended it to be in your marriage.

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

God, we come humbly before you and ask you for forgiveness. Fill us with Your Spirit so we can reflect compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, and love to the world around us. Help us to be willing to quickly extend forgiveness, especially to each other. Lead us in Your truth and show us where we need to work to honor You with our lives. In Jesus's name we pray. Amen.

Day Five

Read: John 17:22-23

In our final devotion for this week, Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane. The prayer He is praying is sometimes referred to as the High Priestly Prayer. Jesus is just about to get arrested and crucified, and this is His prayer. He begins by praying for Himself, then His disciples, then for all believers - I think that's pretty cool that in that moment, right before He was arrested, Jesus took the time to pray for you and me. The verses you just read are the part He prayed for all believers.

He is praying for unity and love for all believers. The final verse in the NKJV translation reads, "And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them." How awesome is it to think of loving with the love that God has for His own Son! I think that all believers have the same access to God, it's not like pastors or deacons have a faster or clearer connection than everyone else - but when I think that Jesus asked His Father to fill me with the love that He loved Jesus with - well, wow! That's one request that I know God will fill - all I have to do, all you have to do, is not reject it.

So what are the implications of being filled with that type of love? Talk about connectedness and forgiveness! Compassion and kindness would overflow! Gentleness and patience would be hallmarks! Now if this is how we are with the world, our relationship with our spouse is even more so because that's a special reserved relationship that we are to

have with no one else. So let's wrap up this devotion by thinking about that.

Discussion Questions

- How does loving your spouse with God's love change things? What aspect of your relationship would look the most drastically different?
- Do you believe that you can be filled with God's love to the point that everything else is washed away? What are the things that you think will keep coming back? What scares you about giving those things up?
- If Jesus is in us, we are treating Him the way we treat our spouses. Is that the way that you'd treat Jesus if He were standing right in front of you? Each of us is God's child once we declare Jesus to be our Lord and Savior. Our spouse is God's child if he or she is a believer. Do you treat each other with that distinction? What can you change to increase the love you show each other?

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

Heavenly Father, thank You for filling us with Your love. Thank You for sending Your Son to open the path to You. Increase Your true love in us each day. Open our eyes to the times that we fail to treat each other as Your precious child and perfect gift. Strengthen us to live as You have shown us through Jesus's example each day. Help us to impact those around us through our words and action to draw closer to You. In Your Son's name we pray. Amen.