

# **Living and Thriving in a Not-So-Perfect Marriage**

## **Study Guide**



**By Karla Downing**

# Living and Thriving in a Not-So-Perfect Marriage

## Study Guide

**For use with the book *10 Lifesaving Principles for Women in Difficult Marriages* and the audio series *Living and Thriving in a Not-So-Perfect Marriage***

**For more information regarding Karla's ministry and materials and to sign up for the free e-newsletter with relationship tips and truths, visit [ChangeMyRelationship.com](http://ChangeMyRelationship.com).**

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## Introduction

Welcome to “Living and Thriving in a Not-So- Perfect Marriage.” Whether your marriage is “not-so-perfect” or really difficult, this study has been designed to show you how to live, love, and even thrive in whatever circumstances you find in your relationship. With biblical truths, you will learn practical tools that include helping you face your fears, speak the truth, set boundaries, change yourself, detach with love, and rest in God. He intends your life to be filled with peace and hope (Jeremiah 29:11). Come discover how to experience God’s blessings in the midst of a challenging marriage.

Because people may be sharing personal information, it is important that the group be a safe and confidential place. Things that are shared in the group should stay in the group. Confidentiality means that group members do not talk about each other with other group members or anyone outside the group, including spouses or friends. The ability to share honestly and openly with the group is a crucial part of healing and growing. (Always remember that you do not have to share any details you are uncomfortable sharing.)

It is also important that you support and empathize with each other, but do not tell each other what to do. Each situation is unique and will require each woman to apply the truths we learn together in her own way according to how she believes God is leading her. We must also be careful not to judge or criticize each other but understand each other’s unique marriage from her perspective. It is helpful to share your own experience but refrain from presenting it as advice for someone else. Each has to follow her own path in her own time.

Applying these principles to your difficult marriage will require you to change and grow in many ways. You will be challenged to be honest with yourself and others in ways that may be uncomfortable. You may face truths that you have been trying to ignore about yourself and your marriage. You may have to do things that are uncomfortable for you. Truth sets us free, but it sometimes causes pain in the process. Hang in there - the rewards are worth it!

Change is a process. There will be things that you do differently by the end of this study, but the changes will need to continue past the end of the study. You may want to get additional support from another woman, counselor, or group. When you recognize that change takes time, it will help you to keep a proper perspective. Expecting too much too fast will only cause you unnecessary frustration. Target one or two things that you can apply each week, then commit to doing both of them at least a few times during the week.

Pace yourself with your weekly chapter reading and questions in the way that works best for you. The study questions are based on your reading in the book *10 Lifesaving Principles for Women in Difficult Marriages* and have the corresponding page numbers listed, so you can reference the material. All Scripture verses are taken from the NIV, but I encourage you to use other versions in your study too. The audio recordings correspond with each chapter and offer additional material. Some of the audios have testimonies of women to demonstrate how they have applied the Principle to their own lives.

Most importantly, you will experience the love of your Heavenly Father in a new way. You will know that He loves you and cares for you in the midst of your struggles and wants you to have an abundant life. You will grow in your ability to surrender your hopes and dreams and trust Him in a deeper way. You will be able to turn over your husband and children to Him, recognizing that He loves them even more than you and will work in each of their lives in His own way and time. You will find peace in acceptance of the things you cannot change and hope by finding the courage to change the things you can. You will learn to rest in Him - one day at a time.

Now, let's get started together and learn how to live, love and yes, even thrive, in our difficult marriages!

Blessings!

Karla

P.S. For more information on Karla Downing's ministry and materials, visit [ChangeMyRelationship.com](http://ChangeMyRelationship.com). Karla also offers a free e-newsletter offering relationship tips and truths.

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Note: The Study Guide starts with Chapter 2 “Reach Out” in the book and the audio: Understanding Difficult Marriages, as this chapter is a perfect introductory chapter for group study. Chapter 1 “Understanding Scriptural Truths comes after Chapter 2.

## **Study Questions for Lifesaving Principle 1: Understand Difficult Marriages (Reach Out)**

Women often struggle in isolation in their difficult marriages. Some have never told anyone about their problems. Others have told only close relatives. Others have told outside people and been discouraged or hurt by their responses.

The church tends to give “pat answers” or quick spiritual fixes that discount the deep feelings and complex issues of difficult marriages. Sometimes, the answers cause guilt by inferring that if a woman were able to trust, believe, pray, submit, and be a “godly wife” everything would be fine. Most have tried that and it hasn’t worked. It isn’t because those answers aren’t valid; it is because a woman needs more than that. She needs to know she isn’t alone, that she has options, and be given tools to deal with the difficulties. One of the ways she gets these things is to share with others who have experienced similar problems.

We are emotionally wounded in relationships. We need emotional bonding in relationships to be healed. God wants us to be connected to others. Your study group may be the first time the women have reached out about their problems in a group or church setting. It can be a powerful step in healing.

1. Look at the list of reasons people isolate on page 23. How and why have you been isolated in your difficult marriage? (page 23)

2. Read James 5:13-16. Why and how do you think God uses our sharing with others to heal us? (page 24)

3. Who have you reached out to prior to this study group? Family? Friends? People in the church? Counselors? Support Groups? What has been your experience? (pages 24-29)



8. Difficult marriages are often referred to as a roller coaster because of the ups and downs and quick changes. The “ups” are a relief, but the “downs” often catch you off-guard. How does the image of a roller coaster describe your marriage? How does it make you feel to know both the ups and downs will affect you? (pages 34-35)

9. Write your prayer to God for this week.

10. Write two things you can apply to your life out of this week’s material.



## Lecture Notes for Principle 1: Understand Difficult Marriages

This study has the following purposes:

- For you to grow in your knowledge of what the Bible says about your marriage.
- For you to recognize how much God cares about your marriage, problems, pain, and you.
- For you to apply these principles to your life and marriage.
- For you to gain hope that your future will be better.
- For you to step out of your isolation and find out you are not alone. And, if you are in a study group, for you to get support from other women.

### **Types of Difficult Marriages**

There are many types of difficult marriages, and it isn't unusual for women to be struggling with many of these problems at the same time. The more of these issues you have, the more complicated your marriage will be, and the more factors you will have to consider in how you respond.

- Addictions (alcohol, drugs, sex, gambling, and others)
- Abuse (verbal, emotional, physical, sexual, and spiritual)
- Anger (raging, hostile, explosive, passive aggressive)
- Mental Illness
- Physical Illness
- Workaholism and Other Excesses
- Being Spiritually Mismatched
- Irresponsibility

- Different Personalities/Genders/Values/Goals/Ethnicities
- General Dysfunction

### **Dynamics of Difficult Marriages**

Difficult marriages have similar dynamics. You are probably dealing with many of the following characteristics:

- Perpetual Problems
- One person wants change/The one with “the problem” doesn’t
- Poor Communication
- Strong Emotions
- Denial
- Distrust
- Disrespect
- Blame
- Resentment
- Codependency/Enmeshment
- Enabling
- Rigidity
- Secrets

- Manipulation/Control
  
- Contempt/Criticism/Judgment
  
- Poor Boundaries
  
- Shame

This study will give you tools to deal with these marital problems and dynamics. You will be empowered with knowledge and practical tools supported by Scriptural principles.

## Study Questions for Lifesaving Principle 2: Understand Scriptural Truths

Women in difficult marriages typically have misunderstandings about what Scripture teaches about submission, love, respect, rights, forgiveness, long-suffering, gentleness, peace, and perseverance. They also wonder how God feels about them: Does He care? Is He punishing them? Is it too late to redeem their lives? These misconceptions have to be corrected, so they have a firm foundation on which to make changes and apply the principles to their lives.

1. Read Nehemiah 9:16-21, Psalm 34, and Exodus 2:23-25. How does God feel about His people when they sin? Is your hardship the result of your own choices and/or other people's choices? How do you think God views your marriage? (pages 7-8)

2. Read Genesis 29:31-35. Leah's husband didn't love her. How did God feel about her? Look at the names of Leah's sons. What insights do the names give into Leah's emotions? Do you see a shift in her focus from her husband to the Lord? When you think about God's compassion toward Leah, does it change your perception about what God thinks about you?

3. Read Ephesians 5:21-33. Explain how you think submission works in a healthy marriage. How do you struggle with submission in your difficult marriage? (pages 8-10)

4. Read Romans 13:1-7, Acts 5:27-29, Exodus 1:15-21, 1 Samuel 25, and Esther 1-2:1. What submission principle do these verses support? How does the exception to submission apply to your difficult marriage? (pages 11-13)

5. Read Ephesians 5:25-33. What responsibilities and restraints does your husband have as the head of the home? Do his actions affect his position as the head of the home in any way? Read the first paragraph in the section, "Forfeiting of Headship," and discuss Laurie Hall's quote on the difference between positional and functional authority. (pages 13-15)

6. Read Ephesians 5:8-11, Galatians 5:19-23, and Hebrews 12:5-11. How can you fulfill your responsibility to live in a way in which you bring light rather than darkness into your marriage? What fruit is being produced in your marriage? What part do you play in bearing that fruit? (pages 15-17)

7. Read Galatians 6:7-9 and 1 Peter 3:13-17. How are you suffering in your difficult marriage? Is it suffering for good or for evil? (pages 15-17)

8. Read Leviticus 19:3, 32, Ephesians 5:33; 6:5, 1 Peter 3:7, and 1 Thessalonians 5:12. How is respect or honor shown in relationships? Why do you think God wants respect in all our relationships? What things have you heard that might have led you to conclude that God does not value respect in your difficult marriage? How can it be right to ask for respect from your husband? (pages 17-18)

9. Read Colossians 3:3-5, Acts 16:37 and 22:25, and Matthew 5:38-39. What have you believed about “rights” in your marriage? How has that affected how you have acted in your difficult marriage? Do you feel any differently now? (pages 18-19)

10. Read 1 Corinthians 13. How should you apply agape love to your difficult marriage? What parts of the description of agape love have you misunderstood? (pages 19-21)

11. Read 1 Peter 3:1-7 and Matthew 11:28-29. How did Jesus exhibit a gentle spirit? Is gentleness the same as tolerance and passivity? If gentleness refers to an inner peace and strength that trusts in God, how does that change how you apply it to your difficult marriage? (pages 13 describing Sarah and 20-21 “A Gentle and Quiet Spirit”)

12. Write your prayer to God for this week.

13. Write two things you can apply to your life out of this week's material.

## Lecture Notes for Principle 2: Understand Scriptural Truths

There are many Scriptural misunderstandings in difficult marriages. The following are the main areas of misunderstanding. The notes provide an outline of the main points in the audio. You are encouraged to look up the verses and do additional studying on your own.

### **Rigid vs. Grace-based Interpretation**

- There is a tendency to interpret the Bible rigidly when applying it to difficult relationships and to focus on one verse while ignoring others.
- Scripture balances Scripture. We cannot put one Scripture over another.
- In Galatians 5:1-4, Paul reminded the Galatians that grace ruled over the law.
- In Matthew 12:1-12, Jesus defended the disciples picking grain on the Sabbath to the Pharisees who objected because it was against the Law.
- In Luke 13:10-17, Jesus healed a woman on the Sabbath and the Pharisees complained about him violating the Law.

### **Submission**

- Ephesians 5:22-24 says, “Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord” (NIV).
- It is not a rigid edict to where a woman can’t live her own life or have boundaries.
- Healthy marriages have a balanced partnership that includes the wants and needs of both people and an agreement about how they will make decisions.
- Some interpret submission rigidly to say it is without exception. They say a woman has to obey without reservations and trust that God will cover her, lead her husband to make right decisions, and prevent her from being asked to do wrong. She should take all her appeals and concerns to God who will work through her husband. Others say submission keeps a woman protected by her husband’s authority and covering; not submitting leaves her vulnerable to Satan’s attacks.
- I believe submission is a choice that must be made with wisdom and discernment in difficult situations and that it can and should be withheld at times, as Peter and his disciples did in Acts 5:29 when they refused to stop talking about Jesus as the authorities demanded. (Romans 13:1-5 sets up a Scriptural principle of submitting



to the authorities to obey God.) God did not intend submission to prevent a woman from being a person in the relationship by exercising choice.

## Respect

- Ephesians 5:33 tells men to love their wives and women to respect their husbands.
- It is difficult to respect a man who is acting in a way that leads a wife to disrespect him.
- You can respect the position and treat him in a way that acknowledges it; however, it does not mean you cannot say no, set boundaries, or speak the truth.
- A man feels respected when he is appreciated, acknowledged, and allowed to lead and protect his family. But if he is acting in ways that disrespect his own body and hurt his family, he does not deserve to be respected for those choices.
- When needing to confront your husband, do it in the things that really matter, and in a way that is as respectful as possible (i.e. not nagging, putting him down, yelling, undermining him, or confronting him in front of others).

## Biblical Love

- 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 says love is patient and kind; it doesn't envy, boast, and isn't proud; is not rude, self-seeking, or easily angered; it keeps no record of wrongs, doesn't delight in evil, and rejoices with truth. It always protects, trusts, hopes, and perseveres.
- Biblical love is misapplied when used to support ignoring problems and not confronting or setting boundaries. Ask yourself what you are persevering for. Is it really love if it enables wrong behavior? Romans 13:10 says, "Love does no harm to its neighbor."
- "Compassionate Toughness" (Romans 2:4) shows how God's kindness leads to repentance but God also allows consequences, convicts of sin, and disciplines us for our good. We need to use compassionate toughness with our loved ones.
- Each person is responsible for carrying his own load and each will reap what he sows (Galatians 6:5-8).

## Gentle and Quiet Spirit

- 1 Peter 3:1-2: Wives with unbelieving husbands won't win them over by nagging and arguing, but by their Christian example and behavior. This doesn't mean you can't speak the truth about relationship issues.

- 1 Peter 3:3-4: Beauty should come from the inward quality of a gentle and quiet spirit. The same word for *gentleness* is in Matthew 11:29 where Jesus is described as “gentle and humble in heart;” yet, he was not a passive weakling, but strong, confident, and in full control of himself at all times.

### **Suffering for Good and Dying to Self**

- Suffering for Good (1 Peter 3:17): “It is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.” Sometimes more suffering comes from standing up in a difficult marriage than from quietly and passively maintaining the status quo. It isn’t suggesting you should be a martyr and willing victim.
- Dying to Self (Colossians 3:3): Some interpret this to mean Christians shouldn’t care about their needs in relationships, but to be healthy, both people in the relationship are important. We die to our sin nature when saved, not to the right to be a person or have a “self,” which God created in his image.
- “Whoever finds his life will lose it and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matthew 10:39). This has to do with following Christ and our devotion to him, not losing our lives in a relationship.

### **Rights**

- It is a wrong belief that Christians don’t have rights in relationships.
- Paul wasn’t afraid to stand up for his rights as a Roman citizen.
- What we see from Jesus’ example is that he chose when, where, and how to lay down his rights. He wasn’t passive or a doormat. He was always in complete control of himself and what he allowed others to do to him. He went to the cross at the appointed time because he chose to be obedient to God for God’s glory and the good of mankind (John 10:17-18); other times, he left when people were trying to harm him (John 7:30).
- Jesus was self-controlled, confident, assertive, confrontational, and in control of what he did and of what others did to him. And he stood uncompromisingly for the truth and righteousness in people’s lives. He was driven by a purpose: to glorify God, to stand for truth, and to redeem mankind. When it served these purposes, he laid down his rights; and conversely, when it served those same purposes, he stood up for his rights, as he frequently did when he spoke the truth to those that opposed him or left when people wanted to harm him.
- We stand up for our rights as citizens of the United States.
- Sometimes standing up for our rights is in the best interest of the other person. It is usually not good to let others get away with wronging us without standing for the truth. Other times, laying down our rights voluntarily is the right thing to do. It depends on the circumstances, the effect it will have, and your willingness.

- 1 Corinthians 9: Paul had the right as an apostle to be provided for financially; but he did not use this right because he felt it would harm his witness. Verse 12b says: “On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ.” Verse 19 says: “Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible.”
- 1 Corinthians 6:1-8: Paul confronted the lawsuits among believers. Jewish communities had their own courts in their synagogues. Bringing their disagreements into secular court brought even more slander and negative attention to their cause than they already had. Paul tells them to settle their disputes between themselves in their own courts for the sake of the gospel.
- The fact they had lawsuits between them meant they were already defeated. Paul asks, “Why not rather be wronged? But instead you wrong your brother” (verse 6). He was condemning the retaliatory attitude they had toward each other.

### **Turn the Other Cheek**

- Matthew 5:38: Jesus brought this up to demonstrate that the Old Testament Law was based on retaliation— an eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth. In Israel and other Near Eastern cultures, this principle was enforced by a court that allowed legalized vengeance—not personal vengeance (the Law of Moses only allowed personal vengeance for a relative’s murder).
- Matthew 5:39: A blow on the right cheek was a grievous insult in the ancient world. Jewish and Roman law allowed prosecution for this offense.
- Matthew 5:40: Poor people had only an inner and outer garment (the outer garment would be their blanket at night), so taking the garments even for a debt wasn’t allowed.
- Matthew 5:41: Roman soldiers had the legal right to demand labor, an animal, or the property of local residents. Some Jews favored cooperating with the Romans and some wanted to revolt. Jesus was possibly suggesting they should not revolt. In 66 AD, the Jews did fight and Rome won in 70 AD.
- Matthew 5:42: There were many beggars. Jesus is suggesting unselfish giving—a theme in the Beatitudes.
- Some possible interpretations of these passages:
  - Complete non-resistance to mistreatment.
  - Relationships are more important than possessions.
  - The new Law in Christ is based on grace and love.
  - Don’t retaliate. We need to be in control of our reactions. When someone treats us badly, we don’t have to react, seek revenge, and hurt back. 1

Peter 3:9 tells us not to “repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing.”

- There may be times when it is best to be wronged, but it doesn't preclude one from standing up for good or from saying no to mistreatment. Be willing to suffer, as needed, for the Gospel and when it is the right thing to do.
- It doesn't condone physical abuse in relationships. When Jesus was before the high priest and one of the officials slapped him, he responded by asking: “If I said something wrong, tell me what it is, if not, why did you strike me?” (John 18:23).
- It could be a situational comment to believers in a culture different than ours. The believers were presenting a new Gospel to the Romans and Jews and standing up for their rights must have hurt their witness.
- Interpretation of these passages as complete non-resistance doesn't fit with other Biblical passages or lead to healthy relationships. It is very rare to see it lead to positive change in a relationship; it usually does the opposite and harms innocent people, including children.

### **Evaluate the Fruit**

- Galatians 5:19-23: Are your choices producing the fruit of the Spirit or the fruit of the flesh?
- Galatians 5:8-11: We need to live as children of light and expose the deeds of darkness.

### **Divorce and Separation**

- In Deuteronomy 24:2, Moses (led by God) wanted men to give their wives an actual certificate of divorce when they left them, so the woman could remarry. In that culture, women that were abandoned by their husbands (which happened for any reason) did not have a way to make a living, except by prostitution. God was actually protecting women by giving them what they needed to remarry to be taken care of.
- In the Old Testament (law), God allowed divorce. The New Testament (grace) must also allow for divorce. People can be like the Pharisees in applying the law (teachings about divorce) and end up hurting people.
- Separation can be a good interim step. It allows you and your husband work on yourselves and your own issues apart from each other. It also allows your husband the opportunity to choose to do or not to do what he needs to do to save the marriage.

## Differences between Men and Women

Some of the dysfunctional dynamics you are dealing with are related to normal differences between men and women.

<u>Men</u>	<u>Women</u>
Single-focused brains	Multi-tasking brains
Need respect, appreciation, & approval	Need love, affection, & attention
Want to compete	Want to be romanced
Solve problems and want to get to the bottom line	Talk about things and want empathy, not solutions
Logical and rational	Emotional
Talking about the relationship means it is not working	Talking about the relationship means it is going well
Feel successful when the job is going well	Feel successful when the marriage and family are going well
Go into their “cave” to recoup. (Shut down and shut out)	Interpret “cave time” as husband not being willing to share his deep thoughts with them.
Sex is intimacy	Talking is intimacy
Say what they mean	Mean more than they say
Protectors and hunters	Gatherers and nurturers
Admitting a mistake means losing honor	Need an apology to heal
Motivated to change by appreciation and approval	Motivated to change by confrontation and discussion

Men: Help meet your wife’s needs by listening better, talking more, opening up your heart and sharing about yourself, continuing to be committed to her and the family, and not fixing.

Continue to “choose” her and let her know she is beautiful to you. Include her as a partner and welcome her thoughts and input. Don’t be harsh and angry with her or the children.

Women: Help meet your husband’s needs by supporting his need to take care of the family financially and to get ahead, affirm his desire to protect the family, support his desire to lead, don’t criticize his natural desire to be analytical and problem solve, be with him without having to talk, appreciate his efforts, and respect him for being who he is—even when he doesn’t deserve it.

## What Not to Say to Women in Difficult Marriages

The following things are often said innocently to women in difficult marriages. There is nothing wrong with any of them; however, women in difficult marriages often misinterpret them and misapply them to their lives, so they end up causing discouragement and further problems.

### Christian Beliefs That Are Misunderstood by Women in Difficult Marriages

**“Submit to your husband.”** She hears, “Do everything my husband says. Don’t stand up for what is right. The problems are my fault because I don’t submit enough.” (Ephesians 5:22-24, Acts 5:29)

**“Love your husband.”** She hears, “Never give up, keep hoping, and persevere. Don’t be angry. If you loved him enough, he’d be different.” (1 Corinthians 13:4-8, Romans 13:10, Philippians 2:4, Matthew 22:39, Romans 2:4, Galatians 6:7-9)

**“Your suffering will work for good.”** She hears, “Keep suffering. Tolerate things as they are, and don’t try to change them. God will reward you for your suffering.” (1 Peter 3:17, Romans 8:28)

**“Christians can’t ask for respect in relationships.”** She hears, “You don’t deserve to be respected by your husband, and you shouldn’t ask for it or get upset when you don’t get it.” (Leviticus 19:3, 32, Ephesians 5:33; 6:5, 1 Peter 3:7, 1 Thessalonians 5:12)

**“Christians don’t have rights.”** She hears, “You shouldn’t expect to be treated well by your husband and shouldn’t tell him when he mistreats you.” (Matthew 5:38-41, Acts 16:37; 22:25, John 18:23, Proverbs 26:5, Galatians 6:1)

**“Die to yourself.”** She hears, “My needs don’t matter, and I shouldn’t ask for what I need.” (Colossians 3:3, John 12:25)

**“Have a gentle and quiet spirit.”** She hears, “Be quiet and don’t say anything to your husband about the problems. Trust God to change him.” (1 Peter 3:1-4; Matthew 11:29, Romans 12:18)

**“Make Jesus your husband.”** She hears, “You shouldn’t feel bad about your problems. If you were a good Christian, Jesus would be enough for you.” (Isaiah 54:5)

**“You have to forgive your husband.”** She hears, “You have to forgive and continue to tolerate what he is doing.” (Matthew 6:14-15)

**“You can’t divorce or separate.”** She hears, “There is no hope, and God doesn’t care about my pain.” (Matthew 5:31-32)

**“You brought this on yourself. God is letting you reap what you’ve sown.”** She hears, “God doesn’t care about you and neither do I. You deserve this and you shouldn’t expect anything more.” (Galatians 6:7-8)

## **Study Questions for Lifesaving Principle 3: Change Yourself, Not Him**

Women in difficult marriages try to force their husbands to change by nagging, explaining, pleading, getting angry, and threatening. They cope with “the problem” by understanding it, fixing it, coping with it, and covering it up. They worry and obsess about their husbands and the problems. This obsession keeps them from living and enjoying their own lives. They may even ignore things they are doing that are damaging to themselves and others. The most important thing they can do is to realize they are completely powerless to force their husbands to change and to begin to change themselves.

1. Read 2 Corinthians 5:10 and Matthew 12:36; 25:14-30. How does the statement, “You will stand before the Lord and give an account of your life, not your husband’s life,” affect you? Do your actions support that truth? Why or why not? (page 37)

2. Even though you are negatively affected by the wrong behavior of others, you still have choices. When you see yourself as a victim or martyr, you give away your power to choose. How have you given away your power to change your life and yourself to your husband? (pages 39-40)

3. Read 1 Corinthians 6:12, 2 Corinthians 10:5, and Philippians 4:8-9. When you are obsessed with your husband, you are controlled by your thoughts. God doesn’t want us to be controlled by anything. How does your obsession over your husband and your problems rob you of the ability to live your own life? How can you begin to let go of your obsession? (pages 40-41)

4. God gives each of us freedom to choose how we live our lives. He does not force us to choose His way, even when it hurts Him or us when we do not. What does it mean to you when you read, “You are 100 percent powerless concerning your husband’s choices, behaviors, feelings, reactions, attitudes, decisions, thoughts, and addictions?” How do you try to exert power over him? How does that affect your life? (pages 41-43)

5. Regardless of your husband’s problems, you have a part in the relationship difficulties. You need to look at your personality, your childhood, and your past and current relationships to identify patterns in how you react. What parts of your personality affect your difficult relationship? What roles did you play in your childhood that you are replicating in your current relationship? What patterns existed in your prior relationships that you are repeating in your current relationship? (pages 43-44)

6. Read Ephesians 4:26 and Psalm 42:5-6. You can be angry and yet, not sin. David was depressed and chose to trust God in his despair. God gave us the ability to feel a variety of feelings. It is important to feel them, because they are an important indicator of how you are affected by your circumstances and a key to why you act like you do. Which feelings are hard for you to feel? Which are easy? Do you struggle with wondering whether your feelings are sinful or normal? Read Romans 7. Paul understood we have trouble doing what we know is right. How do your feelings get in the way of your ability to choose what is right? (pages 45-47)



7. Read Genesis 3:11-13 and Matthew 7:1-3. Blaming others for our actions is part of our fallen nature. But, God wants us to take responsibility for our choices, regardless of what others do. How do you blame others for your feelings, actions, and reactions? How can you begin to take ownership for your feelings, actions, and reactions? (pages 47-49)

8. God cares about what we do *and* why we do it. Read through the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7 and identify the number of times Jesus refers to the inner heart or motives. Review the list of “right motives” and “wrong motives” on pages 50-51. Which ones of those guide most of your actions? (pages 49-52)

9. Read Proverbs 13:12 and Philippians 4:11-12. How do unrealistic expectations affect you? How does accepting circumstances as they are, realizing that you cannot force change, bring you peace? (pages 52-53)

10. Read Proverbs 18:16. Everyone needs to be loved, appreciated, acknowledged, and approved—even your difficult husband. Name something positive that you could acknowledge him for. How would it help for you to tell him? (pages 53-54)

11. Read Proverbs 11:22 and 14:1. Even though you are dealing with difficult and trying circumstances, you have the power to change your home. How can you change yourself to build your house rather than tear it down? (page 54)

12. Write your prayer to God for this week.

13. Write two things you can apply to your life out of this week's material.

## Lecture Notes for Principle 3: Change Yourself, Not Him

Answer this question: How much time and energy do you spend trying to change your husband?

We try to change our husbands by praying, wishing, nagging, lecturing, explaining, begging, threatening, controlling, or manipulating. True, they do need to change, but the problem is that we are powerless to make them change.

*Powerless* means “without power.” Can you stand at the seashore and command the waves to stop? Can you ask the sun not to rise? Can you make your husband change? No! So if you can’t do it, why waste your life trying?

The only sure way to make your life better is to focus on changing yourself. And I don’t mean changing yourself to please your husband, hoping he will change as a result. I mean changing yourself to live in a healthier way in your marriage and life.

### Scriptural Principles

- God’s Word tells us clearly that each of us is responsible for ourselves and we will each stand before the judgment seat of Christ to give an account of our lives—not our husbands’ lives (2 Corinthians 5:10).
- We are to take the plank out of our own eyes before commenting on the splinter in the other person’s eye (Matthew 7:3-5). (This applies even if you think your husband has the plank and you have the splinter.)
- Galatians 6:4-5 says, “Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else.” We have to do what is right, even when our husband’s aren’t.

So what are some of the things you can do to change yourself that will make your life better, even if HE never changes?

#### 1. **Take the responsibility to live your life.**

Give up being a victim or a martyr. You can’t change your life when you don’t even accept that you have the power or right to change it. Victims and martyrs go around acting like they have no other option but to continue bearing whatever life is handing them. Not true. You always have choices. Even if you choose to stay in your difficult marriage because you believe God wants you to, you can know you are choosing to stay. That gives you a sense of power: you are doing it because you believe you should. That means you aren’t a victim—you are a person of conviction who is doing what she believes God wants her to do.

Martha came to Jesus in Luke 10:38-42 and complained that she was the only one working to prepare things for him. She came to Jesus with the view that she had no

choice but to do all the work and she was angry that her sister didn't do as much as she was doing. Jesus recognized there was another choice: She could choose to sit and relax and just be with him. She didn't have to sacrifice and do it all or anything for that matter!

## 2. **Let go of the obsession over him.**

Whatever takes up your mental and emotional energy and robs you of the ability to live your life is your obsession.

Philippians 4:8-9 tells us to choose what we think about and 2 Corinthians 10:5 tell us we can take our thoughts captive. Try the following things to control your thoughts:

- Don't do things that increase your obsession with what your husband is doing. Don't check up on him, watch him, listen to his conversations, stay home to watch him, check his wallet, follow him, call him over and over, or read his e-mails (unless you need to do this to find out what is going on in order to make decisions).
- Keep your head where your feet are. Concentrate on what you are doing in that moment and don't let your thoughts wander.
- Yell "stop" aloud or to yourself every time you find your mind wandering onto him again.
- Find a phrase that reminds you that you are powerless over him and say it over and over. I say the Serenity Prayer: "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference." An abbreviated version might be "Can't change him." "Mind your own business" was another phrase I said to myself.
- Turn on the radio or listen to music.

## 3. **Understand your past.**

You need insight into yourself: your childhood, your family you grew up in, your past relationships, and your personality. This helps you get insight into how you are reacting to people and what you can change in yourself.

## 4. **Admit your part in the problem.**

Even if it is small compared to his, you need to apologize and own your mistakes, and you can't expect or demand an apology from him in return. "Changing yourself" is about you doing what is right for you. The only exception to this would be if admitting your faults would be used abusively against you or jeopardize your safety. In that case, doing what you need to do to protect yourself is more important.

## 5. **Feel and own your feelings.**

Many of us have denied, repressed, and suppressed our feelings for so long that we don't even know what we are feeling. Feelings are a window into your soul. You

have to feel them to deal with them. Otherwise, they go underground and make you sick emotionally, physically, or relationally. King David spoke about his feelings openly to God, and God helped him choose how to respond to the powerful feelings that raged inside him.

When you feel your feelings, it is tempting to blame them on your husband or another person. After all, what he or she did made you mad, sad, embarrassed, disappointed, or hurt. But the reality is that you are the one that had the feeling and that means you have to choose what to do about it.

## **6. Check your motives.**

Jesus spent much of his time on this earth going beneath the exterior. He looked at people's actions and then asked, "Why are you doing that?"

Difficult marriages are complicated. There are many decisions that have to be made and many conflicts to deal with about what to do or say. There aren't any one-size-fits-all answers. The only way you can figure out what to do is to check your motives. If your motive is pure, good, and healthy, then you can take the action; if your motive isn't pure, good, or healthy, then you shouldn't take the action.

## **7. Adjust your expectations.**

The easiest way to protect your emotions, conserve your energy, and get off the roller coaster of hope and then disappointment, is to accept who your husband is. You don't have to approve or like it. Just face the reality, so you won't keep hoping for things that won't happen. Proverbs 13:12 tells us that hope that's not fulfilled makes our hearts sick. Instead of fighting reality, accept it, and then you can decide what to do about it!

## **8. Use your influence.**

As a woman of God, you have the power to influence the mood of your home. Proverbs 14:1 says, "The wise woman builds her house but with her own hands the foolish one tears hers down." A wise woman builds her home and her life by changing herself not by wasting her time trying to force her husband to change, and in doing so, destroying her own life and home. Can you choose to be a wise woman by letting go of changing him and instead focus on changing yourself?

## **CODEPENDENTS**

Codependents struggle with relationships. These relationships can be with our spouses, parents, siblings, children, friends, or anyone else in our lives. Some of these people have addictions to alcohol, drugs, sex, work, gambling or other things. They can also be people with difficult personalities, dependencies, mental illness, or dysfunctional characteristics. We are so affected by other people that we let their behavior and choices dictate how we live. Yet, no matter how much we want to change, we feel stuck and unable to make different choices for ourselves.

We try desperately to control people, places, and things by adapting ourselves, getting angry, nagging, explaining, covering up, pretending, changing ourselves, and accepting the unacceptable. When these don't work, we end up feeling bad about ourselves, scared, alone, unloved, confused, desperate, unworthy, guilty, and anxious. We isolate ourselves from the outside world. Our children, health, marriage, work, and relationships are affected. Our lives become unmanageable.

We are unhappy, hurt, frustrated, sad, angry, lonely, and disappointed. We are confused about how to love others and about what to do with the many complex dilemmas we are continually faced with.

### **CHARACTERISTICS OF CODEPENDENTS**

When we are being “codependent” it means we have an unhealthy way of reacting to other people and their problems and choices.

- We take better care of other people than ourselves.
- We obsess on the other person by thinking about them, feeling anxious, and checking up on them.
- We know more about the feelings, thoughts, likes and dislikes of others than ourselves.
- We feel unloved and unlovable.
- We feel guilty and responsible for others and their behavior.
- We change ourselves hoping that other people will also change.
- We feel stuck and victimized.
- We try to fix and control people, places, and things.
- We are angry, afraid, and hurt.
- We deny reality to cope.
- We feel like we are going crazy.
- We have difficulty knowing what our boundaries should be.

- We have difficulty saying no without feeling guilty.
- We lose track of ourselves: our needs, goals, likes, and wants.
- We feel bad about ourselves.
- We allow ourselves to be manipulated and controlled by others.
- We lie and cover-up for others' mistakes.
- We don't trust our decisions and feelings.
- We feel lots of confusion and pain.
- We people please because we fear rejection and desperately need approval.
- We don't trust others.
- We react and overreact to everything.
- We know what everyone else should do but not ourselves.

We need different tools to deal with difficult people who don't usually change until we stop enabling them and allow them to hit their "bottom." Change in even one family member often changes the whole family. But, whether or not other people change, we find serenity and hope by focusing on changing the only thing we can: ourselves.

# THE SERENITY PRAYER

God grant me the serenity  
to accept the things I cannot change;  
courage to change the things I can;  
and wisdom to know the difference.

Living one day at a time;  
Enjoying one moment at a time;  
Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace;

Taking, as Jesus did, this sinful world  
as it is, not as I would have it;

Trusting that He will make all things right  
if I surrender to His Will;

That I may be reasonably happy in this life  
and supremely happy with Him  
forever in the next.

Amen.

*Reinhold Niebuhr*



## Study Questions for Lifesaving Principle 4: Detach with Love

Women in difficult relationships are entangled with their husbands. They feel responsible for their husbands' choices, cover-up for them, fix their mistakes, and keep them from suffering the consequences of their choices. This is called "enabling" and it can keep their husbands from having to face the consequences of their choices.

"In the paths of the wicked lie thorns and snares, but he who guards his soul stays far from them" (Proverbs 22:5). Detachment is about women separating themselves physically, emotionally, spiritually, and mentally from situations that have a negative effect on them. It helps them to be responsible for themselves and allows them to let their husbands be responsible for their own choices. Loving detachment allows them to understand their husbands' struggles and pain and treat them with compassion and respect.

1. Detachment is a powerful and necessary tool when dealing with difficult relationships. How would you describe "detachment?" Does the statement, "It is possible for you to have a good life regardless of what your husband does," seem impossible? (pages 55-56)

2. How does God detach from us? How did Jesus demonstrate detachment when He interacted with the woman caught in adultery in John 8:1-11? (page 56)

3. Understanding that your husband has a problem that is difficult for him to overcome is important. But, what does the concept, "A reason is not an excuse" mean to you? (pages 56-57)

4. Read Galatians 6:7-8, Lamentations 3:33, and Proverbs 26:27. Enablers prevent others from suffering the consequences of their actions. Does God enable us? How do you enable your husband? How can you stop? (pages 57-58)

5. Difficult people typically blame others for their choices. Read Proverbs 19:3. Does your husband blame you? How do you respond to that blame? How can you detach from it? (pages 58-59)

6. How do you respond to anger, bad moods, accusations, threats, and “button-pushing” from your husband? How do Proverbs 15:1, 17:12, 20:3 and 22:24-25 support the concept of detachment? (pages 60-67)

7. Read Proverbs 19:19. Crises happen in difficult relationships, because eventually there are consequences from wrong choices. While we don't purposefully cause a crisis to happen, we should not intervene and stop it from happening either. What are some of the crises you have gone through? What are some of the things you fear happening? How could the concept of loving detachment help you manage in the next crisis? (pages 61-62)

8. It takes time to learn detachment. Read 1 Corinthians 9:24-27. Paul talks about choosing to make his body do what he knows is right. How does that correlate with the concept of “acting as if.” How would that help you in dealing with your husband? (page 67)

9. Detachment is not abandonment. Read 1 Peter 3:9 and Romans 12:17-21. How can you treat your difficult husband with love and still allow him to bear the consequences of his choices? (pages 67-68)

10. Write your prayer to God for this week.

11. Write two things you can apply to your life out of this week’s material.

## Lecture Notes for Principle 4: Detach with Love

Detachment has two parts: Live your life and let your husband live his life. Let's look at what each of these involves.

### Live Your Life

- Detachment is similar to differentiation or individuation, which are the processes whereby we are able to be connected to but separate from another person.
- Detachment is the opposite of enmeshment or codependency, which is the fusion of ourselves with another person where we are so dependent that we are unable to feel, be, choose, think, and act independently.
- God gave each of us stewardship over our lives, meaning we have the responsibility for how we live regardless of the choices others make (Matthew 25: The Parable of the Steward).
- Detachment is separating emotionally, spiritually, mentally, and sometimes physically from other people's choices and feelings.
- Detachment is stepping back from what is going on and choosing how you want to respond rather than reacting. This allows you to see the situation clearer.
- Jesus was always aware of who he was dealing with and took it into consideration with how he dealt with the person (John 2:24-25). You also need to consider what your husband's problems are when dealing with him (Matthew 10:17).
- Detach from blame by not taking it on if it isn't yours to take.
- Detach from anger by not arguing and getting drawn in. You can use short answers to get out of the argument quickly.
- Detach from moods by recognizing that other people's moods are their own and you don't cause them.
- Detach from threats by not reacting to them (unless they are real), but also don't allow yourself to be intimidated by them.
- Detach from crises by allowing the natural course to occur.
- Detach from other people who may disagree with your choices.
- Stop allowing yourself to get hooked by your husband's manipulation, guilt, anger, blame, buttons, hot spots—anything that pulls you into reacting to him, taking care of him, taking on his “stuff,” and not taking care of yourself (Proverbs 22:24-25).

- Act as if: you act detached before you feel detached.



### **Let Your Husband Live His Life**

- Matthew 19:16-29 is a story about a rich young ruler who came to Jesus to ask him how he could have eternal life. Jesus told him and the man rejected Jesus' answer. How did Jesus respond? He let him go. He didn't run after him, beg him, explain it forty-five other ways, or tell him how foolish he was. He accepted the man's right to make his own choices.
- Jesus told his disciples to shake the dust off their feet if they were not welcomed in a town (Luke 10:5-12), and not to throw their pearls to pigs or to give to dogs what is sacred (Matthew 7:6).
- Your husband is a separate person from you, even though you are married. How he acts and reacts is his responsibility. You can't control it and you didn't cause it. You have to let him own it and you don't have to buy into it.
- Detachment also means you stop enabling and allow him to bear the consequences of his own choices. (Galatians 6:7-8 explains the law of reaping and sowing.) It is scary at first, and you may suffer too, so it takes courage. God doesn't willingly bring affliction to men either, but allows it for their own good (Lamentations 3:33).
- Understand the reason your husband is struggling, but don't let it be an excuse for him to do what isn't okay.
- **LOVING DETACHMENT** means you are kind, courteous, and respectful. You take care of your responsibilities in the relationship. You have compassion without enabling. We are to treat our enemies well (Matthew 5:43-48) and not repay evil for evil, but respond with good (Romans 12:17-21). You respond with goodness and kindness to your husband, instead of treating him with anger, contempt, disrespect, and meanness, while at the same time taking care of yourself and letting him take responsibility for his own problems.

### **Summary of Detachment With Love**

- Detachment could also be called "Releasing with love."
- Detachment is separating emotionally, spiritually, mentally, and physically from others' choices, reactions, and feelings.
- Detachment is not numbness, an absence of emotions, or denial.
- Detachment allows you to not react, so you can step back and see the situation clearly.

- You may have to act detached, before you feel detached.
- Detachment is taking control of your life by not letting others control your choices, feelings, and reactions. When you *react*, you let others dictate your actions, but when you *act* you choose your actions.
- Detachment is taking responsibility for your own life (including actions, inactions, feelings, and reactions).
- Detachment is allowing others the dignity to choose how to live their lives and take the responsibility for their choices.
- Detachment is not abandonment, disinterest, or indifference. You still treat the person with dignity, courtesy, and kindness while detaching.
- Detachment helps you to not take “personalities personal.”
- Detachment reminds you to mind your own business and that there are types of involvement that make the situation worse.
- Detachment is not getting in the middle (unless you choose to and know it is in your best interest and the best interest of others).
- Detachment sets you and the other person free.
- Detachment is letting go and letting God take care of the situation.
- Detachment can be summed up as “LIVE AND LET LIVE.”

## Study Questions for Lifesaving Principle 5: Nurture Yourself

Women in difficult relationships ignore their own needs, because they focus so intently on their husbands and the problems. It is important that they learn to take care of themselves. This strengthens them to meet the many additional demands and stresses of their difficult marriages. It also teaches them to live their lives fully by developing and utilizing their talents and enjoying the good things; otherwise their lives are on hold while they wait for their husbands to change.

When they begin to take care of themselves, their husbands may accuse them of being selfish. But, it is not selfish; it is essential. There are many practical ways they can take care of themselves including taking care of their emotional, physical, spiritual, and mental needs, learning to say yes and no, making good decisions, watching priorities, respecting themselves, keeping journals, and keeping things as simple as possible.

1. Has anyone ever accused you of being selfish when you do something for yourself? Read the list of excuses at the top of page 69. Do you use any of these excuses for not taking care of yourself? How do Ephesians 5:29; Matthew 14:13 and 23, 22:39 and Philippians 2:4 support the premise that you should take care of yourself? (pages 69-70)

2. Answer the questions on the top of page 70. Do they give you any ideas of how you can begin to nurture yourself by developing your own life? (page 70)

3. What emotional needs have you neglected? What can you do to take care of your emotional needs? (page 71)

4. What physical needs have you neglected? What can you do to take care of your physical needs? (pages 71-72)
5. What spiritual needs have you neglected? Have your feelings of guilt and unworthiness kept you from pursuing a relationship with God? How? What can you do to take care of your spiritual needs? (pages 72-73)
6. What mental needs have you neglected? What can you do to take care of your mental needs? (page 74)
7. Women in difficult marriages often put their lives on hold until their husbands change. Matthew 25:14-30 is the Parable of the Talents. It is talking about money, but can also figuratively include all our talents including our life, time, money, abilities, experiences, relationships, gifts, knowledge, and opportunities. Even though you may feel overwhelmed, developing your talents is good for you. What can you do today to use your talents? (pages 74-75)
8. One of the ways you take care of yourself is to “simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No’” (Matthew 5:37). How is allowing yourself to say yes and no when you really mean it taking care of yourself? Do you have difficulty with this concept? How can you begin to make changes in this area? (page 75)



9. Read Colossians 3:8-13. Difficult marriages are full of anger, resentment, and bitterness. Do you struggle with forgiveness? Is it hard for you to understand that forgiveness does not mean you have to tolerate mistreatment in the future? (pages 75-76)

10. It is natural to have many regrets in difficult marriages. Do you struggle with forgiving yourself for the things you wish you had done differently? Read 2 Corinthians 7:10 and Psalm 38:4. What is the difference between guilt and shame? (pages 76-79)

11. Life can easily become overwhelming, even without a difficult marriage. How can you simplify your life and keep your priorities straight? (pages 79-81)

12. Write your prayer to God for this week.

13. Write two things you can apply to your life out of this week's material.

## Lecture Notes for Principle 5: Nurture Yourself

Here are some questions you need to answer to help you learn to nurture yourself:

### 1. How and why have you neglected yourself?

### 2. Is it selfish to take care of yourself?

Philippians 2:4: *“Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”*

No, it is necessary and essential to care for yourself; yes, if you are completely unbalanced and care only for yourself.

Have you believed it is selfish for you to take care of yourself?

How has this affected your choices?

### 3. How do you know when you should put your needs or the other person's needs first?

➤ You have to stay emotionally, physically, spiritually, and mentally healthy.

Ephesians 5:29: *“After all, no one ever hates his own body, but he feeds and cares for it.”*

➤ You have to take care of your family's needs first.

1 Timothy 5:8: *“If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”*

- You have to pay attention to why you are putting the other person first.

2 Corinthians 9:7: *“Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”*

- There are lots of reasons why we put someone else before ourselves:
  - ◆ Obligation – you believe you have to.
  - ◆ Guilt – if you don’t, you will feel bad.
  - ◆ Fear – of the repercussions if you don’t.
  - ◆ Pride/People-pleasing – you want others to think well of you.
  - ◆ Obedience – you believe God wants you to.
  - ◆ To further the gospel
  - ◆ Choice – you want to.

Which ones of these reasons typically motivate you to put other people before yourself?

- You have to compare the importance of both needs.

Matthew 22:39: *“Love your neighbor as yourself.”*

#### **4. What needs to change for you to take care of yourself? How can you take better care of yourself.....?**

- Emotionally
  
- Mentally
  
- Spiritually
  
- Physically

## 5. How would forgiving yourself and others help you to nurture yourself?

Psalm 32:1, 3-4: *“Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.”*

Unforgiveness toward yourself and others has a negative effect on your emotional, mental, spiritual, and physical health. When you hold on to the mistakes of the past, you can't fully live in the present. You cannot go back and undo the past; you can only change the way you live today. Christ forgave you. Forgive yourself. And forgive others, so resentment doesn't keep you from moving forward. (Always remember, you can forgive and still set boundaries on further mistreatment and forgiveness doesn't mean you have to forget or pretend it didn't happen.)

What do you need to forgive yourself for?

What do you need to forgive others for?

What is keeping you from forgiving yourself and others?

## Suggestions for Self-Care

### EMOTIONALLY

- Meet with girlfriends – a gift of God to encourage us.
- Meet with a spiritually mature or older mentor.
- Be aware of what your true emotional needs are (take a personality test).
- Be aware of your emotional vulnerability and work toward balance.
- Watch your priorities.

### PHYSICALLY

- Recreation (have some fun).
- Exercise regularly.
- Stay on a healthy diet.
- Check with a doctor for hormonal issues.
- Get enough sleep.
- Update your physical appearance (make-up, something new, long hot bath, hair cut, etc.).
- Do something to relax.

### SPIRITUALLY

- Read the Bible (specifically Psalms and Proverbs).
- Read a devotional book.
- Meet with other believers (Hebrews 10:25) for encouragement.
- Use meditative prayer (pray Psalms).
- Read Christian fiction.

### MENTALLY

- Stay up with current events.
- Play mental games (Sudoku, cross-word puzzles).
- Read self-help books.
- Take an on-line course.
- Start a craft.
- Watch your priorities.
- Keep a journal (for perspective).

#### **Ephesians 5:29**

*“After all, no one ever hated his own body,  
but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church.”*

### Suggestions for Relaxing

*Use the following to relieve any stress you are feeling that might hinder your quiet time with God.*

- **Tension check**  
Scan your body from head to toe and when you become aware of an area of tension or discomfort, gently tense it and release it and then relax.
- **Massage**  
Gently massage your forehead, head and neck as though you were shampooing your hair. Allow it to help you relax.
- **Word Response**  
Choose a word or brief phrase that helps you to relax such as *peace, relax, be still*, etc. Close your eyes and slowly repeat this word or phrase to yourself until you start to experience its meaning.
- **Peaceful place**  
If you can't be in a beautiful place, imagine one like a forest, park, country lane or sandy beach. Use all your senses to experience this place fully. Allow these images in your mind to relax your body.
- **One-Minute Relaxation - “Be still, and know that I am God.” (Psalm 46:10)**  
Spend a few seconds focusing on your breathing, deeply and slowly. Then slowly repeat the Scripture above, emphasizing a different word each time you say it. Then whisper “*Be Still*” a few times to calm your spirit.
- **U R What U Think - “For as he thinks in his heart, so is he.” (Proverbs 23:7) (AMP)**  
Take an inventory of your thoughts. Just like our words, they are containers of power—good or bad. What we say usually comes from what we think. If you feel caught in a negative pattern of thinking, ask God to help you and surrender your thoughts to Him.
- **Palms Stress Relief - “Cast all your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you.” (Psalm 55:22)(NIV)**  
Sit in a comfortable position with the palms of your hands facing upwards. Breathe deeply and slowly. Then, turn the palms of your hands over to face the floor. Mentally release to God all the things that are troubling you or causing your stress at that moment. Imagine sitting down a bag full of unnecessary, heavy objects and taking each one out, putting them into the hands of God. Name them, if necessary, so you can fully release each stressor to Him. Finally, turn the palms of your hands upwards again and spend a few minutes accepting God's love, joy and peace.

**One-Word Meditation**

*“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” (Galatians 5:22-23)(NIV)*

Focus your attention on God, sit quietly, relax and concentrate on one aspect of the fruit of the Spirit from the above Scripture. Think about the quality and what it means. Finish the meditation by asking God to develop that quality more fully in your life.

**Suggestions for Meditation**

Use the following Scriptures to ponder the wonder of God:

**Who God is:**

*Genesis 22:13-14*

*Psalm 19*

*John 1:14*

**What God has done:**

*Psalm 8*

*Job 33:4*

*Galatians 3:13-14*

**What God has said:**

*Psalm 19:7-11*

*Matthew 5:18*

*II Timothy 3:16*

**What God has commanded:**

*Exodus 20:1-17*

*Ephesians 6:1-20*

*Colossians 3:16*

**What God says about me:**

*Genesis 1:27*

*Jeremiah 1:4-5*

*John 17:23*

## Study Questions for Lifesaving Principle 6: Face Your Fears

Women in difficult marriages have many fears: some real and some projected. They live with all manner of “what ifs.” The fear can keep them paralyzed from making changes, speaking the truth, taking care of themselves, and setting boundaries. It is important that they identify the fears they have, talk about them, do whatever they can to appropriately take care of the situation, and then let the rest go by trusting in God.

Talking about the fears with other people helps them to know that they are not alone and that others also feel many of the same fears.

1. Fear is an emotion. Some mistakenly believe that feeling fear is a sin; it is not. Read the following verses: Matthew 14:22-32, John 6:16-21, Luke 8:22-25, and Philippians 4:6. How do these verses help you see that having fear is not wrong, but that you have a choice to turn that fear into worry and anxiety or into faith by trusting God? What do you typically do with your fear? (page 84)

2. Read Isaiah 51:7, Proverbs 29:25, and 1 John 4:18. How are you afraid of your husband’s reaction? What about the reactions of others? How does this affect your choices? (pages 84-85)

3. Read Psalm 112:7, Proverbs 3:25-26, and James 4:13-16. What changes are you afraid of? How does God want you to view change and the unknown? (pages 85, 94)



4. Which losses do you fear most: financial, relational, material, physical, or spiritual? Read Proverbs 15:16-17, Matthew 6:25-34, and Philippians 3:8. How does God want you to view loss? If it is necessary to bring your husband to his bottom, can you view it in a different way? (pages 85-87)

5. God hates divorce; but He also hates other sin. There is disagreement in the Church over justifiable reasons for divorce. Some say only for adultery (Matthew 5:31-32); others say abuse and emotional abandonment are also grounds, partially based on 1 Corinthians 7:10-16, in which Paul was explaining that a Christian should not leave an unbelieving spouse simply because he or she was unsaved. What do you believe constitutes justifiable grounds for divorce? How does this affect your choices and actions in your difficult marriage? Are there times when sin prevents people from fulfilling God's best for their marriage and divorce is a necessary option? (pages 87-88)

6. Fear of being alone is a common fear for women in difficult marriages. How can you conquer this fear? Read Isaiah 54:4-6. How does knowing God is there for you help? How can you reach out to other people to keep you from feeling and being alone? Do you succumb to the thinking that the only way to combat loneliness is to be with a man in a romantic relationship? How does that hinder you? (pages 88-89)

7. Fear of disappointment is another common fear. How does it affect you? Read Psalm 39:7. What should your hope be in - God or circumstances? (page 89)

8. Finding God's will for our lives is important; yet, we are sometimes confused and unnecessarily fearful. Read Proverbs 20:18, 2 Corinthians 2:12, Proverbs 3:5-6, and Romans 8:28. How do these verses present differing ways to find God's will? Has this been an area of confusion and/or disillusionment for you? Do you need to be afraid of being out of God's will or turn over your decisions to Him and trust Him to guide you? (pages 91-92)

9. The fear of staying the same can be a positive fear, helping you to realize that unless you do something differently, your marriage may either not change or get worse. When you see your marriage in the past, now, and the future, do you see any patterns? Do you have regrets about the past? Will you have those same regrets in the future if nothing changes? (pages 94-95)

10. It is important to identify and analyze your fears, so you can see how they affect your decisions. Second Timothy 1:7 tells us that God has not given “us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love, and of self-discipline” or a “sound mind” (KJV). Read the questions on the bottom of page 95 and top of page 96 that help you evaluate your fears. How will that process help you to say, “So what?” to your fears and allow you to do the right thing anyway? (pages 95-98)

11. Write your prayer to God for this week.

12. Write two things you can apply to your life out of this week’s material.

## Lecture Notes for Principle 6: Face Your Fears

### What is fear?

- *Fear* is a distressing emotion aroused by impending danger, evil, pain, etc. whether the threat is real or imagined.
- *Anxiety* is experienced as mental distress or uneasiness because of some type of fear. It can become worry.
- *F-e-a-r* = false evidence appearing real. Sometimes the thing we fear isn't real; but other times, fear is real and needs to be taken as a warning (Proverbs 22:3).
- Fear-based individuals are naturally more fear-based or anxiety prone from either their inborn personalities or life experiences. Perfectionists tend to have high anxiety related to high expectations of themselves and others.
- Fear is a basic survival mechanism – humans have it and so do animals. Its purpose is to protect by enabling the person or animal to heighten its senses and attend to what is threatening by either fighting or fleeing. This is known as the “fight or flight” response. It is experienced physiologically by the sympathetic nervous system tightening muscles and priming them with oxygen and increasing the heart rate. Emotionally, we experience fear with recognition of danger.
- Individuals also can experience “freeze” along with fight or flight.
- Fear can either motivate you or paralyze you.
- Fear is a natural response to danger. It isn't feeling fear that is sinful. It is what we do with it that matters. The Bible tells us to replace fear with trust in the Lord.

### Common Fears in Difficult Marriages

- Fear of your husband's reaction
- Fear of change
- Fear of loss
- Fear of divorce
- Fear of being alone
- Fear of being out of God's will
  - The Bible uses the phrase “will of God” two ways:
    - ◆ God's specific sovereign plan: Ephesians 1:1, James 4:15, Genesis 12:1-3, Exodus 9:34;14:4, John 3:16
    - ◆ God's general commandments: 1 Thessalonians 4:3, 1 Peter 2:15,

Matthew 7:21, 2 Peter 1:3-10

- Fears regarding children
- Fear of regret
- Fear of the unknown
- Fear of staying the same

### Quotes About Fear

- “There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.” (*1 John 4:18, NIV*)
- “God’s spirit doesn’t make us slaves who are afraid of him. Instead, we become his children and call him our father.” (*Romans 8:15, Contemporary English Version*)
- “For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’” (*Romans 8:15, NIV*)
- “Feel the fear and do it anyway.” (Susan Jeffers, *Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway*)
- “You gain strength, courage and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You must do the thing which you think you cannot do.” (Eleanor Roosevelt)
- “Courage is fear that has said its prayers.” (Dorothy Bernard)

### How do you deal with fear?

- Identify the fear.
- Feel the fear.
- Talk to God and others about the fear.
- Evaluate your fears and how they affect your decisions and life.
- Do the right thing anyway by trusting God through it.

1 Timothy 1:7 says, “God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline” (NIV). The King James Version replaces “self-discipline” with “self-control.” You do not have to let fear paralyze you and keep you from doing whatever it is that you know you should do. You can face your fears with God’s strength.

## Study Questions for Lifesaving Principle 7: Speak the Truth in Love

Poor communication is a part of all difficult relationships. Denial is a common part of dysfunctional relationships. It keeps people from dealing with things, until they are ready to face them. Yet, denial also prevents the truth from being spoken. It is essential that the truth be faced. Women in difficult marriages come to doubt their perceptions, thoughts, and feelings because their husbands often lie, deny, twist, and manipulate. They need validation of their feelings, perceptions, and thoughts. Being in a group with other people that have had similar experiences helps them to see things clearer.

Once they know the truth, they can begin to speak the truth in love by being honest, direct, respectful, humble, persistent, willing to listen, reasonable, and discerning. Even if only one person begins to speak the truth, it changes the dynamics of the relationship.

1. Denial is common in difficult relationships. How have you been in denial about yourself, your husband, and your marriage? How has your husband's denial affected you? Jesus said that truth produces freedom (John 8:32). How would letting go of denial set you free? (pages 99-101)

2. Self-doubt is another common characteristic of a difficult relationship. When your husband disagrees with or denies much of what you believe, feel, and see, you begin to doubt yourself. It is essential that you begin to trust yourself to know your truth; not looking to your husband or others to tell you what it is. How have you let your husband make you doubt yourself? How can you learn to trust yourself more? How does what James 1:5-8 says about doubt relate to your life? (pages 101-102)

3. It is essential that you are willing to confront when it is necessary. Read the examples on page 103 of things Jesus said to the Scribes, Pharisees, and disciples and Paul said to the church. What does this teach you about confronting? “Tough love says, ‘I love you enough to be willing to cause you discomfort or pain in the hope of helping you better your life and mine.’” (page 104) Are there times that you are willing to use tough love? Why or why not? (pages 102-104)

4. Dysfunctional relationships have dysfunctional communication. Indirect communication causes the other person to guess at what is meant. Does your relationship have indirect communication? How can you begin to communicate in short, factual, and direct statements? What would be difficult about that? How would it change things? (pages 105-106)

5. Speaking the truth in love involves speaking to others respectfully, courteously, and kindly. Do you currently do this? What does your body language and tone of voice communicate? Read Colossians 3:12, Titus 3:4-5, and 2 Peter 1:5-7. How can you speak truth that has those components? (page 106)

6. Read Galatians 6:1 and Matthew 7:1-2. How do these verses remind you to speak your truth from a humble heart? Do you do that now or do you feel that your husband is “worse” than you and therefore deserves harsher judgment? (pages 106-107)

7. Sometimes, truth has to be spoken more than once. You may have to say it, let your husband react, walk away, and then say it again—and again. Not nagging, just not backing down from your truth, if it isn’t accepted right away. Can you state your truth and then let it go or do you need your husband to agree with you? How does detachment help you with this principle of persistence? (page 107)

8. Your husband has a different perspective and some of his “truth” too. Can you be open-minded enough to let him speak, or is it difficult for you to hear what he says? How would your being a better listener change your relationship? (pages 107-108)



9. It is important to be reasonable. “The balance to speaking the truth in love is learning that there are times that ‘love covers a multitude of sins’ (1 Peter 4:8) and ‘is not easily angered’ (1 Corinthians 13:5)” (page 109). Some of the things that bother you are small and don’t need to be brought up. Read the questions in italics on page 109 and discuss how asking yourself those questions would help you get a different perspective about the many irritations you have. (pages 108-109)

10. Proverbs 17:28 says, “Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue.” Proverbs 26:4 says, “Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will be like him yourself.” James 1:19 says, “Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.” Proverbs 15:28 says, “The heart of the righteous weighs its answers, but the mouth of the wicked gushes evil.” When do you need to be silent or slow to speak? (pages 108-110)

11. Write your prayer to God for this week.

12. Write two things you can apply to your life out of this week’s material.

## Lecture Notes for Principle 7: Speaking the Truth in Love

### Hindrances to Speaking the Truth in Love

You may need to speak the truth to someone and confront them regarding unacceptable behavior, relay a boundary, or instigate a conversation about a problem in your relationship. Ephesians 4 tells us to live as children of light and speak truthfully by dealing with our anger and emotions in a healthy, productive and Godly way. The following hindrances will prevent you from speaking the truth in love:

**Insisting the other person understand or agree with you.** *(That is never guaranteed and NOT the main reason you speak your truth.)* Matthew 10:11-14; 34

**Fear of causing the other person to be upset, hurt, or unhappy with you.** *(People may be upset with what you tell them, and that doesn't mean you shouldn't have said it, as sometimes it is necessary to cause people distress. You need to detach from their reactions.)* 2 Corinthians 7:8

**Saying too many words in an effort to convince.** *(Keep it to 10 words or less.)* Proverbs 25:11

**Speaking when you are reactive and not meaning what you say, saying things to threaten without the willingness and ability to follow through with it, or saying things in a mean way, meant to hurt or wound.** *(Mean what you say. Say what you mean. And don't say it mean.)* Proverbs 20:25

**Saying things to someone who will use your words to punish or hurt you.** *(Always consider the safety of the person you are speaking to, and don't disclose things to someone who will hurt you with what you share.)* Matthew 7:6

**Allowing yourself to be easily invalidated by the other person's defensiveness, abuse, arguments, and opinions.** *(Just because someone says it, doesn't make it so. Learn to validate yourself by believing what you feel and perceive, and consider your opinions and perceptions just as important as someone else's.)* James 1:6-8

**Difficulty expressing your thoughts, especially in emotionally volatile and unpleasant circumstances.** *(Write down the main points you want to say. When confronted by someone, take time to think about your responses by coming back to the subject later. Consider using e-mails, letters, cards, script, texts, or even a journal. Write every word down and read it, if you need to.)* Proverbs 15:28

**Thinking you have to have a boundary, consequence, or bottom line every time you deal with a difficult issue.** *(It is okay to just share feelings and thoughts. Only share boundaries and consequences when you are ready.) 1 Corinthians 4:14*

**Only caring about your own position and not being willing to hear the other person's truths.** *(Be willing to hear the other person's feelings, thoughts, and perceptions, even if it is uncomfortable or painful. Recognize that you are a part of the relationship and other people are affected by you too.) Colossians 3:12-14, Philippians 2:4*

**Speaking when you feel panicky, anxious, or emotionally reactive and thinking you have to make IT happen NOW.** *(Wait to deal with the issue, if possible, at a time when you feel more in control of yourself. When you feel these things, you are likely to be pushy, intense, emotional, reactive, and/or controlling. The other person will sense your mood and be more defensive.) James 1:19*

**Saying what you don't need to say to a person that it will do no good to speak to and will upset you instead.** *(Always think about why you want to speak and if the good outweighs the bad.) Matthew 10:11-14 & 16-17*

**Saying your truth in a way that accuses or attacks the other person.** *(This will only cause defensiveness. Share your truths in a way that focuses on yourself. Use "I statements." Claim the problem for yourself. Example: "I am not okay with you not working and living here." "I am not able to live with alcohol/drug/pornography use, etc. It is too painful for me. I just can't do it." "I get scared when you are angry and shut down. It is uncomfortable for me.") Proverbs 15:1&18*

**Speaking too soon.** *(Know your truth first.) Proverbs 17:14 & 28*

**Speaking at the wrong time.** *(Timing does matter. Like it or not, there is wisdom in using timing to your advantage.) Proverbs 16:32*

**Allowing yourself to get into a defensive position with your truth.** *(Don't argue or defend. It only weakens your position. After all, it is just your truth.) Ephesians 6:14*

**Taking the person's response personal.** *(DETACH! DETACH! DETACH! The person has the right to his/her own response. It does not invalidate your truth for them to disagree or be upset!) Matthew 10:26*

**Not knowing who you are dealing with.** *(Don't be unprepared. Go into the conversation with the knowledge of who the person is. Expect him or her to act in their usual way. Don't be shocked and disappointed when he or she behaves NORMALLY.) Matthew 10:16-17, Luke 11:17*

**Not persisting in your truth.** (*Your truth is your truth even if someone else doesn't validate it. Don't be easily swayed with every argument and opinion. Don't fall back into denial.*) Ephesians 6:14

**Believing you can't or shouldn't apologize when you are wrong or that you cannot change your mind.** (*You can apologize and/or change your mind—when you really need to— at any time with anyone—even children.*) 1 John 1:8

**Thinking you have to do it perfectly and if you don't, the fallout is your fault.** (*Other people are responsible for their stuff and they have a part in the relationship and conversation too. Do your best and let the rest go.*) Matthew 12:36

**Avoiding confrontation and dealing with the truth, because it is uncomfortable, but continuing to complain about the problem or person.** (*It is your responsibility to bring it up no matter how uncomfortable it is. Be willing to do something different to get change.*) Matthew 5:23-24; 18:15-17

**Thinking you have to say it over and over for the person to hear you.** (*You may need to say it again, but not because they didn't hear you. They heard. They just didn't want to admit it.*) Proverbs 26:4

## Study Questions for Lifesaving Principle 8: Set Boundaries

Boundaries are not about controlling the other person; they are limits on what each of us will and will not do. As was already discussed, we are powerless to make someone else change. The only power we have is over our own lives. Therefore, boundaries utilize the power we have to decide how we will live. Our boundaries also set a standard for others, as we define what is acceptable for us.

“Jesus set boundaries in His interactions with others. He chose when to respond and how to respond, always in full control of Himself and what He allowed others to do to Him. He willingly went to the cross at the appointed time but withdrew Himself from dangerous situations before that time. He held people responsible for their actions while consistently demonstrating authority and integrity (Mark 1:22 and Luke 4:32) (page 111) and a love that enabled Him to die on the cross.

Difficult people don't necessarily welcome their loved ones setting boundaries. It isn't God's first choice that any relationship have a breach, but it may result from making a stand for the higher good of following Christ and standing for righteousness.

1. Difficult relationships weaken and challenge boundaries. Are your boundaries weaker than you would like them to be? Look at the bulleted list at the top of page 112 and share about the reasons that apply to you. (pages 111-113)

2. Read the bulleted list in the middle of page 113 that says, “The following are examples of boundaries to consider.” Think about Christ's life. How did He demonstrate boundaries?

3. Next, read the bulleted list beginning on the bottom of page 113 and continuing onto page 114 of why you need strong boundaries. Which ones strike you as reasons that you should work on strengthening your boundaries? (pages 113-114)

4. Think of an area that you need stronger boundaries. Look at the bulleted questions near the top page 114 following the sentence: “Answering the following questions will help you decide what boundaries you want to set.” Answer those questions as they pertain to that area.

5. Are there any family members or close friends that disagree with the boundaries you want to set regarding your husband? If so, you will have to set boundaries with them regarding your decisions and risk their disapproval. Talk about this with your group.

6. Are there struggles that involve boundaries in your sexual relationship with your husband? (pages 117-119)

7. What is your past and present experience with abuse? Have you been in a verbally, emotionally, or physically abusive relationship? How can you set boundaries with abuse? (pages 122-123 and handout on page 53-54 of the study guide)

8. Read the bulleted questions under “Relationship Boundaries” on page 124. Answer several of the questions posed. (pages 123-124)

9. Separation is sometimes a necessary boundary in a difficult marriage. Read 1 Corinthians 7:10-11. Is this a scriptural justification for separation? What legal, emotional, physical, and relationship protections do you have to consider if you separate? What situations would change the separation into a need to get a divorce? (pages 124-126)

10. Setting boundaries is a process that takes time. It often comes after you have worked the other principles, because it takes clarity of mind, a willingness to face your fears and speak the truth, the ability to nurture and focus on yourself, and the ability to detach so you know what is clearly your responsibility. When you set your boundaries, you have to do so in a clear and calm way. When your difficult loved one doesn't like your boundaries, you have to be prepared to stand firm. What has been your experience with setting boundaries? Have you backed down, argued, explained, begged, threatened, gotten angry, cried, or negotiated? What has and hasn't worked for you in the past? What can you change today? (pages 127-128)

11. Write your prayer to God for this week.

12. Write two things you can apply to your life out of this week's material.



## Lecture Notes for Principle 8: Set Boundaries

### Common Christian Misconceptions about Boundaries

- Boundaries are selfish. I should be willing to sacrifice and put others before myself.
- Boundaries hurt other people and I shouldn't hurt people.
- Boundaries aren't loving and giving.
- Boundaries aren't Christ-like. Jesus modeled forgiveness and passivity.

### Definition of Boundaries

- Boundaries are simply what you will and will not do.
- Boundaries are based on stewardship (Matthew 25:14-30), accountability (Romans 14:12), and the law of reaping and sowing (Galatians 6:7-8).

### Responses to Boundaries

- Unhealthy people don't like boundaries.
- Enmeshed people see boundaries as a betrayal and violation and don't respect your right to be separate and independent. They also don't want to lose control.
- Protesting of boundaries or "flak" is meant to get you to withdraw your boundary and go back to your old behavior.
- They threaten and retaliate in anger or counter your boundary with one of their own.
- They act hurt. The hurt can be manipulative to get you to back down.
- They throw out accusations: "You are hurting me." "You aren't a Christian." "You are a bad daughter, wife, husband, son, mother, father, etc." "You can't say no to me." "You have to submit." "You don't love me or care about me."
- They ignore you and act as if you never set the boundary.
- They punish you.
- They violate the boundary because they refuse to respect it. This requires a response from you.
- They respect your boundary and respond by entering into a discussion, negotiation, and understanding. (This is the only healthy response.)

## How to Set Boundaries

**Definition:** Boundaries are what you will and won't do. It may involve your reaction to what another person chooses to do or not to, but it isn't about making someone else do what you want them to.

### Go through the following process to set boundaries:

1. Identify what is bothering you.
2. Identify who is involved.
3. Identify your wish/want/need/limit in the situation.
4. Identify who is responsible for what in the situation.
5. Decide whether it is a non-negotiable or negotiable wish/want/need/limit.
6. If it is a **non-negotiable** wish/want/need/limit **and** you are **ready** to express it:
  - State the wish/want/need/limit.
  - Identify what you will and will not do.
  - Express it to the appropriate person(s) at the appropriate time, clearly if needed.
  - Follow through with whatever actions you need to take.
7. If it is a **negotiable** wish/want/need/limit **or** you **aren't ready** to express it as a boundary, yet:
  - Express your feelings, thoughts, needs, and/or wishes to the appropriate person(s) if you decide it is wise to do so.
  - Work on dealing with the problem within yourself.
  - Revisit making it a boundary when you are ready.

## Understanding Abuse in Relationships

### Types of Abuse

#### ➤ Emotional/Mental and Verbal Abuse

This includes words or non-verbal looks, body stances, communication styles, and interactions designed to weaken, punish, tear down, control, manipulate, or hurt. It includes humiliation, teasing, ridiculing, put-downs, name-calling, insults, denial, discounting, manipulation, mind-games, anger, withholding, silent treatments, blame, lying, criticizing, threatening, minimizing, and ordering.

#### ➤ Physical Abuse

Physical abuse includes hitting, beating, slapping, pushing, shoving, pulling hair, pinching, holding and refusing to allow someone to move, locking someone in a room, ripping clothes, threatening violence with a weapon, using verbal threats or innuendos about future violence, holding up a fist or appearing to be about to strike, but holding back, destroying personal possessions, throwing objects, hurting pets, and destroying property.

#### ➤ Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse consists of forced sex, threats and manipulation to pressure someone into sexual acts that they are uncomfortable with, sexual put-downs, using sex as a bargaining tool, ridiculing masculinity or femininity, extreme jealousy and accusations of infidelity, and physical attacks on sexual parts of the body.

#### ➤ Spiritual Abuse

Spiritual abuse can occur with the misuse of spiritual authority as a husband or father.

#### ◆ Man as head of the home in role of husband

This is when a husband uses his authority as head of the home to prevent his wife from having input into decisions, to discount her needs, to demand servant-like obedience, to disregard her feelings, to demand she submit, to silence her, to prevent him from having to listen to her, to get his way, and to demand these things with a “master of the house” mentality while ignoring the mandate to love his wife as Christ loved the church (Ephesians 5:25).

1 Peter 3:7 tells husbands to “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 hinders your prayers.” And Colossians 3:19 says, “Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.”

### ◆ **Man as head of the home as father**

Typical attitudes of an abusive father:

- ◆ An abusive father is more concerned with how decisions affect him than his children/family. He is the center.
- ◆ An abusive father sees children as his possessions.
- ◆ An abusive father uses his children to punish, control, or threaten his wife.
- ◆ An abusive father overrules his wife's decisions and authority with the kids to undermine her.
- ◆ An abusive father demands the children meet his needs rather than him meeting their needs.

### ➤ **Other Examples of Abuse**

- ◆ Control over your personal life and treating you like a child.
- ◆ Intimidating looks or acts meant to threaten you and control your behavior.
- ◆ Isolating you from people or activities.
- ◆ Stalking you (including calling you repeatedly on the phone).
- ◆ Using your children to threaten you or control you. Hurting the children to get back at you.

### **Characteristics of the Chronically Abusive Relationship**

- Power
- Control
- Manipulation
- Misuse of authority and position
- Hostility

### **The Abuse Cycle (Lenore Walker)**

- Tension building stage
- Acute battering incident
- Kindness and contrite loving behavior (honeymoon) stage
- Cycle repeats.

### **Destruction from Abuse**

Abuse results in low self-esteem, unhappiness, dissatisfaction with the relationship, broken relationships, loss of self-respect, psychological and physical illnesses, generational dysfunction, and pain. Abuse can also cause complete disintegration of personal worth and oneself to the point where there is an inability to function normally.

In a chronically abusive relationship, you may find yourself confused and constantly asking yourself, "What happened?," doubting your self-perceptions, questioning your

part, accepting blame, feeling off-balance, feeling intense emotional pain, feeling numb, wondering if you are crazy, and re-running incidents and conversations over and over in your mind to figure out what went wrong.

### **Response to Abuse**

- Be aware
- Protect yourself
- Don't let abuse work
- Refuse to live in fear
- Change yourself
- Set boundaries

### **God's View**

- Colossians 3:5-14 tells us to be compassionate, forgiving, gentle, and to let go of anger, malice, bitterness and revenge. Abuse is the complete opposite of these things and is not condoned by Scripture.
- 1 Thessalonians 5:11 says, "Therefore encourage one another and build each other up." Abuse is the opposite of God's intention for relationships. God intended for us to build people up, not purposefully tear them down and destroy them. And, God intended each of us to live our lives with dignity and not to be controlled or abused by others.
- Psalm 10 says: "In his arrogance the wicked man hunts down the weak who are caught in the schemes he devises (verse 2). But you, O God, do see trouble and grief; you consider it to take it in hand. The victim commits himself to you; you are the helper of the fatherless (verse 14)." God is on the side of the victims of abuse.

## **Study Questions for Lifesaving Principle 9: Make Your Children a Priority**

The same dynamics that make the marriage dysfunctional typically make the family dysfunctional. Children are affected by the problems in a difficult marriage. “They experience the tension, insecurity, and turmoil. They live with broken promises and plans that are changed at the last minute. Spontaneity, fun, and laughter are scarce, and their punishment is usually administered in anger or frustration.” (page 129)

The woman in a difficult marriage is faced with many dilemmas in her roles as both wife and mother. It is vital that she prioritize her children in order to minimize the effects of the dysfunction. Listening to them validates their perceptions and feelings. Talking to them involves giving them age-appropriate truth. Even though they experience negative things, they still need to be disciplined. However, disciplining them is often made more difficult by the lack of agreement between her and her husband. When abuse exists by her husband, she needs to draw firm boundaries to protect her children. She also needs to be careful not to abuse them herself. Finding ways to meet her own needs, rather than relying on her children to meet them, is essential. Modeling how to cope in healthy ways gives her children hope. Even though her husband brings instability, she can provide security by following through on promises, being consistent, and exposing them to healthy people. Responding to each child’s individual needs prevents damage from neglect. Finally, when she makes mistakes, she needs to apologize to them.

1. Read Psalm 10:17. How do you respond to your children’s emotions? Do you validate their feelings and perceptions? Is it difficult for you to separate disrespect from the sharing of negative feelings? (pages 129-131)

2. Read Proverbs 11:13. What guidelines can you use to decide whether or not to share the things your children tell you with your husband? What are the positive and negative outcomes of sharing and not sharing? (pages 129-131)

3. Read Ephesians 4:29. How can you decide what is beneficial for you to tell your children? Do you feel you are betraying or criticizing their father when you tell them the truth? Why and when is speaking the truth the right thing to do? (pages 131-134)

4. Read Proverbs 23:13-14 and Hebrews 12:7-11. Do you have trouble disciplining your children? Is part of the reason that you think they are already experiencing negative things in your home? (pages 134-138)

5. Read Ephesians 6:1-4 and Proverbs 18:13 and 26:17. How do you respond to your husband's harsh discipline of your children? When you intervene what is the outcome? Discuss the bulleted options available to you for discipline disagreements on the bottom of page 135. What are the benefits and negative aspects of each for your particular situation? (pages 134-138)

6. How can you teach your children to respect their father, even though he is doing some things wrong? (pages 134-138)

7. Read Luke 17:1-2, Psalm 82:3-4, 1 Corinthians 10:24, and 1 Kings 3:16-27. What is your experience with abuse as an adult and child? Are you or your husband abusive to your children? What should you do to change the situation? (pages 139-141 and 146-147)

8. Read 2 Corinthians 12:14. In a difficult marriage, you have needs that are unmet. Some women expect their children to be their companion, confidante, comforter, or caretaker. These are inappropriate roles for children. Do you expect any of your children to do these things for you? Do you feel guilty when you take time to take care of yourself? (pages 141-142)

9. Read Exodus 20:5 and Titus 2:7. Your example can make a difference in how your children are affected by the problems. What example have you shown your children in how to cope with the difficulties in your home? What would you like to change? (pages 142-143)

10. The turmoil and chaos in dysfunctional homes results in broken promises and changed plans. What can you do to provide more stability and consistency, even when you cannot change your husband's actions? (pages 144)



11. Read 1 Peter 3:12 and 1 Thessalonians 2:7-9. Mothers naturally care for their children's needs, but in a difficult marriage, your focus is often on your husband, which can cause you to neglect your children's needs. Which needs have you been diligent in meeting? Which ones have you overlooked? (pages 144-146)

12. James 5:16 tells us that healing comes when we confess our sins to each other. When you make mistakes with your children, do you apologize? (page 147)

13. Write your prayer to God for this week.

14. Write two things you can apply to your life out of this week's material.

## Lecture Notes for Principle 9: Prioritizing Your Children

“Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will you give him a snake?” (Matthew 7:9)

“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these” (Matthew 19:14).

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

In the midst of a difficult marriage, you need to take care of your children. Few things cause as much pain, anguish, anger, guilt, fear, anxiety, and frustration as seeing your children hurting. Yet due to the dysfunction in the home, you may find yourself doing things that you are ashamed to admit hurt your children. Additionally, dysfunctional family dynamics are complicated. Everyone contributes to the re-occurring cycles and craziness due to the emotional reactivity in the family. Each of the following things directly touches on typical problem areas with children in dysfunctional families. Follow this list of “dos and don’ts” in order to prioritize your children.

1. Don’t assume you understand what is going on with your children. *Do ask open questions like: “What are you thinking?” “Why did you do that?” “What is bothering you?”*
2. Don’t use labels. *Do describe the behavior.*
3. Don’t break promises. *Do keep promises you make.*
4. Don’t be unreliable or inconsistent. *Do maintain as much consistency as possible.*
5. Don’t rely on your children to meet your emotional, physical, spiritual, and relational needs. *Do figure out ways to take care of yourself.*
6. Don’t triangulate. *Do stay out of the relationships between your child and his/her siblings and parent (unless you need to protect your child from abuse).*
7. Don’t use your child as a go-between to your spouse. *Do keep your child out of your relationship with your spouse.*

8. Don't use indirect communication. *Do communicate clearly and directly.*
9. Don't dump your toxic emotions on your children. *Do take care of your own toxic emotions.*
10. Don't try to turn your children against your spouse. *Do allow them to have a relationship with your spouse, unless it is dangerous.*
11. Don't lie about the obvious. *Do tell them age-appropriate truth.*
12. Don't make your children be adults. *Do let them be children.*
13. Don't ignore their physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and relational needs. *Do take care of their needs, even if your spouse doesn't.*
14. Don't leave your children alone in emotionally or physically dangerous situations. *Do use discretion in balancing protecting them and living your own life.*
15. Don't refuse to admit your mistakes. *Do apologize when you are wrong.*
16. Don't ignore verbal, emotional, and spiritual abuse. *Do protect them from abuse.*
17. Don't make empty threats. *Do set clear boundaries and follow through with consequences.*
18. Don't side with a problem child against your spouse. *Stand up for what is right and don't enable wrong behavior; be true to your convictions.*
19. Don't make your children keep secrets. *Do let your child tell the truth about what is going on in the family.*
20. Don't fight in front of your children or their friends. *Do keep as much of the craziness from them as you can.*
21. Don't discipline your children in front of friends and outsiders. *Do discipline your child in private.*

22. Don't get defensive when your children tell you their feelings. *Do allow free expression of feelings in a respectful way.*
23. Don't try to fix your children's feelings or tell them their perceptions are wrong. *Do accept their feelings, thoughts, and perceptions as valid.*
24. Don't expect your children to have more emotional control than you. *Do find a balance for accepting emotions and teaching them self-control.*
25. Don't use your children to get back at your spouse. *Do keep your relationship with your children and spouse separate.*
26. Don't be permissive. *Do set boundaries and give consequences, even if you feel bad about the dysfunction.*
27. Don't automatically support your spouse's discipline. *Do use wisdom in what discipline to support with your spouse.*
28. Don't trust your children when they have lost your trust. *Do trust them when they deserve to be trusted.*
29. Don't ignore your own needs. *Do take care of yourself—mothers and fathers are people too!*
30. Don't expect your children to be perfect. *Do allow for mistakes.*
31. Don't be afraid to answer tough questions. *Do speak the truth to your child, even if it differs from your spouse's truth.*
32. Don't have a favorite child. *Do recognize each child is different; therefore, your relationship is also different with each.*
33. Don't force your child to be someone he/she isn't. *Do accept each child's uniqueness.*
34. Don't be critical. *Do encourage and give approval along with unconditional love and respect.*
35. Don't control everything. *Do give children choices to build competence and self-esteem.*

36. Don't give your children everything to make up for the problems. *Do allow them to learn normal life lessons.*
37. Don't be too serious. *Do laugh and have fun.*
38. Don't be afraid to be real about your faith. *Share your faith, even though you aren't perfect.*
39. Don't let your children push your buttons and make you react. *Do identify hot buttons and develop a plan to not let them be pushed.*
40. Don't talk about your children or spouse in front of them. *Do use discretion with your conversation.*
41. Don't judge yourself harshly. *Do remember that even parents in healthy families aren't perfect. Do forgive yourself.*
42. Don't expect to force your spouse to have your values. *Do enforce your values when it is within your power.*
43. Don't stay in the marriage just for the children. *Do consider what is best for you and the children and evaluate the entire situation. It isn't always in their best interest to be in a dysfunctional home.*
44. Don't tell your spouse everything about the children. *Do what is in the best interest of the children. Make sure your spouse is safe to disclose information.*

This is a glimpse of the complicated dynamic of raising children in dysfunctional families. Do the best you can, as situations arise. Gain wisdom by seeking advice and getting knowledgeable and dealing with your own issues. Be willing to do your part in prioritizing them, and then turn your children over to God. He has a plan for them too and loves them even more than you.

## Study Questions for Lifesaving Principle 10: Enter God's Rest

After doing everything you can, for now, by working the previous nine principles to the best of your abilities, it is time to turn your husbands, loved ones, yourselves, and your own circumstances over to God. You will not be able to work the 10 Principles perfectly and may even find yourselves occasionally slipping back into old habits. That is okay. Change takes time and occurs in increments, but God continues to work through all circumstances.

1. Read Matthew 11:28-30. Discuss what it would mean to truly enter God's rest in the situation you are in.

2. Restitution refers to the process of repairing the damage you've done. Regardless of what your husband has done or is doing, you're responsible for the ways you've hurt him and others. How have you hurt your loved ones? Which of these ways represents a reasonable method of making amends or restitution: acknowledging and apologizing directly, repaying debts, doing nice things, or making "living amends" by changing yourself and acting differently now and in the future? (pages 149-150)

3. When you think of making all the changes you are contemplating, what is most frightening? (pages 150-151)

4. One of the hardest things to do is to truly surrender all your hopes and desires to God. If you are struggling with acceptance, it could be that your dreams have not been realized. Read Philippians 4:11-13. What would it mean if you accepted the facts of your life, just as they are? How would that help you enter God's rest? (pages 151-153)

5. Read Matthew 6:34. Living with a difficult husband results in regrets over the past and fears about the future. How would letting go of the mistakes of the past and the fears about the future affect your life? (pages 153-154, "Live for Today" and "Let Your Husband Take Care of Himself")

6. Read the following sections: "Avoid Major Life Changes," and "Rebuild Trust Slowly." Trust is an essential part of healthy relationships. Trust is often destroyed in difficult marriages. How has your trust been taken advantage of? What would it take to rebuild your trust? Why should you offer trust carefully and warily in the future? Does your husband trust you? Why or why not? (pages 154-155)

7. Healing past wounds is a slow process that involves facing the truth about our pain, discussing it, letting go, forgiving, and building a new relationship. Read Philippians 3:12-13. Some people think that Paul was saying we have to forget the past. Others say we cannot forget, as God gave us a mind that stores memories. But, when those memories come up, we can choose whether we want to allow them to stir up old feelings and thoughts by focusing on them or by letting them go. Resentment means to “re-feel.” What do you think Paul is saying about how we should view our past? (pages 155-157)

8. Even if your husband begins to change, he may not be everything you want and problems will still occur. How can you deal with disappointment when it comes? (pages 157-158)

9. Read 1 Corinthians 1:27, 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, and 1 Thessalonians 5:11. How has God used others to comfort you in your difficult circumstances? How can He use you to comfort others? (page 158)



10. Read Proverbs 16:4, Romans 8:28, Ephesians 3:20, and Jeremiah 29:11. How do those verses change your perspective on your husband's future and yours? (pages 158-160)

11. Describe the differences in you and your life today as a result of this study. What do you need to continue to work on?

12. Write a prayer to the Lord expressing your gratitude for your growth and your request for His continuing work in your life and marriage.

## Lecture Notes for Principle 10: Enter His Rest

Jesus asks you: *Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.* (Matthew 11:28-30, The Message Bible)

Do you answer: *"I have no peace, no quietness; I have no rest, but only turmoil?"* (Job 3:26, NIV)

Do you wonder what *rest* is? *Rest* is ceasing from activity—an experience of peace, ease, refreshment, freedom from disquiet, and a sense of mental or emotional tranquility.

So how do you get *rest* in the midst of the demands of life?

- Recognize you need rest.
- Approach Jesus who understands your pain (Heb.4:15-16).
- Learn from him by taking on his yoke and way of life.
- Surrender and receive his rest.

John 15:5-7 (NIV) *"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."*

The vine does the work by producing the branches and supplying them with everything they need including nutrients and water. Without the vine, the branches don't survive.

Reality Check:

*"God does not give us rest instead of pain and difficulty; he gives us rest in spite of it."*  
(Kim Johnson)

*"We are meant to live sane lives that partake of a deep and playful holy leisure. There is enough time in each day for all that God requires of us. And part of what he requires is rest. So settle in and breathe deeply of his gift of rest."*

(Adele Ahlberg Calhoun in *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*)

*"A heart at peace gives life to the body"* (Proverbs 14:30a, NIV).

So, what can you do to enter his rest in practical ways on a daily basis?

- Exercise.
- Take a nap.
- Sleep longer; go to bed earlier and get up later. Don't set the alarm.

- Stop working an hour before you go to bed and instead, do something that makes you feel rested.
- Take mini-retreats on a weekly or monthly basis. Go somewhere that refreshes your spirit and body and causes you to breathe deeply and recalibrate your soul.
- Find a regular time daily to meditate, pray, and reflect—Even if it is just 10 minutes a day.
- Breathe deeply and let go of the tension in your body—many times a day.
- Plan things you enjoy with and without people—no matter how busy you are.
- Say no to things you really don't want or need to do.
- Memorize the Serenity Prayer and your favorite Scriptures that help you to let go of your plans, worries, and disappointments. Repeat them when you feel yourself striving and worrying. Proverbs 23:7 (NKJV) says, *“For as a man thinks in his heart, so is he.”* If you want to get rest, change your thoughts.
- Journal your feelings, thoughts, dreams, and prayers.
- Do something that reminds you of your childhood. Find a way to “play.”
- Laugh—at yourself and your life. Give it a light touch.
- Spend time with the Lord. Don't worry about praying or doing. Just sit in his presence and take him in and receive his grace.
- Praise the Lord: sing, read a Psalm, listen to worship music, recite his promises and blessings. (Psalm 16:7-9: When we praise the Lord and put him first, even our body will “rest” secure.)
- Take control of your life and choose who you want to be around. Choose to be around people that are healthy and value you and bring you happiness and joy, as much as possible.
- Live with an eternal perspective, rather than a temporal perspective.
- “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not unto your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your paths straight” (Proverbs 3:6-5) = SURRENDER=REST.
- Write your own ideas about how you can enter his rest.

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