

Marriage Problems

Wrap-up to [Ephesians 5:22-33](#)

A Sermon by Chris Mueller

Even when you do everything right, you will still have problems in your marriage. A man at work decided to show his wife how much he loved her, and before going home he showered, shaved, put on some choice cologne and bought her a bouquet of flowers. He went to the front door and knocked. His wife answered the door and exclaimed, “Oh no! This has been a terrible day! First, I had to take Billy to the emergency room and get stitches in his leg, then your mother called and said she’s coming for two weeks, then the washing machine broke, and now this—you come home drunk!”

Every couple knows when they aren’t getting along with each other—it makes a bad day, a bad week, a bad month, even a bad year. One man said marriage is like a cage—the birds on the outside want in, and the birds on the inside want out. But marriage should not be this way. God revealed His purposes for marriage in the very first union.

In Genesis 2, God creates a helpmate for Adam and in verses 24 to 25, He instructs the first couple, *“For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. 25 And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.”*

God showed the first man and woman that He wanted them to be one in marriage. God’s design was for this marriage to be a testimony to the world of His own character. Just as God is one, marriage is to be one. Marriage is also designed to be a deterrent to immorality, a way for people to reproduce godly children, a source of companionship, a cause of great personal joy and a catalyst for greater ministry.

But if you know your Creator through Jesus Christ, seek to live out your purpose in Him, and are trying to follow God’s instructions for your marriage, then why do you experience bad days, weeks, sometimes even months in your marriage? Here’s the reason—as a race of people, we have died.

In [Genesis 2:17](#), God told Adam, *“From the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it, you shall surely die.”* When Adam ate, he did not immediately drop dead, but he did die. Now instead of living in union with his Creator, and in harmony with his spouse, Adam was in conflict with God and in discord with his mate.

The root of all marriage problems is that we are a fallen, sinful, rebellious people at the core. Since Genesis 3, every human being is born wicked, with a nature that rebels against God. And in spite of the love you have for your spouse, sin will show itself in your marriage.

There are times when, instead of oneness, husbands and wives verbally club each other. Someone said life is like a deck of cards—when you’re in love, it’s hearts. When you’re engaged, it’s diamonds. When you’re married, it’s clubs. When you die, it’s spades.

All marriages have problems—but is it possible to insulate your marriage against willful sparring matches? Yes, if you depend on the Holy Spirit to walk according to the Word of God. Today is a wrap-up of our [Ephesians 5:22](#) to 33 study. How do husband and wife dive below the surface to experience deep intimacy and overcome the problems that wipe them out? Let’s find out what God says about common marriage problems.

#1 Get Better at Communicating

Researchers did a study where they wired little girls and little boys with microphones to observe the speech differences between the two groups. When the little girls made sound, 100% of the time it was conversation—with themselves, other people, or imaginary characters. But only 60% of the noise made by little boys was conversation—the rest was bombs, trucks and other sound effects.

Isn't it interesting that the biggest complaint of many wives is, "My husband won't talk to me. He just sits there like a bump on a log." What do men say? Astronaut Michael Collins said the average man speaks 25,000 words a day and the average woman 30,000. Then he added, "Unfortunately, when I come home each day I've spoken my 25,000 and my wife hasn't started her 30,000."

So what is conversation? Conversation is simply verbal attention. Husbands, your wives want you to talk with them and listen to what they say. They want to know that you are interested in how their day went, how they feel, what's going on in their heart. True biblical love shows interest in how others feel, what they think and what they say.

In marriages, lack of good, clear, encouraging communication is epidemic, but good lines of communication are necessary to enjoy marital oneness. Real love shows verbal attention. So how can Christian couples communicate better with one another?

First Tell everything to God FIRST, in prayer alone

[Philippians 4:6](#) says, "*Be anxious for nothing [don't be uptight about talking honestly with your spouse], but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.*" One key reason why we don't communicate as we should with our spouse is because we don't communicate as we should with God. We don't pray to the Lord about what we are about to say to each other.

Your conversation will overflow with Jesus' grace, mercy, love and forgiveness if you depend upon Him to lead you. Ask Him to give you understanding ears and a compassionate heart. When you get that "I've got something to say to him/her"—you'd better pray first! In fact, help each other—"Did you pray?" If you didn't, you're not in God's will.

At the very least, communing with God will tenderize your heart so that the way you say the things you say is more Christlike. Often prayer will cause you to change the things you say to your spouse. I find communing with God often causes me not to say anything at all, because Jesus takes care of the matter Himself. [First Peter 5:7](#) says, "*Cast all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you.*"

Second Commit to speak HONESTLY

[Ephesians 4:25](#), "*Laying aside falsehood, speak truth, each one of you, with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.*" But wives say, "What if my husband gets defensive when I tell him how I feel about his habits, withdrawing even more from me?" And men say, "If I tell my wife I am sexually frustrated, what if she accuses me of having a one-track mind again?"

Sometimes we get upset and defensive when our spouse speaks honestly (at least I do at times). Being the fearless, forthright, outspoken, born-activist that I am, sometimes I respond by saying nothing. At times, don't we all submerge our true feelings to keep the peace?

Candid Camera set up a situation with a man at a café counter who always ate the French fries off the plate of the person sitting next to him. What did the person sitting next to him do? Nine out of ten times, he did nothing. No one likes to rock the boat or disturb the peace. But when someone tries to move beyond counterfeit peace—when a husband or wife finally gets tired of never discussing misunderstandings, never airing frustrations, never disclosing hurt feelings, all chaos can break loose at first.

I remember the first time I decided to be deeply honest with Jean. I lacked good communication skills and common sense timing. So instead of triggering the conversation I wanted, I turned my sweet little French poodle wife into a drooling pit bull, with ears back and eyes blazing. She let me have it. And looking back, I deserved it.

At first I thought, “That’s the last time I’ll be honest with her.” But after many frustrating attempts, with a strong desire for both of us to be honest and non-defensive, we are finally beginning to learn to speak the truth to each other.

Too many couples are hint-droppers and guilt-trippers. Instead of being carefully honest, we use words to manipulate. Don’t. Listen with tenderhearted, humble, quiet brokenness—speak honestly with your spouse. (Name your three sin battles first.)

Third Commit to speak with SELF-CONTROL

Psalm 141:3, “*Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips.*” Biblically, there’s no excuse for having a short fuse. There’s no excuse for unleashing bitter words. You can control your speech—you can wait. True oneness is found by those who control their speech as they yield to the indwelling Holy Spirit. So what will your words be like when you are self-controlled?

1 A self-controlled tongue contains words that build up

Ephesians 4:29a, “*Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification.*” It is a fact, over the first decade of marriage, couples who stayed together utter five or fewer putdowns in every 100 comments to each other. But couples who speak ten or more putdowns out of every 100 comments later split up. Watch what you say! Little nit-picking comments are like a cancer in marriage, slowly draining the life out of a committed relationship. It’s okay if Christian words hurt at times, but only if they build up others.

2 A self-controlled tongue will be well-timed

Ephesians 4:29b, “*According to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear.*” Christian words always wait for appropriate timing.

3 A self-controlled tongue will listen more than talk

James 1:19, “*But let everyone be quick to hear, slow to anger.*” You have two ears and one mouth for a reason. Proverbs 18:13 says, “*He who gives an answer before he hears, it is folly and shame to him.*” Like the little poem says, “To keep your marriage brimming with love in the loving cup, Whenever you’re wrong admit it, Whenever you’re right, shut up!”

Ann Landers listed the twelve secrets for a happy marriage—ten of them were verbal issues. Deep intimacy happens when communication is bathed in prayer, honest and self-controlled. In marriage, intimacy and solving problems also happens when . . .

#2 We Enjoy Sexual Intimacy

God designed sexual intimacy for a man and woman in marriage, and He affirms that sex in marriage is honorable. [Hebrews 13:4](#), *“Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled.”* Playboy magazine didn’t invent sex—God invented sex. And God designed sex to be experienced in marriage as a uniting, giving, pleasurable experience that becomes a creative and special expression of sacrificial love. Married, sexual love was designed to reproduce the race and glorify the Creator. Yet there is no other area of marriage that causes more dissatisfaction. Why?

First One main reason is unresolved guilt

Illegitimate sexual experiences from the past, as David reminds us what unresolved guilt over sexual sin will do in [Psalm 32:3](#) to 4. *“When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. 4 For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was drained away with the fever heat of summer.”*

In verse 5 God shows us what a Christian, married or single, needs to do to resolve guilt. *“I acknowledged my sin to Thee, and my iniquity I did not hide; I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.’ And Thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin.”* The Bible tells us repeatedly that we must agree with God (confess) that our sin was a disobedient choice in order to find forgiveness with God and peace in our relationships. [Proverbs 28:13](#), *“He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion.”*

Second Sexual trouble may be a warning indicator of other issues

It functions like the warning light on the dashboard of your car—sexual problems may indicate underlying problems about money, spiritual decisions or other family issues. With Christian couples, often it means the man is not being the spiritual leader in pursuing God in his life and with his family. Sometimes difficulties in enjoying sexual intimacy come from concealing hurt over harsh words, discourtesies, unresolved quarrels, or neglect.

Third Misinformation can lead to problems with sexual intimacy

If you have bought into worldly lies about sex, you may have false expectations about human anatomy and what is sexually satisfying. Don’t fill your mind with the lies Hollywood gives us about sex. Television, movies, the media, psychology and even popular Christian books can give you misinformation. Fill your mind instead with the Word of God, your owner’s manual—and solid biblical studies that explain God’s blueprint for sexual intimacy. Get a good commentary.

What is the basis for the most common sexual conflict in marriage? Simply this—husbands usually want sex more than wives do, and wives usually want affection more than husbands do. Men and women are built differently. In the book, *His Needs Her Needs*, the author identifies the five major needs of women: 1) affection, 2) conversation, 3) honesty and openness, 4) financial support, 5) family commitment. But the five major needs of men are 1) sexual fulfillment, 2) recreational companionship, 3) an attractive spouse, 4) domestic support, 5) admiration. Number 1 for wives is affection, and number 1 for husbands is sexual fulfillment.

In counseling, wives often say, “Before we were married, he was so romantic. He was affectionate, sent me flowers, swept me off my feet. After we got married, he turned into this lusty monster.” Women often feel cheated when sex overtakes affection in their marriage.

But men feel cheated too. When a Christian man chooses his wife, he makes an unspoken commitment to this one woman for life: “I will look to you alone to meet my needs. I’m committing myself exclusively to you.” A man can go outside of marriage for every other basic need in his life. He gets companionship when he golfs with other guys, he strives for admiration as a top achiever at work.

But ladies, his need for sexual fulfillment can only legitimately be met one place—with you, his wife. He looks to you to meet that basic need. Yet many men think their wives have put them on a starvation diet sexually. In counseling, men complain that they experience little or no sexual fulfillment in marriage. When a man marries, he thinks his wife will feel as strongly as he does about sex, but often he discovers she doesn’t. So men can feel cheated in marriage, too.

The basic problem is that the average wife doesn’t understand her husband’s deep need for sex, and the average husband doesn’t understand his wife’s deep need for affection. So what’s God’s answer? Remember that God designed the whole program.

First Corinthians 7:3 to 5 says to husbands and wives, “*Let the husband fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. 4 The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. 5 Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again, lest Satan tempt you because of your lack of self-control.*” What’s the answer?

1 Treat sexual intimacy as your most precious gift from God in marriage

When you married, you exchanged rings—but intimacy, the gift of your body, is the one sacred, precious gift you give to your spouse. Whenever the wife wants sexual attention from her husband, he should respond to her. And whenever a husband wants sexual attention from his wife, she should respond to him. Grant each other this gift willingly. And . . .

2 Treat sexual intimacy as a command

God’s Word does not say you are more spiritual or holy if you avoid sex in marriage. In fact, God tells us we are in sin when we avoid married sex. Verse 3 commands, “*husband, fulfill your duty to your wife.*” Verse 4 commands, “*stop depriving one another.*” In fact, when you don’t fulfill each other’s desires, verse 5 warns you are setting yourself up for satanic attack, “*lest Satan tempt you*” and possibly wipe you out.

God commands sexual intimacy for inside marriage only and inside marriage it is never demanding, never forceful, and always gracious, by mutual agreement—but always. So can husbands and wives help each other by obedience in this? Husbands, learn to be affectionate without using every gesture of affection to lead to sexual intimacy.

Touch her, hold her hand, hug her, speak kindly about the ways she looks and her character. Don’t just say, “Wild thing; you make my heart sing.” Do acts of kindness. Leave hidden notes. Call to say, “I just called to say I love you.” Put tender thoughts about her in writing, focus your attention on her when she is speaking, look into her eyes.

And wives, learn to meet your husband's needs for sexual intimacy. Ask God to change your heart in this matter—God can turn a disaster into a delight! Talk to an older, godly woman to get a biblical perspective. Schedule regular time for you and your husband to be alone—and surprise him occasionally! How else do we find intimacy and solve problems?

#3 We Learn to Control our Finances

God desires a husband and wife to be one, and this requires unity in the issue of money. Be committed to share what God has given you until death separates you. It is a modern trend for couples to keep separate checking accounts and pay bills independently of one another. But God designed a husband and wife for oneness.

Money is perhaps one of the most divisive forces in marriage—even in Christian marriages. He thinks money is what determines the job you should take—she thinks location, parents and church are more important. He wants to save for future emergencies and retirement—she thinks they should give more to the church. He likes to make as much money as possible—she wants him to spend more time with the family.

It is unlikely that you will escape marital conflict about money, because we are born selfish and we are raised with different attitudes about money and possessions. So Christian couples desperately need to know and follow God's plan for money. Here is God's basic blueprint.

He alone gives you the ability to make money. [Deuteronomy 8:17](#), *"But you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who is giving you power to make wealth."*

Everything you have belongs to God. [Psalm 24:1](#), *"The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains, the world and those who dwell in it."*

There are many things more valuable than money. [Matthew 16:6](#), *"For what will a man be profited if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?"* [Proverbs 16:16](#), *"How much better is it to get wisdom than gold."* [Proverbs 22:1](#), *"A good name is to be more desired than great riches."* [First Timothy 6:6](#), *"Godliness is a means of great gain."*

Salvation, godliness, wisdom, a righteous reputation, and ministry are more important than your bank account. Worry, discontent and covetousness are sins. [Hebrews 13:5](#), *"Let your character be free from the love of money, being content always with what you have."*

God expects us to use the strengths and abilities He has given us in doing honest, hard work so that we share what we have. [Ephesians 4:28](#), *"Let him who steals steal no longer; but rather let him labor, performing with his own hands what is good, in order that he may have something to share with him who has need."*

Giving to the church is a privilege and a responsibility. [Second Corinthians 9:7](#), *"Let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart; not grudgingly or under compulsion; for God loves a cheerful giver."* [Second Corinthians 16:1,2](#), *"Now concerning the collection for the saints . . . 2 On the first day of every week let each one of you put aside and save, as he may prosper."* God wants our giving to be regular and in proportion to our income to His purposes, with a cheerful heart full of thanks for all that Jesus has done.

So take these financial principles and put them into a budget. Begin by discovering how much your income is and then decide what portion you should give back to the Lord. Set aside money to pay your taxes. Then make a detailed breakdown of your family needs, and compare

this list with your income. If your income is not enough, figure out where you can cut expenses or how to increase your income.

Why have a budget? Because God doesn't want finances to tear your family apart, and He doesn't intend for you to work more than is needed. And then live by it! [Proverbs 23:4](#), "*Do not weary yourself to gain wealth, cease from your consideration of it.*" A budget allows you to be a good steward of the way you live—don't forget, it's the Lord's money. Don't let finances undermine your oneness.

#4 You Can FORGIVE your Spouse

Perhaps the greatest problem in marriage is stubbornness about forgiving. One writer says there are ten words that will safeguard any marriage, "I was wrong, I'm sorry, forgive me, I love you." The Bible commands us never to go to bed angry because bitterness and grudges give Satan an opportunity to tempt you.

[Ephesians 4:26](#) and [27](#), "*Do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and do not give the devil an opportunity.*" Clear the slate daily, couples and singles—because grievances and grudges take over your heart. Paul goes on to say in verse 32, "*Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.*"

We have an obligation in all our relationships, and especially in marriage, to keep short accounts and readily forgive. Never keep a list—tear it up today. Why? Because the Bible says, "*Just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.*" Jesus forgave you—if He forgave you, a rebellious sinner, you can forgive your life mate. And finally . . .

#5 Agree on How to RAISE your Kids

1 Get the book, *Shepherding a Child's Heart*, for ages 1 to 12

2 Or, *Age of Opportunity* by Tripp, for ages 12 to 18

3 Be here for our study on Ephesians 6 and parenting next week

Then decide what you are going to do. [Philippians 4:13](#) says you "*can do all things through Christ who strengthens you.*" But you must make time. You get the idea—to solve problems takes work and it takes time. It will not be resolved like a half-hour TV show. Make regular time as a couple to work through some of these things. How?

Stop watching TV, reading the newspaper, give up some hobbies, cancel your kids' sports leagues—stop the sports nonsense. One sport per child per year is plenty—for some that's too much. Stop working so much.

Do a once a week date night—it doesn't have to cost. Trade with a couple and go walk the mall, Old Town, just talk. Tuesday and Friday night, talk after the kids go to bed. Saturday morning is mommy and daddy time—put a movie on and get some time together to talk, read or be intimate. Sunday afternoon is family time and reading. Men, you must take the lead.

You can solve problems as you seek to follow God's Word and depend upon His Spirit in humility. You can learn to passionately love your spouse—unless you don't know Christ to experience what God intended for marriage and sin is in the way. And only one thing can take care of sin—turn to Christ alone.

If you were to ask me who I would want to be if I were not me, I would say I would want to be Jean Mueller's second husband. But that didn't come without work and time—commit to making it.