



THE VERTICAL MARRIAGE

"How To Keep the Wheel Spinning and What To Do When it Stops"

A healthy marriage must stem from living for the God and His glory. This is counter-cultural. Relationships by the world's standards are all based on what we can receive and not what we can give. Approaching your marriage with this mentality will ultimately lead to difficulty and struggle.

To maintain a healthy marriage it is important to understand what keeps the marriage wheel spinning, what stops the wheel from spinning, and how to get it spinning again.

HOW THE WHEEL **KEEPS SPINNING:**

1) Spiritual Growth

The number one most important thing to keep the marriage wheel spinning is you growing to be more like Jesus. You more like Jesus is the best thing for you, your spouse, and your marriage. As you see Jesus more fully you will naturally want to serve Him more and that will have a profound impact on your marriage.

What things are in place in your life to help you see Jesus more fully?

In what areas of your life do you need to grow most spiritually?

What practical steps can you take to grow in those areas?

How can your spouse help you in those areas?

2) What can I give vs. what can I get mentality.

The world tells us that every relationship in our life is about what we can get. It really is a "consumer mentality" in relationships. I will show love only if I am loved. I will give only if I am given to. However, this is anti-gospel. Jesus gave to us when we could give nothing. Jesus sacrificed for us when we weren't worth being sacrificed for. Ultimately the gospel tells us that on our

worst day Christ still died for us. Since marriage is supposed to be a reflection of Jesus and the church we should love our spouses regardless of their performance. I should be seeking to give as much as I can to my spouse not get as much as I can. The ultimate beauty of this is that when both the husband and wife are living that way the wheel is spinning. Wives are being given security from their husbands and husbands are being given significance from their wives and most importantly both spouses are finding their identity in Jesus.

Here are some questions for you to consider:

What I have done this week to give to my spouse?

Am I seeking to pour out to my spouse in a way that they want to be poured into?

Did I increase or decrease my wife's security or my husband's significance today?

Am I holding expectations of my spouse that are not Biblical but instead are for my preference or comfort? Ask your spouse to answer this question about you as well.

3) Romance

Love is an action not an emotion. The emotion follows the action. The reality is that the emotion of love is healthy.

You should never stop "dating" your spouse. What we mean by that is that you should never stop trying to learn who they are and what makes them tick. You should never get to the place where you are comfortable and you just stop trying to win their affection. Don't neglect trying to show your spouse that you love them practically. Pursue your spouse constantly. It's so easy to get comfortable and get into the rut of life. I get up I throw on my sweats and I go about my day. Pursuing your spouse romantically is selfless and it shows them that you love them and are thinking of them. Romance can help keep the wheel spinning.

4) Financial Responsibility

We will cover the principles of financial stewardship more fully in a later session but know that one of the greatest strains on a marriage can be the pressure of finances. Choosing to live within your means and be good stewards of what God has placed in your care will alleviate some of that. That is not to say you may never find yourselves in lean financial times but it will help even in the lean times to know that it is where the Lord has you, not negligence of you or your spouse. Being on the same page about finances long before the “big decisions” come is helpful in alleviating these stresses.

What do you think about buying a home versus renting one?

What do you think about car payments?

What other “big financial decisions” should you discuss with your spouse before they come up?

WHAT STOPS THE WHEEL FROM SPINNING:

1) Self-centeredness

Self-centeredness is the opposite of living a life for God’s glory and for the good of your spouse. When I am at the center of my world I will act from a sinful heart seeking for my own pleasure and not the good of others. Living for you will stop the wheel from spinning.

2) Lying

Marriage is a relationship built on trust. If your spouse isn’t sure you are telling the truth they will not trust you and likewise if you don’t tell the truth you are not trust worthy. This will create tension and stop the wheel from spinning.

3) Adultery

When you choose to step outside of the marriage relationship to meet sexual desires it will cause conflict in your marriage. Hebrews 13:4 tells us that we should honor the marriage bed and that adultery and any sexual immorality is the opposite of that. Sex is meant to be between a husband and wife period. We will cover this more in the upcoming lesson on sex.

4) Lack of Forgiveness

James Macdonald rightly says, "There are no enduring relationships without forgiveness." Remember you are a sinner married to a sinner and sinner's sin. So there will be a ton of times in your marriage when you will need to forgive your spouse. Choosing not to forgive them will only cause bitterness and tension to arise. We choose not to forgive because it brings us something. It gives us debt over our spouse.

Why we don't forgive:

- Debt is power

When I hold onto the sins of my spouse I have power over them. I can now use that wrong that they have committed to get what I want from them.

- Debt is identity

Sometimes we want to be the victim. We want to be the victim so much that we begin to identify as the victim. I choose not to forgive sometimes because I like being the victim. I like the sympathy I get from others or whatever identifying as a victim brings me.

- Debt is entitlement

If you have wronged me you owe me something. If I forgive you then I am releasing you from the debt. Often I don't want to release you because I want you to pay me something for your offense.

- Debt is weaponry

We all know that it is only a matter of time before we fail. I hold onto debt sometimes because I know I might need this to fight with. What you did is far worse than what I've done and I'm going to let you know it in our next argument.

- Debt makes us God

Ultimately we always want to feel like we know better than or are higher than God. Being the one who holds forgiveness makes us feel like we have the authority and power of God.

5) Operating in "Default" Mode

We don't drift towards Godliness. We aren't wired by default to be humble, selfless people. Marriage requires us to be operating in humility and selflessness through the power of the gospel in our lives. When we choose to operate in "the way we are wired" or "default mode" Christ will not be at the center of your life or your marriage.

Husbands operating in default mode tend to neglect their wives. They tend to focus on the other things that they are pursuing and not on their wives. They fail to learn who their wives are, love them well, and lead them.

Wives operating in default mode tend to nag. They just want their husbands to be operating "the way they should" and they will nag them to get there. They fail to follow their husbands, finish their husbands, and to be his biggest fan.

HOW TO GET THE WHEEL SPINNING AGAIN:

We each are in the process of being transformed into the likeness of Christ and in that process we will sin. As we follow these guidelines we manifest the gracious, longsuffering, spirit that God shows toward us. We will look at 2 major ways to get the wheel spinning again.

1) Dealing with conflict Biblically

Read the following passages:

- Romans 12:18
- Colossians 3:15
- Matthew 18:15

These verses tell us that conflict is inevitable. Every relationship, especially with your spouse, will include conflict that you will have to work through somehow.

"Conflict can make life very awkward. It often catches us off guard and leads us to say or do things we later regret. When someone offends us, we can react without thinking. Soon it's as if we're sliding down a slippery slope, with things going from bad to worse." – Ken Sande

Thankfully God has given us the instruction and grace we need to handle conflict in a way that glorifies Him and preserves or mends relationships.

According to Matthew 7:24-27 what is the indicator that a person is like the wise man that built his house upon the rock?

How do you view conflict?

Much of how we respond to conflict is dependent on how we view it.

Conflict provides opportunities for either sinful responses or responses that please God.

Sinful responses

1. To withdraw

Most people don't like conflict and will do everything they can to avoid it. Rather than try to solve a problem and mend a relationship they run from it. Their motto is: "Don't rock the boat" or "peace at all costs." They conclude that if you try to do anything, the problem will only get worse or you won't solve anything. Just forget about it, it's not a big deal.

Do these responses sound familiar?

List any withdrawing responses you practice:

2. To attack

Those who don't withdraw may go to the other extreme and go on the attack. Whatever it takes to get what they want. They may attack verbally, physically, or even with litigation. They might use phrases like "I just yell and get it over with" or "I just need to get things off my chest right away."

Would that be more characteristic of you?

List any attacking responses you practice:

Righteous responses

1. To love God and glorify Him through seeking peace

The believers in Corinth were having disputes about what they should eat and drink. According to 1 Corinthians 10:31 *what was to be the guiding motive in their eating and drinking or in whatever they did?*

2. To love other by seeking their good

What does Philippians 2:3-4 tell us about where our focus should be?

How is this different than what the world teaches us?

According to Ephesians 4:29 what should the end result of our words be?

3. Grow to be like Christ

According to Romans 8:28-29, God's plan is to transform us into the likeness of His son. Verse 28 indicates that He will do so by working all things together for their good. Times of conflict can reveal the sinful attitudes and actions in us that God desires to change for His glory and our good. So while conflict is difficult it can bring about our transformation to the likeness of Christ as we recognize our weakness and take biblical steps of growth and change.

Can you think of a time where conflict helped you see your sinfulness?

So what response should we have to conflict?

1. There are times to hold your tongue and let love cover the offense.

What do the following verses say about this?

- Proverbs 17:9

- 1 Peter 4:8 (Additional verses: Proverbs 10:12; 17:9; 19:11)

The following questions will help you to determine when to cover an offense in love:

- 1) Is the offense a sinful habit that is regularly hindering the individual in their growth in godliness?
- 2) Is the offense public knowledge that would harm the person's testimony or is it continuing to dishonor God?
- 3) Is the offense a violation of the law?
- 4) Is the offense a clear violation of a Biblical command or principle and not just a matter of personal preference?

2. Get the log out of your own eye

Read Matthew 7:1-5

"Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye."

Underline the words or phrases that indicate the need to examine yourself first before you try to confront someone else about their side of the problem.

What dangers can you see to solving conflicts with others if a person doesn't examine himself first to determine his side of the problem?

So what does it look like to "get the log out of your own eye?"

- **Examine Yourself**

In times of conflict we each tend to want to defend what we want and ourselves. If we aren't careful we may be guilty of sinful motives and actions on our part.

To resolve a conflict biblically I must be humble enough to consider how I have contributed to the conflict and plan specifically to seek forgiveness from God and any others I may have sinned against.

Things to examine:

1. Motives – Have I been selfishly motivated in the situation?
2. Words – Have my words or my tone of voice indicated selfish ambition
3. Actions – Have my actions indicated a desire to solve the problem or withdrawing or attacking the other person?

It is always wise to ask God to help you see your sin so that you can repent of it. Honest introspection is the first step in conflict. If you determine that you have sinned in the matter then you need to move through the following steps:

- **Confess Your Sin**

Ken Sande in his book "The Peacemaker" lines out 7 helpful "A's" to remember in confession:

- Address everyone involved

Read 1 John 1:9 and Matthew 5:23-24

Who do these verse indicate you should confess your sin to?

- Avoid if, but and maybe

These words, and others like them, indicate a sense of excusing what you did and an unwillingness to take full responsibility for your actions.

- Admit Specifically

Specific admissions communicate to the hearer that you know exactly what you have done that is dishonoring to God.

- Acknowledge The Hurt

Such an acknowledgment indicates you understand the effect your words or actions had on the individual.

- Accept The Consequences

You sinful actions may have some natural consequences. Your willing acceptance of the consequences will communicate genuine repentance.

- Alter Your Behavior

Indicating to the other individual how you plan to change your behavior shows you understand how you should have handled the situation and what will characterize your behavior in the future.

- Ask For Forgiveness

Forgiveness will be further explored later in this lesson. But know that asking "will you forgive me" is the final step in taking care of your side of the problem.

3. Gently restore

Restoration of relationships will many times necessitate more than identifying and confessing ones own sins. Biblical love may include helping the other individual identify his wrong and change.

It is important to plan how you approach the individual to encourage biblical repentance on his part.

- **Make sure that what the person has done is actually sin and not your personal preference**

Read Matthew 18:15 and Galatians 6:1.

What are the key words in these passages that indicate the issue you confront is to be a sin?

- **God to talk to the other person**

- Plan your words

This gives you time to think carefully about what you will say and hopefully avoid misunderstandings due to lack of clarity.

- Choose the right time and place

Don't go with the attitude "I just want to get this over with." Try to think of and suggest a private place that would be conducive to uninterrupted conversation.

- Talk in person

Face to face conversation is best when dealing with difficult issues. It may be somewhat unnerving but you can see how the individual is receiving what you have to say and avoid possible misunderstandings.

- Speak with grace

When you go, talk as one who is also in process of growing and changing and one who has been shown grace and forgiveness not as one who has arrived and never struggles with sin.

2) Forgiveness

Forgiving others is the base level indicator of how much you understand your own forgiveness. I'm more willing to forgive others when I understand how much I need forgiveness. You cannot be living in the joy and forgiveness that you have been shown through the gospel and also be unwilling to forgive.

So what is forgiveness?

Forgiveness means, "To release a person from an obligation."

What does Ephesians 4:32 and Psalm 103:12 say about forgiveness we have?

How should that motivate us to forgive others?

Earlier we mentioned five reasons we don't forgive.

How does the Gospel answer our desire for these things more than holding onto unforgiveness?

- Debt is power
- Debt is identity
- Debt is entitlement
- Debt is weaponry
- Debt makes us God

In order to "release someone from an obligation" you need to use the words "will you forgive me." This is different than saying "I'm sorry." I'm sorry puts the other person in a position where they will often say something untrue like "well it's ok." The reality is if you sinned against God and them it is not ok and they should not be put in a place to make that statement. Forgiveness is the biblical model not "I'm sorry."

When you commit to forgive you are making three major commitments:

- I will not hold the offense against you ever again.
- I will not talk to others about it.
- I will not talk to myself about it.

True forgiveness requires that I never talk about it, never use it against another person, and that I will not dwell on it in my mind. These three things are challenging and require a constant dying to self and reminder that the Lord does this for me and so I can do it for others.

Is there any unforgiveness standing between you and your spouse?

Between you and anyone else?

What steps do you need to take to correct those?