

Thanks for your interest in

**Building a
Magnificent Marriage**

It is my hope that the
information in this booklet
will give you a clearer
understanding of what it takes
to have a great marriage.

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Christopher R. Losey
IDM - Institute of Disciple Making*



Chris Losey grew up in Calistoga, California. He received his Bachelor of Science degree from the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York, in 1973. After serving for five years as an infantry officer in the Army, he resigned his commission and returned to school receiving his Master of Divinity degree from Western Conservative Baptist Seminary in Portland, Oregon in 1982. After graduation Chris returned to the military where he served as a chaplain in the Air Force retiring in 1994. Since then he and his wife Sharon have ministered at Valley Baptist Church in San Rafael, California, where Chris serves as senior pastor. Chris and Sharon have been married for over 30 years and have two children, Christine and Rob.

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**Dedicated to my wife Sharon
who has been the love of my life
for over thirty years.**

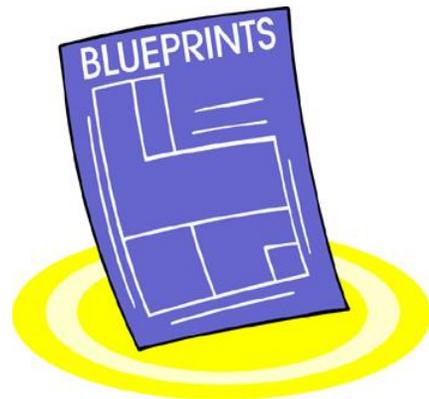
Building a Magnificent Marriage

The word magnificent means great, grand, stately, splendid, noble in character, and exceptionally fine.

Everyone who gets married hopes to have a magnificent marriage. Why? Because they believe they are marrying an exceptional person. No one starts marriage thinking, “I bet this relationship will fail in five years.” Brides see their future husbands as Prince Charming who will make life a fairytale experience. Grooms see their brides as pictures of beauty who will make their marriage the envy of every man.

Unfortunately, statistics tell a sad story. Rather than being magnificent, many marriages are mediocre or barely manageable at best. Nearly half of all marriages end in divorce. Many people who enter marriage with high hopes, see those hopes dashed to pieces. Some people even cynically say, “Marriage is like flies on a window. Those out want in, and those in want out.”

Are magnificent marriages a myth in the minds of naïve idealists or are they a real possibility? Even though there are no perfect marriages because there are no perfect people, magnificent marriages are not beyond the realm of possibility. But they don't happen by accident. Any marriage that wants to move toward magnificence will take a lot of work. The good news is, God has given the blueprint for magnificent marriages in His Word, the Bible. The principles are not rocket science but they take deliberate effort on the part of both spouses. The degree to which married couples follow God's principles will be directly proportional to the magnificence of their marriage.

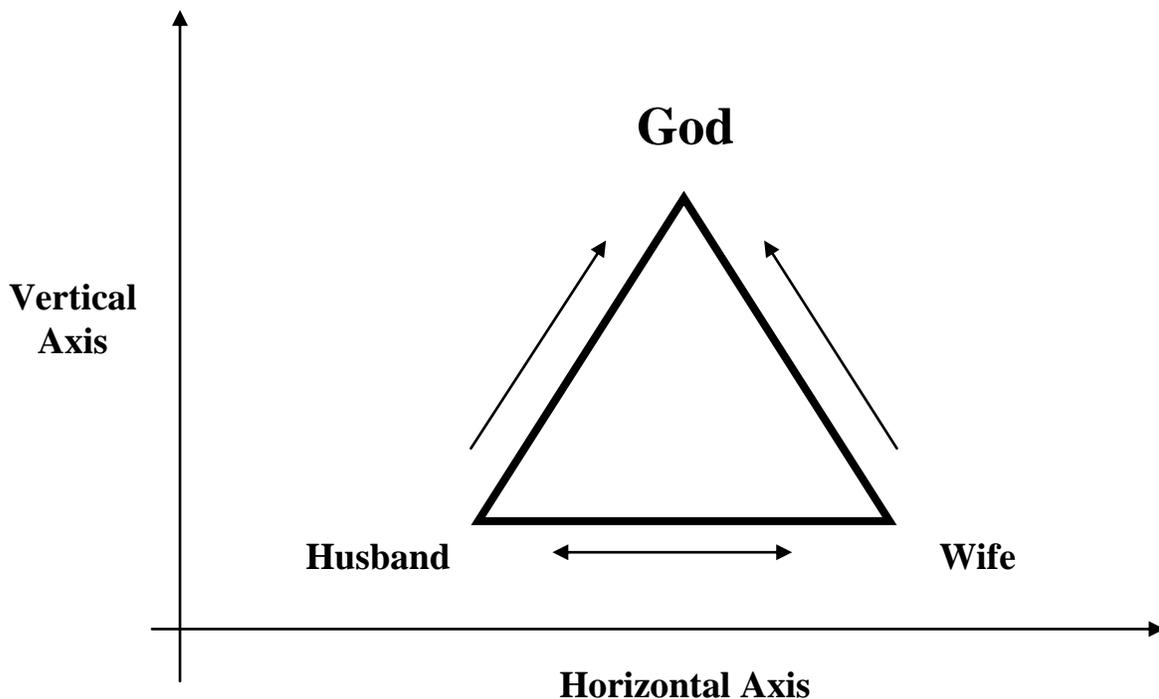


The Marriage Triangle

In any discussion about successful marriages it is important to understand and live by the marriage triangle. In the marriage triangle, God is at the top, and husband and wife are at opposite corners at the bottom (See the diagram below).

In seeking to have a magnificent marriage many spouses simply try to improve their marriage by drawing closer to each other on the horizontal axis. The real key to success in marriage is for each spouse to draw closer to God on the vertical axis by moving up their respective side of the triangle. This automatically draws them closer to each other. Embracing and applying God's principles on the vertical axis is essential to drawing closer on the horizontal.

The Marriage Triangle



The principles that help create a magnificent marriage are found in various passages in the Bible, but one section of Scripture is especially rich - Ephesians 5:15-33:

¹⁵ Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of your time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸ And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; ²⁰ always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; ²¹ and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ. ²² Wives, *be subject* to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself *being* the Savior of the body. ²⁴ But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives *ought to be* to their husbands in everything. ²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, ²⁶ so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. ²⁸ So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; ²⁹ for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also *does* the church, ³⁰ because we are members of His body. ³¹ For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. ³² This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church. ³³ Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must *see to it* that she respects her husband.

At first reading, this passage may sound difficult to understand and a bit overwhelming, but when analyzed closely it provides ten valuable principles to help create a magnificent marriage. I call the principles “The Ten SLs” because each one has those two initials. The principles are:

1. Smart Living – vv15-17
2. Spirit Filled Living – vv18-20
3. Submissive Learning – v21
4. Submissive Lordship – vv22-24
5. Sacrificial Love – v25
6. Spiritual Leadership – vv26,27
7. Sensitive Listening – vv28-30
8. Separated Living – v31a
9. Secure Loyalty – v31b
10. Sexual Liberty – v31c

Each one will be looked at in depth.

Although verses fifteen through seventeen of Ephesians chapter five are not written specifically to married people, the principles contained in them certainly apply and appear in close proximity to the rest.

As each SL is presented, you, the reader, are encouraged to ask yourself the following questions, “How does this apply to me?” and “What am I doing to make this SL a reality in my marriage?”

You are also highly encouraged to memorize and meditate on the SLs so you can refer to them daily. Having counseled many couples and individuals in the area of marriage, I discovered that those people with marriage problems usually have violated one or more of the SLs. When the couples submit to making God’s truth contained in the SLs part of their relationship, they move toward creating a magnificent marriage.

The Ten SLs

1. Smart living

In verses fifteen through seventeen of Ephesians chapter five, Paul tells his readers to be careful how they live (walk). They are not to be foolish but wise. They are to understand God's will and do it. He is telling them to live smart. Here are Paul's words:

¹⁵ Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of your time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

What does it mean to live smart? It means to apply God's wisdom to every area of life. This is God's will. To live any other way is foolish. Here are three examples of wise living:

1) Money: The Bible teaches that we are to stay out of debt (Romans 13:8). The verse says, "Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled *the* law."

Many couples ignore or are unaware of this principle and run-up their credit cards or obligate themselves by taking out loans. Soon, financial tension fills the house and poisons their relationship. As you undoubtedly know, money is the number one cause of divorce!



2) Communication: A second example of smart living is in the area of communication. Ephesians 4:15 says we are to speak the truth in love. This means that we need to speak to one another, speak the truth, and do it in a loving way. All too often, when

conflicts arise, couples lash out or turn a cold shoulder. Very few have learned to live smart by speaking the truth in love.

3) *Training of children:* The Bible makes it clear that parents are to train their children (Deuteronomy 6:1-9). Today, many couples go a thousand different directions and spend little, quality, face-to-face time with their kids. When they are together, more telling than training takes place. The problems seen in this current generation are evidence that many parents are negligent in their children's training. Certainly the church can help. Programs like children's church, AWANA, and youth group are all good, but they can never take the place of training in the home.

I clearly remember being approached by a mom whose daughter walked away from the Lord upon graduating from high school. The mom asked me what had happened. She had her daughter in Sunday school, AWANA and youth group, but at the earliest opportunity her daughter bolted. As we talked, I asked her if she had trained her daughter at home. She said no. She had left the training to the church. I told her the church is a great supplement to parental training, but it can never take its place. Unfortunately the story of her daughter is not uncommon.

In Ephesians 5:16 when Paul says that the "*days are evil,*" he means that our days can be filled with evil and problems. If we aren't careful, we may become victims. Satan likes nothing better than to destroy marriages, especially Christian ones!

There are many habits, attitudes and actions that can harm or destroy a marriage. Examples are workaholism, adultery, financial irresponsibility, insensitivity, poor communication, and alcohol abuse. To avoid these traps we must live in accordance with God's will in every area of life.

For men especially, and also for women, if you want to live smart, I highly recommend studying the book of Proverbs and allowing it's wisdom to permeate your thoughts and actions.

If you are married, would you say that **smart living** is a distinguishing mark of your marriage? Are you and your spouse diligently seeking God's will? If so, great! If not, it is time to change directions. Start talking and planning. Start spending quality time together. Start reading the Bible and biblically based books on marriage. Discover God's principles and do them. This is smart, very smart!

2. Spirit-filled living

The second SL is Spirit-filled living. It is not enough for Christians to live smart, they must also be Spirit-filled. Paul continues his instructions in verses eighteen through twenty:

¹⁸ And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; ²⁰ always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father;

Today, as in Paul's day, alcohol was a problem. In Ephesus, pagan worship abounded with drunken orgies, where inebriated worshipers lost all inhibitions and did things that were detestable to God. In essence, alcohol took control of their lives. Paul warned against such folly.

Instead of being controlled by external substances like alcohol, Christians are to be controlled by the internal Holy Spirit.

When people become Christians, the Bible teaches that God gives them the gift of the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13,14). The Holy Spirit indwells them and has at least four purposes - First, to guarantee their salvation when they die (Eph 1:14). Second, to guide them (Gal 5:16,17). This is done by convicting them of sin and helping them see and make right choices. This guidance comes through Bible truth, conscience and inner promptings. Third, the Spirit empowers believers to be witnesses (Acts 1:8). Fourth, He helps them understand God's truth (1 Cor 2:12- 14).

Looking at verse eighteen, notice Paul's words. He says Christians are to be filled with the Spirit. "To be filled with" means "to be controlled by." It is a present tense verb implying that the filling or controlling is to be an ongoing experience. It is not enough to have **been** controlled in the past; God wants the Spirit to control Christians moment by moment in the present. In order to be controlled, Christians must obey the Spirit's promptings as a deliberate act of the will. Knowing what the Spirit wants isn't enough, Christians must do it. It is reassuring to know that the Spirit always guides us into what is good. The following example illustrates this fact.

Before becoming a Christian I used to swear a lot. At that time, it did not bother me. After coming to Christ, swearing became distasteful. Every time I swore, I felt uncomfortable. This was evidence that the Holy Spirit had come into my life. To break the swearing habit, I asked God to remind me when I swore so I could ask for forgiveness.

Not only did He remind me, He started reminding me in the middle, and eventually before I swore. Finally, He removed the desire to use profanity. Once in awhile I slip, but it is rare. This change is best attributed to the work and power of the Holy Spirit. As long as I obey His inner promptings, I am filled (controlled).

This is exactly what Paul refers to in verse eighteen. This filling (control) is not only to be in our speech, but in every area of life: thoughts, words and actions.

Some Christians mistakenly interpret “to be filled” to mean speaking in tongues. This is incorrect. The Greek word *plerao*, specifically means *to be controlled by*.

Another way to illustrate the filling of the Holy Spirit is the glove and hand. If an empty glove was placed on a piano, what would happen? Nothing! But slide the hand of an accomplished musician inside and it could play beautiful music. Although the hand could not be seen inside the glove, there would be no doubt it was responsible for the music. So it is with the Holy Spirit and us. He cannot be seen but He is able to guide us as we yield to His gentle promptings.



Just because the Holy Spirit lives within each Christian does not mean He is in control. He prompts us, but it is up to us to respond in the affirmative. If the glove mentioned above was soaked in starch or mud and allowed to dry, it would become stiff and resist the movement of the hand. The same happens when we allow sin to enter our lives. It makes us resistant to the Spirit's leading.

Also, we must know that the Spirit will never prompt us to do anything contrary to biblical truth. The man who said, "God told me to kill my family," was not prompted by the Holy Spirit, but by Satan or one of his demons, or by some other negative influence.

Here are some examples where a person can choose either to be controlled by the Spirit or by his own desires. This is where **Spirit-filled living** becomes reality. Picture a man on a business trip. He

finds himself in the motel room of a female coworker who drops subtle hints about sleeping together. The Spirit reminds him that adultery is wrong but his emotions urge him to stay. To be Spirit-filled, he must obey and exit the scene.

Another example involves Sunday. A couple wants to play golf instead of attending worship. Although going to Church does not make a person a Christian, God instructs Christians to meet together regularly (Hebrews 10:25). The wife feels the Spirit's prompting to attend church, but also wants to enjoy the fresh air, sunshine and relaxation of the golf course. To be Spirit-filled the couple should say "no" to golf and "yes" to church. There will be other days and times to play that don't conflict with worship.

Another example involves eating. A couple is at a friend's home enjoying a scrumptious meal. The husband is overweight. Recently he remembers reading in the Bible that his body is God's temple (1 Cor 6:19,20). He knows he needs to lose some weight and get in shape. During the meal his friend offers him a second slice of dessert. He immediately feels the Spirit prompting him to say "No thank you." To be Spirit-filled, he should graciously decline the offer for seconds.

The examples of Spirit-filling are endless. Any situation that presents a choice between doing what we want and doing what God's wants, is a perfect opportunity for Christians to be Spirit-filled.

Not every situation is as cut and dry as the ones presented above. There will be times when a person may not know which decision to make. This is where prayer and wise counsel come in.

A non-Christian might think he doesn't need help from Jesus or the Holy Spirit. He might say, "I know that overeating and adultery are wrong. Everyone does. I don't need anyone to tell me."

By distinguishing between right and wrong, the person is verifying that God wrote His truth on the hearts of all men. But Christians have an advantage. They possess a heightened awareness of God's will through the Holy Spirit's indwelling power. This is especially true when they regularly study Scripture and seek God in prayer. The Spirit takes this input and recalls it when needed.

Another reason why all people need Christ involves salvation. Even if non-Christians conquer bad habits, they will never attain salvation. Without Christ, even moral people go to Hell. No man can save himself because there is no one who is righteous in God's sight (Rom 3:10). And no amount of good deeds or clean living can save a person (Eph 2:8,9, James 2:10). The only way to God is through faith in Christ (John 14:6).

In addition, people without Christ will never make a positive impact for God's kingdom or find the joy He wants them to have. Everyone needs Christ and the subsequent filling of the Spirit.

In Ephesians 5:19,20, notice the results of being filled,

¹⁹ speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; ²⁰ always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father;

When the Spirit controls us, we have joy. We have a song in our heart that helps us have a right relationship with others and God. We can be thankful for all things, knowing that He is in control.

When I think of Spirit-filling, I picture an eagle soaring in the mountains. The invisible air currents allow him to climb and



dive effortlessly. The Holy Spirit does the same for us. When we place our desires in submission to God's will, He becomes the wind beneath our wings. He empowers us to soar higher than we ever dreamed possible (Eph 3:20,21).

Personally, I feel that no one can be Spirit-filled apart from a close walk with God. As a minimum, this involves regular Bible study, prayer, fellowship and worship attendance. Hopefully, it also includes active involvement in ministry and service to others. All too often, Christians resist the Spirit's leading and become impotent for God.

How are you doing in the area of Spirit-filling? Would you say that you have a close walk with God? Do you listen to His Spirit or are you doing your own thing? When is the last time you felt the Spirit prompting you to do or not do something? Did you obey? Do you read and study your Bible regularly and attend church? If not, the Spirit will have a much harder time showing you which way to go.

Our individual lives and marriages desperately need Spirit-filling. But this can only happen when husbands and wives draw near to God as indicated in James 4:7,8:

⁷ Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. ⁸ Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

3. Submissive learning

The next SL is submissive learning. Listen to Ephesians 5:21, "and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ."

Christians are to submit to one another in reverence for Christ. To submit means to defer ones ideas, opinions and actions in favor of

those of others. Christians need to be learners. Husbands can learn from wives. Wives can learn from husbands.

In marriage, both husband and wife have good ideas. Sometimes the wife's ideas are better than her husband's and vice versa. Before a decision is made, couples should sit and talk about alternatives, realizing that both of their thoughts and feelings count. Neither spouse should belittle or condemn the opinions or ideas of the other. Both should be open to share what they feel. All options should be weighed carefully before a final decision is made. This might include: what car to buy, where to live, how to spend money, what church to attend, where to go on vacation, what investments to make, and what restaurant to go to. The possibilities for discussion and compromise are infinite.

Some husbands are threatened by the thought of submitting to their wives. They shouldn't be! Sometimes it is God's will. On the other hand, some wives take every constructive comment as a personal attack. This, too, is not right. Husbands and wives have their own opinions and should have the freedom to express them. No loving husband wants a "yes woman" for a wife. And no loving wife should want a "yes man" for a husband. Just because husbands and wives don't see eye to eye on every issue does not mean they love each other any less. Disagreement and compromise can be healthy. Discussion helps people broaden their perspectives and avoid mental ruts.

If either spouse always insists on getting his or her own way, he or she is in direct violation of God's will.

To see whether or not the principle of **submissive learning** is part of your marriage, you might analyze your most recent family decisions. Did both of you share your opinions? Did you treat each other with respect? Was either person insensitive or pushy? Was there arguing and bickering?

On a scale of one to ten (one being poor and ten being great), how would you rate your **submissive learning** factor? If your rating is high, fantastic! If it is low, commit yourself today to become a submissive learner. God can help you.

4. Submissive lordship

The next SL, submissive lordship, is found in verses twenty two through twenty four,

²² Wives, *be subject* to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³

For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself *being* the Savior of the body.

²⁴ But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives *ought to be* to their husbands in everything.

This principle is specifically directed to wives and is often misunderstood. Many wives think that God is directing them to become door mats. A proper explanation will dispel this myth.



In any organization there needs to be one person who is ultimately in charge. Consider the Air Force. Each wing has one wing commander. Imagine a wing having two commanders with equal authority. They might give conflicting orders causing confusion and chaos. To prevent such problems, the Air Force is set up in a sensible manner with only one wing commander for each wing. This does not mean that members of the commander's staff are of less value than he, it just means that there is a chain of command.

In marriage God has set up a chain of command, too. The husband is the final authority (leader). This does not mean dictator! Nor does it mean the wife is inferior. The Bible clearly teaches that all believers are one (equal) in Christ (Gal 3:26-28). We are not one physically because there are great differences between men and women, but we are one spiritually. We have equal access to God.

God designed marriage with a chain of command to avoid confusion and to help families function smoothly. Just as a wise wing commander consults and listens to His staff, so a husband consults and listens to his wife. Often, commanders discover that their staff's ideas are better than their own. Hopefully, they implement those good ideas for the benefit of the unit. Likewise, a husband will often find that his wife's ideas are better than his. When this is true, he would be wise to set aside his own ideas in favor of hers.

In the military, if a unit fails an inspection, the commander is held responsible. That is another reason why commanders must carefully listen to their staffs and not take a dictatorial approach. Likewise in marriage. If husbands become tyrants and refuse to consider or accept their wife's input, their marriages may be rocky or end in disaster.

Also, in the military there will be times when a staff member will disagree with the commander's decision. If the staff member reacts by making waves and bad-mouthing the commander, he may get fired. Wise staff members realize that once a final decision is made, they must support it or be prepared to suffer the consequences. So, too, in marriage. If, after much discussion, a husband and wife still can't agree, it is up to the husband to make the final decision and for his wife to support him. This may seem hard, but it is God's will!

Although wives are to be submissive to their husbands, this in no way implies second-class citizenship. The next several SLs make this fact abundantly clear. Lest wives think God has fed them to the lions, they need to understand the next principles that He has put in place to keep husbands from overstepping their authority.

5. Sacrificial love

Paul now shifts his attention from wives to husbands in verse twenty five: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.”

To ensure that husbands do not think **submissive lordship** means dictatorial license, God gives them several leadership principles. The first is **sacrificial love**; Husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church. How did Christ love the church? He died for her!

There are three prominent words for love in New Testament Greek. The first is *eros*. It is the word from which we get our English word, erotic, meaning sensual love. Certainly, this is part of marriage, but it is not the love Paul refers to in verse twenty five. Next is *philia*. From this word we get our English word Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love. If *philia* (brotherly love) could talk, it would say, “If you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours. You be nice to me and I'll be nice to you.” This type of love is also part of marriage, but again, it is not the word used by Paul in Ephesians 5:25. Finally comes *agape*. This is God's love. It has no English equivalent. It says, “I love you no matter what. You can hate me, say mean things to me or treat me badly but I still love you.” God directs men to have this type of love for their wives. It is sacrificial, selfless love and meets the needs of the other person.

The beautiful challenge in Ephesians is for men to love their wives this way. Dictators do not have this kind of love. They sacrifice others for their own selfish ends but never the reverse.

If you are a husband, you may be thinking, “If it came right down to it, I would be willing to die for my wife.” That's good, but God probably won't ask you to do that. Instead, He says, “Live for her!” Just as He calls Christians to be living sacrifices for Him (Rom 12:1), He also calls husbands to be living sacrifices for their wives.

But how does a person make this kind of sacrifice? It involves time, talents and treasure. Here are some examples.

Perhaps this weekend you want to go fishing or golfing but your wife needs some time out of the house. She has even expressed the desire to go shopping with a friend. Instead of insisting on your own way or making her drag the children along as she shops, you say, “Honey, I'll take care of the kids today, you go and enjoy yourself. I can handle it. We'll see you when you get back.” Now that's sacrifice! Many wives would faint if their husbands made this kind of offer, but this is exactly what God calls men to do.



Another example involves the broken shelf in the closet. The wife asks her husband to fix it. Many husbands would rather do a thousand different things than something on a "honey do" list. But sacrifice means taking time to fix the problem before being asked twenty times. This may entail putting aside something important, but that is what sacrifice is all about. It is giving up something to meet the needs of someone else.

The wife of one couple felt her husband was a miser. She practically had to beg him to get money for new shoes. Money wasn't tight, either. Her husband managed to put a substantial

amount into monthly investments. His response to his wife's request was, "We have to plan for the future. We have to give up things now in order to have enough for retirement." At the rate they were going, it was doubtful they would make it to retirement. Later the husband and I met alone. I discovered that his wife was not a shopaholic. Her need for new shoes and other items was legitimate. I encouraged him to make some monetary sacrifices. He did and she was thrilled.

Husbands are not called to be dictators, but leaders. They must make the appropriate sacrifices to help their wives become all God wants them to be. When they sacrifice, it sends a clear message, "Honey, you are important, and I care about you!" Few things cause wives to love their husbands more than their husband's expression of agape love.

6. Spiritual leadership

The next SL, spiritual leadership, is also directed to husbands. It is found in verses twenty six and twenty seven:

²⁶ so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.

Jesus worked with the early church to move its members toward spiritual maturity. He wanted them to be holy and blameless without spot or wrinkle. Although this had nothing to do with physical spots and wrinkles, today many husbands act as if it did. They love their wives mainly for their beauty.

Appearance is important but spiritual maturity is more important. Men who marry primarily for physical attraction often divorce their wives when that beauty fades. As each year brings more wrinkles, these husbands feel like they are further out of business.

Wives can feel the same way about aging husbands. Again, God has a much different standard for attractiveness. It needs to become our standard. He admires spiritual maturity!

Just as Jesus had spiritual maturity as a major goal for the church, husbands should have it as a goal for their wives. This leads to the obvious question, “What should men do to ensure spiritual growth is a high priority in their home?” First, they should seek God in their own life through Bible study, prayer, worship attendance, fellowship, and service. They should take the leadership role in training children and creating a godly environment in the home.

If you are a married man, are the above mentioned things true of you? They should be. Do you have a regular quiet time with God? Do you make time for family devotions? Is worship attendance and fellowship a regular part of your schedule? Do you pray with your wife and children? Do you discuss spiritual things? Do you set a godly example in your attitudes and actions? If the answer to these questions is yes, that’s great! If the answer is no, it’s time to get to work!

One phenomenon in many homes is that wives are the prime movers in spiritual things. They encourage their families to go to church. They are consistent in Bible study and prayer. They teach their children about God. The husbands, on the other hand, often hang back, preoccupied with work, recreation and other endeavors. I’m glad wives take great initiative, but spiritual leadership in the home is primarily the responsibility of the husband. This unhealthy trend needs to be reversed.

If you are a husband, how would you rate your **spiritual leadership**? Is it poor, fair, good or excellent? If it is not what you want it to be, it is time to rededicate yourself to Christ. Take the initiative to be the leader God meant you to be.

7. Sensitive listening

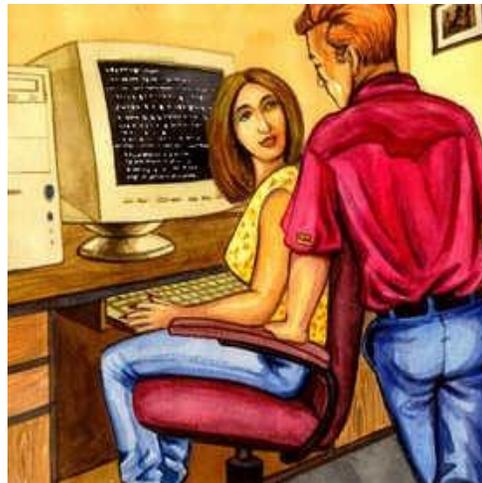
The next SL is sensitive listening. It is found in verses twenty eight through thirty.

²⁸ So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; ²⁹ for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also *does* the church, ³⁰ because we are members of His body.

People naturally care for their own bodies. If an ankle is sprained, other parts mobilize to help. Weight is redistributed and arms work hard maneuvering crutches until the ankle is ready to carry its normal load. It might be said that people sensitively listen to their bodies. This is exactly what a husband must do with his wife.

In marriage, couples become one when married (Gen 2:24). As such, they should function as a unit. This takes communication. Information in the physical body is transferred via electronic impulses to the brain. Unless nerves are severed or anesthetized, this happens automatically. Not so in marriage. People are not connected with nerve endings. Instead, they are connected through various forms of communication; verbal and nonverbal. Too often, couples drift apart because they fail to communicate effectively.

A primary goal of every husband should be to sensitively listen to his wife. He must learn to read her signals that indicate changes in feelings and attitudes. If she has a concern, it should be his. If she is excited about something, he should be, too. If he senses she needs encouragement or reassurance, he should give it to her.



Becoming a sensitive listener takes work. Here are some practical suggestions. When a husband and wife meet at home after a long day, he should take time to talk with her about the day before plopping into a favorite chair and turning on the TV. This shouldn't be a dumping session to relate all his problems, but a time to tune back into his wife.

A husband should also learn to read signals during special times of the month. If his wife needs extra attention, he should give it to her. If she needs more space, she should get that, too. One non-threatening question a husband should ask his wife from time to time is, "How are you feeling?" This often reveals a wealth of information.

"How are you feeling?" is often a better question than "How was your day?" A wife might take the question "How was your day?" as a husband's way of checking to be sure she got enough done. The question "How are you feeling?" communicates a personal concern for her well-being.

If your wife ever wants to talk, stop whatever you're doing and talk, even if it's during the last two minutes of the Super Bowl. She wouldn't have come if it wasn't important. When you stop to listen, she knows that you care. Even if her subject matter seems trivial, it is important to her and thus, should be to you. For example, one wife dropped hints that she wanted a job outside the home. With the children gone, she felt the need to spread her wings. This threatened her husband who kept dumping cold water on the idea. His insensitivity almost cost him his marriage.

Another wife also accused her husband of gross insensitivity. Her story went as follows - they were driving near a fast-food restaurant when she asked him if he would like to stop and get a drink. He said no and did not stop. During counseling, she told him that he should have known she wanted to stop. He then accused her

of not revealing her true intentions. I then stepped in to share three questions they could have asked themselves to better understand the other person.

1. What is the other person saying?

This has to do with the actual words the other person uses. In this case, she was asking if **he** would like to stop and get a drink.

2. What is the other person meaning by what he/she is saying?

This begins the interpretation process. By asking himself this question, the husband might have come to the conclusion that **his wife** wanted to stop. Perhaps the reason she did not tell him was because she did not want to sound pushy.

3. What is the other person feeling?

This question digs even deeper. It tries to determine how the other person is feeling. In this case, **she** was thirsty.

If couples ask themselves these questions, they will avoid many misunderstandings and conflicts. Even so, they should say what they mean and mean what they say. In the above case, the wife could have helped herself by simply saying, "Honey, I'm really thirsty. Do you think we could stop and get a drink?"

If you are a husband, how would you rate yourself in the area of **sensitive listening**? If you are not where you should be, I encourage you to make plans to change. If you feel like you are sensitive and your wife takes advantage of you, talk to her about it. She may see her error. Be gentle.

8. Separated living

The next SL is found in the first portion of verse thirty one. It is called separated living: "For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother..."

This verse is a direct quote from Genesis 2:24 where God instituted marriage saying that a man would leave father and mother and be joined to his wife. The man would be separating himself from one set of relationships in order to form a new one.

Separating oneself from parents does not mean severing ties with them. Hopefully parents can be a great source of encouragement to their married children. Married children will still talk with and visit their parents, but they need time and space to cultivate their own marriage. The problem arises when parents try to control their married children or meddle in their relationship.

Healthy separation can be difficult. Sometimes children find it hard to let go of apron strings. At the first sign of marital conflict, they call mom and dad. Parents should be consulted now and then, but children need to learn to solve their own problems with God's help.

Sometimes children are happy to leave, but parents find it difficult to let them. One such case involved a mother-in-law who constantly meddled in her son's marriage. She stopped by his house unexpectedly as if it were her own. She hunted for and did the ironing. Undoubtedly she meant well, but it drove her daughter-in-law crazy. Even hiding the ironing board did not deter the mother-in-law from hunting through the house. This provided a perfect opportunity for the son to pull his mom aside and tell her that she should call before stopping by, but he did not do it. It almost cost him his marriage.

Some husbands have never learned this separation principle. Not only do spouses need to break away from parents, they also need to separate themselves from some of the interests that consumed their lives before they were married. For example, one wife complained that she was married to the absent husband. As an avid weight lifter her husband went to the gym before and after work. His goal was to build a muscular physique. He would come home exhausted

with only enough energy to eat, watch TV and go to bed. It was obvious from the husband's bulging shirt that he had done well with weight training. Sadly, it was at the expense of his marriage.

Another husband didn't know how to say no to those who asked for help. His wife complained that he was always at someone else's house fixing a car or doing some project. He was never around when she needed him.

In both cases, the husbands realized and corrected their error. The first husband cut down on his time at the gym. The second cut out several activities. Both couples were much happier.

Each husband needs to live separated from the world, committed to his wife. Their relationship is not another in a long list of equal relationships. It is the priority relationship, second only to that with God.

If you are a husband, how would you rate your **separated living** factor? Is it high or low? If it is high, great! Keep up the good work. If it is low, I encourage you to eliminate unnecessary activities and give your wife the attention she needs and deserves.

9. Secure loyalty

The next SL is closely linked to separated living. It is **secure loyalty** and found in the second phrase of verse thirty one, “for this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife...”



To cleave means to hold onto or grasp tightly. A wife should sense closeness from her husband that makes her feel secure in his love. A husband must avoid doing anything that makes his wife question his loyalty.

At a business party, I observed a husband allowing another woman to sit on his lap and hang all over him as his wife looked on in disgust.

On a trip, one man shared that he felt quite comfortable going out and dancing with women other than his wife. He reasoned that such action was totally innocent. I dare say, if his wife went out on him, he might sing a different tune.

In or out of his wife's presence, a husband must never give her reason to doubt his love and commitment to her. She needs to feel totally secure in his love. This does not mean all men need blinders but a little common sense and discretion go a long way.

If you are a husband, do you cleave to your wife? Is she convinced that she is the only woman in your life? Do your actions show her your loyalty? Is she 100% secure in your love or does she have to vie for your attention and affection? If the latter is true, it is time to ask her to forgive you and for you to make some serious changes.

10. Sexual liberty

The final SL is sexual liberty. It is found in the third phrase of verse thirty one: “for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh.”

The phrase “the two shall become one flesh” is a direct reference to sexual union in marriage. It is interesting that God places it last in this list of principles. Many husbands would like it to be first!

Real estate agents say there are three considerations in purchasing a home; location, location and location. A prospective buyer quickly gets the idea that location is important.

Sometimes in marriage, young husbands say they have three priorities; sex, sex and sex. But God has a better idea. If husbands live smart, are Spirit-filled, submit when appropriate, sacrificially love, spiritually lead, sensitively listen, separate themselves, and show secure loyalty, their wives will normally allow them sexual liberty in the confines of marriage. What an incredible plan! And no wonder, it's God's plan! Challenging but so very wise!

Summary Principles

As Paul closes his instructions to husbands and wives, he gives them both a summary principle. Verses thirty two and thirty three state:

³² This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church. ³³ Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must *see to it* that she respects her husband.

After stressing the correlation between Christ and the church, and husbands and wives, Paul tells husbands to **love** their wives, and wives to **respect** their husbands.

Love is a good word to summarize a husband's responsibility. Again, this word for love is *agape* (God's love). When a husband loves his wife, it makes it easier for her to respect him. When he doesn't love her the way he should, it becomes much more difficult for her to fulfill her God-given role.

It is interesting to note that the word **respect** comes from the Greek word *phobeo* meaning to fear or to reverence. Our English word phobia comes from the Greek word *phobeo*. A wife is to have a deep respect/reverence for her husband because God has given him the position of authority in the family. Even if she disagrees with some of his decisions, and even if he has been a mediocre leader, she still needs to respect him. A wife's respect will often spur on a

husband to become the man God calls him to be. Failure to show respect causes nothing but more problems.

Closing Thoughts

Is it possible to build a magnificent marriage? Absolutely! It happens by learning and applying God's principles. His truth can revolutionize any marriage:

- Smart living
- Spirit-filled living
- Submissive learning
- Submissive Lordship
- Sacrificial love
- Spiritual leadership
- Sensitive listening
- Separated living
- Secure loyalty
- Sexual liberty

Hopefully your marriage is strong. If so great! If not, it is never too late to start making needed improvements. No matter where you are, God's truth is applicable.

Marriage is not a 50% - 50% proposition; it is a 100-100. As spouses both give their all, great things happen.

Here's to more magnificent marriages!

Reflection Questions

1. List and describe the 10 SLs (If you have time, memorize one corresponding verse for each principle)

1)

2)

3)

4)

5)

6)

7)

8)

9)

10)

2. What are the two summary principles that Paul gives husbands and wives? Define each one.

3. What do you need to work on most as an individual regarding each SL? Write out a plan below.

- Smart living

- Spirit-filled living

- Submissive learning

- Submissive Lordship

- Sacrificial love

- Spiritual leadership

- Sensitive listening

- Separated living

- Secure loyalty

- Sexual liberty