

# Challenges to Marriage

by Alan Cairns

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*A godly marriage requires open and honest communication, mutual respect, and a commitment to prioritizing each other and their relationship with God.*

**Duration:** 1:03:00

**Scripture:** Isaiah 32:17, Isaiah 53:5, 2 Corinthians 5:14, Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 4:32, Ephesians 5:25, Ephesians 5:33, Hebrews 12:1-3

**Topics:** "Christian Marriage", "Selfless Love"

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## Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of selflessness in marriage, addressing challenges such as communication, children, morals, finances, and selfishness. It highlights the need for couples to prioritize the well-being of each other, rooted in the love of Christ. The ultimate solution to marital difficulties is found in living out the faith of the gospel, denying self, and running the race with patience while looking unto Jesus.

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## Transcript

Father in heaven, we bow in thy presence this morning in the precious name of the Lord Jesus. We thank thee for thy word, we thank thee it is a true word, we thank thee it is always a personal word, and we pray that the blessed author of the book, the Holy Spirit, will himself come and apply the word of God to our hearts today. We thank thee for each person and each couple before thee.

We pray, our God, that thou wilt graciously come and touch each life and touch each marriage and touch each home. We pray that each family will be indeed particularly blessed of God. We ask thee, O Lord, that in this church we will have strong families, strong homes, and we ask thee that home and church will be able to labour together with the common purpose of seeing household salvation, seeing all the little ones brought to Christ, all the teenagers kept going on with God.

We pray that thou wilt put a wall of protection around them all from the wickedness of the world in which we live. We understand something of the devil's devices, and Lord, we pray that thou wilt make us in this place a people who are able to rejoice in that great victory that the Lord Jesus Christ gives to his people. We do take thee at thy word.

We would claim the promise concerning our households and look to thee that thou wilt indeed give us all the joy of a complete family circle and the unity of a common faith, a common love, a common purpose,

and a common walk in fellowship with each other and with the Lord Jesus Christ. Hear us now, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Now, this morning is the last of this series. The class will... Good morning. Good morning.

Or afternoon. There are notes up here if you want to distribute them, John or Richard. Richard's too much thinking about his Easter egg.

But the class will go on, and we'll make full announcement of those arrangements. But this particular part that I've been dealing with, which is really just laying a foundation, the original draft that I had for these classes would have gone on for many, many more weeks, but that is not possible. So I aim to finish on Easter Sunday, a couple of extra Sundays away, cut it down a little bit more, but anyway, here we are.

And so this is going to be a sort of a running here and there sort of lesson that's not going to be concentrating just on one thing. We're going to read in Titus chapter 2, starting at verse 11, which says, For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. These things speak and exhort and rebuke with all authority.

Let no man despise thee. These are general instructions for every part of life, but they certainly include our life in the home, within the bond of marriage. So that what we will see as we come toward the end today, in point 5 of 6, is that this command, through the grace of God teaching us verse 12, to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, is simply a summary fashion in which Paul is bringing together all the teaching of Christ and the gospel regarding our attitude to self.

And I will be pointing out that the biggest problems we have, not only in marriage, but in life, all come back to one four-letter word, and it is S-E-L-F. I better make sure I spell that right. I once did an acrostic on faith.

Dr. Paisley's acrostic on faith, forsaking all I trust him. And I gave the acrostic as forsaking all I trust thee. That's an Irishman's spelling of faith.

But I think we've got it right, S-E-L-F. That is the great problem. And so, as we go through these things today, you will see that surfacing again and again.

Now, we have looked at various things over these past number of weeks, and today we're just going to look at some of the challenges that come to you and me and anybody else in marriage. Within marriage, you'll always have some challenges, some difficulties, some obstacles to be overcome. First thing I should admit is that last week, Mark pointed out to me that I did not give a complete lesson.

The advice was lacking. You remember I said that there were, when I was talking to people pre-marital counseling, I'd give the young men the number of Ts, the tenderness, the talk. And the time when Mark came to me afterwards, his wife and my wife have something in common.

He said, you forgot the first T of all, and that's Talbots. So all you ladies who like Talbots will know that that's the first T. So, ma'am, if you don't know the way to Talbots, your wife does, so anyway, that will help with all the rest. But even with Talbots in the mix, you can still have some problems.

So we're going to look at these challenges to a godly marriage. And here, as I say, it's going to be rambling here and there. First and foremost, perhaps the most persistent, the one that runs through everything else, the one that is going to make every other situation worse, the one that is the constant bugbear of men and women, and this is where all the differences in personality and all, this is where they all come out.

And it comes in this thing that we call communication. Now, this is not just a psychobabble term, because in Deuteronomy chapter 6, you are given very clear instructions as to how to behave in your own home, in your own marriage. And it's very interesting that the Lord places His word right at the heart of a home and right at the heart of a marriage.

And He says something very, very important, which most Christians pay absolutely no attention to whatsoever. And it is, talk of these things. You take the word of God and you talk of these things.

The things of God in the home and with the family. It's not just get on a soapbox and preach about them, but actually talk about these things. Now, of course, remember this, that you talk with more than your mouth.

The old saying, actions speak louder than words, is certainly not without truth. Communication may be verbal, and it ought to be, but we should never, never think that it is the only means of communication. You can say what you like with your mouth, if you're contradicting it with your actions, then you are simply making yourself appear hypocritical or untruthful.

So, the words and the actions in the home. When you talk about the things of God, you live out the things of God. Remember years ago, in our family devotions, trying to emphasize this.

When we were reading the Scriptures, and Frank was just a wee tiny fellow, and we're trying to get it the way that we would all remember. And according to what the Bible says, we ought to do with Scripture, we ought to learn it, it's the first thing, then we ought to live it, and we ought to love it. Now, if those three things come together in our lives, where you learn the Scriptures together, and the together is a very big part of it, where you learn the Scriptures together, where you learn to love the Scriptures together, and you live the Scriptures together, then you have a good basis for talking, in the sense that the Holy Ghost in Deuteronomy chapter 6 is commanding us.

Now, remember what the biblical rule is, and I give you this emphasized in the notes, that in the home we should have constant and open communication that is biblical both in manner and in content. Now, that's a mouthful, it's easily said, but that is fundamental to all godly homes. Open communication, and that is biblical in manner and in content.

Now, let's stop there for a minute. If the Bible does not sanction, in the sense of granting its approval, strange that the word sanction in English can have the two very opposite meanings, it can mean condemn, but I'm using it here in the sense of bringing its approval. If the Bible does not sanction what we are saying to each other, then what we are saying is wrong.

If Christ were there in person, as he is, but I'm talking now in physical form and presence, standing between you, if you could not or would not say it in his presence, then it is wrong. Don't be worried. Come ahead.

You have to sit up where I can spit on you. That's the mark of a good Irish preacher. But a good Irish preacher will always get that far.

Never worry. That's how you know. The old Presbyterian man came home to his wife, and the church was vacant, and they were calling a minister, and having all these candidates come, and he came home and said, Mary, that's the man for us.

She said, how do you know? He said, I could feel the spits of him four rows back. Well, he must have been really preaching. So that's how you know a good Irish Presbyterian preacher, by the way.

Now, in content, our communication must be biblical. But you can say the right thing in a rotten way. You can quote the commandments of God and be sending a wrong message altogether.

It's not just the content, it's the manner. So this is where I'm saying words and actions go together. So if the content and the manner are biblical, then we're measuring up to Deuteronomy chapter 6, but not otherwise.

Now, see how this works out. You come into most houses, what is communication? Well, it's letting off steam. I use the popular American term, venting.

Yeah. You feel you've got to get it off your chest. Well, usually, feeling that pressure is a temptation that you ought not to give in to.

We were reading this morning about denying ungodliness and worldly lusts. This is one exhibition, very usual exhibition of ungodliness and worldly lust, where people just have to let fly, and they'll feel better once they have let fly. Usually, they'll come and say, well, I'm sorry, I really... But, when you hear that, I'm sorry, but, you'd better just button your lip, because you're not sorry at all.

All you're saying is, I'm sorry that you caused this, or somebody else caused this. In other words, it's putting off the responsibility onto somebody else. You can't do that.

That doesn't mend fences, it doesn't build bridges, it doesn't create confidence, it doesn't give any picture of sincerity. Those are things you've got to really face. Now, this, just letting fly, is going to hurt.

The old saying, sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me. The man that made that up was an absolute lunatic. I've seen people healed from broken bones far, far faster than from broken hearts.

I've seen grown men wounded so deeply in one conversation that they bore the scars for the rest of their lives. I saw men who started, and who were doing something worthy of God, and their testimony was, at least their public usefulness, was greatly broken because of the unguarded and foolish and wicked words of somebody who had to vent. Venting is not proper communication.

James 3 talks about a tongue that blesses God, but it curses men. I know people, you do too. For the sake of decorum, I will take an example from 4,000 miles away.

Now, I could take examples from a whole lot closer home, but I'm not going to do that. I don't want you to think that the Irish are the only people who have this sort of evil person. There's a woman who's now in eternity.

Where she is, I don't know. If you had gone to a certain free Presbyterian church, she was not a member as far as I know, but if you had gone there, you'd have found her there with religious regularity every Wednesday night in the prayer meeting. And furthermore, when it was left open to pray, you would have heard her pray.

And you would have said, this is the sweetest, loveliest, godliest, most instructed Christian woman that you could desire to meet. She prayed like an angel. And for a Belfast woman, I would have to say she had a beautiful intonation of voice.

She had a beautiful accent, not a bit like mine. She had it all. You'd have said, this woman, she's a mighty woman of God.

That woman was a she-devil. She was a wicked, vile-tongued, cursing, blaspheming wretch. Who turned her daughters into prostitutes to make a bit of money.

Now that's an extreme case. I know that's an extreme case. You don't have to go to that extreme to have the same kind of hypocrisy.

You see, the tongue that blesses God should let that attitude control everything else. If you can't control that tongue, you're out of control. But let me tell you, if you're out of control, and I'm not talking about just that this is a sudden fall, I'm talking as a way of life.

If you're out of control, you're out of Christ. It's as simple as that. You can't be in Christ constantly and out of control constantly.

It can't be. Because the fruit of the Spirit is self-control. The grace of God teaches you to deny ungodliness.

Deny that natural lust of the flesh. This is a serious thing. Communication.

So you've got this venting, this bursting out, which is to be abhorred. But then you've got the opposite, this what I call sullen silence. And you may feel that you're a whole lot holier, that you're not bursting out, but it's the exhibition of the same selfish spirit.

It's a rejection of communication. Sullen silence is usually a very powerful method of manipulation for selfish ends. You know the old saying, at least I think it's an American one, we have it in Ireland anyway, that a fellow has a constant diet from his wife of hot tongue and cold shoulder.

They alternate it. Well, whether it's the hot tongue or the cold shoulder, it's a rejection of biblical communication. So in all confrontational or controversial situations, remember, you're going to have to open the lines of communication sooner or later, and the sooner the better.

But, I have to admit, there are many, many times when a little bit of space is necessary, a little bit of time is necessary. And here's my advice. Go first and communicate with the Lord.

Before you, in any difficult situation, go first and speak with the Lord. Indeed, it would be better before you have to deal with anything together, if together you could come and say, Now, we have something difficult to deal with. Let's take our Bible.

Let's recognize it has the answer, and we're looking for God's answer, and let's honestly, humbly pray today for grace. If you'll pray it through together, you're in the best basis of all for communication. But communication is at the heart.

What I've dealt with over these many years, we dealt with couples. You know, at one level or other, you have this, this failure to get through. Either one is not speaking, I think I've told you about two couples I know, or knew, they're now in eternity, and they lived in the same house together for years, and they literally never even spoke to each other.

I knew a missionary, his father and mother were unsaved, but they lived for 25 years in the same house, and never even said good morning to each other. Never spoke. How he came out of it, he was a magnificent missionary.

As a Christian, I have no idea, except you say, that's the grace of God. That's an extreme. But you have people who are not talking, or if they're talking, they're talking at each other, talking to score points, talking to vindicate self, talking to establish precedence, priority, or some sort of dominance.

That's not communication. The very word communication in English starts with a c-o-m, which is an anglicized version of the Latin word c-u-m, cum, which means with. The communication part comes from the root that gives us the idea of unity.

There is a communication that is talking with and to each other with the view to establishing a true fellowship and unity. This is at the heart of all good marriages. Now if you can't talk to your wife, and you can talk to somebody else, there's something radically wrong.

If you can't talk to your husband, but you're talking to somebody else, there's something radically wrong. Don't just admit there's something radically wrong. Now is the time to get it right.

Communication. Now, children. Children are the heritage of the Lord.

Right? They are a blessing. Sadly, they also become a point of division and of contention between husbands and wives. What I'm going to deal with today is I'm going to deal with it very quickly, but I am nonetheless going to highlight these things.

First of all, children are not there to be misused. They're not there to be abused, and they're not there to be misused. Children are not there to become little idols and little gods.

Never forget that. When you make your children your gods and your idols, and most parents do, they stand the chance of coming between you and your spouse. They also stand the chance of being wrecked and ruined for time and for eternity.

You talk to any school teacher, and you'll find this, that parents go mad. Let the school correct their little Johnny or Mary or Maggie or whatever she is. Not at all.

The whole world can be wrong, but don't you dare say a word about mine. You make idols out of your children, and if God doesn't intervene, you're doing your best to damn them. They're not idols.

They're gifts of God. They're the heritage of the Lord. Treat them as such.

Don't abuse them, and don't misuse them. How do wives misuse their children? Well, very often, they become the be-all and the end-all of the woman's life. Now, this is a difficult thing, because it is on that bond between a mother and a child that the family in many ways is based.

God has inculcated that. It is natural, and it is good. Can a woman forget her sucking child? She may, but it's most unnatural.

Where would we be in our families if we did not have mother love? So that's a wonderful thing, but it should never replace married love. Let me repeat that. Mother love must never replace married love.

And again and again, you come across the situation where a husband is reduced to being an onlooker in his family, where he is feeling totally unwanted, unappreciated, unloved. He is simply the provider, and that's it. Now, this is not unique to you, or to this church, or to this society.

This is true across the world. I've come across this again and again. You see it in family after family after family.

And this breeds resentment. It breeds division between husband and wife. And when you've got a divided husband and wife, you have got a family in danger.

It doesn't matter how long you spend teaching the Bible to your children. If you're teaching selfish disobedience by your way of life, you are doing more with your actions than you'll ever accomplish with your words. So this is serious.

You wives never forget, mother love never replaces married love. They are not mutually exclusive. One should strengthen the other.

But then there's the other side of the coin, where wives very often feel abandoned. The husbands beget the children, and that's it. They spend little time with them.

The wife does all the looking after. She does all the training. Well, there's a lot of that has to be because she's spending more time with them.

But when it comes to spiritual things, she does the training. She does the catechizing. She does the teaching of the Bible.

She teaches them to pray. They pray together perhaps, but the father very often is never there to pray with them. There's no family altar.

There's no time when he calls the family together. He's the head of the home, but you would never know it by his actions. Now, here we come to a delicate thing.

This is particularly true in two areas. You've got young women, and very often they are every bit as intellectual, sometimes far more intellectual than their husbands. They need some mental and spiritual stimulation, and yet every day, all day, every night, sometimes in all night, they're locked into the conversation of children.

Now, I'm not for a moment suggesting that they want to change that, but I'm simply saying there are times, and husbands need to recognize this, when young mothers feel that their head's going to burst if they don't get some release and some adult input, some real adult conversation and fellowship. It's very

necessary, and husbands should be the first ones to make sure they provide it. There's yet another delicate aspect to it.

Now, don't jump to conclusions and don't get me wrong here. Large families carry a particular difficulty. Now, I'm not against large families.

I was number five of six, so if I were against large families, I wouldn't exist. Well, that's not quite true, but you know what I mean. If I had the power to ban large families and tried to do so, I'd have banned myself.

So I'm not in favor of that. I'm all in favor of keeping me in existence. I'm not against large families.

My wife's family was a large family, and I think that any family, any family, run according to God's word is a blessing. But nowadays, especially when Christian families are opting for homeschooling, this is something I have found, and I'll mention one case because it's not in this church, and therefore you'll not be likely to be able to hunt it down. I'm not talking about somebody that I'm blowing their secret.

But I think of a young woman who came to me, and she had in some areas, at least some areas, maybe many areas, very considerable abilities. Large family. That meant that there were kids at school while other kids were still arriving.

Money was very, very tight, and she was homeschooling. Now, she's up all night when children are sick. She's trying to keep a home.

She's trying to cook. She's trying to shop. She's trying to raise children.

She's trying to teach children. Finally, she came to me in tears, and she said, I don't know where I'm going. I don't know what I'm going to do.

I don't know where to turn. I cannot go on. I just can't do it anymore.

But if I can't do it, what is to be done? We don't want to send our kids to public school. We can't afford to send them to Christian school. I'm locked into this, and I'm dying.

What am I to do? It's a very difficult position. And the obvious answer is that the answer started with her husband. He didn't see it.

He didn't see it. Wives feeling abandoned. Husbands feeling abandoned.

This is allowing children, in one way or another, to come between husband and wife, and that's destroying not only the marriage, that's going to destroy the children. I say they're not to be abused. This is a form of child abuse, when you allow them to come between husband and wife like this.

They're parents who use their kids to get at their husbands or their wives. That's a wicked and evil thing to do, but it's done all the time. Use the kids to get at the other party.

Then you get the case of the divided family, where the father has this pet and the mother has this pet. You see that in the case of Isaac and Rebecca. You see what good it did them.

Now listen, what I'm dealing with here is everyday challenges to marriage. Ephesians 5, Ephesians 6, they give you the biblical approach. You need first a strong marriage experience, and then a united and godly parental approach.

The marriage and the parenting. You will not be strong parents with a weak marriage. It'll be difficult.

If you can get your marriage on track biblically, you will be the better parents as the result. So children are often a challenge. And I'm not blaming the kids for that, by the way.

I'm saying parents make them into a challenge to the marriage. Next thing is morals. Morals.

Now let me make it absolutely clear. Something that really doesn't need to be proved, although you can prove it very easily from Scripture. Marriage.

Well, not only marriage, actually. God, even if you're single, demands this of you. But in marriage, God demands absolute sexual fidelity.

Absolute fidelity. There is no fuzzy area. This is black and white.

Absolutely no gray area. So essential is this to the marriage that the Lord Jesus, in outlawing divorce, makes one exception. And He makes that exception, a word that is translated in our authorized version, fornication.

Most people take it as adultery. Well, that's one form of the Greek term. Pornea.

You'll see the word immediately. Porn. Pornea.

It is adultery, but it's a whole lot more than adultery. Bestiality, for example. Homosexuality.

Pornea. Ultimately, I take to be any form of sexual perversion that renders the intimacy of the marriage bond intolerable. God says that is so wicked that it equates to the death of a marriage.

In the Old Testament, there was really only one way to end a marriage, and that was by death. If they'd gone by the law of God. Adulterers were to be put to death.

That ended the marriage. Now, in place of that, God allowed a bill of divorcement. And what it's saying is that the sin there is so great that it spelt the death of the marriage.

Now, by Bible standards, therefore, this call for absolute fidelity has to be seen as something so essential that God allows the breakup of a marriage. Now, he's not saying that if there is this, that it is the wise or the good or the expedient or the best response. I would argue in most cases it's not the best response.

Divorce very rarely ever solves anything. Leaves behind you a trail of bitterness and brokenness. And usually there is for Christians a better way.

All at the moment I'm saying is to emphasize how strong the Bible's demand is for absolute purity. Remember that by the Bible standards, looking with lust is adulterous. And never forget that.

Looking with lust is adultery. And this maybe usually is secret, but even then it's destructive to a marriage. Even if a wife knows nothing about what her husband is doing and looking and lusting, it brings a tension, it brings a bitterness, it brings a distance into the marriage.

And let me tell every man here not to think he's smarter than he is because it's my experience that most women have not only a sixth sense but a sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth sense. And the very things that you think are hidden are the very first things that will be in their mind. When you get involved in

pornography, and I'm going to be very blunt about this because any survey, any survey of Christian men will reveal a very, very disturbing pattern.

It used to be that in order to glare at porn, people would have to go in and buy a magazine. There's some publicity to it. In many cases that very thing was what kept them back.

That is no longer the case. And this foul, filthy stream of wickedness is freely available. And there are people all through the Christian church who are glued to it, and it's destroying their marriages.

Now let's understand this. This is sin. That's good news.

That's good news. Because once I tell you it's sin, once the Bible identifies it's sin, we know what to do with sin. There is an answer to sin.

Let's not put down, well, but, but, but, but, but, there's this excuse, that excuse. There is no excuse for my sin, and there's no excuse for your sin. We may make excuses, but there ain't any.

There's no excuse. Morals. Now this raises the matter of repentance and forgiveness.

Now I'm going to start kicking with the other foot. Let me say to wives, the old saying, you can't have your cake and eat it, is absolutely true here. And I have dealt with wives, and I've had to talk very bluntly with them.

I don't want divorce. I want, say their husband has committed adultery. I'm thinking of a case right now, where this was not just pornography, this was open adultery.

And first thing is, get rid of him. But then realize, no, no, I don't want to do that, for many, many reasons. Usually there's still, underneath it all, despite all the betrayal, a love there.

Then there's testimony. Then there's family. All these things come together.

So, there's a profession of repentance, and a seeking of forgiveness. Now the wife has a real problem here. I can say I forgive, but there is this difficulty.

There is this chasm in the marriage. She can't abide the look or the touch of this man anymore. There's another person there between them.

There is this thing going on. I want the marriage, but I really don't want a husband. I want them there, but not too much there.

You can't have it that way. Now, I understand it's going to take time, and you can't just command like that, the feelings will change. But ladies, you cannot keep on bringing up the past.

I remember going, when I came to Greenville at first, and I can again say this, because these people are long, long gone, but I came to Greenville at first. I got a call one day, could you come round to our house? We're in trouble. I went round.

And I was a little embarrassed, because these people could have been my parents. Well, I think so. They were older than I was anyway.

I felt that young, whether I was or not. We're in trouble. Communication broken down.

There was no infidelity in this case, that I was ever aware of. But there was this inability on the part of a wife to forgive what she took to be something wrong. And she would keep on bringing up, and bringing up, and bringing up, and bringing up, and bringing up, until the marriage was just about on the rocks.

So, we got around and used the Word of God, and the Lord seemed to be doing the work, and then the woman opened her mouth and started to speak. And she started to throw things at this fellow, about things that he supposedly had done. And he looked at me and he said, You realize this was 25 years ago? It's all supposed to have been forgiven and forgotten, but this was 25 years ago? And over the 25 years, it had grown, and grown, and grown, and grown, and it kept on getting thrown up.

She wanted a husband. She didn't want to break the marriage, but she was not willing to let go. Now listen, however hard it may sound to you, you can't have your cake and eat it.

You either have a marriage or you don't have a marriage. Morals are essential in marriage. Absolute fidelity.

If that fidelity has been breached, either physically or by porn, there must be repentance, and there must be an honest and goodness, open communication where there is. This goes against the male ego, by the way. There is a willingness to be responsible.

There is a willingness to be accountable. There is a willingness not only to do right, but to be seen to do right. And a wise woman will make sure not to push that to an extent where she undercuts all respect.

Remember this. Where there's sin, there must be repentance. Where there's repentance, there must be forgiveness.

How do we do that? Well, we'll get to that in the last point, but really it comes down to this. If God were to treat me as I'm treating my husband or my wife, where would I be? Ephesians 4.32 Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. If Christ has died for the sin of your husband or your wife, if Christ has already borne the punishment for it, if Christ has already granted forgiveness for it, then you be tenderhearted, and you forgive as God has forgiven you, and on the same basis.

The fourth challenge is money. The old saying is that money talks. The Irishman said, the only thing it ever said to me was goodbye.

And I think most of us can get into that. Money's usually in short supply. Now, I'm not getting into finances.

Doug has already dealt with that very expertly, so I'm not going to get into it. But I will say this, that since money's usually in short supply, it means that we need a lot of wisdom in using what we have. That should be plain and simple.

I would say this. In your money, keep the communication open. Agree on a budget.

Now, you'll have to be a whole lot better than I was. I made many budgets in my life, and every one of them was rubbish. Because, you see, I don't really do much shopping.

I have no love for the grocery store. I love a lot of what comes out of it, but I have no particular love for the grocery store. I have no particular love for any other store.

Maybe a bookstore, but that's about it. So I haven't much of a clue. I would tend to think that things cost what they cost maybe 30 years ago, so I'm not really up to date.

That means that anything I'm likely to say in a budget is likely to be slightly off the mark. That's why it should be a cooperative effort. It should be a fairly constant effort, say, on a monthly basis, where you see how you're doing.

I would say this to you as a family. Do not operate on the basis of debt. If you're in credit card debt, cut up your credit card and take the necessary steps to make sure you get out of it.

If you're incurring more and more debt, if you're doing what many Christians are doing, and that's using a credit card to pay off a credit card, all you're doing is being a thief. You're stealing somebody else's money. And if you're telling me you can't exist without stealing somebody else's money, there's something radically wrong.

Don't exist on a basis of debt. Money is important. Debt is corrosive in your home.

So, if you have financial difficulties, and this is all I'm going to say about money, if you have financial difficulties, you need help. Well, come and tell us about it. We don't discuss your affairs with others.

But there are people in the Church who can help you. There are people who know their way through the maze. They're not just going to throw money at you, because that's not the answer.

But there is a way out. There is a way out. And in this Church over the years, we have been able to direct people to mentors and helpers without making a song and dance about it, and have seen them come back from the verge of financial destruction.

We've seen them come back from what would have been sure and certain bankruptcy, and into a life wherein God is meeting their needs and their families' needs, and they can do it with their head held high. So, if you have problems, there are answers. Biblical answers.

And perhaps that's something that we'll be able to look at more fully in future classes in this room. I said number five, and I'll have to be very quick here, that the bottom line in all marriage difficulties is selfishness. That's what it all comes down to.

Now, selfishness is sin. And the Bible tells us how to deal with it. What are you to do? Jesus said in Luke 9, 23, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself.

That's the basic bottom line of being a Christian. You cannot accept Christ without denying yourself. You deny your own merit.

You deny your own righteousness. You deny your own efforts. You deny yourself.

You're denying the right of sin to rule over you. When you take Christ as Lord and Master, you are automatically denying self. That's why I say, where there is no self-control, there's no Christ.

If you're out of control all the time, then you're out of Christ. Now, we can all feel. I understand that.

The Bible makes it clear that the best of men feel. At best, they are men. But nonetheless, the general mark of the Christian is the denial of self.

Now, take the opposite of that. Marriage is the ultimate expression of human love. Marriage should be, and I think sadly in many cases, marriage is more and more becoming another expression of self.

People marry out of mere physical attraction. They marry for lust. They marry for money.

They marry for this. They marry for that. And these are expressions of self.

But these are not the biblical concepts of marriage. The biblical picture of marriage is, as we looked at in Ephesians 5, and it is the ultimate expression of human love. That means that it's the ultimate human expression of seeking the welfare of somebody else.

You're placing somebody else above yourself. This is ultimately what it comes down to, and this is the answer to selfishness. Where you are dedicated to the good of another, no matter what it costs you.

And that other is dedicated to your good, no matter what it costs them. That's the basis of a great marriage. I have to be honest.

At times, it can be frustrating. Every husband knows this. I decide, of course I decide, as you can tell by my shape, too often.

There are only two of us in the home now, so it makes more and more sense to go out more and more. But I decide my wife needs to be taken out. My wife needs to, not I, not I at all, but I need to get the wife out and treat her to dinner.

Well, she's quite happy with that. So, okay, you'd like to go out to dinner? Yes, where would you like to go? Wherever you like. Now, tell me where you would like.

I'd like to go where you like. Well, I want to go where you like. And there it goes back to whatever you want.

No, whatever you want. And before you want it, you know it, you're going to end up in an argument. I will not go out at all.

But that would be foolish with it now. That would be cutting off your nose to spite your face. But if that's the basis of your problem, your only problem is each wanting to defer to the other.

Just make sure it doesn't become an excuse for no decision making, but where you can both get together and honestly seek the well-being of the other. Let me get back to something I've said before. Husbands, if you're treating your wife right, she should know that in the eyes of one man, you, she is the queen of this world.

And there's nobody like her. If you're treating her right, she knows in your eyes she is the queen of this world and of your life. And wives, if you're treating your husband right, he will know that he's the king of this world and of your life.

This is the ultimate negation of selfishness. And this is essential to marriage. Now, it's easy to say all these things.

How do you put them into practice? Well, I leave the good wine to the end and I do it because I've spent 30 years here almost preaching this and so I'm now going to do it in mere summary fashion. All I've said

so far you could put down to rules and regulations. Well, yes, they are rules and regulations.

I believe in rules and regulations. I believe in a well-regulated life. The Puritans got their name because they believed in a regulated life.

The Methodists got their name because they believed in method in a regulated life. So, there's nothing new about this. But how do you get the power to fulfill the rules and regulations? And it is lived by the faith of the gospel.

In other words, let's get back to what I've said so many times in the pulpit and I've said in some of these classes. What do you believe? Not just what do you feel in your gut at a given time, but what do you believe? What do you believe about the gospel? What do you believe about the blood of Christ? What do you believe about the cross? What do you believe about your standing in Christ? What do you believe about the communion of saints in Christ? What does the gospel mean to you? Listen, unless I am convinced of the love of Christ for me, I'm incapable of life. Now, let that sink in.

Paul says, the love of Christ constraineth us. 2 Corinthians 5.14 Christ's love is what constrains me. It's what compels me.

It's what energizes me. It's what motivates me. That's why Christians should spend time day after day after day going through on their knees before God, letting it sink in.

The love of God to me. The love of Christ in giving himself for me. I am loved of God.

You know, that's the great heart warmer. I am beloved of God. United to Christ.

Now listen, in the light of that, in the light of that, what am I to do? Well, you say, but hold a second, I still feel. Well, blow the feeling. I know I feel the same.

Listen, we all feel. The idea here is, however, there is a way to overcome destructive feeling. And it is by constructive faith.

You either are going to make shipwreck of faith by giving in to gut feeling, which is just another way of talking about the flesh. Gut is flesh. So you're either going to make shipwreck of the faith by giving in to gut feeling, or you're going to deal with flesh through living out the faith of the gospel.

Christ loves us. Let that warmth suffuse our very beings. Galatians 2, I said, I don't know if it's in your notes, there's a misprint, or just mine.

Could be just mine, but it's Galatians 2.20, not Galatians 2.2. The life that I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. How do you do that? Hebrews 12. You run with patience.

You know, the word patience is a beautiful word. The Greek language, patience, is made up of two words. The word under, and the word stay, or remain, or abide.

The word patience means literally remaining under. Patience is not a quick release. Patience does not denote a sudden flight from trouble.

Patience is remaining under a burden with your eyes on Christ. It is an endurance through the faith of the gospel. So, he said, run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.

Looking unto Jesus. Consider him, verse 3, he endured such contradiction of sinners against himself. Consider him.

What we see of Christ will strengthen us for what we have to endure ourselves. Life is not all fun. Marriage is not always a picnic.

But I want to tell you, there is absolutely no reason, except our own unwillingness, there is absolutely no reason why our marriages should not be fulfilling the vision that God gave through Moses, where we enjoy days of heaven upon the earth. How does Jesus Christ and his church, how do they come together? How does God describe that coming together? In the great climax of the ages, he describes it as the marriage supper of the Lamb. Can there be any greater dignity attached by God to marriage than that? It is that picture of Christ and his church.

Men and women, young couples, get this very clear in your minds. There is no reason except our selfish sinfulness, our own complete unwillingness. There is no reason at all why we cannot, as Christians, enjoy each other in the fellowship of a living Christ.

This is Easter Day. This is Resurrection Day. It's a living Christ we serve, not a dead idol.

We can live in him in the fullness of a real power and joy. Will we? Or will we not? The answer will always come down to this. Is it going to be self, or is it going to be the Savior? Simple? In words, yes.

In practice, no. But Christ is conqueror. I trust that you'll have gained something out of these preliminary lessons.

There's a whole lot of detail that we have not got into. So this is just laying the foundation for whatever comes to follow. If Mr. Mercer comes, I trust he will, but I have no indication as yet as to what he's going to do.

If he comes, I know that he has dealt extensively with lessons on the Christian family, and they have been a great blessing to many. Perhaps he will take this up in the future if that would be the Lord's will. I'll leave you some things for further study and discussion.

Have a look at those points. Talk them through. Consider them deeply.

May the Lord indeed give us all homes that are worthy of his name and a blessing to us and to our family circles. Thank you for being here these weeks. I trust that you'll continue in the weeks to come and that the Lord will do you good.

But I'll be watching from the sidelines next Sunday in the will of the Lord and leaving you in better hands than mine. So let's have a word of prayer. Let's all seek the Lord's face.

Father in heaven, we do thank thee for these times together and we pray that thou wilt go from seat to seat and heart to heart. We pray, Lord, that thou wilt move in every heart and every home. We pray that thou wilt unite husbands and wives in the love of Christ.

We pray, our God, that thou wilt make us more than conquerors. We know that Satan wants to destroy our lives. He wants to destroy our homes.

But yet, Lord, we confess to thee that we are our own worst enemies, that neither the world nor the devil is the greatest foe, however great they are, that we must conquer self. And we pray that thou wilt give us victory in the Lord Jesus Christ. Bless the homes, bless the husbands, bless the wives, and, Lord, grant that the children will be blessed indeed with fathers and mothers who are living for Jesus in the fullness of the Holy Spirit of God.

Hear our prayer. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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