

IN LOVE FOR LIFE



BUILDING OR REBUILDING A GREAT MARRIAGE

MIKE MAZZALONGO

TEACHER'S GUIDE

bibleTalk^{TV}



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In Love for Life

Building or Rebuilding a Great Marriage

Mike Mazzalongo

This 4-part series examines the area of public worship. Each lesson looks not only at the practice of worship but also explores the purpose and personal experience that the Bible describes for those who worship in Spirit and Truth.



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**Teacher Guide created by
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Overall Teaching Strategy

It is recommended that teachers use a combination of informal lecture and guided discussion to present these lessons. There are discussion questions associated with each lesson that teachers may use and/or supplement their own questions. A student note guide is also provided for each lesson.

It is recommended that teachers have students view the associated video or read the text for the lesson. This helps students come to the class ready to discuss the lesson and to formulate questions of their own. Teachers should begin the class with a review of key points from the video/text before starting the discussion.

Begin each lesson with appropriate introductory statements that help students focus on the lesson. Teachers should also provide a brief summary of the previous lesson and an overview of key points of the new lesson. This helps students see the ongoing narrative of scripture.

Conclude the lesson by summarizing, or having students summarize the information from their notes. It is also helpful to ask questions from the lesson to determine that students grasp the concepts. Asking questions in this manner serves as an assessment to ensure objectives are met.

Challenge students with a call to action to apply this information to their lives to help them grow spiritually and help others to do so as well. This can be accomplished by asking questions of students as to how this information relates to their spiritual development at this time and moving forward.

For more information on teaching adults, please visit:
<https://bibletalk.tv/101/teaching>

Lesson #1 - The Love Connection

Teaching Strategy

The focus of this lesson is an overview of the idea of love. Of special note is how this has influenced our concept of marriage. A thread that runs through this lesson is God's plan for marriage as a stable, loving, happy, and permanent relationship between one man and one woman.

Student Learning Outcomes

- **Know:** Understand God's plan for marriage.
- **Feel:** Commit to following God's plan for marriage.
- **Do:** Apply the concepts for building a lasting and loving marriage relationship.

Support

- Series – Lesson Title; Mike Mazzalongo, In Love for Life
- Video/Text – Lesson 1 – The Love Connection
- Student Note Guide for Lesson 1

Body of the Lesson

- 1.0 - The Romantic Myth
- 2.0 - Romance vs. Love
 - 2.1 - Romance
 - 2.2 - Love
- 3.0 - Building on love
- 4.0 - Application

Discussion Questions

Below are suggested questions to use during the guided discussion portion of the lesson. There are also suggested responses to questions to help students grasp the various concepts. These are provided to assist the discussion and are not considered as "right or wrong" responses.

1. Defend the following statement.

"If God created marriage to last a lifetime, then He has also given us the ability to love each other for that long as well."

Originally, when God created Adam and Eve, there was no sin and no death as consequence of sin.

In that relationship there was the imbedded commitment to each other as mates. This commitment was to last for eternity as was their lives. Once sin entered the world there was injected into this perfect world and life the consequence of death. However, God did not remove the characteristics from Adam and Eve that made them in God's image. He perhaps even strengthened them through their co-dependency, compatibility, and responsibility to each other (Genesis 24-25).

There are many scriptures addressing the marriage relationship, but perhaps the best example of commitment and responsibility to each other within the marriage relationship is found in Ephesians 5:22-33. In this passage we see the husband and wife share roles and commitments to each other and their family. In binding ourselves to one another in marriage and committing ourselves to faithfulness to God, we fulfill His will for each partner in marriage.

2. How does God's plan for a lifelong loving marriage relate to Paul's words in I Corinthians 10:13?

No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. (ESV)

Although in the context of this verse Paul is talking about idolatry, the principle behind it can apply to our marriage relationship as well. Sexual sin is a major temptation used by Satan since the early days of our existence. It is listed in various scriptures as sinful. God's plan for one man, one woman in a permanent, committed, and loving relationship is a significant way to avoid sexual sin. The husband and wife are focused on meeting each other's physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual needs.

3. Defend the following statement.

"Marriages that work are the ones that base their relationship on love, not compatibility or romance."

Compatibility and romance are important in a relationship. Compatibility does not mean we are ideally suited or in full agreement with each other. It does mean, however, that there is a level of suitability. Romance helps keep love and attraction alive. However, romance is an ideal that few attain or sustain.

Love is lasting when it is based on God's view of caring for and committing to ensuring that our spouse's needs are met. We, as Christians, know this as the "agape" form of love. It is the same love that God shows for us and demands of us. It is sacrificial in nature, best seen in Jesus' sacrifice for sinners. This type of love seeks the wellbeing of another, even to one's own hurt or disadvantage.

4. Discuss the following limitations of romance as a basis for a successful relationship.

Romance produces the wrong expectations – Many seek Mr. or Ms. Right based on an ideal seen in modern culture. The reality, however, is that there is no perfect Mr. or Ms. Right because we all have faults, weaknesses and sinful natures.

Romance emphasizes the wrong things – Romance looks for the spark to ignite the relationship and may cause one to overlook the lasting characteristics such as spiritual strength, emotional stability, and commitment. Many of the sparks quickly burn out in much the same way as seed sown in shallow soil (It is recognized that the Parable of the Sower – Matthew 13:1-9 is not focused on the marriage relationship. However, the illustration can be seen in a lasting marriage relationship.)

Romance does not take advice – Someone fully enamored with another may overlook glaring faults and character flaws and may reject counseling and advice. Instead, they give in to their strong emotions over reality.

Romance demands perfection – As stated above, Romance looks for the ideal and overlooks what is sustained. Romance demands an unsustainable level of novelty and excitement.

5. Explain the two things necessary to make a marriage work.

1. A commitment to consider another's welfare equal to one's own – This concept of commitment is at the core of the strongest form of human love – agape love. We promise to be faithful in all ways to each other and do whatever is necessary to fulfill that promise.

2. Self-discipline – Self-discipline enables us to sustain our commitment. Self-discipline helps us overcome our selfishness. Self-discipline is also known as self-control and is essential for our spiritual growth (Galatians 5:22-24). This is relevant to our relationship as we encourage and support each other in our life together and our faithfulness to God.

6. Complete the following statement from the text.

“If love is in place, it is a joy to add the other elements. This is what growth in marriage is all about.”

(**Note:** The underlined words are the one to provide to complete the statement.)

7. How does Philippians 2:5-7 serve as a model for a loving marriage relationship that lasts a lifetime?

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. (ESV)

The love Christ has for the church is seen in His willingness to give His life for it. In a similar way, we consider our spouse's welfare equal to or above our own. Christ emptied Himself for His church. We empty (give) ourselves completely to our spouse. We have specific roles in marriage, however, the primary function of each role is to serve each other in love.

Lesson #2 - The Currency of Love

Teaching Strategy

The focus of this lesson is on various communication methods and how they improve marriage. A special focus is on how to improve our communication and how an improved communication in marriage leads to an improved relationship with God.

Student Learning Outcomes

- **Know:** Understand God’s plan for marriage.
- **Feel:** Commit to following God’s plan for marriage.
- **Do:** Apply the concepts for building a lasting and loving marriage relationship.

Support

- Series – Lesson Title; Mike Mazzalongo, In Love for Life
- Video/Text – Lesson 2 – The Currency of Love
- Student Note Guide for Lesson 2

Body of the Lesson

- 1.0 - Review
- 2.0 - Communication as the currency of love
- 2.1 - Knowledge through communication
- 2.2 - Productive communication
- 3.0 - Application

Discussion Questions

Below are suggested questions to use during the guided discussion portion of the lesson. There are also suggested responses to questions to help students grasp the various concepts. These are provided to assist the discussion and are not considered as “right or wrong” responses.

1. What kind of love is necessary for a marriage to last a lifetime?

Desired response: A love where each partner has a disciplined commitment to seek the wellbeing equal to or greater than themselves. This is the nature of the love God has for us and asks of us as His faithful followers.

2. In what way is communication the currency of love?

Currency is defined as a medium of exchange (www.dictionary.com). We generally apply this to money by which we obtain goods and services to satisfy our wants and needs. In a similar way, we communicate our wants and needs with people in our various relationships, especially, however, in our marriage relationship.

Currency is only valuable if it is exchanged. The same is true of communication as a currency in marriage. We must exchange it and the more we exchange, the better its application.

3. Complete the following statement from the text and provide reasons why it is true.

(Note: The underlined words are the one to provide to complete the statement.)

“Marriages are held together by love and love
is built through communication.”

We express our love through communication. This is done verbally, non-verbally, and through our actions. If we do not communicate regularly and effectively then love will not grow and will instead decrease over time.

4. Reword Proverbs 27:15 in your own words.

There will be various responses to this. A suggested response is: "As unpleasant as arguing and rebuke are, these are better than no communication at all. No communication is like no love."

5. What are some ways we communicate love beyond the important statement of, "I love you"?

The text provides five ways: words, gifts, actions/service, time, and physical affection. Encourage participants to share specific examples of each and how these make them feel.

6. What are some basic elements of productive communication?

Be totally honest (Ephesians 4:15). Honesty, as applied to communication, means to be open with our spouse about our needs and wants, and how things affect us. We must recognize each other's different needs and openly communicate about them with each other. Note: Refer to the Hierarchy of Needs chart in the text.)

We cannot assume our spouse will understand fully our communication if we are ambiguous with our words or other expressions. What we say and do must be clear and consistent. This is obtained through providing feedback to each other about what was communicated.

Communication must be complete. We must tell the truth, express it clearly, and tell it all. Note: We are communicating to express our love, not to criticize or tear down.

7. How can you use this lesson to grow spiritually and help others come into a relationship with Jesus?

Communication is one of the strongest tools we have in building our relationship with our spouse. More importantly, it is necessary that we communicate regularly and honestly with God. As part of our communication with God, we should often bring our spouse and marriage before Him in prayer as well. When we do this, we grow spiritually and help each other grow spiritually.

Remember, marriage is a gift from God. If you have not done so, or even if you have done so, take a few minutes and pray for your spouse and to thank God for the gift of marriage.

Teacher Note: Consider ending this class with a special prayer for the marriages of students in your class.

Lesson #3 - Cords of Love

Teaching Strategy

The focus of this lesson is how we can sustain the relationship we have with our spouse through the "Cords of Love." Of special note is the five cords mentioned that continue to bind us together. This lesson is based on the Book of Ruth.

Student Learning Outcomes

- **Know:** Understand God's plan for marriage.
- **Feel:** Commit to following God's plan for marriage.
- **Do:** Apply the concepts for building a lasting and loving marriage relationship.

Support

- Series – Lesson Title; Mike Mazzalongo, In Love for Life
- Video/Text – Lesson 3 – Cords of Love
- Student Note Guide for Lesson 3

Body of the Lesson

- 1.0 - Review of previous concepts
- 2.0 - The cords of love
 - 2.1 - Kindness
 - 2.2 - Loyalty
 - 2.3 - Hard work
 - 2.4 - Patience
 - 2.5 - Faith in God
- 3.0 - Application

Discussion Questions

Below are suggested questions to use during the guided discussion portion of the lesson. There are also suggested responses to questions to help students grasp the various concepts. These are provided to assist the discussion and are not considered as "right or wrong" responses.

1. Defend the following statement: (See Ecclesiastes 49:12)

“The more cords we have the greater their strength in binding us together.”

As Solomon states, three cords are stronger than a single cord. When we have cords in our relationship that are interwoven, they interact together to offer a greater level of strength. The more cords the stronger the bond. Consider how cables of wire are woven together to hold even the largest and heaviest of structures.

2. How is the cord of Kindness expressed in Ruth 1:1-15 and how does this relate to our marriage?

Naomi recognized that her daughters needed to have a full life rather than to be bound by the custom of remaining widowed and caring for her. She was willing to sacrifice her needs to provide for theirs. Kindness towards each other is one of the strands in the cord that holds us together in marriage. It is seen in our desire to put the needs of our spouse before our own needs. It is seen in how we express ourself to each other by kind words and deeds. Don't forget, kindness is also one of Fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).

3. How is the cord of loyalty expressed in Ruth 1:16-22 and how does this relate to our marriage?

Ruth rejected Naomi's sacrifice choosing instead to remain and care for her widowed mother-in-law. She recognized her responsibility of caring for Naomi above fulfilling her own needs and wants. Note that through her actions, she was eventually able to fulfill both Naomi's needs as well as her own.

We make a total and permanent covenant (commitment) to our spouse and must honor all aspects of that. In addition to this, we remain loyal to our spouse no matter the circumstances or challenges of life.

4. How is the bond of hard work expressed in Ruth 2:1-23 and how does this relate to our marriage?

Ruth worked hard, both physically and emotionally, to provide for herself and Naomi. In addition to the ministrations she provided to Naomi, she worked physically as a hired hand. We have to work hard, making the effort to build and sustain our relationship.

We have to be willing to pay the price to care for and provide for one another. This is beyond the physical element of earning a living. All too often, this becomes the primary focus at the expense of emotional and spiritual elements. The concept of hard work extends to every part of our relationship.

5. How is the cord of patience expressed in Ruth 3:1-4; 12, and how does this relate to our marriage?

Ruth was told to wait patiently for the opportunity to make herself known to Boaz.

Building a successful and happy marriage requires time. We must work at it consistently and patiently. Remember, we are building a lifetime together. This helps sustain our relationship through difficult times as we look beyond the now and into the future. Impatience leads to mistakes. Patience helps us avoid rash and poor decisions. Patience also builds experience upon which we can draw wisdom.

6. How is the cord of faith in God expressed in Ruth 4:13-22 and how does this relate to our marriage?

Ruth was responding to Naomi's needs out of her love for her. There is no indication it was through a faith in God, although there was a deep spiritual element to that relationship (Ruth 1:16-18).

As history unfolded, we see God's hand guiding her life to fulfill His purpose (See Romans 8:28). As a result, her faith was rewarded. Not only was God's plan fulfilled through her, but she, Naomi, and Boaz were all blessed.

7. How does this lesson help us grow spiritually and help others grow in their relationship with God?

Even though we know that eventually our marriage will end due to some level of separation (divorce or death), we commit to one another and express our faith and devotion to God by following His plan for our marriage. For those faithful to God, they commit to His plan for life and marriage and to one another for life.

This is not only an expression of love for our spouse, but more importantly, our love for God. Because of this, our love for each other transcends this life into life eternal.

It can be convincingly argued that developing and sustaining our faith in God together is the greatest way to express our love for each other.

The cords of love keep our relationship alive and growing.

When others see this, especially our growing faith, they are encouraged by our example. This is especially true in our family but extends to those with whom we come into contact.

Teacher Note: Consider having the class sing the song, "Bind us Together"

Lesson #4 - Holy Sex: Part 1

Teaching Strategy

The focus of this lesson is to examine God's original purpose for sexual union. Of special note is how God's plan was designed for marriage. There is further examination on the spiritual nature of sex and how this leads to full satisfaction within the marriage relationship.

Student Learning Outcomes

- **Know:** Understand God's plan for marriage.
- **Feel:** Commit to following God's plan for marriage.
- **Do:** Apply the concepts for building a lasting and loving marriage relationship.

Support

- Series – Lesson Title; Mike Mazzalongo, In Love for Life
- Video/Text – Lesson 4 – Holy Sex - Part 1
- Student Note Guide for Lesson

Body of the Lesson

- 1.0 - Sex and the Mind of God
- 1.1 - Sex as holy
- 1.2 - The deeper meaning of sex
- 2.0 - Application

Discussion Questions

Below are suggested questions to use during the guided discussion portion of the lesson. There are also suggested responses to questions to help students grasp the various concepts. These are provided to assist the discussion and are not considered as “right or wrong” responses.

1. Summarize worldly attitudes about the role and meaning of sex over the past 1,000 years.

See text for more information.

- Sex was seen as a necessary evil necessary for procreation (Genesis 1:22)
- Over time, the pleasure of sex was seen as God-given and blessed by Him in marriage.
- A modern view is that since God created sex, we should use every tool and technology to embrace it and maximize its pleasure.
- Current thinking is summarized by the expressions, "meta-sex" meaning beyond the usual experience of sex.

2. Defend the following statement:

“Sex is also a way to experience oneness with God.”

Sex was created by God for the purpose of procreation. It was also created to provide completeness and unity with our spouse. It fulfills God's design for marriage between a man and a woman. When we experience the sexual relationship as God designed it, we are further expressing faithfulness to His plan and will.

3. Summarize three reasons why sex is holy. (See text for greater detail)

- It was created by God before sin entered the world and corrupted it.
(Genesis 2:24-25)
- It was designed by God to be one of His special experiences. It has a spiritual component that man-made actions do not have. - It is set apart for a specific purpose (To be made holy means to set apart therefore, sex is considered holy).
- To become one flesh is to experience the holy oneness designed by God
(Genesis 1:24)
 - Sex was designed by God as a unique experience in marriage, thus any other practice is not acceptable to God.
 - Used to represent the relationship between Christ and His Church (Ephesians 5:31-32) Just as God created many different symbols and ceremonies to show man His work with Christ, sex represents the intimate and exclusive relationship between Christ and His Church.
 - Procreation (Genesis 1:28) Conceiving children is a direct result of the experience of sex within a marriage. Other ways of procreation do not reflect God's original design.
 - For worship (I Thessalonians 5:18) The oneness experienced through God's design for sex can lead to a heartfelt sense of gratitude and praise for God for this wonderful gift.

4. How does the combination of Adam and Eve reflect the true image of God?

- Oneness (unity) is the image of God (God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit).
- Sex represents oneness in marriage.
- Sex, therefore, (oneness in marriage) represents the image of oneness of God.

God created Adam and Eve to become one (2 in 1) just as God is 3 in 1.
The combination of oneness by Adam and Eve mirrors God's oneness.

5. Complete the following statements found in the text:

Note: The underlined words are the one to provide to complete the statement.

God designed human sexuality in marriage to create oneness.

Sex in marriage is God given.

A complete person is one who is complete in Christ. (Colossians 1:28).

6. How can you use this lesson to grow spiritually and help others come into a relationship with Jesus?

We should understand that God gives good gifts (Matthew 7:11). The sexual relationship between a husband and wife represents just one such gift. We must practice it as God desires, thus expressing obedience and faithfulness to Him. Further, in doing so, we grow spiritually as we praise and honor Him through our sexual lives within marriage.

Lesson #5 - Holy Sex: Part 2

Teaching Strategy

The focus of this lesson is on a case study of a couple dealing with sexual issues. Of special note is how to apply the principles from Part 1 to the situation here. All of this is within the scope of God's plan for a healthy, loving, and lasting relationship between a husband and wife and His model for the family.

Student Learning Outcomes

- **Know:** Understand God's plan for marriage.
- **Feel:** Commit to following God's plan for marriage.
- **Do:** Apply the concepts for building a lasting and loving marriage relationship.

Support

- Series – Lesson Title; Mike Mazzalongo, In Love for Life
- Video/Text – Lesson 5 – Holy Sex – Part 2
- Student Note Guide for Lesson

Body of the Lesson

- 1.0 - Review of previous principles
- 2.0 - Case study analysis
 - 2.1 - Review of case
 - 2.2 - Oneness in sex
- 3.0 - Application

Discussion Questions

Below are suggested questions to use during the guided discussion portion of the lesson. There are also suggested responses to questions to help students grasp the various concepts. These are provided to assist the discussion and are not considered as “right or wrong” responses.

1. Review the key points from Holy Sex Part 1

- Sex was created by God before sin entered the world (Genesis 2:24-25).
- Sex was designed by God with a spiritual component that man-made actions do not have.
- Sex is set apart for a special purpose.

2. Case study analysis. Summarize the situation presented in the case study of Kevin and Brenda.

Views on this will vary depending on perception. Teachers must be familiar with the case and form their own perception of the situation. However, teachers should refrain from putting forth their perception as the only option.

Both Kevin and Brenda are reluctant to share their feelings. Brenda feels Kevin equates affection or intimate moments with sexual activity. She is turned away by his continued assertiveness.

She feels that sex was for unification or oneness. She and Kevin do not connect sexually because their focus and what they gain individually from the sexual act is different.

What recommendations would you suggest for this couple?

Review the key principles of communication (see chapter 2, "The Currency of Love").

Both Brenda and Kevin must communicate to each other their perceptions, needs, and desires for their relationship. They must be totally honest, recognize the different hierarchy of needs for men and women, and they must be clear, and complete in their feedback.

In this case study, they are seeking a third party to help them navigate their situation. This is an appropriate effort if the third party is qualified to help them understand and deal with intimate issues in marriage.

3. Defend the following statements:

"When we misuse human sexuality in any way, it's power turns against us."

God created sex in the context of the marriage relationship to achieve oneness. To use human sexuality in other ways or contexts goes against God's plan and thus, is sin. Furthermore, without the marriage context, practicing human sexuality often destroys oneness and can be physically and spiritually harmful.

"When pursued for its own pleasure, sexual experience will always follow the law of diminishing return."

Generally, the first time for anything is noteworthy. This is especially true with the first climax of the sexual act. It is natural, that if that is the goal of the sexual action, then it will naturally diminish. However, if one combines both the spiritual and physical aspects of the sexual experience, it will grow in satisfaction rather than diminish. This is true with anything we view from the perspective of our relationship with God.

4. Consider Paul's statement in I Corinthians 7:3-5. How is the use of "duty" related to the marriage relationship?

We owe to our spouse the fulfillment of their needs in the area of human sexuality. This is a two-way relationship. We are, in essence, owned by our spouse in every way. If we see the relationship in this way, we then become indebted to the other.

This is not a selfish view. It is the antithesis of selfishness when we view our role as meeting the needs of the other.

5. How can you use this lesson to grow spiritually and help others come into a relationship with Jesus?

Always keep in mind that God created us and gifted us in ways we may not realize. One gift is the achievement of pleasure through a sexual relationship with our spouse. This is a giving relationship in the same way that our relationship with God is a giving relationship. God gives us love, grace, forgiveness, and life. We give faithfulness and love in return. The marriage relationship mirrors our relationship with God in many ways. When this happens, we grow spiritually and in sexual intimacy.

Lesson #6 - The Money Trap

Teaching Strategy

The focus of this lesson is on the impact poor money management places on a relationship. Of special note is a list of suggestions on addressing financial issues from a Christian perspective. It is recommended that this lesson be divided into two presentations. Part 1 is an understanding of the money trap itself. Part 2 covers suggested solutions for those caught up in the money trap.

Student Learning Outcomes

- **Know:** Understand God's plan for marriage.
- **Feel:** Commit to following God's plan for marriage.
- **Do:** Apply the concepts for building a lasting and loving marriage relationship.

Support

- Series – Lesson Title; Mike Mazzalongo, In Love for Life
- Video/Text – Lesson 6 – The Money Trap
- Student Note Guide for Lesson 6

Body of the Lesson

- 1.0 - Part 1 – The money trap
 - 1.1 - Reasons finances are an issue
 - 1.2 - The money trap and how it works
 - 1.2.1 - External forces
 - 1.2.2 - Internal forces
 - 1.2.3 - The trap
- 2.0 - Part 2 - Solutions
 - 2.1 - Bad solutions
 - 2.2 - Good solutions
- 3.0 - Application

Discussion Questions

Below are suggested questions to use during the guided discussion portion of the lesson. There are also suggested responses to questions to help students grasp the various concepts. These are provided to assist the discussion and are not considered as “right or wrong” responses.

PART 1 – THE MONEY TRAP

1. Why do financial issues often lead to marital conflict?

See text for detail.

Different ideas and training about money; finances not discussed adequately before marriage; different economic backgrounds.

Two main factors: earning power and chosen lifestyle.

Note also that every plan is only as good as its ability to deal with challenges to the plan. A family might have an effective budget and financial plan but when the events of life place challenges on it, adjustments and other changes may have to occur.

2. Explain how the following forces effect our concepts of what our lifestyles should be.

External forces

Three basic external forces are explained in the text:

- How our parents lived, their attitudes, and what we are, or are not taught about finances.
- The availability of easy credit.
- The abundance of and variety of merchandisers and merchandise. Added to this is the proliferation of internet-based merchandisers.

Internal forces – These are internal to the individual. They include greed, jealousy, pride, laziness, lack of self-control, selfishness. Added to this is one's view towards materialism and one's desire to have a chosen lifestyle now through credit rather than build it by wise use of finances already gained.

3. Define the expression “money trap” in your own words.

Answers will vary but look for responses related to:

- The misuse of finances.
- Accessibility of finances that lead to excessive materialism.
- The ease of credit leading to debt.

4. Summarize the symptoms of financial pressure and how these can negatively impact a marriage.

Details are contained in the text.

If these are not avoided or dealt with, they cause us to potentially shift our focus away from building a loving relationship and turn into resentment for our partner or blaming each other for the problems at hand. Furthermore, financial stress often leads to challenges to our faith and service to God.

PART 2 - SOLUTIONS

5. Differentiate between bad solutions and good solutions when it comes to the money trap.

Bad solutions:

- **The ostrich solution** – refusal to admit the problem or simply ignoring financial problems. As a result, the problem gets worse.
- **The chicken solution** – This solution seeks an immediate escape usually resulting in more debt and can be fatalistic.
- **The parakeet solution** – The same mistakes are repeated (lots of small debts consolidated into one big debt, poor use of credit).
- **The horse solution** – Just work harder to resolve the debt without removing the destructive practices.
- **The spider solution** – Removing one's mate (divorce). It doesn't eliminate the problem and likely creates more problems.

Good solutions:

- Establish a lifestyle based on current earning power (aka: living within one's means). See Proverbs 22:7.
- Establish priorities for how the money you have is used. Implement the "B" word – budget!

6. Why is it effective to give first to God?

When we offer God the first portion of our earnings, He blesses the entire amount we earn. In doing this, we show our faith in God. We accept that He is our provider and will take care of us.

7. Defend the following statement: "Credit limits are not financial protection. God is financial protection."

First, financial limits serve as the spring that trips the money trap. They lure the foolish and unaware into the trap that is difficult at best to escape from. Secondly, God provides true riches, joy, and comfort in life, which are not found in material or worldly possessions (See Psalms 37:25; Matthew 6:19-34).

8. How does the way we use our finances and other physical blessing help us grow spiritually?

When we fall prey to the money trap, we are in danger of losing our primary focus of loving and serving God. We allow the things of this world (materialism) to come between us and God.

On the other hand, when we continue to trust God and use a portion of our physical blessings for His glory, He multiplies what we have and guides us into its most productive use.

We do this two ways: (1) Literally and spiritually, giving God the first (and best) portion of everything. This means we dedicate it to His service. (2) Trust God to help us manage all that God has given us.

Lesson #7 - Why Christians Divorce

Teaching Strategy

The focus of this lesson is on some reasons why Christians divorce. Of special note is God's view of divorce, its spiritual impact, and how to avoid this situation.

Student Learning Outcomes

- **Know:** Understand God's plan for marriage.
- **Feel:** Commit to following God's plan for marriage.
- **Do:** Apply the concepts for building a lasting and loving marriage relationship.

Support

- Series – Lesson Title; Mike Mazzalongo, In Love for Life
- Video/Text – Lesson 7 – Why Christians Divorce
- Student Note Guide for Lesson 7

Body of the Lesson

1.0 - Divorce

1.1 - Understanding what divorce is

1.1 - God's view of divorce

2.0 - Keeping the bond strong

3.0 - Application

Discussion Questions

Below are suggested questions to use during the guided discussion portion of the lesson.

There are also suggested responses to questions to help students grasp the various concepts.

These are provided to assist the discussion and are not considered as “right or wrong” responses.

1. Restate in your own words what Matthew 19:5-6 states and explain its intended meaning.

This verse clearly teaches that in marriage, men and women leave their existing families to establish a new family unit consisting of a husband and wife joined together for life in marriage. This is God's plan and is seen by Him as a permanent relationship.

2. What comes to mind when you hear the word, "divorce"?

Look for responses that indicate failure of some kind. Failure in:

- Upholding the marriage covenant and God's plan.
- Upholding faithfulness to each other in the marriage.
- Sin at some level of both or one of the members of the marriage.

3. At what point does divorce occur and why?

Divorce may be declared officially by some sort of legal decree, but the divorce begins long before when the couple or individual in the relationship begins to disengage or loosen the ties that bind them to their marital partner.

4. How is losing one's salvation like divorcing your spouse?

When we obey God, we obey our Lord's will to establish a relationship with Him. This process begins with our belief that Jesus is the Divine son of God which is subsequently expressed through repentance for sin and baptism (immersion in water). The Holy Spirit then adds us to the church, often described as the bride of Christ" (II Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:21-27; Revelation 19:7-8; Matthew 25:1-13; Revelation 21:1-2).

This relationship remains if we are faithful to our covenant with God. Note: God does not break the covenant, we do. We break this covenant as we allow something to interfere with our relationship with God and draw us away from exclusive commitment to God (See also Exodus 20:3). This lack of faithfulness is often a gradual process.

As noted in the text, the divorce of a couple usually begins long before the actual legal decree. Sometimes this occurs gradually. As also noted, there are times when something or someone is allowed to come between the couple causing them to violate their exclusive covenant to each other.

5. What does God think about divorce?

The bond between a man and woman was the first thing God established after he created woman (Genesis 2:18-25). This forms the foundation for Malachi 2:16 where God states that He hates divorce.

- Matthew 19:6 states that God forbids divorce.
- Hebrews 13:4 – Sexual activity is reserved for the marriage relationship. God considers sexual activity outside of marriage as sin and subject to God's judgment.
- Matthew 19:9 – God allows for divorce in the situation of adultery. Note: He allows for it but does not command it.
- I Corinthians 7:15 – God allows for divorce in the situation of abandonment but does not command it. Remember that physical abandonment begins with emotional abandonment.

Matthew 19:9 and I Corinthians 7:15 are to protect the innocent party from bearing guilt in the situation.

6. Discuss the following proactive ways to help keep the marriage bond strong.

- **Complete honesty** – There must be effective communication between the husband and wife. They must not only provide words, but also consistent behavior and feedback. Being united or bound in marriage means openness and honesty between both parties.
- **Complete fidelity** – This means we keep ourselves exclusively for each other. We reserve the best of ourselves for our spouses. • **Complete submission to Jesus** – This is true for both husband and wife. Being united in faithfulness to Jesus supports being faithful to each other (See Proverbs 31:30; 12:4; Joshua 24:15; Ephesians 5:25)
- **Develop spiritual intimacy** – Physical intimacy is a significant part of marriage. Spiritual intimacy is even more significant. It is an extension of our spiritual intimacy with God. There are 3 components of spiritual intimacy for a couple:
 - Growing in knowledge of each other
 - Growing in trust in one another
 - Praying with and for one another

We grow in knowledge and trust by spending time together. Sometimes this is scheduled time, other times it is just being together to experience a shared period. As we grow together spiritually, we should also share prayer time together. We pray with and for each other. We share with one another the things we wish to be brought before God. When we do this, we continue to grow in knowledge and trust for one another. It is a positive cycle of spiritual togetherness mirroring what God intends for a successful and sustained marriage relationship.

Suggested activity: If possible, have the couples pair off in an area away from other couples and have them spend some time in quiet prayer with each other. As an alternative, have the couples commit to spending time in prayer together in their homes. Encourage couples to report back later how this activity helped them grow together spiritually.

7. How can you use this lesson to grow spiritually and help others come into a relationship with Jesus?

As faithful followers of Jesus, we commit to following His teachings. As such, we realize God hates divorce, so we commit to avoiding it in every way possible.

Lesson #8 - Marriage or Divorce

Teaching Strategy

The focus of this lesson is on the advantages and disadvantages of remaining married or divorcing. This lesson is not advocating divorce but rather resolving the issues and problems in a relationship that may lead to divorce. Successful marriages emphasize their focus on God's plan for successful marriages.

Student Learning Outcomes

- **Know:** Understand God's plan for marriage.
- **Feel:** Commit to following God's plan for marriage.
- **Do:** Apply the concepts for building a lasting and loving marriage relationship.

Support

- Series – Lesson Title; Mike Mazzalongo, In Love for Life
- Video/Text – Lesson 8 – Marriage or Divorce
- Student Note Guide for Lesson

Body of the Lesson

- 1.0 - Stages of a marriage
 - 1.1 - Romantic stage
 - 1.2 - Bargaining stage
 - 1.3 - Coercive stage
 - 1.4 - Desperation stage
 - 1.5 - Acceptance stage
- 2.0 - Marriage as an option
 - 2.1 - Consider the other option
 - 2.2 - God hates divorce
 - 2.3 - You made a covenant
- 3.0 - Exercise

Discussion Questions

Below are suggested questions to use during the guided discussion portion of the lesson. There are also suggested responses to questions to help students grasp the various concepts. These are provided to assist the discussion and are not considered as “right or wrong” responses.

1. Defend the statement that divorce begins long before the lawyers and courts are involved.

The intent of this activity is to review the concept of divorce as presented in the previous lesson.

Divorce is a process that begins as we allow something or someone to come between us and our spouse. It is like the idea that we separate ourselves from God as we allow something or someone to come between us and our relationship with Him. This is generally a gradual process also known as drifting. The symbolism is like that of an unanchored boat in a stream as it is carried away from the safety of the shore.

We must remain alert to ensure that we don't begin to drift away from our goal of making our marriage relationship our #1 priority. This is also a requirement in our relationship with God (I Peter 5:8).

2. Review the following scriptures related to divorce.

- **Matthew 19:6** – God sees marriage as exclusive and permanent.
- **Matthew 19:9** – Divorce involves sin at some level.
- **Malachi 2:16** – God hates divorce. It is against His plan. For this reason alone, there is sin involved at some level and at least in the life of one of the members of the marriage. It is understood that sometimes there is an innocent party.
- **Hebrews 13:4** – Marriage is sacred before God. To violate the covenant is sinful.
- **I Corinthians 7:15** – Another reason for divorce is abandonment. This further illustrates how divorce is not a single event, but a process.

3. Describe the stages of marriage as outlined in the text for this lesson (lesson 8).

- **Romantic stage** – An early stage where couples see their partner as ideal.
- **Bargaining stage** – Partners recognize imperfections in their spouse but are willing to give and take to keep the romance alive.
- **Coercive stage** – This stage is more assertive and actively seeks to change the other partner. This usually involves outside influences. Desperation stage – This stage involves a sense of trying anything (sometimes unreasonable things) to change the other.
- **Acceptance stage** – This stage involves realizing the romance stage may likely have involved unrealistic views, expectations, and is now an awareness of each other's shortcoming and limitations. An interesting phenomenon that happens here is that the "romance" stage often returns. Perhaps this may be because the focus shifts away from self and onto the other.

4. Discuss the following reasons why divorce is not an easy solution to a troubled marriage.

See list in chapter.

- Divorce creates new problems and situations
- Divorce hurts financially
- Divorce hurts emotionally
- Divorce hurts spiritually
- Divorce hurts socially

5. Discuss the following reasons why marriage is an option over divorce.

Consider the other (alternative) option. Divorce does not remove the pain, rather it changes the location of the pain. If possible, it is better to heal the pain rather than compounding or shifting it.

God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16). Sexual sin and divorce are condemned by God (Hebrews 13:4). Jesus condemns divorce (Matthew 19; Mark 10:11-13). It is a broken promise and causes sorrow, guilt, and sadness even to the next generation.

The married couple has made a covenant. As previously mentioned, marriage is both a legal and moral covenant (promise) that is binding on both parties. This covenant is what truly holds us together. Commitment to the covenant is foundational to remaining married.

6. Conduct the exercise from the chapter.

Have each member write a covenant to their spouse then sign and exchange it with each other. Explain that the "signing" of a covenant is a form of contract between them.

If one is willing, ask how it makes them feel about their spouse. Look for expressions of commitment and recommitment to one another.

Lesson #9 - Remarriage and Renewal

Teaching Strategy

The focus of this lesson is biblical advice for those who remarry whether from the death of a spouse or loss through divorce. Of special note is how to reestablish and grow in a relationship according to God's plan.

Student Learning Outcomes

- **Know:** Understand God's plan for marriage.
- **Feel:** Commit to following God's plan for marriage.
- **Do:** Apply the concepts for building a lasting and loving marriage relationship.

Support

- Series – Lesson Title; Mike Mazzalongo, In Love for Life
- Video/Text – Lesson 9 – Remarriage and Renewal
- Student Note Guide for Lesson 9

Body of the Lesson

1.0 - Considerations for subsequent marriages

1.1 - You are really married

1.2 - Your marriage is perfect through the cross

1.3 - Follow biblical advice

2.0 - Application

Discussion Questions

Below are suggested questions to use during the guided discussion portion of the lesson.

There are also suggested responses to questions to help students grasp the various concepts.

These are provided to assist the discussion and are not considered as “right or wrong” responses.

1. Discuss your understanding of I Corinthians 7:20.

There will be various insights provided for this verse. Direct learners to understand it in the overall context of Paul providing practical guidance on remaining married for a wide variety of Christians in the Corinthian Church. Many were coming out of pagan societies where multiple marriages, even polygamy was an accepted practice. Paul was seeking to encourage his readers to remain committed to God's plan for marriage (one man/one woman for life). Emphasize also that God is a God of peace and unity who exercise grace and love for all who seek Him.

2. Discuss the following concepts related to remarriage.

You really are married – Although the dissolving of the previous marriage through divorce involved sin for at least one party in the marriage, one who remarries is married in God's eyes. It is still the union of one man/one woman. When a Christian turns to God in repentance, He promises to forgive (I John 1:5-10). This repentance does not specify the current marriage must be dissolved, nor is it required anywhere else in scripture. The members of the marriage must commit to the covenant as with any marriage.

Your marriage is perfected through the cross – A non-Christian who marries is legally married to the person whether it is a first or subsequent marriage. However, one's soul is at risk because of adultery if the divorce was dissolved without cause.

A person who repents of their adultery is forgiven. God does not distinguish between which sin is forgiven or not. His grace forgives. It's not the fixing of the marriage that is required, but the fixing of the relationship with God.

Follow the Bible's advice (teaching) for a person who is remarried – A divorce is a failure, just as is all sin before God. Therefore, the requirement for forgiveness applies to the remarriage. We turn away from self and turn to Jesus for forgiveness. His blood covers our sins (I John 1:5-10). Further, the teachings from scripture to avoid sin also apply.

There are three elements involved with this (see text for detail).

Forget the past (This can also be stated as moving on from the past) – The past was a failure. When forgiven by God we must move on to serving as He wills.

Learn from the past – Repentance is a change of heart. We are aware of our failure and learn how this was against God's will. Don't let what caused the failure to become a part of the current marriage.

Be a witness for Christ – As with all elements of a Christian's life, we must base our marriage on biblical principles. When we do so we show God's love and grace and help draw others to Christ. Live a faithful and fruitful life as a Christian through the new marriage.

3. How can you use this lesson to grow spiritually and help others come into a relationship with Jesus?

In I Corinthians 7:17-24 Paul states to remain in whatever condition each was called. The context is referring to marriage. Further, he states in 1 Corinthians 7:15 that God has called us to peace.

True peace is found only in our relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Jesus came to save, encourage, and equip, not to announce judgement, punish, or criticize. He mirrors God's love and grace and encourages us to accept it. Not only is God a God of peace, but He is a God of renewal and regeneration. This is true in our spiritual relationship with Him and true in every other part of our lives, including our marriages.

As with all parts of life, we should dedicate our marriage (remarriage) to God asking for His guidance. When we do so, we show the world the grace and forgiveness of our loving God and Father. To Him be the glory!

Lesson #10 - Blended Families: Part 1

Teaching Strategy

The focus of this lesson is information blended families. Of special note is gaining an understanding of what blended families are and strategies for uniting two families. This is the first lesson of three.

Student Learning Outcomes

- **Know:** Understand God's plan for marriage.
- **Feel:** Commit to following God's plan for marriage.
- **Do:** Apply the concepts to building a lasting and loving marriage relationship.

Support

- Series – Lesson Title; Mike Mazzalongo, In Love for Life
- Video/Text – Lesson 10 – Blended Families Part 1
- Student Note Guide for Lesson 10

Body of the Lesson

- 1.0 - Laying the foundation
- 1.1 - Reasons why marriages fail
- 1.2 - Reasons second marriages fail
- 2.0 - Blending families
- 2.1 - Know your mate and children
- 2.2 - Understand your future children's needs
- 2.3 - Build a new relationship
- 2.4 - Include everyone in the family
- 3.0 - The Goal of unity
- 3.1 - Avoid the co-conductor system
- 3.2 - Giving up previous roles
- 3.3 - Establish ground rules
- 4.0 - Application

Discussion Questions

Below are suggested questions to use during the guided discussion portion of the lesson. There are also suggested responses to questions to help students grasp the various concepts. These are provided to assist the discussion and are not considered as “right or wrong” responses.

1. What comes to mind when you hear the term, "blended families"?

Answers will vary but look for concepts of separate families coming together for a single, new family caused by the remarriage of the parents. Other examples include extended family members taking on the responsibility of rearing children (grandparents, uncles and aunts, older siblings, etc.). Another example includes adding adopted children.

2. Discuss the following principles based on Philippians 3:13-14.

If there are members of the class that have experienced the blending of a family, encourage them to provide real life situations and how they handled them. Also be aware that there may be members who are in the process of blending a family and are seeking answers to a particular situation.

- **Knowing your mate and their children** – The dating situation for unmarried with children carries an entire set of challenges. Consideration must be given to the children in the situation. However, remember that you are establishing a permanent relationship with the person if you marry. Much care and attention must be given to this relationship.

- **Understand your future children's needs** – Children coming into the marriage bring many emotions that are magnified by having been part of a previous family. Doubts, fears, and other common emotions that are part of any child's development are now very real and apparent. Both prospective parents must be proactive and receptive to questions and concerns.
- **Build a new relationship** – This process takes time and patience, maybe even restarts. Every relationship is different. We cannot, nor should not assume that the new marriage will mirror the previous one. The stages of marriage presented in chapter 8 of this series are still part of the remarriage development.
- **Include everyone in the wedding** – The story is told of a man proposing to his perspective bride. She had a young daughter from a previous marriage. When he proposed to her, he also offered an "engagement ring" to the little girl. He wanted her and her mother to know that he included both of them in his new family.

Including all members of the new family helps set the foundation for family building and bonding. One should even include them in the planning, if possible.

3. Discuss the following concepts for developing unity in a blended family.

- **Avoid the co-conductor system** – Avoid separate customs and traditions, disciplining methods, etc. Better to develop new customs and traditions and agreed upon disciplinary roles. Paul's words from Ephesians 5:22-6:4 still apply in the blended family.
- **Give up or modify previous roles** – One may not give up entirely a previous role, but there certainly will be modifications with the blended family. Consideration must be given to blending roles as well. Previously, the single parent had to shoulder all roles. Now there is a sharing and transferring that takes place. Consideration must be given to different perceptions and values of roles. To help achieve unity, this sharing must occur.
- **Establish ground rules** – This must be done prior to the wedding. This helps remove many potential friction and stress points in the new family. One key rule is shifting from "my" to "our" family.

4. How can you use this lesson to grow spiritually and help others come into a relationship with Jesus?

This is an opportunity to help others grow. The new family is bound by Paul's instructions for roles of fathers, mothers, husbands, wives, and children (Ephesians 5:22-33; 6:1-4 Colossians 3:18-21).
In doing so, we obey, honor, and glorify our Lord.

Lesson #11 - Blended Families: Part 2

Teaching Strategy

The focus of this lesson is on the day-to-day challenges of raising children in a blended family. Of special note is how to begin blending two families into one.

Student Learning Outcomes

- **Know:** Understand God's plan for marriage.
- **Feel:** Commit to following God's plan for marriage.
- **Do:** Apply the concepts for building a lasting and loving marriage relationship.

Support

- Series – Lesson Title; Mike Mazzalongo, In Love for Life
- Video/Text – Lesson 11 – Blending Families – Part 2
- Student Note Guide for Lesson 11

Body of the Lesson

- 1.0 - Review of keys to success for subsequent and blended families
- 1.1 - Knowing your future mate and children
- 1.2 - Considerations for blending families
- 2.0 - Children's reactions
- 2.1 - Grieving children
- 2.2 - Developmental levels
- 3.0 - Life in two homes – parenting styles
- 4.0 - Helpful hints for weekend visits
- 5.0 - Application

Discussion Questions

Below are suggested questions to use during the guided discussion portion of the lesson. There are also suggested responses to questions to help students grasp the various concepts. These are provided to assist the discussion and are not considered as “right or wrong” responses.

1. Review the keys to successful subsequent marriages and blended families.

Review the content from the previous chapter to assist with this review.

- Know your future mate and children.
 - Pay attention to children's special needs.
 - Build a new relationship.
 - Include everyone in the wedding.

- Concerning blended families
 - Avoid co-conductor system.
 - Give up old roles.
 - Establish ground rules.

2. Defend the following statement:

"True unity in any family can only be achieved through Jesus Christ."

The Lord heals all wounds brought to Him. When the family is focused first on faithfulness, the Lord then works to bring true unity between family members and Himself. This further underscores the role of the father as the spiritual leader in the family (Ephesians 5). It is not his role alone but is ultimately his unique responsibility. Obviously, both the husband and wife have key duties in this. Their unity in Christ is the critical foundation for building unity in the family.

3. Discuss the impact on children from a family that falls apart.

Children go through a cycle much resembling the grieving process. This is for loss of parents and family times and lifestyles.

The process of grieving includes, denial where children have difficulty accepting the finality of divorce; anger when children realize the father isn't coming back or that this is a "new mom" or "new home"; bargaining where individuals try to manipulate or change events; depression; and finally, acceptance where there is the realization that the blended family is not the traditional or nuclear family and that there is a place for one in it.

4. Differentiate between the different needs of children in various age groups.

See text for details. Note that these are a generality and that all children are individuals and react in their own ways. We seek to reestablish stability and maintain opportunities for spiritual growth.

- 0 – 2 years – This age group needs a lot of physical contact and nurturing to reassure everything is OK despite changes.
- 3 – 5 years – Children in this age group are aware something is wrong (different) but can't process all the information. It helps to explain things frequently and to be patient with regressive behavior.
- 6 – 12 years – Children in this group feel responsible for the situation (It's my fault). Refrain from using children in this age as a sounding board. They need to be encouraged and reassured.
- 13 and up – Children in these years, experience a strong need for independence. They have to deal with different rules and acceptable standards and behaviors. This leads to confusion and discouragement. It is helpful for this age group to be part of a negotiation of standards that all can agree upon.

5. Describe the different parenting styles and their impact on children and how to avoid letting them create issues with blended families.

See text for details.

- **Star parent** – This parent assumes they are better, more responsible and make certain the child realizes it.
- **Glue parent** – This parent can't let go. They create, whether intentionally or not, anxiety in children by being over-protected or distrustful of the other parent.
- **Distant parent** – Wants little to nothing to do with the other parent. This creates communication difficulties and a sense of distrust.
- **Sometimes parent** – This parent is inconsistent with their time and relationship with the child. This can negatively impact the emotional health of the child.
- **Ruthless parent** – This parent is still fighting with the ex-spouse or new partner. This causes hurt and rejection among the children. It certainly causes distrust and increases the time for healing and moving on.
- **Parent parent** – Recognizes that even though the marriage is over, their role is not. They strive for a team approach with the ex-spouse and blended family. This is done from the perspective of love, development, and happiness of the children.

6. Complete each of the following statements from the text related to making visits with former spouses.

(Note: The underlined word(s) is the one to provide to complete the statement.)

- **Take the initiative:** Plan the visit, especially the first night.
- **Provide structure:** A visit is not a vacation; it is time to experience the life of the other parent and share a bond with them.
- **Be accepting:** You are offering more than hospitality; you are offering an equal place in your family for a limited time.
- **Provide home, not just a room:** Visiting children will accept the situation as well as the other family if they are given their own space in the home.
- **Give them permission to love:** Granting them permission to love enables children to mature emotionally and work out these issues in their lives.
- **Help smooth out the transitions:** Children tend to withdraw at departure in order to lessen the pain. Share your time first, give them space and welcome them happily.

7. How can you use this lesson to grow spiritually and help others come into a relationship with Jesus?

A significant characteristic of Jesus is unconditional love. Our Lord demonstrated unconditional love in much of His teachings as well as His life. We must grow in this grace as well. One of the ways we do so is to continue to demonstrate our love for our children. This helps provide stability in their lives and encourages them to continue to develop into healthy adults and followers of Jesus.

Lesson #12 - Blended Families: Part 3

Teaching Strategy

The focus of this lesson is on the challenges of being a stepparent. Of special note is how to meet the challenges in this new role.

Student Learning Outcomes

- **Know:** Understand God's plan for marriage.
- **Feel:** Commit to following God's plan for marriage.
- **Do:** Apply the concepts for building a lasting and loving marriage relationship.

Support

- Series – Lesson Title; Mike Mazzalongo, In Love for Life
- Video/Text – Lesson 12 – Blended Families Part 3
- Student Note Guide for Lesson 12

Body of the Lesson

- 1.0 - Stepping in as a stepparent
- 1.1 - Stepping in from the outside
- 1.2 - Stepping into a new role
- 1.3 - Stepping into new responsibilities
- 1.4 - Stepping into new relationships
- 2.0 - Application

Discussion Questions

Below are suggested questions to use during the guided discussion portion of the lesson. There are also suggested responses to questions to help students grasp the various concepts. These are provided to assist the discussion and are not considered as “right or wrong” responses.

1. Complete the following statement from the text regarding being a new stepparent.

Note: The underlined words are the one to provide to complete the statement.

"The one thing for new stepparents to remember is the original reason for being there in the first place, the love of the partner."

2. Complete the following statement from the text and offer ideas of how to help this happen.

"It is important to know about the past but also create new memories of the new family so they can be added to the old."

There are many ways this can happen. Ask for practical suggestions from the class. Encourage those with experience in this area to share their successes and challenges.

3. Discuss the key points of each scripture below and how they relate to the role of parents, both male and female.

- **John 3:16** – The gracious love of our Father and our Lord's willingness to give of self.
- **Romans 10:12** – Fairness; all are equal in God's family.
- **Luke 12:6-7** – Attentiveness – God is intimately aware of and concerned about what happens in our life.
- **Hebrews 12:5** – Discipline – God shows His love by teaching and guiding us in righteousness. We must remember His love for us and remain faithful to Him.

4. Discuss each of the following key points about our attitudes for family members.

- **Attitude towards marriage itself** – Parents must develop in themselves a positive and hopeful attitude about marriage and help instill these in their children as well. This must be centered on God's plan for marriage.
- **Attitude towards self-worth** – The setbacks and major adjustments of blended families impacts everyone's self-worth, especially in children. Stepparents must help children develop and maintain a positive view of themselves. A significant way to do this is through positive reinforcement of what the children do well and encouragement to improve in challenging areas.
- **Attitude towards life itself** – The loss of a parent often causes children to see life in terms of that significant event. This could cause a view that life is unfair, especially for them. Stepparents help turn defeats and fears into success through love and positive reinforcement.
- **Attitude towards God** – Whether a natural parent or stepparent, we have the charge from God to help our children develop spiritual maturity. Our example and teaching play an important part in this charge. Our attitude towards spiritual maturity directly impacts our children's attitude towards God.

5. Discuss the following steps to developing relationships in a blended family.

Step 1 – Accept the fact that you are a stepparent – Although there may be limits in many areas of a blended family, there are no limits on love and respect. Stepparents must accept limits on the past and work towards the future.

Step 2 – Educate yourself – Like many things, parenting is a learned skill. Much learning comes from day-to-day experiences and the advice of trusted others.

Step 3 – Do not assume – Especially do not assume that what worked in one family will carry over automatically into the blended family. There will be different needs, values, views, expectations, and other unique challenges.

Step 4 – Set objectives – Setting objectives helps establish a pathway to success and method of measurement.

Step 5 – Be flexible yet firm – We must be firm in our consistency of saying and doing, rules and expectations, and awareness of exceptions. This provides a sense of security in children.

Step 6 – Market yourself – "Selling" oneself includes communicating the desire to be acceptable by the children. This means you gain their trust by living up to their expectations. Show them the worth that you bring to them and the family.

Step 7 – Exercise forgiveness – Things are often said and done that will be hurtful so we must learn to forgive. These come from within the blended family and from without. Learn to forgive.

Step 8 – Learn to laugh – Enjoying moments and laughing together forms a bond. We can laugh at ourselves and press on.

6. How can you use this lesson to grow spiritually and help others come into a relationship with Jesus?

We depend on God's grace for our forgiveness and salvation. We also depend on God's grace to help us through difficult life situations. God has given us His will through scripture. We must take the teachings from scripture about self and families and put them into practice. Significant among these is to be spiritual leaders in our family. Paul gives specific information on this in his letter to Titus. He gives instructions to all elements of the family leadership.

Further, we recognize how God helps us deal with the disruptions and tragedies of life from losing a spouse, gaining a new family, and meeting the challenges we face. God is a God of peace, and He promises that peace to those who seek Him.

Lesson #13 - Keeping Your Spouse Happy

Teaching Strategy

The focus of this lesson is on achieving and maintaining happiness in a marriage. Emphasis is on practical ways for each partner in the marriage to keep each other happy.

Student Learning Outcomes

- **Know:** Understand God’s plan for marriage.
- **Feel:** Commit to following God’s plan for marriage.
- **Do:** Apply the concepts for building a lasting and loving marriage relationship.

Support

- Series – Lesson Title; Mike Mazzalongo, In Love for Life
- Video/Text – Lesson 13 – Keeping Your Spouse Happy
- Student Note Guide for Lesson 13

Body of the Lesson

1.0 - Happy husbands

2.0 - Happy wives

3.0 - Application

Discussion Questions

Below are suggested questions to use during the guided discussion portion of the lesson.

There are also suggested responses to questions to help students grasp the various concepts.

These are provided to assist the discussion and are not considered as “right or wrong” responses.

1. Discuss why it is important to keep your spouse happy.

Look for responses centering around how our spouse is the most important person in our lives. We have made a covenant to meet his or her physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. Meeting these needs forms a basis for a successful and enjoyable lifetime relationship.

Follow-up Question: Think of a time when your relationship was the happiest. What was the basis for this happiness?

2. Discuss the ways Peter instructs wives for keeping husband happy (I Peter 3:1-6).

- I Peter 3:1 – Assume a role that is pleasing to him. Wives are to be submissive to their husband. This is a role prescribed by God. The wife is honored by God when she fulfills her role according to God's will. If the husband lacks the characteristics to be an effective leader in the family, then she must help him grow in this area and not subvert his role.
- I Peter 3:2 – Develop attitudes that make him happy.
 - A chaste attitude – Sexually pure in word, dress, and action. The marriage relationship and all of its elements is exclusive between the husband and wife.
 - A respectful wife makes him happy – Restrained in word and action.
- I Peter 3:3-6 – Cultivate an appearance that makes him happy. Initially, men are generally attracted through visual stimulation. As the relationship matures, he must continue to be drawn to her, but from what he comes to see on the inside of his wife. He looks for a gentle and quiet spirit, doing what is right, and not being fearful (having appropriate confidence).

3. Discuss the ways Peter instructs husbands for keeping their wives happy (I Peter 3:7).

- I Peter 3:7a – Live with your wife. The preposition "with" communicates that he is to be a part of her life beyond simply being a provider. This includes all areas of her life; physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual. He is to be closely aligned with her. The husband must manage well all parts of the home (1 Timothy 3:4-5). Although addressed to elders, the principle applies to all men.
- I Peter 3:7b – Knowing your wife. The word "knowing" used here means to treat her in an understanding way. The more we seek to understand our wives, the more success we will have in our relationship. We learn to understand her by:
 - Being willing to share and listen to her;
 - Being transparent and open with her;
 - Being ready to forgive;
 - Being sensitive and seeking to anticipate her needs (this implies seeking to fulfill her needs).
- I Peter 3:7c – Honor your wife. We must hold our wives as precious to us, above all others. And, we must demonstrate this by word and actions. We value her role as equal in value to ours. Peter states that to not do so makes us hypocritical and unable to pray effectively to God.

4. What are practical ways we can honor our wives?

- Use our strengths to serve and protect her.
- Tell her how much we appreciate what she does
(Note: This implies we know what she does).
- Show respect for her in front of others.
(Never, ever denigrate your wife in any way but especially not in front of others)!
- Do what you can to lift her load.
This means doing the mundane or difficult things for her.

5. Application: Ask class members for specific examples of things to illustrate these points. Consider asking for examples of how husbands are doing this.

Consider ending this class by reminding both the husband and wife for the need to live in a way to be worthy of each other.

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