



Keys to a Lasting Marriage: Lesson One

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Identify some obstacles to a lasting marriage
- Appreciate more fully THE solution
- Start to explore how Jesus helps us overcome obstacles.



Lesson One

ICEBREAKER

Have couples take two minutes to introduce themselves, share what they do for a living, and see which couple has been married the longest.

OPENING PRAYER

INTRODUCTION

It seems like many people have their “happy place” — somewhere they like to be or an activity they like doing. What might some of those “happy places” be? *(Slide 2)*

Take two minutes—so each individual can share their answer with the others at the table. After two minutes, continue: What a blessing that God allows many of us to have those happy places. We need them. Life can be really stressful. So it’s nice for us to have an oasis every once in a while where we can relax and recharge.

Is marriage meant to be one of those happy places? God did design marriage to be a great blessing to us... a relationship that offers and gives safety, love, companionship, and support.

Slide 3: (from A Marriage Rite)

Slide 4: (quote from Ben Franklin)

Slide 5: (quote from William Lyon Phelps—an American author from 100 years ago)

Slide 6: (lyric from the Turtles)

Maybe that’s how it is in poetry and song lyrics, but often that’s not how the world views marriage. (Sadly, marriage is degraded, no longer en vogue; rather marriage is seen as disposable, unnecessary—and a whole bunch of other depressing descriptive words). And there’s a hard reality—a lot of marriages struggle.

Rhetorical Question: Why is it that something so wonderful can be such a struggle for so many couples?

Consider this...

When “the Tingles” Strike. That heading comes from a section in Gary Chapman’s book, *Things I Wish I’d Known Before We Got Married*. In it, he references research done by Dorothy Tennov. According to that research, “the tingles” stage of the marriage lasts about two years. After about two years (longer for some, less for others), couples start to come down from that emotional high and a reality sets in. They realize their marriage needs to be built on something more than emotions and “tingles.”

The tingles stage of the marriage is also known as the “in love” or the infatuation stage—where emotions are driving the bus and one feels head-over-heels in love.

Many people get married not fully understanding what marriage is all about; I know I did. A lot of us got married when the “tingles” were driving the bus. Sadly, many marriages start to fade and fail when the tingles fade and fail. A first step is identifying and understanding some common obstacles.

UNDERSTANDING THE OBSTACLES *(Slide 7)*

- The Curse of FAMILIARITY
It's the "new puppy" syndrome. When something is new and fresh, we give it attention, effort, and energy. After a while, when something is familiar, we can take it for granted. We can do that with *things*, and we can do that with *people*.

Take 60 seconds and jot down TWO amazing qualities in your spouse you can sometimes take for granted—this will help you appreciate them.

List TWO amazing qualities in your spouse you sometimes take for granted:	
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- Epidemic of EXHAUSTION
Think of all the different hats people can wear—employee/employer, friend, dad/mom, spouse, church member, maybe a member of another organization, a volunteer. You are pulled in a dozen different directions. It can be exhausting. Think of this: I can give my best time and energy to customers or colleagues—and my spouse can often get my leftovers when I get home in the evening. When we were first married, my spouse got my very best; is that still true?

So that you can be more aware in the future, take 60 seconds and identify TWO entities that sometimes get your best quality time and energy.

List TWO entities (beside your spouse) that sometimes get the best of your quality time and energy:	
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- Chapters of CHANGE
Take 60 seconds and think of TWO ways you've changed since the day you were married—put it in the box below.

After 60 seconds ask the tables to offer some of their answers. If you have a whiteboard, it might be good to write these down. Ways we've changed: tastes and interests, our bodies and looks, our priorities and responsibilities change, even personalities. This is a true statement: My wife married a different man. In fact, she's probably been married to about six different men—and they're all me! (NOTE: That can be a beautiful thing as we change and grow and get to know each other. The point is, we have to realize this is happening... and embrace it... cope with it.)

List TWO ways you have changed since the day you made your wedding vows:	
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- Fruits of the FLESH
My wife is married to a sinful person; so am I. (Slides 8 and 9 - Rom 7:18 and Mark 7:21-22). A constant struggle takes place within me. I have a sin factory in my heart. And since marriage is one of the choicest blessings God has given to mankind, the devil is going to attack it on all sides. And in my sinful nature, unfortunately, the devil has an ally.

Identify TWO bad habits or attitudes you'd like to get rid of—YOU, not your spouse. *The participants don't need to write these out but do give them time for honest reflection.*

Take a moment for quiet, self-reflection.
Identify TWO bad habits or attitudes you'd like to get rid of. (YOU—not your spouse)

EMBRACING THE SOLUTION *(Slide 10)*

So how is this going to work? How can two sinful people overcome all these obstacles?

Start to develop some answers from the passages below. Take five minutes—read through the passages and create three lists based on answers in the passages:

What Jesus has done - What benefits we receive - What we are encouraged to do

Romans 5:8 - But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Psalms 103:8,10 - The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love... he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.

1 John 3:16 - This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.

Colossians 3:12,13 - Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

What Jesus has done	What benefits we receive	What we are encouraged to do
Laid down his life Died for us (sinners) Compassionate and gracious	Notice what we are called in Colossians 3 (Chosen... holy ... dearly loved) We are not treated as we deserve to be treated Forgiven	Lay down lives for others (others first) Clothe self with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience Forgive

These certainly apply to ALL our relationships, but we have the most opportunities (by far) to do this in our homes and marriages!

___CHRIST JESUS___ is the solution (*Slide 10b*)

As a summary to the passages you've just read, finish each thought:

- Jesus put me first; I can now.... **put others first**
- Jesus forgives me freely; I can now... **forgive others**

Jesus is like the sun, and we are like the moon. The light comes from HIM and shines on us... so we can reflect that light toward others... especially our spouses.

JESUS IS THE KEY TO OVERCOMING OBSTACLES (*Slide 11*)

When the world talks about love in relationships, it often means something far different from when the Bible talks about love. Apart from Jesus, our understanding of love would be very shallow and selfish. Jesus introduces us to a new way of thinking and acting. You saw it in the verses you just read. There's a special word the Bible uses to describe the love Jesus has for us, a love so deep and so undeserved—*agape*. He loved us and gave himself up for us. He put our needs ahead of his own. That's *agape* love. That's far different than obsession or infatuation. When God tells husbands and wives to love each other, he is directing them to take the tingles out of the driver's seat and replace it with the love of Christ. This is the "something more" our marriages are built upon.

In the sessions that follow we'll look at the specific strength and guidance we get from Jesus, as well as some practical ideas to put *agape* love into practice. As we end today's session, think quietly for a minute and jot down several possible completions to the thought below.

(As you record your thoughts, try to have your goals also be solutions to some of the obstacles we mentioned earlier.)

COMPLETE THIS THOUGHT: *Because of all that Jesus has done for me, here's what I would like to do for my spouse:*

Let the participants come up with their own personal goals. If they need some examples to help prime the pump...

- I will try to reserve my best time and energy for my spouse.
- I will be more attentive and appreciative of what my spouse does (around the house... with the kids... at work... etc.).

ALSO, identify two things you can do in the coming days and weeks that will strengthen your relationship with Jesus.

CLOSING COMMENTS

We started earlier talking about marriage being one of our happy places. Let's make this distinction. That's not accurate if we are looking at marriage as an oasis I can go to so that my spouse can recharge my batteries... so I can get all my needs met... so I can be served and fulfilled. Marriage can be one of my happy places when I understand it is a safe relationship... where I bring my love and understanding and forgiveness... where I get an opportunity to love my spouse as Jesus has loved me... where love and forgiveness flow unconditionally.