



## Keys to a Lasting Marriage: Lesson Two

### **OBJECTIVES**

After today's session participants will:

- See that love in a marriage is all about SERVICE and saying “you first” to their spouse.
- Briefly consider why that's so difficult to accomplish.
- Turn to the Lord for help/guidance.



## Lesson Two

### OPENING PRAYER

### INTRODUCTION

God’s approach to marriage and his definition of love are so different than the mainstream approach to love and marriage.

List at least two other examples of how God’s ways are very different than the ways of the world.

*See what the participants come up with. Here are some possible answers: Value of life. Origin of the world. Morality/values. Human sexuality. Value of possessions and money.*

God wants husbands and wives to have a relationship built on sacrificial love, agape love. That’s not easy for us. So God himself promises to educate us with his Word, model agape love in his Son, and equip and motivate us with his gospel. With God’s constant help we can give ourselves to our spouses. As Paul says, “for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose” (Philippians 2:13). In fact, it’s already happening in your marriage.

Take 30 seconds and identify at least two things your spouse does to serve you.

*After 30 seconds, take a minute and let them share their answers with their spouses.*

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### Quotable Quote: *(Slide 2)*

We tend to think of love as a mystery, and the mystery of what makes us fall in love is fascinating. But staying in love is not mysterious. What makes marriage work is predictable, universal, and completely under our control. People stay in love in very common ways.  
(Kevin A. Thompson, *Friends, Partners & Lovers*, page 28)

*Last time we spoke about “the tingles” or the passionate feelings we feel for our spouse. Our relationship may have started that way. Our heart may have skipped a beat or maybe we met each other by chance or caught each other’s eye across a crowded room. That’s the mysterious part Kevin Thompson is talking about. Rhetorical Questions: What will “keep the fire going?” What are some of the “common ways” people stay in love? Today we’ll answer those questions with yet another important key: SERVICE.*

Here's a challenge for you: What's one of the most difficult functions of being a husband or a wife? (NOTE: It's also one of the most important functions!) We'll answer that in a few moments, but first:

Read the passages below carefully and complete the three tasks below.

**Ephesians 5:25** – Husbands, **love** your wives, just **as Christ loved the church and gave himself up** for her.

**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.**

**Philippians 2:1-4** – Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. **Do nothing out of selfish ambition** or vain conceit. Rather, in humility **value others above yourselves**, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

1. Using your own words, summarize the bolded portions of the passages.  
*Love and serve as Christ, put others ahead of yourself... be willing to sacrifice yourself.*
2. From personal experience, why is it so difficult to put others ahead of self?  
*It goes against our nature—our natural, sinful reflex is ME FIRST.  
It is countercultural. Putting others first is seen as weak and undesirable.  
It seems impractical. If I put someone else first, I'll get overlooked, my needs won't get met, I'll suffer.*
3. Decide on two or three ways the Philippians passage motivates us to do what God has urged us to do.  
*We have encouragement from Christ. We are united and joined to him. We have been given comfort from his love.  
We share the Holy Spirit.*

In the box below write an answer to the question:

*What's one of the most difficult functions of being a husband or a wife? (And also one of the most important!)*

*Let the participants develop their own answers. It can be something like this: To live not for yourself and your own happiness, but for your spouse and his/her happiness. Or—To love and serve my spouse more than I love and serve myself. Or—To think of myself less and my spouse more.*

Come up with a godly and loving counter to the self-centered attitudes below.

<u>self-centered attitude</u>	<u>godly counter</u>
Impatient -----	_____ <i>patient</i> _____
Mean-spirited -----	_____ <i>kind</i> _____
Greedy -----	_____ <i>content</i> _____
Arrogant -----	_____ <i>not proud, humble</i> _____
Selfish, me-first -----	_____ <i>selfless</i> _____
Short-tempered -----	_____ <i>not angry, calm</i> _____
Holds onto grudges -----	_____ <i>forgiving</i> _____

*(Slide 3) Show 1 Corinthians 13. Their list above should look a lot like Paul's description of agape love in 1 Cor. 13.*

Here's a good rule: Be the kind of person that's easy to be around. Imagine how the "tingles" are negatively impacted if I spend all my time in the left column—yikes! Imagine how difficult things would be for my spouse if I'm always exhibiting attitudes from the left column—double yikes! **Be the kind of person that's easy to be around!**

Pick three from the list above that you'd like to intentionally work on as you strive to love and serve your spouse. Put a star by them.

In the box below, write a prayer, asking the Lord to help you make improvements in the areas identified above. *(It sometimes helps when we articulate our thoughts—broad concepts can become a little more specific, realistic, and attainable.)*

To put my spouse’s interests ahead of mine—that’s hard to do. So it’s important to remember who we are.

Read the passages below. In the box that follows, write down one or two ways these passages can help you commit to less self-centeredness and more agape love.

**2 Corinthians 5:14,15,17** – For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

**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.

*Answers could include: Christ’s love for us drives us... He has made us NEW creations (we no longer have to be driven by our natural, sinful instincts)... When we serve our spouses we are honoring Christ... Our God regularly loves us and is gracious to us, and we don’t deserve any of it—we want to share and reflect that same grace in all our relationships, especially our marriage*

## CLOSING EXERCISE

**OPTION 1:** Do you remember the quote we started with today? “People stay in love in very common ways.” Below is a sampling of practical ways spouses can show agape love to one another. Take TWO minutes to identify the TWO you feel are most important. Then, add TWO of your own in the blanks provided. (*Pretend you are offering advice to a couple about to get married—what valuable tips would you highlight?*)

- Try to better understand your spouse
- Assume the best—take words and actions in the kindest possible way
- Realize the little things are powerful (ex. Thank you, compliments)
- Grow in faith—stay connected to the Word of God
- Pray for your spouse
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

*Give the participants two minutes to identify the top choices and add their own two. If time permits, give them another four or five minutes to discuss and share at their tables. Then, another five minutes to have them share with the larger group, if they are willing.*

**OPTION 2:** You started today’s lesson by listing ways your spouse serves you. Now, take 90 seconds and list three practical ways you can serve your spouse in the days ahead. Be very specific.

## CLOSING COMMENTS:

Bad habits are hard to break, and good habits are equally as hard to start and maintain. In his book, *Atomic Habits*, James Clear talks about how poor decisions can add up and have a negative impact. (See quote.)

*SLIDE 4* – “When we repeat 1 percent errors, day after day, by replicating poor decisions, duplicating tiny mistakes, and rationalizing little excuses, our small choices compound into toxic results. It’s the accumulation of many missteps—a 1 percent decline here and there—that eventually leads to a problem.”

He then talks about an airplane flying from Los Angeles to New York City. If the pilot leaves LAX and adjusts the route by just a slight 3.5 degrees south, the plane will land in Washington D.C. instead of New York City. The small change was barely noticeable at takeoff—but it made a huge difference after time.

Here’s the cool thing. Small positive changes make a big difference as well.

*SLIDE 5* – “Similarly, a slight change in your daily habits can guide your life to a very different destination.”

Making a choice that is 1% better might seem insignificant and hardly worth it. But it adds up. Just imagine reading your Bible and having personal devotion time 3% more than you already do. Imagine saying something nice to your spouse a few percentage points more than normal. You get the idea. The goal of a marriage enrichment isn’t to set up unrealistic expectations and demand that spouses make wholesale changes overnight.

Rather, make steady progress. See areas where we can improve and work on them, with the Lord’s help. We don’t need James Clear to tell us that service and sacrifice will help our marriages. Our God tells us that. He shows us what sacrificial love is. He gives us the strength to carry it out.