

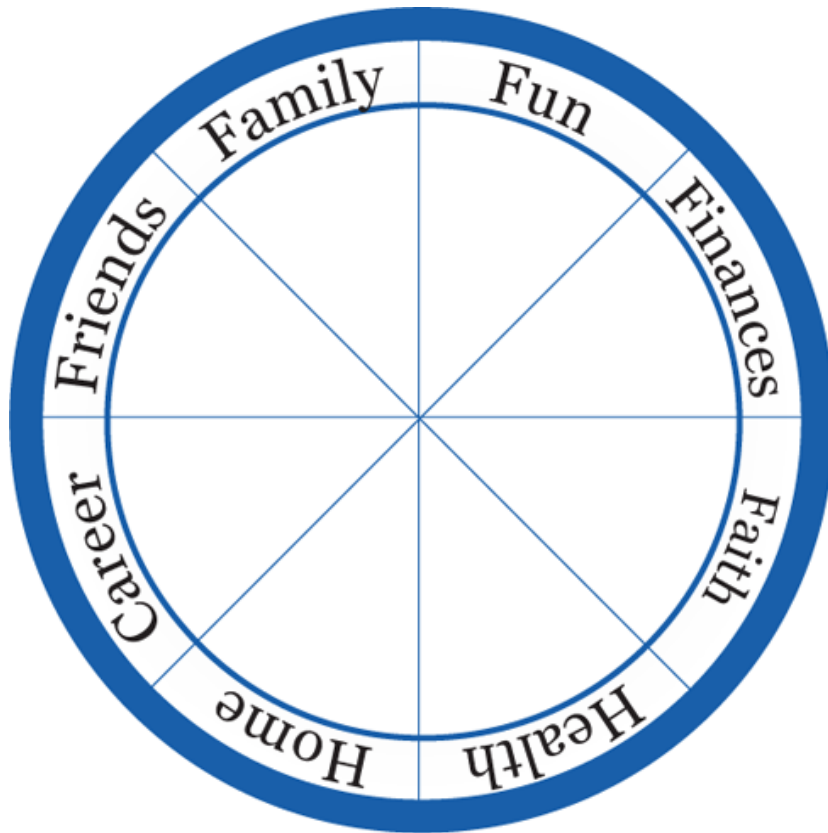


Lesson 3: Marriage as a Priority

Video introduction includes (speaker reference only; do not include this in student handout)

- Arranged marriage stats: Possible to have a happy marriage, even if you didn't know the person beforehand
- Caring for the marriage is a priority; but a hard priority to put into practice
- Wheel of Life – explain
- Elisha burning the plow – Jesus prioritizing our salvation
- Help doing the same thing in your marriage: Explain Recipe for Intimacy

The Wheel of Life





A Recipe for Intimacy

[Source: Focus on the Family]

NOTE: Each part of this will be explained in the video. But there should still be a copy of this included in the class notes.

1. ONCE A DAY:

Connect emotionally, spiritually, and physically without any distractions for at least 15 minutes.

Connect emotionally: Take turns asking each other, “What’s the biggest thing on your mind today?” Listen, discuss, plan, pray and encourage as needed.

Connect spiritually: Share an inspirational reading, devotion, and/or prayer.

Connect physically: Hug for 20 seconds. Kiss passionately for 5-30 seconds without leading to sex.

2. ONCE A WEEK:

Do something that allows you to focus all of your attention on being present with your spouse.

Examples: Take a walk together, go on a date, or shower together—with no demands of receiving anything in return or expectations of leading to sexual intimacy.

3. ONCE A QUARTER:

Experience something together that’s not part of your regular routine.

Examples: Play together in a new way, explore a new park or city, try a new restaurant, learn a new skill together.

i. ONCE A YEAR:

Be together alone, away from home, with no distractions, for a minimum of two nights.

INSTRUCTIONS:

- Work through the following exercise together as a couple.
- You will be talking through the action steps outlined in the Recipe for Intimacy and making specific plans as to how to put them into practice in your marriage.
- Be patient with yourselves as you go through this exercise. Answers may not immediately be clear. Spouses may have differing views on how best to accomplish specific tasks. Be willing to try something, even if you're not convinced it will work. Be ready to try something else if an idea doesn't work.
- Be patient with yourselves as you begin to implement these new habits. Calendar conflicts will inevitably arise from time to time. If you are not currently in the habit of doing these things, it will be challenging to start these new habits, especially those that are to take place each day and each week. One or both spouses may sometimes forget something you agreed upon. Be humble, gracious, and forgiving toward one another. Keep your eyes on the goal of sustained marriage intimacy.

1. ONCE A DAY

The best time for us to connect each day for 15 minutes without interruption is:

We will start/continue doing this:

One resource we will try using to be spiritually inspired/guided will be:

Possible options: Various written devotion books (many available through www.nph.net)
Online devotions (www.wels.net, www.timeofgrace.org)
Find a daily bible reading plan

2. ONCE A WEEK

The best time in the next 7 days to spend extended time together is _____.

Which of the following is true:

_____ This same time will work each week

_____ The best time for our quality time will need to change each week

The best time each week to schedule this is _____

Some things we might enjoy doing together on a regular basis might be:

The one thing we will be sure to do together this coming week is:

3. **ONCE A QUARTER**

Something we don't do together regularly, but we would like to try or do again is:

The best time to do this within the next three months is _____.

What are the logistical considerations we need to keep in mind while planning this activity?

Work –

Children (if applicable) –

Finances –

Other commitments –

4. **ONCE A YEAR**

The last meaningful getaway we took was _____.

Write down one reason it was so meaningful to you (then share your answer with your spouse):

Our next meaningful getaway could/should happen:

When:

Where:

What are the logistical considerations we need to keep in mind while planning this getaway?

Work –

Children (if applicable) –

Finances –

Other commitments –

Once you have completed this exercise, read the Conclusion together.

CONCLUSION: Growth Takes Time



THE ANGEL OAK

There is a tree just outside the city of Charleston, South Carolina called the Angel Oak, and it's incredibly large. Its trunk is 28 feet in diameter. When the sun is directly above the tree, its crown shades over 17,000 square feet. Its longest limb is 187 feet long. The Angel Oak is a large tree.

And it's incredibly strong.

It has remained standing despite being assaulted by hurricane force winds multiple times over hundreds of years while countless other trees have fallen.

No one knows exactly how old the Angel Oak is. Some believe it is the oldest living thing in the United States east of the Mississippi River. Its estimated age is over 500 years, though it's impossible to know for sure.

While we don't know the exact day it started growing, we do know what it looked like on that day.

It was an acorn. That entire tree easily fit within the palm of your hand.

But then it started growing. Little by little. Day by day. Gradually. Mostly unnoticeably to anyone who would have walked by it regularly.

Each day, it drank in nutrients from the soil. Each day, it absorbed every good thing God designed the sun to give it. And eventually, over a long period of time, that tiny little acorn grew into a solid oak.

What does the Angel Oak have to do with husbands and wives? It illustrates an important truth that provides healthy expectations for your marriage. That truth is this:

Marriages grow the same way. Little by little. Day by day. Gradually. Mostly unnoticeably to anyone who looks at it regularly.

Marriages only grow that way.

It's not unusual for a husband or wife to feel their marriage needs to grow in some (or many) ways.

It's not unusual for couples to try and do something about it: attend a weekend marriage retreat, sign up for a seminar, make an appointment with a counselor, or read a devotion. They want things to change, and they want things to change quickly.

And so, it's also not unusual for spouses to feel disappointed shortly after the retreat, seminar, appointment, or devotion is done. After the initial burst of optimism that comes from learning new information or identifying specific barriers to joy in their relationship, after they get back into their regular routine, they often don't feel any different. They don't notice any new growth. They don't feel stronger.

But you are.

In the same way that the little acorn was just a little bit stronger after one day of soaking in nutrients from the soil and the sun, if the retreat, seminar, counselor, or devotion fed your soul with God's grace; if, through it, you absorbed God's declaration that, in Christ Jesus, you are a loved, forgiven, child of your Father in heaven; if it equipped you to better live as the bride of Christ and reflect love for our Savior in all you do in your marriage, then your marriage is a little stronger than it was the previous day.

But not yet as strong as it will be the next day when you feed your marriage with the same thing again.

Little by little, day by day, continue to feed your marriage with God's grace in Christ Jesus so that 10, 25, or 65 years from now, you may not even recognize your marriage. In the same way that anyone who held that little acorn hundreds of years ago never would have been able to accurately picture the strength and shade it would provide after years of growth, neither can you accurately foresee how strong, faith-filled, and joyful your marriage will be when it is regularly fed by God himself.

This is why Scripture urges us to “Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18).

Just because it may not look very different from day to day doesn't mean the best kind of growth isn't happening.

CLOSING PRAYER

Father in heaven, thank you for the nourishment you provide to our souls the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus. Keep us faithful in feeding our marriage with all your Word tells us about him, his finished work for our salvation, and your wonderful promises, that our marriage will continue to grow in a way honors you and also provides strength and shade to our family. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.