
COVENANT KEEPERS

"Dedicated To Strengthening Marriages Through Biblical Principles"

Volume 29 – Issue 2

Fall Edition

The Keys to a Fulfilling Marriage!

Have you ever wondered why God created marriage, and what was His original purpose for this union? Did you know that God has explained His reasoning and purpose for marriage in Genesis 2:18, and verse 24? He states as He speaks to Adam, *"It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him"* (Gen. 2:18). In verse 24 He declares, *"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."* God declared that it was not good for Adam to be alone, which was why He created the woman and brought her to Adam, and she became his wife. Then God revealed that when two people marry they become one flesh, or one person. Therefore, God made it clear that the marriage relationship was to enable two people to experience oneness which would produce harmony in their relationship.

But the concept of becoming *one flesh* is difficult for people to understand, because it is such an abstract concept. People question, *How can two individual people become one when they are two separate people?* In Malachi 2:14, God explained that the marriage relationship was intended to give a husband-and-wife in-depth companionship with one another. God said, *"The LORD has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, with whom you have dealt treacherously; yet she is your companion and your wife by covenant"* (Mal. 2:14). That word *companion* literally means, one with whom you are knit together. This word *companion* was to give you a picture of what God intended for every couple. He wanted two people to be knit together as one. Knitting is something that most people have observed at one time or another. As you watch a person knitting you see an individual intertwining yarn together to make a sweater or afghan. This knitting process is something that takes place one stitch at a

time, until you have a beautiful finished product. Consequently, Malachi was explaining what God meant when He said that the two shall *become one flesh*, as they are intertwined together.

How does this knitting process take place in your marriage?

The knitting process is a daily choice you make with your spouse to intertwine your lives together as true companions. You will either choose to love, give, and serve your mate, or you will choose to love, give, and serve yourself. Every choice you make for companionship is a choice to knit yourselves together as one. When husbands and wives choose to intertwine their lives together spiritually, emotionally, intellectually, verbally, parentally, recreationally, and sexually, this is how oneness is experienced. When couples choose to meet each other's needs in these areas they will naturally be knit together in love. When one or both partners in a marriage choose to not meet the other's needs, they will experience distance and estrangement in their relationship. If these decisions are not reversed, division and very possibly destruction will result.

What is the most important ingredient that enables and keeps this knitting process growing?

The most important ingredient necessary for oneness to occur is a vibrant, alive, and real relationship with Christ. The most profound oneness and companionship can only be found in Christ, which means that you need a daily fellowship with Him. Christ living in you is how true companionship can be experienced by two people. Why do I say this? Because the oneness that God refers to is only something He can bring about. Oneness is a work of God. How can I be so sure? When Jesus was answering the Pharisees' question about marriage and divorce, He took them to the book of Genesis and explained, *"Have you not read that He who made them at the*

beginning 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matt. 19:4-6). Notice in this last sentence that Jesus said, *"What God has joined together."* It is therefore God who does this supernatural work of joining two people together. It is your spiritual relationship with Him that gives you the actual power to be knit together with your mate. This is a supernatural work of God through His Spirit living in you.

Therefore, God made it clear that the marriage relationship was to enable two people to experience oneness which would produce harmony in their relationship.

But you must remember that this work of God is a process. Oneness and companionship in marriage is very similar to how you become one with Christ. Paul explained this process in 2 Corinthians 5:17 when he wrote, *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."* The word *"become"* in this verse is in the perfect tense, which describes a past completed act, that has present and continuous results. So, when you received Christ by faith you became a new creation, but God continues to transform you so that you can become more like Him. This same transforming process also takes place in your marriage, as you submit yourself to God and obey His command to love one another.

When couples come in for marriage counseling to try and fix their broken marriage, I always begin by addressing their spiritual relationship with God and the depth of their commitment to Him. I usually ask them, "How do you follow Jesus? Are you seeking Him daily? Do you truly desire to hear His voice? When

"She is your companion and your wife by covenant" Mal. 2:14

you do hear Him, do you obey Him in your private life? Are you putting off the selfishness in your life?" I explain to couples that this is more than occasionally reading your Bible, praying with your spouse at dinner, or going to church every so often. I'm talking about having real communion with Him, the surrender of self, so that you can follow Him. Jesus said, *"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me"* (Matt. 16:24). Why is this depth in your commitment to Christ so important?

The death of self is the only way to unite your heart with the heart of God. David prayed for this work to take place in his own life when he cried out in surrender to God, *"Unite my heart to fear Your name"* (Ps. 86:11). He wanted more than just an external religious relationship; he wanted his heart to be united with the God he loved. Uniting your heart with the Lord will always be the key to oneness with God, and spiritual oneness with your spouse. Without this oneness with the Lord, your walk with Him will always be superficial, and you will live a life motivated by self-effort. Why is this true? Because without Christ reigning in your heart, you can't experience the reality of the power of the Holy Spirit. Without the power of the Spirit, you will be trying in your own strength to put into practice what God has commanded. But the fruit of the Spirit is where you will experience His love and power that will motivate every change that is necessary in your marriage. The Spirit is the One who gives you the desire to serve your mate, and also the ability to resist your sinful desires that would surely destroy your marriage (Gal. 5:16; 22-23).

Is this how you and your spouse are following Christ? To find the oneness you are seeking, you both have to be aiming for the same goal. If you both want to exalt Christ as Lord of your lives, and you want to know Him and the power of His resurrection, then you will experience death to self. Putting off selfishness is the only way that spiritual oneness will occur in your marriage.

Practical steps to oneness!

1. Commit yourself to putting Christ first in your life and marriage. In practical terms how can you put Christ first in your marriage? Start by praying daily with your mate. Tell the Lord that you want Him to be your first priority, and that you want a first love relationship

with Him (Rev. 2:4-5). Don't allow your prayer time to be just at meals, but lift up your family's needs before you go off to work in the morning, or before you go to bed at night. Praying together reveals that you want Christ as Lord of your life. Then get to church on a regular basis so that you can learn the Scriptures together, and so that your children can be encouraged in their faith and knowledge of God's Word at their level in children's ministry. Take time every day to personally seek God in His Word, so He can speak to you about your individual issues. This is exactly what Jesus told His disciples to do. He said, *"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you"* (Matt. 6:33). Jesus meant what He promised in this verse. If you put Him first, everything else will take care of itself. Lastly, obey what God speaks to you from His Word. This is the ultimate proof that you love Him (John 14:15).

2. Determine the issues that hinder your oneness. How can you determine these issues? They will be what you fight about most with your spouse. Are you being divided by your failure to resolve conflicts, because you are unwilling to communicate in love? Or, is it your failure to spend time with each other? Are there sexual problems in your relationship? Or, perhaps there are problems with an intrusive in-law, or you are not finding agreement in how you discipline your children, or how you spend money? These areas of conflict are always made worse by pride, selfishness, or stubbornness. But this is where your relationship with Christ can really help! How? If you will yield to the Holy Spirit, He will empower you to put off your selfishness, pride, and stubbornness. Remember, putting off these attitudes of the heart is the only way to experience the oneness and companionship that God intends for your marriage.

The most important ingredient necessary for oneness to occur is a vibrant, alive, and real relationship with Christ.

Begin today by asking God to reveal to you why there is so little companionship with your spouse? When the disciples failed in their personal lives Jesus always asked, what I call, "the why question." When they struggled with fear, He asked,

"Why are you fearful, O you of little faith" (Matt. 8:26)? At another time when He taught them about conflicts, He asked them, *"Why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye"* (Matt. 7:3)? When there is conflict in your marriage, ask God to show you why this is happening, and He will reveal the answer.

3. Take a hard look at yourself and determine your personal faults in your marriage. When dealing with conflicts, this is what Jesus told His disciples to do first. He commanded them, *"Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye"* (Matt. 7:5). If Jesus said to take this action *first*, then this is exactly what you should do *first*. If you don't, then you are being hypocritical, because you are only looking at your mate's faults instead of your own.

Therefore, *first* think about where you are being selfish, prideful, or stubborn. Where have your words or actions been unloving? Then confess these faults to your mate, and ask for his or her forgiveness. When your spouse asks for your forgiveness, grant it willingly with compassion, knowing that you have also been forgiven by God.

4. Start with your greatest weaknesses in your oneness and companionship. If you deal with the greatest weaknesses first, and your spouse sees real change in your behavior, this will give your mate hope that the lesser issues can be changed as well. This is the process I use in my marriage counseling ministry. I have seen real progress in many marriages when I attack the most difficult strongholds first.

Here are some practical ideas and actions you might want to take. If you fail miserably in the way that you communicate with your spouse, start by reading the articles that I have posted on communication at covenantkeepers.org. Next go to the worksheet section of this website. Print and fill out the worksheet entitled "Identifying Communication Roadblocks." Then listen to some of the audio studies I've done on the subject of communication that are posted in the media section of this website.

If your greatest failure is not properly resolving conflicts with your spouse, take these steps. Read or listen to the studies on this topic on the Covenant Keepers website. Or, if you want a more in-depth

study read the three chapters on this topic in my book, *“Married and How to Stay That Way,”* which can be found on Amazon.com.

If your greatest struggles relate to lying, insecurity, addiction, fear, depression, or past abuse in your life, read the chapters on these topics in my book, *“Winning Your Personal Battles,”* which also can be obtained on Amazon.com.

If your greatest struggle is with your parenting or with intrusive in-law issues, read the articles on these topics on the Covenant Keepers website.

If your greatest struggle is in your sexual companionship, go to my YouTube channel at “Pastor Steve Carr,” and listen to the study there in the marriage playlist, or read chapter eighteen in my book, *“Married And How To Stay That Way.”*

My point in giving you these practical steps is so you will start seeking answers to the issues you are struggling with in your marriage. God is the One who created you, and He knows how to fix these issues. Start pursuing answers today!

In addition, give up any of the excuses you are using to not seek change, and take the biblical action that God commands. Reject the thinking that tells you, *“It won’t do any good even if I do change. Or, God can’t fix this marriage; it is too far gone.”* Remember, Jesus has heard every excuse that men have ever come up with, and has rejected all of them. Why? Because He knows your heart, and that your excuses are just the mental game you are using to avoid giving up your selfishness, pride, and disobedience to His Word. Remember, Paul explained that men are, *“without excuse”* (Rom. 1:20). This means you have no excuse that He will accept! Therefore, get to work on dealing with your issues and let God take care of your spouse!

5. If you want to build oneness with your mate, choose to love by giving, serving, and finding creative compromises. True oneness and companionship can only be realized by putting to death self, and choosing to give by serving one another (Gal. 5:13). This quality of love is only found as you seek the Lord and His creative compromises with one another. Choosing to love in this manner is true wisdom from above. The Apostle James drew this contrast between the wisdom that comes from above, and that which is of the earth when he wrote,

“Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy” (James 3:13-17).

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The wisdom found in these words is so powerful if you will put them into practice in your marriage. James’ instruction is to motivate you to consider the fruit of your relationship with others. If you are experiencing bitterness, envy, strife, and division, you are living by the wisdom of this world. But if you are experiencing peaceful relations, gentleness with others, where each is willing to yield when there is a difference of opinion, and mercy fills your heart, then you are walking in love and living by the wisdom that comes from God. Is this the fruit you see in your heart?

If you want the good fruit described in these verses, then start showing mercy to your spouse and become willing to yield your self-will and bitterness up to God. Then you will be able to find creative compromises and the oneness that results.

6. Friendship. Do you remember when you first began your relationship, and the fun you had doing things together? There was a friendship that grew between you, and that friendship turned into romantic love. But when couples get married, they usually stop dating each other, which reveals that they have forgotten that friendship is one of the key ingredients to romance. Notice what Solomon’s wife said about her husband in the most romantic book in the Bible. She said of Solomon, *“He is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, and this is my friend”* (Song of Songs 5:16)!

So, how can this friendship return to your marriage? When you read the Song of Solomon you can’t miss the fact that they were always doing fun things together.

They took walks in their vineyard just so they could talk and be together (S. of S. 2:10-14). They took trips to the villages to spend time together (S. of S. 7:11-12). They were also verbally and physically expressing their affection to each other (S. of S. 1:15-16; 2:6).

The equation is simple - when you do fun things together, and you are verbally and physically affectionate, you feed your friendship. This friendship between you then enables you to keep the romance alive in your marriage. So don’t forget, the way to build oneness and keep your companionship growing is to do fun things together. Talk to each other in a caring and compassionate way. Start today!

7. Have the right attitude. If there is one thing that ruins your attempt to start showing love, it is when you have a grudging attitude. When your spouse senses this grudging attitude, you might as well not do anything. Why? Because they know you are not acting from love. If God loves a cheerful giver, so will your spouse. Remember Paul wrote this encouragement to the Corinthians concerning their giving. He said, *“So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver”* (2 Cor. 9:7). So, the next time your mate asks you for help around the house, help with the children, or to go somewhere together, don’t roll your eyes or give a big sigh and say, “Okay, if I have to,” because this will ruin the moment, and communicate to your mate that companionship and oneness is not important to you. Your attitude is also essential when your spouse walks up to give you a hug, kisses you on the neck, or approaches you for sex (1 Cor. 7:3). All of these requests are essential that you respond with a loving attitude. This is what will help to build real companionship and oneness between you. Therefore, whatever you do, do it willingly in love.

8. The power of the Holy Spirit. If you want to experience greater oneness and companionship, then ask God daily to fill you with the power of the Holy Spirit, so that you can be enabled to change whatever is missing in your marriage. If you simply try to make these changes in your own strength, it won’t happen! But, with the power of the Holy Spirit reigning over your heart, you will be able to do all things through Christ who strengthens you (Phil. 4:13). God is more willing to

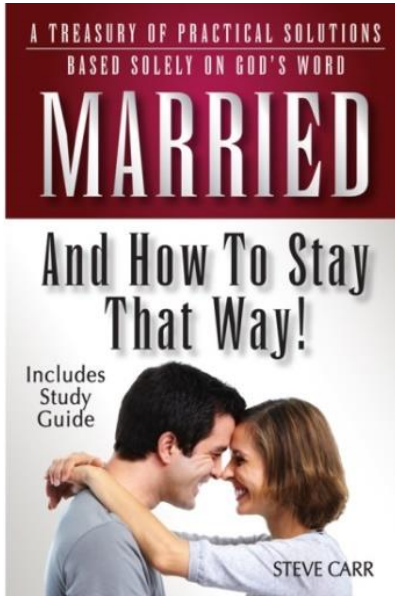
flood you with His Spirit than you could ever imagine. Listen to Jesus as He speaks to His disciples about one of His greatest desires. He declared, "I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him" (Luke 11:9-13)! The words *ask*, *seek*, and *knock* in these verses are all in the present tense, which means that Jesus wants you to continually come to Him all through your day. Whenever you are struggling and are in need of His power to love your spouse, ask and keep on asking. Seek Him and keep on seeking. Keep knocking on His door, and He will open up the windows of heaven and pour upon you more of His Spirit. How much more of His Spirit does He want to give to you? You will never know unless you ask! James declared that, "You do not have because you do not ask" (James 4:2).

Don't try to fix your marriage in your own strength! Only with Christ as Lord of your life, and His power at work in you, can you experience the true oneness and companionship that you want! Ask Him to begin His transforming work today!

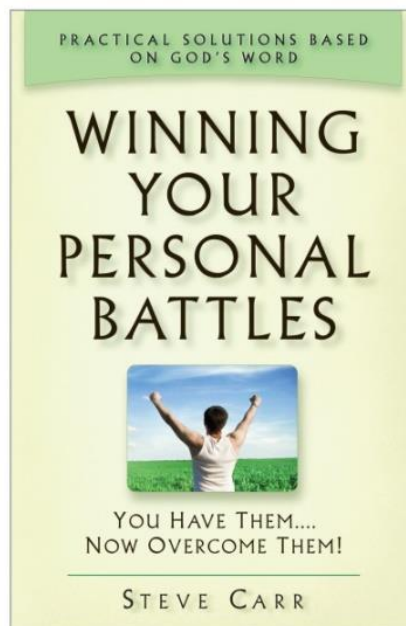
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Please visit our website www.covenantkeepers.org for a complete list of available resources and over 600 articles, Bible studies, and discipleship lessons to help you and your marriage.

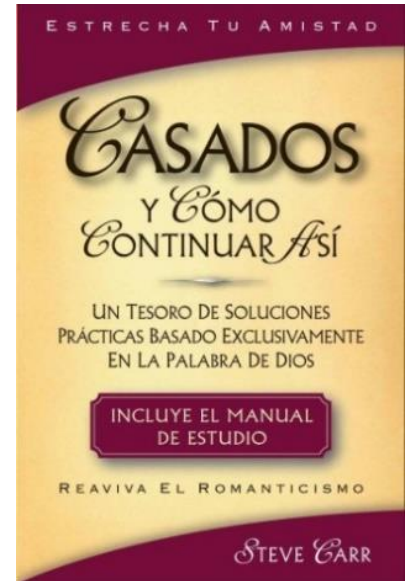
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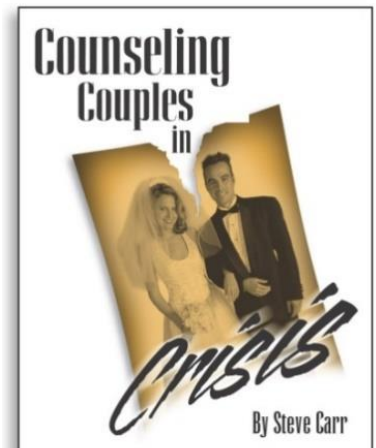
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