

Becoming One

This booklet is designed for couples that desire to find God's plan in marriage. It especially targets God's purposes in marriage and then lays a foundation whereby this purpose can begin to be accomplished.

The first two studies focus on the unity, or the corporate identity God desires in marriage.

The next two studies focus on barriers to this unity.

The last two studies focus on vehicles for achieving unity.

The studies are designed to be done by both the husband and wife together. They may then meet with a support group or individually with shepherds for accountability and help. Leading questions are provided in the studies to generate discussion. The studies should begin and end with prayer as only God brings supernatural unity. Usually the final question leads naturally into prayer. Pray together out loud.

Study#1: FALLING OUT

I. Read Genesis 2:18-25.

A. Why did God institute marriage?

B. What is the significance of the fact that Eve was taken out of Adam (vs. 21)?

a. What is Adam's view of Eve (vs. 23)? In what way would this have affected the way he treated her?

b. Compare this with Ephesians 5:28, 29. What do you learn from the comparison?

C. Try to describe what Adam and Eve's relationship was like in the garden before the fall. You might include their communication, time together, sex life, and cooperation in the tasks God gave them.

II. Read Genesis 3:1-24.

A. In what ways was the relationship between Adam and Eve affected by the fall?

B. The curse of God fundamentally altered the harmonious relationship between man and woman, indeed between all men and women (See Genesis 4:8). What effects of the curse do we see today?

C. Man's struggle with woman and visa versa is an age-old struggle, stemming from disobedience to God and His plan. Through the ages, man has attempted to regain that perfect oneness using his own ability. This has been the focus of much great romantic literature. Look at Genesis 3:15 and compare this with I John 3:8. What is God's solution to this disunity? Are you willing to commit to God's solution no matter what the cost? Have a time of prayer committing yourself to the Lord and to His plan for your marriage.

Study #2 CORPORATE IDENTITY (TWO BECOME ONE)

I. God's purpose in creating Eve and instituting marriage was to complete man. Although some men and women may remain single, God's plan for man is still that he/she become complete not in themselves, but as they become part of another. We call this becoming part of another "corporate identity". In an age and culture which is characterized by "radical individualism" (as Chuck Colson calls it) the call to a

corporate life and identity may at first sound foreign and unfamiliar. Yet the new Testament clearly calls us to a corporate life, both in His body as well as in the home. This must cause nothing less than a radical overhaul of our present Worldview if we are to "find what is pleasing to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:8-10).

- A. Examine Galatians 2:20. Try to define each of the "I"'s used in the verse.
1. What is Paul saying about his life and Christ's life?
 2. What do you suppose this means in practice? (You might look at 2 Corinthians 5:15, and Romans 14:7, 8 for examples).

B. Look up the following verses and write what you learn about developing a corporate identity (some refer to developing it with a spouse, others with the body of Christ).

Ephesians 5:22, 23

Ephesians 5:28-30

Ephesians 2:11-16

Ephesians 4:1-3

Ephesians 4:25

I Peter 3:7

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

I Corinthians 12:26, 27

C. The New Testament puts forth the new life in Christ as a life, which is shared between us and Christ as well as us and His people (Church). The Greek work *koinonia* can be translated "share" or "fellowship" by which we understand the deep bonds established by the work of the cross. This Fellowship (corporate bonding by which a new identity comes about) is one of the themes of the book to the Philippians. A cursory reading shows the deep relationship Paul shared with this church. In Philippians 2:1-3 he appeals to them for greater unity (Even this Godly church was struggling with interpersonal relationships--Cf. 4:2). When two or more individuals come together there will be differing values, goals, motives etc.

Take a few minutes to reflect on where you and you wife differ in goals and values. What are a few of these?

D. In order to develop corporate unity, there needs to be a supernatural molding of the individuals together to form a new, corporate man (Cf. Genesis 2:24, Ephesians 5:31-33, 2:15). This can only be done "in Christ". Values and goals are two areas where God needs to work to make the two one.

Make a list of goals and values which need to be reviewed in your home in order that the two will become one. Don't focus on resolving differences now; that will be the theme of a later lesson. Just try to draw up the list. A few suggestions are given to get you started. They may or may not apply to you.

GOALS (PURPOSES)

- Develop strong corporate identity in marriage
- Raise Godly children
- Developing deepening sexual relationship

VALUES

- Importance of family
- Type and place of ministry (Each person, family as a whole)
- Use of home
- How money is spent
- Use of time
- Lifestyle
- Entertainment
- Manners
- Personal hygiene

E. Look at Philippians 2:2. On a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being completely united) how would you rate your corporate unity with your spouse? How well have you become one?

F. Developing a corporate identity is much like sanctification, a lifetime activity. So don't get discouraged. The next studies will be helpful in continuing in your corporate growth together. Have a time of prayer that you will be willing to be open to growth toward greater unity no matter what the cost.

Study #3 BARRIERS (PART I)

I. Just as sanctification requires repentance, growing in corporate identity requires us first to detect things which stand in the way, so that we can turn from them and press on to the unity which the Holy Spirit desires us to have (Ephesians 4:1-3). This study on barriers will focus on understanding and appreciating the inequities in relationship.

A. Let's look first at our relationship with our risen Christ. Jesus is Lord, God, Sovereign king, invisible, all knowing, all-powerful, etc.

1. Looking at the above descriptions of Christ, how are we different from him?
2. How does the fact that He is Lord and we are His servants bring inequity (radical, unchangeable differences) to our relationship with him? (Cf. John 15:9-11)
3. How does this relationship restrict us?
4. Do the inequities and restrictions in this relationship ever frustrate you, disturb you, or make you angry? Explain.

B. In our American culture we are trained from early on that all men are created equal and free. It is a powerful value. This often causes us to judge any inequity in relationships as "unfair". Inequity and restrictions within relationships are seen as "bad". However, we have seen above that our relationship to Christ is inequitable by nature and carries with it restrictions. We may neglect to look at these from His viewpoint.

1. Can you think of any inequities or restrictions, which would look different when viewed from Jesus' perspective?

2. One area is that we are often called to obey Him without fully understanding why He commands us to do something (a walk of faith). How do you respond when commanded to follow without fully knowing why?

C. The Roles of Husband and wife are also by nature inequitable though complementary.

1. Can you think of any obvious inequities in the relationship based on the nature of man and woman? (A look at Genesis 2:18-24 (Cf. I Corinthians 11:3, 7-9) and Genesis 3:16-19 may help you get started with inequities stemming from creation and the fall.)

2. Look at Ephesians 5:21-33, I Peter 3:1-7, and Titus 2:3-5. Make a list of the different Roles of Husband and wife.

HUSBAND'S ROLE

WIFE'S ROLE

3. The way each couple works out these roles in the marriage will vary from couple to couple. Never-the-less, there are distinct, God-given roles for husband and wife. The husband/wife relationship is inherently inequitable yet complementary. How are the elements of these roles complementary and essential in the home?

4. God has created us in particular ways to bring glory to His name. His commands are not burdensome (I John 5:3) but rather designed with our true nature in mind. When we surrender ourselves to Christ, he places a new nature in us, which desires to seek His will. The tension is that our old flesh is still very much alive and seeks to serve self rather than deny self to serve God. The flesh is deceptive and easily led by the devil (Ephesians 4:22). It must be countered by taking our stand on God's word against our previous ways of thinking. For the believer, regeneration is followed by an ongoing process of repentance and renewing of the mind (Ephesians 4:22-24) leading to a transformed life (Romans 12:2).

Not accepting God's guidelines will result in frustration and, ultimately, alienation. Have you accepted God's role (restrictions) in your own life? Have a time of prayer for repentance and/or commitment to God's plan for you as a husband or wife. Pray that He will continue the process of renewing your mind through His Word and His Spirit, so that you will grow in your understanding, faith, and commitment to do what pleases Him.

Study #4 BARRIERS (PART II)

The Flesh

I. You have probably found that simply knowing the truth does not always enable you to obey it (Him). What is the problem?

A. Look at Romans 8:5-8, and Galatians 5:16, 17. What is the problem? How deep is it? (Romans 7:14-25 probes this.)

B. Look at Galatians 5:13-17. Who is the flesh interested in serving? Who is the Spirit interested in serving?

1. When the flesh is in control, what results? (Look at vs. 15, 19-21, 26). In what areas is the flesh evident in your marriage?

2. What is the solution? (Cf. vs. 24, Matthew 16:24, 25, Luke 13:3)

C. The solution is simply (though not easily) to become God centered rather than "me" centered. By our own strength this is impossible. The flesh causes fragmentation and chaos both in our relationships and in our own being. Only the Holy Spirit has the power to deliver us from these patterns of destruction through repentance and renewing of the mind (Romans 8:12-14; Romans 12:2).

1. When the spirit is in control, what results (Galatians 5:22, 23)?

2. In what areas have you seen the ministry of the Spirit working in your marriage, bringing greater unity and harmony?

II. Attempting to develop a corporate identity with your spouse (or the church) will always be resisted by your flesh. The tendency for the flesh to create barriers is especially likely when differing goals and values lie at the root of the problems. Often the marriage becomes a battle ground between two wills to see whose will prevails. Or quiet manipulation behind the scenes may serve to determine whose values and goals take precedence.

A. What are the recurring problems in your relationship?

B. How do you respond when this problem(s) comes up in your marriage? (Next study we will begin to examine positive patterns of communication, which can help in overcoming conflicts.)

C. What differing goals or values might underlie this conflict?

D. The solution to this chaos begins when each person in the relationship realizes that God's will (not ours) needs to prevail. (This can be especially difficult if each has learned how to carefully wrap their goals and values in the garb of Godliness--the heart is desperately wicked!). Indeed God has brought the two persons together with all their differences to form something new and beautiful!

1. Look at Genesis 2:20-23. The words of vs. 23 were literally true! How would that affect the way Adam interacted with his wife in terms of seeking what was best for them when there was conflict?

2. Look at Ephesians 5:28, 29 in light of the last question. How should this affect the way we interact with our spouses?

E. Once a couple has realized that the good of the corporate whole is what is far more important than the individual good (indeed this usually costs the individual), then the two can repent from their self-centeredness (deny self) and begin to set their minds on finding what is best for the corporate man.

1. You may need to have a time of repentance before God and acknowledge where you have sought your own will and not His (the good of the corporate unit as revealed by God). Look at your answer to II #2 above.

2. You may need to go to your spouse and make restitution as well (Cf. Matthew 5:23, 24).

3. What does John 12:24, 25 promise for those willing to die to themselves? Praise Him for the faith to believe such a truth!

Study #5 COMMUNICATION

I. It goes without saying that good communication is required for relational unity and corporate identity. Only communication, which promotes deepening, ongoing understanding enables two individuals to re-examine long held values and goals in order to realize God's purposes in their life. This study will look to learning and evaluating good communication. The next study will look at communication in the midst of conflict.

A. Good Communication skills grow out of our relationship with our Lord. Since our horizontal relationships (with other, visible people) are connected to our relationship with the Lord (Cf. Matthew 25:31-46), let us begin our evaluation of our communication skills by looking at our vertical relationship with Him.

1. Good communication requires regular time together (Cf. John 1:39-43). Do you take regular time to talk with the Lord? Honestly evaluate your prayer life.

2. Good communication requires good listening (I Corinthians 2:11-13). We listen to God when we read His word. The New Testament reveals the teachings and words He shared with the apostles. We also need to listen as the Holy Spirit applies the Word to the particular real-life situations in which we find ourselves. A good listener will find himself sensitive to the Spirit's convictions and encouragements as he walks in the world. He needs regular times of study, confession, repentance and rejoicing as the Spirit leads him in the ongoing task of sanctification. How good a listener are you?

3. Relationships require much work. When we stop working on them they stop growing. What are your weaknesses in your relationship with the Lord? Ask your spouse to help you evaluate your walk with the Lord (especially looking at "B" above).

4. The Bible teaches that the basis of our fellowship with one another is our relationship with Christ (Cf. I John 1:3). Do you and your spouse have a regular time of Bible reading and prayer together?

B. If our relationship with our spouse is to deepen and grow, we must work on our relational skills in our marriage, which is the most important of our horizontal relationships. The following are elements necessary in good communication. Look up the verses and evaluate yourself in each area, then ask your spouse to evaluate you.

1. Time together (see A above).
2. Listening (Proverbs 18:13, James 1:19)
3. Openness and honesty (Ephesians 4:25)
4. A receptive, understanding attitude (I Peter 3:7,
5. Asking good Questions
6. Getting beyond yourself to understand the other (Ph 2:1-4, Ephesians 4:1-3)
7. Self-Control (Ephesians 4:26, 27)
8. Careful selection of words, tone of voice, etc. (Eph. 4:29, Proverbs 12:18)
9. A charitable and patient spirit (Eph. 4:31, 32)

C. Good communication requires you to be vulnerable in the relationship. Pain as well as joy awaits those who commit themselves to corporate unity. Fear and self-protection are real barriers, which often have to be repented of and overcome with the help of God's Spirit. Commit yourselves in prayer to this corporate path.

D. Because vulnerability is required in a relationship, and we are all sinners, hurt will occur. Therefore forgiveness is essential in maintaining a healthy relationship. Look at Matthew 18:21-35.

1. For the Christian, what is the size of his/her debt with God?
2. What has God done about this debt? How did He do it? What did it cost him?
3. How does the size of this debt with God compare with the debts others have incurred against us?
4. What should we do about these debts? Why?
5. What does this mean in practice? (Think about what it means for God to forgive us.)

E. Does it mean that we are to be permissive with each other's sin? (Look at Matthew 18:15-20)

F. How should we confront one another and for what purpose?

One way to work this out in practice in marriage is to exercise a Covenant of Forgiveness. It works something like this:

Step 1: The villain comes to the victim and confesses that he/she has done something wrong. He/she takes full responsibility for the action and humbly requests forgiveness. For example: "Honey I was wrong to get angry with you and lose my temper this evening." (No excuses!) If other restitution is required, offered it! (See Mt. 5:23, 24).

Step 2: The victim says, "I forgive you" thus canceling the debt and letting the villain off the hook. The victim thus promises no longer to nurse a grudge by going over the injury in her mind (2 Cor. 10:5), telling others to gain sympathy, or throwing it in the villain's face at a later date.

Alternative to Step 1: If the villain does not approach the victim as specified in Step 1, then the victim follows the steps in Matthew 18:15-20 confronting the villain.

G. Evaluate how well you are doing this in your marriage.

Study #6 COMMUNICATION & CONFLICT

I. When two sinners live under the same roof, conflict is inevitable. Dealt with properly, this suffering can bring about tremendous change and transformation in their lives. Conflict handled improperly, however, leads to withdrawal, fragmentation, mistrust and a progressive deterioration in the marriage relationship. Once again, different couples will handle conflict in different ways. This study will focus on how to handle conflict in ways, which will lead to transformation of the individuals and lead to deepening unity.

Unfortunately, the only way to learn the lessons is by practice. Therefore, although this study may help you by simply reviewing it, the best way to learn these lessons is to go back to Study #4 section II and begin to work through areas of conflict in your marriage.

STEPS TO RESOLVING CONFLICT:

1. Define the problem. What underlies the problem? Does it arise from different opinions, convictions, values, goals? Some possible passages which might help: Romans 14, I Corinthians 8, .

2. Define your contribution to the problem (especially if it is an ongoing one).
 - a. Have you sinned against your spouse (in thought, word or deed)?
 - (1) Sins can be actions of omission as well as commission (eg. the silent treatment is as sinful as cursing).
 - (2) Be especially careful in evaluating your words (Matthew 12:34-37). Beware of verbal overkill "you always, never." Such exaggeration violates the law of speaking the truth on to another.
 - (3) Beware of justifying your reactions due to your spouse's sinful actions. You are accountable to God for your actions as well as your reactions (Cf. I Peter 2:18-23).
 - b. Is your flesh keeping you from seeing clearly? It might help to look over study #4. If so, have a time of confession and, if necessary, make restitution to your spouse. See Mt 7:1-5, 5:23, 24.
3. Have a time of prayer and meditation praising the Lord for His plan and asking Him to give you clarity of sight. Ask Him also to show you what qualities He may be trying to develop through this situation. Thank Him for giving a partner who is able to re-shape and re-mold you even though it is painful. You might look at Hebrews 12:1-11 for some encouragement.
4. Plan times together when you can talk about the problem. Explore the things, which may be underlying this particular conflict (see #1 above).
 - a. Be certain your eye is clear and you have gone through the above steps so you can receive the full benefit of what the Lord has in store.
 - b. Open with a time of prayer acknowledging that all that will transpire in the discussion is done before Him. **THEN BE SENSITIVE TO HIS PRESENCE.** Times of prayer (for guidance, confession, repentance etc.) may help as you talk.
 - c. Try to understand what the other person is saying. Saying it back to them is most helpful in understanding what the other person is saying.
 - d. Try to understand what may be motivating your spouse. Fear? Self-protection? Flesh? Bitterness over past hurts? etc.
 - e. Put your thoughts on the table openly and honestly, but also compassionately.
 - f. Evaluate everything in the light of God's word. If you are uncertain about what the Lord says about the problem, ask your shepherd or discipler, or study it from your Bible.
 - (1) Use a concordance or topical Bible to look up relevant passages and prayerfully study them.
 - (2) Go to a wise believer to ask advice and Biblical guidance.
5. If the underlying cause of the problem is different goals or values, which the two of you hold, but are allowed by Scripture, then this is a great opportunity to form a new corporate value or goal.
 - a. Values are things, which must be embraced and thus must be done consciously and voluntarily.
 - b. It usually takes some time for this to happen, and therefore it may be necessary to plan a temporary solution until both come to an agreement. The temporary solution should graciously avoid all unnecessary offense (e.g. "I am not certain it is important how I hold my fork, honey, but I will talk to some Christians I really respect. Until I reach some conclusion, however, I will hold my fork according to your values".).
6. In the event persistent efforts do not resolve your conflicts, ask a wise brother to mediate between the two of you (I Corinthians 6:1-8). This "marriage counselor" should be a mature believer which both

trust. If the couple can agree on none, then ask an elder to recommend a counselor, and agree beforehand to work with him, whoever it is.

Paul says wisely to those who marry "such will have much trouble in this life, and I am trying to spare you". I Cor 7:28. The single person would be wise to heed this counsel. For those of us who are married, we have no other choice then to give ourselves joyfully to this caldron of sanctification. May God grant us the grace to be conformed to His image in our marriage.