Session 3: Restoring a Troubled Marriage
By Ken and Donna Kessler

Marriages Today Face Great Pressure

The scriptures teach with great clarity that God’s best plan for married couples is to remain with the same mate for life.

The scriptures tell us that the Lord is for marriage but hates divorce (Mal. 2:16), He that men are to be married to one wife (1 Tim. 3:2), and says that marriage is a covenant relationship between a man and a woman (Mal. 2:14).

God’s highest expression of commitment are His covenants with man. We are saved by covenant, and we inherit every blessing of God by covenant.

God’s best is for married couples to remain married to the same person for life.

God has practical reasons for marriage to last for a lifetime.

It is from a lifetime commitment that true love can flourish. When a husband and a wife both know their mate is committed to them for life, it frees them to be who they are. It allows them to be open, transparent, and to relate at a much deeper level than would otherwise be possible. It frees them to be what God created them to be.

Children also flourish in the safety and security of knowing that their moms and dads are not going to abandon them but are going to be together to raise them and nurture them until they are old enough to go out on their own.

Couples who stay together tend to be more financially stable than those who separate, divorce, and remarry. In the USA, the welfare system is filled with single mom’s raising their children because their baby’s father has left. Families with a mom and a dad tend to be much more financially stable.

Of course, as we inferred in Session 1, there are also many spiritual purposes that God has for couples as they live for God and His kingdom.

So, there are many reasons--both natural and spiritual--for married couples to remain married and to work through problems when they arise.

At the risk of repeating ourselves concerning those who are single, divorced, or remarried, God does not condemn you and He has not set you aside from being in the center of His purposes.

Even though you might have failed or your spouse has failed and your life has been deeply affected, God is not finished with you. There is no condemnation in Christ. God is the God who restores, redeems, and uses us even in our mistakes, failures, sins, or troubles.

Just remember, this class is intended for those who are already married or planning to marry or remarry in the future. If you are currently married, God has a plan for your marriage—a great plan—and His will is for you to stay married for a lifetime.
Cultural opinion of marriage in much of the world is in direct opposition to the teachings of scripture.

The divorce rate in the western world is extremely high. Studies indicate that about 50% of first marriages, 67% of second marriages, and 74% of third marriages end in divorce.¹

In addition to this alarming statistic, almost half of couples in America are now choosing to live together before marriage, and many of those never marry. Others even have children in their unmarried state.² Some studies indicate that as many as 40% of children in America are born to unwed mothers.

If this weren’t troubling enough, many individuals are choosing to never marry. The Pew Research Center’s latest report shows that married adult Americans are soon becoming a minority. According to Pew, 51% of adults 18 or older are married. That’s down from 57% in 2000 and 72% back in 1960.³

Marriage is under such an attack in our culture that even our governments are attempting to redefine the long held definition of marriage of one man married to one woman.

There is a tremendous need for christians to hold to God’s standard of marriage—one man to one woman for life.

There is a real need for christians to decide that they are and will be committed to their marriage relationship for the rest of their life. Issues, problems, struggles, and pressures in the family and on the relationship will occur from thime to time in every marriage relationship. Christians must not shrink back but willingly pay the price to work through issues that come against their relationship.

This session will focus on three key concepts that will help married couples stay married for life and to work through problems in their marriage. God wants your marriage to be a happy marriage; so, these principles are intended not to just keep your marriage together for 50 years, but to help you resolve issues so that you can be as the story books tell us married happily ever after.

If you are in a troubled marriage, this session is for you!

God Has Worked in the Lives of Others

God restored our marriage.

As we shared in Session 1, Donna and I were on the brink of divorce at the 3 to 4 year mark in our marriage. We were still living under the same roof, but the flame of love had completely left our relationship. She did not love me and I did not love her. Our marriage was merely a shell, with no respect, no communication and very little else. It was only by the grace of God and because of Donna’s efforts to save our marriage that we are still married today. Read as Donna shares what she did to save our marriage.

The first thing that I did was to take the advice of a faithful friend and asked the Lord to give me alove for Ken. I prayed with very little faith and maybe a little doubt. But God
heard my feeble prayer. Thankfully, He saw my heart and heard my cry. Not long after that I took the course “You Can Be The Wife of a Happy Husband”. As I have said in previous sessions, I was so convicted by what I was hearing. Like I said in the last session, I started submitting to Ken and almost immediately quit nagging. I definitely prayed a lot too. My best friend would always talk and pray with me for our marriages. Many times when Ken would come home after traveling I would have a special meal or appetizer for him. I was always nice when Bryan was asleep. One thing that our teacher told us to do was to make a list of all of our husband’s good qualities. She said, “If you can’t think of any, remember what drew you to him in the first place.” I began to make my list and tried to live out Philippians 4:8, “Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.” I tried to think only about the good qualities and he definitely had a lot of great qualities.

Another principle I learned was based on 1 Peter 3:1-6 which encouraged me that my unbelieving husband could be won over not by my words but by my godly behavior. I didn’t preach to him but by the grace of god my behavior changed. It took a lot of discipline and diligent prayer as I held on to the Lord trusting Him and allowing the Lord to change me rather than me trying to change Ken. Remember that God is faithful and will according to your need, reward your obedience to His commands.

The changes were not instantaneous but eventually they came and our marriage grew better and more closer than I could ever have hoped for. God was faithful as He restored our marriage.

In addition to our story, we have been in full time ministry for almost 30 years. In that time, we have counseled a lot of couples with marriage problems. I want to share a few of their stories to illustrate to you that it is possible for you to see your marriage restored. I will change the names to protect their privacy.

**For Bob and Sara, God did not restore their marriage.**

I wanted to start by sharing a failure so that you know that this is not a magic formula that will always work if you implement a specific set of principles. We have to recognize in dealing with a marriage, there are two free willed people involved, and, as much as we would like to see marriages restored, some people just refuse to change. When this happens, their marriages remain in a broken state.

Sara had separated from Bob before he came to me for counseling. She had moved on, already having filed divorce papers. Bob loved Sara and desperately desired to see the marriage restored. My counsel to Bob was to do what we recommend in this session. I told him to remain committed to Sara, pray, ask for forgiveness, and try to show her love by attempting as best he could in their separated state to meet her needs.

He faithfully did everything I advised. He was a great student. However, unfortunately it did not work. He tried for several years to do this with only a few small victories. When Sara finally remarried, Bob knew it was over, and there was no hope for reconciliation. Even though he was greatly discouraged, he had the priceless peace of mind that he had tried everything he could to save his marriage. He could look himself in the mirror and be at peace with God and know he was free to move on.

I am glad to say that Bob has remarried and is very happy in his second marriage.
For Pat and Reece, God did restore their marriage.

Pat and Reece are good friends of Donna and myself. Reece is now retired, but was a very successful businessman. He had married Pat right out of college, and their marriage was pretty good, but not great. A major holiday had come, and Reece was supposedly out of town on business. Pat prepared the holiday meal, trusting the Lord. But Reece never came home. With that event recent in their minds, at about the 20 year mark in their marriage, Reece moved out. They never divorced, but they were living separate lives in virtually every way. Pat is a christian whereas Reece is not. Pat went to the Lord and began to practice the principles discussed in this session. It was a very hard time in her life. She was alone for about two years as they lived separate lives. Even in the midst of Reece’s failure to be a good husband, Pat never spoke an unwholesome word to the children about their father. She protected them from knowing anything, and she never spoke unkindly about Reese to anyone. She kept a cheerful attitude around everyone. But, in their case, I am happy to report that Reece finally came to his senses and moved back in. He is still not a christian, but they are very happy now and have two children that came from their renewed relationship.

God worked in the marriage of Keith and Lynn.

Keith and Lynn came to the church Donna and pastor with tremendous marriage problems. We were not sure they would make it. Fortunately, they came to us before they separated. This is such an important point. As it worked with Pat and Reece, God can restore a marriage if separation or divorce has already happened, but it is much more difficult to see it occur. If a couple will begin to save their marriage before it gets to the point of separation, it is much more likely that the marriage will be restored. Now, back to Keith and Lynn. I really think that Lynn hated Keith at the time they came to us. After venting about each other for a few hours, they did begin to do what we had advised, and the results were amazing. In a relatively short period of time their marriage was on much more solid footing, and they were on their way to a healthy, fulfilling marriage. Today, they are very happy and walking strongly with the Lord.

These topics operate together to transform a troubled marriage to one that is joyful and fulfilling for each spouse.

Committed for Life

The foundation for working through problems in a marriage—even serious problems—is knowing that you are committed to being married to your current mate for life.

When couples don’t have this idea firmly in their hearts, their minds often run to the idea that if their effort doesn’t work out like they want, they can always get a divorce. When couples don’t accept the idea of a lifetime commitment, they normally will not pay the price or wait the necessary time to see circumstances change.

As Donna and I shared in in a previous section, we had tremendous problems in our marriage at the three to five year mark. At the height of our problems, the only thing that held us together was that neither of us believed in divorce. Although I grew up going to church every week with my parents, I was not a christian. Donna was a christian although a nominal one. Even so, our parents had instilled deep in our hearts the biblical mandates about marriage.
We did not argue much, but there was a great invisible wall between us and silence characterized our relationship. We did not relate in any way other than those things necessary to keep the household functioning.

We knew that christians did not divorce.

Therefore, without really understanding why, we were committed to not divorcing. Moreover, we did not want to remain in the state of misery that we were in. That only left one alternative for us—to work things out. As we shared, I did not try first, Donna was the one who began to work alone to save our marriage. Nonetheless, we were committed to remaining married.

This is a very important decision that every couple wanting a God honoring marriage blessed by God's favor must make. They must decide with deep conviction in their heart that they are married for life. To see things change, you must make this decision. You must decide with sincerity that you are committed to this relationship for life and that you don’t want to be miserable for life so you are going to work hard on making your marriage what it should be.

To help you make this commitment, let’s look at how God views the commitment of marriage.

**Marriage is a covenant made between a man and a woman.**

".....the LORD has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant...no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth. 'For I hate divorce,' says the LORD, the God of Israel,...So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously" (Mal. 2:14-16).

The preceding passage makes it clear that when a couple marries, in God’s eyes they are entering into a covenant with each other. Since God hates divorce, He takes their covenant agreement very seriously.

**Understanding covenant helps us understand the degree of commitment expected of a couple in a godly marriage.**

The Lifeschool class, *Understanding Your Inheritance in Christ*, goes into great detail on the principle of covenant. Even though this class focuses on our covenant relationship with God, the principles in this class provide great insight into what type of commitment is intended in a marriage covenant. It would be a good study for you to do to look at the sessions on covenant in that class.

Let’s just present a few of the principles about covenant here. Some are:

1. God’s highest expression of commitment are His covenants with man. We are saved by covenant, and we inherit every blessing of God by covenant.

2. A covenant is far more binding than anything we think of in our culture. In western culture, we think in terms of contracts that have terms, lengths, and remedies. A covenant is far different. To the ancients, a covenant communicated a very solemn agreement of loyalty, faithfulness, and commitment that lasted for life and could not be broken.
A covenant takes two independent parties and joins them together to live as one for a common purpose.

A covenant establishes a relationship between covenant partners that is closer and more loyal than any other relationship.

A covenant requires each partner to give all they have and are to their covenant partner and provides the right for each partner to draw from all the other partner has or is.

According to our class on covenant, the act of entering into an ancient covenant would consist of up to eight steps. Each of these steps are symbolic of the agreement they were entering.

Here are some of these steps and how they relate to a husband and wife entering into the covenant of marriage.

**The pre-ceremony actions**

In a typical ancient covenant, before a covenant was enacted, the two parties would discuss the terms, conditions, the promises of blessing, and the warning of curses related to the agreement. As a part of this step, they would weigh the advantages and disadvantages of the covenant and evaluate whether it was a worthwhile opportunity. They would spend time counting the cost of entering into the covenant. In essence, they would assess whether the personal sacrifice demanded by the pact would return equal or greater blessings.

This is what couples do when they are deciding if the person they are dating is the right person for them. They talk through desires, likes, dislikes, and each person’s relationship with God. They have not yet entered the lifelong covenant with their mate. They are making a decision on whether or not to enter the covenant.

**The Selection of the Covenant Representatives and the Cutting of the Covenant Sacrifice.**

In ancient times, there was always the killing of a covenant sacrifice to accompany the ceremony and the selection of two people to represent the two larger groups entering into the covenant. The killing of the sacrificial animal indicated the seriousness of the covenant agreement in ancient times.

Fortunately, our marriage ceremonies do not have animal sacrifices. However, when couples marry, they are doing a similar thing. The groom and the bride are the covenant representatives joining together in marriage. But there is also a larger group involved in their marriage. Parents, grandparents, brothers, and sisters and the children who will come from the relationship are affected by the covenant agreement between the husband and wife.

So, husbands and wives you have not only agreed to marry, you have joined two families together and the children you will have together.

**The Walk Unto Death**

In ancient covenants, both parties would walk between the pieces of the sacrificed
animal and say something like this, “Do so to me as has been done to this animal if I break this covenant. If I fail to keep this covenant, may I die even as this animal has died.” In essence, when two parties made this statement, they were committing to the covenant arrangement until death. As you trace the idea of covenant through the scriptures, you observe quickly that this is the level of commitment God intends in covenant.

When you uttered the words, “until death do we part” at your wedding ceremony, you were not just going through a ritual required to get the marriage license signed. You were making a covenant statement much like the ancients made after taking the walk unto death. You were stating with God as your witness that you are committed to your marriage for life.

_Pronouncement of Blessings and Curses_

After taking the walk unto death, the ancients would stand between the pieces of flesh with God (or in the case of pagan covenants their pagan god) as a witness and proclaim blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. Of course, we know that Jesus took the curse upon Himself. So, we are no longer cursed in Christ, but blessed.

When you spoke your vows at your wedding, you were taking a solemn oath to have and to hold in sickness and in health, for better or worse. In essence, you were pronouncing that you are committed to be a blessing to your mate until death separates. You made this pronouncement of blessing with God as your witness.

_The Seal of the Covenant Mark_

In a typical ancient covenant, after the animal was sacrificed, the walk unto death completed, and the blessings and curses stated, the two parties would seal the agreement with a special sign or token. This became the mark of the covenant that reminded both parties of the solemn pact that bound them together as one. If the agreement enacted was a blood covenant, then the mark would normally involve the shedding of blood by the two covenant partners, again symbolizing the serious nature of your decision—serious enough to require the shedding of blood.

Ancient Jewish weddings involved the demonstration of the shedding of blood. In ancient Jewish weddings after the couples had said their vows, they entered a room to consummate their vows while their friends waited outside. Doesn’t sound very romantic does it! The groom would exit the room with a blood stained cloth to prove the bride’s virginity and to show that the marriage had been consummated. The shedding of blood was the mark sealing the marriage covenant.

Just like the seal and sign of the covenant with Noah was the rainbow, with Abraham was circumcision, and with Jesus was a circumcised heart, water baptism, and communion—the seal and sign confirming the establishment of the marriage covenant is the physical consummation of the marriage sexually.

The sexual act is the one act that separates your relationship with your spouse from any other. Each time couples join together in physical intimacy, they are doing so in remembrance of the covenant they have entered.
You may not have realized it, but your wedding day was a covenant ceremony with God as your witness.

You may not have had any idea that when you said “I do” you were entering a covenant with your mate, but God knew it. And as one who wants God’s best for your marriage, you must accept the truth that you have entered into a covenant with your spouse—a covenant with the same seriousness, the same expectation of commitment, and the same promise of great blessing as ancient covenants suggested.

You have made a lifetime commitment to your mate and to the Lord to remain married. Therefore, if you are currently in a troubled marriage, the first step to seeing YOUR marriage become a blessing in your life rather than the source of great unhappiness is to accept the fact that you have entered a covenant with your mate witnessed by God.

God does give permission in certain cases to break the marriage covenant.

In discussing restoring troubled marriages, I want to be true to the scriptures. God does give permission in certain cases to break the marriage covenant. Specifically, if one party is involved in adultery, fornication, or homosexuality, God does give an exception clause (Matt. 19:1-15) to free the innocent party from the marriage. Paul also writes that if a person is married to an unbeliever and the unbeliever leaves, the believer is free from the marriage (1 Cor. 7:10-16).

Even though God does not require a person to live in a relationship in which one spouse is involved in immorality, most of the time, God’s best is not to leave the marriage but to restore it. In our years of counseling, Donna and I have seen a lot of marriages in which one partner is or has been involved in adultery or some other form of sexual perversion. Almost always, it is better to restore the marriage than to leave it. There are many reasons for this assessment. The grass is most often not greener on the other side, love can and often is restored to surpass all expectations, the children are better off, and single parents tend to struggle in poverty for the rest of their lives.

So, when we counsel couples, although there are some exceptions, Donna and I almost always counsel people to restore the marriage they are in rather than end it.

This leads us to our next life principle,

**Life Principle 25:** Husbands and wives, look each other in the eyes and tell each other I am committed to you and to this covenant relationship for the rest of my life.

With that said, let’s move to the next step in restoring a broken marriage.

**Forgiveness**

**Once you have settled the issue of commitment, the next step toward restoring your marriage is forgiveness.**

The scriptures are filled with references about the need to ask for forgiveness and to offer forgiveness. The scriptures speak of forgiveness on four levels.

1. When Jesus died on the cross, He provided forgiveness for all sin for all
people for all of time.

2. When we accept Jesus for the first time and also when we sin following our conversion, the Lord forgives us when we ask for it.

3. When we sin against another person in a way that either hinders the relationship with them or is committed in a public way, we are to go to them and ask their forgiveness. If someone sins against someone in a private manner such as thoughts of judgment or lust, we are not to go to them. Going to them would create more harm than good.

4. When someone sins against us, we are to forgive them because Christ forgave us.

If we are to see our marriage restored, husbands and wives must walk out forgiveness in their marriage. They must ask for and receive forgiveness from the Lord for their sin in general and for sins affecting the marriage. They are to ask their mate to forgive them for what they have done to them. And they need to forgive their mate for offenses against them.

**Our story of forgiveness illustrates how the dimensions of forgiveness work together.**

When Donna and I had our troubles early in our marriage, I was the primary culprit. Donna has since realized that she wasn’t perfect either in those years, but for the most part I was the sinner—and I put SINNER in capital letters—in the situation. The first step in our restoration was me recognizing my sin and my need to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior. I repented of my sin and asked the Lord to forgive me. Please remember that repentance means to have a change of mind that results in a change of action. So, when I repented and asked the Lord to forgive me, I also immediately changed my behavior. To the degree I recognized my sin, I ended my sinful actions immediately.

This is a very important step. Usually, both parties need to ask God to forgive them for their sin. Not always, but in most cases, both spouses have contributed to the problems the couple is facing and both need to accept responsibility for their sin.

I was content to keep my sins from Donna forever. I had no plans to ever tell her what I had been doing in my years of rebellion. Our marriage was getting better. I was going to church and teaching Sunday School. My thought was that the less said about my past actions the better.

But God had a different idea. About two years after I had truly and deeply repented and changed, God began to convict me that I need to confess my sins to Donna and to others I had sinned against. I fought this idea with great vigor trying to convince myself this is not what I should do. But finally I could not wrestle with God any longer and I confessed my sin to Donna and asked her forgiveness. This was one of the most difficult things I have ever done, but I am so glad I did it. Looking back on the decision, I know now that if I had not been open with her and confessed my sins to her, there would have been a ceiling on how high our relationship could go. There would always be something hidden between us. I had waited on the timing of the Lord to do this and not surprisingly, the Lord had been preparing Donna to hear what I had to say. I won’t say it was easy. It most definitely was not. But it led to a transparency in our relationship that has only grown in the years since.
When I asked Donna to forgive me, she graciously offered her forgiveness. It was not easy for her to do so. I had hurt her deeply, but she found the grace of God to forgive and our marriage jumped from one level of restoration to another. Donna shares her side of the story. After Ken’s confession and my getting over the initial shock, I gently heard the Lord’s voice, “Do not take into account a wrong suffered”. I immediately forgave him, and I know now it was only by the grace of God that I was able to do so. The Lord had truly been preparing my heart. I had been memorizing and meditating on the love chapter, 1 Corinthians 13, "Love is patient, love is kind, etc." What God asks of us, He provides us with grace to endure.

There have been subsequent seasons where the Holy Spirit has convicted both Donna and I to be open and transparent with each other concerning sin in our lives or past sin that the other did not know about and to ask the other for forgiveness. These times have always been hard for both of us. But they are very necessary if you truly desire your marriage relationship to be healed and restored.

**There are several important points to consider as we prepare to ask for and to offer forgiveness.**

Matthew 18:21-35 presents a wonderful parable about forgiveness. As the story goes, a man owed a king an amount of money that it was impossible for him to repay. The man begged the king for mercy, and the king forgave him the debt and released him from the debt in its entirety. But the same man was owed money by another man, only this time it was a small amount. The man who had been forgiven by the king would not forgive or release the second man. The result was that the man who had been forgiven was turned over to the tormentors when he would not forgive and the man who was not forgiven was put in prison. Then Jesus ended the story with these words, “My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart” (Matt. 18:35).

We can learn several important points from this story. The first man was forgiven when he came to the king and pleaded for forgiveness with all of his heart. This is important. If your marriage is in trouble and you are in part to blame, the process of restoration begins when you recognize that first of all you have sinned against God and you plead with Him for forgiveness. We know from the scriptures that God will forgive all who come to Him with deep sincerity. But your asking for forgiveness from the Lord must be real, sincere, deep, without conditions, and with a humble heart ready to change.

The second point is that the second man asked the first man to forgive him of something big but not as big as what either of them had done to offend the king. Here is the second point. Once you have asked the Lord to forgive you, you must then go to your spouse whom you have hurt and ask his or her forgiveness. At this point, there must be sincerity of heart. You can’t say "if I have offended you, I am sorry". It must be more like "I have hurt you deeply, and for that I am very sorry. Will you forgive me?"

The third point naturally follows, and that is that the offended mate must respond by granting his or her forgiveness and also by releasing their mate from the offenses. Forgiveness and release are two different acts. First, the offended mate must truly forgive. Not only must the offended spouse forgive, he or she must also release the offender from the offense. In other words, the one offended must not continually bring up the offense to the guilty party. People often say "I have forgiven them but I
can never forget what they did”. When people think this way, they have not yet released the offender from their sin. If the offended mate does not forgive from their heart and release their mate, then bitterness will emerge. When bitterness dominates the relationship, it becomes virtually impossible to see the relationship truly restored. The couple may stay together, but the marriage will never reach its full potential.

Of course, it takes much grace to enter into this realm of forgiveness and release. But by God’s grace you can do it. And you must do it if you want your marriage restored. So it is worth the effort to work at forgiveness until you are able to forgive and release.

**God’s grace is sufficient even if the offense is an affair.**

You might be thinking that sounds possible unless the offense is an affair. To address that issue, let’s go to Jesus’ encounter with the woman caught in adultery in John 8. The men gathered there that day were wanting to stone the lady to death based on their interpretation of the law of Moses. Jesus’ response to them was he who is without sin, cast the first stone. After Jesus said this all of the men left beginning with the older ones (John 8:9). After they had all left the scene, Jesus told the woman, “Neither do I condemn you; go your way. From now on sin no more.” (John 8:11).

There are a lot of wives who want to stone their husband when he confesses to being unfaithful, and there are a lot of husbands who feel likewise. Whereas they are most definitely justified in being angry and whereas they have the scriptural support to leave the marriage, Jesus has a higher law. He said if you have sin in your own life, then forgiveness is the better choice. It is interesting to me that the older men left first—the ones who had been through more in their lives and possibly realized that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23).

Donna and I agree that in years of counseling when one spouse is unfaithful, there is almost always something that the other spouse is doing that tempts them to sin. We are not justifying adultery by any means, but the faithful spouse is usually not “without sin”.

Of course, there are always exceptions. When the unfaithful spouse continues to be unfaithful and is not willing to change or when the unfaithfulness is accompanied by abuse and continued rejection, then God gives the faithful spouse a way out. However, our experience tells us that in most cases forgiveness leads to a better marriage than either party would have if they divorced and remarried. Let’s share another life principle.

*Life Principle 26:* There is great power in forgiveness. Deep and sincere forgiveness will cleanse a relationship from past wounds and erase the slate in preparation for going forward. Practice asking for it and generously granting it.

Now, that forgiveness has taken place, let’s move on to the next step--restoration.

**Restoring What Was Stolen—and More**
Even after forgiveness has been asked for and granted, there remains a need for the restoration of the relationship.

When we ask the Lord for forgiveness with a sincere heart, He grants it to us immediately. The same can be true when a mate has hurt his or her spouse and forgiveness is granted. It too can come immediately.

However, restoration is different. It is a process and takes time—sometimes a lot of time if the hurts are deep and have occurred over a long period of time.

It normally takes time, sometimes year, to fully restore trust and to rebuild the love relationship. It is not as though there is misery for five years then a sudden improvement in the relationship. Rather, the relationship progresses gradually as both parties begin to work on the relationship. But it does take time.

Several actions will help in the restoration process: openness and transparency, patience, ongoing forgiveness, demonstrating acts of love, and deliverance.

First, there is a need for patience in the restoration process.

Acts 3:21 tells us that before He can return, Jesus must wait patiently in heaven until the restoration of all things spoken by the prophets from ancient times. Jesus must wait on the restoration of all things. Now, of course, He is not sitting idly in heaven waiting. He is actively involved in the affairs of man. The book of Hebrews tells us that He ever lives to make intercession for us (Heb. 7:25). Jesus is very much involved in the restoration process while He patiently waits for His bride to make herself ready for Him.

In restoring a marriage relationship, a similar dynamic must take place. It takes time to restore trust, respect, honor, and for love to be rekindled. This most often will take patience—on the part of both mates.

The offended mate normally wants to see change. He or she wants to make sure there will be no return to the bottle, the nightclub, the internet pornography, or the affair. Therefore, as the offender continues to walk uprightly, he or she must wait patiently for his or her spouse’s trust and love to return. But it will return if the offender will wait patiently for the spouse’s acceptance of him or her.

At other times, the offended spouse must also wait patiently. Many times the one who has been hurt has forgiven, but now they want to see immediate transformation. They want the person who hurt them so badly to instantaneously become the model husband or wife they desire. It doesn’t work that way.

So, both parties must be patient as they work toward the restoration of their marriage.

Second, there must be ongoing forgiveness.

The offended spouse has already forgiven once, and they don’t want to have to do it again and again. But real restoration might require repeated seasons of forgiveness.

Depending on what the offense was, the offender might succeed for a while and then regress. There might be a season of victory and then a setback. The offending
spouse must be prepared to continue to ask for forgiveness and the offended spouse must continue to grant forgiveness until the offender becomes an overcomer in the issue he or she struggles with.

**Third, there must be transparency and openness.**
All along the journey of restoration, there must be good communication between a husband and wife. They both must be transparent and open in sharing their feelings about the restoration process. They must share what they see is happening or not happening in the process.

Each should attempt to share their feelings, needs, and areas where they are struggling to overcome or to forgive. When there is open, frank, and transparent communication about the issues involved, then restoration can more easily come forth.

**Fourth, individually and together, both spouses must pray for restoration to occur and for the marriage to go even beyond where it has ever been.**

Prayer is critical to the restoration process. Hopefully by this point, both parties have decided they are committed to the relationship for life, have asked forgiveness and granted it, and have begun the process of restoring love, joy, and happiness to the marriage. In addition to these critical actions, you must add prayer for reconciliation and restoration.

Prayer changes things, and prayer will bring change for good into your marriage. Jesus said, "Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst" (Matt. 18:19-20).

Who could agree more about your marriage than a husband and a wife? There is great power in the prayer of agreement and especially when husbands and wives pray together about marriage and family issues. In addition, it is hard to argue about issues that you are praying together about.

So, do not forget this critical and essential step in the restoration process. Pray together, pray daily, pray specifically, and pray boldly. Prayer like this will break through barriers and release great favor to bring about change.

**Fifth, both partners should strive to avoid strife and contention.**
Contention and strife is the easiest to be dealt with before it gets out of control. Paraphrasing Proverbs 17:14, the beginning of strife is like when water first trickles from a crack in a dam. Of course, when the crack breaks the water bursts through the hole in the dam. In the same way, contention should be stopped before quarreling breaks out full force.

When fighting is allowed to continue, strong walls are built up that are difficult to remove. As the scriptures say, “It is harder to win back the friendship of an offended brother than to capture a fortified city. His anger shuts you out like iron bars” (Prov. 18:19, TLB).

**Sixth, make sure you keep up your appearance so that you remain attractive to your mate.**
Donna always maintained her appearance. She says that appearance is another area that I learned early on to be important. It communicates to your mate that he is the important enough to look good for him.

Before Ken would come home from work, I would touch up my make up, comb my hair, and straighten up the house. The number one person that you want to look good for is your spouse.

**Seven, do not compare yourself to others.**

Second Corinthians 10:12, Amplified Translation reads, “Not that we [have the audacity to] venture to class or [even to] compare ourselves with some who exalt and furnish testimonials for themselves! However, when they measure themselves with themselves and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding and behave unwisely.”

Do not compare yourself to others and do not compare your marriage to anyone else’s marriage, even to a couple’s marriage that you respect. It is not wise to compare because it only leads to jealousy and envy.

**Eight, each mate should practice acts of love that fuel the restoration process.**

Remember Session 2 in which we talked of the roles of the husband and the wife and the need to attempt to meet the other’s needs. It is very important as you try to restore a broken relationship that each mate focus on living out their role and on intentionally attempting to meet their mate’s needs.

As both mates do this, it will build trust and cause love to flourish much faster than you would imagine.

**Nine, deliverance is very often required to bring restoration.**

The topic of deliverance is such a broad subject that there is not time for a thorough discussion of it here. We have a Lifeschool class on deliverance that delves into the topic in detail.

Nonetheless, when a couple has marriage problems, there are almost always issues in the lives of both spouses that require deliverance. Sins committed, hurts, rejection, trauma, and generational sin all open people up to demonization.

To experience full restoration, deliverance is almost always needed to accompany the other aspects of the restoration process.

It all sounds overwhelming. But it isn’t as hard as it seems. And it is well worth the effort you will put into it. Just imagine how important it is to your children to grow up with a mom and a dad at home. You can do it. God’s grace will be there for you. And it is worth it!

(http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/headlines/marriage-rate-in-america-continues-to-decline/10028/).