

**Getting a Marriage Unstuck:  
The Right Focus and Practical Steps for Real Change**  
*Pastor Brad Bigney*

**I. Get Them to Start Praying Like They've Never Prayed Before**

- A. "O God, help me to see everything you want me to see about ME, and where I need to change, and grow, and repent!"
- B. I make this a homework assignment in the very first session

**Show my 'Homework Assignment' sheet**

- C. Use **Psalm 139:23-24** as a basis for this kind of praying

**Psalm 139:23-24** "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts."

**II. Help Them to Get the Bigger Context and Purpose of Marriage**

- A. Use **Ephesian 5:22-32**, but show them the centrality of Jesus in the midst of it all

- 1. Get them to see Jesus

**5x in 8 verses:** "as" | "even as" | "just as" - Christ!

v. 22 - Wives should submit to their husbands "as to the Lord."

v. 23 – For the husband is head of the wife, "as also Christ is head of the church."

v. 24 –Therefore "just as" the church is subject to Christ, so let wives be to their own husbands.

v. 25 - Husbands love your wives "just as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it."

v. 29 - Husbands should nourish and cherish wives, "just as Christ does the church."

- 2. Get them to see the bigger purpose

**Ephesians 5:32** "This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church."

You see, if you eliminate Christ and you just throw the spotlight on one man and one woman, naked on the stage of marriage—with no resources greater than their own and no drama bigger than their own wish list of "what I want" versus "what she wants"—you have doomed that marriage to a war zone and ultimate failure.

God never designed for marriage to work well without Jesus Christ at the center of it.

**David Powlison** said it well, when he said...

“Where the Lord calls for change, connect those specific changes to what God is doing. Whenever you need to change, put the Redeemer in the center of the picture... Don’t ever degenerate into giving advice unconnected to the good news of Jesus crucified, alive, present, at work, and returning.” *Seeing With New Eyes*, David Powlison, p. 43

### III. Help Them to Be Killing One of Their Biggest ‘Grace Blockers’

A. Use **James 4:6** “... God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”

B. Help them to identify what pride looks like in their own life

Use Stuart Scotts’ booklet, “**From Pride to Humility**”

C. Unpack **Philippians 2:3-8** and call them to start looking out for the needs / interests of their spouse

**Philippians 2:3-8** “<sup>3</sup> Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. <sup>4</sup> Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. <sup>5</sup> Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

D. Verse 4 “Look not only to his own interests.” Greek word ‘Skopeo’ - To look intently or to ‘scope’ it out.

### IV. Teach Them How to Listen More than Talk

A. Use **James 1:19** “My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.”

B. Assign them to use the “**Floor Tile**” concept to learn how to really listen, and how not to talk over top of each other as they discuss issues

- First person holds the ‘Floor Tile’ and says everything they want to say about the issue and why they think and feel the way they do
- The listening spouse cannot interrupt or interject anything at all. Just listen. When they’ve finished speaking, say back to them what you heard them saying about this issue, and see if you are correct.
- If they say, ‘That’s it. Yes. That’s what I’ve been trying to tell you’, then the listening spouse gets to hold the ‘Floor Tile’ and say everything they’ve wanted to say about how they think and feel about this issue.
- But if the spouse says, ‘No. That’s not what I’m saying,’ they get to go again until the listening spouse can state what it is that they’re saying

- After they get it right, the other person now goes through the same process

**C. Use the 31-Day Devotional “*Marriage Conflict: Talking as Teammates*”**

- This is fantastic!
- It gives them a homework assignment related to communication for 31 days
- Something to do personally and then something to discuss and reflect on together as a couple

**V. Get Them to Focus on Their Own Sin First**

**A. Use *Matthew 7:3-5* to explain the biblical process**

**Matthew 7:3-5** “Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? <sup>4</sup>Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye? <sup>5</sup>You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.”

**B. Explain and then assign them to memorize Dave Harvey’s excellent statement:**

- See your own sin first
- See your own sin as worse
- See your own sin as what you need to be working on most

**C. Walk them through doing the ‘*Log List*’ Assignment**

1. Get alone with God for an unhurried time of reflection and soul searching. Ask God to clearly reveal to you ways that you have sinned against your spouse.
2. Get a blank sheet of paper and begin to ‘brainstorm.’ Make a full list of all the things that you have done and are doing wrong in your marriage. Use the sample “Log List” for husband or wife as a guideline. Go over it and personalize it. Be honest and **specific**. We sin against each other in specific, concrete ways, and we need to confess the sin in specific, concrete ways. You should try to have at least 30-50 items listed.
3. Privately confess each of the items as sins, and repent before God.
4. Give your list to your spouse and allow them to add anything to your list that you left off that are items where you have hurt them. You also take their own list of their sins against you and make sure all the issues / items where you have been hurt or think you have been sinned against are listed. The goal is to have as complete a list as possible. We want to ‘clear the decks’ and set the record clean so that you can begin to rebuild your marriage.
5. Get the list of your own sins back from your spouse.

6. Pick a place and time when you can meet together for a **“Confession Session.”** Come together with your own list in hand. Pray together and ask God’s Spirit to meet with you and bring healing.
7. Be ready to speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15). Do not argue, defend yourself, raise your voice, interrupt, or lose your cool. This meeting is to be a place of healing and reconciliation, not a time to attack, malign, get revenge, or argue. Do not discuss or debate the validity of the other person’s judgment. LISTEN to your spouse. Bite your tongue. Be humble.

If it becomes obvious at some point that you cannot continue in a godly, productive manner, the meeting should be suspended for an hour or two or until another time. But **DO NOT DELAY** indefinitely. Satan does not want you to have this meeting! Press on.

During the interim, force yourself to see things from the other person’s point of view. Sit where she/he sits. Think as he/she thinks. Then come back together and proceed.

8. As the spiritual leader, the husband should begin by confessing his sins and failures to his wife. Be very careful to read each item listed on your “Log List” and say: “I sinned against you as a husband when I... Or by not... **Will you please forgive me?**” The wife should respond, “I forgive you.” Then move to the next item.

After the husband has completed going through his list and confessing his sins, the wife should do the same with her list. If you prefer, you can both go through your lists at the same time, alternating back and forth one item at a time... the husband can confess one, then the wife, etc.

9. Close in prayer together.
10. Give each other your own “Log List” and ask your spouse to select the top 5 items from your list that they would like you to begin working on - changing and repenting.
11. Pick a time to sit down and do a face-to-face question / answer time with your spouse regarding the top 5 sins they chose for you to work on. To guide you through this time together use the instructions titled “Getting a Better Understanding of How My Sin Affected My Spouse.”

## **VI. Show Them How to Create a Specific Repentance Plan**

- A.** Help them to understand how their thinking feeds their feelings and actions towards each other.

Use George Sanchez’ article **“Changing Your Thought Patterns”**

- B.** Teach them how to create a written plan of new thinking and behavior in each area.

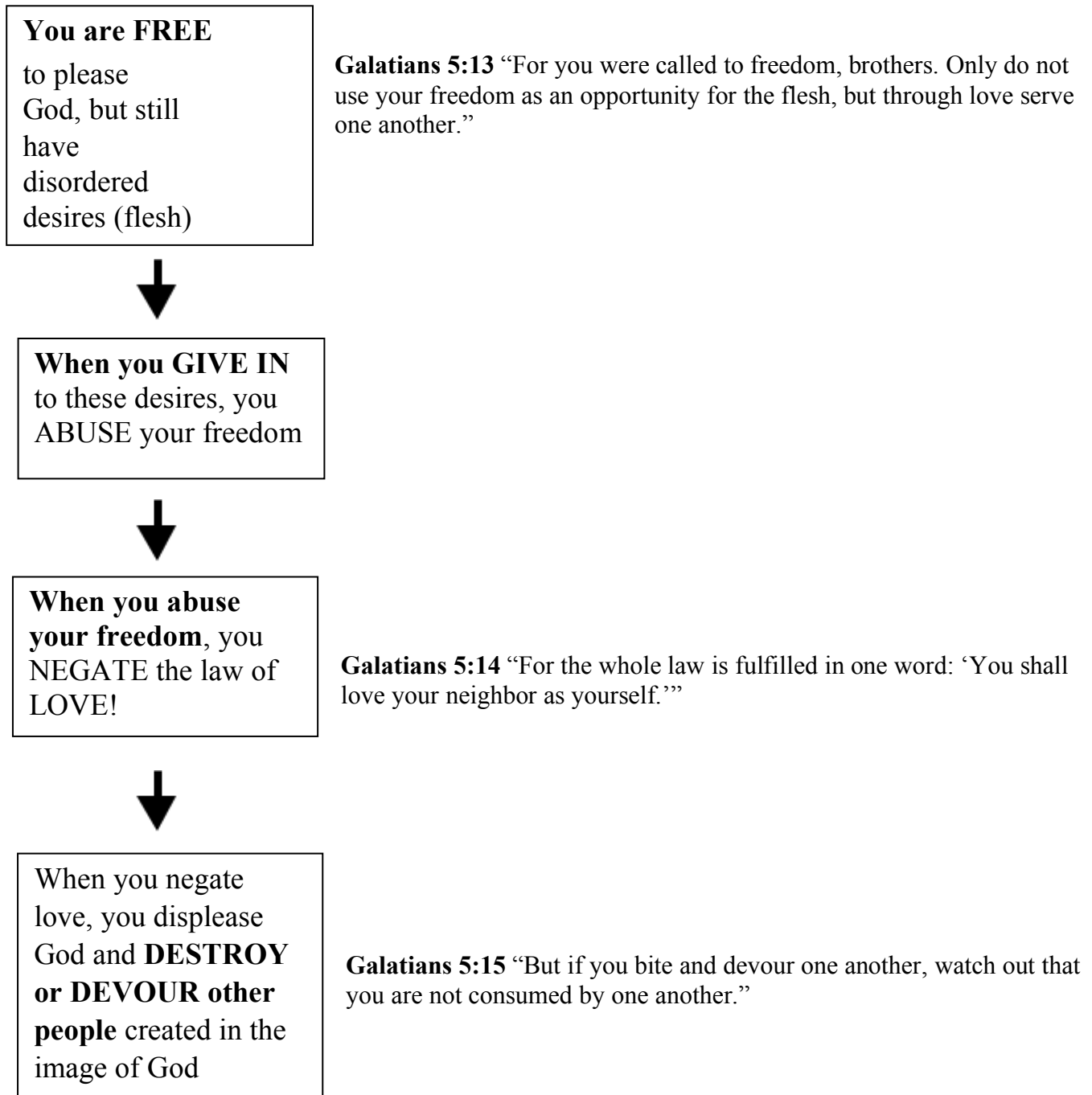
Show my personal Example sheet

## VII. Teach Them How to Fight Sin and Form New Habits of Pleasing God

- A. Teach them what God has given them to fight sin and please Him. Walk through the 'Pleasing God / Fighting Sin' Chart

### You Are Free!

#### Galatians 5:13-25



## **You Are Free But You Are Conflicted**

**Galatians 5:17** “For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.”

**Romans 7:18** “... For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.”

## **So, You Must Be Filled with the Spirit**

**Ephesians 5:18** “And do not get drunk with wine... but be filled with the Spirit”

## **And You Must Live and Fight Your Own Flesh by the Spirit**

**Galatians 5:16** Walk by Spirit

**Galatians 5:18** Be led by Spirit

**Galatians 5:25** Live by Spirit... Keep in STEP with Spirit

**Romans 8:3-4** Do not live according to the flesh... but Spirit

**Romans 8:5-7** 5x uses “mind” set on Spirit instead of flesh

**Romans 8:13** You by the Spirit put to death the deeds of the flesh

**B.** Use the ‘**Catch Yourself**’ Card each week to help them form new habits

Come to our next session ready to give me three examples of where, in your interactions with your spouse, you were about to think, or say, or do what you’ve always done but, by God’s Spirit in you, and our sessions together, you ‘caught yourself’ and instead did what would please God and bless your spouse.