



Marriage Series, Lesson 3

Tending Your Garden, Week 3 –September 20

I. Getting Started: Divining the difference in Men and Women

We start off this week's lesson by first taking a look at some of the basic differences in men and women. We all know that men and women are different but nowhere is it more important to understand certain differences in the way our brains work than in the marriage. Understanding how your mate operates internally can make it a lot easier to understand their motivations and how to relate to them. Let's start off taking a look at the men first.

Men – What are men like? I believe the best way to sum up men as a group is to describe them as a group of very physical creatures. This can be easily illustrated just by looking at one of their favorite group pastimes, sports. And, what sports do men like? Physical ones, the more rough and tumble the better! Football, basketball, hockey, boxing, mixed martial arts, hunting, fishing... the list goes on. If they can't play them then they watch them. And, when they do they watch them, they do it with gusto! They hop up and down, they yell, they scream, they pump their fists when their team scores. Of course, these are the same guys who fall asleep while sitting in church!

Let's also take a look at the way they tackle problems. "Real" men don't sit around and talk about their problems, they get out and do something about them. They get physical with them!

Finally, look at how men are in their personal relationships. Men greet each other by shaking hands, fist bumping, high-fiving, and, in extreme shows of machismo, they "chest bump." With their close relationships with the opposite sex they tend to be just as physical but in quite a different way. There's a very good reason, ladies, that fathers are cleaning their shotguns when young men come to call on their daughters. Let's just suffice it to say that as a general rule men like physical communication as opposed to talking. They're creatures of action!

Women – Next, we take a look into the mind of the average woman. Big surprise but they are really, **really** nothing at all like men! Rather than the rugged and physical nature that most men present they tend to gravitate to activities that are more refined, subtle, cerebral. They tend to seek out those activities that touch their emotions. They often engage in group activities that promote verbal exchange rather than physical competition in which talk is limited. Rather than act out their feelings like men, they'd rather talk about their feelings. They like things that touch the heart, like pictures of puppies and ponies and butterflies. Ever seen Pinterest? Need I say more?

If technology was used to represent the complexities of the verbal communication of men and women, men would be using a string and two cups where women would be using satellite-based communication devices linked together with complex video conferencing software. Is it any wonder the two have trouble communicating? (Dear, where do I plug in the string from my Solo cup into your Wifi hot spot?)

But take note men to NOT be fooled by their subtle nature! Though their activities and mannerisms may be much more refined than men, they are no less fierce and competitive in their natures. They win

wars but they use words, cunningness and manipulation not fisticuffs! The subtle nuances and manipulations at play between two women at odds with each other is much too difficult for a mere Man to grasp!

Please note that these are generalizations. Not all men and women are as described above. But, it generally describes both camps. And, I'd venture to say that more often than not, a party of one type will be attached to a party of the other type.

II. Getting together

Now, given that we can agree to accept the above two rather simple premises about each of the sexes, it's amazing that these two would ever be attracted to each other much less want to bond together into a lifelong relationship, yet we do. Why is this?

Read Genesis 2:22-24: *²² And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. ²³ Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." ²⁴ Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. ²⁵ And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.*

This scripture was so important that Christ later quoted it and it was noted in the two gospels, Matthew 19:5 and Mark 10:7, and again later by Paul in Ephesians 5:31!

Read Proverbs 30:18-19: *¹⁸ There are three things that amaze me — no, four things that I don't understand: ¹⁹ how an eagle glides through the sky, how a snake slithers on a rock, how a ship navigates the ocean, how a man loves a woman.*

So, mystery solved! (sort of) God created woman specifically as a companion for man. We're great together but it is something that defies explanation. We were designed specifically for each other and we need each other but we really don't know why.

III. Garden of Love

So, once a man and a woman have found each other and they marry they become one flesh. What exactly does this mean? It means that they should no longer be thinking about themselves separately, as two individuals, but consider everything as one. How many of us really do that?

Okay, so a couple gets married and they start their life together. To illustrate this new life they started, I'd like you to picture a garden... a garden of love that represents the couple's relationship. In this garden the couple begins to plant the things that nurture and sustain each other.

Now, imagine if you will rows of peas and rows of carrots. Peas represent her favorite (the things most important and necessary to sustain her) and carrots represent his (the things most important and necessary for him). However, these two vegetables are really best when they're served together, peas and carrots. When the marriage is young it's much easier to keep up the garden. The ground is freshly tilled and cleared and both man and wife are young, fresh and eager to help the entire garden grow.

We call this the honeymoon phase. Take a moment to reflect on the things you used to do for each other when you were first married.

Of course as often happens, other things in life begin to demand our attention. As we devote more and more time to these other pursuits, the garden begins to suffer as a result. After all, we can't expect to spend all our time working in this garden, right? So, weeds start to pop up here and there. We undoubtedly notice them but we think, I'll have some time to deal with those this weekend. Or, he/she will get that one. But, the next thing we know the garden has gotten out of hand. In many cases it gets so bad that the couple starts to think the only good solution would be to till it all under and start over (divorce). This is unfortunate.

Then again, there are other gardens that, when the owners are diligent, persist and flourish. This is good! BUT... another change is coming.

At some point, the owners decide it would be nice to add an orchard (AKA, children). It starts out simply enough with the planting of a couple of small seedlings but it soon becomes a tidal wave of care that demands the physical and emotional attention of both owners (the husband and wife). The seedlings require constant watering, weeding, and fertilizing. There's predators to worry about that would eat the greenery of the young saplings. Wilting heat and killing frost are all very real dangers that require close monitoring of the tender plants. Pretty soon, the peas and carrots are a distant memory, neglected and abandoned.

This is where a difference in the man and woman can often appear. The woman, for the most part, can often be content to abandon the rest of the garden for the sake of the orchard. But the man fondly remembers what it was like to have fresh peas and carrots. He'd like to set aside a bit of time to bring back a row or two of each. Surely there's time for both the garden and the orchard but as is often the case the woman is, whether by choice or necessity, just too busy with the orchard to spare any time for the garden. Now remember that as the seedlings (children) grow, they **should** require less and less attention but the focus on them is many times not scaled back as it could, and should, be.

Finally, where is God through all of this you may ask? Why, He's the ground in which the vegetables grow. He's the gentle rain that falls and provides sustenance for the plants. He's the sunlight that shines down and causes the plants to grow. In short, He's EVERYTHING that can make the garden flourish. Not only that but He OWNS the entire garden. So, make sure He stays in the center of your garden and seek His help in making your garden flourish.

IV. Questions For Discussion

1. Is the description of men and women accurate? Why or why not? Be honest about your own gender!
2. We can all agree that men and women are as different as night and day. How can we improve our understanding of each other?
3. Take a mental inventory of your own "love garden." Is it overgrown with weeds? Do you even have any "peas" and "carrots" left? How can we begin to get our garden back in shape?
4. Whose job is it to get our garden in shape again? Are you focusing primarily on your own rows or are you just as concerned with your spouse's rows?

5. Have you been guilty of sacrificing your garden for the orchard? How do you find the balance between the two so that neither perishes?
6. Have you (and I'm talking primarily to the guys here) been doing your part to keep up the orchard so that your spouse has time to work in the garden?
7. How can we as couples make sure that our gardens are flourishing?

V. Scriptures About Marriage

Following are various Scriptures about marriage. Although not specifically referenced in the regular part of the lesson above, it would be good to later read and contemplate these together as a couple and discuss what these verses have to say.

Genesis 2:22-24: ²² *And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. ²³ Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." ²⁴ Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.*

Proverbs 5:18-19: ¹⁸ *Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, ¹⁹ a lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love.*

Proverbs 12:4: ⁴ *An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, but she who brings shame is like rottenness in his bones.*

Proverbs 18:22: ²² *He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the LORD.*

Proverbs 19:14: ¹⁴ *House and wealth are inherited from fathers, but a prudent wife is from the LORD.*

Proverbs 20:6-7: ⁶ *Many a man proclaims his own steadfast love, but a faithful man who can find? ⁷ The righteous who walks in his integrity — blessed are his children after him!*

Proverbs 30:18-19: ¹⁸ *Three things are too wonderful for me; four I do not understand: ¹⁹ the way of an eagle in the sky, the way of a serpent on a rock, the way of a ship on the high seas, and the way of a man with a virgin.*

Proverbs 31:10: ¹⁰ *An excellent wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels.*

Ephesians 5:22-33: ²² *Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. ²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶ that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. ²⁸ In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, ³⁰ because we are members of his body. ³¹ "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." ³² This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. ³³ However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.*

Deuteronomy 24:5: ⁵ *"When a man is newly married, he shall not go out with the army or be liable for any other public duty. He shall be free at home one year to be happy with his wife whom he has taken.*

Matthew 19:4-6: ⁴ He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, ⁵ and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? ⁶ So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."

1 Corinthians 7:1-16: ¹ Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman." ² But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. ³ The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. ⁴ For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. ⁵ Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. ⁶ Now as a concession, not a command, I say this. ⁷ I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another. ⁸ To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am. ⁹ But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion. ¹⁰ To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband ¹¹ (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife. ¹² To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. ¹³ If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. ¹⁴ For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. ¹⁵ But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace. ¹⁶ For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?

Colossians 3:18-19: ¹⁸ Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. ¹⁹ Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.

Hebrews 13:4-7: ⁴ Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous. ⁵ Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." ⁶ So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?" ⁷ Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.

Mark 10:6-9: ⁶ But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female. ⁷ Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, ⁸ and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. ⁹ What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."