Living and Thriving in a Not-So-Perfect Marriage

Study Guide

For use with the book *10 Lifesaving Principles for Women in Difficult Marriages* (2013 revised version) and the audio series *Living and Thriving in a Not-So-Perfect Marriage*

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Introduction

Welcome to “Living and Thriving in a Not-So-Perfect Marriage.” Whether your marriage is “not-so-perfect” or really difficult, this study has been designed to show you how to live, love, and even thrive in whatever circumstances you find in your relationship. With biblical truths, you will learn practical tools that include helping you face your fears, speak the truth, set boundaries, change yourself, detach with love, and rest in God. He intends your life to be filled with peace and hope (Jeremiah 29:11). Come discover how to experience God’s blessings in the midst of a challenging marriage.

Because people may be sharing personal information, it is important that the group be a safe and confidential place. Things that are shared in the group should stay in the group. Confidentiality means that group members do not talk about each other with other group members or anyone outside the group, including spouses or friends. The ability to share honestly and openly with the group is a crucial part of healing and growing. (Always remember that you do not have to share any details you are uncomfortable sharing.)

It is also important that you support and empathize with each other, but do not tell each other what to do. Each situation is unique and will require each woman to apply the truths we learn together in her own way according to how she believes God is leading her. We must also be careful not to judge or criticize each other but understand each other’s unique marriage from her perspective. It is helpful to share your own experience but refrain from presenting it as advice for someone else. Each has to follow her own path in her own time.

Applying these principles to your difficult marriage will require you to change and grow in many ways. You will be challenged to be honest with yourself and others in ways that may be uncomfortable. You may face truths that you have been trying to ignore about yourself and your marriage. You may have to do things that are uncomfortable for you. Truth sets us free, but it sometimes causes pain in the process. Hang in there - the rewards are worth it!

Change is a process. There will be things that you do differently by the end of this study, but the changes will need to continue past the end of the study. You may want to get additional support from another woman, counselor, or group. When you recognize that change takes time, it will help you to keep a proper perspective. Expecting too much too fast will only cause you unnecessary frustration. Target one or two things that you can apply each week, then commit to doing both of them at least a few times during the week.

Pace yourself with your weekly chapter reading and questions in the way that works best for you. The study questions are based on your reading in the book 10 Lifesaving Principles for Women in Difficult Marriages and have the corresponding page numbers listed, so you can reference the material. All Scripture verses are taken from the NIV, but
I encourage you to use other versions in your study too. The teaching in class each week will correspond with the chapter as well as offer additional material. Some of the lessons will have testimonies of women to demonstrate how they have applied the Principle to their own lives (audio studies only).

Most importantly, you will experience the love of your Heavenly Father in a new way. You will know that He loves you and cares for you in the midst of your struggles and wants you to have an abundant life. You will grow in your ability to surrender your hopes and dreams and trust Him in a deeper way. You will be able to turn over your husband and children to Him, recognizing that He loves them even more than you and will work in each of their lives in His own way and time. You will find peace in acceptance of the things you cannot change and hope by finding the courage to change the things you can. You will learn to rest in Him - one day at a time.

Now, let’s get started together and learn how to live, love and yes, even thrive, in our difficult marriages!

Blessings!

Karla

P.S. For more information on Karla Downing’s ministry and materials, visit ChangeMyRelationship.com. Karla offers a free e-newsletter offering relationship tips and truths. You can also become her Facebook Fan and get daily relationship tips and truths.
## Table of Contents

Lifesaving Principle 1: Understand Difficult Marriages  
(Chapter One: “Reach Out” in the book)  
Pages 5 – 10

Lifesaving Principle 2: Understand Scriptural Truths  
Pages 11 – 22

Lifesaving Principle 3: Change Yourself, Not Him  
Pages 23 -33

Lifesaving Principle 4: Detach With Love  
Pages 34 - 44

Lifesaving Principle 5: Nurture Yourself  
Pages 45 -54

Lifesaving Principle 6: Face Your Fears  
Pages 55 - 60

Lifesaving Principle 7: Speak the Truth in Love  
Pages 61 -67

Lifesaving Principle 8: Set Boundaries  
Pages 68 - 84

Lifesaving Principle 9: Prioritize Your Children  
Pages 85 - 92

Lifesaving Principle 10: Enter His Rest  
Pages 93 - 98

Resources  
Pages 99 - 104
Study Questions for Lifesaving Principle 1: Understand Difficult Marriages (Reach Out)

Women often struggle in isolation in their difficult marriages. Some have never told anyone about their problems. Others have told only close relatives. Others have told outside people and been discouraged or hurt by their responses.

The church tends to give “pat answers” or quick spiritual fixes that discount the deep feelings and complex issues of difficult marriages. Sometimes, the answers cause guilt by inferring that if a woman were able to trust, believe, pray, submit, and be a “godly wife” everything would be fine. Most have tried that and it hasn’t worked. It isn’t because those answers aren’t valid; it is because a woman needs more than that. She needs to know she isn’t alone, that she has options, and be given tools to deal with the difficulties. One of the ways she gets these things is to share with others who have experienced similar problems.

We are emotionally wounded in relationships. We need emotional bonding in relationships to be healed. God wants us to be connected to others. This study group may be the first time women have reached out about their problems in a group or church setting. It will be a powerful step in their healing.

1. Look at the list of reasons people isolate on pages 11-12. How and why have you been isolated in your difficult marriage? (pages 11-12)

2. Read James 5:13-16. Why and how do you think God uses our sharing with others to heal us? (page 12)

3. Who have you reached out to prior to this study group? Family? Friends? People in the church? Counselors? Support Groups? What has been your experience? (pages 12-17)
4. What do you hope to get from this study?

5. How have your husband, family, and friends responded to your getting help? If your husband disapproves, how do you justify getting help anyway? (pages 17-18)


7. There are many common relationship difficulties: general dysfunction, mental illness, addictions, workaholism and other excesses, emotional manipulation, spiritually mismatched, abuse, anger, mental illness, and physical problems. If you haven’t already shared about this, explain which of those difficulties affect your marriage. (pages 19-25)
8. Difficult marriages are often referred to as a roller coaster because of the ups and downs and quick changes. The “ups” are a relief, but the “downs” often catch you off-guard. How does the image of a roller coaster describe your marriage? (page 25)

9. Write your prayer to God for this week.

10. Write two things you can apply to your life out of this week’s material.
Lecture Notes for Principle 1: Understand Difficult Marriages

This study has the following purposes:

- For you to grow in your knowledge of what the Bible says about your marriage.
- For you to recognize how much God cares about your marriage, problems, pain, and you.
- For you to apply these principles to your life and marriage.
- For you to gain hope that your future will be better.
- For you to step out of your isolation and find out you are not alone. And, if you are in a study group, for you to get support from other women.

Types of Difficult Marriages

There are many types of difficult marriages, and it isn’t unusual for women to be struggling with many of these problems at the same time. The more of these issues you have, the more complicated your marriage will be, and the more factors you will have to consider in how you respond.

- Addictions (alcohol, drugs, sex, gambling, and others)
- Abuse (verbal, emotional, physical, sexual, and spiritual)
- Anger (raging, hostile, explosive, passive aggressive)
- Mental Illness
- Physical Illness
- Workaholism and Other Excesses
- Being Spiritually Mismatched
- Irresponsibility
Different Personalities/Genders/Values/Goals/Ethnicities

General Dysfunction

Dynamics of Difficult Marriages

Difficult marriages have similar dynamics. You are probably dealing with many of the following characteristics:

- Perpetual Problems
- One person wants change/The one with “the problem” doesn’t
- Poor Communication
- Strong Emotions
- Denial
- Distrust
- Disrespect
- Blame
- Resentment
- Codependency/Enmeshment
- Enabling
- Rigidity
- Secrets
➤ Manipulation/Control

➤ Contempt/Criticism/Judgment

➤ Poor Boundaries

➤ Shame

This study will give you tools to deal with these marital problems and dynamics. You will be empowered with knowledge and practical tools supported by Scriptural principles.
Study Questions for Lifesaving Principle 2: Understand Scriptural Truths

Women in difficult marriages typically have misunderstandings about what Scripture teaches about submission, love, respect, rights, forgiveness, long-suffering, gentleness, peace, and perseverance. They also wonder how God feels about them: Does He care? Is He punishing them? Is it too late to redeem their lives? These misconceptions have to be corrected so they have a firm foundation on which to make changes and apply the principles to their lives.

1. Read Nehemiah 9:16-21, Psalm 34, and Exodus 2:23-25. How does God feel about His people when they sin? Is your hardship the result of your own choices and/or other people’s choices? How do you think God views your marriage? (pages 27-29)

2. Read Genesis 29:31-35. Leah’s husband didn’t love her. How did God feel about her? Look at the names of Leah’s sons. What insights do the names give into Leah’s emotions? Do you see a shift in her focus from her husband to the Lord? When you think about God’s compassion toward Leah, does it change your perception about what God thinks about you?


5. Women want to be loved and men want to be respected. Read Ephesians 5:33. How do you struggle with respecting your husband? How can you respect him when you don’t feel loved and you don’t respect his behavior? Give specific examples. (pages 37-39)

6. Read Ephesians 5:8-11, Galatians 5:19-23, and Hebrews 12:5-11. What fruit is being produced in your marriage? What part do you play in bearing that fruit? How can you fulfill your responsibility to live in a way in which you bring light rather than darkness into your marriage? (pages 39-40)

7. Read Colossians 3:3-5, Acts 16:37, Acts 22:25, and 1 Corinthians 9. What have you believed about “rights” in your marriage? How has that affected how you have acted in your difficult marriage? Do you feel any differently now? (pages 41-42)
8. Read Matthew 5:38-42 and 1 Peter 3:9. How can you “turn the other cheek” correctly in your marriage? How is that different than you have been acting? (page 42)

9. Read 1 Corinthians 13. What parts of the description of agape love have you misunderstood? How should you apply agape love to your difficult marriage? (pages 42-44)

10. Read 1 Peter 3:1-7 and Matthew 11:28-29. How did Jesus exhibit a gentle spirit? Is gentleness the same as tolerance and passivity? If gentleness refers to an inner peace and strength that trusts in God, how does that change how you apply it to your difficult marriage? (pages 43-44)

11. Write your prayer to God for this week.

12. Write two things you can apply to your life out of this week’s material.
Lecture Notes for Principle 2:
Understand Scriptural Truths

There are many Scriptural misunderstandings in difficult marriages. The following are the main areas of misunderstanding. The notes provide an outline of the main points in the lecture. You are encouraged to look up the verses and do additional studying on your own.

Rigid vs. Grace-based Interpretation

- There is a tendency to interpret the Bible rigidly when applying it to difficult relationships and to focus on one verse while ignoring others.

- Scripture balances Scripture. We cannot put one Scripture over another.

- In Galatians 5:1-4, Paul reminded the Galatians that grace ruled over the law.

- In Matthew 12:1-12, Jesus defended the disciples picking grain on the Sabbath to the Pharisees who objected because it was against the Law.

- In Luke 13:10-17, Jesus healed a woman on the Sabbath and the Pharisees complained about him violating the Law.

Submission

- Ephesians 5:22-24 says, “Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord” (NIV).

- It is not a rigid edict to where a woman can’t live her own life or have boundaries.

- Healthy marriages have a balanced partnership that includes the wants and needs of both people and an agreement about how they will make decisions.

- Some interpret submission rigidly to say it is without exception. They say a woman has to obey without reservations and trust that God will cover her, lead her husband to make right decisions, and prevent her from being asked to do wrong. She should take all her appeals and concerns to God who will work through her husband. Others say submission keeps a woman protected by her husband’s authority and covering; not submitting leaves her vulnerable to Satan’s attacks.

- I believe submission is a choice that must be made with wisdom and discernment in difficult situations and that it can and should be withheld at times, as Peter and his disciples did in Acts 5:29 when they refused to stop talking about Jesus as the authorities demanded. (Romans 13:1-5 sets up a Scriptural principle of submitting
to the authorities to obey God.) God did not intend submission to prevent a woman from being a person in the relationship by exercising choice.

Respect

- Ephesians 5:33 tells men to love their wives and women to respect their husbands.
- It is difficult to respect a man who is acting in a way that leads a wife to disrespect him.
- You can respect the position and treat him in a way that acknowledges it; however, it does not mean you cannot say no, set boundaries, or speak the truth.
- A man feels respected when he is appreciated, acknowledged, and allowed to lead and protect his family. But if he is acting in ways that disrespect his own body and hurt his family, he does not deserve to be respected for those choices.
- When needing to confront your husband, do it in the things that really matter, and in a way that is as respectful as possible (i.e. not nagging, putting him down, yelling, undermining him, or confronting him in front of others).

Biblical Love

- 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 says love is patient and kind; it doesn’t envy, boast, and isn’t proud; is not rude, self-seeking, or easily angered; it keeps no record of wrongs, doesn’t delight in evil, and rejoices with truth. It always protects, trusts, hopes, and perseveres.
- Biblical love is misapplied when used to support ignoring problems and not confronting or setting boundaries. Ask yourself what you are persevering for. Is it really love if it enables wrong behavior? Romans 13:10 says, “Love does no harm to its neighbor.”
- “Compassionate Toughness” (Romans 2:4) shows how God’s kindness leads to repentance but God also allows consequences, convicts of sin, and disciplines us for our good. We need to use compassionate toughness with our loved ones.
- Each person is responsible for carrying his own load and each will reap what he sows (Galatians 6:5-8).

Gentle and Quiet Spirit

- 1 Peter 3:1-2: Wives with unbelieving husbands won’t win them over by nagging and arguing, but by their Christian example and behavior. This doesn’t mean you can’t speak the truth about relationship issues.
1 Peter 3:3-4: Beauty should come from the inward quality of a gentle and quiet spirit. The same word for *gentleness* is in Matthew 11:29 where Jesus is described as “gentle and humble in heart;” yet, he was not a passive weakling, but strong, confident, and in full control of himself at all times.

**Suffering for Good and Dying to Self**

- Suffering for Good (1 Peter 3:17): “It is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.” Sometimes more suffering comes from standing up in a difficult marriage than from quietly and passively maintaining the status quo. It isn’t suggesting you should be a martyr and willing victim.

- Dying to Self (Colossians 3:3): Some interpret this to mean Christians shouldn’t care about their needs in relationships, but to be healthy, both people in the relationship are important. We die to our sin nature when saved, not to the right to be a person or have a “self,” which God created in his image.

- “Whoever finds his life will lose it and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matthew 10:39). This has to do with following Christ and our devotion to him, not losing our lives in a relationship.

**Rights**

- It is a wrong belief that Christians don’t have rights in relationships.

- Paul wasn’t afraid to stand up for his rights as a Roman citizen.

- What we see from Jesus’ example is that he chose when, where, and how to lay down his rights. He wasn’t passive or a doormat. He was always in complete control of himself and what he allowed others to do to him. He went to the cross at the appointed time because he chose to be obedient to God for God’s glory and the good of mankind (John 10:17-18); other times, he left when people were trying to harm him (John 7:30).

- Jesus was self-controlled, confident, assertive, confrontational, and in control of what he did and of what others did to him. And he stood uncompromisingly for the truth and righteousness in people’s lives. He was driven by a purpose: to glorify God, to stand for truth, and to redeem mankind. When it served these purposes, he laid down his rights; and conversely, when it served those same purposes, he stood up for his rights, as he frequently did when he spoke the truth to those that opposed him or left when people wanted to harm him.

- We stand up for our rights as citizens of the United States.

- Sometimes standing up for our rights is in the best interest of the other person. It is usually not good to let others get away with wronging us without standing for the truth. Other times, laying down our rights voluntarily is the right thing to do. It depends on the circumstances, the effect it will have, and your willingness.
1 Corinthians 9: Paul had the right as an apostle to be provided for financially; but he did not use this right because he felt it would harm his witness. Verse 12b says: “On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ.” Verse 19 says: “Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible.”

1 Corinthians 6:1-8: Paul confronted the lawsuits among believers. Jewish communities had their own courts in their synagogues. Bringing their disagreements into secular court brought even more slander and negative attention to their cause than they already had. Paul tells them to settle their disputes between themselves in their own courts for the sake of the gospel.

The fact they had lawsuits between them meant they were already defeated. Paul asks, “Why not rather be wronged? But instead you wrong your brother” (verse 6). He was condemning the retaliatory attitude they had toward each other.

**Turn the Other Cheek**

Matthew 5:38: Jesus brought this up to demonstrate that the Old Testament Law was based on retaliation—an eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth. In Israel and other Near Eastern cultures, this principle was enforced by a court that allowed legalized vengeance—not personal vengeance (the Law of Moses only allowed personal vengeance for a relative’s murder).

Matthew 5:39: A blow on the right cheek was a grievous insult in the ancient world. Jewish and Roman law allowed prosecution for this offense.

Matthew 5:40: Poor people had only an inner and outer garment (the outer garment would be their blanket at night), so taking the garments even for a debt wasn’t allowed.

Matthew 5:41: Roman soldiers had the legal right to demand labor, an animal, or the property of local residents. Some Jews favored cooperating with the Romans and some wanted to revolt. Jesus was possibly suggesting they should not revolt. In 66 AD, the Jews did fight and Rome won in 70 AD.

Matthew 5:42: There were many beggars. Jesus is suggesting unselfish giving—a theme in the Beatitudes.

Some possible interpretations of these passages:

- Complete non-resistance to mistreatment.
- Relationships are more important than possessions.
- The new Law in Christ is based on grace and love.
- Don’t retaliate. We need to be in control of our reactions. When someone treats us badly, we don’t have to react, seek revenge, and hurt back.
Peter 3:9 tells us not to “repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing.”

- There may be times when it is best to be wronged, but it doesn’t preclude one from standing up for good or from saying no to mistreatment. Be willing to suffer, as needed, for the Gospel and when it is the right thing to do.

- It doesn’t condone physical abuse in relationships. When Jesus was before the high priest and one of the officials slapped him, he responded by asking: “If I said something wrong, tell me what it is, if not, why did you strike me?” (John 18:23).

- It could be a situational comment to believers in a culture different than ours. The believers were presenting a new Gospel to the Romans and Jews and standing up for their rights must have hurt their witness.

- Interpretation of these passages as complete non-resistance doesn’t fit with other Biblical passages or lead to healthy relationships. It is very rare to see it lead to positive change in a relationship; it usually does the opposite and harms innocent people, including children.

**Evaluate the Fruit**

- Galatians 5:19-23: Are your choices producing the fruit of the Spirit or the fruit of the flesh?

- Galatians 5:8-11: We need to live as children of light and expose the deeds of darkness.

**Divorce and Separation**

- In Deuteronomy 24:2, Moses (led by God) wanted men to give their wives an actual certificate of divorce when they left them, so the woman could remarry. In that culture, women that were abandoned by their husbands (which happened for any reason) did not have a way to make a living, except by prostitution. God was actually protecting women by giving them what they needed to remarry to be taken care of.

- In the Old Testament (law), God allowed divorce. The New Testament (grace) must also allow for divorce. People can be like the Pharisees in applying the law (teachings about divorce) and end up hurting people.

- Separation can be a good interim step. It allows you and your husband work on yourselves and your own issues apart from each other. It also allows your husband the opportunity to choose to do or not to do what he needs to do to save the marriage.
Differences between Men and Women

Some of the dysfunctional dynamics you are dealing with are related to normal differences between men and women.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single-focused brains</td>
<td>Multi-tasking brains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need respect, appreciation, &amp; approval</td>
<td>Need love, affection, &amp; attention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Want to compete</td>
<td>Want to be romanced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solve problems and want to get to the bottom line</td>
<td>Talk about things and want empathy, not solutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logical and rational</td>
<td>Emotional</td>
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<tr>
<td>Talking about the relationship means it is not working</td>
<td>Talking about the relationship means it is going well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel successful when the job is going well</td>
<td>Feel successful when the marriage and family are going well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go into their “cave” to recoup. (Shut down and shut out)</td>
<td>Interpret “cave time” as husband not being willing to share his deep thoughts with them.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sex is intimacy</td>
<td>Talking is intimacy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Say what they mean</td>
<td>Mean more than they say</td>
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<tr>
<td>Protectors and hunters</td>
<td>Gatherers and nurturers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admitting a mistake means losing honor</td>
<td>Need an apology to heal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivated to change by appreciation and approval</td>
<td>Motivated to change by confrontation and discussion</td>
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Men: Help meet your wife’s needs by listening better, talking more, opening up your heart and sharing about yourself, continuing to be committed to her and the family, and not fixing. Continue to “choose” her and let her know she is beautiful to you. Include her as a partner and welcome her thoughts and input. Don’t be harsh and angry with her or the children.

Women: Help meet your husband’s needs by supporting his need to take care of the family financially and to get ahead, affirm his desire to protect the family, support his desire to lead, don’t criticize his natural desire to be analytical and problem solve, be with him without having to talk, appreciate his efforts, and respect him for being who he is—even when he doesn’t deserve it.
What Not to Say to Women in Difficult Marriages

The following things are often said innocently to women in difficult marriages. There is nothing wrong with any of them; however, women in difficult marriages often misinterpret them and misapply them to their lives, so they end up causing discouragement and further problems.

Christian Beliefs That Are Misunderstood by Women in Difficult Marriages

“Submit to your husband.” She hears, “Do everything my husband says. Don’t stand up for what is right. The problems are my fault because I don’t submit enough.” (Ephesians 5:22-24, Acts 5:29)

“Love your husband.” She hears, “Never give up, keep hoping, and persevere. Don’t be angry. If you loved him enough, he’d be different.” (1 Corinthians 13:4-8, Romans 13:10, Philippians 2:4, Matthew 22:39, Romans 2:4, Galatians 6:7-9)

“Your suffering will work for good.” She hears, “Keep suffering. Tolerate things as they are, and don’t try to change them. God will reward you for your suffering.” (1 Peter 3:17, Romans 8:28)

“Christians can’t ask for respect in relationships.” She hears, “You don’t deserve to be respected by your husband, and you shouldn’t ask for it or get upset when you don’t get it.” (Leviticus 19:3, 32, Ephesians 5:33; 6:5, 1 Peter 3:7, 1 Thessalonians 5:12)

“Christians don’t have rights.” She hears, “You shouldn’t expect to be treated well by your husband and shouldn’t tell him when he mistreats you.” (Matthew 5:38-41, Acts 16:37; 22:25, John 18:23, Proverbs 26:5, Galatians 6:1)

“Die to yourself.” She hears, “My needs don’t matter, and I shouldn’t ask for what I need.” (Colossians 3:3, John 12:25)

“Have a gentle and quiet spirit.” She hears, “Be quiet and don’t say anything to your husband about the problems. Trust God to change him.” (1 Peter 3:1-4; Matthew 11:29, Romans 12:18)

“Make Jesus your husband.” She hears, “You shouldn’t feel bad about your problems. If you were a good Christian, Jesus would be enough for you.” (Isaiah 54:5)

“You have to forgive your husband.” She hears, “You have to forgive and continue to tolerate what he is doing.” (Matthew 6:14-15)

“You can’t divorce or separate.” She hears, “There is no hope, and God doesn’t care about my pain.” (Matthew 5:31-32)

“You brought this on yourself. God is letting you reap what you’ve sown.” She hears, “God doesn’t care about you and neither do I. You deserve this and you shouldn’t expect anything more.” (Galatians 6:7-8)
How Does a Woman Respect a Man Who Does Not Love Her?

Ephesians 5:33 says, “Each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband” (NIV). This perfect prescription for a happy marriage that fulfills both the man’s and woman’s needs isn’t a problem in a healthy marriage, but it is tricky in a difficult marriage.

*Love* means to care for someone in a way that nourishes them and takes their needs into consideration. When a man mistreats his wife by not treating her as an equal partner in a way that shows he cares for her needs and wants as well as his own, he isn’t loving her. When he repeatedly does things that hurt her, he isn’t loving her. When he makes choices that hurt the family, his wife, and himself, he isn’t loving his wife.

*Respect* means to honor or value. When you honor and value someone, you treat them in a way that shows respect. Your words and actions build up rather than tear down and show how much the person means to you. The problem in difficult marriages is that it is incredibly difficult to respect a man who is acting in a way that leads a wife to disrespect him.

Love and respect are reciprocal. It is difficult to love someone who doesn’t respect you; conversely, it is difficult to respect someone who doesn’t love you. However, there are six things you can do to show respect to a man that doesn’t act in ways that you respect and who doesn’t love you as he should:

1. You can respect the position and treat him in a way that acknowledges he is your husband; however, it does not mean you cannot say no, set boundaries, or speak the truth—even if those things feel disrespectful to him.

2. A man feels respected when he is appreciated and acknowledged. Appreciate and acknowledge him for the things he is doing right. You do not have to pretend you respect his choices in other areas.

3. When needing to confront your husband, do it in the things that really matter and in a way that is as respectful as possible (i.e. not nagging, putting him down, yelling, or undermining him in front of others). Just state your own truth clearly and simply.

4. Men feel respected when they lead their families. If you can safely allow your husband to make decisions, let him lead and experience the natural consequences of his leadership with your input as a partner. Always use wisdom and be willing to protect your family when needed by saying no.

5. Do your part in the marriage. Continue to be his wife and fulfill your responsibilities in a way that is not demeaning to you. This includes sex, if it is safe, comfortable, and doesn’t devalue you. It also includes your responsibilities in the home and marriage even if he doesn’t do his part and doesn’t deserve you to do yours. This doesn’t mean you can’t have boundaries or say no to protect yourself.
6. Do not treat him with disdain or contempt. No matter what he has or hasn’t done, he is still a human being loved by God. Treating him in a way that is demeaning only decreases his own self-worth. Treating him in a way that shows he deserves good things will build his self-worth.

It isn’t easy for you to respect a man who doesn’t love you as he should, but it is a goal you should have to fulfill your part in the marriage before God. The difficulty is in figuring out how to do that in a way that still stands for truth and has boundaries that protect you. It can be done carefully by using wisdom and discernment.
Study Questions for Lifesaving Principle 3: Change Yourself, Not Him

Women in difficult marriages try to force their husbands to change by nagging, explaining, pleading, getting angry, and threatening. They cope with “the problem” by understanding it, fixing it, coping with it, and covering it up. They worry and obsess about their husbands and the problems. This obsession keeps them from living and enjoying their own lives. They may even ignore things they are doing that are damaging to themselves and others. The most important thing they can do is to realize they are completely powerless to force their husbands to change and to begin to change themselves.


2. Even though you are negatively affected by the wrong behavior of others, you still have choices. When you see yourself as a helpless victim, martyr, or doormat, you give away your power to choose. How have you given away your power to your husband? (pages 46-48)
3. Read 1 Corinthians 6:12, 2 Corinthians 10:5, and Philippians 4:8-9. When you are obsessed with your husband, you are controlled by your thoughts. God doesn’t want us to be controlled by anything. How does your obsession over your husband and the problems rob you of the ability to live your own life? How can you begin to let go of your obsession? (pages 48-50)

4. God gives each of us freedom to choose how we live our lives. He does not force us to choose His way, even when it hurts Him or us when we do not. What does it mean to you when you read, “You are 100 percent powerless concerning your husband’s choices, behaviors, feelings, reactions, attitudes, decisions, thoughts, and addictions?” How do you try to exert power over him? How does that affect your life? (pages 50-51)

5. Regardless of your husband’s problems, you have a part in the relationship difficulties. You need to look at your personality, your childhood, and your past and current relationships to identify patterns in how you react. (pages 51-53)

What parts of your personality affect your difficult relationship?

What roles did you play in your childhood that you are replicating in your current relationship?
What patterns existed in your prior relationships that you are repeating in your current relationship?

6. Read Ephesians 4:26 and Psalm 42:5-6. You can be angry and not sin. David was depressed and chose to trust God in his despair. God gave us the ability to feel a variety of feelings. It is important to feel them because they are an important indicator of how you are affected by your circumstances and a key to why you act like you do. (pages 53-55)

Do you struggle with wondering whether your feelings are sinful or normal?

Which feelings are hard for you to feel? Which are easy?

7. Read Romans chapter 7. Paul understood we have trouble doing what we know is right. How do your feelings get in the way of your ability to choose what is right? (pages 55-56)

8. Read Genesis 3:11-13 and Matthew 7:1-3. Blaming others for our actions is part of our fallen nature. God wants us to take responsibility for our choices, regardless of what others do. How do you blame others for your feelings, actions, and reactions? How can you begin to take ownership of your part in the relationship problems? (pages 56-58)
9. God cares about what we do and why we do it. Read through the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7 and identify the number of times Jesus refers to the inner heart or motives. Review the list of “right motives” and “wrong motives” on pages 59-60. Which ones guide most of your actions? (pages 58-61)

10. Read Proverbs 13:12 and Philippians 4:11-12. How do unrealistic expectations affect you? How would accepting circumstances as they are instead of expecting them to be different bring you peace and simplify your life? (pages 61-62)

11. Read Proverbs 18:16. Everyone needs to be loved, appreciated, acknowledged, and approved—even your difficult husband. Name something positive that you could acknowledge him for. How would it help for you to tell him? (pages 62-63)

12. Read Proverbs 11:22 and 14:1. Even though you are dealing with difficult and trying circumstances, you have the power to change your home. How can you change yourself to build your house rather than tear it down? (page 64)
13. Write your prayer to God for this week.

14. Write two things you can apply to your life out of this week’s material.
Lecture Notes for Principle 3: Change Yourself, Not Him

Answer this question: How much time and energy do you spend trying to change your husband?

We try to change our husbands by praying, wishing, nagging, lecturing, explaining, begging, threatening, controlling, or manipulating. True, they do need to change, but the problem is that we are powerless to make them change.

Powerless means “without power.” Can you stand at the seashore and command the waves to stop? Can you ask the sun not to rise? Can you make your husband change? No! So if you can’t do it, why waste your life trying?

The only sure way to make your life better is to focus on changing yourself. And I don’t mean changing yourself to please your husband, hoping he will change as a result. I mean changing yourself to live in a healthier way in your marriage and life.

Scriptural Principles

- God’s Word tells us clearly that each of us is responsible for ourselves and we will each stand before the judgment seat of Christ to give an account of our lives—not our husbands’ lives (2 Corinthians 5:10).

- We are to take the plank out of our own eyes before commenting on the splinter in the other person’s eye (Matthew 7:3-5). (This applies even if you think your husband has the plank and you have the splinter.)

- Galatians 6:4-5 says, “Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else.” We have to do what is right, even when our husband’s aren’t.

So what are some of the things you can do to change yourself that will make your life better, even if HE never changes?

1. Take the responsibility to live your life.

Give up being a victim or a martyr. You can’t change your life when you don’t even accept that you have the power or right to change it. Victims and martyrs go around acting like they have no other option but to continue bearing whatever life is handing them. Not true. You always have choices. Even if you choose to stay in your difficult marriage because you believe God wants you to, you can know you are choosing to stay. That gives you a sense of power: you are doing it because you believe you should. That means you aren’t a victim—you are a person of conviction who is doing what she believes God wants her to do.

Martha came to Jesus in Luke 10:38-42 and complained that she was the only one working to prepare things for him. She came to Jesus with the view that she had no
choice but to do all the work and she was angry that her sister didn’t do as much as she was doing. Jesus recognized there was another choice: She could choose to sit and relax and just be with him. She didn’t have to sacrifice and do it all or anything for that matter!

2. **Let go of the obsession over him.**

Whatever takes up your mental and emotional energy and robs you of the ability to live your life is your obsession.

Philippians 4:8-9 tells us to choose what we think about and 2 Corinthians 10:5 tell us we can take our thoughts captive. Try the following things to control your thoughts:

- Don’t do things that increase your obsession with what your husband is doing. Don’t check up on him, watch him, listen to his conversations, stay home to watch him, check his wallet, follow him, call him over and over, or read his e-mails (unless you need to do this to find out what is going on in order to make decisions).

- Keep your head where your feet are. Concentrate on what you are doing in that moment and don’t let your thoughts wander.

- Yell “stop” aloud or to yourself every time you find your mind wandering onto him again.

- Find a phrase that reminds you that you are powerless over him and say it over and over. I say the Serenity Prayer: “God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference.” An abbreviated version might be “Can’t change him.” “Mind your own business” was another phrase I said to myself.

- Turn on the radio or listen to music.

3. **Understand your past.**

You need insight into yourself: your childhood, your family you grew up in, your past relationships, and your personality. This helps you get insight into how you are reacting to people and what you can change in yourself.

4. **Admit your part in the problem.**

Even if it is small compared to his, you need to apologize and own your mistakes, and you can’t expect or demand an apology from him in return. “Changing yourself” is about you doing what is right for you. The only exception to this would be if admitting your faults would be used abusively against you or jeopardize your safety. In that case, doing what you need to do to protect yourself is more important.

5. **Feel and own your feelings.**

Many of us have denied, repressed, and suppressed our feelings for so long that we don’t even know what we are feeling. Feelings are a window into your soul. You
have to feel them to deal with them. Otherwise, they go underground and make you sick emotionally, physically, or relationally. King David spoke about his feelings openly to God, and God helped him choose how to respond to the powerful feelings that raged inside him.

When you feel your feelings, it is tempting to blame them on your husband or another person. After all, what he or she did made you mad, sad, embarrassed, disappointed, or hurt. But the reality is that you are the one that had the feeling and that means you have to choose what to do about it.

6. Check your motives.

Jesus spent much of his time on this earth going beneath the exterior. He looked at people’s actions and then asked, “Why are you doing that?”

Difficult marriages are complicated. There are many decisions that have to be made and many conflicts to deal with about what to do or say. There aren’t any one-size-fits-all answers. The only way you can figure out what to do is to check your motives. If your motive is pure, good, and healthy, then you can take the action; if your motive isn’t pure, good, or healthy, then you shouldn’t take the action.

7. Adjust your expectations.

The easiest way to protect your emotions, conserve your energy, and get off the roller coaster of hope and then disappointment, is to accept who your husband is. You don’t have to approve or like it. Just face the reality, so you won’t keep hoping for things that won’t happen. Proverbs 13:12 tells us that hope that’s not fulfilled makes our hearts sick. Instead of fighting reality, accept it, and then you can decide what to do about it!

8. Use your influence.

As a woman of God, you have the power to influence the mood of your home. Proverbs 14:1 says, “The wise woman builds her house but with her own hands the foolish one tears hers down.” A wise woman builds her home and her life by changing herself not by wasting her time trying to force her husband to change, and in doing so, destroying her own life and home. Can you choose to be a wise woman by letting go of changing him and instead focus on changing yourself?
CODEPENDENTS

Codependents struggle with relationships. These relationships can be with our spouses, parents, siblings, children, friends, or anyone else in our lives. Some of these people have addictions to alcohol, drugs, sex, work, gambling or other things. They can also be people with difficult personalities, dependencies, mental illness, or dysfunctional characteristics. We are so affected by other people that we let their behavior and choices dictate how we live. Yet, no matter how much we want to change, we feel stuck and unable to make different choices for ourselves.

We try desperately to control people, places, and things by adapting ourselves, getting angry, nagging, explaining, covering up, pretending, changing ourselves, and accepting the unacceptable. When these don’t work, we end up feeling bad about ourselves, scared, alone, unloved, confused, desperate, unworthy, guilty, and anxious. We isolate ourselves from the outside world. Our children, health, marriage, work, and relationships are affected. Our lives become unmanageable.

We are unhappy, hurt, frustrated, sad, angry, lonely, and disappointed. We are confused about how to love others and about what to do with the many complex dilemmas we are continually faced with.

CHARACTERISTICS OF CODEPENDENTS

When we are being “codependent” it means we have an unhealthy way of reacting to other people and their problems and choices.

➤ We take better care of other people than ourselves.

➤ We obsess on the other person by thinking about them, feeling anxious, and checking up on them.

➤ We know more about the feelings, thoughts, likes and dislikes of others than ourselves.

➤ We feel unloved and unlovable.

➤ We feel guilty and responsible for others and their behavior.

➤ We change ourselves hoping that other people will also change.

➤ We feel stuck and victimized.

➤ We try to fix and control people, places, and things.

➤ We are angry, afraid, and hurt.

➤ We deny reality to cope.

➤ We feel like we are going crazy.

➤ We have difficulty knowing what our boundaries should be.
 We have difficulty saying no without feeling guilty.
 We lose track of ourselves: our needs, goals, likes, and wants.
 We feel bad about ourselves.
 We allow ourselves to be manipulated and controlled by others.
 We lie and cover-up for others’ mistakes.
 We don’t trust our decisions and feelings.
 We feel lots of confusion and pain.
 We people please because we fear rejection and desperately need approval.
 We don’t trust others.
 We react and overreact to everything.
 We know what everyone else should do but not ourselves.

We need different tools to deal with difficult people who don’t usually change until we stop enabling them and allow them to hit their “bottom.” Change in even one family member often changes the whole family. But, whether or not other people change, we find serenity and hope by focusing on changing the only thing we can: ourselves.
THE SERENITY PRAYER

God grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change;
courage to change the things I can;
and wisdom to know the difference.

Living one day at a time;
Enjoying one moment at a time;
Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace;

Taking, as Jesus did, this sinful world
as it is, not as I would have it;

Trusting that He will make all things right
if I surrender to His Will;

That I may be reasonably happy in this life
and supremely happy with Him
forever in the next.

Amen.

Reinhold Niebuhr
Study Questions for Lifesaving Principle 4: Detach with Love

Women in difficult relationships are entangled with their husbands. They feel responsible for their husbands’ choices, cover-up for them, fix their mistakes, and keep them from suffering the consequences of their choices. This is called “enabling” and it can keep their husbands from having to face the consequences of their choices.

“In the paths of the wicked are snares and pitfalls, but those who would preserve their life stay far from them” (Proverbs 22:5). Detachment is about women separating themselves physically, emotionally, spiritually, and mentally from situations that have a negative effect on them. It helps them to be responsible for themselves and allows them to let their husbands be responsible for their own choices. Loving detachment allows them to understand their husbands’ struggles and pain and treat them with compassion and respect.

1. Does the statement, “It is possible for you to have a good life regardless of what your husband does,” seem impossible? Why or why not? (pages 65-67)

2. Detachment is a powerful and necessary tool when dealing with difficult relationships. How would you describe “detachment?” (pages 65-67)

3. How does God detach from us? How did Jesus demonstrate detachment when He interacted with the woman caught in adultery in John 8:1-11 and with the rich young ruler in Matthew 19:16-22? (page 67)
4. Understanding that your husband has a problem that is difficult for him to overcome is important. What does the concept, “A reason is not an excuse” mean to you in your situation? (page 68)


6. Difficult people typically blame others for their choices. Read Proverbs 19:3. Does your husband blame you? How do you respond to that blame? How can you detach from it? (pages 70-71)

8. How do you respond to anger, bad moods, accusations, threats, lies, and “button-pushing” from your husband? How can you detach from them? (pages 71-80)

9. Read Proverbs 19:19. Crises happen in difficult relationships because eventually there are consequences from wrong choices. While we don’t purposefully cause a crisis to happen, we should not intervene and stop it from happening either. What are some of the crises you have gone through? What are some of the things you fear happening? How could the concept of loving detachment help you deal with the next crisis? (pages 74-75)

10. Detachment is about living your life and letting your husband live his life. How can you do this in practical ways while still fulfilling your responsibilities to your husband and marriage? (pages 76, 80-81)

11. It takes time to learn detachment. Read 1 Corinthians 9:24-27. Paul talks about choosing to make his body do what he knows is right. If you were perfectly detached in your marriage, what would you be doing, saying, thinking, and feeling? “Acting as if” is doing those things even if you don’t feel detached. How could you begin to “act as if?” (pages 81-82)
12. Detachment is not abandonment. Read 1 Peter 3:9 and Romans 12:17-21. How can you treat your difficult husband with love, courtesy, and kindness while still allowing him to bear the consequences of his choices?” (page 82)

13. Write your prayer to God for this week.

14. Write two things you can apply to your life out of this week’s material.
Lecture Notes for Principle 4:
Detach with Love

Detachment has two parts: Live your life and let your husband live his life. Let’s look at what each of these involves.

Live Your Life

- Detachment is similar to differentiation or individuation, which are the processes whereby we are able to be connected to but separate from another person.

- Detachment is the opposite of enmeshment or codependency, which is the fusion of ourselves with another person where we are so dependent that we are unable to feel, be, choose, think, and act independently.

- God gave each of us stewardship over our lives, meaning we have the responsibility for how we live regardless of the choices others make (Matthew 25: The Parable of the Steward).

- Detachment is separating emotionally, spiritually, mentally, and sometimes physically from other people’s choices and feelings.

- Detachment is stepping back from what is going on and choosing how you want to respond rather than reacting. This allows you to see the situation clearer.

- Jesus was always aware of who he was dealing with and took it into consideration with how he dealt with the person (John 2:24-25). You also need to consider what your husband’s problems are when dealing with him (Matthew 10:17).

- Detach from blame by not taking it on if it isn’t yours to take.

- Detach from anger by not arguing and getting drawn in. You can use short answers to get out of the argument quickly.

- Detach from moods by recognizing that other people’s moods are their own and you don’t cause them.

- Detach from threats by not reacting to them (unless they are real), but also don’t allow yourself to be intimidated by them.

- Detach from crises by allowing the natural course to occur.

- Detach from other people who may disagree with your choices.

- Stop allowing yourself to get hooked by your husband’s manipulation, guilt, anger, blame, buttons, hot spots—anything that pulls you into reacting to him, taking care of him, taking on his “stuff,” and not taking care of yourself (Proverbs 22:24-25).
Let Your Husband Live His Life

- Matthew 19:16-29 is a story about a rich young ruler who came to Jesus to ask him how he could have eternal life. Jesus told him and the man rejected Jesus’ answer. How did Jesus respond? He let him go. He didn’t run after him, beg him, explain it forty-five other ways, or tell him how foolish he was. He accepted the man’s right to make his own choices.

- Jesus told his disciples to shake the dust off their feet if they were not welcomed in a town (Luke 10:5-12), and not to throw their pearls to pigs or to give to dogs what is sacred (Matthew 7:6).

- Your husband is a separate person from you, even though you are married. How he acts and reacts is his responsibility. You can’t control it and you didn’t cause it. You have to let him own it and you don’t have to buy into it.

- Detachment also means you stop enabling and allow him to bear the consequences of his own choices. (Galatians 6:7-8 explains the law of reaping and sowing.) It is scary at first, and you may suffer too, so it takes courage. God doesn’t willingly bring affliction to men either, but allows it for their own good (Lamentations 3:33).

- Understand the reason your husband is struggling, but don’t let it be an excuse for him to do what isn’t okay.

- LOVING DETACHMENT means you are kind, courteous, and respectful. You take care of your responsibilities in the relationship. You have compassion without enabling. We are to treat our enemies well (Matthew 5:43-48) and not repay evil for evil, but respond with good (Romans 12:17-21). You respond with goodness and kindness to your husband, instead of treating him with anger, contempt, disrespect, and meanness, while at the same time taking care of yourself and letting him take responsibility for his own problems.

Summary of Detachment with Love

- Detachment could also be called “Releasing with love.”

- Detachment is separating emotionally, spiritually, mentally, and physically from others’ choices, reactions, and feelings.

- Detachment is not numbness, an absence of emotions, or denial.

- Detachment allows you to not react, so you can step back and see the situation clearly.
➢ You may have to act detached, before you feel detached.

➢ Detachment is taking control of your life by not letting others control your choices, feelings, and reactions. When you *react*, you let others dictate your actions, but when you *act* you choose your actions.

➢ Detachment is taking responsibility for your own life (including actions, inactions, feelings, and reactions).

➢ Detachment is allowing others the dignity to choose how to live their lives and take the responsibility for their choices.

➢ Detachment is not abandonment, disinterest, or indifference. You still treat the person with dignity, courtesy, and kindness while detaching.

➢ Detachment helps you to not take “personalities personal.”

➢ Detachment reminds you to mind your own business and that there are types of involvement that make the situation worse.

➢ Detachment is not getting in the middle (unless you choose to and know it is in your best interest and the best interest of others).

➢ Detachment sets you and the other person free.

➢ Detachment is letting go and letting God take care of the situation.

➢ Detachment can be summed up as “LIVE AND LET LIVE.”
Crazymakers

Some people in life are easy, some are difficult, and some are crazymakers. A crazymaker is simply someone around whom you feel crazy.

When you feel “crazy,” you doubt yourself. You believe the person’s opinion and words over yours. You allow the person to violate your boundaries. You believe promising words instead of the conflicting actions. You find yourself losing it and reacting. You say “yes” when you want to say “no.” You come away from an encounter feeling confused, bad about yourself, upset, manipulated, and thrown off balance. You don’t feel in control of your thoughts, emotions, or actions.

Technically, no one can “make” you feel any particular way. So the person’s actions don’t have to make you feel crazy, but they will if you don’t know what you are dealing with because that is what they are designed to do.

Here are some of the things crazymakers do:

- They lie even when caught red-handed.
- They say one thing and do another.
- They twist your words while accusing you of twisting theirs.
- They use fear, guilt, power, and threats to manipulate and pressure you into doing what they want.
- They refuse to cooperate with you and undermine your attempts to fix the relationship or problem.
- They deny what they are doing and instead accuse you of doing it.
- They prevent any meaningful discourse by defensively turning everything around by making you the problem.
- They blame you for everything but don’t give you any power to do anything.

The crazymaker’s purpose is to maintain control by making you feel crazy so you won’t have any power in the relationship. Instead, recognize the tactics and refuse to feel or act crazy.

Sensitive People

Are you dealing with sensitive people? Then you are most likely frustrated and even exasperated. Touchy people will keep you from being able to relax and enjoy your life because they require you to walk on eggshells in order to keep from offending them.

“Sensitive” means readily or excessively affected by external circumstances. All kinds of things bother them and affect them predictably and unpredictably.
They are unreasonable. You never know if something that you do with good intentions is going to make them upset. What you do know is that it is difficult to reason with them and explain what your intentions really were. They don’t like to take facts and circumstances into consideration nor do they want to understand what really happened. They just seem to want to be offended.

They are moody. You can say the same thing to them one time and they aren’t offended, but the next time they are. It all depends on their state of mind, which they won’t acknowledge or consider as part of the problem. This keeps you watching and anticipating their moods so you can gauge whether or not it is safe to say what you want to say or do what you want to do.

They are defensive. They are able to see problems in others, but absolutely unwilling and unable to see any problems in themselves. They will argue, deflect, and avoid any acknowledgment that they are to blame.

They are chronic victims. As much as they are “hurt” by what others do and say and what life hands to them, they are also unwilling to do anything to remedy the problem. They like to complain but don’t like to fix anything, even when it is obviously within their power to do it.

They are self-focused. You would think that they would have empathy for you when you are offended, hurt, or upset by them, but they are not. They have no concern for how they affect you at all.

Now, enough talk about THEM. What about YOU? If you are dealing with sensitive people, you know you can’t change them—you can only change yourself. So recognize that a sensitive person will be unreasonable, moody, defensive, self-focused, and a chronic victim and that you don’t cause them to be that way. Put the focus on yourself. Detach. Don’t take responsibility for their feelings. Don’t try to talk them out of it. Don’t explain or argue. Hand it back to them. Be sorry they feel that way and then let it go. That’s it. Then, go do what you were going to do before they got upset.

How to Apply Detachment to Your Relationship with an Alcoholic or Drug Addict

Detachment means you remember that the alcoholic/addict is dealing with an addiction that has been called a disease. It is a disease because alcoholics can’t drink like other people, and when they do, the alcohol changes them and makes them powerless over the next drink. Drug addiction can be psychological as well as physical, and is difficult to stop. It is a disease that destroys their bodies, souls, spirits, and relationships. This reminds you to be compassionate and grateful that you don’t have that disease and understand that the alcoholic/addict is struggling with an obsession and compulsion to drink/use that is more powerful than simple willpower.

Detachment means you treat the alcoholic/addict with love and dignity. You don’t have to be driven by your anger, resentment, and hurt. You can choose to treat the
alcoholic/addict with courtesy and respect because every human being deserves at least that. You recognize that even though the alcoholic/addict mistreats you and affects your life negatively, the truth is that the alcoholic/addict is struggling with his/her own pain and is not happy. If you respond with anger and revenge, you will add to the hopelessness that the alcoholic/addict is already feeling. You will also make yourself part of the problem and not feel good about your actions.

**Detachment means you let the alcoholic/addict face the consequences of the drinking/using.**

Substance abusers have problems related to the substance abuse. Whether it is missed work, unpaid bills, bad relationships, health problems, legal problems, or anything else, it isn’t yours to fix and control. When you intervene with any of these problems, you prevent the alcoholic/addict from facing the consequences that can eventually bring him/her to the place that change is desired because life isn’t working. It isn’t easy, but you have to get out of the way.

**Detachment means you live your own life and let the alcoholic/addict live his/her own life.**

You recognize that the alcoholic/addict has to make the choice to drink/use or not and to get help or not. It is your choice whether you will get help for yourself. It is up to you to decide what you will and will not do. Your boundaries have to do with yourself and what is okay and not okay for you. You don’t have to be obsessed with what the alcoholic/addict is or isn’t doing. Turn your focus onto living your own life and what you want for yourself, and you will naturally be more detached.

**Detachment means you don’t take on the blame, anger, threats, manipulation, guilt, and drama that the alcoholic/addict throws at you.** You don’t have to engage in arguments. You can refuse to allow threats and manipulation to change your course. You can refuse to take on blame and guilt that isn’t yours to carry. You don’t have to be a part of the drama. And you have the power over whether or not you believe what the alcoholic/addict says about you.

Having a relationship with an alcoholic/addict isn’t easy; but when you detach with love, your life and relationship will improve, and so will the chances that the alcoholic/addict will get help. When family and friends aren’t detaching, they are usually enabling the drinking/using by preventing consequences and acting in ways that allow the alcoholic/addict to blame them for the problems. God detaches from us by allowing us to make our own choices, suffer the consequences, and come to him in repentance when we are ready to change. Give the alcoholic/addict in your life the dignity of the same choices God gives you.
Here are Nancy's wise words from her testimony on "Detaching with Love."
Enjoy.

**Detachment means** I can be loving and respectful, but let go of the things that are not mine to handle such as his choice to drink or not. The days when I used to pace in front of the window or stay up until he gets home are gone. I don’t track him during the day or call him when he should be leaving the office.

**Detachment means** I don’t need to attend every single argument I am invited to. I can kindly busy myself doing something else or even remove myself from the situation or area without engaging or without commenting on something. That doesn’t mean storming out of the room; it means graciously making another choice.

**Detachment is loving.** It is first loving myself enough to realize I don’t need to control, criticize, or convict anyone else.

**Detachment means** I don’t need to point out his wrongs, unless they are truly putting my life in jeopardy. He’s pretty aware of his wrongs, as I am of mine, so I can allow him the dignity to deal with them however he decides and not take them personally.

**Detachment means** I am not constantly worrying about “what others will think of us” because, really, that is none of my business. I can only affect what they think of MEEEEEE by doing the best I can. I can give my mind a rest!

**Detachment means** I don’t need to feel responsible when he fails at something, and I don’t need to figure out how he can fix it either. That gives me much more time to look at my own issues and how I can fix those….like going to this class, reading the Word, etc.

**Detachment** can be taking a walk with the dog—alone and leaving my cell phone at home. It allows me to truly leave my troubling thoughts at home and spend time with God…not being tempted to call someone to discuss my worries or problems when I should spend time with Him. My cell phone has a way of becoming a sort of “REMOTE CONTROL”. When it’s not in my hand, I can turn off my thoughts.

**Detachment** is a valuable lesson that my kids see me practicing, as long as it is done with love. By my stepping away from something I have no control over, it will help them to identify healthy ways of coping in their own lives.
Study Questions for Lifesaving Principle 5: Nurture Yourself

Women in difficult relationships ignore their own needs because they focus so intently on their husbands and the problems. It is important that they learn to take care of themselves. This strengthens them to meet the many additional demands and stresses of their difficult marriages. It also teaches them to live their lives fully by developing and utilizing their talents and enjoying the good things; otherwise their lives are on hold while they wait for their husbands to change.

When they begin to take care of themselves, their husbands may accuse them of being selfish. But, it is not selfish; it is essential. There are many practical ways they can take care of themselves including taking care of their emotional, physical, spiritual, and mental needs, learning to say yes and no, making good decisions, watching priorities, respecting themselves, keeping journals, and keeping things as simple as possible.

1. Read the list of excuses at the top of page 83. Do you use any of these excuses for not taking care of yourself? (page 83)

2. Answer the questions at the top of page 84. Do they give you any ideas of how you can begin to nurture yourself by developing your own life? (page 84)

3. Has anyone ever accused you of being selfish when you take care of yourself? How do Ephesians 5:29, Matthew 14:13 & 23, Matthew 22:39, and Philippians 2:4 support the premise that you should take care of yourself? (pages 84-85)
4. What emotional needs have you neglected? What can you do to take care of your emotional needs? (pages 85-86)

5. What physical needs have you neglected? What can you do to take care of your physical needs? (pages 86-87)

6. What spiritual needs have you neglected? Have your feelings of guilt and unworthiness kept you from pursuing a relationship with God? How? What can you do to take care of your spiritual needs? (pages 87-88)

7. What mental needs have you neglected? What can you do to take care of your mental needs? (page 88)
8. Women in difficult marriages often put their lives on hold until their husbands change. Matthew 25:14-30 is the Parable of the Talents. It is talking about money, but can also figuratively include all our talents including our life, time, money, abilities, experiences, relationships, gifts, knowledge, and opportunities. Even though you may feel overwhelmed, developing your talents is good for you. What can you do today to use your talents? (pages 88-89)

9. One of the ways you take care of yourself is to simply say “Yes” or “No.” (Matthew 5:37). How is allowing yourself to say yes and no when you really mean it taking care of yourself? If you have difficulty with this concept, how can you begin to make changes in this area? (pages 89-90)

10. Read Colossians 3:8-13. Difficult marriages are full of anger, resentment, and bitterness. What are your struggles with forgiveness? Is it hard for you to understand that forgiveness does not mean you have to tolerate mistreatment in the future? (pages 90-91)

11. It is natural to have many regrets in difficult marriages. What do you have difficulty forgiving yourself for? How can you let go of the regrets and offer yourself grace? (pages 91-93)
12. Life can easily become overwhelming, even without a difficult marriage. How can you simplify your life and keep your priorities straight? (pages 94-95)

13. Write your prayer to God for this week.

14. Write two things you can apply to your life out of this week’s material.
Lecture Notes for Principle 5: Nurture Yourself

Here are some questions you need to answer to help you learn to nurture yourself:

1. **How and why have you neglected yourself?**

2. **Is it selfish to take care of yourself?**

   Philippians 2:4: “Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”

   No, it is necessary and essential to care for yourself; yes, if you are completely unbalanced and care only for yourself.

   Have you believed it is selfish for you to take care of yourself?

   How has this affected your choices?

3. **How do you know when you should put your needs or the other person’s needs first?**

   - You have to stay emotionally, physically, spiritually, and mentally healthy.

     Ephesians 5:29: “After all, no one ever hates his own body, but he feeds and cares for it.”

   - You have to take care of your family’s needs first.

     1 Timothy 5:8: “If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”
You have to pay attention to why you are putting the other person first.

2 Corinthians 9:7: “Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

There are lots of reasons why we put someone else before ourselves:

- Obligation – you believe you have to.
- Guilt – if you don’t, you will feel bad.
- Fear – of the repercussions if you don’t.
- Pride/People-pleasing – you want others to think well of you.
- Obedience – you believe God wants you to.
- To further the gospel
- Choice – you want to.

Which ones of these reasons typically motivate you to put other people before yourself?

You have to compare the importance of both needs.


4. What needs to change for you to take care of yourself? How can you take better care of yourself? ..........?

- Emotionally

- Mentally

- Spiritually

- Physically
5. How would forgiving yourself and others help you to nurture yourself?

Psalm 32:1, 3-4: “Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.”

Unforgiveness toward yourself and others has a negative effect on your emotional, mental, spiritual, and physical health. When you hold on to the mistakes of the past, you can’t fully live in the present. You cannot go back and undo the past; you can only change the way you live today. Christ forgave you. Forgive yourself. And forgive others, so resentment doesn’t keep you from moving forward. (Always remember, you can forgive and still set boundaries on further mistreatment and forgiveness doesn’t mean you have to forget or pretend it didn’t happen.)

What do you need to forgive yourself for?

What do you need to forgive others for?

What is keeping you from forgiving yourself and others?
Suggestions for Self-Care

EMOTIONALLY

- Meet with girlfriends – a gift of God to encourage us.
- Meet with a spiritually mature or older mentor.
- Be aware of what your true emotional needs are (take a personality test).
- Be aware of your emotional vulnerability and work toward balance.
- Watch your priorities.

PHYSICALLY

- Recreation (have some fun).
- Exercise regularly.
- Stay on a healthy diet.
- Check with a doctor for hormonal issues.
- Get enough sleep.
- Update your physical appearance (make-up, something new, long hot bath, hair cut, etc.).
- Do something to relax.

SPRITUALLY

- Read the Bible (specifically Psalms and Proverbs).
- Read a devotional book.
- Meet with other believers (Hebrews 10:25) for encouragement.
- Use meditative prayer (pray Psalms).
- Read Christian fiction.

MENTALLY

- Stay up with current events.
- Play mental games (Sudoku, cross-word puzzles).
- Read self-help books.
- Take an on-line course.
- Start a craft.
- Watch your priorities.
- Keep a journal (for perspective).

Ephesians 5:29

“After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church.”
Suggestions for Relaxing

Use the following to relieve any stress you are feeling that might hinder your quiet time with God.

- **Tension check**
  Scan your body from head to toe and when you become aware of an area of tension or discomfort, gently tense it and release it and then relax.

- **Massage**
  Gently massage your forehead, head and neck as though you were shampooing your hair. Allow it to help you relax.

- **Word Response**
  Choose a word or brief phrase that helps you to relax such as peace, relax, be still, etc. Close your eyes and slowly repeat this word or phrase to yourself until you start to experience its meaning.

- **Peaceful place**
  If you can’t be in a beautiful place, imagine one like a forest, park, country lane or sandy beach. Use all your senses to experience this place fully. Allow these images in your mind to relax your body.

- **One-Minute Relaxation**
  “Be still, and know that I am God.” (Psalm 46:10)
  Spend a few seconds focusing on your breathing, deeply and slowly. Then slowly repeat the Scripture above, emphasizing a different word each time you say it. Then whisper “Be Still” a few times to calm your spirit.

- **U R What U Think**
  “For as he thinks in his heart, so is he.” (Proverbs 23:7) (AMP)
  Take an inventory of your thoughts. Just like our words, they are containers of power—good or bad. What we say usually comes from what we think. If you feel caught in a negative pattern of thinking, ask God to help you and surrender your thoughts to Him.

- **Palms Stress Relief**
  “Cast all your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you.” (Psalm 55:22)(NIV)
  Sit in a comfortable position with the palms of your hands facing upwards. Breathe deeply and slowly. Then, turn the palms of your hands over to face the floor. Mentally release to God all the things that are troubling you or causing your stress at that moment. Imagine sitting down a bag full of unnecessary, heavy objects and taking each one out, putting them into the hands of God. Name them, if necessary, so you can fully release each stressor to Him. Finally, turn the palms of your hands upwards again and spend a few minutes accepting God’s love, joy and peace.
One-Word Meditation

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” (Galatians 5:22-23) (NIV)

Focus your attention on God, sit quietly, relax and concentrate on one aspect of the fruit of the Spirit from the above Scripture. Think about the quality and what it means. Finish the meditation by asking God to develop that quality more fully in your life.

Suggestions for Meditation

Use the following Scriptures to ponder the wonder of God:

Who God is:
Genesis 22:13-14  Psalm 19  John 1:14

What God has done:
Psalm 8  Job 33:4  Galatians 3:13-14

What God has said:
Psalm 19:7-11  Matthew 5:18  II Timothy 3:16

What God has commanded:
Exodus 20:1-17  Ephesians 6:1-20  Colossians 3:16

What God says about me:
Genesis 1:27  Jeremiah 1:4-5  John 17:23
Study Questions for Lifesaving Principle 6: Face Your Fears

Women in difficult marriages have many fears: some real and some projected. They live with all manner of “what ifs.” The fear can keep them paralyzed from making changes, speaking the truth, taking care of themselves, and setting boundaries. It is important that they identify the fears they have, talk about them, do whatever they can to appropriately take care of the situation, and then let the rest go by trusting in God.

Talking about the fears with other people helps them to know that they are not alone and that others also feel many of the same fears.

1. Fear is an emotion. Some mistakenly believe that feeling fear is a sin; it is not. Read the following verses: Matthew 14:22-32, John 6:16-21, Luke 8:22-25, and Philippians 4:6. How do these verses help you see that having fear is not wrong, but that you have a choice to turn that fear into worry and anxiety or into faith by trusting God? (page 98)

What do you typically do with your fear?

2. Read Isaiah 51:7, Proverbs 29:25, and 1 John 4:18. How are you afraid of your husband’s reaction? How does this affect your choices? (page 99)

4. Which losses do you fear most: financial, relational, material, physical, or spiritual? Read Proverbs 15:16-17, Matthew 6:25-34, and Philippians 3:8. How does God want you to view loss? If it is necessary to bring your husband to the place where he will want to change, can you view it in a different way? (pages 100-101)

5. God hates divorce, but He also hates the sin that causes it. There is disagreement in the Church over justifiable reasons for divorce. What do you believe constitutes justifiable grounds for divorce? How does this affect your choices and actions in your difficult marriage? (pages 101-102)

6. Fear of being alone is a common fear for women in difficult marriages. Read Isaiah 54:4-6. How does knowing God is there for you help? How can you reach out to other people to keep you from feeling and being alone? Do you succumb to the thinking that the only way to combat loneliness is to be with a man in a romantic relationship? How does that hinder you? (page 103)

8. Finding God’s will for our lives is important; yet, we are sometimes confused and unnecessarily fearful. Read Proverbs 20:18, 2 Corinthians 2:12, Proverbs 3:5-6, and Romans 8:28. How do these verses present differing ways to find God’s will? (pages 105-106)

How has this been an area of confusion and/or disillusionment for you? Do you need to be afraid of being out of God’s will or simple turn over your decisions to Him and trust Him to guide you?

9. The fear of staying the same can be a positive fear, helping you to realize that unless you do something differently, your marriage may either not change or get worse. When you see your marriage in the past, present, and future, do you see any patterns? Do you have regrets about the past? Will you have those same regrets in the future if nothing changes? (pages 109-110)
10. It is important to identify and analyze your fears, so you can see how they affect your decisions. Second Timothy 1:7 tells us that “the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline” (NIV) or a “sound mind” (KJV). Read the questions at the bottom of page 110 and top of page 111 that help you evaluate your fears. How will that process help you to say, “So what?” to your fears and allow you to do the right thing anyway? (pages 110-112)

11. Write your prayer to God for this week.

12. Write two things you can apply to your life out of this week’s material.
What is fear?

- *Fear* is a distressing emotion aroused by impending danger, evil, pain, etc. whether the threat is real or imagined.

- *Anxiety* is experienced as mental distress or uneasiness because of some type of fear. It can become worry.

- *F-e-a-r = false evidence appearing real. Sometimes the thing we fear isn’t real; but other times, fear is real and needs to be taken as a warning* (Proverbs 22:3).

- Fear-based individuals are naturally more fear-based or anxiety prone from either their inborn personalities or life experiences. Perfectionists tend to have high anxiety related to high expectations of themselves and others.

- Fear is a basic survival mechanism – humans have it and so do animals. Its purpose is to protect by enabling the person or animal to heighten its senses and attend to what is threatening by either fighting or fleeing. This is known as the “fight or flight” response. It is experienced physiologically by the sympathetic nervous system tightening muscles and priming them with oxygen and increasing the heart rate. Emotionally, we experience fear with recognition of danger.

- Individuals also can experience “freeze” along with fight or flight.

- Fear can either motivate you or paralyze you.

- Fear is a natural response to danger. It isn’t feeling fear that is sinful. It is what we do with it that matters. The Bible tells us to replace fear with trust in the Lord.

Common Fears in Difficult Marriages

- Fear of your husband’s reaction
- Fear of change
- Fear of loss
- Fear of divorce
- Fear of being alone
- Fear of being out of God’s will

The Bible uses the phrase “will of God” two ways:

- God’s specific sovereign plan: Ephesians 1:1, James 4:15, Genesis 12:1-3, Exodus 9:34;14:4, John 3:16
- God’s general commandments: 1 Thessalonians 4:3, 1 Peter 2:15,
Matthew 7:21, 2 Peter 1:3-10

- Fears regarding children
- Fear of regret
- Fear of the unknown
- Fear of staying the same

Quotes About Fear

- “There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.” (1 John 4:18, NIV)
- “God’s spirit doesn’t make us slaves who are afraid of him. Instead, we become his children and call him our father.” (Romans 8:15, Contemporary English Version)
- “For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’” (Romans 8:15, NIV)
- “Feel the fear and do it anyway.” (Susan Jeffers, Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway)
- “You gain strength, courage and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You must do the thing which you think you cannot do.” (Eleanor Roosevelt)
- “Courage is fear that has said its prayers.” (Dorothy Bernard)

How do you deal with fear?

- Identify the fear.
- Feel the fear.
- Talk to God and others about the fear.
- Evaluate your fears and how they affect your decisions and life.
- Do the right thing anyway by trusting God through it.

1 Timothy 1:7 says, “God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline” (NIV). The King James Version replaces “self-discipline” with “self-control.” You do not have to let fear paralyze you and keep you from doing whatever it is that you know you should do. You can face your fears with God’s strength.
Study Questions for Lifesaving Principle 7:
Speak the Truth in Love

Poor communication is a part of all difficult relationships. Denial is a common part of dysfunctional relationships. It keeps people from dealing with things, until they are ready to face them. Yet, denial also prevents the truth from being spoken. It is essential that the truth be faced. Women in difficult marriages come to doubt their perceptions, thoughts, and feelings because their husbands often lie, deny, twist, invalidate, and manipulate. They need validation of their feelings, perceptions, and thoughts. Being in a group with other people that have had similar experiences helps them to see things clearer.

Once they know the truth, they can begin to speak the truth in love by being honest, direct, respectful, humble, persistent, willing to listen, reasonable, and discerning. Even if only one person begins to speak the truth, it changes the dynamics of the relationship.

1. Denial is common in difficult relationships. How have you been in denial about yourself, your husband, and your marriage? How has your husband’s denial affected you? Jesus said that truth produces freedom (John 8:32). How would letting go of denial set you free? (pages 113-114)

2. Self-doubt is another common characteristic of a difficult relationship. When your husband disagrees with or denies much of what you believe, feel, and see, you begin to doubt yourself. It is essential that you begin to trust yourself to know your truth; not looking to your husband or others to tell you what it is. How have you let your husband make you doubt yourself? How can you learn to trust yourself more? How does what James 1:5-8 says about doubt relate to your life? (pages 114-116)
3. It is essential that you are willing to confront when it is necessary. Read the examples on pages 116-117 of things Jesus said to the Scribes, Pharisees, and disciples and Paul said to the church. What does this teach you about confronting? Is confrontation easy or hard for you? (pages 116-117)

4. What can you do to be prepared when you communicate to your husband? Matthew 10:16 says, “Be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.” How would it help you to keep your husband’s problems in mind so you won’t be thrown off guard? (page 118)

5. The purpose of your communication isn’t to get your husband to hear you, to change, or to validate you (because difficult people don’t usually want to listen, change, or validate). The purpose is for you to speak your truth just because you need to. How does this change the way you talk to your husband? (pages 118-120)

6. Dysfunctional relationships have dysfunctional communication. Indirect communication causes the other person to guess at what is meant. Too many words cause the person to tune out. Emotional reactivity increases defensiveness. How can you begin to communicate in short, factual, and direct statements? How would it change things? (pages 120-121)
7. Speaking the truth in love involves speaking to others respectfully, courteously, and kindly. Do you currently do this? What do your body language and tone of voice communicate? (pages 121-122)

Read Colossians 3:12, Titus 3:4-5, and 2 Peter 1:5-7. How can you speak truth that has those components?

8. Sometimes, truth has to be spoken more than once. You may have to say it, let your husband react, walk away, and then say it again— and again. Not nagging, just not backing down from your truth, if it isn’t accepted right away. How does detachment help you with this principle of persistence? (pages 122-124)

9. Your husband has a different perspective and some of his “truth” too. Can you be open-minded enough to let him speak or is it difficult for you to hear what he says? How would your being a better listener change your relationship (as long as he isn’t abusive)? (page 124)
10. It is important to be reasonable. The balance to speaking the truth in love is learning that there are times that “love covers over a multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8) and “is not easily angered” (1 Corinthians 13:5). Some of the things that bother you are small and don’t need to be brought up. Read the questions in italics on page 126 and discuss how asking yourself those questions would help you get a different perspective about the many irritations you have. (pages 125-126)

11. Proverbs 17:28 says, “Even fools are thought wise if they keep silent, and discerning if they hold their tongues.” Proverbs 26:4 says, “Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you yourself will be just like him.” James 1:19 says, “Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.” Proverbs 15:28 says, “The heart of the righteous weighs its answers, but the mouth of the wicked gushes evil.” When do you need to be silent or slow to speak? (pages 126-127)

12. Write your prayer to God for this week.

13. Write two things you can apply to your life out of this week’s material.
Lecture Notes for Principle 7: Speaking the Truth in Love

Hindrances to Speaking the Truth in Love

You may need to speak the truth to someone and confront them regarding unacceptable behavior, relay a boundary, or instigate a conversation about a problem in your relationship. Ephesians 4 tells us to live as children of light and speak truthfully by dealing with our anger and emotions in a healthy, productive and Godly way. The following hindrances will prevent you from speaking the truth in love:

**Insisting the other person understand or agree with you.** *(That is never guaranteed and NOT the main reason you speak your truth.)* Matthew 10:11-14; 34

**Fear of causing the other person to be upset, hurt, or unhappy with you.** *(People may be upset with what you tell them, and that doesn’t mean you shouldn’t have said it, as sometimes it is necessary to cause people distress. You need to detach from their reactions.)* 2 Corinthians 7:8

**Saying too many words in an effort to convince.** *(Keep it to 10 words or less.)* Proverbs 25:11

**Speaking when you are reactive and not meaning what you say, saying things to threaten without the willingness and ability to follow through with it, or saying things in a mean way, meant to hurt or wound.** *(Mean what you say. Say what you mean. And don’t say it mean.)* Proverbs 20:25

**Saying things to someone who will use your words to punish or hurt you.** *(Always consider the safety of the person you are speaking to, and don’t disclose things to someone who will hurt you with what you share.)* Matthew 7:6

**Allowing yourself to be easily invalidated by the other person’s defensiveness, abuse, arguments, and opinions.** *(Just because someone says it, doesn’t make it so. Learn to validate yourself by believing what you feel and perceive, and consider your opinions and perceptions just as important as someone else’s.)* James 1:6-8

**Difficulty expressing your thoughts, especially in emotionally volatile and unpleasant circumstances.** *(Write down the main points you want to say. When confronted by someone, take time to think about your responses by coming back to the subject later. Consider using e-mails, letters, cards, script, texts, or even a journal. Write every word down and read it, if you need to.)* Proverbs 15:28
Thinking you have to have a boundary, consequence, or bottom line every time you deal with a difficult issue. (It is okay to just share feelings and thoughts. Only share boundaries and consequences when you are ready.) 1 Corinthians 4:14

Only caring about your own position and not being willing to hear the other person’s truths. (Be willing to hear the other person’s feelings, thoughts, and perceptions, even if it is uncomfortable or painful. Recognize that you are a part of the relationship and other people are affected by you too.) Colossians 3:12-14, Philippians 2:4

Speaking when you feel panicky, anxious, or emotionally reactive and thinking you have to make it happen NOW. (Wait to deal with the issue, if possible, at a time when you feel more in control of yourself. When you feel these things, you are likely to be pushy, intense, emotional, reactive, and/or controlling. The other person will sense your mood and be more defensive.) James 1:19

Saying what you don’t need to say to a person that it will do no good to speak to and will upset you instead. (Always think about why you want to speak and if the good outweighs the bad.) Matthew 10:11-14 & 16-17

Saying your truth in a way that accuses or attacks the other person. (This will only cause defensiveness. Share your truths in a way that focuses on yourself. Use “I statements.” Claim the problem for yourself. Example: “I am not okay with you not working and living here.” “I am not able to live with alcohol/drug/pornography use, etc. It is too painful for me. I just can’t do it.” “I get scared when you are angry and shut down. It is uncomfortable for me.”) Proverbs 15:1 & 18

Speaking too soon. (Know your truth first.) Proverbs 17:14 & 28

Speaking at the wrong time. (Timing does matter. Like it or not, there is wisdom in using timing to your advantage.) Proverbs 16:32

Allowing yourself to get into a defensive position with your truth. (Don’t argue or defend. It only weakens your position. After all, it is just your truth.) Ephesians 6:14

Taking the person’s response personal. (DETACH! DETACH! DETACH! The person has the right to his/her own response. It does not invalidate your truth for them to disagree or be upset!) Matthew 10:26

Not knowing who you are dealing with. (Don’t be unprepared. Go into the conversation with the knowledge of who the person is. Expect him or her to act in their usual way. Don’t be shocked and disappointed when he or she behaves NORMALLY.) Matthew 10:16-17, Luke 11:17
Not persisting in your truth. (Your truth is your truth even if someone else doesn’t validate it. Don’t be easily swayed with every argument and opinion. Don’t fall back into denial.) Ephesians 6:14

Believing you can’t or shouldn’t apologize when you are wrong or that you cannot change your mind. (You can apologize and/or change your mind—when you really need to—at any time with anyone—even children.) 1 John 1:8

Thinking you have to do it perfectly and if you don’t, the fallout is your fault. (Other people are responsible for their stuff and they have a part in the relationship and conversation too. Do your best and let the rest go.) Matthew 12:36

Avoiding confrontation and dealing with the truth, because it is uncomfortable, but continuing to complain about the problem or person. (It is your responsibility to bring it up no matter how uncomfortable it is. Be willing to do something different to get change.) Matthew 5:23-24; 18:15-17

Thinking you have to say it over and over for the person to hear you. (You may need to say it again, but not because they didn’t hear you. They heard. They just didn’t want to admit it.) Proverbs 26:4
Boundaries are not about controlling the other person; they are limits on what each of us will and will not do. As was already discussed, we are powerless to make someone else change. The only power we have is over our own lives. Therefore, boundaries utilize the power we have to decide how we will live. Our boundaries also set a standard for others, as we define what is acceptable for us.

Jesus set boundaries in His interactions with others. He chose when to respond and how to respond, always in full control of Himself and what He allowed others to do to Him. He willingly went to the cross at the appointed time but withdrew Himself from dangerous situations before that time. He held people responsible for their actions while consistently demonstrating authority and integrity (Mark 1:22 and Luke 4:32) and a love that enabled Him to die on the cross.

Difficult people don’t necessarily welcome their loved ones setting boundaries. It isn’t God’s first choice that any relationship have a breach, but it may result from making a stand for the higher good of following Christ and standing for righteousness.

1. Difficult relationships weaken and challenge boundaries. Are your boundaries weaker than you would like them to be? Look at the bulleted list at the bottom of page 130 and top of page 131. Share about the reasons that apply to you. (pages 130-132)

2. Read the bulleted list under “Setting Boundaries” on page 132 of boundary examples. Think about Christ’s life. How did He demonstrate boundaries? (pages 132-133).
3. Next, read the bulleted list at the top of page 133 as to why you need strong boundaries. Which ones strike you as reasons that you should work on strengthening your boundaries? (pages 132-133)

4. Think of an area that you need stronger boundaries. Look at the bulleted questions on the middle of page 133 following the sentence: “Answering the following questions will help you decide what boundaries you want to set.” Answer those questions as they pertain to that area. (page 133)

5. Are there any family members or close friends that disagree with the boundaries you want to set regarding your husband? If so, you will have to set boundaries with them regarding your decisions and risk their disapproval. Will this be difficult for you?

6. Are there struggles that involve boundaries in your sexual relationship with your husband? What boundaries do you need to set? (pages 135-139)
7. What are your struggles with financial irresponsibility? What boundaries do you need to set? (pages 139-141)

8. What is your past and present experience with abuse? Have you been in a verbally, emotionally, spiritually, or physically abusive relationship? How can you set boundaries with any abuse that is still happening? (pages 141-144)

9. If your husband is narcissistic, angry, and/or passive aggressive, how can you set boundaries to protect yourself? (144-146)

10. Does your husband have a physical or mental illness? What boundaries do you need to set? (page 146)
11. How are you and your husband spiritually mismatched? What boundaries do you need to set? (pages 146-147)

12. Read the bulleted questions under “Relationship Boundaries” on pages 147 and 148. Answer several of the questions posed that pertain to your marriage. (pages 147-148)

13. Separation is sometimes a necessary boundary in a difficult marriage. First Corinthians 7:10-11 is used as a scriptural justification for separation. What legal, emotional, physical, and relationship protections do you have to consider if you separate? (pages 148-150)

What would you have to see change before you would reunite with your husband?
14. Setting boundaries is a process that takes time. It often comes after you have worked the other principles because it takes clarity of mind, a willingness to face your fears and speak the truth, the ability to nurture and focus on yourself, and the ability to detach so you know what is clearly your responsibility. When you set your boundaries, you have to do so in a clear and calm way. When your husband doesn’t like your boundaries, you have to be prepared to stand firm. What has been your experience with setting boundaries? Have you backed down, argued, explained, begged, threatened, gotten angry, cried, or negotiated? What has and hasn’t worked for you in the past? What can you change today? (pages 150-152)

15. Write your prayer to God for this week.

16. Write two things you can apply to your life out of this week’s material.
Common Christian Misconceptions about Boundaries

- Boundaries are selfish. I should be willing to sacrifice and put others before myself.
- Boundaries hurt other people and I shouldn’t hurt people.
- Boundaries aren’t loving and giving.
- Boundaries aren’t Christ-like. Jesus modeled forgiveness and passivity.

Definition of Boundaries

- Boundaries are simply what you will and will not do.
- Boundaries are based on stewardship (Matthew 25:14-30), accountability (Romans 14:12), and the law of reaping and sowing (Galatians 6:7-8).

Responses to Boundaries

- Unhealthy people don’t like boundaries.
- Enmeshed people see boundaries as a betrayal and violation and don’t respect your right to be separate and independent. They also don’t want to lose control.
- Protesting of boundaries or “flak” is meant to get you to withdraw your boundary and go back to your old behavior.
- They threaten and retaliate in anger or counter your boundary with one of their own.
- They act hurt. The hurt can be manipulative to get you to back down.
- They throw out accusations: “You are hurting me.” “You aren’t a Christian.” “You are a bad daughter, wife, husband, son, mother, father, etc.” “You can’t say no to me.” “You have to submit.” “You don’t love me or care about me.”
- They ignore you and act as if you never set the boundary.
- They punish you.
- They violate the boundary because they refuse to respect it. This requires a response from you.
- They respect your boundary and respond by entering into a discussion, negotiation, and understanding. (This is the only healthy response.)
How to Set Boundaries

**Definition:** Boundaries are what you will and won’t do. It may involve your reaction to what another person chooses to do or not to, but it isn’t about making someone else do what you want them to.

**Go through the following process to set boundaries:**

1. Identify what is bothering you.
2. Identify who is involved.
3. Identify your wish/want/need/limit in the situation.
4. Identify who is responsible for what in the situation.
5. Decide whether it is a non-negotiable or negotiable wish/want/need/limit.
6. If it is a **non-negotiable** wish/want/need/limit and you are **ready** to express it:
   - State the wish/want/need/limit.
   - Identify what you will and will not do.
   - Express it to the appropriate person(s) at the appropriate time, clearly if needed.
   - Follow through with whatever actions you need to take.
7. If it is a **negotiable** wish/want/need/limit or you **aren’t ready** to express it as a boundary, yet:
   - Express your feelings, thoughts, needs, and/or wishes to the appropriate person(s) if you decide it is wise to do so.
   - Work on dealing with the problem within yourself.
   - Revisit making it a boundary when you are ready.
Understanding Abuse in Relationships

Types of Abuse

➢ Emotional/Mental and Verbal Abuse

This includes words or non-verbal looks, body stances, communication styles, and interactions designed to weaken, punish, tear down, control, manipulate, or hurt. It includes humiliation, teasing, ridiculing, put-downs, name-calling, insults, denial, discounting, manipulation, mind-games, anger, withholding, silent treatments, blame, lying, criticizing, threatening, minimizing, and ordering.

➢ Physical Abuse

Physical abuse includes hitting, beating, slapping, pushing, shoving, pulling hair, pinching, holding and refusing to allow someone to move, locking someone in a room, ripping clothes, threatening violence with a weapon, using verbal threats or innuendos about future violence, holding up a fist or appearing to be about to strike, but holding back, destroying personal possessions, throwing objects, hurting pets, and destroying property.

➢ Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse consists of forced sex, threats and manipulation to pressure someone into sexual acts that they are uncomfortable with, sexual put-downs, using sex as a bargaining tool, ridiculing masculinity or femininity, extreme jealousy and accusations of infidelity, and physical attacks on sexual parts of the body.

➢ Spiritual Abuse

Spiritual abuse can occur with the misuse of spiritual authority as a husband or father.

♦ Man as head of the home in role of husband

This is when a husband uses his authority as head of the home to prevent his wife from having input into decisions, to discount her needs, to demand servant-like obedience, to disregard her feelings, to demand she submit, to silence her, to prevent him from having to listen to her, to get his way, and to demand these things with a “master of the house” mentality while ignoring the mandate to love his wife as Christ loved the church (Ephesians 5:25).

1 Peter 3:7 tells husbands to “be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing hinders your prayers.” And Colossians 3:19 says, “Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.”
**Man as head of the home as father**

Typical attitudes of an abusive father:

- An abusive father is more concerned with how decisions affect him than his children/family. He is the center.
- An abusive father sees children as his possessions.
- An abusive father uses his children to punish, control, or threaten his wife.
- An abusive father overrules his wife’s decisions and authority with the kids to undermine her.
- An abusive father demands the children meet his needs rather than him meeting their needs.

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**Other Examples of Abuse**

- Control over your personal life and treating you like a child.
- Intimidating looks or acts meant to threaten you and control your behavior.
- Isolating you from people or activities.
- Stalking you (including calling you repeatedly on the phone).
- Using your children to threaten you or control you. Hurting the children to get back at you.

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**Characteristics of the Chronically Abusive Relationship**

- Power
- Control
- Manipulation
- Misuse of authority and position
- Hostility

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**The Abuse Cycle (Lenore Walker)**

- Tension building stage
- Acute battering incident
- Kindness and contrite loving behavior (honeymoon) stage
- Cycle repeats.

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**Destruction from Abuse**

Abuse results in low self-esteem, unhappiness, dissatisfaction with the relationship, broken relationships, loss of self-respect, psychological and physical illnesses, generational dysfunction, and pain. Abuse can also cause complete disintegration of personal worth and oneself to the point where there is an inability to function normally.

In a chronically abusive relationship, you may find yourself confused and constantly asking yourself, “What happened?,” doubting your self-perceptions, questioning your
part, accepting blame, feeling off-balance, feeling intense emotional pain, feeling numb, wondering if you are crazy, and re-running incidents and conversations over and over in your mind to figure out what went wrong.

Response to Abuse

- Be aware
- Protect yourself
- Don’t let abuse work
- Refuse to live in fear
- Change yourself
- Set boundaries

God’s View

- Colossians 3:5-14 tells us to be compassionate, forgiving, gentle, and to let go of anger, malice, bitterness and revenge. Abuse is the complete opposite of these things and is not condoned by Scripture.

- 1 Thessalonians 5:11 says, “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up.” Abuse is the opposite of God’s intention for relationships. God intended for us to build people up, not purposefully tear them down and destroy them. And, God intended each of us to live our lives with dignity and not to be controlled or abused by others.

- Psalm 10 says: “In his arrogance the wicked man hunts down the weak who are caught in the schemes he devises (verse 2). But you, O God, do see trouble and grief; you consider it to take it in hand. The victim commits himself to you; you are the helper of the fatherless (verse 14).” God is on the side of the victims of abuse.
Narcissism

DSM-IV Criteria for Narcissistic Personality Disorder

✓ Personality disorders are inflexible and pervasive and appear in multiple areas of life, not just one relationship.
✓ Apparent in either adolescence or early adulthood.
✓ Can’t be due to the physiological effects of a drug addiction.
✓ Has to have at least 5 of the following characteristics:
  o Grandiose sense of self-importance where one exaggerates achievements and abilities and expects to be recognized as superior to others.
  o Fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty, or ideal love.
  o Belief that one is special or unique and should only associate with special people.
  o Requires excessive admiration.
  o Sense of entitlement that involves favorable treatment or automatic compliance with expectations.
  o Exploits others to achieve one’s own ends and expects to be given whatever they want or need.
  o Lacks empathy and is unwilling to recognize others’ needs or feelings and views others’ needs and feelings as weakness.
  o Envious of others and believes others are envious of him/her.
  o Arrogant and haughty behaviors and attitudes.
✓ Can have NPD or narcissistic-like behaviors due to addictions or other problems but not be serious enough to be diagnosed with the personality disorder.
✓ Cause: Psychologically empty and anxious with shaky sense of self and self-esteem. Often has deep childhood wounds.

Relationship Problems with a Narcissist

✓ May be very charming and charismatic to draw you into the relationship.
✓ You lose your sense of “self” and your needs, wants, and desires.
✓ Relationship operates on his/her terms and your feelings, needs, and concerns don’t matter.
✓ You have to spend energy making sure he/she feels important, admired, and special.
✓ You feel controlled and have difficulty saying no.
✓ Takes lots of energy.
✓ Moody and difficult to deal with.
✓ Sensitive to criticism and reacts to it with rage or shame.
✓ Perfectionistic and Intolerant of others’ mistakes and overreacts to them.
✓ Unrealistic demands and expectations of others.
✓ You will experience emotional pain.
✓ Unable to look at himself/herself and see personal problems or weaknesses.
Will need to feel “one up” on you at all times.
Will not be empathic toward you or the children.
Will be unconcerned with how he/she affects you and treats you.
Will not be able to give unconditional love and approval or acknowledge others individuality.

Coping Skills for Dealing with a Narcissist

- Work on developing a strong sense of “self.”
- Learn to validate your “self.”
- Give up trying to make him/her validate your feelings, thoughts and needs.
- Attend to your own needs.
- Identify the things in you that make you vulnerable to the narcissist’s behaviors.
- Identify the narcissistic behaviors so you can defend yourself against them and not be surprised when they happen.
- Set clear boundaries and refuse to back down.
- Develop assertiveness skills.
- Sever the relationship if necessary or limit interactions if it is toxic.
Dealing with the Passive Aggressive Person

Passive aggressive behavior is more difficult to identify than aggressive behavior, unless you know what you are looking for.

What is passive-aggressive behavior? It is a pattern of indirectly expressing negative feelings rather than directly expressing them. The true feelings are expressed by the behavior rather than the words.

Here are questions you can use to determine whether or not you are dealing with a passive aggressive person. “Yes” answers mean the person is passive aggressive. Does the person:

- Frequently say one thing but do the opposite?
- Agree to do something but then sabotage it by being late, doing it wrong, or forgetting it?
- Seem constantly resentful and upset at perceived mistreatment?
- Express opposition at being told what to do?
- Constantly feel unappreciated?
- Accuse you of being controlling and overpowering in the relationship?
- Procrastinate on things you want done?
- Stir up intense anger in you?
- Deny his/her anger toward you?
- Blame you for everything in the relationship?
- Thwart your efforts to make any real change or decisions?

Passive aggressiveness is the opposite of making sure you mean what you say. Jesus told us to make our yes’ and no’s clear (Matthew 5:37). In other words, our actions should match our words. The difficulty in recognizing a passive aggressive person results from the tendency, especially in difficult relationships, to pay more attention to the person’s words than their actions. When you do this, you will become confused. If you are dealing with a passive aggressive person, identify it and then pay attention to the actions. This won’t change the behavior, but it will make things clearer to you and you will feel less confused. After you clearly recognize it, you can then decide what to do about it.

Passive aggressive people are insecure in the relationship. They see you as powerful and capable of overpowering them. They will accuse you of wanting to dominate and control them. You will be confused by this because you may actually feel dominated and
controlled by them. They will blame you for everything in the relationship, but deny you any real power to make changes and decisions. When you recognize that a person is passive aggressive, you will need to decide how to deal with the behavior that is probably making you crazy.

The closer a person is to you, the more the passive aggressive behavior will be problematic. Jesus warned us to be on guard against people who will attempt to manipulate, harm, outmaneuver, and abuse us. When you have close relationships with people who aren’t living and walking in the truth and are engaging in unhealthy behaviors, it is important that you recognize what you are dealing with and respond in a way that is healthy for you and the relationship. Here are four ways to deal with passive aggressive behavior:

**Don’t attack.** Passive aggressive people evoke anger in other people and the anger usually isn’t passive. You may have so much anger pent up inside of you that any time you interact, you are attacking and intense. This will only evoke more passive anger toward you, so even though it takes a tremendous amount of self-control, don’t attack. Remember, you will be accused of attacking even when you don’t, so you will need to learn to remain calm and state your truth in short non-defensive ways that focus on your needs and don’t label, accuse, or criticize.

**Encourage truth.** When the passive aggressive person risks talking about feelings, issues, problems, and concerns, be careful not to be defensive or critical. Instead, encourage the truth and listen intently. You don’t have to agree with what is being said, but you do need to make it a safe experience for the passive aggressive person who fears being vulnerable and is taking a huge risk in speaking his/her truth.

**Resist lies.** You have to hold firmly to the truth about you and the other person. Don’t believe the untruths projected onto you. Passive aggressive people see things in others that aren’t there. They project their own insecurities and weaknesses. Their fear of being dependent on you will cause them to see you as controlling when you may only be trying to fix the relationship, ask for cooperation, or talk about things that need to be discussed. Stand firm in your truth no matter what is said even when you can’t convince the other person that what he/she believes is a lie. Don’t allow yourself to be invalidated by giving up your truth.

**Set boundaries.** You will need boundaries to prevent the passive aggressive person from wrecking havoc in your life. Give time limits for what you need and have a backup plan if the person doesn’t follow through. Adjust your expectations, so you won’t be so dependent on the person acting differently. State your decisions and stick to them. Finally, decide how much you will tolerate before giving an ultimatum or ending the relationship. Using these tools will empower you and enable you to respond without using anger yourself.
Recognizing and Responding to Emotional Manipulation

Dysfunctional people often use tactics to manipulate you to get what they want. These people are usually skilled at recognizing the weaknesses they can exploit. The only way to counter their ability to get to you is to recognize the tactics so you can stand against them. Jesus warned that we should be on our guard because some people will want to hurt us and that some of them will be from our own families (Matthew 10:17; 35). Emotional manipulation occurs when someone deliberately manipulates another person into feeling a certain way that can then be exploited.

Recognize Emotional Manipulation

Threats
Threatening to take away something that you value or want is used to get you to do what the person wants. Threats can include loss of the relationship, financial ruin, revealing secrets, holding resentments, imposing consequences, treating you badly, or blaming you for the outcome. An example would be, “If you don’t continue to give me money, I will never see you again. I will be forced to live on the street and will resume my drug habit. If I die, it will be your fault.” Threats induce fear of loss in you that makes you want to give in to avoid whatever you dread. Dysfunctional people often want what they want regardless of how they have to get it. In order to get their way, they often resort to emotional blackmail. Emotional blackmail says: “If you don’t do what I want, I will hurt you.”

Guilt
When people want you to feel guilty, it is because they are using the guilt to convince you to do what they want. The guilt is usually focused on an area that you have self-doubt in and already feel guilty about. Here are some examples: “A loving Christian wife wouldn’t treat her husband this way.” “You don’t love me or you would help me. What parent would throw a child out on the street?” These will get to you if you already doubt that you are a good Christian, a good wife, or a good parent.

Triangulation
It is easier to get you to back down or give in when you feel you are outnumbered. By bringing in another person to support his/her position, you will be more likely to question and doubt yourself. This uses the power of another person to get to you. Here are some examples: “I’ve talked to all my friends and none of their parents do this.” “Dad agrees with me.” “The pastor/elder says you are wrong.”

Victimization
The emotional manipulator can actually pretend to be the victim of mistreatment by wallowing in self-pity. If you begin to see the person as a victim of poor circumstances, mistreatment by others, bad luck, or hurt by your actions, then you will likely give in
because you feel so bad. Some examples are: “No one helps me.” “I always get bad
breaks.” “I’ll never be able to survive this.” “No one understands.”
When sin entered the human race through disobedience, relationships were affected
because people became self-centered. Rather than being transparent, cooperative, and
honest, people began to cover up and hide their motives and their intentions to get what
they wanted. Emotional manipulators do this on a regular basis because they have
become adept at being able to exploit the weaknesses of other people to get their way.
Here are four types of emotional manipulators:

**Types of Emotional Manipulators**

**Intimidators.** The intimidators use their power and position to threaten you into
compliance. They do this through threats, anger, withholding, and punishment. They
threaten to hurt you, themselves, or others. They know what you fear and will exploit
those fears. They know how to exploit your doubts and weaknesses to get you to give in.
When people use their power to get you to give in to their demands, they are using
intimidation.

**Dependents.** These people project their helplessness onto you and make you feel
responsible for them. When you try to hold them accountable for themselves, they make
you feel guilty for expecting them to take care of themselves. They may try to make you
feel sorry for them by reciting their bad luck, difficult circumstances, and a “woe is me”
attitude. When you accept their incompetence and helplessness and let them get away
with being irresponsible, you are being emotionally manipulated.

**Pretenders.** These people pretend not to understand what you are saying or to hear your
concerns. They may accuse you of saying and doing things you aren’t saying or doing.
They are experts at changing the subject, turning things against you, and making you the
bad guy. They will call you a nag for bringing things up about them; call you selfish for
asking for what you want; and call you controlling for confronting them. They are experts
at using manipulation to convince you that they don’t get your concerns, and as a result,
will never deal with them.

**Projectors.** The projectors accuse you of being emotionally manipulative and of having
the characteristics that they have. An angry person will accuse you of being angry, an
unfaithful person will accuse you of being unfaithful, a selfish person will accuse you of
being selfish, a liar will accuse you of lying, an avoider will accuse you of avoiding, a
controller will accuse you of being controlling, and a mean person will accuse you of
being mean. When you find yourself being accused of something you aren’t and
recognize the person is actually that way instead, you are dealing with a projector.
By recognizing the manipulation, you will be empowered to resist it.
Resisting Emotional Manipulation

Here are some things you can do that will help you resist the manipulation:

 Stop trying to change emotional manipulators. They are highly resistant to change.

 Know your weaknesses and how you are usually pressured to give in.

 Don’t use emotional arguments. Stick to the facts instead.

 Don’t expect to win arguments or convince the person you are right and he/she is wrong.

 Don’t try to defend yourself. It won’t work.

 Stop the manipulative interactions as quickly as you can, so you won’t get worn down and give in. Use short responses, end the conversation, or leave.

 Know your boundaries and stick to them.

 Limit the time you spend together, if you have that option.

 Don’t take the threats personally. Detach from them by recognizing that the emotional manipulator is using pressure tactics to get you to give in.

 Work on getting stronger by knowing what you believe and who you are.

 Share the interaction with someone else to get validation that the person is being emotionally manipulative.

 If it is possible without causing the situation to escalate, let the manipulator know that what was said was outrageous and unacceptable.

This is not easy to do at first. You will learn to do it slowly and incrementally. And it will always take vigilance and strength to resist emotional manipulation, but as hard as it is to do, it is necessary and right. You will have to do it if you are in a relationship with someone using emotional manipulation.
Study Questions for Lifesaving Principle 9: Make Your Children a Priority

The same dynamics that make the marriage dysfunctional typically make the family dysfunctional. Children are affected by the problems in a difficult marriage. They experience the tension, insecurity, and turmoil. They live with broken promises and plans that are changed at the last minute. Spontaneity, fun, and laughter are scarce, and their punishment is usually administered in anger or frustration.

The woman in a difficult marriage is faced with many dilemmas in her roles as both wife and mother. It is vital that she prioritize her children in order to minimize the effects of the dysfunction. Listening to them validates their perceptions and feelings. Talking to them involves giving them age-appropriate truth. Even though they experience negative things, they still need to be disciplined. However, disciplining them is often made more difficult by the lack of agreement between her and her husband. When abuse exists by her husband, she needs to draw firm boundaries to protect her children. She also needs to be careful not to abuse them herself. Finding ways to meet her own needs, rather than relying on her children to meet them, is essential. Modeling how to cope in healthy ways gives her children hope. Even though her husband brings instability, she can provide security by following through on promises, being consistent, and exposing them to healthy people. Responding to each child’s individual needs prevents damage from neglect. Finally, when she makes mistakes, she needs to apologize to her children.

1. Read Psalm 10:17. How do you respond to your children’s emotions? Do you validate their feelings and perceptions? Is it difficult for you to separate disrespect from the sharing of negative feelings? (pages 154-156)

2. Read Proverbs 11:13. What guidelines can you use to decide whether or not to share the things your children tell you with your husband? What are the positive and negative outcomes of sharing and not sharing? (pages 154-156)
3. Read Ephesians 4:29. How can you decide what is beneficial for you to tell your children? Do you feel you are betraying or criticizing their father when you tell them the truth? Why and when is speaking the truth the right thing to do? (pages 156-159)

4. Read Proverbs 23:13-14 and Hebrews 12:7-11. Do you have difficulty disciplining your children? What are the reasons and what do you need to improve? (pages 159-162)

5. Read Ephesians 6:1-4, Proverbs 18:13, and Proverbs 26:17. How do you respond to your husband’s harsh discipline of your children? When you intervene what is the outcome? Discuss the bulleted options available to you for discipline disagreements on the bottom of page 160. What are the benefits and negative aspects of each for your particular situation? (pages 159-163)

6. How can you teach your children to respect their father even though he is doing some things wrong? (pages 163-164)

8. Read 2 Corinthians 12:14. In a difficult marriage, you have needs that are unmet. Some women expect their children to be their companion, confidante, comforter, or caretaker. These are inappropriate roles for children. Do you expect any of your children to do these things for you? (pages 168-169)

9. Read Exodus 20:5 and Titus 2:7. Your example can make a difference in how your children are affected by the problems. What example have you shown your children in how to cope with the difficulties in your home? What would you like to change? (pages 169-171)

10. The turmoil and chaos in dysfunctional homes results in broken promises and changed plans. What can you do to provide more stability and consistency, even when you cannot change your husband’s actions? (page 171)
11. Read 1 Peter 3:12 and 1 Thessalonians 2:7-9. Mothers naturally care for their children’s needs, but in a difficult marriage your focus is often on your husband which can cause you to neglect your children’s needs. Which needs have you been diligent in meeting? Which ones have you overlooked? (pages 172-173)

12. James 5:16 tells us that healing comes when we confess our sins to each other. When you make mistakes with your children, do you apologize? (pages 174-175)

13. Write your prayer to God for this week.

14. Write two things you can apply to your life out of this week’s material.
“Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or is he asks for a fish, will give him a snake?” (Matthew 7:9)

“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these” (Matthew 19:14).

“These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up” (Deuteronomy 6:6-7).

In the midst of a difficult marriage, you need to take care of your children. Few things cause as much pain, anguish, anger, guilt, fear, anxiety, and frustration as seeing your children hurting. Yet due to the dysfunction in the home, you may find yourself doing things that you are ashamed to admit hurt your children. Additionally, dysfunctional family dynamics are complicated. Everyone contributes to the re-occurring cycles and craziness due to the emotional reactivity in the family. Each of the following things directly touches on typical problem areas with children in dysfunctional families. Follow this list of “dos and don’ts” in order to prioritize your children.

1. Don’t assume you understand what is going on with your children. Do ask open questions like: “What are you thinking?” “Why did you do that?” “What is bothering you?”

2. Don’t use labels. Do describe the behavior.

3. Don’t break promises. Do keep promises you make.

4. Don’t be unreliable or inconsistent. Do maintain as much consistency as possible.

5. Don’t rely on your children to meet your emotional, physical, spiritual, and relational needs. Do figure out ways to take care of yourself.

6. Don’t triangulate. Do stay out of the relationships between your child and his/her siblings and parent (unless you need to protect your child from abuse).

7. Don’t use your child as a go-between to your spouse. Do keep your child out of your relationship with your spouse.
8. Don’t use indirect communication. *Do communicate clearly and directly.*

9. Don’t dump your toxic emotions on your children. *Do take care of your own toxic emotions.*

10. Don’t try to turn your children against your spouse. *Do allow them to have a relationship with your spouse, unless it is dangerous.*

11. Don’t lie about the obvious. *Do tell them age-appropriate truth.*

12. Don’t make your children be adults. *Do let them be children.*

13. Don’t ignore their physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and relational needs. *Do take care of their needs, even if your spouse doesn’t.*

14. Don’t leave your children alone in emotionally or physically dangerous situations. *Do use discretion in balancing protecting them and living your own life.*

15. Don’t refuse to admit your mistakes. *Do apologize when you are wrong.*

16. Don’t ignore verbal, emotional, and spiritual abuse. *Do protect them from abuse.*

17. Don’t make empty threats. *Do set clear boundaries and follow through with consequences.*

18. Don’t side with a problem child against your spouse. *Stand up for what is right and don’t enable wrong behavior; be true to your convictions.*

19. Don’t make your children keep secrets. *Do let your child tell the truth about what is going on in the family.*

20. Don’t fight in front of your children or their friends. *Do keep as much of the craziness from them as you can.*

22. Don’t get defensive when your children tell you their feelings. *Do allow free expression of feelings in a respectful way.*

23. Don’t try to fix your children’s feelings or tell them their perceptions are wrong. *Do accept their feelings, thoughts, and perceptions as valid.*

24. Don’t expect your children to have more emotional control than you. *Do find a balance for accepting emotions and teaching them self-control.*

25. Don’t use your children to get back at your spouse. *Do keep your relationship with your children and spouse separate.*

26. Don’t be permissive. *Do set boundaries and give consequences, even if you feel bad about the dysfunction.*

27. Don’t automatically support your spouse’s discipline. *Do use wisdom in what discipline to support with your spouse.*

28. Don’t trust your children when they have lost your trust. *Do trust them when they deserve to be trusted.*

29. Don’t ignore your own needs. *Do take care of yourself—mothers and fathers are people too!*

30. Don’t expect your children to be perfect. *Do allow for mistakes.*

31. Don’t be afraid to answer tough questions. *Do speak the truth to your child, even if it differs from your spouse’s truth.*

32. Don’t have a favorite child. *Do recognize each child is different; therefore, your relationship is also different with each.*

33. Don’t force your child to be someone he/she isn’t. *Do accept each child’s uniqueness.*

34. Don’t be critical. *Do encourage and give approval along with unconditional love and respect.*

36. Don’t give your children everything to make up for the problems. *Do allow them to learn normal life lessons.*

37. Don’t be too serious. *Do laugh and have fun.*

38. Don’t be afraid to be real about your faith. *Share your faith, even though you aren’t perfect.*

39. Don’t let your children push your buttons and make you react. *Do identify hot buttons and develop a plan to not let them be pushed.*

40. Don’t talk about your children or spouse in front of them. *Do use discretion with your conversation.*

41. Don’t judge yourself harshly. *Do remember that even parents in healthy families aren’t perfect. Do forgive yourself.*

42. Don’t expect to force your spouse to have your values. *Do enforce your values when it is within your power.*

43. Don’t stay in the marriage just for the children. *Do consider what is best for you and the children and evaluate the entire situation. It isn’t always in their best interest to be in a dysfunctional home.*

44. Don’t tell your spouse everything about the children. *Do what is in the best interest of the children. Make sure your spouse is safe to disclose information.*

This is a glimpse of the complicated dynamic of raising children in dysfunctional families. Do the best you can, as situations arise. Gain wisdom by seeking advice and getting knowledgeable and dealing with your own issues. Be willing to do your part in prioritizing them, and then turn your children over to God. He has a plan for them too and loves them even more than you.
After doing everything you can, for now, by working the previous nine principles to the best of your abilities, it is time to turn your husbands, loved ones, yourselves, and your own circumstances over to God. You will not be able to work the 10 Principles perfectly and may even find yourselves occasionally slipping back into old habits. That is okay. Change takes time and occurs in increments, but God continues to work through all circumstances. Continue to work the Principles and commit yourself to becoming healthy one step at a time.

1. Read Matthew 11:28-30. Discuss what it would mean to truly enter God’s rest in the situation you are in.

2. “Restitution” refers to the process of repairing the damage you’ve done. Regardless of what your husband has done or is doing, you’re responsible for the ways you’ve hurt him and others. How have you hurt your loved ones? Which of these ways represents a reasonable method of making amends or restitution: acknowledging and apologizing directly, repaying debts, doing nice things, or making “living amends” by changing yourself and acting differently now and in the future? (pages 177-178)

3. When you think of making all the changes you are contemplating, what is most frightening? (pages 178-180)
4. One of the hardest things to do is to truly surrender all your hopes and desires to God. If you are struggling with acceptance, it could be that your dreams have not been realized. Read Philippians 4:11-13. What would it mean if you accepted the facts of your life just as they are? How would that help you enter God’s rest? (pages 180-181)

5. Read Matthew 6:34. Living with a difficult husband results in regrets over the past and fears about the future. How would letting go of the mistakes of the past and the fears about the future affect how you live for today? (page 181)

6. What would it mean for you to let your husband take care of himself? (pages 182-183)

7. Read the following sections: “Avoid Major Life Changes,” and “Rebuild Trust Slowly.” Trust is an essential part of healthy relationships. Trust is often destroyed in difficult marriages. How has your trust been taken advantage of? What would it take to rebuild your trust? Why should you offer trust carefully and cautiously in the future? (pages 183-184)
8. Healing past wounds is a slow process that involves facing the truth about our pain, discussing it, letting it go, forgiving, and building a new relationship. Read Philippians 3:12-13. Some people think that Paul was saying we have to forget the past. We cannot forget, as God gave us a mind that stores memories. When those memories come up, we can choose whether we want to allow them to stir up old feelings and thoughts by focusing on them or by letting them go. What do you do with your memories now? Have you begun to work on forgiving your husband or is the pain still too much? (pages 184-185)

9. Even if your husband begins to change, he won’t be everything you want and problems will still occur. How can you deal with disappointment when it comes? (page 186)

10. Read 1 Corinthians 1:27, 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, and 1 Thessalonians 5:11. How has God used others to comfort you in your difficult circumstances? How can He use you to comfort others? (pages 186-187)

12. Describe the differences in you, your life, and your marriage as a result of this study. What do you need to continue to work on?

13. Write a prayer to the Lord expressing gratitude for your growth and your request for His continuing work in your life and marriage.
Lecture Notes for Principle 10: Enter His Rest

Jesus asks you: Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly. (Matthew 11:28-30, The Message Bible)

Do you answer: “I have no peace, no quietness; I have no rest, but only turmoil?” (Job 3:26, NIV)

Do you wonder what rest is? Rest is ceasing from activity—an experience of peace, ease, refreshment, freedom from disquiet, and a sense of mental or emotional tranquility.

So how do you get rest in the midst of the demands of life?

➢ Recognize you need rest.
➢ Approach Jesus who understands your pain (Heb.4:15-16).
➢ Learn from him by taking on his yoke and way of life.
➢ Surrender and receive his rest.

John 15:5-7 (NIV) “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

The vine does the work by producing the branches and supplying them with everything they need including nutrients and water. Without the vine, the branches don’t survive.

Reality Check:
“God does not give us rest instead of pain and difficulty; he gives us rest in spite of it.” (Kim Johnson)

“We are meant to live sane lives that partake of a deep and playful holy leisure. There is enough time in each day for all that God requires of us. And part of what he requires is rest. So settle in and breathe deeply of his gift of rest.”

(Adele Ahlberg Calhoun in Spiritual Disciplines Handbook)

“A heart at peace gives life to the body” (Proverbs 14:30a, NIV).

So, what can you do to enter his rest in practical ways on a daily basis?

➢ Exercise.
➢ Take a nap.
➢ Sleep longer; go to bed earlier and get up later. Don’t set the alarm.
➢ Stop working an hour before you go to bed and instead, do something that makes you feel rested.

➢ Take mini-retreats on a weekly or monthly basis. Go somewhere that refreshes your spirit and body and causes you to breathe deeply and recalibrate your soul.

➢ Find a regular time daily to meditate, pray, and reflect—Even if it is just 10 minutes a day.

➢ Breathe deeply and let go of the tension in your body—many times a day.

➢ Plan things you enjoy with and without people—no matter how busy you are.

➢ Say no to things you really don’t want or need to do.

➢ Memorize the Serenity Prayer and your favorite Scriptures that help you to let go of your plans, worries, and disappointments. Repeat them when you feel yourself striving and worrying. Proverbs 23:7 (NKJV) says, “For as a man thinks in his heart, so is he.” If you want to get rest, change your thoughts.

➢ Journal your feelings, thoughts, dreams, and prayers.

➢ Do something that reminds you of your childhood. Find a way to “play.”

➢ Laugh—at yourself and your life. Give it a light touch.

➢ Spend time with the Lord. Don’t worry about praying or doing. Just sit in his presence and take him in and receive his grace.

➢ Praise the Lord: sing, read a Psalm, listen to worship music, recite his promises and blessings. (Psalm 16:7-9: When we praise the Lord and put him first, even our body will “rest” secure.)

➢ Take control of your life and choose who you want to be around. Choose to be around people that are healthy and value you and bring you happiness and joy, as much as possible.

➢ Live with an eternal perspective, rather than a temporal perspective.

➢ “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not unto your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your paths straight” (Proverbs 3:6-5) = SURRENDER=REST.

➢ Write your own ideas about how you can enter his rest.
Recommended Books/Websites

All Relationship Issues

   ChangeMyRelationship.com (Karla Downing’s website has lots of materials on difficult relationships and a subscription to a free e-newsletter with Relationship Tips and Truths for all relationships whether difficult or not.

   Codependency

   Codependent No More, Melody Beattie

   The Language of Letting Go, Melody Beattie (A daily devotional for Codependents)

   A Codependent’s Guide to the Twelve Steps, Melody Beattie

   When Love Hurts: 10 Principles to Transform Difficult Relationships, Karla Downing

   Boundaries, Henry Cloud and John Townsend

   Boundaries in Marriage, Henry Cloud and John Townsend

   Setting Boundaries with Difficult People, Allison Bottke

   Love Must be Tough, James Dobson

   The Dance of Anger: A Woman’s Guide to Changing the Patterns of Intimate Relationships, Harriet Lerner, Ph. D

   The Dance of Intimacy: A Woman’s Guide to Courageous Acts of Change in Key Relationships, Harriet Lerner, Ph.D

   Shattered Dreams by Larry Crabb

   Abuse (verbal, emotional, physical)

   The Verbally Abusive Relationship, Patricia Evans

   The Verbally Abusive Man: Can He Change?, Patricia Evans

   Verbal Abuse Survivors Speak Out, Patricia Evans

   Controlling People: How to Recognize, Understand, and Deal with People Who Try to Control You, Patricia Evans

   Angry Men and the Women Who Love Them, Paul Hegstrom

   Why Does He Do That? Inside the Mind of Angry and Controlling Men, Lundy Bancroft

   Men Who Hate Women & The Women Who Love Them: When Loving Hurts and You Don’t Know Why, Dr. Susan Forward
Narcissism, Obsessive Compulsive Personality Disorder, and Other Difficult Personalities

The Wizard of Oz and other Narcissists: Coping with the One-Way Relationship in Work, Love, and Family, Eleanor D. Payson, M.S.W.

The One-Way Relationship Workbook: Step-by-Step Help for Coping With Narcissists, Egotistical Lovers, Toxic Coworkers & Others Who are Incredibly Self-Absorbed. Neil J Lavender, Ph.D., Alan Cavaiola, Ph.D.

Emotional Vampires: Dealing With People Who Drain You Dry, Albert Bernstein, Ph.D.

Too Perfect: When Being in Control Gets Out of Control, Alan E. Malinger, MD., and Jeannette DeWyze. (Obsessive Compulsive Personality Disorder resource – if you or your loved one is dealing with it)

Stop Walking on Eggshells: Taking Your Life Back When Someone You Care About Has Borderline Personality Disorder, by Paul T. Mason, MS Randi Kreger

Living with the Passive Aggressive Man, by Scott Wetzler, Ph.D.

Overcoming Passive-Aggression: How to Stop Hidden Anger from Spoiling Your Relationships, Career and Happiness by Tim Murphy and Loriann Hoff Oberlin


Emotional Blackmail: When the People in Your Life Use Fear, Obligation, and Guilt to Manipulate You by Susan Forward, PhD.

Bipolar Disorder

The Bipolar Disorder Survival Guide: What You and Your Family Need to Know by David J. Miklowitz, PhD

An Unquiet Mind by Dr. Kay Jamison

Sexual Abuse

Surviving Childhood Sexual Abuse, Carolyn Ainscough and Kay Toon

Strength in Weakness: Healing Sexual and Relational Brokenness, Andrew Comisky

Hush: Moving from Silence to Healing After Childhood Sexual Abuse, Nicole Braddock Bromley

Door of Hope, Jan Frank

Childrearing/Parenting

Setting Boundaries with Your Adult Children: Six Steps to Hope and Healing for Struggling Parents, by Allison Bottke

You Never Stop Being a Parent, Jim Newheiser

Raising Respectful Children in a Disrespectful World, by Jill Rigby

The Mom I Want to Be: Rising Above Your Past to Give Your Kids a Great Future, by T. Suzanne Eller

Creative Correction, Lisa Whelchel

The New Strong-Willed Child, James Dobson

The New Hide or Seek: How to Build Self-Esteem in Your Child, James Dobson

Bringing Up Boys, James Dobson

Parenting With Love and Logic, Foster Cline, MD and Jim Fay

Parenting Teens With Love and Logic, Foster Cline, MD and Jim Fay

Focus on the Family has many resources and CDs: focusonthefamily.com

Blended Families

The Smart Step Family: Seven Steps to a Healthy Family, Ron Deal

The Smart Stepmom, Ron Deal

The Smart Stepdad, Ron Deal

Dysfunctional Family/Dealing with the Past

Adult Children of Dysfunctional Families, Linda and John Friel

Adult Child’s Guide to What’s Normal, Linda and John Friel

The Intimacy Struggle, by Janet Woititz

Broken Children: Grown Up Pain, Paul Hegstrom

Changes That Heal, Dr. Henry Cloud

When a Man You Love Was Abused, Cecil Murphy

Bad Childhood, Good Life, Dr. Laura Schlessinger

Unclaimed Baggage, Jan Frank

Toxic Parents: Overcoming Their Hurtful Legacy and Reclaiming Your Life, Susan Forward, Ph.D.

Toxic In-laws: Loving Strategies for Protecting Your Marriage, Susan Forward, Ph.D.
Boundaries with Your Aging Parents: Finding Balance Between Burnout and Respect, Allison Bottke

Marriage

10 Lifesaving Principles for Women in Difficult Marriages, Karla Downing

Love and Respect, Emerson Eggerichs

The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work, John Gottman

Language of Love, Gary Smalley

Men are Like Waffles – Women are Like Spaghetti: Understanding and Delighting in Your Differences, Bill and Pam Farrell

Laugh Your Way to a Better Marriage, Mark Gungor

When Your Lover is a Liar: Healing the Wounds of Deception and Betrayal, Susan Forward (written for women)

Alcoholism/Drug Addiction

Getting Them Sober: You Can Help! Toby Rice Drews

Marriage on the Rocks: Learning to Live With Yourself and an Alcoholic, Janet Woititz

Sexual Addiction

Shattered Vows: Hope and Healing for Women Who Have Been Sexually Betrayed, Debra Laaser

Faithful & True: Sexual Integrity in a Fallen World, Mark Laaser (for sex-addicts)

Homosexuality

When Homosexuality Hits Home: What to Do When a Loved One Says They’re Gay, Joe Dallas

Exodus International is an organization that reaches out to people struggling with homosexuality and their families. Website: Exodusinternational.org

Divorce

Helping Children Survive Divorce, Archibald Hart

Single, Married, Separated and Life after Divorce, Myles Munroe

A Women’s Guide to Healing the Heartbreak of Divorce, Rose Sweet

A Woman Who Hurts, a God Who Heals, Elsa Kok

Splitting: Protecting Yourself While Divorcing Someone with Borderline or Narcissistic Personality Disorder, Randi Kreger and Bill Eddy, LCSW JD.

Joint Custody with a Jerk: Raising a Child with an Uncooperative Ex-An Hands-on, Practical Guide to Communicating with a Difficult Ex-Spouse, by Julie Ross and Judy Corcoron

**Personality**

Personality Plus, Florence Littauer

Please Understand Me II: Temperament, Character, Intelligence, David Keirsey

Understanding Your Child’s Personality, Dr. David Stoop

Come As You Are: How Your Personality Shapes Your Relationship with God, by Betty Southard and Marita Littauer

**Affairs**

Torn Asunder: Healing From Extramarital Affairs, Dave Carder (workbook available too)

**Self-Esteem**

The Truth in the Mirror: A Guide to Healthy Self-Image, Karla Downing

Ten Days to Self-Esteem, David Burns, M.D.

**General**

Toxic Faith, Steven Arteburn

9 Things You Simply Must Do to Succeed in Love and Life, Dr. Henry Cloud

Hinds’ Feet on High Places, Hannah Hurnard

Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us, Adele Ahlberg Calhoun

When I Lay My Isaac Down: Unshakable Faith in Unthinkable Circumstances, by Carol Kent

**Anxiety, Depression, Fear, Perfectionism**

New Light on Depression, David Biebelt and Harold Koenig

The Feeling Good Handbook, David Burns

Feel the Fear and Do it Anyway, Susan Jeffers, Ph.D.

The Dance of Fear: Rising Above Anxiety, Fear, and Shame to Be Your Best and Bravest Self, Harriet Lerner, Ph.D.
The Freedom from Depression Workbook, Les Carter and Frank Minirth

**Aging Loved Ones**

*Caring for Aging Loved Ones*, Focus on the Family

**Loss**

*A Grace Disguised: How the Soul Grows Through Loss*, by Jerry Sittser

**Support Groups/Information**

**Divorce Recovery**
Check local churches if it isn’t available at yours.

**Twelve Step Recovery**

Alanon Family Groups (families/friends of alcoholics)
www.alanon.com

Alcoholics Anonymous (alcoholics)
www.aa.org

Codependents Anonymous
www.codependents.org

Codependents of Sex Addicts
www.cosa-recovery.org

Gam-Anon (gamblers)
www.gam-anon.org

Nar-Anon Family Groups (families/friends of drug addicts)
www.nar-anon.org

Celebrate Recovery is a Christian 12 Step recovery group. Check local churches if your church doesn’t have it. www.celebraterecovery.com

Sexual Addiction: Faithful and True Ministries: Mark and Debra Laaser,