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Proverbs: Husbands and Strife



Proverbs - Steve Gregg

In this discussion, Steve Gregg offers insights on marital relationships based on the book of Proverbs. He notes that jealousy is natural but should be avoided, and that mutual trust is essential for a healthy marriage. Gregg emphasizes the importance of praising one's spouse and dealing with conflicts calmly, while also warning against contentious behavior and pride. He emphasizes that forgiveness and grace are critical for maintaining peace in relationships.

Transcript

The theme of wives and husbands has been discussed a lot in the last lecture. Last time we were in Proverbs, we were looking at the theme of wives and husbands, and we really only got through the material in Proverbs about wives. So we'll come down to the material about husbands.

I don't think that Solomon has as much to say about the virtues of a virtuous husband as he does about a wife. Of course, he has warnings about the wrong kind of woman, and he has praise for the right kind of woman. When it comes to what he says about husbands, he doesn't have as much to say, but there's still plenty there to consider.

The first point we've made also more than once previously, and that's found in chapter 6 in verse 34, where he's talking about the evils and the dangers of committing adultery with your neighbor's wife, and it talks about her husband's anger when he finds out that his wife has been cheating. It says in verse 34, Proverbs 6, 34, For jealousy is a husband's fury. Therefore he will not spare in the day of vengeance.

Now, this is not necessarily a statement of virtue on the husband's part, nor a vice. It's simply making a statement. Husbands are jealous over their wives, at least they ought to be.

Now, they shouldn't necessarily be furious. You know, obviously to have a rule over your own spirit is desirable, but to be jealous over a wife is simply natural. It's not stated to be a good thing or a bad thing.

It's just natural. When people are bonded in marriage, they have a sense of ownership of each other. That is an unpopular concept today, very unpopular today, but it's still the truth.

I mean, what does a covenant do? What does a covenant relationship do if not bring people into mutual ownership in some sense? I mean, that's what that's what God made very clear when he made a covenant with Israel. Now you'll be my people. I'll be your God.

You own me. I own you. We are a unit.

We belong to each other. And it was God's covenant with Israel that is the model of marriage covenant. So God said he was jealous over Israel.

And what that meant was that it doesn't mean that God walked around with a short fuse ready to blow up as soon as, you know, anyone looked at her. But, you know, if she began to have flirtatious behavior toward other gods, he was that was not OK with him. He wasn't cool with it.

And these days, you know, we kind of feel like you're supposed to be cool about it. Supposed to be cool about your your spouse. Not too controlling, of course, not not having too much sense of an ownership.

After all, you don't want to take that person's freedom away, which is kind of a stupid thing to say with reference to marriage. Of course, you take the freedom away. But I mean, what is the difference between being married and unmarried? Well, the married person is not free in some of the same ways.

But of course, they traded their freedom for something else that's a value to them that they apparently value more than freedom. And there are some things perhaps more valuable than freedom. But the truth is that when you get married, you do trade your freedom away, both the man and the woman.

You take yourself out of circulation. And there is a covenant and promises made so that there's a sense of, you know, you're mine, I'm yours. In fact, in the ancient times, the earliest known form of marriage ceremony that has been discovered from the ancient Babylonians, from Abraham's time, was a man would say to his wife, to a woman, you're my wife.

And she'd say, you're my husband. And that was the ceremony. Just basically laying claims here.

I'm just taking a claim here. You're mine. Yeah, you're mine, too.

OK, that's marriage. Of course, there were implicit things involved in belonging to each

other. But the point is, that's how that was the nature of the agreement.

And it's funny because people often will make all kinds of promises like that when they're in courtship, when they're in love, when they're in love, they say, you know, she belongs to me or I belong to her and my heart belongs to her and so forth. And then when they're married, sometimes they begin to resent the fact that the other person really wants them to take that seriously. But a good man will have some jealousy over his wife, just as a good wife will have some jealousy over her husband.

Some people, I think, oh, my wife's just perfect. She doesn't care where I am, doesn't care who I'm with, doesn't care how long I've gone. Well, is that what a good wife is? Someone who doesn't really care about you? Why doesn't she care about you? She doesn't really care about her that way? Marriage is a bond that is supposed to have some sanctity.

Something to watch over, something to be protective of, and that's what the jealousy of a husband is. I was saying when we talked about jealousy the other day that the Bible doesn't very often talk about jealousy in a negative way. I went and looked in a concordance since then and I couldn't find one place where jealousy is spoken of negatively.

Yeah, jealousy is always spoken of positively. God is jealous. Paul said he's jealous over the Corinthian church because they were, he had a spouse and his chaste virgin to Christ and he was afraid they'd go after other gods and so forth.

And so here, of course, this might sound negative, but jealousy is a husband's fury. Fury is obviously anger and it's not, we don't think of a person who's furious as being virtuous. But the point is, a man who hears that his wife has been cheating or sees that happening, who just keeps his cool, is not somebody who cares as much as he should about his marriage.

That doesn't mean he should get violent or anything like that. It just means that he shouldn't be so cool that it just doesn't matter to him. There's got to be a measure of jealousy or else there's not a measure of, or else there's too much of a measure of apathy.

And apathy in a marriage is not a healthy thing because if a person is apathetic toward their spouse, then they really don't have the commitment that is required to lay down their life for their spouse either. So jealousy is a husbandly trait, it is also a wifely trait, but it's mentioned in connection with a husband in this connection here in chapter six, when a man finds his wife is cheating, his jealousy is activated. However, in chapter 31, we find that he shouldn't be unrealistically jealous or paranoid or overly suspicious, if he has a good wife at least.

It says in chapter 31, verse 11, the heart of her husband safely trusts her. Now, safely is an important word here, a man may trust his wife, but it's not safe because she's not honest. You can trust your friends, your employers, you can trust people, but if they're not honest, it's not safe.

Trusting them was not safe. And the Bible does not actually state that it's a virtue to trust people. This is, again, the way our culture thinks differently than we do.

They think that jealousy in marriage is bad. They think that trusting people is good. The Bible says, curses he who puts his trust in man.

The Bible does not indicate there's any virtue in trusting people. However, trust is something you would naturally and legitimately feel towards somebody who is trustworthy. And so a man who's got a good wife should not be overly suspicious of her.

A man should know his wife is a good wife if she is, and he should safely trust in her. He shouldn't be overbearing and too paranoid about her friendships and so forth. Not unduly suspicious.

He may be jealous in a healthy way, but there is an unhealthy kind of jealous, too. There's an unhealthy jealousy that where a man has a wife who is actually given no reason for him to be suspicious. But he's always accusing her or suspecting her of wrong.

And that's usually because of something in him more than something in her. Of course, he's insecure. Now, he might be insecure for reasons that are understandable.

Maybe he's never found a faithful woman before and he has assumed they're all unfaithful. And so he has a hard time trusting one when he finds one who is faithful. But other times he's just self-centered and he wants his wife's attention all to himself.

And he just doesn't want anyone else to maybe appear to be in competition for her affection. And so he's just really insecure and suspicious. But the virtuous husband, if he has a virtuous wife, he trusts in her.

He's not overly suspicious. Now, there's a hint about something that is instructive to husbands, it seems to me, in chapter seven, and this is also in the context of an adulterous woman, adulterous wife. She says to the man that she is trying to seduce in verse 19, Proverbs 7, 19, For my husband is not at home.

He has gone on a long journey. He has taken a bag of money with him and will come home on an appointed day. Now, I don't want to read too much into this, but this man is away from home too much.

He's away from home so much that his wife finds some other man to replace him while he's gone. And so this is something that probably a husband needs to watch out for.

Obviously, the longer you've been married, the more that kind of thing can be negotiated.

Fairly young married people and men who travel in their business a lot and they're just away all the time and their wives never seen them. They're basically, I'm not saying the wife has any excuse for cheating in a case like that, but the husband's rather tempting her. And he's you know, she's she married him because she wanted a partner.

And if he's gone all the time, then she doesn't have a partner so much. And so there's the needs of his wife are not being attended to. This man is gone a long time, took a lot of money with him.

He's staying away from home from his wife. And she's not really a reliable wife either in this case. Now, he is also a man who is faithful to his wife and satisfied with her in chapter five, verses 15 through 21, using the imagery of satisfying a thirst for water by drinking.

He's actually in the context talking about satisfying one's sexual cravings with his wife. He says, drink water from your own cistern and running water from your own well. Should your fountains be dispersed abroad, streams of water in the streets? Now, what he's saying is, of course, confine your sexual activities to your home with your own life and don't go out and disperse your fountains, as it were, publicly with other people.

He says, let them be only your own and not for strangers with you. Let your fountain be blessed and rejoice with the wife of your youth as a loving dear, as a graceful doe. Let her breast satisfy you at all times and always be enraptured with her love.

For why should you, my son, be enraptured by an immoral woman and embrace in the arms of a seductress? For the ways of a man are before the eyes of the Lord, and he ponders all his paths. So, the man who is a virtuous husband is going to be satisfied with his wife. Now, of course, this requires his wife being cooperative, too, because a man may be quite willing to be satisfied with his wife and she's not interested in satisfying him.

But the point here is that a man is probably, unless he's a very saintly man, he's probably going to have strong urges to satisfy his sexual desires, and his wife is the provision that God has given for that. And he should just stay at home with those desires and just be satisfied with his wife. And this is the choice he's got to make, because sometimes a wife has simply gotten to a place where she's too tired or she's not attractive anymore because she's gotten too old or whatever.

And he might feel that she's not what she once was. But he's got to make a decision that she's what he's got, that she's what he's going to have to be satisfied with. He's going to have to love her.

That's a choice. And when you love somebody, you can make those kinds of choices. When you love yourself, it's harder.

When you love yourself, you're looking for somebody who's going to do something for you emotionally and sexually and so forth. But when you love your wife, then, of course, you can choose to be satisfied with her, assuming she will cooperate and be satisfied with you, too. Paul gave instructions along these lines in 1 Corinthians 7. 1 Corinthians 7, verses 3 through 5, he says, Let the husband render his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband.

The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise, the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another, except with consent for a time that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer, and come together again, so Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

Now, what this indicates is that God gives husbands and wives to each other to save them from the temptations outside the home, basically. So that Satan doesn't tempt you. Now, the Bible doesn't say that if Satan tempts you, you have the right to succumb.

Obviously, if Satan tempts you, you have to resist the temptation. There's no excuse for falling. But we can stumble other people, and a husband or a wife can stumble their spouse by simply not meeting their needs emotionally in this area, sexually in this area.

And so Paul says, don't deprive each other so that the devil doesn't tempt you too much. Now, even though there's no excuse for falling to temptation, human beings have a rather a track record, typically, of falling to temptation if it gets severe enough. And therefore, husbands and wives should both be concerned to prevent their spouses from having more temptation than is necessary.

If you stumble your brother, if you stumble your sister, that is, if you cause them to sin, you are sinning against them, Paul said. And so, when a spouse is not responsive, not cooperative in this area, then of course they are loading extra temptation on their mate. And Paul is aware of that and says, the wife doesn't really have authority over her own body and the husband doesn't have authority over his own body.

That's that ownership thing. When you're a single person, you've got, in a sense, authority over your body. Although you're not your own, you belong to Christ, you've been bought with a price.

But you are the only one who makes decisions under God about what you'll do with your body, what you'll do with your time, what you'll do with your opportunities and so forth. You have the authority over those things when you're single. When you're married, you surrender that authority to your mate in measure and you mutually surrender so that

somebody is not in the mood and the other person has a need, then the one who is not in the mood is willing to submit and the one who has the need is willing to submit too.

In a sense, there's mutual consideration instead of selfishness. Virtually every marriage breaks up, of course, because of selfishness on at least one party's part, sometimes both. The complaints that spouses have against each other are usually complaints that selfish people make against somebody else.

I am not being satisfied. She is not meeting my needs. He is not meeting my needs.

Well, okay, that's not right. They should meet your needs. But you don't break up a marriage over it because your married life is not about you having your needs met.

It's about you meeting the other person's needs. If both people are trying to meet the other person's needs, then there's not going to be anyone's needs not met. And so the virtuous husband stays home, as it were, with his wife.

I say stays home, what I mean is sexually stays at home. It doesn't mean he never goes out, or is never away, but sexually he is available only to his wife. But of course, she's available to him too.

And so that they aren't out spreading their fountains out in the streets to everybody, which is the euphemism that he uses for just going out and sleeping around. So the wise and virtuous husband also praises his wife, even flatters his wife. In chapter 31, verses 28 and 29, her children rise up and call her blessed, her husband also.

And he praises her and he says, many daughters have done well, but you excel them all. He praises his wife and even uses a bit of hyperbole, perhaps. You excel all the women in the world.

Of course, the woman will not be satisfied if she hears anything less than that from her husband. And she knows it's got to be a hyperbole because he doesn't know all the women in the world. He can't really make that assessment.

But he's saying, as far as I'm concerned, you are, as far as I'm concerned, you're the best there is. And so he tells her those things that affirm her. And praising your spouse is really a good marriage skill.

Sometimes it's hard. Sometimes it's hard to think of something to praise them for. Because there are spouses who really neglect almost every duty they have.

But in most cases, you can praise them just like you can praise God for something, no matter how bad your circumstances are. There's always something you can be thankful for. There's always something you can praise him about.

If a wife simply is faithful and doesn't cheat, that's a good thing. Since there are wives

who do cheat. Every man should be aware that his wife, if she is faithful to him, has abandoned all other men for the rest of her life for his sake.

She might not be the most charming, the most beautiful, or the most happy wife or the most considerate or whatever. But if she's with you and not with someone else, then she is taking seriously that she has forsaken all her other options. And both parties need to realize that about the other.

That marriage is something, as far as I'm concerned, every spouse has a lot to be thankful for to the other spouse. Unless, of course, the other spouse is unfaithful and is not taking their marriage responsibilities at all recently. Then there's not much to be thankful for because they're not really being a spouse.

But whenever anyone stays faithful to a spouse for years, that's a sacrifice they're making. I'm not saying it's a hard sacrifice to make. They may enjoy making the sacrifice, but it is.

They are sacrificing something. They're sacrificing a lot of their freedom. They're sacrificing other options that may come along.

And by the way, once you get married, it's not likely that you'll never, ever, ever meet somebody else who could have been more attractive to you. You can't predict that. You marry someone who's attractive to you at the time, but you're not guaranteed, and no one can guarantee that you won't meet someone else who's more attractive than your mate.

But you are guaranteeing that it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter whether someone's more attractive or not. You've already decided they're not going to be available to you, and you're not going to be available to them because you're tying yourself down with one person.

That's a sacrifice you're making. And you don't even know how much you're sacrificing. You don't know how much more attractive somebody else may be someday to you.

But the door is closed to that. You're shutting that door, and you're saying, it really doesn't matter who I may meet. Once I marry this person, I'm sacrificing all other options that may come along.

And when we say sacrifice, that may sound like a negative. It's not a negative. You can enjoy making a sacrifice.

Don't you enjoy making sacrifices for your children? I mean, obviously, what could be more enjoyable than making sacrifices for someone you love? So, I'm not talking about sacrifice like it's a drudgery. It just means that you're eliminating certain other options that you would otherwise have. And anyone who has done that and kept their promise in

that, has something to be praised for, even if nothing else.

Now, if your wife's a good cook or good at other things, then praising her for that makes sense, too. People should really praise their spouses, honestly. I mean, not fake.

If a woman asks, do these pants make me look fat? It's not really obvious what a husband's supposed to say in a case like that. I'd probably say, it's not the pants. Being honest, you know? I'd say, no, those pants don't make you look fat.

That's honest. You've got to learn how to flatter, you know? As honestly as you can. And wives, by the way, should learn how to express commendation for their husbands, too, because husbands want to be respected also.

In fact, from what I understand, that's what husbands feel is most lacking in unhappy marriages that they have, is that their wife doesn't respect them. Husbands are always doing things for their families, and they would like it if their families noticed. And wives do that, too, by the way.

Wives are always making little sacrifices for their families, and it's nice to be noticed. Now, if you're not noticed by people, then, of course, if you're a Christian, you know that you're seeking the praise of God, not of man anyway. And you know that if people don't notice what you did, in fact, sometimes you don't want them to, because you don't want your left hand to know what your right hand's doing.

You want him to do something that only God will know about. But you kind of hope that your partner in life will know that you're being virtuous, that you're doing things for them, that you're making sacrifices for them, and they'll appreciate it. And women make those kinds of sacrifices all the time, and men don't always see them, because men are usually out working, and the woman's at home doing those things.

And the husband often doesn't have any idea how much she's doing, how much of a load she's carrying, and a husband needs to be able to praise his wife. She needs to get praised by him, as it says here. Her husband praises her, and tells her that she excels all the other women in the world, which she does, as far as he's concerned.

Probably doesn't in the objective sense. I mean, every woman can't excel every other woman. And that they can in the mind of their own husband, and husbands should be able to say that sincerely.

Now, there's another aspect to a husband's role toward his wife, and it's stated in a verse that's not about husbands in Proverbs, but the same thing is said about husbands in the New Testament. In Proverbs 15, 1, it says, Now, it's the harsh words here. This is not a statement in Proverbs about marriage particularly, but it is a statement about relationships.

And this is especially true in marriages, because harsh words do tend to wound. And marriage is a relationship where wounds don't heal very quickly. As they might say, if somebody at the office insulted you, you can go home and kind of forget it for a while, maybe have the weekend away from them.

But when there's harsh words being spoken at the home, you don't really, I mean, that's home. You don't get away from there. You're immersed in this hurtful situation.

And it just can fester if a person doesn't handle it as they should. It says in Colossians 3, 19, Husbands love your wives and do not be harsh toward them. Now, the New King James says, Do not be bitter toward them, following pretty much the King James Version.

The word bitter in the Bible often means harsh. It says don't be bitter toward them. In modern English, we use the word bitter somewhat differently than they did in older English.

Like the bitter herbs that the Israelites ate at Passover to remember the bitterness of their bondage, the harshness of their bondage. We use the word bitter these days when we're speaking metaphorically of an emotion. We're thinking usually of someone being resentful.

I've got bitterness towards somebody means I'm resentful to them. That's not the word that Paul is using here. He's not saying don't be resentful toward them, though that would be a good suggestion too, but that's not what he's saying here.

The word bitter means harsh. And almost all the modern translations render it harsh. Do not be harsh toward them.

A man needs to be gentle, maybe more gentle than he naturally would be with a woman because she's more fragile. Now, women don't like to think of themselves as more fragile. And I'm not saying women aren't strong.

Women can be very strong, but they are also emotionally more fragile than men. And anyone can see that when they just see how, if a man insults his wife, she'll bring it up 20 years later. If a man insults another man, they'll forget it by lunchtime.

Men, they're just thick-skinned. Men, they can insult each other and be best friends. The next day, I've hardly ever known a man who that wasn't true.

There are some men who are more like women in this way, I suppose. But men usually, you know, they can be, they can insult each other or say things that are harsh with each other. They can be in touch with each other and curse each other when they're angry.

And later in the day, just go out and enjoy each other's company. And it's like nothing ever happened. It's not that way usually with women.

Women, if you hurt them, that stays with them. And if you're a husband and you hurt your wife, she can bring it up 20 years later. Believe me, I know.

Because you do things dumb when you're first married because you don't know the person well enough to know what things are going to hurt them. And so when you hurt them, and then you get later in the marriage, decades later, you've learned not to do those things anymore. So you're not doing hurtful things anymore.

If the wife gets angry, she has to bring up something from what you did 20 years ago. But she will. She remembers.

And she still feels it, apparently. And that's just the way women are different than men, I think. And so Peter says in chapter 3, 1 Peter 3, 6, 3, 7, excuse me.

So likewise, you husbands dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife as to the weaker vessel. And it's been heirs together of the grace of life that your prayers may not be hindered. Now, seeing the wife as the weaker vessel, obviously, there's a lot of ways that the word weak could be understood.

And he doesn't explain how he means it. But some women are not physically weak. Some women can carry very heavy loads.

And women have strength that men don't have. But one area that women are weaker is, generally speaking, they are going to be more emotionally fragile. And weaker, in this case, is not a put down.

Because fine china is more fragile than, you know, plastic dog food bowls. But china is more valuable. But it's more fragile.

It's more delicate. Something that's more delicate has to be handled with greater care. Not because it's not of great value, but because it is.

And so don't be harsh with them, Paul says. Peter says you got to deal with them according to understanding, giving honor to the wife as to the more fragile, the more delicate vessel. And so Proverbs also speaks about that, though not necessarily in the connection with husbands and wives.

In Proverbs 15, when a soft answer turns away wrath. But harsh words stir up anger. And when we come to the subject of anger, we have a whole section on that at the bottom of this page on wives and husbands, about strife in the home.

Now, Solomon has a lot to say about strife in general, as we saw in chapter 15, verse 1, that's just in general, in relationships, not just husbands and wives. But he also has a lot to say about strife within the family, which is usually between husbands and wives, although it can be children and parents that are having the problems. But in Proverbs 17,

one Solomon said, better is a dry morsel with quietness than a house full of feasting with strife.

Strife in the household, strife in the family is about as bad a circumstance as human beings can know, I suppose. I mean, it's one thing if you were in prison and being tortured, it'd be pretty bad, obviously. But at least you don't expect your persecutors to be your partners and your lovers and your friends.

You expect that from your spouse. That's why you married them. You were looking for a partner.

You're looking for someone who's on your side, somebody who's going to stand with you against all those outside enemies. So when you have that partner, and then they are arguing and insulting and inconsiderate and so forth, whether it's the man or the woman, you feel like, wow, where can I go now? Usually you go home to get away from all the evil hatred and hostility of the world out there. You go home to your family where you have your team, you know, where you have your partnership.

And you go there, if you go home and there's strife, where do you go from there? You know, out to the bar? Where do you go? Go for a long walk or something? I mean, you want to be able to go home and have quiet. You want to have sympathy. You want to go home and find somebody who's on your side.

Because you go out of the home and find all the evils that a fallen world hurls at you. People trying to cheat you out of your money. People trying to, you know, get ahead of you in the business or even on the freeway.

I mean, there's just people always competing and striving with each other. And then you go home and you want to have a haven there. And when you go home and there's strife there, you'd rather have just a dry morsel of food and have a quiet circumstance at home than have a feast at home where there's people arguing over the food and over the table and over the other issues all day or all through the meal.

That is, a feast is no consolation for unpleasantness in the home. Strife in the home is a very, very few things make a home more unpleasant than does strife. And so in chapter 17, verse 14, he says, The beginning of strife is like releasing water.

Therefore, stop contention before the quarrel starts. Once you begin to strive, it's like you're breaking a dam. Once the dam is broken, it's hard to collect all the water back.

It's not so hard to keep the water behind the dam when the dam is intact and the water is sitting there in the reservoir. Once the dam cracks and the water starts moving, then to regather it is almost impossible. You've loosed a flood.

The Jerusalem Bible, which I read when I was in my teens, I remember this verse, they

applied it to legal proceedings, but it doesn't specify legal proceedings, but it said the way it reads in the Jerusalem Bible is as soon loose a flood as initiate legal proceedings. Therefore, stop contention before the quarrel starts. Now, there is obviously contention before there's a quarrel.

The NIV says drop the matter before a quarrel starts. New American Standard says abandon the quarrel. See, in Proverbs chapter 20, in verse 3, it says it's honorable for a man to stop striving since any fool can start a quarrel.

One of the skills that people need to learn in the home, husbands and wives, is that they're, first of all, they're not always going to agree. Once in a while, you'll find people who just really seem to be on the same page about almost everything, but that's extremely rare. Generally speaking, you're going to marry somebody who has opinions of their own, and they're not always going to be the same as yours.

And so there's going to be times when you're expressing one opinion, and your spouse has the other opinion. And how you handle that difference of opinion is going to matter more in the home than it matters with any other difference of opinion you encounter in any other relationships or anywhere else. Because differences of opinion can be the source of quarrels and strife.

And basically, so I'm saying don't do it. If you're contending a point, and of course, there's a point at which you have to do that initially. You have to, you know, the husband sees it one way, the wife sees it another way.

They both have to make their points. They have to make their arguments. They have to present their case.

That shouldn't be considered to be quarreling. Debating a point on the merits of each side is not a quarrel. Quarreling is where it gets down to a place where you just decide you're going to stand by what you're standing for, and you're going to argue against whatever they say.

Even when you run out of valid arguments, you're just going to quarrel back and forth until you win. And it's an honorable thing to just not go there. Just stop.

Just stop quarreling. Stop contending before the quarrel starts even. That is to say strife is best nipped in the bud rather than cured after it's escalated.

You know, once a quarrel has escalated, there's bad feelings. They can be overcome. There can be reconciliation, but it's a lot harder than just to not get there in the first place.

Just be a peacemaker and be somebody who says, okay, I'm going to give you that point. Or if I can't, I'm just going to say, well, I can't. I don't want there to be strife between us,

so I'm going to have to make this decision anyway.

I've got to. This is what I feel very strongly is the right thing to do. I can't not do it because that would be violating my conscience, but this is not a personal thing against you, and I'm not ignoring your concerns.

It may seem to you like I am, but I'm not. There are ways to disagree and to come to a decision. It's a little easier for the husband in the case that he's in the position to make that decision.

The wife is in a harder spot if she feels like her husband's the one who's totally out to lunch, and he's totally missing the point. She sees as clearly as can be what the right and godly thing to do is, and she can't just say to him, well, regardless, I'm going to just ignore what you say. He's the head.

She has to deal with it, unfortunately, and trust God. She has to trust God that God will take care of it because she's going to submit, and that's what God told her to do. But even the husband who has the right to say, okay, this is the decision we're going to make about this, sometimes husbands don't do that very well.

They just quarrel back and forth, and they never really take leadership. They just try to, for one thing, they are afraid to move without their wife's approval, and so they have to argue her into it and so forth. It comes a time when you just have to stop quarreling and say, you know, I'm just going to make an executive decision here, you know, and not just keep the quarrel going and going and going.

Hopefully, of course, if both parties are Christians and conscientious, neither party will make a decision that is morally objectionable to the other person. If that happens, then even the wife has to object and not go along. I think that the husband's decision is morally wrong.

The wife has to just say, well, you can go that way if you want, but I can't follow you there because I can't do something that's morally wrong. She doesn't have to follow her husband into sin. In fact, she shouldn't and can't.

But a lot of times, the wife is in a somewhat harder spot because what the husband's suggesting isn't maybe morally wrong, it's just stupid. You know, he's just not making a wise decision. And she can't object on moral grounds, and she's kind of stuck in the situation.

I sympathize for women like that. I suppose women who have to do that just have to trust God. We all have to trust God for certain things, and that's what a wife has to trust God for, you know.

Well, God, you said to submit to this man, and I don't think he's very wise, and it looks

like we're going down the road to disaster here with this choice of his, but I'm not going to sin by being the rebellious, quarrelsome wife who brings the strife into the home over this man. Men and women both can be guilty of this, but mature Christians should be people who recognize, oh, this is becoming a quarrel. Let's not let it go there.

Let's just end it. And if one person's a little more mature than the other, then that person will say, okay, let's don't argue about that anymore right now. You know, I found that in my marriage, found this out too late, if my wife and I had a difference of opinion, in the early days of our marriage, we'd debate it out.

I didn't think of it as a quarrel. When I'm debating someone, I don't think of it as a quarrel, on the air or any other time. I mean, someone can have the opposite view from me, and we can argue back and forth.

I don't feel like we're quarreling. I just feel like we're discussing. And my wife seemed to be that way too early in our marriage, but later on, I didn't realize that she'd had a bit of a shift.

She didn't like to debate. She wanted to, I don't know what she wanted. I mean, I lost track of what she wanted to change.

But I found that near the end of our marriage, if she and I disagreed, that arguing with her was really a bad decision. Even if I knew she was wrong. I mean, there were times when there is very clear that she was not thinking right.

And I knew she was wrong. But I found that if I would just say, okay, let's not talk about this right now. I'll think about what you said.

I'll pray about it. And give me 24 hours or more to sleep on this. And almost every time she came back to me within 24 hours, she said, you know, I thought about that.

I've changed my mind on that. And it resolved very peaceably in those cases, you know, and I thought, well, it could have been so different. Because if I just kept arguing until I won, I would never win.

I just would never win. We would just have strife, continuous strife. So on those occasions where I said, why don't we just, why don't we just don't discuss this right now? I've heard what you have to say.

I'll do that consideration tomorrow. Maybe I can make a decision about this tomorrow. We can revisit it.

And just cut off the quarrel before it really became a quarrel. And like I said, in each of the cases, I can recall that that happened. And there were a number of cases that I noticed that within 24 hours, she was back saying, you know, I thought about that

different.

I think you were right about that or something, you know. And so it never became a problem. It may still be a problem if you do that.

You still may not find agreement. But at least, you know, a lot of times I think a wife, what she is offended most about in a quarrel is she just feels like she's not being heard. If the husband makes a comment, I hear what you're saying, you know.

I can see that's a valid point in a way. I'll give that some thought. Let me think about that overnight.

If the husband is behaving in a way that she can tell he's not just ignoring her and discarding what she has to say, he's thinking about it. Usually, she feels a little more at peace about the situation. So you can stop quarreling.

You can end a quarrel before it begins or as you see it beginning. If it begins, be the first to end it. We saw that in chapter 20 and verse 3. It's honorable for a man to stop striving.

And sometimes it's the woman who's got to be the honorable one because she doesn't have an honorable man. There are men who aren't honorable enough to stop striving, but the woman has to be the honorable one. She has to be the grown up.

It's a shame because a man should be a spiritual leader in his home. He should be the one who recognizes something bad is coming into our home. Some strife is entering into our relationship.

I'm going to bring an end to it right now. I'm going to stop this quarrel. There's times when the man is not the wise one and the woman is.

And so it's honorable for a woman to stop striving too. It's worth it. It's even worth it to give up your point.

Unless it's a moral issue. It's worth it to give up your point to have peace in the home. Now, if a man's always giving in to his wife just to keep peace, of course, he's kind of spineless.

He's not really being the leader. But a man needs to realize what battles are worth fighting, what battles are not worth fighting. And a man's ego will often make him fight every battle just because he's offended that his wife doesn't see the eminent wisdom of everything he says.

And that she's not just on board with him because he's the man. I mean, she should understand. He knows more than she does.

He's the wiser one. But his ego gets involved there. So sometimes a man just will argue every point until they're out of breath.

I was going to say until he wins, but he often won't win. They'll just argue until one of them falls asleep. And a person needs to be wise enough to realize some things just are not really worth the fight over.

They may be points where I'm quite sure I'm right and I'm quite sure she's wrong. But really, what's at stake here? Is what's at stake more important than the peace in our home? I think not. In most cases, not.

So what are the causes of strife? The Bible in Proverbs names a number of things that can cause strife. One of them is that some people just have a contentious nature. Some people just want to fight.

Chapter 26 and 21 says, As charcoal is to burning coals and wood to fires, so is a contentious man to kindle strife. You put burning coals to wood and it is their nature to set it on fire. You put a contentious man into a group of people and it's his nature to kindle strife.

He'll just cause strife because he's a he's a contentious person. Fortunately, there aren't as many of these as there could be. Most people are civilized enough to really want to have peace in most situations.

Although, in marriage, they don't always seem to have that commitment. I don't know why. I think most people are willing to make compromises and so forth at the workplace, at school, in the neighborhood, with the neighbors and so forth.

But when it comes to in the home, they want to insist on their way and they're ready to fight anyone who seems to be threatening their position. And there's people who are just not peacemakers. Jesus said, Blessed are the peacemakers.

They shall be called sons of God. Why? Because God's a peacemaker and children look like their parents. A peacemaker will be recognized as a son of God because God's a peacemaker.

He's a reconciler. And yet some people are just the opposite. They're strife makers.

They're contentious by nature. In chapter 17 and verse 19, it says, He who loves transgression loves strife. A person who loves transgression loves strife.

There are people who seem to really enjoy strife. It's a sport to them to debate any point. And they like to prove everyone else wrong and prove themselves wise and witty.

And so they want to pick an argument and pick a fight anytime they can with people who aren't even interested in having an argument with them. A person who loves strife,

who's a contentious person, is trouble. They're trouble and you don't want to marry somebody like that.

And if you're married to somebody like that, you need to become very adept at deflecting quarrels and making sure they don't escalate because your spouse is going to be one who's going to be trying to make them happen. There's also, of course, in chapter 10, verse 12, another thing that causes strife is hatred. A person who loves contention isn't necessarily someone who hates, but someone who hates is going to be contentious and inconsiderate, of course, toward other people and starting fights.

Chapter 10, verse 12, it says, Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all sins. Now, if you hate somebody, you're going to find fault with them about everything. And in many cases, they're going to defend themselves and you're going to argue and you're going to strive and you're going to quarrel and there's going to be hostility.

But if you love somebody, you can cover their sins. You can refuse to be offended. You can forgive automatically.

If you love somebody, you're going to be inclined to, you're going to want to cover their sins. It's going to be your inclination. Now, there may be times when although you love somebody and would like to cover their sin, you realize there's something you have to speak to them about because being loving toward them requires that you bring correction to them.

But when you don't love somebody, then quarreling with them is sport and is fun and striving is something that arises out of hatred when you have hatred for somebody. Also, Proverbs recognizes pride as involved in almost all strife. In chapter 13, in verse 10, it says, By pride comes only contention.

But with the well advised wisdom, the King James says only by pride comes contention. Now, it's worded a little different, just the word order difference. And in the Hebrew, it can be worded either way.

It's just a question of word order. In the King James, it says only by pride comes contention. And this new King James says by pride comes only contention.

Now, you might say, what's the difference? Well, think about it. If the King James renders it correctly, it's saying that the only thing that causes contention is pride. In other words, there's never contention where there's not pride.

And where both people are adequately humble, there will not be quarrels. Only by pride, contention comes. It would mean that if there's no pride, contention will never come.

Now, the way it's worded in the new King James is a little different. By pride comes only contention. That doesn't mean that contention is always caused by pride, but that pride

will always bring about contention.

There may be contention caused by other things, too. But pride will always be one of those things that brings contention. The point here is that anyone can see, if they think about it, that you would argue much less if you cared less about having people acknowledge that you're right and saving face and coming out on top.

And, you know, a lot of times an argument continues because no one is humble enough to let the other person have the last word. Because if you're good at debate, you can always find something to answer the last argument of the other person, and they can find something to answer your last argument. And if you stop arguing, if you stop the quarrel, you're letting them have the last argument as if you can't think of something to say when you can.

And you know you can, and you know you can just blast that argument out of the water. But then they're going to come back to something else, and you're going to come back to something else, and they just go back and forth, back and forth. And if you say, you know, if I stop this contention, they're going to think they won.

They're going to think they reached the end of my arguments. They're going to think they were right and I was wrong. But I know I'm right, and I know I could answer that argument.

But that's OK. I'll let them think that about me. Let them think I lost.

That's OK. I don't have to have my pride in this thing, my ego in this thing. I don't have to be the winner.

Contention, therefore, is fueled by and caused by pride. In chapter 28 of Proverbs, and verse 25, it says, He who is of a proud heart stirs up strife, but he who trusts in the Lord will be prospered. He who is of a proud heart stirs up strife.

So a contentious person, a hateful person, a proud person are all going to be causers of strife. In a marriage, you just can't have a contentious nature. You can't have hatred.

You can't have pride. You have to be humble. You have to be a peacemaker.

You have to be one who loves peace. There's this great Psalm, Psalm 120, I believe. Yes, it is.

It says in verses five through seven, Woe to me that I sojourn in Meshach, that I dwell among the tents of Kedar. My soul has dwelt too long with the one who hates peace. I am for peace, but when I speak, they are for war.

You ever been with someone who just hates peace, a contentious person who stirs up strife? You just want to get along and they just don't want to get along. They want to

fight. He's feeling it.

He's saying, man, I've lived too long with people who hate peace. I'm for peace, but every time I speak, they want to start a war. I have had that experience with many people in my life.

People that I have nothing against them, but for some reason, they've got something against me. And every time I speak, I'm trying to speak conciliatory, trying to speak reconciliation toward them and making sure I walk on eggs not to do anything to harm them. But man, they just want to grab anything they can and make a war over it.

That's a carnal person. And that's a person whose marriage is going to be miserable if they take that quality into marriage. And many people in marriage could say, I've dwelt too long with the one who hates peace.

However, you can't leave just because they hate peace. So you need grace. You need a lot of grace.

Sometimes you feel like you've lived too long with someone who hates peace, but you're going to have to live longer with them because you can't just go. That's not even just true in marriage. It might be if you're a child in the home of a parent or an adult child taking care of an aged parent.

Well, sometimes that's a situation where it's hard to keep the peace because an aged parent can sometimes be very controlling and very bitter and sometimes slightly demented. And you just seem like everything makes him upset. And so it's not only with a husband and wife, but certainly it's serious when it's between husbands and wives when there's contention and strife.

It's an awful thing. Bad for kids, too. Another thing that causes strife is when a person has a short fuse, when they're quickly angry.

Chapter 15 and verse 18 says, A wrathful man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger, who is a longer fuse, allays contention. A person who can rule his spirit, as we saw earlier, being slow to anger is the same thing as ruling your spirit in Proverbs. If you can rule your own spirit and not get angry quickly, you can avoid a lot of strife that would happen if you let yourself get angry more quickly.

Because if you respond angrily immediately, it usually brings back an angry response and then it escalates. If somebody's even angry at you, and it says in verse 1 of this chapter, soft answer turns away their wrath. If you're slow to anger and you don't get angry right away, it might be that eventually they can get you mad.

But if you don't get mad quickly, you can sometimes deflect what would be a volatile situation. Sometimes people just aren't interested in deflecting volatile incidents. Or

they're not onto it.

They're not paying attention. They're not noticing what's happening. And then things get volatile and they don't know why.

Because they weren't paying attention. They got angry too quickly. In chapter 29, 22, it says, an angry man stirs up strife.

Again, an angry man and a furious man abounds in transgression. So, if somebody's got a short fuse and is an angry person, they're going to have a lot of strife in their lives. Now, one other thing I want to point out that we've done, and that is that another thing that stirs up strife is outside influences.

Not, you know, neither party in the marriage is particularly contentious or hateful or proud or interested in fighting. But outsider's influence causes strife. Chapter 16, verse 28 says, a perverse man sows strife and a whisperer separates best friends.

A whisperer is someone who's gossiping. Here's two people who are best friends and a third party is in there whispering and gossiping to one about the other one and separates them. A lot of times, foolish marriage counselors can do this.

They can start dealing with a couple that has problems and make them worse. I mean, I've heard crazy things. I've heard crazy people trying to, I mean, they're marriage counselors, but the husband or the wife comes with a complaint about their spouse and the marriage counselor just affirms that they're right in their complaint about their spouse.

And they don't ever confront the person about the need to, how to love somebody who's unlovely or how to forgive somebody who's offensive or whatever. They just kind of coddle the person and encourage them to be angry at their spouse by saying, oh yeah, that really was wrong. That was really bad.

I, uh, what's your spouse say? Okay, that's very unthoughtful of him, of her. And I'm not just talking about professional marriage counselors. A lot of times individuals who are Christians, who have friends who have troubled marriages, the husband or the wife comes to them and the friend just adds more fuel to the fire that's already burning there by siding with their friend and against their spouse.

You know, if somebody comes to you and they're having trouble in their marriage, it's okay to be sympathetic if their spouse is awful and they're having a hard time. It's okay to be sympathetic, but you got to, you can't just keep affirming that their spouse is bad. They know that already.

What you have to do is teach them how to be forgiving and how to be patient and how to have grace and so forth. And a lot of times the input from outsiders actually makes the

strife worse. And I've seen that with my own eyes more than once.

Chapter 26 in verse 20, Solomon says, where there is no wood, the fire goes out. But where there is no tail bearer, strife ceases. A tail bearer is a gossip.

A tail bearer is somebody who's sticking their nose into a situation that isn't their business and causes strife by, you know, reporting negative things about somebody that isn't present and causing the people who are hearing to think badly of that person. I honestly don't remember this event, but my friend Jim Soderbergh says that when he first met me, one thing that he remembers that made a profound impression on him was that several of us, he and I and two other people, I think guys, were at a coffee shop and one of the guys started talking about a man that wasn't present, a man named Steve Norman, I remember. I didn't know Steve Norman well, but I knew him.

He was a brother. He was running a ministry in town. And this man at the table with Steve Norman was not present, but the man at the table has a quarrel or a problem with Steve Norman.

And he started to sort of tell us at the table about some interchange they'd had where Steve Norman had allegedly said something that this guy was upset with. And although I don't remember this, Jim has told me this. I spoke and I said, well, excuse me, before you go any further, I just want you to know I consider Steve Norman to be a friend of mine and he's not here to defend himself, so I'd rather not hear what you have to say about him.

Now, I don't always do that. That was a good thing to do, but I don't remember doing it. I'm glad I did it because I don't always do that, but sometimes I listen to gossip instead.

But my friend Jim said that that profoundly impacted him about how to deal with those situations. The situation where I didn't do the right thing was about another Norman, Larry Norman. Larry Norman was a controversial Christian musician.

He was a Christian and a musician, but he had controversial things in his life and some people thought he was worldly and so forth. I remember some friends of mine and I went to a concert of his once. I knew Larry Norman later, but this was when I didn't know him.

Some of his performance on stage I just thought was kind of worldly or something. A bunch of us were sitting around in the living room after the concert visiting and talking about him and most of us were saying things that were kind of critical of his performance and of him and so forth. One of the girls that was sitting silently for a long time there, she spoke up and said, well, I wonder how you talk about me when I'm not here.

That really convicted me because I realized that I was talking about somebody who wasn't there in a negative way and I wouldn't prefer for someone to talk about me negatively when I'm not there. I don't mind if they talk negatively about me when I'm

there to answer for it, but gossip is an evil thing. My friend Danny Lehman referred to the skill of cutting off the tail of the tail bearer.

The tail bearer is the gossip in Proverbs and he said you need to learn how to cut off the tail of the tail bearer. That would be like saying, excuse me, that person is not here right now to defend themselves and therefore let's not discuss them until they're present. What good can it possibly do to criticize them behind their back? It's not going to improve their behavior.

Anyway, what has to be recognized is many times when outsiders in a relationship, speaking about someone else, speaking about the husband, speaking about the wife who isn't present, gossip, whispers, they stir up strife. There might be a little bit of strife between the couple, but then it really is stirred up like a fire by a tail bearer. Where there's no wood, the fire goes out.

And where there isn't a tail bearer, the strife ceases. A fire will burn out by itself if you don't keep putting fuel in it. It'll burn for a while, but it'll burn up the fuel and it'll be over.

But where there's a tail bearer, they keep adding fuel to the fire. They keep adding to the strife. Strife that would have probably passed over reasonably soon otherwise.

Not all of these statements about strife have to do with married life, but Solomon knows very well that strife in the home is the worst kind of strife. And so what he says about strife in general is worth taking a look at in this connection.