

Independence - Interdependence

Week 4

As for those who seemed to be important – whatever they were makes no difference to me; God does not judge by external appearance ... Galatians 2:6

John and Susan, parents of a teenage daughter, are still on the sunny side of forty. John works at a computer firm where he manages nearly 100 engineering projects at one time. It's a high-stress job. Occasionally he has to travel on business, and thanks to the World Wide Web and email, the stress just follows him wherever he goes.



Susan, an experienced accountant, manages the payroll for a large health organization. She has just gone through the trauma of being micromanaged by a former supervisor. She now has a new supervisor who appreciates her contribution a lot more. Her job also requires her to travel occasionally.



Both John and Susan are active at church. He runs the sound system for worship services and works in the club program with young people. Susan recently gave up her position as church treasurer to volunteer in the club program with John.

John recently had a mild heart attack. Because of it, he will have to take medication daily for the rest of his life. His doctor also advised him to lower his stress level if possible.

When he returned to work, his request for a lower-stress position was met with a promise: "We'll be glad to help you." If only the promise stacked up to reality. Recently the help he has been receiving has evaporated and he is again in a high-stress position.

Though John and Susan are both Christians, they struggle with some of the roles they have had to assume as a dual-income family. At the office, Susan has had to overcome a demonstrated lack of trust in her abilities. For several years she has also felt that being a woman has prevented her from using her gifts effectively. At home, she struggles with being both homemaker and mother, with far too little time for either role.

John comes home worn out, run down, and needing some quiet relaxation time to restock his physical, mental, and emotional energy reserves. But Susan clearly needs help with housework and with parenting their daughter. To John, doing housework is distasteful. He thinks wistfully of the home where he grew up. His dad brought home the paycheck and his mom did what he cannot help but think of as "women's work," taking care of the house and minding the children. Yet it's a fact that he and Susan need both their incomes to live the lifestyle they want for their daughter.

Oneness? John and Susan love each other, but where do they find time to nurture oneness? And what is "oneness," anyway?

Independence? That’s John and Susan’s reality most days. They carry on independent careers, focusing on the work that makes it possible to live in a middle-income neighborhood.

Interdependence? That’s a worthy goal, but it is far from the reality. How can John and Susan develop greater mutual support and closeness when there is always something else to do?

Recent research reveals we underestimate the level of role conflict in dual-income families—and its impact on marital unity. Many times couples simply struggle along, hoping they’ll make it. This week we want to examine what it means for two independent personalities to achieve the closeness and support they need through interdependence.

The first duty of love is to listen.
—Paul Tillich

Scripture Memory: Review all the verses already memorized.

Day 1 – Independently Dependent
Read Ephesians 2:10 and John 14:17.

Every believer needs to be independently dependent on God. This is true whether you are married or single. We each have an identity as a unique person in the family of God. Many of our weddings had a candle lighting ceremony during which both bride and groom took their individual candles and lit a single candle, symbolizing two becoming one. In every marriage there is both individuality and oneness. We call this description the *independent–interdependent principle*.

1. In your own words, describe the balance between individuality and dependence. How does it work out in your marriage? Which extreme do you tend toward?

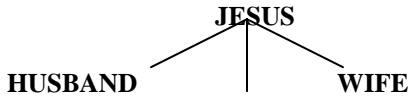
2. Describe how you like to express your individuality.

3. Describe how your wife likes to express her individuality. If you don’t know, ask her.

4. Each of us has a need to express independence as well as share his life. As a result we have fears about being abandoned or smothered and controlled. The following diagrams show what can happen if we lose the balance between autonomy and control, between closeness and abandonment.

5. Which of these diagrams seems most like your own marriage?

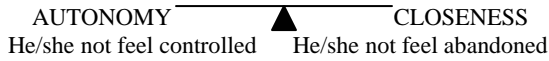
6. Which seems least like your marriage?



Each has two needs:

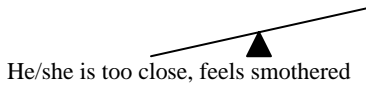
1. To feel closeness (as a couple)
2. To feel autonomy (as an individual)

There is a balance ... ideal:

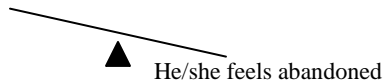


Examples of being Out of Balance:

- (1) He/she is controlling



- (2) He/she is too autonomous



7. In your marriage, how does independence–interdependence relate to your daily fleshing out of your relationship to Christ? For a revealing perspective on this question, ask your wife how she would answer it!

Day 2 – Oneness in Marriage

Read Genesis 2:21-24; Malachi 2:13-15; Matthew 19:4-6.

1. What do these passages reveal about oneness in marriage at the following levels?

Physical

Mental

Emotional

Spiritual

2. What role does the husband play in making this oneness happen, according to Malachi 2:13-15? Include truths from other verses in Days 1 and 2 in your answer.

3. Of the above four areas, which do you think is the most important to your wife in enhancing oneness between you? Why?

4. Now ask her which is most important. Her answer may surprise you!

Though God made man and woman as one at creation and re-creates the oneness in marriage, God asks the husband to take the initiative—consciously, self-sacrificially doing the actions of love that develop oneness with his wife.

5. In light of 1 Peter 3:7-10, what are some of the things you have done recently that:

Hindered oneness?

Fostered oneness?

One of the first things that Eros does is obliterate the distinction between giving and receiving.
—C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*

6. How does romantic love—what some have called *eros*, after the Greek word for physical love—enhance interdependence?

Day 3 – Communication That Promotes Interdependence

Read James 3:1-12; Ephesians 4:29-32, 5:21-33.

1. How can expressing your interdependence with words hinder oneness in marriage, according to James 3:1-12?

2. What is the climate that promotes communication in marriage, according to Ephesians 4:29-32?

3. What kind of communication characterizes a man of knowledge, according to Proverbs 17:27-28?

4. How would you describe your communication with your wife in the past weeks? What do you need to do to make your words more Christlike?

5. Communicating by praying together: So often when we study Ephesians 5:21-33, our focuses are on leading and submitting as Christ and the church, all of which are right. Remember, though, the essential point is a husband and wife being united in one flesh. This is a mystery and the purpose for marriage, and it is expressed in many ways: good conversation where the heart and mind are revealed, physical oneness, and enjoying life and one another. How about spiritual oneness? It includes all the above as well as serving and worshiping together and praying together.

6. Do you find it difficult to pray together with your wife? If you do, what issues or concerns seem to keep you from doing it?

One hindrance may be that we men may have been taught not to share our feelings openly, and thus we have a hard

time being vulnerable in front of another person. Do you, like many men, feel awkward baring your soul in front of someone else?

Or maybe you find yourself focusing on *how* your wife prays. You get distracted by the form rather than agreeing with the person and with God on the substance. That's a natural reaction—so if that describes you, you're not alone!

Or maybe you're a "doer"—a task-focused man—"Let's get'er done" so we can move on to the next item on the list. It's easy to forget that one of prayer's purposes is to thank and worship God.

Here are some steps to help you walk slowly and more confidently as the initiator of this prayer practice with your wife.

- A non-threatening way to begin regularly praying together is to make it a practice at meal times to pray before you eat. As the habit gets established, begin to add more content and depth and start to move away from routine prayers.
- Sometime before you fall asleep, offer to lead in prayer. Keep it brief and meaningful as you begin. If she wants to close, encourage her to do so. If not, just say "amen." To help ease into prayer, ask if there are prayer needs or praises, then suggest you will pray for certain ones and she prays for others. You could also follow this procedure before or after dinner.
- In times of crisis you or your friends are experiencing or when you or your friends have big decisions to make, offer to lead in prayer.

- When you come across a verse in your quiet time or in other reading, or some present cultural issue on TV or other area, discuss the topic, look for truth from the Scripture, then pray about it.

Day 4 – Independence in Marriage
Read Galatians 3:26-29; Proverbs 31.

1. How does Galatians 3:26-29 reveal individuality?

2. Read the many things done by the woman in Proverbs 31. List some of them.

3. List a few of the things your wife does that are similar to the ones above.

Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.
—Galatians 6:2

4. In the spirit of this verse, what are some ways in which you are helping or hindering your wife in expressing her God-given gifts and abilities?

5. In what ways has your wife encouraged or discouraged the development of your individuality?

6. Think of some specific instances in which you can be sensitive to your wife's needs and her individuality while at the same time expressing your individuality.

(Example: Your wife loves going to musical theater productions, while you find yourself falling asleep in the middle of them! What do you do?)

Day 5 – Romantic Love, That Thrill Factor



Read Chapters 7 and 8 of *Love Life for Every Married Couple*.

1. Of what value is romantic love, according to the author?

2. Why do some Christians downplay romantic love in marriage?

3. What will arouse and increase romantic love:

In the husband?

In the wife?

4. In what ways does this chapter describe your relationship with your wife?

5. What did you learn in this chapter that you can apply in your marriage?

6. What actions do you plan to take to develop and strengthen the *storge* type of love?

7. In what ways is *storge* love a defense against lust?

8. What, in your opinion, is the state of romantic love in your marriage?

If you have a marriage, it can be a place of homecoming, and you can begin moving toward that goal this day.
—Ed Wheat

Taking It to the Streets

Share with your wife the Proverbs 31 passage from Day 4. In particular, concentrate on the things you listed about her. Tell her how much you love and appreciate her and how much you thank God for bringing her to you.

Prayer Requests

During the group discussion time, issues and prayer requests will come up. List them here so you can pray for the guys in the group.



The One Thing

As you look back over what you have studied this week, what is that One Thing that was most significant to you from your personal study?

Why was it important to you?

What will you do in the power of the Holy Spirit about this one thing?

Be ready to share in class with your brothers.