



Overcoming Challenges

FaithBuilder 4 | Lesson 23 | Conjugal Love

Lesson Overview

1. BrainBuilder

Introduce the idea of challenges in relationships.

2. Read

Nearly all marriages encounter difficulties. What strategies to the Writings say can help at these times? p. 1-2

3. Discuss

Reflect on and discuss ways in which we can address challenges in all relationships. p. 2

New Church Concept Cold States

There are many reasons for cold states in marriage, some of them are internal, some are external, and some result from a particular situation. Their origins lie hidden deeply within a person, and they develop until they appear outwardly. *Conjugal Love 237*

BrainBuilder

1. What factors might make it difficult for a person to overcome challenges in a relationship?
2. In what ways is it possible to help a person who is going through a hard time? In what ways is it impossible to help someone who is going through a hard time?
3. How might challenges in a relationship with another person be a good thing?

Read

Married partners will almost certainly experience challenges from differences in behaviors, attitudes, interests and tastes from growing up in different households. Over time, and especially when a person is in a more self-centered state of mind, some habits may become annoying, and one or both partners may no longer feel in love. For example, one partner may be very concerned with cleanliness while the other partner places little importance on it. Things like this are *external* causes for coldness between partners. Other examples of this are competing to be right or best; one partner working hard while the other likes to take it easy; having a large difference in ages, wealth or position. These kinds of differences disappear after death because life on earth is different than life in heaven.

In heaven, there is no difference in partners' ages, positions in society, or levels of wealth. All there are youthful, and they remain that way to eternity. People are regarded in accordance with the useful services they render and put the value of service before status. See *Conjugal Love 250*

Sometimes negative thinking causes coldness between married partners. For example a person may be suspicious about what his or her partner is thinking or telling others about the relationship. Coldness like this is called *incidental* coldness, and it is the unintended consequence of certain ways of thinking. Once a couple feels estranged, their minds may close up towards each other. This distance may then start showing up in the ways partners express their affection for each other.

The Lord has a way forward

No matter what challenges cause partners to feel as if they no longer love each other, the Writings give reasons for remaining married and suggest practical ways to nurture marriage so that feelings of love may eventually return. One of the first

principles of being a loving person is to think about making another person happy.

The essence of love is not loving ourselves but loving others and being united to them through love. Loving is feeling the joy of someone else as joy within ourselves. Feeling our joy in others and not theirs in ourselves is loving ourselves. See *Divine Love and Wisdom* 47

Putting your partner's joy before your own is a good first step! The Writings list practical things partners can do that hold the potential to bring a couple closer.

A married couple's qualities can be joined in time if they bend to one another's wishes, share responsibilities, treat each other kindly, refrain from unchaste thoughts and behaviors, love and care for their children, and, most importantly, do what their religion teaches. See *Conjugal Love* 228

If partners want their marriage to work, the Writings say they should *behave* as if they feel "in love". They should cooperate in caring for their children and doing household jobs. They should interact as friends, being polite and loving toward each other. When partners make an effort to treat each other with kindness and respect, the Lord can bless their marriage.

Discuss

Choose questions for discussion.

1. *Conjugal Love* 237 (see sidebar on p. 1) lists various reasons why married partners feel cold towards each other. *Internal* differences, such as differences of religion, are not discussed here. *External* and *incidental* differences, which are discussed, are likely to come up for most couples. In what ways might reflecting on the root cause of a problem be helpful in moving forward?
2. What practical steps do the Writings suggest taking to rebuild a marriage relationship that is struggling?
3. Will taking these steps bring about changes if only one partner takes them in a marriage?
4. Compare the Golden Rule, "Do unto others..." with the following sentence in the Talmud, "If you treat your husband like a king, he will treat you like a queen." In what ways are these ideas similar or different?
5. In what ways would looking to the Lord as a married couple make addressing challenges in a marriage easier?
6. In what ways might not having religion in a marriage make external challenges more difficult to deal with?
7. What can we learn about marriage relationship from friendships with others?

... although states of coldness separate the minds of married partners in the world, partners continue to live together and have children. This would not be the case if there were not states of apparent love as well, which at times simulate the warmth of genuine love. These appearances are necessary and useful. Organized societies would not hold together without them. Some conscientious persons may labor under the idea that disagreements of minds and resulting internal estrangements between them and their partner are attributable to faults in themselves, so that they are to blame, on which account they grieve in heart. But because internal differences are not in their hands to remedy, their distresses can be eased by showing apparent love and favor. Friendship may even return as a result, which carries within it conjugal love on the part of the one, if not on the part of the other. See *Conjugal Love* 271

Simulations of conjugal love are appearances of love and friendship between partners who differ in spirit. They are done to heal differences when a spiritual person is married to a natural person. This is done by having thoughtful and polite conversations and by doing favors that appeal to their partner. If these do not affect the partner's behavior, a person can look for more ways to make more changes with the goal of preserving order in their home, continuing to help each other, and protecting their infants and children. For the words and deeds of a spiritual person are inspired by justice and judgment. See *Conjugal Love* 282