

What Men Need to Know

The Complete Idiots Guide to Marriage

Introduction

- You know...good marriage...effort & sacrifice over time but:
What kind of effort and sacrifice?
What is it that we are supposed to be doing as husbands?
 - Even if we had a 'to do' list, **why** should we do it? **How** do we keep at it?
 - What about what we want/need? What if she just laps it up and demands more?
- If we can't address these questions, we are going to be pretty erratic husbands.
Most will just settle into doing whatever it is that comes naturally and end up with a poor or imbalanced marriage.

The Principles

While marriage is complex, a few easy-to-remember principles, as they are practiced, can make a huge difference.

These principles can be summarized as follows:

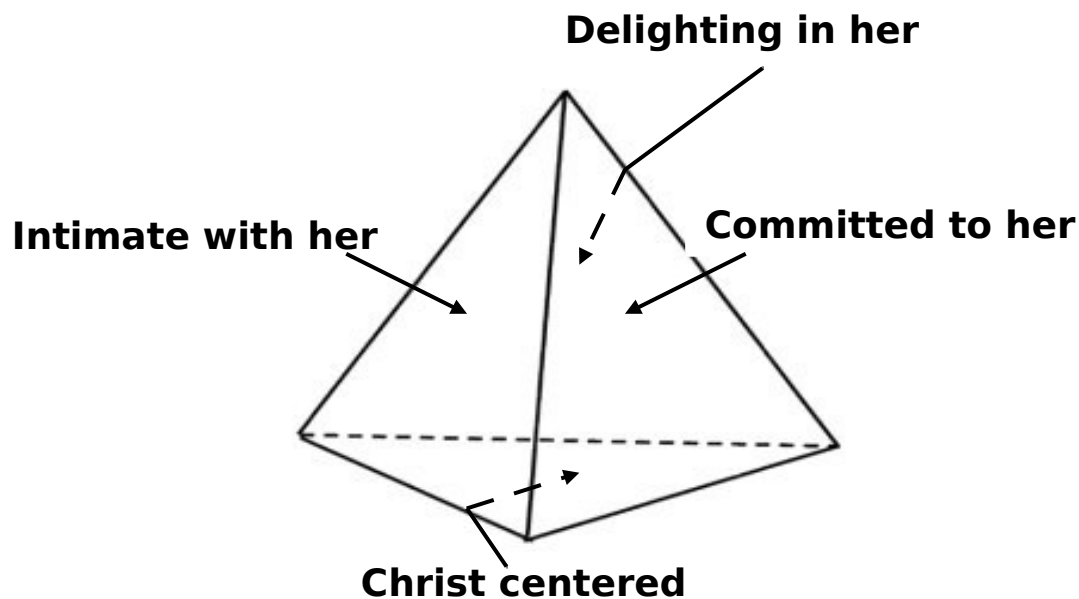
A great marriage is a Christ centered relationship full of mutual delight, intimacy and commitment.

Christ centered – living from God's grace and for God's glory

Delighting in her – gratitude, enthusiasm & shared experiences

Intimate with her – curious, honest & persisting through conflict

Committed to her – leaving, cleaving & working for her good



Assume that your marriage depends only on you

For all practical purposes, you need to assume that this is completely up to you.

- You cannot control if, when or how your wife participates in your marriage
- In poor marriages, husbands focus on their wife's failure (and *vice versa*).

So, you must keep focused on your own faults and responsibilities, trusting God to work in and through your wife as he wishes.¹

The problem of hidden expectations:

- 'She will give me everything I want/need' – at least most of the time
- 'We will serve each other.'

This sounds reasonable but often just means, "I will be the spouse I ought to be to the degree that you are the spouse that you ought to be."

In other words, "If you make me happy, I'll reciprocate."

aka ☐ **a transactional relationship – *quid pro quo* – will fail**

If you want your relationship to fail, keep insisting on *quid pro quo*.

- 'I will be so giving that she will be blown away and grateful' – at least most of the time.

This is really just another form of transactionalism; the deal falls apart when she isn't blown away or grateful.

God calls on us to say, **"I will be the husband I must be regardless if she is the wife she ought to be because God alone is enough for me and His agenda trumps mine."**

The more you love when you don't feel like loving:

...the more your feelings of love will grow toward her and

...the greater your gratitude and confidence in God.

The more you act unloving when you feel unloving or unloved:

... the more your apathy & hostility will grow toward her and

...the greater your anger, self-pity & distance you'll feel in your relationship with God

Ride your own ride - Read your own mail – Run your own race – Tend to your own knittin'

The Importance of Balancing these Principles

Our tendency is to focus on the things we're better at and ignore or demean the importance of the others BUT...

They are each needed² AND...

1 One teacher, Ralph Ankeman (sp?) says that if there is a problem in the marriage it is the husband's fault because God has designated him the love-giver for the relationship.

2 From Christ we get what we need to sacrificially love; through commitment we build trust and growth; through intimacy we know one another deeply; through delight we have pleasure bonding.

They are all needed together

They are so interconnected with one another that you really can't do justice to any one of them without the others.

- What kind of marriage...if you were much stronger at Christ centered?
 - How strong is it without the others?

Well, for one, there's no such thing because love for others is the natural outcome of life with Christ (John 15:9-17; 1John 4:19).

 - Some may just be super-spiritual people - posers
 - Some may find relationships too demanding or too difficult to manage - unlike their spiritual disciplines.³
 - What does the relationship feel like with this and not much of the others?
 - Without delight - joyless
 - Without commitment – cold, aloof, disengaged and/or legalistic (ala Romans 7:1-6 if you don't help her grow)
 - Without intimacy – roommates; she doesn't really matter and she doesn't get to share your life.
- What kind of marriage would you expect if you were much stronger at commitment?
 - How strong is it without the others?

Well, this usually means that he's a loyal guy, just less likely to divorce.

 - He's not committed in the sense of moving toward her;
 - He's not committed in the sense of sacrificial service for the sake of her personal growth;.

Such husbands are often full of self-righteousness, resentment and self-pity.
 - What does the relationship feel like with this and not much of the others?
 - Without Christ – little hope for growth; 'have to' more than 'get to'
 - Without delight – joyless, dull
 - Without intimacy – no closeness; might as well live in adjacent apartments
- What kind of marriage would you expect if you were mainly a positive and fun loving guy?
 - How strong is it without the others?

³ I talked with a guy who, when he got into a difficult conflict with his wife (usually around bed time); she'd say her piece and go to sleep and he'd be wide awake and angry. So, he'd get up and read the Bible. Sounds good but often she'd wake up find him in the Bible and get more angry at him. Isn't she a bitch? No, there'd be nothing wrong with him saying, "I'm really angry and unresolved about this and want to get some Biblical perspective" but he was doing this **instead** of staying in the fight with her. She sensed that he was using spiritual disciplines as a way out of relational difficulty.

- It's generally self-focused & demanding...I want to have fun
- What does the relationship feel like with this and not much of the others?
 - Without Christ the motivation waxes/wanes depending on their response
 - Without commitment – may opt to play because it distracts from problems without resolving them; may eventually go somewhere else more stimulating when the wife expresses dissatisfaction (someone else, an addiction or an all consuming hobby).
 - Without intimacy – shallow playing; law of diminishing returns
 - What kind of marriage comes from a guy who mainly emphasizes intimacy?
 - How strong is it without the others?
 - Becomes a kind of marriage cloister...avoid the outsider; too much weight for the relationship to bear.
 - Tendency toward hiding yourself; learning about them in order to keep them happy (i.e. not rocking your boat).
 - What does the relationship feel like with this and not much of the others?
 - Without Christ - intimacy can only go so far; where do you get the stamina, wisdom and leadership that intimacy will require you to have? You can't give what you don't have. Narcissistic (focused on 'us') no upward or outward
 - Without delight – feels like it's always intense or boring; a drag; no joy
 - Without commitment - endless discussion with no change; feelings trump every conversation; static.⁴

In all of these imbalances husbands tend to believe that they are trying very hard and resent the sense they get from their wife that it's never good enough.

So, let's just say, you have plenty of other things to focus on besides your wife's failings.

Also, you get to have an increasing sense of your need for and gratitude toward God.

As we explore these simple principles in the next few weeks, it is important that you offer suggestions to all of us from your strengths or experiences and humbly devote yourself to learning from the strengths/experiences of others so that you can effectively lead your marriage forward.

My Own Story

There are many weaknesses in my 'husbanding' both past and present.

Christ centered

⁴ Some of you are much more descriptive than prescriptive; leading you to spend much, much too much time analyzing and much, much too little time taking action.

Most critically, I have not often led a Christ centered life where I trust Him alone to care for all my needs - how and when he wishes - as I attend to his agenda for my life.

Without this, I find myself disappointed in her; full of self-righteousness - "I'm trying so hard and she's not lifting a finger" & self-pity - "I can't believe what I have to put up with".

Delight

I haven't always delighted in my wife, especially in creating enjoyable experiences together.

I'm often stumped about what fun thing to do with her and

I can be reluctant to sacrifice by doing things with her that she would enjoy but I would not (i.e. or I do it but not with any real engagement).

Also, the frequency of me expressing gratitude is inadequate.

She still looks startled when I praise or thank her

Much of my talk to and around her involves 'playful teasing' which as often as not is me criticizing her under the guise of humor (e.g. the video of Evan revelation).

My overall enthusiasm is pretty low (i.e. It's part of how I'm built).

Intimacy

I actually tend toward intimacy, being curious about her thoughts, goals and feelings.

But, I haven't always been honest with her about my own - avoiding the grief I might get if I were honest about my sins, my desires or my disappointments.

I tend to think more than do; wait for the right time rather than make it the right time

Commitment

I'm naturally loyal but have had to overcome a habit of withdrawing rather than cleaving to her.

I found her agitation about things that need to be done (practical and spiritual) a real threat to my hunger for peace & quiet.

I would say that past involvement with porn has been a way that I have wormed my way out of commitment to my wife

...getting from fantasy the lust I've had to be wanted & desired when I didn't feel I was getting it from my wife.

...rather than entrusting my desires to God and then giving my wife the gift of total commitment.

...justifying myself b/c of her behavior/distraction/disinterest

It's only been in the past few years that I've become more consistently committed to her spiritual success.

Prior to this, I was willing to discipline my wife but most often when her attitudes or behaviors affected me in some negative way.

I can give up too easily when I'm blocked...need more 'like hell' instead of 'oh well'

Questions to consider (if unmarried...sub. 'friend' for 'marriage' or 'wife')

- 1. What is your biggest disappointment in marriage? Or what is your greatest longing for marriage?**
- 2. What is your wife's biggest disappointment in marriage? Or your friends?**
- 3. What would you most like to see change in your husbanding? Or male friendships?**
- 4. What is your reaction to the statement, "If there's a problem in marriage, it's the husband's fault."**
- 5. Of these principles, which one(s) would your wife say are your weakest? Or your male friends?
Be specific. Saying "I suck at everything" isn't that helpful. Neither is, "I'm awesome at every one of them."**
- 6. Why might it be difficult to stay focused on your own role and not your wife's?**

BEING A CHRIST CENTERED MAN

INTRODUCTION

Did you think that your wife would make you happy?

If you could be totally self-aware and honest you'd have to admit that you married because you thought your wife would make you happy.

You saw something great about her. Then after you married her you realized that what was cool about her...

- needed more development than you thought;⁵
- was more attached to her own self-centered goals than you realized;⁶
- had a dark side that you didn't notice earlier;⁷
- didn't outweigh the faults you now see; or
- simply seemed to disappear.⁸

How do you react to disappointment with your wife?

Depending on your personality and life experience, you may have any number of reactions to this disappointment – avoiding; demanding; punishing; self-pity; getting busy with more interesting things; etc.

These are the thoughts and behaviors of a self-focused/self-trusting man – what he is or is not getting from his wife is all he can think about.

But, knowing this or even wanting to change does not make it possible to change - at least not for long.

There is something more that must be believed and clung to.

LEARN TO LIVE FROM GOD'S GRACE

Two huge threats toward my marriage are my own self-focus and self-trust.

Because of self-focus I constantly tune in to what I want from the relationship or what I need to protect in the relationship.

For example, my wife is an agitator. Her mind is always full of observations and plans.

As a self-focused man I often feel trapped between two threats:

- on the one hand listening to her takes time from me and may involve me taking some action step that I did not have in mind when she started talking;

5 Maybe she was warm and friendly but only toward people she felt close to.

6 Maybe she paid close attention to her appearance but it was because she craved admiration from others

7 Maybe she's a hard worker but that often comes at the expense of relational sensitivity; or she has lots of functional expectations for everyone around her.

8 One of the most common complaints I hear from husbands is that their wife was very sexual when dating/engaged and then her sexual interest appeared to vanish after marriage. When dating they felt a promise of constant sexual satisfaction only to end up feeling defrauded or deceived later on. I often hear a similar complaint from wives concerning their husband's attentiveness before and after marriage. They are disappointed because they entered marriage as takers and are now disappointed takers.

- on the other hand, I can't brush the conversation aside because it will bother her and then my peace and quiet get disturbed.

Because of self-trust I keep falling back to techniques I learned as a kid to cope with getting or not getting what my self-focused heart desires:

- Avoiding people keeps me from feeling drawn into their issues
- Concealing my negative thought and failures keeps them from rocking my boat
- Pursuing CPR keeps me distracted from work, pain & difficulty.
- Keeping the focus on others makes me seem loving/wise and has the added benefit of avoiding any negative scrutiny.

Real change from a taking or stingy man to a loving man requires a change from a self-focused & self-trusting man to a God-focused & God-trusting man.

Such men know and believe that Christ has and will provide for every need.

They are grateful sons rather than orphans.⁹

Galatians 1:3-5 May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace. ⁴ **Jesus gave his life for our sins**, just as God our Father planned, in order to rescue us from this evil world in which we live. ⁵ All glory to God forever and ever! Amen.

Galatians 4:4-7 But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. ⁵ God sent him **to buy freedom for us** who were slaves to the law, so that he could **adopt us** as his very own children. ⁶ And because we are his children, God has sent the **Spirit** of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, "Abba, Father. ⁷ Now you are no longer a slave but God's own child. And since you are his child, God has made you his **heir**.

Galatians 6:14 As for me, may I never boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of that cross, my interest in this world has been crucified, and the world's interest in me has also died.

The heart of these verses is the great news from God that:

- Jesus atoned for you,
- rescued you from a life of performance righteousness,
- freed you from addiction to what this world offers,
- adopted you,
- became one with you,
- gave his Spirit to you and
- has an inheritance for you.

⁹ An orphan has a small view of God & the Gospel of Jesus Christ. An orphan feels alone in the world.

And the question he asks is in light of all this, what happened to your joy?

Galatians 4:15 Where is that joyful and grateful spirit you felt (when you first received the gospel)?

The man who lives in and out of the gospel:

is focused on God out of gratitude for all He's done;

trusts God because of the many reliable promises He's made to provide for every need and

glorifies God because God alone deserves that kind of weight.

This man does not show up hungry and needy but full and confident to his marriage.

To be a great husband, you must preach the gospel to yourself and your friends constantly and prefer its provisions over any that you might grasp for yourself.

Our natural approach to conflict is to focus on what an opponent did to us. Yet if we try to resolve conflict by focusing only on what someone else did wrong, we never reach a real solution. God's approach begins with us understanding the gospel—everything Jesus Christ accomplished for us on the cross. Through the gospel, God treats us with extraordinary, unearned kindness. And his gracious response to us gives us power to respond to others in an entirely new way. Once we understand how the good news of Jesus empowers real reconciliation, we can begin to learn and apply God's practical steps to peacemaking.

Sande, *Resolving Everyday Conflicts*

Sande, Ken; Johnson, Kevin (2011-05-01). *Resolving Everyday Conflict* (Kindle Locations 107-112). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

Let's consider what it takes to live a gospel life.

1. Believing that you are a great sinner *(the paper, "Sin & Idolatry" is for this)*

Notice what takes the place of God in your life - idolatries

Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs.

Jonah 2:8

An idol is anything raised up above God, from which we hope to draw our needs.¹⁰

In their proper place, many of these idols are good and appropriate longings but they become idols when they get elevated to ultimate importance in our hearts and when we become the administrators of those needs

We ourselves are the 'little gods' behind the idols.

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do

¹⁰ This is why the NT properly identifies pleonexia as idolatry Colossians 3:5; In this sense, idolatry is 'overdesire.'

not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. James 4:1-3

What are these desires?

Well, anything can be elevated to ultimate status but commonly the following are typical:

- **Comfort/Pleasure/Rest**
- **Approval/Desirability**
- **Security/Control/Power**
- **Significance/Meaning**

Since Christ is God & we are in Christ – we have everything we need according to Colossians 2:9-10.

We no longer need to extract these needs from others or from the world.¹¹

Sande describes *The Progression of an Idol*, in his article *Getting to the Heart of Conflict*. He says idolatry begins with a desire, which morphs into a demand about which I judge and punish others

How can we identify our idols?

Well, interestingly, we find God often leads us into circumstances explicitly intended to expose them – frequently in our marriage.

Often we can look back at certain disappointing or exasperating themes in our life and spot a whole series of circumstances or conflicts related to disruption of our comfort/pleasure

OR that have left us feeling like we are powerless

OR we become aware, one after another, of people who don't like us and won't resolve things

OR we keep failing at things we find important and meaningful.

When God exposes us, our inordinate emotions, our sinful behaviors & our mental focus point to our idol(s) like a compass.¹²

Emotions – we feel anger when a desire is blocked, anxious when it is threatened, bored when it isn't available or devastated when it is lost to us.

¹¹ We don't need to take from others (3:5-10) – using, attacking & deceiving others is evidence that we don't know or believe we have everything we need.

¹² Colossians 3:11-17

Beyond all this, we all walk around with a sort of emotional 'background music' in our soul that reflects what's going on in our hearts.

Under grace it's joy, peace, faith, gratitude & hope.¹³

In the flesh (i.e. under the influence of our idolatries) - sadness, anxiety, anger, self-loathing, hopelessness, complaining and dread.

Behaviors – using, attacking, avoiding or deceiving people to get or protect our cherished desire.

This is so different from the affection & service that spontaneously flow toward others for those in Christ who 'get' grace and are living in it.

Mental focus – preoccupation with re-playing grievances; rehearsing responses, planning strategies and day dreaming about getting what we crave.

*Ask God to reprogram your heart so you find more joy in pleasing him and serving others than getting your own way.
(modified from) Resolving Everyday Conflict, Sande*

2. Turning toward and trusting God for everything

In repentance and rest you will be saved, In quietness and trust is your strength. Isaiah 30:15

We must repent and confess our infidelity to Him and to others.

Make no excuses (what she did, was the occasion, not the cause of what you did wrong; the cause is your own sinful heart)

Recognize your deep flesh commitments and wrestle with God about them

So, we must preach the gospel to ourselves. We must remind ourselves that we have all we need in Christ. The gospel doesn't stop at our justification. It's the heart of our sanctification too.

¹³ Moreland & Issler use the mnemonic Glad – Sad – Mad – Dread - Dreams to ask themselves questions that might evoke emotional insight. In *The Lost Virtue of Happiness*, p.61
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Then, we must take our stand in Christ – that He knows and will provide for every need; that we are complete in Him; that we can completely trust Him with our life.

When we do this our sense of our own sinfulness and God's grace grow such that the Cross of Christ grows with it and so our appreciation of it.

In repentance and rest you will be saved, In quietness and trust is your strength.
Isaiah 30:15

- **Believing that JC atoned for your sin** (passive righteousness)
Prefer the atonement of Christ over self-righteousness
(Zeph.3:11).

[defensiveness handout]
[put the shield on the whiteboard]

What are your defenses intended to defend – what feels attacked?
You can actually be attacked without being defensive.
Most of the time, you are defensive when you are not being attacked.

Thank God that Christ died for your sins.

Christ is the only God whom, if you serve Him, gives great reward and pleasure and whom, if you fail Him has already died for you. Every other idol leaves hungry when you serve it well and crushes you when you fail it.

Many get stuck on their own fault and they shift back and forth excusing and then accusing themselves.

"Remorse and regret are a part of the self-salvation project."

Keller, Prodigal God

Self-condemnation is as ugly as self-righteousness. In fact it's the reverse side of the same coin. "I'm right/innocent" & "I really suck" are both focused on self-abilities. The one is self-congratulatory, the other is self-condemning.

But, we need to think less about ourselves and hope less in ourselves focusing/trusting more upon God.

“Sin turns you in on yourself, blinding you to God... *Self-loathing* exalts your opinion of yourself as supremely important; shame exalts the opinion of other people. But...what God chooses to “remember” about you *is* decisive. Your conscience, if well-tuned, is...dependent on the stance He takes.”

David Powlison from, *Making All Things New*

- **Believing that you are an adopted son**

Take your longings to God, trusting Him to satisfy you how and when He decides.

Trust God to attend to what you really need.

Ask Him for what you need to serve her (2 Pet.1:2-3; Col.1 – knowledge of His will, wisdom & understanding)

Remembering that you are one with God through the Spirit

Never alone

Revelation, Reminder, Instruction, Leadership, Opportunities created, etc.

Reflecting on your certain future with God in this life and the next

Review the biblical perspective on God’s grace and being a husband.
(handout)

Are you feeding off of Christ so you can approach your wife full instead of needy?

We are called to live from God's provisions not for our wife's (Jn.13; 1 Pet.2:21-23)

Do you accept your role in the marriage – to be THE love giver?

- **Do you avoid sacrificing for her?**

Husbands are to be the first to sacrifice in the relationship, not the best at protecting themselves.¹⁴

¹⁴ Some guys spend more time avoiding the sacrifices of husbanding than demanding things.

- **Do you demand, manipulate and punish her for not giving you what you want?**

Husbands are the love givers for the relationship not the love takers¹⁵

- **Do you dwell on how she's not giving you enough love or respect** (i.e. are you a pity whore)?

Husbands are to focus intently on their role, not their wives¹⁶

To the extent you decide to expect everything from God and nothing from her ☐ you'll succeed.

LEARN TO LIVE FOR GOD'S GLORY

Another huge threat to my marriage is my self-glory. Self-glory is the habit of putting the spotlight on myself and my agenda.

Because of self-glory I have things I want my wife to think and do that will make me look great and move my agenda forward (i.e. my agenda may be bad, neutral or even good but my purpose is to be admired & respected).

Anything that casts a bad light on me, directs attention to someone else or fails to advance my self-glorifying project is hated.

Defensiveness comes into play here as well as when my righteousness is questioned – the need to be admired, or at least not criticized, drives my defensiveness.

(A cautious recommendation: Paris Reidhead, *Ten Shekels and a Shirt*)

Maybe your happiness isn't God's goal right now...maybe His glory is his goal. Are you willing to subordinate your happiness for his glory?

- **Put God's glory above your own**

Look for ways to direct positive attention toward God.

Wondering aloud what God thinks about issues that arise & praying with her.

Passing on what you're learning about God from the Word & from life.

Repenting in front of her when you are glorifying yourself instead of God

¹⁵ Some guys demand things from their wives and actively punish them for not delivering.

¹⁶ Some guys aren't demanding but they are sure full of self-pity that they don't get what they want from their wife.

Self-pity is just a passive way of being demanding – I didn't get what I deserved.

They are masters at indirect punishment (e.g. pouting, withdrawing, confessing their wife's sins to others {i.e. gossip}, using humor to get even and retreating behind "just kidding").

- **Put God's agenda above your own.**
Ask God for what you need to love His daughter (Col.1 - knowledge of His will, wisdom, and understanding).

Think about your marriage in light of the Body of Christ.

Homework

- 1. Ask your wife and/or male friends, "If you could change anything about me, what would it be?"**
Don't defend or explain yourself. Whatever they say, ask them to elaborate. Ask them what it is like for them for you to be weak in this area. Ask for their forgiveness if appropriate.
- 2. Read the paper, *Sin and Idolatry*. What do you believe are your typical idolatries? In what way do they substitute for God? Why do you crave what they promise over what God promises?**
- 3. Read the upper room discourse in John 14-17. Notice how relational Jesus' promises are. What better thing does He offer in place of what you crave?**
- 4. What does God give - that you must you prefer - to help you love your wife?**
- 5. Identify one area where you want to change. What promise of God must you believe to make that change? What threats might you have to welcome in order to learn to trust God for that promise? What risk might you take that would threaten your idol but would honor God?**