



Creating a Gospel-Centered Marriage (Part I of V)

“Foundations” (Listening Guide)

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“Foundations”

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NOTE: Many people have asked how they can get a copy of the full seminar notebook (a.k.a. mentoring guide or study guide) referenced in this presentation. Summit members can pick up a copy of the notebook in the church office. For those outside the Summit family, you can request a PDF copy from Amy LaBarr (alabarr@summitrdu.com), office administrator over counseling.

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What Can I Hope to Get From this Seminar?

Whether you are here for personal needs, the needs of others, or a general interest in the topic, we hope that this seminar will benefit you. If we do our job well, parts of this seminar will speak to you personally. There will also be parts of this seminar that speak to aspects of this subject that are different from your own experience. What follows are **six unavoidable facts** that may help you profit from all of the material you hear (bold faced text taken from Paul Tripp and Tim Lane *How People Change*):

1. Someone in your life had a problem this week. That person may be you. Even if you are here for yourself, chances are you know or will know others who struggle in this area. Because we live in a fallen world and have a sin nature, we can be certain that we will battle with sin and suffering in our lives. Because we love people, we can be certain we will be called on to love and assist others in their battle with sin and suffering.

2. We have everything we need in the Gospel to help that person (2 Peter 1:3). God has given us Himself, the Gospel, the Bible, and the church and has promised that they are effective for all things that pertain to life and godliness. Our task as Christians is to grow in our understanding of and our ability to skillfully apply them to our struggles. These resources are the essence and source of “good advice,” and we hope to play a role in your efforts to apply and disseminate this “good advice.” We do not aim to present new material but new ways of applying the timeless, eternal truths of the Gospel that is found in Scripture.

3. That person will seek help from friends, family members, or pastors before seeking professionals. Counseling (broadly defined as seeking to offer hope and direction through relationship) happens all the time. We talk with friends over the phone, crying children in their rooms, spouses in the kitchen, fellow church members between services, and have endless conversations with ourselves. We listen to struggles, seek to understand, offer perspective, give advice, and follow up later. This is what the New Testament calls “one-anothering” and something that we are all called to do.

4. That person received either no help, bad help, or biblical, gospel-centered help. Not all counseling is good counseling. Not all advice that we receive from a Christian (even a Christian counselor) is Christian advice. Too often we are advised to look within ourselves for the answers to our problems, or we are told that we are good enough, strong enough, or smart enough to overcome our problems. Hopefully today, you will see how the Bible calls us to something (rather Someone) better, bigger, and more effective than these messages.

5. If they did not receive meaningful help, they will go elsewhere. When we do not receive good advice (pointing us to enduring life transformation), we keep looking. We need answers to our struggles. This means that as people find other unfulfilling answers they will eventually (by God’s grace) come to a Christian for advice. When they eventually come to you, we hope that you will be better prepared because of our time together today.

6. Whatever help they received, they will use to help others! We become evangelists who speak of the things that make life better (this is why the Gospel is simply called “Good News”). We quite naturally share the things that we find to be effective. Our prayer for you today is that you will find the material presented today effective for fighting your struggles and that you will be so comforted and encouraged by it that it will enable you to be a more passionate and effective ambassador of the Gospel in the midst of “normal” daily conversations.

Creating a Gospel-Centered Marriage Mentoring Series

This seminar is one piece of a five part series designed to facilitate mentoring relationships for married or engaged couples (one-on-one or in a group setting). Our goal in these seminars is to cover the key subjects that often hinder, but could greatly enhance, a couple's ability to experience all that God intended marriage to be.

We believe that lasting change happens in relationship. Private change tends to be short-lived. Living things that are exposed to light grow. Living things that are kept in the dark wither. This is why we designed this series to encourage you to give your marriage the light of Christian community by studying these materials with others.

These materials are built upon a central premise – God gave us marriage so that we would know the gospel more clearly and more personally. It is the gospel that gives us joy. Marriage is meant to be a living picture of the gospel-relationship between God and His bride, the church. For this reason, we have two goals for you as you go through this study:

1. That you would get to know and enjoy your spouse in exciting, new, and profoundly deeper ways, so that...
2. ... you would get to know and enjoy God in exciting, new, and profoundly deeper ways.

This series of seminars is arranged around five topics that represent the most common challenges that a marriage faces. While the difficulties of each area are acknowledged, the tone of these seminars is optimistic. We believe that those things that cause the greatest pain when done wrongly bring the fullest joy when done according to God's design.

These seminars are both sequential and interdependent. Each seminar is meant to build upon the ones before it and lead into the ones after it. If you are going through these materials for general marital enrichment or pre-marital counseling, it is best to complete them in order. However, if you are looking for guidance in a particular area of need, it is possible to start with the subject of greatest urgency in your marriage.

1. Foundations: Why is marriage hard? Why do so many marriages that begin in sincere love end in divorce? What are the essential things a couple should focus on in order to have a marriage that flourishes? What is a covenant, and why is marriage a covenant? Why do we have a marriage ceremony? What are the roles for a Christian husband and wife? What if I don't "fit" the masculine-feminine stereotypes or don't have the personality to match a "traditional" husband/wife?

2. Communication: What does a couple talk about over a life time? What if I'm not good with words or listening? How do we maintain friendship when we're having to keep up with so many logistics? How do we disagree and protect our marriage without losing what's important to each of us individually? Why do words matter so much, and why can they hurt so badly? How do we make things right after they go wrong and not let negative momentum build?

3. Finances: Why are money problems the number one cause of divorce? How do we maintain reasonable expectations for money in a debt-sick culture? How do two people manage their money together when it is hard enough to manage as a single person? Who should administrate the finances, and how involved should the other person be? How do we learn self-control and contentment as a couple? How can "budget" become an exciting or, at least, pleasant word?

4. Decision Making: How do we manage our time? How do we navigate situations where we each want good things that cannot both happen? How do we determine God's will for our personal and marital lives? How do we functionally express the biblical roles of headship and submission? How do we ensure that life's tough decisions draw us closer to God and each other instead of creating distance? How do we respond when bad things happen to a good marriage?

5. Intimacy: How do you maintain the "spark" of marriage over a lifetime? How do you continue learning each other without feeling like you know all there is to know? How do we protect our expectations from highly romanticized cultural ideals? How many ways are there to express love, and why are they all necessary? How do we enjoy a balance of both intimacy and intercourse? How do we grow as lovers throughout our marriage?

Evaluation: Knowing Each Other and Having Healthy Expectations

Note: Each major section of the Creating a Gospel-Centered Marriage series will have a brief evaluation tool to help you assess your marital strengths and weaknesses. Complete the evaluation before reading the material, then review the assessment again after completing each section to learn the accuracy of your initial self-assessment.

Instructions: Read the following descriptive statements. Consider how well they describe your experience or perspective on your marriage. If you are engaged, consider how well they describe your courtship experience or your beliefs about what you think your coming marriage should be. Mark the answer that best fits how you respond:

(CD) Completely Disagree, (SD) Somewhat Disagree, (NS) Not Sure, (SA) Somewhat Agree, or (CA) Completely Agree

1. I recognize that marriage is a living relationship and will require work and attention.	CD SD NS SA CA
2. I recognize that we will both change significantly throughout our marriage.	CD SD NS SA CA
3. My spouse recognizes marriage is a living relationship and requires work and attention.	CD SD NS SA CA
4. We have shown the ability to love and support one another in good times and in bad.	CD SD NS SA CA
5. I resist the urge to think that marriage or my spouse should solve life's struggles.	CD SD NS SA CA
6. I resist the temptation to think that it is my spouse's job to make me happy.	CD SD NS SA CA
7. I am free from the distorting influence of a past abusive relationship or home of origin.	CD SD NS SA CA
8. My spouse is free from the distorting influence of a past abusive relationship or home.	CD SD NS SA CA
9. I have resisted making a list of things that I want to change about my spouse.	CD SD NS SA CA
10. I believe my spouse has resisted making a list of things he/she wants to change about me.	CD SD NS SA CA
11. I recognize marriage requires me to willingly do things I'm not good at or don't enjoy.	CD SD NS SA CA
12. My spouse knows marriage requires them to do things they're not good at or don't enjoy.	CD SD NS SA CA
13. I resist the temptation to expect my spouse to compensate for my weaknesses.	CD SD NS SA CA
14. My spouse resists the temptation to expect me to compensate for his/her weaknesses.	CD SD NS SA CA
15. I treat my spouse with more honor than my friends, family, co-workers, or customers.	CD SD NS SA CA
16. My spouse treats me better than his/her friends, family, co-workers, or customers.	CD SD NS SA CA
17. I know the important life events that shaped my spouse's character and beliefs.	CD SD NS SA CA
18. My spouse knows the important life events that shaped my character and beliefs.	CD SD NS SA CA
19. I enjoy hearing about the day-to-day events of my spouse's life.	CD SD NS SA CA
20. My spouse enjoys hearing about the day-to-day events of my life.	CD SD NS SA CA
21. I regularly think about how to bless my spouse based on what I know of them.	CD SD NS SA CA
22. My spouse regularly thinks about how to bless me based upon what they know of me.	CD SD NS SA CA
23. I am comfortable knowing how to encourage my spouse when he/she is down.	CD SD NS SA CA
24. My spouse is comfortable knowing how to encourage me when I'm down.	CD SD NS SA CA
25. I enjoy learning about my spouse's preferences, interests, goals, and dreams.	CD SD NS SA CA
26. My spouse enjoys learning about my preferences, interests, goals and dreams.	CD SD NS SA CA
27. I know my spouse's fears and insecurities and we can talk about them.	CD SD NS SA CA
28. My spouse knows my fears and insecurities and we can talk about them.	CD SD NS SA CA
29. Our marriage is free from any use of illegal drugs.	CD SD NS SA CA
30. Our marriage is free from any abuse or excessive use of alcohol.	CD SD NS SA CA
31. Our marriage is free from any gambling.	CD SD NS SA CA
32. Our marriage is free from lying to cover up painful or embarrassing events.	CD SD NS SA CA
33. Our marriage is free from verbal, emotional, or physical abuse.	CD SD NS SA CA
34. Our marriage is free from controlling behaviors during conflict or because of jealousy.	CD SD NS SA CA
35. We resist the temptation to threaten divorce during conflict.	CD SD NS SA CA
36. Past romantic relationships do not cause me to distrust my spouse.	CD SD NS SA CA
37. Past romantic relationships do not cause my spouse to distrust me.	CD SD NS SA CA

Key to Survey Scoring: Tabulate your score for each set of question using the following numerical values. The scoring is weighted with the “neutral” NS answer being a negative score, because if you have not defined or pursued important aspects of your marriage relationship it will negatively impact the marriage.

CD	–	Negative 3 points	SA	–	Positive 1 points
SD	–	Negative 2 points	CA	–	Positive 2 points
NS	–	Negative 1 point			

If your total score...

- ...**matches or exceeds the total number of questions**, then this area of marriage is an area of strength.
- ...**is less than the total number of questions**, then this area of marriage could use attention or refinement.
- ...**is a negative number**, then this area of marriage should be given immediate and concentrated attention.

➤ Questions 1-16: (Total: _____ in 16 questions)

This set of questions examines the “**understanding relationships**” aspect of a gospel-centered marriage. If we have unrealistic expectations of relationships, then marriage will inevitably disappoint us; not because the marriage is bad, but because the measure of our contentment is not realistic.

Recommended Resources: *Relationships: A Mess Worth Making* by Tim Lane and Paul Tripp; *When People are Big and God is Small* by Ed Welch. Chapter one of this seminar will address these kinds of questions.

➤ Questions 17-28: (Total: _____ in 12 questions)

This set of questions examines the “**knowing each other**” aspect of a gospel-centered marriage. A common temptation in marriage is to neglect continually learning about your spouse. Familiarity has a tendency to produce laziness in most areas of life. The time and energy you devote to learning your spouse and family should rival your passion for your career or favorite hobby.

Recommended Resources: Each seminar in this series is interspersed with Couple Discussion Questions. Use these to facilitate ongoing conversation. Chapter two of this seminar will address these kinds of questions.

➤ Questions 29-37: (Total: _____ in 9 questions)

This set of questions examines the “**red flags**” that would destroy a gospel-centered marriage. Often love causes us to want to overlook significant problems. While love does cover a multitude of sins (1 Pet. 4:8), it does not call us to ignore destructive patterns. The most loving and healthy response to a red flag is to take the steps necessary to remove it. If you are engaged, these are reasons to postpone the wedding.

Recommended Resource: If one of these areas presents as a problem in your marriage, you should seek the guidance of a counselor who has expertise in that area. This seminar is for marital enrichment. The issues addressed in these questions are either marital restoration or personal struggle subjects and should be dealt with in personal counseling.

Sometimes within a marriage the problem is not one specific area or issue but an overall imbalance in the effort, skill, thoughtfulness, and awareness being put into the marriage. Below is a list of questions that reveal your perspective on your effort and your spouse’s effort in the marriage. Use the same numerical scoring system as you used above. In this case, the closer your scores are to another, the more mutual (and typically healthy) the marriage.

_____ **My Score** – Using the same scoring system as above add together the score for questions 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 20, 22, 24, 26, 28, 30, 32, 34, and 36.

_____ **My Spouse’s Score** – Using the same scoring system as above add together the score for questions 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 21, 23, 25, 27, 29, 31, 33, 35, and 37.

Chapter I

Why Is Marriage Hard? The Obvious and Not-So-Obvious Things We Rarely Discuss

Plumb Lines: These are the “sticky” statements that capture the core messages of this chapter.

- Character is a better predictor of marital satisfaction than compatibility.
- You will be married to at least a dozen people over the course of one marriage.
- We don’t need higher or lower expectations; we need healthy and articulated expectations.
- The “ordinary” moments of marriage are often the most significant moments in a marriage.

Memorize: Luke 9:23-25 (ESV), “And he said to all, ‘If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?’” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “All” – You’ll never be a better spouse than you are disciple. Growing as a spouse requires becoming Christ-like.
- “Deny” – Marriage exists in a context of limited resources (time, money, attention, etc...) and requires sacrifice.
- “Daily” – Like discipleship, a good marriage is achieved in daily moments and decisions, not “special” moments.
- “Save... lose... loses...save” – A satisfying marriage is the product of two people learning joy by sacrificial love.
- “Profit” – It is good to want a great marriage, but we’re often misguided on how to attain, protect, and enrich it.

Presentation Notes

Why?!? Why do so many marriages that begin with sincere love and the best intentions end in divorce? Why do so many marriages that start with great promise and greater dreams end up just staying together “for the kids” and “living as roommates”? These are disturbingly relevant questions regardless of where we are in our marital journey (i.e., dating, engaged, newlywed, or celebrating an anniversary).

Whatever the answer is, Christians are not immune to “it.” The divorce rate among Christian couples is equivalent to the rest of the culture. If the statistics are true, then much of what we, as Christians, are doing to correct the problem is ineffective, misguided, or possibly even feeding the problem.

This chapter may feel a little scary. But it is necessary to define accurately what we are seeking to correct. While it is easy to be falsely positive at the beginning of a journey, the result would be an embittered, disenfranchised marriage; however, if we identify accurately the obstacles ahead, we will be encouraged and unified as we navigate those challenges.

Read Luke 14: 28-30. As Jesus speaks of “counting the cost” in Luke 14, that is what we will be doing martially in this chapter. Unless we count the cost, we are likely to lay a bad foundation (v. 29) for marriage and not be prepared to fulfill our lifetime vow. Think of every major decision you’ve ever made (i.e., choosing a career, buying a house). Do you remember feeling overwhelmed as you realized the commitment? Yet that fear and the advice you received made you wiser (or at least it should have, Proverbs 1:7). That is the purpose of this chapter.

20 Things that Make Marriage Hard

“Our personal dreams for marriage seem so beautiful and convincing that we don’t stop to consider that God’s dreams for us may be different (p. 60).” Winston Smith in *Marriage Matters*

1. The mundane nature of everyday life.
2. The investor to owner perspective change.

“I am persuaded that it is more regular than irregular for couples to get married with unrealistic expectations (p. 16)... The person who was once your escape from responsibility has become your most significant responsibility. Spending time together is radically different from living together. Reasons for attraction now become sources of irritation (p. 32)... Marriages don't typically change with an explosion. Marriages typically change by the process of erosion (p. 254).” Paul Tripp in *What Did You Expect?*

3. Overly high expectations of marriage.
4. Overly high expectations of your spouse.
5. Overly high expectations of love.

“But here's the problem. My wife does not learn about my sins like a physician learns about my diseases or like my counselor learns about my anger and fear. She knows my sins because they so often are committed against her... And there's the Great Problem of marriage. The one person in the whole world who holds your heart in her hand, whose approval and affirmation you most long for and need, is the one who is hurt more deeply by your sins than anyone else on the planet (p. 162)... Marriage does not so much bring you into confrontation with your spouse as confront you with yourself. Marriage shows you a realistic, unflattering picture of who you are and then takes you by the scruff of the neck and forces you to pay attention to it (p. 140).” Tim Keller in *The Meaning of Marriage*

6. We are sinners and we are self-centered.
7. Viewing compatibility as a noun instead of a verb.

“Destructive to marriage is the self-fulfillment ethic that assumes marriage and the family are primarily institutions of personal fulfillment, necessary for us to become 'whole' and happy. The assumption is that there is someone just right for us to marry and that if we look closely enough we will find the right person. This moral assumption overlooks a crucial aspect of marriage. It fails to appreciate the fact that we will always marry the wrong person (p. 417).” Stanley Hauerwas in “Sex and Politics” in *Christian Century* (April 19, 1978).

8. Having to do things that I don't like and am not good at.
9. We try to make marriage our church.

“When you marry a person, you don’t know what they are going to be like in thirty years (p. 58).” John Piper in *This Momentary Marriage*

10. You are both changing people.

Other Challenges in the Larger Notebook

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 11. No longer having to be “on” once we’re married. 12. Sharing space and co-managing limited resources. 13. Two (or more) different ways of “doing family.” 14. An undefined and changing role. 15. Low view of commitment. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 16. Wrong view of ownership over the marriage. 17. Unwillingness to work for a good relationship. 18. Bracing against past hurts. 19. A real enemy who wants to destroy marriage. 20. Unwillingness to be weak. |
|--|---|

Closing

It would be easy to be overwhelmed at this point and think that a good marriage requires a perfect spouse. These questions reveal how far short we all fall from being a perfect spouse. But Jesus put this kind of high standard before anyone who wanted to be his disciple, “You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect (Matthew 5:48).” His purpose, however, wasn’t discouragement, but revival.

That is the aim of a gospel-centered approach to marriage. We want more than marital enrichment. We want marital revival! We desperately need an intense awakening to what God called marriage to be; not a mere nudging towards more functional principles. The general condition of marriage in our culture cries out to God for a radical transformation of our “common sense” and “best practices” about marriage, because they’re not working.

If we are going to seek a gospel-centered marriage, we must realize such an endeavor will cast us to our knees begging God for the grace, strength, and wisdom to bless our spouse and homes in ways that we are, in ourselves, utterly incapable and sometimes even unwilling to do. But from our knees we will find that God is both willing and capable to give the kind of marriage we could have never had on our feet.

That brings us to one final virtue that is absolutely necessary to experience and enjoy a gospel-centered marriage – humility.

Marriage is a journey from our weakness (both spouses) to God’s strength. Due to the effects of sin, many of our weaknesses are exaggerated strengths. So even our strengths must be handled with humility or they betray us and our marriage. But when handled with humility even our weaknesses become a blessing to our marriage. It is only the gospel that will teach us to view life this way.

Chapter 2

What Makes Marriage Work? Finding the Essential Core of a Good Marriage

Plumb Lines: These are the “sticky” statements that capture the core messages of this chapter.

- The best spouse is the best learner, so we will never “arrive” as a spouse.
- We will have to take the risk of being known before we experience the joy of being loved.
- If we are going to do marriage enrichment well, it must be a lifestyle connected with our life purpose.
- A thriving marriage is lived in a story larger than either spouse, or even both spouses combined.

Memorize: Ephesians 5:28-30 (ESV), “In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body.” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “In the same way” – We’re to present our spouse to God spotless and holy as Christ does the church (Eph 5:27).
- “As their own bodies” – What we’d do for our self should be the minimum we’re willing to do for our spouse.
- “Loves his wife love himself” – We best love ourselves by loving our spouse; creating a home marked by peace.
- “Nourishes and cherishes” – We’re to be excellent (willing, skillful, and frequent) at what builds up our spouse.
- “As Christ does” – We can only love our spouse this way because of God’s love for us (1 John 4:10-11, 19).

Presentation Notes

What?!? What does it take to make marriage work? How does our marriage enrichment not degenerate into a series of random acts of kindness driven or distracted by the tyranny of the urgent? How do we ensure that our individual acts of marital enrichment are working together to build a momentum and gather energy from one another?

These are important questions to ask, even if you are not currently discouraged or overwhelmed by the number of seemingly unrelated things that need to be done to improve your marriage. Marital enrichment that feels random is hard to maintain, easily forgotten, and tend to get bumped down the priority chain. This is why we must not allow marital enrichment to remain random.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the “big picture” that gives meaning to all the “little pieces” of marital enrichment. This chapter does not give all the “little pieces,” that is the purpose of the rest of this series. But you should get the framework to make enrichment seem purposeful.

“One of the riskiest, but most rewarding benefits of a marriage relationship is the exhilarating experience of knowing and being known, of revealing and having another person reveal himself or herself to you (p. 19)... If the person who knows you best also loves you most, your marriage will be truly special (p. 88).” Dennis Rainey (editor) in *Preparing for Marriage*

- We will have to take the risk of being known before we experience the joy of being loved.

Learning to Tell Your Story

Stories are made up events, but a story is larger than the events that comprise it. This will be a guiding principle as you learn to tell your marriage story. You will begin by listing formative events in your life, courtship, and marriage. But telling your life-marriage story is about more than building a chronologically-arranged list of events.

Events: Begin each worksheet by writing in the key life events which shaped you in the order in which they happened. Questions to prompt you in this part of the exercise are included in each section below. For "Birth to Wedding" general time markers are given to help you outline these events. In the other two, it would be wise to begin by charting the time periods that will divide that segment of your life-marriage story.

Experience: After you list the key events, it is helpful to assess how you experienced those events. A simple "-5" to "+5" scale has been provided. These represent pleasant (peaceful, joyful, excited, etc...) and unpleasant (i.e., angry, anxious, grieving, etc...) responses to each item. From this you should begin to be able to see what the major seasons of your life-marriage have been like: good seasons (+3 to +5), bad seasons (-3 to -5), mixed seasons, and "blah" seasons (-2 to +2).

In this part of the chart place an "x" where that event ranks on the unpleasant-to-pleasant spectrum. Once you have completed the list and rated the experience of each event, connect the dots to give yourself a visual of how that section of your life story has unfolded. A sample of this completed exercise is provided at www.bradhambrick.com/foundations.

You should begin to notice whether the major shifts (good or bad) in your life have been the result of your choices or situational changes outside your control. You can probably begin to notice where your instincts towards trust or mistrust gained their current force.

Meaning: There is a "comment" box beside each event for you to summarize how you originally understood the significance of that event upon you. Comments can be serious or playful, but they should accurately represent the way that event actually impacted you at that time.

"The Christian teaching does not offer a choice between fulfillment and sacrifice but rather mutual fulfillment through mutual sacrifice... So, what do you need to make marriage work? You need to know the secret, the gospel, and how it gives you both the power and pattern for your marriage (p. 47)... Within this Christian vision for marriage, here's what it means to fall in love. It is to look at another person and get a glimpse of the person God is creating, and to say, 'I see who God is making you, and it excites me! I want to be part of that. I want to partner with you and God in the journey you are taking to his throne. And when we get there, I will look at your magnificence and say, 'I always knew you could be like this. I got glimpses of it on earth, but now look at you!' (p. 121)" Tim Keller in *The Meaning of Marriage*

Sketching our Marriage Story

Birth to Wedding

Unpleasant Experience
Pleasant Experience
Comments

-5
-4
-3
-2
-1
+1
+2
+3
+4
+5

Birth												
Elementary Age												
Middle School Age												
High School Age												
College Age												
After												

Modified and adapted from *Preparing for Marriage* edited by Dennis Rainey (pages 36-37)

Gospel as the “Grand Narrative”

Most people are unable to talk about the gospel as the theme of their life because they have never thought through their life as a story. Hopefully, your work in the previous sections has removed this obstacle for you and your spouse. This section moves the three story exercises from merely reflective-relational exercises to tracing the hand of God through your life, marriage, fears, and dreams.

The gospel doesn't rewrite your story; it reinterprets your story. The facts of your life will not change, but the significance of those facts has (or, at least, can) change significantly. For this reason, it is suggested that you use color, more than words, to identify where the core themes of the gospel appear in your life-marriage story. The “x's” and line will not move, but they will become three dimensional and multi-colored.

The chart below contains the major themes of the gospel and a color-coding system. Use these colors to trace the line that runs through your charts. In some areas the colors may stack like a rainbow as you see multiple themes surrounding the same event.

Theme	Description	Color
God's Faithfulness	The gospel begins with God's faithfulness. Before, during, and after our sin and its affects, God is faithful. That is our hope. As the King of Kings (purple for royalty), we can count on God to be faithful. Where do you see God's faithfulness in your story?	Purple
Sin & Suffering	The gospel is needed because of the marring affects of sin and suffering upon our lives. We are born corrupted by sin. We live in a broken world with people who will hurt us. Our lives are marred (black like spilled ink on a work of art) by these realities. Where do you see sin and suffering in your story?	Black
Undeserved Love	We could not fix ourselves or make up for the wrongs we had done. We deserved punishment and rejection, but Christ lived the perfect life necessary to merit heaven and died the death we deserved (red represents his blood) in order to demonstrate the depth of God's great love for us. Where do see God's love and grace in your story?	Red
Faith / Hope	A story filled with sin and suffering should be a dark story. Whenever we experience faith and hope (yellow like the breaking of the morning sun) it is intended to be a reminder that our story has been invaded by Someone greater than our sin and suffering. Where do you see the themes of faith and hope in your story?	Yellow
Joy	Laughter is the privilege of those who feel safe. Soldiers in battle don't make jokes. Pleasure and joy are common-grace tastes of what God intends for His people and are meant to remind us of the home, Heaven, God provides for those who accept His gift of grace (orange for warm and inviting). Where do you see the theme of joy in your story?	Orange
Generosity	Without the gospel we live in a context of limited time, love, and resources. Before we experience the gospel, life is about getting as much of “it” (whatever you value most) as you can. Once we are filled with God's love we are freed to be generous (green represents money, which is commonly associated with generosity). Where do you see the theme of generosity (in yourself and others) in your story?	Green
Community	We are saved <i>by grace through faith into</i> a community called the church. This is how we realize that our life is about more than ourselves (blue to indicate the breadth of God's body, like the sky). Where do you see the theme of Christian community in your story?	Blue
Perseverance	By the gospel God forgives our sin (justification) and shapes our character (sanctification). Character shaping is the process by which God makes us like Jesus (brown for steady, solid growth like a tree). Where do you see the theme of perseverance in your story?	Brown
Surprise	Because of the truths of the gospel we are able to trust God with the unexpected, and God rarely works as we expect Him (asterisk to represent something out of the ordinary). Where do you see God's unexpected hand guiding your story?	Asterisk (*)

Now that you have completed tracing the gospel themes through your story, examine what you wrote as the significance or meaning of each event in the “comments” column. What did you learn, re-learn, or unlearn about God, the gospel, and your story?

Marriage Enrichment: The Lifestyle of Being a Life-Long Learner

A good fisherman never tires of learning about fishing. An avid scrap-booker is eager to learn new ways to make things cute or meaningful. A good spouse is defined less by their current skills and abilities and more by their willingness to be a continual learner of their partner.

A skilled spouse who grows lazy or distracted will soon live in a deteriorating marriage. A spouse with below average marriage skills who is consistently learning about their partner will experience the encouragement of steady marital improvement and a deepening affection for their spouse.

This has a simple, yet profound, implication – a good marriage is a lifestyle, not something you “finish.” As you go through these seminars, remember you are learning a gospel-centered way of life that blesses and gives life to your marriage, not a few biblically-based techniques to be activated when needed or turned back on when a problem arises.

The exercise “Celebrating Non-Moral Marital Differences” (found on the next page) is designed to help you think through and talk about this common marital pitfall. If you have been married for a number of years, a fruitful exercise is to use this chart to see how you and your spouse have changed over your marriage.

“It is not your husband or wife’s choices that you are rejecting, but God’s... It is God who formed your spouse with his or her natural gifts and personality, and after he did, he stood back and declared your spouse ‘good.’ It is hurtful to your spouse when you disrespect her for things she did not choose or reject her for things she cannot change. Every difference is an opportunity to celebrate God’s creative artistry (p. 211).” Paul Tripp in *What Did You Expect?*



Celebrating Our Non-Moral Marital Differences

Introduction: The longer we are married, the easier it can be to view the ways our spouse is different from us as "bad" (moral language) or as a sign of incompatibility (threatening language). This exercise is meant to help you see and celebrate the non-moral differences between you and your spouse. The attributes listed are neither morally good nor morally bad. Neither side nor the center is necessarily "holy." If you view these characteristics as moral qualities it will be harmful to your marriage. Your responsibility is to celebrate how God made your spouse and put the gospel on display finding ways to express loving unity in the midst of non-moral diversity.

Instructions: Write your initials where you believe you are on each spectrum. Write your spouse's initials where you believe he/she is on each spectrum. Compare your assessment with your spouse's assessment. Talk about (a) ways the two of you have viewed your differences as "bad" and this has caused conflict, (b) ways that your differences compliment one another well, and (c) how you have changed over the last few years.

Attribute	Scale	Attribute
Extrovert	_____	Introvert
Bold	_____	Timid
Calm	_____	Excitable
Reserved	_____	Expressive
Optimistic	_____	Pessimistic
Flexible	_____	Structured
Logical	_____	Emotional
Athletic	_____	Non-Athletic
Loud	_____	Quiet
Sentimental	_____	Stoic
Outdoors	_____	Indoors
Trusting	_____	Cautious
Detailed	_____	Generalizer
Organized	_____	Disorganized
Confident	_____	Insecure
Spender	_____	Saver
Conventional	_____	Unconventional
Leader	_____	Follower
Punctual	_____	Non-punctual
Aggressive	_____	Passive

Modified and adapted from *Preparing for Marriage God's Way* by Wayne Mack (p. 11)

Evaluation: “We” Identity and Leave & Cleave

Note: Each major section of the Creating a Gospel-Centered Marriage series will have a brief evaluation tool to help you assess your marital strengths and weaknesses. Complete the evaluation before reading the material, then review the assessment again after completing each section to learn the accuracy of your initial self-assessment.

Instructions: Read the following descriptive statements. Consider how well they describe your experience or perspective on your marriage. If you are engaged, consider how well they describe your courtship experience or your beliefs about what you think your coming marriage should be. Mark the answer that best fits how you respond:

(CD) Completely Disagree, (SD) Somewhat Disagree, (NS) Not Sure, (SA) Somewhat Agree, or (CA) Completely Agree

- | | |
|---|----------------|
| 1. I enjoy becoming more of the kind of person who can be used by God to bless my spouse. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 2. My spouse enjoys becoming the kind of person God can use to bless me. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 3. I regularly and intentionally seek to be used by God to enrich the life of my spouse. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 4. My spouse regularly and intentionally seeks to be used by God to enrich my life. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 5. I spend time thinking about how we can realize my spouse's dreams and ambitions. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 6. My spouse spends time thinking about how we can realize my dreams and ambitions. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 7. I do not feel like I have to compete with anyone in my spouse's life. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 8. My spouse does not feel like he/she has to compete with anyone in my life. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 9. I voluntarily abstained from habits or practices that make my spouse fearful or upset. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 10. My spouse has voluntarily abstained from habits or practices that cause me fear or upset. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 11. I have made the changes that marriage necessitates without resentment or bitterness. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 12. My spouse has made the changes marriage necessitates without resentment or bitterness. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 13. I honor my spouse in my interactions with members of the opposite sex. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 14. My spouse honors me in his/her interactions with members of the opposite sex. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 15. We have a set of traditions and customs that we enjoy and give us a sense of family identity. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 16. God has enriched my life through the experience of being married. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 17. I naturally think of consulting my spouse when making plans or spending money. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 18. My spouse naturally thinks of consulting me when making plans or spending money. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 19. We are creating a home that represents us more than recreates our parents. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 20. We have a good relationship with our extended families. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 21. I have healthy separation from my family and allegiance to our marriage. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 22. My spouse has a healthy separation from his/her family and allegiance to our marriage. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 23. I am free from any bitterness towards my parents or family. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 24. My spouse is free from any bitterness towards his/her parents or family. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 25. My spouse's perspective and values means more to me than my parents. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 26. My perspective and values mean more to my spouse than their parents. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 27. We are able to make plans without seeking the permission or approval of parents. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 28. Our parents have accepted that their opinion is no longer authoritative in our lives. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 29. I put the benefit of my marriage ahead of my family's expectations. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 30. My spouse puts the benefit of our marriage ahead of his/her family's expectations. | CD SD NS SA CA |

Key to Survey Scoring: For each set of questions, tabulate your score using the following numerical values. The scoring is weighted with the “neutral” NS answer being a negative score, because if you have not defined or pursued important aspects of your marriage relationship, it will negatively impact the marriage.

CD	–	Negative 3 points	SA	–	Positive 1 points
SD	–	Negative 2 points	CA	–	Positive 2 points
NS	–	Negative 1 point			

If your total score...

...**matches or exceeds the total number of questions**, then this area of marriage is an area of strength.

...**is less than the total number of questions**, then this area of marriage could use attention or refinement.

...**is a negative number**, then this area of marriage should be given immediate and concentrated attention.

➤ Questions 1-18: (Total: _____ in 18 questions)

This set of questions examines the “**sharing a ‘we’ identity**” created by a gospel-centered marriage. When you marry you are no longer primarily a “me” but a “we.” This is part of the truth that married couples become “one flesh.” Thinking primarily as an individual will harm a marriage.

Recommended Resources: *Marriage Matters* by Winston Smith (especially chapter 18); *Each for the Other* by Bryan Chappell

➤ Questions 19-30: (Total: _____ in 12 questions)

This set of questions examines the “**leave and cleave**” aspect of a gospel-centered marriage. Marriage is a relationship that changes our identity and, thereby, changes (to a greater or lesser degree) all our other relationships. Scripture particularly emphasizes how this change affects our relationship to our parents.

Recommended Resources: *Strengthening Your Marriage* by Wayne Mack (Unit 1)

Sometimes within a marriage, the problem is not one specific area or issue, but an overall imbalance in the effort, skill, thoughtfulness, and awareness being put into the marriage. Below is a list of questions that reveal your perspective on your effort and your spouse’s effort in the marriage. Use the same numerical scoring system as you used above. In this case, the closer your scores are to another, the more mutual (and typically healthy) the marriage.

_____ **My Score** – Using the same scoring system as above add together the score for questions 1, 3, 5, 9, 11, 13, 17, 21, 23, 25, and 29.

_____ **My Spouse’s Score** – Using the same scoring system as above add together the score for questions 2, 4, 6, 10, 12, 14, 18, 22, 24, 26, and 30.

Chapter 3

Beyond Pageantry and Sentimentality How the Wedding Ceremony Helps Us Understand Covenant

Plumb Lines: These are the “sticky” statements that capture the core messages of this chapter.

- Contracts are relationships of mutual benefit; covenants are relationships of mutual joy through mutual sacrifice.
- At the most, you’ll only make four major covenants (Savior, church, marriage, and children) during your lifetime.
- We all must resist the tendency to obsess over the most temporal and neglect the most eternal.
- Marriage is designed to be a living, walking portrait of the gospel that “goes into all the world (Mark 16:15).”

Memorize: Matthew 19:4-6 (ESV), “[Jesus] answered, ‘Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.’” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “From the beginning” – Marriage’s existence and design were not God’s plan B response to anything.
- “Leave... cleave” – Your response to the world around you, even family, is changed when you enter a marriage.
- “One flesh” – You’re sharing life when you marry. How you think about and administrate life should display this.
- “No longer two” – Jesus re-emphasizes the oneness of marriage to show how radically it transforms our identity.
- “God has joined” – Once you have made a covenant, God’s seal supersedes your choice in terms of importance.

Presentation Notes

When something becomes common, its meaning and significance are forgotten. This is true of marriage and the wedding ceremony. Weddings have been in so many movies we begin to think they are good cinema instead of sacred covenant or that they belong to Hollywood instead of the Holy God. We begin to compare the pageantry and the bride’s dress more than we reflect on the eternal message being enacted before our eyes.

If we miss the gospel-rich meaning of our wedding as a covenant ceremony, then living a gospel-centered marriage can easily feel like a bait-and-switch. We must remember marriage is always a covenant. This is true regardless of our awareness or intentionality during our ceremony or appointment with the justice of the peace.

In this chapter, we want to learn what it means for marriage to be a covenant by examining the symbolism in a traditional wedding ceremony. If you are about to get married, this should be exciting. If you have been married for a number of years, this should be a call back to marriage fundamentals.

“Society still considers the parent-child relationship to be a covenantal one, not a consumer relationship (p. 81).” Tim Keller in *The Meaning of Marriage*

Understanding Covenant

We rarely use the word covenant today. So we need to define the term. If not, we will use our closest cultural equivalent to understand what God designed.

A contract is...	A covenant is...
... entered into in order to limit liability	... entered into as an agreement of unlimited responsibility
... is predicated upon mistrust	... is ultimate sign of trust
... a common, legal document regulated by the state.	... a sacred, moral agreement overseen by God.
... based upon mistrust between two people.	... based upon trust between two people and God.
... embedded with "opt out" or termination clauses.	... intended to be permanent.
... demands joy through mutual benefit.	... seeks joy through mutual sacrifice

The last covenant our culture holds as sacred is the parent-child covenant (and even that shows signs of weakening). A parent who forsakes the parent-child covenant (abandoning their child) is viewed as having done a very bad thing; not having made a good choice towards self-actualization or expressing their rights according to legitimate preferences.

Because we still view the parent-child relationship as covenant (whether we use the language or not), we expect parents to do whatever is necessary to learn to love and bond with their children. A lazy, neglectful parent cannot at the same time still be viewed as a "good person." But marriage, which is based upon the command to leave and cleave, should be held in even higher honor than the parent-child covenant.

The Wedding as Covenant Ceremony

We will now walk through a traditional wedding. As we do, we will be asking one question – how was the wedding ceremony designed to teach us about covenant? We will look at fifteen parts of the wedding ceremony.

We must not forget that the marriage ceremony is a covenant-making ceremony.

Seating of the Family

Family and friends of the bride sit on one side of the church. Those of the groom sit on the other. As participants in the wedding enter and leave the wedding ceremony, they pass through the middle of the two families. This creates two covenant images: the power of covenant to unite and the imagery of God's covenant with Abraham.

First, the bonding power of a covenant is so strong it cannot be confined to two individuals. As the couple passes between their families, they act like the tongue on a zipper uniting two families. As the husband and wife become "one flesh," both families share something precious enough (i.e., son or daughter, brother or sister) to create a common identity as family.

Read Ephesians 2:18-22. Observe the power of covenant to bring unrelated people, even people with great differences, into the same family. See how the gospel moves us from being "outsiders" (i.e., "strangers and aliens") to being "members of the household" (v. 19). As newly joined husband and wife walk out together between their respective families they are involving all in attendance in what the gospel does.

Second, this seating arrangement gives a portrait of God's covenant with Abraham in **Genesis 15**. The Hebrew word for covenant, *berith* meaning "to cut," is most clearly seen in this passage. God had Abraham cut several animals in half and make a lane between their carcasses. God passed down this lane as a way of saying, "Shall it be to me like these animals, if I break this covenant."

As husband and wife pass through their families, they are also visualizing a death (leaving) that brings life (cleaving). Those in attendance instinctually understand the profound paradox as they experience the simultaneous emotions of sadness and joy.

White Wedding Dress

The bride, dressed in white, comes to meet her groom for the entire world to see. She is coming to have her name and identity changed. She is drawn by love. She is lovely in the eyes of her groom, and everyone in attendance sees her through the eyes of her beloved. Her eyes are fixed on his and no one else's opinion matters. Love triumphs over any fear and any insecurity that might otherwise be present: covenant is giving love the power it was always intended to have.

The white dress is a picture of the righteousness given to us by the Groom – Christ. We do not come to Christ in our white garments but in His righteousness gifted to us. We come offering Christ our life, not our spotless record. Christ simply receives us as His beloved.

This will be one of the most essential truths to remember in a marriage. When we begin to wear our own righteousness in marriage, shame will bring lying, insecurity will bring hiding, comparison will bring competing, and pride will bring judging. We will stop loving as we have been loved and start measuring our spouse as we believe we have performed.

Father Gives Away the Bride

This is more than just a way to change the arrangement of how people are standing at the altar. It is a picture of God's design for marriage and demonstration of the four major commitments of the marriage covenant.

Commitment One – Receive: We must realize that our spouse is a gift: we receive our spouse from his/her family and from God. We did not earn our spouse by our good looks, earning capacity, charming personality, or other desirable attributes. You cannot “earn” a person. You receive them as a gift given of their free accord and God's gracious provision.

“You must individually receive your spouse as God's provision... You must accept His gift. Receiving your spouse demonstrates your faith in God's integrity. Adam's focus was on God's flawless character, not Eve's performance. He knew God, and he knew that God could be trusted (p. 87)... In the 100/100 plan, there is no talk of ‘meeting each other halfway.’ You are both willing to do anything it takes to make the marriage work (p. 94).” Dennis Rainey (editor) in *Preparing for Marriage*

Commitment Two – Leave: As the bride walks from her father to her groom, we see the second commitment of the marriage covenant. The bride and groom are severing the bond of primary allegiance and dependence with their parents to form that bond with each other. Here again, we see the primary image behind the Hebrew word for covenant, “to cut.”

This commitment has five implications (Wayne Mack in *Strengthening Your Marriage*, p. 2-3).

1. You establish an adult relationship with your parents.
2. You are more concerned about your spouse's thoughts and practices than your parents.
3. You are not controlled by your parent's affection, approval, or assistance.
4. You eliminate any bad feelings toward your parents that tie you to them emotionally.

“Plenty of people have marital problems because they haven't ‘left’ to cleave to their spouse. You have failed to leave your parents if you are more driven by their wishes and expectations than by your spouse's. But you can also fail to leave your parents if you resent or hate them too much (p. 128)... If you rigidly impose the patterns that you saw in your own family rather than working together with your spouse to create new ones that fit both of you, you haven't ‘left home’ yet (p. 129).” Tim Keller in *The Meaning of Marriage*

5. You do not try to change your spouse to meet your parent's preferences.

Commitment Three – Cleave: It is common for the negative command (leave) to get more attention than the positive (command). When this happens, marriage will quickly begin to feel like a limitation; like marriage is defined more by what you're not supposed to do than what you pursue. This dynamic is a recipe for discouragement or rebellion.

It is as important to cleave to (pursue) your spouse as it is to leave your parents.

Commitment Four – Become One Flesh: This commitment will be unpacked in the seminars on communication (the method of unity), finances (sharing the same treasure; Matt. 6:21), decision making (the practice of unity), and intimacy (the joy of unity). For now, realize that “oneness” in each of these areas is an essential expressions of your marriage covenant.

The Charge

As the bride and groom now stand face to face, preparing to take their marriage vows, the pastor takes a moment to remind everyone present about the significance of this sacred celebration. These remarks are meant to highlight the gospel-meaning of marriage. The charge can vary greatly based upon the pastor, but here is a sample charge.

We are here to observe something that is not just beautiful and joyous, but also profound. [Groom] and [Bride] do not stand before one another as perfect individuals. But they are making an unending choice to cover the faults of the other with their own sacrificial love. They pledge to respond to each other as perpetual examples of Christ’s sacrifice for them. This choice is not a burden to them, but rather a joy, because of the delight they take in one another. Their delight is meant to be the clearest earthly representation of God’s abundant love for us and our joyous response to His love.

[Groom] and [Bride] are here today to make their covenant known publicly to family, friends, and the world. This covenant is marked by the physical symbol of a golden ring. Gold because it is the only metal that does not tarnish and is the standard of value for all other commodities. A ring because it, like all true covenants, has no end point.

Once this covenant is established, [Bride] will take [Groom]’s name in the same way that each person who covenants with God takes His name as “Christian.” From that point forward they will live for the joy of the other and take their deepest satisfaction in seeing the dreams of the other fulfilled in the same way God delights in His people and we find our greatest fulfillment in Him.

In this ceremony, let us see not only the beautiful uniting of our dear friends [Groom] and [Bride] in marriage; let us also see a picture of what God established as a picture of the relationship He desires with each one of us. Let us not only celebrate with [Groom] and [Bride] but be encouraged and drawn to the love of our great God.

The Pledge

The pastor calls the groom and bride by name as he gives both the opportunity to tell the world of their intentions.

[Groom], I want to ask you a series of questions that you are not hearing for the first time. As you hear them again today, I want you to respond to them with the words, “I do.” [Groom], do you promise before God and this community to receive [Bride] as your wife? Do you promise to love her and to care for her? Do you promise to seek with God’s help to be the spiritual head of your household for [Bride]? Do you promise to listen to her, to respect her, and to honor her for the unique and special woman of God that she is? [Groom] “I do.”

[Bride], I want to ask you a series of questions that you are not hearing for the first time. As you hear them again today, I want you to respond to them with the words, “I do.” [Bride], do you promise before God and this community to accept [Groom] as your husband? Do you promise to love and to care for him? Do you promise with God’s help to submit lovingly to his leadership of your household and do you promise to listen to him, to respect him, and to honor him as the unique and special man of God that he is? [Bride] “I do.”

The wedding pledge is a declaration that this couple has found something better than personal freedom and wants the entire world to know. This is the nature of covenant, it makes us not ashamed to identify with our covenant partner (Rom. 1:16, 2 Tim. 1:12, Heb. 11:16). We want to tell the world what we’ve found and invite them to find similar joy.

The Vows

Now the couple transitions from making a public pledge to taking personal vows. The audience is invited to overhear words that are directed only towards each other. Line after line the couple repeats after the pastor the essence of their covenant.

I _____ take you _____ to be my wife / husband.
 I promise before God and these witnesses that I will love you and be faithful to you.
 I promise to stand with you in sickness and in health,
 in good times and in bad times,
 and forsaking all others,
 I promise to give my life to you fully and faithfully
 as long as we both shall live.

The Pronouncement

“I now pronounce you husband and wife.”

Covenants are made. Therefore, they have a definite beginning. It would be inaccurate to say, “We have always been married.” Similarly, it would be inaccurate to say, “I have always been a Christian.” Saving faith is a covenant made with God that has a beginning. Before that covenant was made, we could not claim any of the special benefits of Christ’s death on the cross – forgiveness of sin, assurance of heaven, or the fruit of the Spirit.

Similarly, before the marriage covenant is made, we have no claim on the special benefits of the marriage covenant – living together and sexual intimacy. In the same way that good intentions towards God do not merit heaven, we should not assume that good intentions towards marriage merit presuming upon the benefits of the marriage covenant.

Bridal Veil

When the bride enters the sanctuary, she wears a veil. This is not a coy means of flirting with her groom, an insecure response to how she looks, or a trendy piece of wedding paraphernalia that has yet to go extinct. It is another piece of covenant imagery.

In the old covenant, within the temple there was a veil that separated the holy place from the holy of holies (Exo. 26:33). This is where God’s glory dwelt, and only the High Priest was allowed to enter this place, and he was only allowed to enter once per year. When Christ died on the cross, this veil was torn from top to bottom (Matt. 27:51) signifying the unlimited access we have to God through Christ.

During the wedding, the groom, representing Christ, is allowed to remove the veil from his bride. Now, by virtue of the marriage covenant, he has gained access to a level of intimacy with his bride he did not have before marriage. In the same way that Christ came to reside in our hearts upon removing the temple veil, the husband and wife come to reside in the same home and discover a whole new level of intimacy after removing the wedding veil.

The Kiss

Much of the ceremony to this point has carried the weight of marriage’s significance. It has been a sober celebration. If this tone did not change, it would give the impression that marriage was solemn. Marriage is sacred and to be held in great honor, but that honor should be expressed through joyous celebration.

In the kiss, we see another element of God’s design for marriage – pleasure. There is no reason, outside of God’s gracious design, why marriage had to be more than functional. But God created affection, arousal, and intimacy to be enjoyed in marriage. God intends for us to enjoy Him like husband and wife enjoy each other. This corporate response of celebration is a vital aspect of the wedding message. The congregation is invited to enthusiastically affirm the goodness God’s design.

Presentation of the Couple

“It is my honor to present to you Mr. and Mrs. [Groom] and [Bride] [Last Name].”

As the couple turns to face family and friends, the pastor speaks these words to the world. A true covenant will always change the way the world sees you. No one enters a covenant in order to remain the same. The couple walks out of the church as new people, with a new name, and a new identity (husband and wife).

Conclusion

Now that you've reconsidered what it means to establish a marriage covenant, can you imagine thinking of marriage as a 50-50 relationship? Saying, “I'll do my part, if I see you doing your part,” or “I'll meet you half way after I see you start moving towards me.” Does that, in any way, fit the Christ-church prototype of which marriage is to be a living picture?

“What most divorces mean is that at least one party, and possibly both, have ceased to put the gospel first in their lives (p. 35).” Gary Thomas in *Sacred Marriage*

There are two times when our selfishness tempts us to treat our marriage as less than a covenant – conflict and laziness.

We will address conflict more fully in the seminar on “Communication” and laziness more fully in the seminar on “Decision Making.” But in those seminars, we will be addressing the skills needed to manage conflict and avoid laziness. However, no amount of skill will circumvent the need for commitment – that is the role of covenant. We should realize (or admit) we will never out-perform our level of commitment.

The following exercise is designed to give you “eyes to see” the moments when covenant commitment is needed to combat our selfish tendencies in conflict and laziness. On the next page, you will find the words spoken during this wedding ceremony over the image of a puzzle. If unhealthy conflict or laziness is disrupting your marriage (and you're not implementing the good skills you already know), then this assignment is for you.

1. Print a picture of you and your spouse on one side of a piece of paper (high gloss if you want it to look nice).
2. On the other side print a copy of your wedding charge, pledge, and vows with the puzzle in background.
3. Write your first names in the appropriate blanks in the ceremony, and reread your wedding commitments.
4. Cut the picture into its 25 pieces – it is said doing something 21 times makes it a habit.
5. Create a frame in which you will put your marriage portrait together.
6. Begin to look for those moments when your laziness or approach to conflict would harm the marriage.
7. Each time you navigate one of these moments in a way that honors your covenant, add a piece to the portrait.
8. Each time you violate your covenant commitment through laziness or poor conflict remove a piece.
9. Your goal, by God's grace, is to create a lifestyle of:
 - (a) being aware of the moments you are tempted to neglect your marriage covenant, and
 - (b) intentionally loving your spouse as your own body (Eph. 5:28) in these moments of temptation.
10. Keep the picture as a trophy of God's grace in your life and a reminder of your covenant commitment.

Read Malachi 2:15-16. Anytime we see or hear the word “hate” it makes the message being delivered seem negative. This passage has that connotation because it is more frequently used “against divorce” than it is used “for marriage.” Read this passage about God's attitude toward divorce. But, read it in light of this chapter. See covenant marriage as God's great masterpiece to care for people and tell them of His gospel. God does hate to see the gift He gave to communicate His message of healing to become an instrument of pain. Marveling at what God made marriage to be is the core remedy for avoiding the experience of what God hates – divorce.

The Charge

We are here to observe something that is not just beautiful and joyous, but also profound. _____ and _____ do not stand before one another as perfect individuals. But they are making an unending choice to cover the faults of the other with their own sacrificial love. They pledge to respond to each other as perpetual examples of Christ’s sacrifice for them. This choice is not a burden to them, but rather a joy, because of the delight they take in one another. Their delight is meant to be the clearest earthly representation of God’s abundant love for us and our joyous response to His love.

_____ and _____ come here today to make their covenant known publicly to family, friends, and the entire world. This covenant is marked by the physical symbol of a golden ring. Gold because it is the only metal that does not tarnish and is the standard of value for all other commodities. A ring because it, like all true covenants, has no end point.

Once this covenant is established, _____ will take _____’s name in the same way that each person who covenants with God takes His name as “Christian.” From that point forward they will live for the joy of the other and take their deepest satisfaction in seeing the dreams of the other fulfilled in the same way God delights in His people and we find our greatest fulfillment in Him.

In this ceremony, let us see not only the beautiful uniting of our dear friends _____ and _____ in marriage; let us also see a picture of what God established as a picture of the relationship He desires with each one of us. Let us not only celebrate with _____ and _____ but be encouraged and drawn to the love of our great God.

The Pledge

_____, do you promise before God and this community to receive _____ as your wife? Do you promise to love her and to care for her? Do you promise to seek with God’s help to be the spiritual head of your household for _____? Do you promise to listen to her, to respect her, and to honor her for the unique and special woman of God that she is? _____ **responds with the words, “I do.”**

_____, do you promise before God and this community to accept _____ as your husband? Do you promise to love and to care for him? Do you promise with God’s help to submit lovingly to his leadership of your household and do you promise to listen to him, to respect him, and to honor him as the unique and special man of God that he is? _____ **responds with the words, “I do.”**

The Vows

I _____ take you _____ to be my wife / husband.
 I promise before God and these witnesses that I will love you and be faithful to you.
 I promise to stand with you in sickness and in health,
 in good times and in bad times,
 and forsaking all others,
 I promise to give my life to you fully and faithfully
 as long as we both shall live.

Evaluation: Character and Role Expectations

Note: Each major section of the Creating a Gospel-Centered Marriage series will have a brief evaluation tool to help you assess your marital strengths and weaknesses. Complete the evaluation before reading the material, then review the assessment again after completing each section to learn the accuracy of your initial self-assessment.

Instructions: Read the following descriptive statements. Consider how well they describe your experience or perspective on your marriage. If you are engaged, consider how well they describe your courtship experience or your beliefs about what you think your coming marriage should be. Mark the answer that best fits how you respond:

(CD) Completely Disagree, (SD) Somewhat Disagree, (NS) Not Sure, (SA) Somewhat Agree, or (CA) Completely Agree

- | | |
|---|----------------|
| 1. I have a regular time of reading from the Bible. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 2. My spouse has a regular time of reading from the Bible. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 3. I regularly share with my spouse what I learn in my time of Bible study. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 4. My spouse regularly shares with me what he/she is learning in Bible study. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 5. I pray for my spouse regularly. My spouse knows it, and asks me to pray for specific things. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 6. My spouse prays for me regularly and I ask him/her to pray for specific things. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 7. We agree on the importance and frequency of church attendance. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 8. We agree on the importance and frequency of small group attendance. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 9. We agree on the moral principles by which we ought to live. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 10. We agree on the major doctrines of the Christian faith. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 11. I actively strive to be mature and exemplify the fruit of the Spirit. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 12. My spouse actively strives to be mature and exemplify the fruit of the Spirit. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 13. I seek to bless my spouse by obeying the “one another” commands towards him/her. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 14. My spouse seeks to bless me by obeying the “one another” commands towards me. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 15. We agree on what it means and looks like to be a Christian family. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 16. I believe my spouse’s friends are a positive influence and a blessing to our marriage. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 17. I believe my friends are a positive influence and a blessing to our marriage. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 18. We have married friends who model and actively pursue a healthy marriage. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 19. I have seen my relationship with God grow over the course of our marriage. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 20. I have seen my spouse’s relationship with God grow over the course of our marriage. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 21. I enjoy and agree with how we have divided the responsibilities of managing our home. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 22. I consistently fulfill my household responsibilities as we have agreed. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 23. My spouse consistently fulfills their household responsibilities as we have agreed. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 24. We are able to peacefully talk about new responsibilities when they emerge. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 25. I agree with my spouse about what it means for a husband to lead his family. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 26. I agree with my spouse about what it means for a wife to submit to her husband. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 27. Our marriage is free from negative gender role influences from his home of origin. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 28. Our marriage is free from negative gender role influences from her home of origin. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 29. I believe that a healthy marriage is the essential foundation for being good parents. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 30. My spouse believes that a healthy marriage is the foundation for being good parents. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 31. I trust my spouse to be a spiritual leader and teacher for our children. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 32. I trust my spouse to be a disciplinarian for our children. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 33. I trust my spouse to be an example of Christ for our children. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 34. I trust my spouse to teach our children to enjoy life and how to relate to people. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 35. We agree that parenting should not become more important than our marriage. | CD SD NS SA CA |

Key to Survey Scoring: For each set of questions, tabulate your score using the following numerical values. The scoring is weighted with the “neutral” NS answer being a negative score because if you have not defined or pursued important aspects of your marriage relationship, it will negatively impact the marriage.

CD	–	Negative 3 points	SA	–	Positive 1 points
SD	–	Negative 2 points	CA	–	Positive 2 points
NS	–	Negative 1 point			

If your total score...

- ...**matches or exceeds the total number of questions**, then this area of marriage is an area of strength.
- ...**is less than the total number of questions**, then this area of marriage could use attention or refinement.
- ...**is a negative number**, then this area of marriage should be given immediate and concentrated attention.

➤ Questions 1-20: (Total: _____ in 20 questions)

This set of questions examines the “**character**” necessary for a gospel-centered marriage. We are not strong, wise, or loving enough to create a healthy lasting marriage on our own. Unless we recognize our dependence on God to transform our character through marriage, our sinful human nature will eat away at what we most want to preserve and cherish.

Recommended Resources: *Sacred Marriage* by Gary Thomas; *Marriage Matters* by Winston Smith.

➤ Questions 21-35: (Total: _____ in 15 questions)

This set of questions examines the “**role expectations**” involved in a gospel-centered marriage. Any ongoing relationship which cooperatively manages time, money, emotion, ambitions, children, and “life” as a marriage does, must have agreed upon responsibilities and roles to function well.

Recommended Resources: *Each for the Other* by Bryan Chapell (chapters 1-6); *This Momentary Marriage* by John Piper (chapters 6-8).

Sometimes within a marriage the problem is not one specific area or issue, but an overall imbalance in the effort, skill, thoughtfulness, and awareness being put into the marriage. Below is a list of questions that reveal your perspective on your effort and your spouse’s effort in the marriage. Use the same numerical scoring system as you used above. In this case, the closer your scores are to one another, the more mutual (and typically healthy) the marriage.

_____ **My Score** – Using the same scoring system as above add together the score for questions 1, 3, 5, 11, 13, 16, 19, 22, and 29.

_____ **My Spouse’s Score** – Using the same scoring system as above add together the score for questions 2, 4, 6, 12, 14, 17, 20, 23, and 30.

Chapter 4

The Shared Job Description of Husband and Wife: Personal Maturity, Healthy Friendships, and Functional Living

Plumb Lines: These “sticky” statements capture the core messages of this chapter.

- Personal maturity, the ability to be a friend, and a functional approach to life are pre-requisites for marital unity.
- Only having the gospel at the center of your life story can prevent marital burnout.
- Your marital mission is to make it as easy as possible for your spouse to look like, live for, and show others Jesus.
- Healthy living and marriage are primarily designed by God and secondarily canvasses for our personal expression.

Memorize: Ephesians 5:15-18, 21 (ESV), “Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit... submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “Look carefully”— The Christian life nor marriage are for lazy people who resist regularly examining their life.
- “Making the best use of the time” – As Paul prepares to teach on marriage, he reminds us of our use of time.
- “Do not be foolish” – Most of what wrecks a marriage is living foolishly (short-sighted, self-centered living).
- “Be filled with the Spirit” – When overwhelmed with your role, remember, it is the Holy Spirit who sustains you.
- “Submitting to one another” – Most of marriage is mutual submission to living out what is mutually agreed upon.

Teaching Notes

“There is a conservative approach to marriage that puts a great deal of stress on traditional gender roles... There is a lot of emphasis on the differences between men and women. The problem is that an overemphasis could encourage selfishness, especially on the part of the husband (p. 66)... It is my experience that it is nearly impossible to come up with a single, detailed, and very specific set of ‘manly’ or ‘womanly’ characteristics that fits every temperament and culture (p. 200).” Tim Keller in *The Meaning of Marriage*

“Your identity as someone’s spouse is secondary to your identity as a servant of God (p. 83).” Winston Smith in *Marriage Matters*

“The example the husband sets has eternal consequences. This means headship is more about controlling one’s character than controlling one’s wife. The man who is more concerned with how his wife should obey him than with how he should obey God fails the kindergarten of biblical headship (p. 78).” Bryan Chappell in *Each for the Other*

“God is always worthy of being obeyed and served, so when I act out of obedience to him, the person who receives my service doesn’t have to be deserving—they’re benefiting from what I owe God (p. 188)... Service includes allowing your spouse to give—if, of course, they are willing to give. In other words, service isn’t just washing somebody else’s feet; at times it’s letting your own feet be washed (p. 190).” Gary Thomas in *Sacred Marriage*

“After declaring that there is mutual submission in verse 21, Paul devotes twelve verses to unfolding the difference in the way a husband and wife should serve each other. You don’t need to deny mutual submission to affirm the importance of the unique role of the husband as head and the unique calling of the wife to submit to that headship (p. 78).” John Piper in *This Momentary Marriage*



Job Description: A Christian Husband

Reports To: God through His Local Church as Held Accountable by His Small Group

Hours Per Week: 168 (Full-Time Position; Monday through Sunday)

Summary of Position

Be a growing ambassador and example of Christ in character, thought, emotion, and deed. Lead by ensuring his family has a God-honoring, functional plan to manage life, initiating important conversations, and being the first to sacrifice when life requires.

Skills / Knowledge / Experience Required

- A personal relationship with Jesus Christ evidenced by daily reliance upon the Holy Spirit, prayer, and Bible intake.
- An accurate, sober self-assessment of strengths and weakness that can be shared without defensiveness (Rom 12:1-3).
- Willingness to lead in submission by accepting God’s moral standards and being accountable to specific Christian men.
- Contentment with God’s provision (finances, skills, wife, children, etc...) to model how the family is to find stability.
- Ability to set the tone of the family to be a positive place of mutual encouragement and sacrifice for one another.
- Guide each member of your household to discover, develop, and deploy their unique gifts in God’s service.

Responsibilities

AREA #1: Actively Pursue the Personal Character Necessary to Sustain a Healthy Marriage. Every Christian is to be marked by the traits that Galatians 5:22-23 calls the “Fruit of the Spirit.” Pursuing these character traits is the moral obligation and sign of true conversion for every Christian. These qualities are necessary for a healthy marriage and should never have to be “demanded” by your spouse. Your spouse is only the recipient of a blessing flowing from your imitation of God in these ways.

Passive Distortion (Your Tendency)	Fruit of the Spirit (Standard of “Healthy”)	Aggressive Distortion (Your Tendency)
-5 -4 -3 -2 -1	Love	-1 -2 -3 -4 -5
-5 -4 -3 -2 -1	Joy	-1 -2 -3 -4 -5
-5 -4 -3 -2 -1	Peace	-1 -2 -3 -4 -5
-5 -4 -3 -2 -1	Patience	-1 -2 -3 -4 -5
-5 -4 -3 -2 -1	Kindness	-1 -2 -3 -4 -5
-5 -4 -3 -2 -1	Goodness	-1 -2 -3 -4 -5
-5 -4 -3 -2 -1	Faithfulness	-1 -2 -3 -4 -5
-5 -4 -3 -2 -1	Gentleness	-1 -2 -3 -4 -5
-5 -4 -3 -2 -1	Self-Control	-1 -2 -3 -4 -5

AREA #2: Actively Pursue the Marks of Christian Relationships for Your Marriage. God’s call for how Christians relate to one another should be most clearly seen in marriage. Marriage should be the example of Christian friendship, not the exception. When you take the actions described below you are fulfilling your Christian duty not “going the extra mile.”

Command	Reference	My Strength	My Weakness	My Spouse’s Desire
Accept One Another	Romans 15:7			
Admonish One Another	Colossians 3:16			
Bear One Another’s Burdens	Galatians 6:2			
Build Up One Another	Romans 14:19			
Confess to One Another	James 5:16			
Encourage One Another	Hebrews 3:13			
Be Honest with One Another	Colossians 3:9			
Honor One Another	Romans 12:10			
Serve One Another	Galatians 5:13			
Spur On One Another	Hebrews 10:24			



AREA #3: Fulfill Shared Responsibilities of Marriage Not Pertaining to Gender Roles. There is much more to a Christian marriage than gender roles – headship and submission. Paul introduces his famous passage on genders roles (Eph. 5:22-33) with a preface calling for every believer to examine their life systems (Eph. 5:15-21). While it is the headship-responsibility of the husband to ensure a couple answers these questions, either spouse (or both) may bear the responsibility of primary oversight of these areas.

“Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise, but as wise...” (v. 15)

- **Finances:** Do you have a monthly family budget that keeps up with all income and expenses? Does your monthly income exceed your planned monthly spending? Do you have a system for saving for significant future expenses?
- **Household Tasks:** Do you have a list of daily, weekly, yearly, and periodic tasks necessary to operate your household? Do you have shared expectations about each other’s available time, skills, and interest? Have you agreed upon who will assume responsibility for which tasks? Are you flexible and sacrificial when changes need to be made to this division of labor?

“Making the best use of the time, because the days are evil...” (v. 16)

- **Time:** Do your expectations for yourself and your spouse fit within a 168 hour week? Do each of you arrange your schedule prioritizing time for God and each other? Do you regularly evaluate your use of time to ensure you are living your priorities as life changes?

“Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is...” (v. 17-18)

- **Daily Decisions:** Do you have shared moral values to guide your decision making? Do you study Scripture together when you disagree on a moral decision or whether a decision is a moral issue? Are you free of negative controlling influences (i.e., alcohol, debt, bad peers, etc...) that lead to foolish decisions?

“Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ” (v. 21)

- **Attitude and Lordship:** Do I blame or resent my spouse for having to meet the requirements of a Christian husband or wife? Do I view the ways I bless my spouse as acts of worship to God? Do I view my joy in blessing my spouse as a primary way that I disciple and guard the heart of my spouse?

AREA #4: Fulfill Your Unique Gender-Calling to Represent Christ in Your Family. A husband, through his God-given personality and gifting, is to obey God by serving as the head of his family. If areas one through three are sincerely engaged by both husband and wife, then this headship should rarely necessitate the use of headship as “authority.” However, whenever his authority is exercised, it is should be clear that his motive is love rather than merely satisfying his personal preferences.

A husband should initiate creating an environment where it is safe, normal, and encouraged for his family to pursue God. Everything about household operation should be designed or engaged for this purpose (Deut. 6:4-9). A husband is to learn each member of his family and disciple them to have maximum impact for God’s kingdom (Psalm 127:4). The items found on this job description are how God intends for a husband to measure success in life.

Husband Roles	Reference	My Strength	My Weakness	My Spouse's Desire
Servant Leader	Matthew 20:25-28			
Shepherd of the Family	I Timothy 3:1-7			
Man of Understanding	I Peter 3:7			
Provider for the Family	I Timothy 5:8			
Protector of the Family	Colossians 3:19			



Job Description: A Christian Wife

Reports To: God through Her Local Church as Held Accountable by Her Small Group

Hours Per Week: 168 (Full-Time Position; Monday through Sunday)

Summary of Position

Be a growing ambassador and example of Christ in character, thought, emotion, and deed. Supporting her husband's God-honoring, functional plan to manage life, contributing to important conversations, and being willing to sacrifice when life requires.

Skills / Knowledge / Experience Required

- A personal relationship with Jesus Christ evidenced by daily reliance upon the Holy Spirit, prayer, and Bible intake.
- An accurate, sober self-assessment of strengths and weakness that can be shared without defensiveness (Rom 12:1-3).
- Willingness to live in submission by accepting God's moral standards and being accountable to specific Christian women.
- Contentment with God's provision (finances, skills, husband, children, etc...) to model how the family is to find stability.
- Ability to reinforce the tone of the family to be a positive place of mutual encouragement and sacrifice for one another.
- Assist each member of your household to discover, develop, and deploy their unique gifts in God's service.

Responsibilities

AREA #1: Actively Pursue the Personal Character Necessary to Sustain a Healthy Marriage. Every Christian is to be marked by the traits that Galatians 5:22-23 calls the “Fruit of the Spirit.” Pursuing these character traits is the moral obligation and sign of true conversion for every Christian. These qualities are necessary for a healthy marriage and should never have to be “demanded” by your spouse. Your spouse is only the recipient of a blessing flowing from your imitation of God in these ways.

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-5 -4 -3 -2 -1		Faithfulness	-1 -2 -3 -4 -5	
-5 -4 -3 -2 -1		Gentleness	-1 -2 -3 -4 -5	
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AREA #2: Actively Pursue the Marks of Christian Relationships for Your Marriage. God's call for how Christians relate to one another should be most clearly seen in marriage. Marriage should be the example of Christian friendship, not the exception. When you take the actions described below you are fulfilling your Christian duty not “going the extra mile.”

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Confess to One Another	James 5:16			
Encourage One Another	Hebrews 3:13			
Be Honest with One Another	Colossians 3:9			
Honor One Another	Romans 12:10			
Serve One Another	Galatians 5:13			
Spur On One Another	Hebrews 10:24			



AREA #3: Fulfill Shared Responsibilities of Marriage Not Pertaining to Gender Roles. There is much more to a Christian marriage than gender roles – headship and submission. Paul introduces his famous passage on genders roles (Eph. 5:22-33) with a preface calling for every believer to examine their life systems (Eph. 5:15-21). While it is the headship-responsibility of the husband to ensure a couple answers these questions, either spouse (or both) may bear the responsibility of primary oversight of these areas.

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“Making the best use of the time, because the days are evil...” (v. 16)

- **Time:** Do your expectations for yourself and your spouse fit within a 168 hour week? Do each of you arrange your schedule prioritizing time for God and each other? Do you regularly evaluate your use of time to ensure you are living your priorities as life changes?

“Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is...” (v. 17-18)

- **Daily Decisions:** Do you have shared moral values to guide your decision making? Do you study Scripture together when you disagree on a moral decision or whether a decision is a moral issue? Are you free of negative controlling influences (i.e., alcohol, debt, bad peers, etc...) that lead to foolish decisions?

“Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ” (v. 21)

- **Attitude and Lordship:** Do I blame or resent my spouse for having to meet the requirements of a Christian husband or wife? Do I view the ways I bless my spouse as acts of worship to God? Do I view my joy in blessing my spouse as a primary way that I disciple and guard the heart of my spouse?

AREA #4: Fulfill Your Unique Gender-Calling to Represent Christ in Your Family. A wife, through her unique personality and gifting is to obey God by being a well-suited helper for her husband as the head of the family. If areas one through three are seriously engaged by both spouses, then submission should rarely necessitate “relenting.” However, when his authority is exercised, it should be clear that she supports his leadership without bitterness and that there is grace when her husband is wrong.

A wife should build upon her husband’s efforts to create a home environment where it is safe, normal, and encouraged to pursue God. Everything about household operation should be designed or engaged for this purpose (Deut. 6:4-9). A wife is to learn each member of her family and find ways to encourage and enhance her husband’s efforts to equip each one for effective service to God (Psalm 127:4). The items found on this job description are how God intends for a wife to measure success in life.

Husband Roles	Reference	My Strength	My Weakness	My Spouse's Desire
Well-Suited Helper	Genesis 2:18			
Submissive to Her Husband	1 Peter 3:1-7			
Woman of Competence	Proverbs 31			
Enthusiastic Lover	Solomon 5:10-6:3, 7:9-13, 8:10,14			
Overseer of Her Home	Titus 2:3-5			

Chapter 5

The Unique Aspects of a Husband’s Job Description Understanding Servant-Leader, Protector, and Provider

Plumb Lines: These “sticky” statements capture the core messages of this chapter.

- Christian leadership exists for the good of those being led; not the preferences of the leader.
- There is no such thing as a Christian leader who does not invest himself in knowing those being led.
- Family leadership is not a personality trait or skill set you’re born with. It is a responsibility given by God.
- The primary tool of Christian leadership is self-sacrifice and allowing others to follow you towards Christ.

Memorize: Ephesians 5:25-27 (ESV), “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “Husbands” – This is a voluntary role which, once assumed, removes the choice to live covenant-free.
- “As Christ Loved (A.C.L.)” – A rupture to the A.C.L. commitment of a husband is devastating to marriage.
- “Sanctify Her” – Your first goal in marriage is to facilitate your wife becoming what God intended her to be.
- “Present... in Splendor” – Your second goal in marriage is to celebrate and affirm what God does with your wife.
- “To Himself” – Your third goal in marriage is to learn to personally delight and enjoy your godly wife.

Presentation Notes

There are few things more pathetic than media portrayals of a husband/father—weak, incompetent, lazy, disinterested, selfish, juvenile, distant, uninvolved, pleasure-seeking, greedy, cold, and anything else that is the antithesis of Jesus. We laugh when we should cry. We are being desensitized to the abolition and abdication of manhood that is occurring all around us.

A true man is one who loves and leads his family well. Any married man who fails in loving or leading his family is less than masculine; regardless of strength, influence, income, intelligence, sexual prowess, or appearance. These attributes have become a counterfeit economy for masculinity, replacing the biblical ideal.

“While the principle is clear – that the husband is to be the servant-leader and have ultimate responsibility and authority in the family – the Bible gives almost no details about how that is expressed in concrete behavior (p. 185)... What does this mean for us? It means that rigid culture gender roles have no Biblical warrant. Christians cannot make a scriptural case for masculine and feminine stereotypes... We must find ways to honor and express our gender roles, but the Bible allows for freedom in the particulars, while still upholding the obligatory nature of the principle (p. 186).” Tim Keller in *The Meaning of Marriage*

Servant Leader

Read Matthew 20:25-28. Male headship starts here. Any view of headship that does not grow from this soil is a weed, a distortion of God’s design, and is undeserving of the label “Christian.” Any attempt to express headship that does not resemble this passage is a sinful manipulation of God’s Word, and if taught to children, receives Jesus’ strongest rebuke (Matt. 18:6). This view of leadership is meant to protect husbands from the temptation to abuse the authority of headship.

While the role servant-leader is not defined by a personality type, a man’s personality will often impact which side of this role he emphasizes. Where would you place yourself on the following progression?

Servant	Servant-Leader	Leader
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Servant: A servant-only husband merely funds, assists, and facilitates the desires of his household. The agenda for the family is created exclusively by the “wants” of each family member. Little moral or biblical instruction is given, consequences are not enforced, and pouting or guilt become his primary tools for influencing behavior. On this end of the spectrum the husband is more loved (usually in the form of appreciation which can devolve into entitlement) than respected.

A milder form of servant-only husbanding usually has higher moral standards but still does not initiate establishing a direction for the family. The husband helps members of his family reach their individual goals, but he does not lead by providing a vision to create unity amongst individual goals. The result is that a family becomes so divergently busy that they cease to function as a family and lose a common sense of identity.

Leader: A leader-only husband is typically a micro-manager who makes most of the decisions in his household and measures family members by how they respond to his directives. If the idol of the servant-only husband is his family (people pleasing), then the idol of the leader only husband is himself (mistaking his preferences for God’s will). On this end of the spectrum, the husband is more respected (usually in the form of fear which can devolve into dread) than loved.

A milder form of leader-only husbanding is the “Mr. Fix It” or “answer man” approach. This husband shares truth and gives direction but withholds himself (the opposite of I Thes. 2:8). The guiding question to any concern his family brings to him is, “What do you want me to do or say?” without first asking “How can I join you in this struggle or situation?” There is a distance between leader and those being led that is inconsistent with the incarnational example of husbanding set by Christ.

Absent: Some husbands are not on the scale, because they are either not at home or not engaged with their wife. This husband may be selfishly absent (doing what he likes best) or fearfully absent (afraid he’ll mess up if involved). Regardless of how or why a husband is absent, the best way for him to get involved is to focus on areas one through three of the husband’s job description. It is difficult, even unhealthy, to go directly from absent to leader. Decisions become arbitrary and the disjointedness makes for short-lived change. However, if the husband emphasizes personal character, friendship with his wife, and a functional approach to living, then servant-leadership will develop and be a blessing to his family.

Servant Leader: A balanced servant leader is highly invested in the dreams of his family. He is as committed to seeing his family’s aspirations become reality as he is his own. This commitment is tangibly expressed in time, energy, finances, private thought, conversation, and personal sacrifice. A balanced servant-leader is not merely orchestrating a collection of “me’s” but a family “we.” Therefore, the husband not only sets the example of investing in the aspirations of each family member, but also (a) examines how his family’s gifts and abilities complement one another, and with that assessment (b) calls on the family to follow his example by sacrificing for one another.

Examples of being a servant-leader:

- Regularly involving his wife in envisioning their future and anticipating upcoming seasons of life.
- Discussing the family schedule and prioritizing to make sure it fairly represents each family member and is realistic.
- Being the first to sacrifice when life requires and doing so with a loving, joyful attitude.
- Initiates important conversations

“The Bible does not permit men to be uninvolved, disinterested, intentionally deaf, or selfishly blind. Headship requires the husband actively (and graciously) to work for the physical and spiritual well-being of each person in the family. A husband’s passivity can lead to cycles of abuse. A common pattern in abusive marriages is long periods of male passivity interspersed with brief episodes of rage (p. 31)... Too often Christians try to summarize male headship in the home by simply saying the husband has ‘the last word’ or is the final authority in decision making. Be glad this abbreviation of responsibilities is not found in the phrases of Scripture because it can cause great damage (p. 69)... Biblical headship shifts the focus of husbanding from taking charge to taking responsibility. Being a godly husband is not so much asserting one’s will as submitting one’s prerogative to the good of another (p. 70).” Bryan Chappell in *Each for the Other*

Shepherd of the Family

As a shepherd of his family the theme verse for every husband should be I Corinthians 11:1, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.” The first rule of shepherding is to walk in the direction you want the sheep to go. It is both hypocritical and ineffective to do otherwise. Read Psalm 23 and John 10 and ask yourself the question, “What does it look like to be a godly and Christ-like shepherd for my family?”

Beyond being an example, being a shepherd involves the physical and spiritual protection and provision of one’s family. The chart below helps you see these various responsibilities.

	Provider	Protector
P H Y S I C A L	See Husband as “Provider for the Family” Below	See Husband as “Protector of the Family” Below
S P I R I T U A L	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prays for his family Leads in family Bible study Initiates church involvement Initiates small group involvement Find resources in areas of struggle or interest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leads in guarding the family’s schedule Leads in selecting a healthy church Invites and seeks answers to family’s questions Address family’s areas of sin and temptation Address areas of family conflict or bitterness

Other examples of how a husband serves as shepherd of his family:

- Invites his wife and children to really know him and his struggles to serve as a model of a growing disciple.
- Establishes, with his wife, the biblical values that will guide the family and finds ways to reinforce them.
- Initiates meaningful family traditions that teach and reinforce family values and identity.
- Encourages his wife and family to grow as individuals who know their unique place in God’s family and your family.

Man of Understanding

Read I Peter 3:7. Simply stated, if you won’t honor your wife by lovingly listening to her, God won’t listen to you. Your access to the strength necessary to do what God calls a husband to do will be blocked. God is that serious about husbands understanding their wives – because husbands represent God’s concern for the church to the world. Practically, it is impossible to fulfill the other aspects of headship when you are not continually learning your wife.

- There is no such thing as a Christian leader who does not invest himself in knowing those being led.

The mission of every husband is to be the Ph.D.-level expert on his wife. When God wants to bless, encourage, strengthen, instruct, or show His love to your wife, there should be no one more qualified for Him to use than you. As you seek to serve your wife, you need to know what is most meaningful to her. As you seek to shepherd your wife, you need to know her areas of gifting and struggle. As you seek to serve as provider, you need to know what is most important to her as you make financial decisions. As you seek to serve as protector, you need to know your wife’s fears and insecurities. A Christian husband must know (i.e., be continually learning) his wife!

Examples of being a man of understanding:

- Asking questions to understand your wife’s emotions and responses to events.
- Listening attentively when your wife speaks.
- Never mocking or dishonoring your wife’s emotions or weaknesses so you are a safe person to confide in.
- Observing what other people draw out in your wife.

Provider for the Family

Read I Timothy 5:8. It is the moral obligation of a husband to make sure that his family has its necessary provisions. A wife should be able rest in the fact that the family’s needs will be met and the family’s resources will be managed wisely because of her husband’s servant leadership. While this passage refers primarily to caring for widowed or ailing parents, its implications are no less applicable to a husband’s primary household.

Does this mean a wife should not work? The husband providing for his family has no implication for whether his wife works. Based upon the husband’s provision the wife should be free not to work and, with the exception of short-term circumstances, the decision of whether a wife chooses to work should not be made on the basis of necessity.

Does this mean a husband should make more than his wife? If a family chooses for the wife to work, the husband-as-provider does not mean he must make more money than his wife. A husband should be secure enough, that the comparison of salaries does not affect him. The role of provider is a husband’s function, not his identity and definitely not a competition.

“For most of Western history, the primary and most valued characteristic of manhood was self-mastery... A man who indulged in excessive eating, drinking, sleeping, or sex—who failed to ‘rule himself’—was considered unfit to rule his household.” Sara Lipton in “Those Manly Men of Yore” in *New York Times* (June 17, 2011).

Examples of being the provider for the family:

- Initiating the creation of a family budget and ensuring it is monitored regardless of which spouse administrates it.
- Consulting his wife on all financial decisions.
- Providing for family’s basic living expenses (fixed and variable necessities) unless unemployed or in school.
- Ensuring that his family avoids unwise debt and that the family is aware of their financial situation.

“The reason I am using the title “Lionhearted and Lamblike” to refer to the Christian husband as head of his wife is because the husband is called to lead like Jesus who is the Lion of Judah (Rev. 5:5) and the Lamb of God (Rev. 5:6)—he was lionhearted and lamblike, strong and meek, tough and tender, aggressive and responsive, bold and broken-hearted. He sets the pattern for manhood (p. 74)... Leadership does not assume it is superior. It assumes it should take initiative (p. 89).” John Piper in *This Momentary Marriage*

Protector of the Family

Read Colossians 3:19. Scripture continually reminds us that the greatest dangers we face are not from the outside world, but from within. This is true in marriage as well. All dangers are relevant to husband-as-protector, but internal dangers are usually the most prevalent. When a husband is humble and self-aware enough to protect his wife from his expressions of harshness, his willingness and awareness to protect her from external dangers increases significantly.

Physical Danger: While this is the rarest opportunity to protect, a wife should have no doubts that her husband would sacrifice his own safety and life if hers were in danger. This is usually a matter of character more than choice, because situational dangers rarely give advanced warning.

Relational Danger: Parents, children, employers, nor friends should be allowed to denigrate or manipulate a man’s wife without him engaging in a respectful but firm confrontation. While a wife may ask her husband not to speak in these circumstances, she should have every confidence that he would speak with self-control (I Tim. 3:3; 2 Tim. 2:24-26). A husband’s response in protecting his wife should not itself become a reason for her to fear.

Redemptive Safety: How a husband responds to his wife’s sin and non-moral failures is also part of his protective role. Shame and condemnation are not acceptable tools for a Christian husband to use. A wife should feel like she is interacting with Jesus when she talks to her husband. That is the whole point of Ephesians 5:25-33. When is this more relevant than when she fails?

Atmosphere of Safety: A husband protects his family when he leads in establishing a positive, uplifting tone for his household. Protecting is about more than how we respond to danger or failure. Protection also includes creating an atmosphere of rest and encouragement that strengthens one’s family between times of danger or failure.

Examples of being the protector of the family:

- Being the example of saying “I was wrong. Will you forgive me?” to his family and modeling patient repentance.
- Being quick to forgive and evidencing a restored relationship when his family asks for forgiveness.
- Following through with his commitments to his wife to create an atmosphere of predictability and safety.
- Telling his wife what he likes about her to eliminate ways for insecurity to enter her thoughts and emotions.
- Honoring his wife often in public so that no one can assume dishonor is an acceptable response to his wife.

Conclusion

What summarizes these five headship responsibilities of a husband? Ephesians 5:25, “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” Servant-leading, shepherding, understanding, providing, and protecting are different angles of considering what it means to love your wife like Jesus loves the church.

The danger of discussing the role of a husband in terms of a job description is that it comes across as a to-do list instead of a person to-be. Remember, being a husband is not a skill set to master, but Christ-likeness to embrace. When we forget this we start keeping track of our “streak” of how long we’ve “been good.”

This leads to pride (“My streak is longer than my spouse’s streak”) or despair (“I’ll never be able to keep this up”). We are a good husband in the same way that we are a good Christian – moment by moment dependence upon Christ and His grace. The law (or, in this case, job description) is meant to remind us of our dependence upon Christ, not train us to be independent from Christ.

Husbands, you lead your family not only by what you do, but by whose strength you do it in.

Chapter 6

The Unique Aspects of a Wife’s Job Description Highly-Competent, Well-Suited Helper-Lover

Plumb Lines: These “sticky” statements capture the core messages of this chapter.

- Both the husband (head) and wife (submitting) are playing “the Jesus role” in their marriage.
- A wife expresses as much strength in submitting to her husband as he does gracious wisdom in leading his family.
- The home a wife manages impacts more generations than anything a husband manages outside the home.
- The glory of a wife and the glory of husband are the same – the unique ways they reflect the character of Christ.

Memorize: Ephesians 5:22-24 (ESV), “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “Submit” – Define this word in light of the passage instead of defining this passage by your response to this word.
- “To your own husbands” – This passage is not about the value of men-women, but functioning within a family.
- “As Christ is the head” – More women may embrace Christianity because they are made to be in the church-role.
- “As the church” – Read how Jesus’ sees and treats His church to understand God’s intention (Rev. 21).
- “In everything” – This does not apply to immoral actions and should not be frequently needed but is the standard.

Presentation Notes

There is so much debate over what a wife is not, that it often feels like we’ve lost a passion for who a wife is. Our time is spent debating and defending instead of celebrating. We often talk about wives as if they were subjects instead of people – the Holy Spirit may be the only person who is treated comparably.

“God did not make marriages with a cookie cutter, and the ways in which wives may support, complement, and complete their spouses are usually open to a lifetime of discovery. But the realization that Christ intends for each wife to represent him—to be his hands and heart—for her husband is the key discovery that revolutionizes women’s perceptions of their purposes in marriage (p. 105).” Bryan Chappell in *Each for the Other*

Well-Suited Helper

Read Genesis 2:18. The first description of woman in Scripture describes her as “a helper.” The Hebrew word is stronger than our English word and can be more fully translated “well-suited helper.” This same word is frequently used about God (Psalm 10:14, 28:7, 54:3-4, 72:12, 86:17; John 14:26; Hebrews 13:6), so it cannot mean “having a lesser role” or “being of less importance.”

“The opposite of being a helper is being a competitor (p. 174).” Dennis Rainey (editor) in *Preparing for Marriage*

Is helping her husband all that a wife can/should do? No, but nothing that a wife does should take away from her ability to be a well-suited helper for her husband. Similarly, not one aspect of the husband’s job description should be all he does, but nothing he does outside his job description should detract from those primary roles that God assigns.

Who gets to decide what “helping” entails? Answering this question requires both spouses to fully embrace areas one through three of their job description. This “helping” requires a mature character, healthy friendship, and functional approach to life. There is no one-size-fits-all answer to this question. When couples try to answer this question without taking the rest of the job description seriously they experience the kind of stereotyping, abuses of authority, and confusion that can often make biblical teaching gender roles in marriage unpopular.

Examples of being a well-suited helper:

- Knowing your husband’s interests, dreams, fears, strengths, and weaknesses without idolizing or shaming them.
- Being trustworthy and dependable in the things you say and do.
- Facing sacrifices and challenges without pouting, punishing, or becoming discontent.

Submissive to Her Husband

“We see that the submissive wife—far from being the weak-willed women our culture portrays—is actually a model of inner strength. By God’s grace, she has conquered this opposition within her own heart. It is actually weakness on display when a wife is not submissive; she is only caving in to her natural inclination to usurp authority and demand her own way. That doesn’t take any effort at all (p. 140).” Carolyn Mahaney in *Feminine Appeal*

Read I Peter 3:1-7. If “helper” is an identity “submission” is the activity this identity produces. John Piper defines submission as, “The divine calling of a wife to honor and affirm her husband’s leadership and help carry it through according to her gifts (p. 80; *This Momentary Marriage*).” We see in this passage that submission is the God-ordained way for a wife to influence her husband. Rather than using sex (I Cor. 7:1-5) or beauty (v. 3), a wife is called to display a godly character (v. 4) and entrust herself to her husband (v. 1). This precious gift is to be seen by her husband (v. 2) and treated with the honor it deserves (v. 7). Scripture acknowledges that this is frightening (v. 6), but promises that as a wife entrusts herself to God in this way He will provide sufficient grace to face these fears.

From I Peter 3:1-6 John Piper identifies six things submission is not (p 99-101; *This Momentary Marriage*; bold text only).

1. Submission does not mean agreeing with everything your husband says.
2. Submission does not mean leaving your brain or your will at the wedding altar.
3. Submission does not mean avoiding every effort to change a husband.
4. Submission does not mean putting the will of the husband before the will of Christ.
5. Submission does not mean that a wife gets her personal, spiritual strength primarily through her husband.
6. Submission does not mean that a wife is to act out of fear.

How far does “in everything” (Eph. 5:24) apply? This question was raised in a political debate when Michelle Bachmann, a female candidate for nomination for president and committed Christian who believes in submission was asked, “As president of the United States would you submit to your husband in this role?” The question was raised because in a public statement Mrs. Bachmann said she chose a career she was not interested in out of submission to her husband.

This question is instructive for helping us think through the extent of a wife’s submission to her husband. The following is a modified excerpt from a blog post on this subject from www.bradhambrick.com. It is included as a block quote because of the change to a first person, testimonial style of writing.

Disagree About Career Choice: I disagree with Michelle Bachmann’s application of submission to her husband in the choice to study tax law. In my opinion, this over extends the jurisdiction of submission. Choosing the field of work for one’s wife is not what it means for a husband to lead his family.

My wife has been a full-time teacher, tennis coach, full-time mother, part-time financial coach, and considered taking up refinishing antique furniture. The only role that submission has played in those decisions is in determining whether our family was in a position where those transitions were wise and feasible during that season of life. My role was to lead our family, not rule my wife.

Our initial conversations were about the priorities by which we wanted to guide our family (i.e., standard of living, how to educate our children, time we would have together as a couple, etc...) and the things my wife finds most fulfilling (i.e., skills, interests, life goals, etc...). Once we agreed on the priorities of our family, and I was aware of the things she found most fulfilling, our shared goal was to find the best possible match – submission was only relevant if we disagreed on the feasibility and timing of this type of decision.

Irrelevant to White House: The question about submission and the presidency was a bad question. It would be the equivalent of asking, “Would you obey the speed limit of a school zone while driving on the interstate?” Submission is a relational structure that applies to the husband-wife relationship and not outside that relationship.

When my wife was a teacher, we sometimes talked about the misbehavior of her students. Submission did not require that she utilize each of my classroom management suggestions. Once we made a family decision that her teaching was a good choice for our family, my role as her husband to her as a teacher became one of love and support, not leadership or oversight of her educational responsibilities.

Examples of being submissive to her husband:

- Showing confidence in her husband’s decisions and striving to make them succeed.
- Encouraging her husband, especially when his decisions fail or go differently than expected.
- Building loyalty and respect from their children towards her husband.
- Speaking words of dissent without casting doubt on her husband’s role as leader.

“We simply can’t have our cake and eat it, too. We can’t insist on running the show and then expect men to be proactive, take initiative, and be ‘spiritual leaders’... You must be willing to let him fail—believing that ultimately, your security is not in your husband but in a sovereign God who is not going to fail you (p. 154).” Nancy Leigh DeMoss in *Lies Women Believe*

Woman of Competence

Read Proverbs 31. Scripture does more than value women (v. 10). It celebrates women’s competence. In poetic affirmation, this passage spotlights women’s ability to work hard (v. 13-15), make wise business decisions (v. 16, 18), be strong (v. 17), be generous (v. 20), anticipate the future (v. 21), make those around her better (v. 23), be brave (v. 25), be wise (v. 26), and be more than pretty face (v. 30). God’s expects that those who know her should praise her for all that He has equipped her to do (v. 31). Scripture is clear: there is nothing a man does that she could not do; just as Jesus’ submission to the Father does not make Him any less God, powerful, wise, or worthy of praise.

“God’s will for every Christian wife is that her most important ministry be to her husband (p. 4)... She will also show respect on a daily basis when he is just an everyday, ordinary person. If your husband is in this category (as are most husbands), God wants you to be grateful for him and his ordinary job, looks, not-so-eloquent speaking ability, etc. (p. 110).” Martha Peace in *The Excellent Wife*

Examples of being a woman of competence:

- Knowing and being confident in her abilities, spiritual gifts, and life dreams.
- Making decisions in her spheres of influence and in areas she has her husband’s blessing within the home.
- Managing the family’s resources with excellence as mutually agreed upon with her husband.
- Continuously seeking to use her life to advance God’s kingdom and bless her family.

Enthusiastic Lover

Read Solomon 5:10-6:3, 7:9-13, 8:10, 14. It may be hard to believe this intensely romantic, highly aroused writing is in the Bible. Some find it even harder to read these to be the divinely inspired words of a wife to her husband. God wants a wife to be as passionate towards her husband as the church is for Christ.

Is this just about men “needing” sex? Read these passages again and see if that is what it sounds like. Does it seem like she is resigned to her “wifely duties”? Love is worth celebrating. God gave a unique celebration for marital, covenant love. Celebrating love is a way to honor the marriage.

But men do want sex more, right? Often, yes. Always, no. Stereotypes are not necessarily true for a given marriage and are not the essence of “biblical manhood” or “biblical womanhood.” Scripture does seem to speak to the general weaknesses of men and women; calling us to remember the things we naturally forget – men to be understanding and women to be enthusiastic lovers. But Scripture never concedes to an aspect of fallen humanity that is not good. So we can rest in the fact that if Scripture prescribes something for marriage, it is God’s design and good for both husband and wife.

Examples of being an enthusiastic lover:

- Verbally praise and affirm her husband.
- Keeping her inner and outer self healthy and attractive.
- Initiating and enjoying sex.
- Responding to his flirtation as she would to a complement.

Overseer of Her Home

Read Titus 2:3-5. Our difficulty in embracing this passage is often correlated with our valuing the workplace over home. We view one as important, the other as boring; one as valuable, the other as expendable. God’s call on both husband-fathers and wife-mothers necessitate a high view of home and family. When we realize that home is the most influential place in the world, we will view this responsibility as a high honor. When our family life reveals that we value outward success more than our families, we discredit what the Bible has to say about life (v. 5).

Does this mean a wife must not work outside the home? No. It means that what a wife does outside the home should not be viewed as more valuable or receive more energy than what she does inside the home. Proverbs 31 is clear about the ability and opportunities for women. Titus 2 is talking about the priorities that should govern our lives. The application of a wife as overseer of her home will vary based upon many factors but that does not mean it can be minimized or dismissed.

Does this refer to certain household chores or responsibilities? No. The Bible has no category for “women’s work” beyond bearing children. Just as a wife’s career does not violate the husband’s role as provider, a husband helping out around the house does not violate a wife’s role as overseer of her home.

Examples of being the overseer of her home:

- Making the home a safe and enjoyable place of refuge for every member of her family
- Being content with the family’s possessions and modeling contentment for the children
- Ensuring the possible systems are in place to provide predictability within the home
- Enforcing the family’s values and disciplining when needed as decided upon with her husband.

Conclusion

“Suppose a person who knew nothing about salt. You give him a pinch to taste and he experiences a particular strong, sharp taste. You then tell him that in your country people use salt in all their cookery. Might he not reply ‘In that case I suppose all your dishes taste exactly the same: because the taste of that stuff you have just given me is so strong that it will kill the taste of everything else.’ But you and I know that the real effect of salt is exactly the opposite. So far from killing the taste of the egg... and the cabbage, it actually brings it out. They do not show their real taste till you have added the salt... It is something like that with Christ and us. The more we get what we now call ‘ourselves’ out of the way and let Him take us over, the more truly ourselves we become. There is so much of Him that millions and millions of ‘little Christs,’ all different, will still be too few to express Him fully (p. 225).” C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity*.

Appendix A

Dates from the Creating a Gospel-Centered Marriage “Foundations” Seminar

You will remember what you rehearse. You will rehearse what you enjoy. Marriage is meant to be enjoyed but requires rehearsing (i.e., remembering) the things that are most important. For this reason, each seminar in this series will provide a collection of dates that are designed to allow couples to review what they’ve learned. Two things you should note:

1. Each date can be taken multiple times. You and your spouse will change over time. Because you change, the same date, with the same person becomes a new experience. Marriage resists becoming stale when we enjoy anticipating and learning what God is doing in our spouse’s life and marriage next.
2. Create the habit of reinforcing key marriage lessons with playfulness and romance. Learn from the content and pattern of these dates. Pick a section of this seminar that was useful to your marriage and create a date that allows you to review those truths in an enjoyable way.

Dream Date

Preparation: Complete the “Future Dreams and Fears” exercise from chapter two. Give your sheet to your spouse 2-3 days before the actual date. Read over your spouse’s sheet. Create a list of questions and a list of ways you can invest in his/her dreams.

Activity: Pick an activity or location that represents one of your dreams. It is best if the setting / activity is conducive to conversation. Example: If your dream is going back to school, go for a walk at a college campus. If your dream is to write book, get coffee at a bookstore. If your dream is to start a business, then plan a date in a place related to the type of business. If your dream is your first grandchild, then walk around a toy store.

During the date, take turns talking through your “Future Dreams and Fears” sheets. Ask your spouse the questions you wrote out beforehand. Listen well to your spouse’s answers. Initially, don’t get caught up in planning or logistics. Join the enthusiasm of your spouse for their dream. Share ways you thought you might invest in your spouse’s dream.

Ending: This date should be ended with a time of prayer for one another’s dreams and fears. If you can think of a special place that would make this prayer more memorable, go there. You might also consider whether there is a trinket you could purchase to symbolize your dream. Having a shadow box in your home that has trinkets from major events in your marriage and future dreams is a great way to reinforce your marriage story.

Follow Up: Keep your “Future Dreams and Fears” sheets and post them in a place you frequent (i.e., the bathroom mirror, where you have your quiet time, at the breakfast table, etc...). Use this as a reminder to pray for your spouse regularly and to show interest in your spouse by asking questions about these things.

Goal for Date: On this date, you want to capture the power of Matthew 6:21, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also,” to unify your marriage. Treasure does not have to be money. Treasure is merely those things we place the most value on which is always connected to our dreams and fears. By putting these on paper, talking openly about them, praying for them regularly, and following up with each other you will use the power of shared dreams and fears to knit your lives and stories together as a married couple.

Covenant Renewal Date

Preparation: Before the date, have your quiet time or personal Bible study in Ephesians 5:22-33. As a part of this time, review the charge, pledge, and vows from your marriage ceremony. If you don’t have a copy from your wedding, use the samples provided in chapter three. Highlight the aspects that you realize you’ve begun to neglect with the passage of time.

Activity: Pick an activity that reminds you of your wedding and honeymoon (i.e., eating at a Mexican restaurant if you went to Mexico on your honeymoon). Flip through photos of your wedding and honeymoon. Find something that is an activity that reminds you of those memories. It is great to do this date around your anniversary.

During your date, talk about the stories and memories that came to mind as you reviewed pieces of the wedding and looked through the pictures. Reflect on what you thought life would be like and the actual path God has taken you on. Allow this part of the date to be fun and playful.

Ending: Go to a special place in your marriage (i.e., where you got engaged, the church where you were married, the place you first met, a place with a significant marker for your relationship, etc...). Have the husband reread aloud the charge and pledge. Then recite your vows to one another and re-place your wedding bands on each other's hand as you do. Afterwards, share the things you think you have neglected, and share how you plan to honor the marriage covenant by recommitting to them. End by praying together for the grace and strength to honor the marriage covenant "until death do you part."

Follow Up: Create the habit of regularly holding up your hand to highlight your wedding band and saying, "I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine (Solomon 6:3)." Often, we only say, "I love you," to our spouse in the same way we say it to our children or parents. This unique expression between husband and wife can affirm and remind you that there is something unique and extra to marital, covenant love.

If you're resistant only because you think this sounds cheesy, get over yourself (typed in love, with a smile) and remind your spouse of the covenant you made that is bigger than either of you.

Goal for Date: This date is to rescue marriage from the mundane. Anything we participate in regularly runs the risk of being viewed as "common." This carries with it the strong temptation to neglect. We must remind ourselves not to view our marriage as "ordinary" and the rest of life as "exciting." This date should impress upon you that marriage is "special" and "sacred" while everything else is just "the rest of life."

Know Your Role Date

Preparation: Review your job description from chapter three. It should have notes on it from when you went through this study. Take some time to compare where you were then with where you are now. Where have you seen growth? Where have you seen regression? Look particularly at the "My Spouse's Desire" column in areas two and four.

Assess how you are doing in your God-given responsibilities in the ways that are most meaningful to your spouse. Pick one or two areas that will be your focal point for growth in the coming weeks.

Activity: Pick an activity that highlights an area you are striving to grow in that is special to your spouse. If you are a husband wanting to grow as "Shepherd of the Family," you may go to a bookstore and pick out a marriage or family devotional with your wife. If you are a wife wanting to grow as "Well-Suited Helper," you might plan a date around things you know would be encouraging for your husband.

Ending: End the date with an opportunity to talk; the setting doesn't need to have particular significance. The husband should lead by sharing his self-assessment of where he is, how he's grown, and areas of needed growth as a husband (using the job description). The husband should then invite his wife to share her thoughts on where he is, how he's grown, and areas of desired growth as a husband.

Then the wife should share her self-assessment and invite her husband's assessment. Based upon this conversation, both husband and wife should pick an area of growth to focus on and get input from their spouse about how this would be best accomplished.

Follow Up: Preferably, each spouse would share their growth goal with one or members of their small group. This prevents the spouse who would be blessed by this growth from the awkward position of also serving as accountability for this growth. It also allows the couple's marital enrichment to become "contagious" in their circle of Christian community.

Goal for Date: This date is about authentic vulnerability and encouragement. It creates an opportunity to assess how the marriage compares to God's ideal. Talking about areas of growth when it is not triggered by a negative event is very healthy for a marriage. Allowing a marital date to move you towards more authentic Christian community protects the marriage from carrying the burden of being the church for each of you.

Appendix B

Small Group Accountability Questions From the "Foundations" Seminar

How do small marital problems become big marital problems? There are two primary ways: (1) they get ignored, and (2) they are dealt with alone. Ask yourself these questions about any case of divorce or chronic marital unhappiness you know:

If that couple had addressed their struggle early on with the love and perspective of fellow Christians, how different would their life be now? How many generations would be blessed? How much pain and suffering would have been alleviated? How much sin and destruction would have been averted?

The condition of Christian marriage is a church problem. When the church does not fulfill the one another commands of the New Testament, every marriage in that church suffers (even the good ones). Excellent, crisis-based pastoral counseling (no matter how effective) will not have near the impact as small groups regularly asking one another simple, fundamental questions about "Creating a Gospel-Centered Marriage."

For this reason, every seminar in this series will contain a series of accountability questions to be used in the small group life of our church. It is suggested that at least once per month any small group with married couples divide men and women for the prayer time and ask one of the questions below. These questions are written in the first person plural (i.e., we, us, our) to imply that every person in the room should have an answer.

Chapter 1

- How are we letting the mundane-ness of everyday life lead us to neglect our marriages?
- What are we avoiding doing that would bless our marriages because it's hard or unnatural?
- With what are we being selfish that may be deteriorating our marriages?
- For what do we need to repent to our spouse but we are resisting?

Chapter 2

- Where have we seen the themes of the gospel in our marriages this week/month?
- What specifically are we praying for our spouses about this week/month?
- How have we invested time and energy into learning our spouse this week/month?
- When do we avoid being weak in front of our spouse and how is it affecting our marriages?

Chapter 3

- What little things have we begun to view as big things and how is it affecting our marriages?
- How have we viewed marriage as a 50-50% relationship instead of a 100-100% covenant?
- What aspect of covenant do we need to refocus upon: receive, leave, cleave, or being one flesh?
- What wedding vow (i.e., sickness and health, good time and bad, etc...) have we begun to neglect in our marriage?

Chapter 4

- Which of the fruit of the spirit are we neglecting and how it is affecting our marriages?
- Which of the New Testament one another commands are we neglecting and how is it affecting our marriages?
- What part of life do we not have a functional plan for and how is it affecting our marriages?

Chapter 5 and 6

- How have we done at playing the Christ-role (husband: servant-leader; wife: submissive) in our marriages?
- How are we doing at [pick one of the given gender specific functions of a husband/wife]?

Rebuttal: Wow! That seems really personal for a small group discussion.

Response One: It is not more personal than a divorce is public. And, it is not more personal than the Bible calls for us to be transparent about our sin.

Response Two: Once you have done this for three months and seen the benefits to your marriages, you will laugh at the defensive rebuttal. Accountability is only scary like swimming lessons are scary for a child. Putting your face in the water is only intimidating until you do it. Then you realize a whole new world of freedom and fun awaits.

Appendix C

What Do I Do Now?

A plumb line of the Summit counseling ministry is, “We don’t do events; we create resources.” That means you should be asking yourself, “What can or should I do with this information now?”

We have created a series of brief videos that answer that what-now question from several different perspectives. Each of these can be found at:

www.bradhambrick.com/whatnow
www.bradhambrick.com/GCMfoundations

Personal Study or Small Group

Question: I’ve been to several of the Summit counseling seminars and notice there appears to be a couple of different kinds. You frequently recommend studying them as a small group or with a friend. That seems like a great idea, but since I haven’t done that before I’m not quite sure how to start something like that. Do you mind giving me guidance?

Pursue Personal Counseling

Question: After attending this seminar I realized I would like to pursue counseling to help me grow in this area. It sounded like there are several different options available. Would you mind explaining to me what those are and how I could connect with the one that best serves me need?

Leveraging My Workplace

Question: I’ve heard rumors that I’m supposed to be able to use the Summit counseling seminars to leverage my workplace for gospel influence. My first impression is that it sounds awkward and intrusive; like I’m telling people they’ve “got issues” or “need help.” But I’m also worried about putting up Christian material that might be offensive to some people who visit my workplace. But I would at least like to hear what you’ve got to say. How would this work?

As a Professional Counselor

Question: I’m a licensed counselor (LPC) and came across the Summit counseling seminars. I’m excited to see the church addressing these kinds of subjects, and I’m curious how you might see someone in my position (or a LCSW or LMFT) using the materials. I can see recommending them to my clients who are open to an overtly Christian aspect to their counseling, but it seems like there could be more uses than just counseling homework. Could you share your thoughts on how those in private practice might use these resources?

Our goal in Summit counseling is to (1) equip the church to care for one another and our community with excellence; (2) provide quality counseling services that allow our people to get involved in the lives of others with confidence – knowing additional, experienced care is available to come alongside them if needed; and (3) create ways for our members and other Christians in our community to leverage their workplace and careers for greater gospel impact in their spheres of influence.

We hope this seminar and these videos give you a vision for how this can happen and stirs a passion in you to be a part of God’s work of redeeming and restoring hurting individuals and families.