STRENGTHENING MARRIAGE FROM A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

AT CORNERSTONE BAPTIST CHURCH

SPRINGFIELD, GEORGIA

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A Project

Presented to

the Faculty of

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Ministry

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by

Duane Waddell Logsdon

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APPROVAL SHEET

STRENGTHENING MARRIAGE FROM A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE
AT CORNERSTONE BAPTIST CHURCH
SPRINGFIELD, GEORGIA

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To Jennifer, Jonathan, and Anna
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PREFACE

I am grateful to God for giving me the strength, the knowledge, and the courage to persevere and complete this project, when at times it almost seemed impossible. Faced with numerous challenges and personal struggles, I was on several occasions tempted to abandon the course of action to which God had called me. When I was ready to give up, God would convict me to look up to Him, and there I would find the strength I needed to move forward. God, You have been gracious and patient with me during this project. Thank You for Your mercy and loving-kindness, which are new each day.

My wife, Jennifer, has vividly displayed her love and support during this long and drawn-out process. She has spent many hours praying with and for me. She has helped me celebrate the milestones along the way, and at times she has patiently listened to me complain. I do not believe I would have completed this project without her. On more than one occasion, God has used her to get my attention and to help me refocus my efforts. She has so generously allowed me the time I needed to complete this task. Thank you, my love, for loving me and for being a source of inspiration when I needed you to be.

When I needed time away from studying and writing, our children, Jonathan and Anna, always seemed to provide special times for playing and recreation. They kept me going in their own special way with their innocent, yet convicting, questions about when I was going to be done with school. Thank you, kids. Maybe one day you will understand why Daddy has been in school for so many years.
I am thankful to the faculty and staff of the Billy Graham School of Missions and Evangelism. The teaching and instruction I have received has helped me grow as a Christian, as a pastor, and as a Kingdom worker. They have helped me look for new ways and opportunities to reach the lost with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They have challenged me to strive for excellence in all I do for the Lord and to make an impact for Christ in the world. Thank you for patiently allowing me the privilege of participating in this program.

Without the people of Cornerstone Baptist Church, I would not have had the opportunity to pursue this project. Their encouragement and prayers have been timely. Without their willingness to be open and share their lives with me, I could not have completed the project. May those who took part in the project find their lives and their marriages blessed by our Heavenly Father. Thank you, people of Cornerstone Baptist Church.

To God be the glory.

Psalm 127:1

Duane W. Logsdon

Springfield, Georgia

May 2012
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Rationale

Long before the birth of the New Testament church, God instituted the family. Beginning with creation, the family has been a basic building block in God’s plan for inhabiting the earth and for passing on the traditions and teachings of faith. Numerous texts throughout the Bible address the importance of maintaining the integrity of the family, especially the covenantal relationship between man and woman in the bonds of marriage. Scripture also emphasizes the need for a healthy relationship between children and their parents and the promise of blessing to those children who will honor their parents. Healthy families, then, play a critical role in the advancement of the kingdom of God.

Unfortunately, the family and the biblical guidelines associated with it are under attack. Battles rage in society and the courts as to how the family unit, especially marriage, is to be defined. Throughout the United States, the liberal, ungodly faction promotes an agenda in which marriages of two men or two women would be legal and morally correct. Proponents of these partnerships are demanding the same rights and privileges as marriages between one man and one woman. The world is attempting to redefine God’s building block for society.

Concomitant to society’s attempt to distort biblical marriage is the problem of divorce. The legal system has made divorce as easy as returning an item to a department store (maybe even easier). Men and women go enter marriage relationships leaving divorce as an option if things “do not work out.” Given this philosophy and the ease of getting a divorce, divorce rates continue to grow both outside and inside the church.
Caught up in the divorces and the unbiblical family units are the future generations of children in this country. Many children are growing up in one-parent families, multiple-parent families, or families with a host of other problems. They no longer know what marriage looks like or how two individuals can “become one flesh.” Sadly, even “churched” children are finding it hard to identify what a biblically healthy home looks like.

In the midst of all this mayhem is the church with its biblical mandate “to go and make disciples,” but before the church can be effective in fulfilling this mandate, it needs to be healthy. Healthy families, as defined in the Bible, are one of the main components for the health and well-being of a church’s witness; therefore, the church needs to educate and equip its members on how to have godly marriages and godly family relationships. It also need to provide the biblical foundations and guidelines necessary to heal broken or dysfunctional relationships that are already present in the church.

The church needs members who are above reproach in their family life; hence, they have a stronger witness to a world that so desperately needs to know what godly families look like. The church needs families where Christ is the head and the gospel is passed on to the next generation by parents who show their children the love of Christ. The church needs unity as part of its witness, and this unity needs to begin in the family unit.

Family unity is impeded at the foundation of most marriages as many couples receive little or no premarital counseling. Even fewer receive scripturally-based training to guide them through the early years of marriage. The church needs to offer a discipleship class that can be used to educate, train, and equip couples as to how they can pursue and maintain a healthy marriage. These couples need to have a better
understanding of the biblical foundation of covenant marriage, as well as the biblical truths that can aid them in the difficulties faced in marriage.

Healthier marriages are needed to reflect Paul’s emphasis on marriage being a model of Christ’s relationship to the church. Healthier marriages allow the couple to have a greater witness, hence a greater witness for the church as a whole. The church, therefore, becomes a cleaner vessel through which God pours out His grace.

**Cornerstone Baptist Church Analysis**

Cornerstone Baptist Church is a nontraditional,\(^1\) Southern Baptist church located in Effingham County, Georgia – one county removed from Georgia’s Atlantic coastline. The church started with two locations: (1) the Lion’s Club building in Rincon, a rented facility which was initially used for Sunday School, worship, and other large indoor events and (2) the church property, located between Rincon and Springfield (the county seat) on Georgia Highway 21. In 2008, the church moved permanently onto the church property for worship, Sunday School, and all other church-related activities. The church is currently leasing and utilizing a modular unit from the Georgia Baptist Convention as a temporary worship center while a first-phase, multipurpose building is under construction. This new facility will accommodate up to 250 people in worship.

Cornerstone is a “splinter” church with only a brief history. In April 2002, approximately 120 members left Emmanuel Baptist Church following a period of unrest. Within this group was a majority of the lay leadership at Emmanuel. This group immediately began meeting for Sunday School and worship in the Lion’s Club building in Rincon, Georgia. They were constituted as a church under the name “Cornerstone Baptist Church” in the spring of 2003, and they called their first fulltime pastor in August 2004. The church has seen little to no growth since it began. In fact, membership and

\(^1\)Cornerstone Baptist Church is nontraditional in its use of contemporary music and a live band for worship.
active participants in the church have steadily declined in the last few years.

Although some people in the community still refer to this local church body as “the group that split from Emmanuel Baptist Church,” Cornerstone has built a good name for itself. The church is an active member of the Savannah Baptist Association, and the people are known in the community. Additionally, several ministries have made the church visible in the local area.

If one looks at a five-mile radius around both locations (which does include some overlap), one will find a similar social-economic mix of the population – the only difference being a higher population density around the Lion’s Club in Rincon. Both areas consist mainly of 25 to 54 year old Caucasian, middle-class families who own their own homes, have both parents working, have at least a high school degree with some college, have an average household income around $60,000, and have at least two cars and one child. This mix is not expected to change over the next five years.2 The highest percentage of the population falls in the age range of 35 to 54 years (Springfield – 30 percent; Rincon – 31 percent), which is representative of Cornerstone’s current membership. The second largest percentage, 14 percent, represents those in the age range of 25-34 years.3 A majority of the guests who have visited Cornerstone’s Sunday School and/or worship service have been young married couples (who have younger children) who would belong to this age bracket.

Until recently, the communities in Effingham County could only be described as what might be called small-town, rural America. However, this description is rapidly changing for several reasons. First, as new industries move into Effingham County and neighboring Chatham County, families are moving into this area to claim the jobs these


3Ibid., 4.
new industries create. Second, Effingham County has seen growth as people have moved out of the more populated and tourist-oriented Savannah, Georgia (Chatham County). Third, families are attracted to Effingham because of the quality of the school systems. As a result of these factors, both ministry areas for Cornerstone have experienced phenomenal growth in a county that is in the top 100 for growth in the United States. In the Springfield ministry area, a 48 percent increase in population occurred from 2000 to 2009 (an increase of almost 7,000 people), while the Rincon ministry area grew 33 percent during the same period (an increase of almost 5,000 people).\(^4\) Within five minutes of the church property there have been multiple subdivisions constructed bringing new families into the area. The ministry field is certainly growing, indicating great potential for a church that is willing to reach them.

Time and money issues are critical factors in both Springfield and Rincon – as they are most anywhere. Seventy percent of the households in the five-mile radii have two or more vehicles,\(^5\) indicating the availability of transportation for people to come to church; however, this statistic also suggests that these households are quite busy and may not “have time” for church. With families having to pay off mortgages and multiple car loans, both mom and dad are most likely working, adding to the “time crunch” problem. Many jobs in the area are shift work, creating scheduling problems for family time and church time. These are the families Cornerstone will have to reach if it is to grow.

The Congregation

Attempts to define the cultural makeup of Cornerstone Baptist Church will leave a researcher somewhat puzzled. In *U.S. Lifestyles and Mainline Denominations*,

\(^4\)Ibid., 3.

\(^5\)Ibid., 5.
Tex Sample characterizes churches as being culturally right, left, or middle. Based on the descriptions of these groups, one will find some of all three represented in the congregation at Cornerstone. Most of the congregation, however, falls into either the cultural right or cultural left. First, there are those who are culturally right. These members are hard-working people who are trying to provide for their family, make ends meet, and do what has to be done to the house or for saving to buy a house. Time is a problem as they have to work shift work and/or multiple jobs. Effingham County or one of the neighboring counties is “home” for these members, and they have a great deal of pride in the smaller communities in which they live. Second, there are younger couples in the congregation (ages 25 to 35) who are culturally left. These couples are interested in “doing their own thing,” having personal freedom and tolerance, and they are looking for worship they can experience. With this last factor in mind, Cornerstone’s leadership has chosen to have a more contemporary worship style.

The members at Cornerstone consider themselves servants to their community. They reach out to those who need food and clothing, to those in prison, and to those who cannot take care of themselves. They also reach in to other members of the church in times of need. Based on the types of congregation listed in Carl Dudley and Sally Johnson’s book, Energizing the Congregation, Cornerstone would be classified as a “servant church.” The people are not so much interested in making a name for themselves as they are in bringing glory to God through faithful service in ministry. The

6 Tex Sample, U. S. Lifestyles and Mainline Churches (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 58

7 Ibid., 25, 26, 34.

first permanent structure the church built on the property was a food pantry building – a building to service a ministry rather than house congregational worship or education.

The church split that birthed Cornerstone in 2002 left many people hurt emotionally and spiritually. Three other factors have added to this hurt and uncertainty. First, in 2003 the church incurred a significant amount of debt with the purchase of 52 acres of land, resulting in the loss of several members who did not approve of the church borrowing money. Second, the church was without full-time pastoral leadership for almost two-and-a-half years. Finally, the church has not grown since the split, despite efforts (and a deep desire) to evangelize the community.

In light of these factors, Cornerstone would be classified as a mixture of civic and evangelistic orientations based on the paradigm found in Varieties of Religious Presence.\(^9\) The church has a civic orientation in that the people do not want conflict – they do not want another split like the one that gave birth to this congregation. The church will not avoid issues that might cause unrest, but they desire to put problems to rest by using biblical guidelines and truth.

Cornerstone broke from a church that had had much success in reaching the lost for Christ. Many of the members of Cornerstone were a part of the evangelistic efforts that God used to make that growth possible. Members at Cornerstone desire to see God working as He did in their previous church – hence the evangelistic orientation. Many of the members have a desire to share their faith in the routine of daily life, as well as in focused, organized efforts of community outreach. They emphasize prayer for the lost and for those going out to share the Gospel.

My leadership style is best described as “servant leadership.” I lead by example and participation. By participation, I do not mean that I have to attend every

committee meeting or event that takes place in the life of the church. I do, however, believe I am responsible for overseeing those who are leading in the church. I have been called to equip the people so they can lead and perform the ministries to which God has called them. As the pastor of Cornerstone Baptist Church for seven years, I am unwilling to ask of others that which I would be unwilling to do or attempt to do myself. The church has great potential. The people have leadership ability, but they find themselves at times being tired. I am attempting to set the example of Gideon’s army that kept on pursuing the enemy even though they were weary (Judg 8:5). My strengths are in leadership, preaching, and teaching. The church (for the most part) is allowing me to focus on these duties. When I was called, they said they wanted a visionary that could lead them in God’s will for the church. I have continued to seek God for the strength and wisdom only He can impart as I have served and led the flock at Cornerstone to build lives on Him – i.e., Jesus Christ, our Cornerstone.

The Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project was to disciple married couples in order to increase church health at Cornerstone Baptist Church in Springfield, Georgia.

The Goals

This project sought to accomplish five goals. These goals served as the criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of the project. The first of these goals was to identify the spiritual maturity of couples (those married less than seven years) with regard to marriage. The objective of this goal was to determine how the couples view marriage and uncover what problems they were facing in their married life.

Having determined the spiritual maturity, the second goal was to disciple the couples in order to help them develop a biblical worldview as it relates to marriage. The curriculum used to disciple the couples, whether compiled or written, was based on the
principles of marriage presented in the Bible. The content of the class addressed various problems uncovered during the research, as well as provided additional information for helping the couples grow in their marriage relationship. At the end of the class, the couples were to have a greater understanding of the “covenant model” of marriage as presented in Scripture. They were challenged to examine their marriages and to apply biblical principles presented during the class.

The third goal was to provide tools to help couples continue to grow together in their church ministry. The couples were challenged to develop the spiritual disciplines needed to grow in their faith and in their knowledge of God’s Word. They were also encouraged to increase their involvement and healthy support of the church by attending Bible study and worship, sharing their faith, participating in ministry, and giving of their tithe and offering.

The fourth goal was to offer the class as an outreach to the community and to church members. Although church members received the greatest emphasis during the project, the class was structured with the intent of inviting unchurched couples. The class, then, became one more outreach arm of the church to the community.

The fifth goal of the project was to increase the marriage health of the pastor at Cornerstone Baptist Church. Not only should the pastor possess biblical knowledge for preaching and teaching, but he should also practice the truths in his own life. Couples were encouraged through the testimony of a pastor who provides a living illustration of what he preaches and teaches.

Research Group

The project was advertised within the church body for several weeks via the bulletin, public meetings, electronic announcements, and one-on-one conversations. In attempts to reach people outside the church body, information fliers were emailed to churches across the local Baptist association. Additional attempts to reach the local
Community were made by distributing fliers in various subdivisions near the church property, as well as in the neighborhoods of church members. People within the church were encouraged to invite other couples (churched and unchurched) to participate. A local Christian counselor was also contacted, so he would be aware of the class and be able to recommend it to couples.

Initially, twelve people from within the church expressed interest in being a part of the marriage health class. Ten of these individuals represented five married couples. The other two individuals were single divorcees. Before the class began, one of the couples left the church, and therefore, chose not to participate in the class. One additional single joined the class in the first few weeks after it had started. By the end of the class, one of the couples who started the class dropped out, leaving the final number who completed the class at nine, all of which were a part of Cornerstone Baptist Church.

Unfortunately, no unchurched couples were reached through the class. The single who joined the class after the first few weeks was not a regular attendee of Cornerstone but was dating one of the other singles in the class. By the end of the class, they were engaged to be married.

**Time Frame**

After an initial introductory meeting on June 12, 2011, the marriage class began on July 10, 2011 and continued through September 25, 2011. It consisted of eleven one and one-half hours sessions. Only one interruption was placed in the scheduled class meetings – that interruption being a cookout held on Labor Day weekend.

**Methodology**

The focus of this project was an eleven-week discipleship class designed to help married couples have a better understanding of the biblical foundation of covenant marriage and the biblical truths that can aid in the difficulties faced in marriage. In
keeping with the goals of the project, research was focused on (1) ascertaining and identifying the type of problems couples have faced in their marriages, (2) measuring the amount of knowledge couples had with regards to covenant marriage and biblical guidelines for marriage, and (3) evaluating the confidence level couples placed in their Christian faith for dealing with marital problems.

The methods for evaluating the aforementioned areas were a class survey/questionnaire (see Appendix 1) and a focus group. The survey/questionnaire was used in pre-class and post-class format, which allowed for understanding and evaluation of each participant’s knowledge of biblical marriage and the biblical guidelines for dealing with problems in marriage.

The pre-class instrument consisted of three sections and was used for gathering pertinent research information. The first section was a questionnaire used to collect demographic and church involvement data about the individuals taking the class. The last four digits of social security numbers were used to identify participants, allowing for analysis and comparison of the pre- and post-class instruments. The second section consisted of a number of statements related to marriage to which the participants indicated their agreement on a seven point Likert scale. The final section consisted of a series of open-ended questions related to various aspects of marriage and marriage health. Answers to these questions provided insight into the types of problems couples had faced in marriage and to what extent their Christian faith had helped them in dealing with the problems. Pre- and post-seminar answers to section three questions, as well as the responses to the statements in section two, were compared and used to evaluate the effectiveness of the class.

A focus group composed of individuals participating in the class was conducted on the last night of class. In open discussion, participants were asked to reflect on what they had learned and how the knowledge had impacted their lives. Additionally,
participants were asked to take home and complete the post-class survey/questionnaire. By allowing participants to complete the instrument at home, they were afforded the privacy and time needed for proper reflection.

The post-seminar instrument consisted of the same sections as the pre-seminar form, as well as an additional series of open-ended questions. Responses to these questions were also used to evaluate the effectiveness of the class.

**Biblical Focus**

Although numerous verses are referenced in the project, two Bible passages are focal. The first is the creation story found in Genesis 1 and 2. An examination of this passage is critical for ascertaining the foundational basis for covenant marriage, for it is here God unfolds His purpose and plan for marriage in the original wedding of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. From the very beginning, marriage done God’s way was to be the building block for society (and for the church).

The second focal passage is Ephesians 5:21-33. Paul, writing to the church at Ephesus, reveals a beautiful correlation between covenant marriage and Jesus Christ’s relationship to the church. An examination of the Ephesians passage reveals numerous characteristics of healthy marriage. In fact, these characteristics are to be a testimony and an illustration of God’s love, grace, and forgiveness.

**Terminology**

As previously stated, the purpose of this project was to disciple married couples in order to improve church health. Stated another way, the purpose was to increase marriage health in order to increase church health. Based on this wording, two phrases are critical for understanding the purpose of this project – “healthy marriage” and “healthy church.” The following will provide a brief description of the phrases as they pertain to the project.
For marriage to be healthy, it must be based on God’s plan and purpose as described in Scripture. A survey of God’s Word reveals His plan has always been for marriage to be a covenant relationship, where covenant is a special agreement between two parties based on love, respect, and commitment. This project focused on discipling couples to help them gain a deeper understanding of covenant relationships as God’s model for building a healthy marriage. Additional information will be provided in chapter 2 for defining the term “covenant.”

Space does not permit a lengthy definition of what is meant by a “healthy church”; therefore, I offer the following words from Mark Dever’s book, What Is a Healthy Church?, to summarize the meaning of the term:

A healthy church is not a church that’s perfect and without sin. It has not figured everything out. Rather, it’s a church that continually strives to take God’s side in the battle against the ungodly desires and deceits of the world, our flesh, and the devil. It’s a church that continually seeks to conform itself to God’s Word…A healthy church is a congregation that increasingly reflects God’s character as His character has been revealed in His Word.10

Healthy churches will reflect the character of God. As marriages are an important building block for the church, and as healthy marriages reflect the character of God, then one component of a healthy church is healthy marriage. The local church should encourage healthy marriages by taking a stand on God’s Word and by promoting covenant marriage.

CHAPTER 2
BIBLICAL ANALYSIS OF COVENANT MARRIAGE

God’s intention has always been for marriage to be a covenant relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord of the relationship. What this covenant relationship looks like, its foundation, and how it is to be practiced is given explanation in the Bible. As there is no single passage of Scripture which provides a complete explanation of covenant marriage, an examination of several biblical passages in both the Old and New Testaments is necessary to obtain a clear understanding of the concept.

This chapter examines a few of the more prominent passages used in defining covenant marriage and its importance for marriage health. First, the biblical foundation for marriage is found in God’s plan of creation; therefore, passages in Genesis 1 and 2 are examined to find God’s intent for marriage. This Scripture, along with numerous supporting passages, are used to show that marriage done God’s way is a covenant relationship. Secondly, the scriptural definition and description of what the covenant marriage relationship should look like is examined. Numerous passages are used to explain how covenant marriage fulfills God’s purpose for marriage. One of the more critical passages for defining the biblical model of marriage is Ephesians 5:21-33. This passage is used to explain, among other issues, how love is defined in a covenant marriage relationship. The Ephesians 5 passage, along with 1 Peter 3:1-7, is also utilized to explain man’s responsibility as “head” of the marriage relationship and the woman’s responsibility to submit herself to her husband. Finally, Scripture is examined which points to the permanence of a marriage based on a covenant relationship. Taken together, these passages provide God’s intention for marriage, and therefore God’s prescription for a healthy and blessed marriage.
The Foundation for Covenant Marriage

God is the sovereign creator of the entire universe. Through the spoken word, He brought all into existence in the six days of creation recorded in Genesis 1 and 2. The words of Scripture found in Genesis 1:1 are “the foundation of all that is to follow in the Bible.”¹ In these foundational moments of creation, the reader is introduced to the “two main subjects of Holy Scripture, God the Creator and man His creation”² and to the “scene for the long tale of their relationship.”³ As the creation story unfolds, one finds God’s plan for creation, including the divine plan of man and woman and their relationship within the boundaries of marriage, as well as the relationship they are to have with their Creator.

The First Wedding

As the Creator, God knows how marriage works. In fact, God created marriage, a special relationship between one man and one woman, as indicated in the creation story. In the midst of this story, Scripture states “God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female he created them” (Gen 1:27). Early on in the Garden of Eden, God looked upon Adam and said “it was not good for man to be alone” (Gen 2:18). Then, in His great wisdom, God created woman from man and performed the first wedding ceremony in the Garden of Eden.

Then the Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.” Out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him. So the Lord God


³Ibid.
caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. The Lord God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. The man said, “This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.” For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. (Gen 2:18-24 NASB)

God never intended for man to be alone. He created man for relationship, with Himself and with others – in this case, a wife. The critical nature of this man and woman relationship is given light as God observes there is something not right with man being in the world with just the animals. The fact that such an observation is made by God “alerts the reader to the importance of companionship for man.” God cannot declare His creation “finished” or “very good,” because man by himself is in need.

Adam, in the midst of naming the animals, realizes that something is missing, as there is no “helper suitable for him” (Gen 2:20). God, then, taking the initiative, provides for Adam a suitable helpmate – one who will be able to correspond to and complement him (unlike the animals) and one who “will be neither a superior nor an inferior, but an equal.” The term “helper” does not indicate that the woman is superior in strength or ability to man; rather, it connotes that the man’s strength is not adequate in and of itself. Neither should the reader see the woman as lesser than or inferior to the man. In fact, the verb form of the Hebrew word translated as “helper” means to “save from danger” or “deliver from death.” God creates Eve so that she can deliver, or save, the man from his loneliness.

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4Ibid., 68.


6Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 68.

God puts man in a deep sleep and takes from his side both bone and flesh, fashioning from these portions the woman who would be called Eve. Even in the methodology which God used to create woman, the reader becomes aware this special helper is one who will work alongside Adam in “carrying out the divine commission to fill the earth and to subdue it.”

God institutes this first marriage relationship, and in doing so He fashions the woman in such a way as to indicate the harmony and intimacy that is to exist between the partners. The new couple, Adam and Eve, will work together as “partners” to fulfill God’s purpose for the world and for marriage.

As the original “matchmaker,” God placed the first man and first woman together, and one can honestly say, “These two people were made for one another.” God defined marriage and its original purpose. His biblical parameters have not changed since the first wedding in the Garden of Eden, when, after fashioning Eve, God “brought her to the man” (Gen 2:22). The impact of God’s work in creating Eve and presenting her to Adam resulted in the first recorded words of man: “This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man” (Gen 2:23). These words reflect a covenant statement of his commitment to her and his loyalty to the marriage relationship into which God placed him—a commitment and a loyalty that were never intended to be broken by Adam or Eve or any couple who enter into a marriage relationship.

Commitment and loyalty to one’s spouse are critical in God’s plan for marriage, as Genesis 2:24 indicates. Because of the special relationship that is formed when a man and woman enter into covenant marriage, Scripture prescribes that a man should “leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife.” The Hebrew verb

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9Wenham, Genesis 1-15, 69.

10Hamilton, The Book of Genesis Chapters 1-17, 180.
translated as “leave” is frequently used in the Old Testament to describe Israel’s rejection of her covenant relationship with God (Jer 1:16; 2:13; 17, 19; 5:7; 16:11; 17:13; 19:4; 22:9). Additionally, the verb translated as “joined” (“cling,” “cleave”) is used often in the Old Testament to depict the maintenance of this same covenant relationship between God and the children of Israel. Given the use of these terms, one can conclude that “to leave father and mother and cling to one’s wife means to sever one loyalty and commence another.”

Clearly, Genesis 2:24 indicates that marriage is a covenant relationship that is to be taken seriously. Once a man, guided by the Lord, enters into the holy bonds of marriage, his first and foremost loyalty and obligation is to be directed toward his new wife – his lifelong helpmate and partner. The husband and wife are to guard the integrity of their new home and life together. They are to be “joined” together, a term suggesting both the passion and permanence which are to characterize covenant marriage. God made it clear from the beginning that the marriage relationship was intended to be “permanent until death.”

The sanctity of the marriage relationship is also highlighted in the last phrase of verse 24, when it states that husband and wife “shall become one flesh.” The new relationship which is formed between husband and wife is unlike any other type of relationship in God’s creation. Commenting on the meaning of the phrase “they shall become one flesh,” Gordon Wenham states,

This does not denote merely the sexual union that follows marriage, or the children conceived in marriage, or even the spiritual and emotional relationship that it involves, though all are involved in becoming one flesh. Rather it affirms that just as

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11 Ibid., 181.
12 Ibid.
13 Wenham, Genesis 1-15, 71.
14 Morris, The Genesis Record, 102.
blood relationship are one’s flesh and bone, so marriage creates a similar kinship relation between man and wife.\textsuperscript{15}

**Reflecting the Image of God**

In Genesis 1:26-27, the inspired author of Genesis states that God created mankind, both male and female, in such a way that they share the likeness of their Creator.\textsuperscript{16} He also highlights the importance of mankind being created by switching from the verb in the jussive (e.g., “Let there be”) to the cohortative (“Let us make”), which prepares the reader “for something momentous on the sixth day.”\textsuperscript{17} The momentous occasion is, of course, the creation of the first male and the first female human beings and the marriage relationship which began as God put the two humans together in the Garden of Eden. The use of the divine plurality in verse 26 can be “seen as an anticipation of the human plurality of the man and woman, thus casting the human relationship between man and woman in the role of reflecting God’s own personal relationship with Himself.”\textsuperscript{18} In other words, the relationship between husband and wife within the boundaries of marriage is to be a reflection of the beautiful relationship which exists between the members of the Holy Trinity – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The relationship between the members of the Trinity is characterized by, among other traits, the ideas of permanence, harmony, love, cooperation, and good communication. A marriage based on biblical guidelines should possess and portray these characteristics.

Not only is covenant marriage to reflect the relationship of the members of the Holy Trinity, it also should reflect the relationship between God and His people. Later in

\textsuperscript{15}Wenham, *Genesis I-15*, 71.

\textsuperscript{16}Sailhammer, *Genesis*, 37.

\textsuperscript{17}Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters I-17*, 134.

\textsuperscript{18}Sailhammer, *Genesis*, 38.
this chapter, we will look at this characteristic of covenant marriage when we examine the marriage passage found in Ephesians 5.

**Stewardship Responsibilities**

God created man and woman with the intention of them being stewards of His creation: “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ God blessed them; and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth’” (Gen 1:26, 28). God blessed the man and the woman in appointing them as stewards, and in doing so, He bestowed on them “not only a gift but a function.”19 A number of functions, or stewardship responsibilities, can be found by examining the creation story of Genesis 1 and 2.

First, man and woman are to be stewards of their relationship to the rest of God’s creation. In this stewardship responsibility, God “gives two assignments to the male and female: procreation and dominion.”20 With procreation, God’s plans were for man and woman, within the safe confines of marriage, to have sexual intercourse which would result in the birth of children. With God’s help, couples have the responsibility of populating the earth rather than having God create more humans, as He had done with Adam and Eve. The family unit, therefore, is to be the building block upon which society is to be structured. The personal relationship God has with mankind is depicted in His command for mankind to “be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.”21 This command,

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like others in Scripture, “carries with it an implicit promise that God will enable man to fulfill it.”

Also stated in verse 28 is God’s command for man to “subdue” and “rule over” the rest of creation. Man and woman, made in the image of God, are granted the authority and ability to manage and have dominion over the rest of creation – the natural resources and the other animals. Mankind is to rule the world on God’s behalf. Note that the command to rule over creation is given to man and woman, the family unit, here in the creation story. Certainly individuals are to be stewards, but God places much emphasis on the responsibility of families to be good stewards of His creation.

Second, man and woman have stewardship responsibilities in conjunction with the marriage relationship into which God places them. God ordained marriage such that man and woman, in covenant relationship, would receive the blessings, joys, and benefits of being husband and wife. In order to receive such merits, the marriage relationship must be guarded and held as sacred. Married couples should consider the permanence, the commitment, and the exclusivity of the marital relationship. Families, society as a whole, and the church benefit from marriage done God’s way. In chapter 3 we will take a more in depth look at this truth.

The third stewardship responsibility has already been implied via the discussion on procreation. As man and woman procreate, they are given the critical task of parenting. God designed marriage such that children are to be one of the natural outcomes of sexual intercourse in marriage. The responsibility for these children, however, does not end at the moment of birth. In fact, the responsibilities only grow as the child enters into the world and needs the provision and care which parents are to provide for them. Husbands and wives have the responsibility of providing for the

21Ibid.

22Ibid., 33.

23Ibid.
spiritual, physical, and emotional well-being of their children. Certainly, when God is at
the center of the family, He provides the parents with the ability to learn and grow in their
parenting role, and He helps the parents obtain those things necessary for survival.

Perhaps one of the greatest stewardship responsibilities parents have is proclaiming
God’s Word to their children. God’s plan is for parents to have the lead role in teaching
their children about the one true God – His will, His ways, His Word.

Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your
God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words,
which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them
diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when
you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind
them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You
shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deut 6:4-9
NASB)

Even though not directly related to the marriage relationship, the fourth
stewardship responsibility, vocation, is critical for couples. God designed creation, put
man into it, and then gave him his first vocation in the garden: “Then the Lord God took
the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it” (Gen 2:15). God
never intended the first man and woman to sit around with nothing to do in the Garden;
rather, God’s intention was for mankind to work even before sin entered the equation and
the curse of Genesis 3 had been proclaimed. Once sin occurred, man found work to be
harder, but he still had a responsibility to work the land and be active in providing for the
family’s survival. Having a vocation, then, is a natural part of a married couple’s
lifestyle. Decisions on what type of work, the amount of time to be invested, and how to
balance time between vocation and family are critical areas which have to be addressed
by couples. Like the other stewardship responsibilities, poor decisions in this area can
have devastating effects on the health of a marriage.

Finally, man and woman are to be good stewards of justice, i.e., morality. They
have a responsibility to obey the commands of the Lord. In Genesis 2:16-17, we read
that “the Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.’” Mankind was originally only given one command they were to obey. Obedience to this command was necessary for the continued fellowship God intended to provide for them in the Garden of Eden. Eventually, Eve was deceived by the serpent, partook of the fruit, and then had Adam eat of it as well. Having partaken of the forbidden fruit, Adam committed the first sin which resulted in God proclaiming the curse of Genesis 3:14-19. God has provided a remedy for the sin problem – i.e., Jesus Christ’s substitutionary death on Calvary’s cross – but mankind still has the responsibility of obeying the relevant commands God gives in His Word. Certainly, a number of these commands deal with marriage and family life. In addition to obeying God’s commands, mankind should be a good example of one who obeys the moral, ethical, and legal codes prescribed by society (as long as these are not contradictory to God’s Word).

**Marriage: A Covenant Relationship**

Marriage is much more than a contract drawn up in the form of a marriage license which is to be filed at the local court house. As presented above, marriage is a special relationship God instituted as part of His plan and purpose for creation, and God takes these relationships very seriously. He ordained marriage to be a permanent relationship between one man and one woman who remain faithful in their commitment to one another. God’s intention has always been to bestow His blessings on those who strive to build and maintain a healthy marriage based on the principles and guidelines He outlined in Scripture. The type of marriage relationship that is based on the biblical principles and guidelines is known as a “covenant marriage.”

In the section which follows, information will be presented from Scripture to define the biblical concept of “covenant.” Once a definition has been established, the
claim that marriage is a covenant relationship will be further developed using Scripture. Included in this discussion will be information which describes the concept of “sacrifice” and how it relates to covenant marriage.

Covenant – A Biblical Definition

Following the original sin which resulted in the curse pronounced upon mankind, the introduction of spiritual and physical death, and the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, God had to take the initiative in providing a means by which mankind could have a relationship with Him. The process by which God established these relationships and made promises to those who would be faithful in them are what is known as a covenant. According to the Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words, God’s “covenant” is a relationship of love and loyalty between the Lord and His chosen people. In the Expository Dictionary of Bible Words, Lawrence Richards defines a biblical covenant as “a clear statement of God’s purposes and intentions expressed in terms that bind God by solemn oath to perform what He has promised.” Put in simpler terms, a covenant is a “binding promise.” In the Mercer Dictionary of the Bible, John Hayes provides the following explanation of the dynamics involved in a biblical covenant.

The term “covenant” could thus be used to refer to a variety of solemn, binding obligations or agreements involving two or more parties in a relationship. (1) The obligation might be self-assumed by the primary party for the benefit of the secondary party. In this case, the covenant was more like a pledge or a promise. The expected attitude of the primary party to the obligation was one of fidelity and the attitude of the secondary party was one of acceptance and trust. (2) When the obligation was imposed on the secondary party, it represented a demand or condition placed upon the obligated party and required obedience. Generally, such a

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26Hamilton, The Book of Genesis Chapters 1-17, 437.
A covenant relationship was assumed to benefit the party imposing the obligation although obedience to the obligation might be seen as beneficial to the obligated party as well. (3) Conditions and commitments accepted by both or all parties produced a situation of mutual obligation intended to benefit all parties concerned. In all three cases, the gravity and solemnity of the parties’ commitment could be enhanced by verbal declaration, swearing, or taking of an oath.  

In the Old Testament, covenant is translated from the Hebrew word *berit* (ברית), and is used of special relationships between God and man, as well as special relationships between man and man. Where it is used in reference to relationship agreements between individuals, *berit* is used to describe such things as a pledge of friendship (1 Sam 18:3, 20:8; 23:18) or as a business contract. The term is also used to describe agreements on a national level between a ruler and those being ruled. When used in this respect, covenants served as a “national constitution and spelled out the responsibilities of the ruler and the ruled” (cf. 2 Sam 3:21; 5:3; 1 Chr 11:3).

More prevalent in the Old Testament is the use of covenant to describe the special promises and relationships God established with individuals and with nations. Examples of covenant promises God made to individuals include those He made to Noah (Gen 9), to Abraham (Gen 15), and to David (2 Sam 7). God also made a covenant with the nation of Israel as they were His special, chosen people. This covenant is “the most prominent portrayal of covenant in the Old Testament.” Three sections of text speak of the making of this covenant between Yahweh and Israel – Exodus 19-24, Exodus 34, and Deuteronomy 28-31. In each of these incidences, whether to an individual or to a nation, God took the initiative to provide the covenant, and in each case He offered His blessing on those who would be faithful to the covenant relationship.

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29 Ibid.

30 Hayes, “covenant,” 179.
Of special interest here is the Abrahamic Covenant and the covenant ceremony God carried out in making His promise to Abraham and to all individuals who would be faithful to the covenant promise. The ceremony and God’s promises to Abraham are found in Genesis 15.

After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, “Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great.” Abram said, “O Lord God, what will You give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” And Abram said, “Since You have given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir.” Then behold, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, “This man will not be your heir; but one who will come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir.” And He took him outside and said, “Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” And He said to him, “So shall your descendants be.” Then he believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness. And He said to him, “I am the Lord who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess it.” He said, “O Lord God, how may I know that I will possess it?” So He said to him, “Bring Me a three year old heifer, and a three year old female goat, and a three year old ram, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon.” Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, and laid each half opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds. The birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, and Abram drove them away. Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, terror and great darkness fell upon him. God said to Abram, “Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions. As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you will be buried at a good old age. Then in the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete.” It came about when the sun had set, that it was very dark, and behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a flaming torch which passed between these pieces. On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, “To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates: the Kenite and the Kenizzite and the Kadmonite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Rephaim and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Girgashite and the Jebusite.” (Gen 15:1-21 NASB)

First of all, God alone obligates Himself by enacting the covenant ceremony.\(^{31}\) God alone makes this “promissory oath.” Lawrence Richards points out “the nature of the biblical berît as something in which God binds Himself by solemn oath is seen in the

ritual followed in making the covenants.” The verbs used in the passage give evidence that it is God who takes the sole initiative in covenant making and fulfillment. Via the ceremony and the oath, God makes a promise of blessing on Abraham and his descendents based on their faithful obedience to God and a trust in His promises.

Second, a sacrifice is made as part of the ceremony. With reference to the preparatory cutting of the animals for the ceremony, Richards states that “in Old Testament times a covenant was ‘cut,’ perhaps referring to the fact that the most binding covenants were enacted in a ceremony that involved the offering of a sacrifice. Genesis 15 describes how God followed this cultural form, passing between the halves of sacrificial animals as Abraham lay in a deep sleep. In this way God bound Himself to keep the promises made to Abraham.” Sacrifices such as this one foreshadow the great sacrifice God would make of His Son, Jesus, in providing the New Covenant for salvation to those who would place their faith in God’s ultimate provision and promise. Sacrifice, like promise, is part of the biblical definition and description of covenant.

The connection between the concepts of covenant and promise is also found in the New Testament. Paul indicates biblical covenants are associated with promise in passages such as Romans 4:13-17 and Galatians 3:15-18. Like the promises God made in the Old Testament time period, the promises God makes in the New Covenant are not dependent on human reaction to them; rather, God will do what He promised.

Covenant, as just noted, is a term also found in New Testament writings. The Greek word which translates into the biblical concept of “covenant” is the word diatheke (διαθήκη). Diatheke is used 270 times in the Septuagint to render the Hebrew word berit.

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34 Richards, “covenant,” 194.
35 Ibid., 194.
In the New Testament it occurs 33 times. Along with the specific use of the Greek term, writers in the New Testament “base arguments on different aspects of the covenant that God established with Abraham and his descendants (e.g., Rom 5, Gal 3)”, further establishing the importance of the covenant concept.

One particular passage in the New Testament that gives light to the biblical concept of covenant is Hebrews 9:13-22. Here one finds the concept of covenant being equated with a last will and testament.

For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. For where a covenant is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it. For a covenant is valid only when men are dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives. Therefore even the first covenant was not inaugurated without blood. For when every commandment had been spoken by Moses to all the people according to the Law, he took the blood of the calves and the goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, “This is the blood of the covenant which God commanded you.” And in the same way he sprinkled both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry with the blood. And according to the Law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. (Heb 9:13-22 NASB)

The writer of Hebrews uses the term *diatheke* to point out the necessity of the death of the one making the promise in order for the inheritance to be given, as the “will became effective only after the person making it died.” In other words, Jesus had to shed His blood and die in order to institute the New Covenant, as the will could be effective only after the testator had died (Heb 9:16-17). Also, once the testator had died,

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36Ibid., 195.
37Ibid.
the will became unalterable.\textsuperscript{40} Like the covenant ceremony of Genesis 15, sacrifice, death, and blood are a part of the covenant making process in the New Testament. Clearly, sacrifice is critical if a covenant relationship is to exist.

**Marriage as Covenant**

Although not specifically stated, the idea of marriage as a covenant relationship can be found in Scripture. In reference to the Old Testament record, John Hayes states that “marriage was understood in ancient Israel along the lines of a triangular covenantal arrangement in which the spouses were the primary partners and God was the custodian and guardian of the marriage relationship.”\textsuperscript{41} He offers three passages in support of this statement – Proverbs 2:17, Malachi 2:14, and Leviticus 19:20-22. The writer of Proverbs 2:17 describes a woman who “leaves the companion of her youth and forgets the covenant of her God.” The use of the Hebrew word *berit* implies “both that marriage was covenant and that the covenant was under the sanction of God.”\textsuperscript{42}

Second, Hayes refers to Malachi 2:14, a verse found in the context of God warning the children of Israel against sins of the family. Through the prophet, God reveals the real reason behind his rejection of man’s offerings – they have not been faithful to the one who was chosen for their arranged marriage: “Yet you say, ‘For what reason?’ Because the Lord has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife


\textsuperscript{41}Hayes, “covenant,” 180.

\textsuperscript{42}Ibid.
by covenant” (Mal 2:14). In this verse, the writer refers to God “as witness to a marriage arrangement and the wife is referred to as the covenant woman.”

Finally, Hayes refers to Leviticus 19:20-22.

Now if a man lies carnally with a woman who is a slave acquired for another man, but who has in no way been redeemed nor given her freedom, there shall be punishment; they shall not, however, be put to death, because she was not free. He shall bring his guilt offering to the Lord to the doorway of the tent of meeting, a ram for a guilt offering. The priest shall also make atonement for him with the ram of the guilt offering before the Lord for his sin which he has committed, and the sin which he has committed will be forgiven him. (Lev 19:20-22 NASB).

Even though this passage only refers to the betrothal process, Hayes believes the author is implying the triangular relation which is part of covenant marriage. He offers the following summary as the reasoning for his conclusion.

An outside male who sexually interfered in a man-woman relationship was required to offer a reparation (guilt) offering which was demanded when on transgressed against God by profaning the divine name or desecrating something holy to the deity. This would suggest that an oath in the name of Yahweh was sworn (or assumed to be implied) in marriage-betrothal arrangements.

As in the Old Testament, marriage is not referred to as a covenant relationship in the New Testament; however, in offering a prescription for healthy marriage in Ephesians 5:21-33, Paul makes an analogy which clearly depicts biblical marriage as an illustration of Jesus Christ’s love for the church in the New Covenant. Christ willingly sacrificed Himself, dying on Calvary’s cross, so the New Covenant might be established (refer to Heb 9:13-22 discussion, p. 42). The love which Christ showed His people (the church) is to be the same type of love the husband is to show his wife. In Ephesians 5:25, Paul writes, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.” The idea of sacrifice, commitment, and promise – covenant relation concepts – are therefore applied to the marriage relationship.

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43Ibid., 180.

44Ibid.
Love in Covenant Marriage

God is love (1 John 4:8), and He demonstrated to the world what love looks like when He sent His Son Jesus to die on the cross and provide the means by which man could have a restored relationship with Him (John 3:16). Mankind’s covenant relationship with God is based on the self-sacrificing agape love which Christ demonstrated by giving of Himself on the cross for the forgiveness of sins. God, in turn, expects human covenant relationships, especially marriage relationships, to be based upon and exemplary of this kind of love. The question is, then, what does this love look like?

Paul, writing to the church at Ephesus, provides us with four different aspects of marital love. These characteristics, based upon a study of Ephesians 5:21-33, will be presented in the section which follows.

Sacrificially Submitting to One Another

In a culture which thrives on power and being in charge, the idea of “being submissive” or “being subject” to someone else is often regarded as a foreign concept. In fact, many people reject submission as a positive character trait. God’s ways, however, are not the ways of the world, and He commands us to “be subject to one another in the fear of Christ” (Eph 5:21). Submission, then, as it pertains to Christian relationships, is to be regarded as a positive trait and is to be practiced between all Christians, both men and women, in the form of sacrificing selfish desires for the betterment of another. According to Paul, all human relationships should “find their pattern and meaning and ordered expression under the authority of Christ.”

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45 Rick Williams, Blessed Beyond Measure (Nashville, GA: Like Skills Ministries, 2005), 13.

more so to the marriage relationship which is to give testimony of Christ’s love for the church.

The Greek verb ὑποτάσσω, translated in Ephesians 5:21 as “be subject to” (NASB) or “submit to” (KJV), is quite often misunderstood. The term is taken to mean “less than” or “inferior to,” which is not the case, as Jesus Christ submitted Himself to the will of His Heavenly Father (Mark 14:36). Jesus Christ, who is fully God, was never less than His heavenly Father. He did, however, willingly submit to the will and desires of the Heavenly Father which included an obedient decision to give of His life on Calvary’s cross. Jesus willingly sacrificed Himself because He loved the Father and desired to obey Him. He also willingly submitted to the Father’s will because He loved the church.

Paul knew when individuals practiced a sacrificial submission of self for the well-being of others the community was more likely to maintain joyful fellowship (Eph 4:2-3). As a basic building block for society, the family unit also needs to experience such joy to be healthy and blessed. Sacrificial submission mutually practiced by husbands and wives creates a healthy environment for the home (and for the church). Couples should be willing to serve one another, to learn from one another, and to be corrected by one another in love. Husbands and wives should be willing to change themselves for the betterment of their spouses, rather than expecting their spouses to change. John MacArthur adds to this thought: “The filling and control of the Holy Spirit will lead us to a spirit of humility, to the spirit that gives us the desire to seek the welfare of others before our own and to be mutually submissive.”

47Ibid., 160.

48Ibid., 160-61.

Teaching of Truth to One Another

Writing to the church at Ephesus, Paul notes that Christ gave Himself as a sacrifice for the church “so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word” (Eph 5:26). The term “sanctify” (ἁγιάζω) Paul uses in this verse means to set apart. God’s intention is to “set apart” His people. Through His sacrificial death on the cross, Jesus purposed to “separate for Himself a people for His own possession.”50 In Paul’s culture, “before the bride was presented to the bridegroom she received a cleansing bath and was then dressed in her bridal array…So here, the purpose of Christ’s giving Himself up for the church is said to be her sanctification and cleansing in water.”51 Therefore, through His death, Christ provided the means by which His bride, the church, would be cleansed and purified.

A husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church. One of the ways he shows this great love is by living in such a way that he “teaches” or “exemplifies” Christ and His sanctifying love. A husband is to love his wife in such a manner that he leads her toward Christ and Christ-likeness – i.e., he encourages the sanctification process in his wife. John MacArthur writes that “for husbands to love their wives as Christ loves His church is to love them with a purifying love. Divine love does not simply condemn wrong in those loved but seeks to cleanse them from it.”52 A husband also helps his wife by holding in high regard the reading and teaching of God’s Word, as it is through the Word – the truth – that mankind is sanctified (John 17:17).

Although verse 26 focuses on the husband’s love for his wife, certainly wives should reciprocate this type of love (John 13:34; 15:13; Eph 5:2; 1 John 4:7, 11) by living


52 MacArthur, Ephesians, 299.
like Jesus Christ and teaching the truth of God’s Word in love. Husbands and wives should encourage spiritual growth and maturation in one another. They should lead one another toward a closer relationship with God, and at the same time increase the health of their marriage.

**Leading One Another to Holiness**

In verse 27, Paul writes that Christ sanctifies the church so “He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.” Christ’s intent is to work in such a way that He improves the lives of the people who are His church. He wants to protect them from evil and lead them from sinful activities (Eph 5:27, *spots* and *wrinkles*) so that at the “end of the age He might be able to present her to Himself in unsullied splendor as a bride adorned for her husband” (Rev 21:2).

The practice of love by couples in a covenant marriage not only teaches the sanctifying truth of Christ Jesus and the Word of God, but it also works to protect them from the evil and ungodliness which exists in the world. In other words, covenant love leads people toward holiness. Husbands and wives should desire to see their counterpart “holy and blameless” (Eph 5:27). They should desire for one another the spiritual protection and well-being that comes from pursuing a life of Christ-likeness. They should also want the best for one another according to MacArthur, who writes,

> Love wants only the best for the one it loves, and it cannot bear for a loved one to be corrupted or misled by anything evil or harmful. When a husband’s love for his wife is like Christ’s love the His church, he will continually seek to help purify her from any sort of defilement. He will seek to protect her from the world’s contamination and protect her holiness, virtue, and purity in every way. He will never induce her to do that which is wrong or unwise or expose her to that which is less than good.\(^5^4\)

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Nourishing and Cherishing One Another

Jesus Christ loves the church as His body because it is His body (Eph 1:22; 5:23; Col 1:18). Jesus’ desire is to nourish the church as His bride, to raise her to maturity by providing all she needs to survive (Phil 4:19), and to protect her via the spiritual armor which He provides (Eph 6:10-17). Paul, exhorting husbands to love their wives in like manner, states that husbands should “love their own wives as their own bodies” (Eph 5:28), and that they are to do so by “nourishing” (ἐκτρέφω) and “cherishing” (θάλπω) their wives (Eph 5:29). Having become one flesh in covenant marriage, when a husband loves his wife, he is in reality loving himself, for she has become an extension of him.55

According to the Practical Word Studies in the New Testament, “nourishes” means “to feed, to nurture, to look after until she is mature.”56 MacArthur suggests further that when nourishing someone, one individual helps another to mature in favor with God and man.57 Applying these definitions, love practiced in covenant marriage seeks to nourish by providing for the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being of a spouse, and by helping a spouse grow older physically, as well as spiritually. Love that nourishes also strives to protect a spouse from the evil in the world, especially through the discipline of prayer (Eph 6:19).

Paul also states that love in covenant marriages is practiced by “cherishing” one another (Eph 5:29). Cherishing, as used in this verse, means to use tender love and physical affection in order to give warmth, comfort, protection, and security.58 As

54MacArthur, Ephesians, 300.
55Wood, Ephesians, 77.
57MacArthur, Ephesians, 301.
58Ibid.
spouses practice this type of bonding, they display a willingness to regard one another as more important than the other. They also communicate the value and level of importance with which they regard one another.

**Role Responsibilities in Marriage**

In the section which preceded, an examination of Ephesians 5:21-33 was undertaken in order to reveal what “love” looks like in the covenant marriage relationship. The passage, therefore, was examined from the perspective of love as it relates to both the husband and the wife. A close look at the Ephesians passage reveals, however, that there are specific instructions given separately to both the husband and the wife. These special instructions, or role responsibilities, are critical in covenant marriage and will be explored in the sections which follow. (Reference to the preceding discussion on love will aid in the understanding of role responsibilities.)

**Submission: Her Role Responsibility**

Paul exhorts the wives to “be subject to your own husbands, as the Lord” (Eph 4:22). “Submission” is a biblical principle ordained by God for the role of the wife within marriage. If she is to fulfill her covenant role responsibility, she must make a choice to willingly submit to her husband who is to be the “head of the wife” (Eph 5:23).

Translated from the Greek verb ὀποτάσσω, the word “submit” was originally a military term meaning to arrange or rank under.\(^{59}\) It occurs twenty-three times in Paul’s New Testament writing, and where it is used the word “denotes subordination to those considered worthy of respect, either because of their inherent qualities or more often because of the position they held.”\(^{60}\) The one submitting recognizes the authority of the one to whom they are submitting. In turn, they willingly yield to their authority. Jesus

\(^{59}\)MacArthur, Ephesians, 276.

\(^{60}\)Wood, Ephesians, 75.
serves as a biblical model of submission as He, empowered by the Holy Spirit, recognized and willingly submitted to the authority of the Heavenly Father. Jesus gave testimony that He did not speak or act except that He was under the direction of His Heavenly Father (John 5:19).

Just as Jesus submitted to the Father, wives are to submit to their husbands whose authority and headship position has been granted them by God. The wife’s motivation for submitting to her husband “is the fact that he is her functional head in the family, just as Christ is also the head of the church.” Also like Jesus, the wife is not considered inferior or less than the one to whom she is submitting. The wife is equal to her husband in moral and spiritual nature. She is not less than her husband in the eyes of God; however, she is to submit to her husband based on his God-given function of being the “head of the wife.” Her submission is functional and relational.

What does submission look like in covenant marriage? First of all, let us look at what submission is not. Submission does not mean the wife is a doormat. She is not in the “hands of one who has authority to command what he pleases.” She is not to be walked on or abused by her husband as a slave. Neither is the wife a silent partner who never expresses opinion or gives input in making decisions. She is to offer advice, encouragement, and times of warning.

When a wife does submit, “she places herself under the authority of her husband’s leadership, working along with him to support, encourage, and complete him.” As his “helper” (Gen 2:18), her goal should be to complement her husband and

61MacArthur, Ephesians, 276.

62Daniel L. Akin, “Family Life Seminar” (seminar lecture delivered at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, 1999), 7.

63Foulkes, Ephesians, 164.

64Akin, “Family Life Seminar,” 7.
to meet his basic needs (see Appendix 7, Session 7). Daniel Akin suggests that the wife works to accomplish this goal by,

Yielding voluntarily to him (Eph 5:22; Col 3:18; 1 Pet 3:1) – acknowledge the position God has given him; support and encourage his efforts; lending cooperation, imagination, and implementation (includes advising and taking responsibility); trusting the Lord to guide them both and to honor her obedience to the Word. Respecting him sincerely (Eph 5:33) – believing in him; giving him the benefit of the doubt; praising him rather than criticizing him; trusting him to do the right thing.  

Headship: His Role Responsibility

Whereas wives are exhorted in their role responsibility to “be subject to” their husbands, the husbands are commanded to love their wives, “just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her” (Eph 5:25). Husbands are to exemplify the love which Christ Jesus showed the church, while functionally positioned in the marriage by God as the “head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body” (Eph 5:23). The pattern for the husband’s love for his wife is the self-sacrificing love of Christ for the church. His position as head and his responsibility to love and provide care are “pictures, imperfect, but the best that this life can offer, of Christ as head, of His love, self-sacrifice and concern for His church.” In turn, the wife’s response to his headship is a picture of how the church should love and act towards the Lord.  

An examination Ephesians 5:21-33 and 1 Peter 3:7 reveals seven aspects of the husband’s role responsibility as head of the wife. First, as head of his wife (Eph 5:23), the husband has a responsibility to lead. He practices his leadership in the marriage based on the authority which has been granted to him by God. As a leader, he is not to be a

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65 Ibid.
66 Ibid.
67 Foulkes, Ephesians, 169.
68 Ibid.
dictator who orders his wife around or treats her like a slave. Nor is he to be a “father
tfigure” who disciplines his wife and expects her to obey him like a child. Rather,
following the example of Jesus Christ, the husband is to be a servant leader who willingly
gives of his time, energy, and resources to better his wife.

Second, the husband is to love his wife by sacrificing himself for her as Christ
sacrificed His life for the church (Eph 5:25). Christ willingly laid down His life for the
salvation of those who choose to receive His great act of love. A husband, likewise,
should willingly give of himself, including his own life if necessary, to provide for his
wife. He should put “his own likes, desires, opinions, preferences, and welfare aside if
that is required to please her and meet her needs.” He is to die to self in order to live for
his wife and be an example of Christ to her.

Paul refers to Jesus as “Savior of the body” (Eph 5:23), “body” referring to the
church. The term “Savior” (σωτήρ) is used only of Jesus in the New Testament, referring
to His provision of salvation and deliverance from spiritual death and separation from
God. Christ is the Savior of the church, and following His example, the third role
responsibility of a husband is to be a “human savior,” whereby he functions as the
protector of his wife. As savior, the husband should strive to provide for her and to
protect her physically, spiritually, mentally, and emotionally. He should also strive to
provide for her basic needs (see Appendix 7, Session 7).

The fourth role responsibility of husbands in covenant marriage is to prepare
their wives. Christ’s work on the cross not only “saved” the lost, but it also provided the
power by which the sanctification process takes place. Jesus’ desire is to sanctify His

71Ibid.
72Wood, *Ephesians*, 76.
bride (Eph 5:26), the church, making her ready for His second coming. He is continually at work, through the Holy Spirit, transforming the lives of individual members of the church into His likeness. Following Christ’s model, husbands should strive to encourage Christ-likeness in their wives. They should desire to see their spouses be transformed more and more into the image of Jesus Christ (Rom 12:2), preparing them for the purpose for which God made them.

According to Ephesians 5:29, the fifth and sixth role responsibilities of husbands are to nourish and cherish their wives, loving them as their own bodies (Eph 5:28). Daniel Akin suggests that in order to nourish his wife, a husband should strive to spiritually enrich her by modeling godly living and by sharing and instructing in biblical understanding, by seeking to make her a success, and by providing guidance and encouragement in personal and family affairs. He is also to model trust, which is critical in covenant relationships. In order to cherish his wife, a husband should treat her with tenderness, care, and romance, as well as protect her from distress and danger (physically, emotionally, and spiritually).

The final role responsibility, the need to understand her, is found in 1 Peter 3:7, where Peter writes, “You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered.”

Husbands, while given authority in headship (Eph 5:23), “should exercise their authority with proper deference.” Husbands are to treat their wives as equal partners (“fellow heir of the grace of life”), honoring them as sisters in Christ. They should strive to show

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74 Ibid.
understanding in their marital relationship, an understanding of what God demands them to do for their wives,\textsuperscript{76} as well as an ever-growing understanding of their spouse personally. Gaining a personal understanding is a lifelong process and should be done continually. A husband should work to accomplish this goal by studying his wife, by developing an awareness of her emotions and moods, by allowing her the luxury of doing things her way, and by having her serve the Lord alongside him.\textsuperscript{77}

**Covenant Marriage: Regulated by God’s Commandments**

As the One who ordained marriage and its purposes, God’s intent has always been to bless couples who would enter into covenant marriage relationships. In order for couples to receive such blessings, they should adhere to the guidelines God provides for them in His word. Other directives and nuances of biblical marriage have already been elaborated on previously; however, two more commands need to be addressed. These commands are (1) that covenant marriage is to be permanent and (2) that the couple should not be unequally yoked.

First, God designed marriage to be a permanent relationship between one man and one woman as long as they both live. Their relationship should be “holy and indissoluble, just as that relationship between Christ and His church is holy and indissoluble.”\textsuperscript{78} When Jesus was asked by the Pharisees if it was lawful for a man to “divorce his wife for any reason at all” (Matt 19:4), His response was, “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined

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\textsuperscript{76}Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, The New American Commentary, vol. 37 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 160.

\textsuperscript{77}Akin, “Family Life Seminar,” 6.

\textsuperscript{78}MacArthur, *Ephesians*, 273.
together, let no man separate” (Matt 19:5-6). Jesus points to the fact that God the Father is the One who is the witness and sealer of the covenant relationship between husband and wife, for He is the one who joins them together (Matt 19:6). Quoting specifically from Genesis 1:27 and 2:24, Jesus indicates the marriage union is to be exclusive and unbreakable. No man is to separate (carry out divorce) the two who have been united in the eyes of God.

God hates divorce (Mal 2:16) and does not intend for a man and woman who have covenanted together to dissolve their marriage. Although He hates it, God does “allow” divorce and remarriage for a few reasons, including the death of a spouse (Rom 7:2), adultery by a spouse (Matt 5:32; 19:9; Mark 10:9), and the departure by a nonbeliever who no longer desires to be married (1 Cor 7:13-15). An individual who does divorce for one of these reasons is permitted to remarry; however, they are to marry another believer (1 Cor 7:39).

The second principle here examined deals with the issue of being “equally yoked.” In 2 Corinthians 6:14-15, Paul writes that believers in Jesus Christ are not to be “bound together with unbelievers.” These verses do not specifically indicate a reference to marriage, but the concept certainly should be applied to marriage. Believers and unbelievers are “two different breeds and cannot work together in the spiritual realm.”

God cannot grant the type of blessings He intends for covenant marriage if one partner is an unbeliever. David Garland makes this point when he writes: “Those who bear Christ’s yoke (Matt 11:30) cannot share it with others who deny Christ. Those who harness


themselves together with unbelievers will soon find themselves plowing Satan’s fields. One can only be a true yokefellow (Phil 4:3) with a fellow Christian.”

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CHAPTER 3
BENEFITS OF HEALTHY MARRIAGE

Statistics from the Institute of American Values indicate that over the past four
decades adults are less likely to find marriage an attractive choice. In 1970, the number
of adults ages 20-54 who were married was 78.6 percent. In 2008, only 57.2 percent of
adults in the same age group were married, down over 20 percentage points. This trend
is disturbing in light of God’s original intention for marriages and families to be the
building blocks for communities and society as a whole. Over these four decades,
Americans have experienced a change in the cultural norms and no longer look at the
state of marriage as a benefit (a blessing) and a fulfillment of God’s will for His creation.
The number of divorces continues to rise, more and more laws are enabling the ease of
divorce, and fewer people see the importance and the blessing of making and keeping a
commitment in marriage as God intended it.

American society as a whole, Christian and non-Christian, needs to be
reminded of the benefits of marriage – good healthy marriages which are based on
commitment, trust, and longevity. David Akinsanya believes there are benefits to
marriage of this type. He writes, “A happy and God fearing home is what gives birth to a
happy and God fearing church, and a God fearing church is what will constitute a happy
community. A happy and God fearing community is what makes up a God fearing
society. A happy and God fearing society is what makes up a happy nation.”

1“The Marriage Index: A Proposal to Establish Leading Marriage Indicators,” the Institute for
American Values [on-line]; accessed 01 November 2009; available from
www.americanvalues.org/pdfs/IAV_Marriage_Index_09_25_09.pdf; Internet.

2 Ibid.
In chapter 3, research is presented to indicate there is indeed great benefit to healthy marriage done God’s way. In the first portion of the chapter, the benefits of healthy marriage for society are presented. The benefits presented in this section will be categorized by society as a whole, the homes within the society, and then the individuals living in the homes. The latter part of chapter 3 focuses specifically on the benefits of healthy marriage for the church. Many of the benefits presented in the first portion of the chapter also affect the church, but for redundancy’s sake, they will not be addressed a second time. Items which are discussed in the second part of the chapter focus mainly on the spiritual realm – those benefits which promote the health of the church and future marriages.

Benefits of Healthy Marriage for Society

The importance of the marriage and the family is made clear in the creation story of Genesis, as well as throughout many of the pages which follow this passage in the Bible. God, inspiring the writers of His Word, “never underestimated the importance of the family. After all, like marriage, he invented it. The family is the original society from which every other society emerges.” Healthy marriages and the healthy families which originate from these marriages are still needed in today’s society – perhaps more now than ever. In his book *Getting Marriage Right*, David Gushee emphasizes the importance of healthy marriage on society’s future when he writes: “I think it quite possible that society as a whole is a lost cause. But if it is to be changed, it will only occur through the modeling and witness offered by faith communities that are still able to

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make of marriage a coherent, compelling, and successful institution.” In other words, society is in trouble if we do not start emphasizing marriage done God’s way, as well as start helping couples learn how to do marriage according to God’s prescription.

Research from various organizations and institutions indicates marriage benefits society. The following is a summary of several organizations, both secular and religious, which support the need for healthy marriage.

**Benefits to the Community**

From a biblical perspective, communities should benefit from couples who take seriously their commitment to God and to the stewardship responsibilities He ordained for marriage (see chapter 2). According to Gushee, “In any wedding the marrying couple is also implicitly enmeshing themselves in covenantal obligation to the civic community. In keeping with the brute facts of marriage and family life as well as with God’s design, they are promising to do marriage well so as to contribute to the common good rather than to be a drain on it.” If couples take seriously their commitment to God, they will strive to be good stewards of their home, their family members, and their civic responsibilities, all of which should benefit the community in which they live.

Researchers have noted numerous benefits for communities which have a higher level of healthy marriages as compared to unhealthy marriages. The following list, published by the U.S. Department of Health and Family Services, summarizes several of these benefits. Some of these benefits, as well as others, are discussed in this section.

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6Ibid., 144.

1. Higher rates of physically healthy citizens
2. Higher rates of emotionally healthy citizens
3. Higher rates of educated citizens
4. Lower domestic violence rates
5. Lower crime statistics
6. Lower teenage pregnancy rates
7. Lower rates of juvenile delinquency
8. Higher rates of home ownership
9. Lower rates of migration
10. Higher property values
11. Decreased need for social services

**A happier community.** As noted in the quote by David Akinsanya at the beginning of chapter 3, happiness associated with healthy marriages trickles from the married couple into the community which surrounds them. This type of happiness comes from the blessings which God bestows on couples who commit themselves to living in a covenant relationship. In her article “Why Marriage is Good for You,” Maggie Gallaher reports that “40 percent of married people, compared with about a quarter of singles or cohabiters, say they are ‘very happy’ with life in general.”\(^8\) She also goes on to indicate that divorce is not a “happier” option, as just “18 percent of divorced adults say they are ‘very happy,’ and divorced adults are twice as likely as married folk to say they are ‘not too happy’ with life in general.”\(^9\) This last statistic would indicate that, in general,

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\(^9\)Ibid.
divorce is not a more pleasant option in some cases for people who think they will be happier apart from their current spouse.

**Improved social order.** The community needs homes which teach and live according to God’s Ten Commandments. After all, they are the original bedrock upon which America’s legal system was founded, and they are still needed today. On this thought, Ligon Duncon and Terry Johnson write,

> Four of the ten commandments are directly related to the family. The fourth commandment requires the head of the household to lead the family in Sabbath-keeping. The fifth commandment requires children to respect and submit to their parents. The seventh commandment protects the family from sexual infidelity (whether it is expressed in a spouse being unfaithful to the family itself or someone else’s endangering the family core by intrusion). The tenth commandment protects the family from those who would, in virtue of their coveting, take its necessary property or disrupt its relations. God is clearly concerned to throw around the family every moral/legal protection he can find.

Adherence to these commands and other teachings in God’s word, which deal with marriage and family, help to promote stability and order in what is otherwise a chaotic society. God gave his commands with the intent that people would honor Him by keeping His Word in faith. He also gave the commands, especially the ones mentioned above, to provide a sound structure upon which family and community could survive and thrive.

> Not only does healthy marriage promote order in a community, it also helps to prevent the chaos which ensues when the guidelines are not followed. Poor or weak marriages cost “taxpayers billions of dollars — in more jails, welfare payments, medical costs, court costs, remedial education, and juvenile justice systems — and creates untold suffering for millions of children and for society as a whole.”

The family stability which results from healthy marriage also reduces the amount of legal action a community has to deal with. David Gushee suggests,

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Think of it: If the couple marries for life and raised their children well, the community never has to deal with that couple again other than to register births and deaths at the courthouse. But if the marriage fails, the community and its agencies will be needed. Mediation services, legal services, child custody settlements, restraining orders, police involvement, child protective services, juvenile court, and so on – all are mobilized to try to keep the alienated members of one family from killing each other. Likewise, at a national level, an epidemic of failed marriage has a corrosive effect on society as a whole, weakening marriage for everyone else.\footnote{Gushee, Getting Marriage Right, 144.}

Healthy marriage provides a safe setting for couples to fulfill their desires for love and sexual relations. Where this safe haven is honored, husbands and wives freely give of themselves to one another, helping them to harness what could become dangerous human desires for love and sex. Marriage, viewed this way, helps protect the social order from chaos and violence.\footnote{Ibid., 100.} A more peaceful community is the result.

**Improved building blocks.** God created the family as a “building block” for the community – for the whole world. Healthy marriages provide the type of social building blocks a community needs to grow and be healthy because healthy marriages foster more stable homes – physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Research from the Institute for American Values indicates that “marriage, and a normative commitment to marriage, fosters high quality relationships between adults, as well as between parents and children.”\footnote{W. Bradford Wilcox et al., Why Marriage Matters: Twenty-Six Conclusions from the Social Sciences, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed. (New York: report published by the Institute for American Values, 2005), 10.} How much more will a strong commitment to marriage foster the type of loving, supportive, and committed relationships that are needed in today’s society than would the current lackadaisical approach to such a commitment?

Healthy marriages also help to foster more stable homes by reducing the amount, as well as the risk, of sexual infidelity. Maggie Gallaher reports,

Marriage increases sexual fidelity. Cohabiting men are four times more likely to cheat than husbands, and cohabiting women are eight times more likely to cheat than wives. Just one out of ten cohabiting couples are still cohabiting after five

\footnote{Gushee, Getting Marriage Right, 144.}
\footnote{Ibid., 100.}
\footnote{W. Bradford Wilcox et al., Why Marriage Matters: Twenty-Six Conclusions from the Social Sciences, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed. (New York: report published by the Institute for American Values, 2005), 10.}
years. By contrast, 80 percent of couples marrying for the first time are still married five years later, and close to 60 percent (if current divorce rates continue) will marry for life.  

Trust and commitment are important for healthy relationships in the home. Homes where infidelity occurs (or even a concern infidelity may occur) do not create the healthy, trusting environment which is so vital for families to be a strong building block in their community. David Gushee believes “by structuring and stabilizing adult sexual relationships, marriage reduces social stress and frees up adult energies for constructive participation in work and community life.” In this way, families have much more to contribute to the community where they are located.

**Healthier future generations.** No society or organization can long survive and maintain itself without giving forethought and effort into preparing the next generation of leaders, workers, and contributors. Healthy marriages provide a foundation and a springboard for those future generations by encouraging them in a number of critical areas. First, healthy marriages promote socially healthy young men and women by providing a “context in which children are socialized, thus preparing them for later participation as responsible adults in society rather than as morally or psychologically mined wards of the state.” Second, children need both parents to be present and active in their lives, which is a standard environment in homes where there are healthy marriages. More and more children are growing up in, or are being born into, families with only one parent. In the 1960s, only one-twentieth of American children were born to unmarried women. Today the fraction is one-third, and the trend does not seem to be improving. The growing absence of fathers indicated by these statistics is one snapshot of the deterioration in the home life for many American children in this generation.

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16Ibid.
Third, healthy marriages encourage better relationships between parents and their children, creating a home environment where children feel loved and desire to reciprocate that love back to both parents. According to a report by Maggie Gallagher in *City Journal*, “Divorce weakens the bonds between parents and children over the long run. Adult children of divorce describe relationships with both their mother and their father less positively, on average, and they are about 40 percent less likely than adults from intact marriages to say they see either parent at least several times a week.”\(^{17}\) Children should be able to learn what love looks like and how to express that love through a maturing relationship with their parents. With the absence of parents in the home, or in cases where parents are divorced and playing emotional tug-of-war with their children, children have difficulty developing an understanding of love and how to express it.

The fifth reason healthy marriages are so critical for future generations is because the decision-making processes of these future generations are affected by the stability (or instability) of their home life. According to the Institute of American Values, children raised outside of intact marriages are significantly more likely than other children to use drugs, to drop out of school, to commit crimes, to be sexually active early, and to commit or consider suicide.\(^ {18}\) These same children are also more likely to get divorced themselves and to bear children outside of marriage later in life, perpetuating what is already a problematic situation.\(^ {19}\) Communities will only continue to suffer if trends such as these are not reversed.

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\(^{17}\)Gallagher, “Why Marriage Is Good for You.”

\(^{18}\)“What Is America’s Most Serious Problem?” Institute for American Values, Fact Sheet No. 1.

Benefits to the Family

According to a report from the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, “marriage researchers have determined that having a healthy, happy, fulfilling marriage benefits all family members.” A statement such as this one should be of no surprise to Christians who understand the connection between obedience to the Word of God and the blessings God desires to give to those who are obedient. God’s plan is to bless couples who strive to have healthy marriages based on His directions in Scripture.

In the following section, details will be presented which indicate healthy marriages are indeed beneficial to families, as well as to the individual members that make up these families. Information relating to the benefits of healthy marriage for the whole family unit will be presented first followed by details which pertain to the individuals representing these families.

Benefits to Married Couples

Better physical health. Various studies have been conducted examining the correlation between marriage health and physical health. Overall, the statistics indicate that married people live longer and healthier lives than those individuals who are in unhappy marriages or who have been divorced. In her article “Why Marriage Is Good for You,” Maggie Gallagher reports that “even controlling for initial health status, sick people who are married live longer than their unmarried counterparts. Having a spouse, for example, lowers a cancer patient's risk of dying from the disease as much as being in an age category ten years younger.”


22 Ibid.
At least three factors contribute to better health and sustained life for happily married couples. First, researchers believe marriage promotes well-being in couples because with these couples there is an increased likelihood of early detection of symptoms. Also, spouses provide encouragement to receive medical treatment and follow healthy diets, discouragement from risky behavior such as drinking and smoking, and assistance during any recovery process.23 By creating an environment of good choice making, healthy marriages help reduce the rates of alcohol and substance abuse for both adults and teenagers, which contributes to better health.24 Second, scientists who have studied immune functioning in laboratory settings find that happily married couples have better-functioning immune systems.25 These same tests indicate the immune function in people who have been divorced for a number of years still do not function at the level of those who are happily married.26 Third, happy marriage improves health by promoting lower levels of stress. In an online article for CBS News, Lloyd de Vries reports that “researchers found men and women in unhappy marriages suffered from increased stress levels throughout the day at home and at work as well as higher blood pressure at midday at the office, which could raise the risk of heart attack or stroke.”27 He goes on to write that “the results showed that men and women who reported a higher level of marital concerns had higher cortisol levels in the morning after waking up and higher self-


24Wilcox, Why Marriage Matters, 11.


26Ibid.

reported stress and blood pressure throughout the day than those who were generally happy with their marriage.”

Divorce is not a healthy option for couples, as “divorce has a bigger negative impact on your health than marriage has a positive one.” Research indicates that “divorced or widowed people have 20 percent more chronic health conditions such as heart disease, diabetes or cancer than married people. They also have 23 percent more mobility limitations, such as trouble climbing stairs or walking a block.”

**Better mental and emotional health.** In conjunction with promoting better physical health, the discipline of a happy marriage also promotes improved mental health for couples. Gallagher reports that “marriage is good for your mental health. Married men and women are less depressed, less anxious, and less psychologically distressed than single, divorced, or widowed Americans.” Improved mental health, in turn, results in a decline in suicide for those who are happily married. “Married men are only half as likely as bachelors and one-third as likely as divorced guys to take their own lives. Wives are also much less likely to commit suicide than single, divorced, or widowed women.” Divorce, on the other hand, appears to increase significantly the risk of suicide.

Why do healthy marriages increase mental and emotional well being? First of all, husbands and wives in healthy marriages provide increased emotional support that

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28Ibid.


30Ibid.


32Ibid.

might not be there otherwise. According to Steven Jack and J. Ross Eshleman, “Married persons are more likely than persons who are not to report a higher degree of emotional support. Emotional support tends to lower depression and other forms of mental health.” The second reason for better mental health is related to the increased standard of living which also results from healthy marriage. The improved standard of living and lower risk of impoverishment contribute to better mental health, including increased levels of happiness. Finally, healthy marriages increase emotional well being by providing couples a purpose in life. This thought is summarized in the following excerpt from “Why Marriage is Good for You.”

Improved safety. Marriage, in general, is a safer state of living than the alternatives. According to the Institute for American Values, “marriage appears to reduce the risk that adults will be either perpetrators or victims of crime.” It also reduces the risk that these people will be victims of domestic violence, which is a growing problem in many communities. Reports also indicate that children who are not living with two married parents have a greater risk of falling victim to child abuse. Safer living supports

35 Ibid., 528.
37 Wilcox, Why Marriage Matters, 11.
38 Ibid.
the assurance and confidence levels of people living in a household, which, in turn, promotes marriage health.

**Improved sex life.** A healthy sex life is important to marriage health. The reverse is also true. Studies indicate that “both husbands and wives are more likely to report that they have an extremely satisfying sex life than are singles or cohabiters.” 39 Contributing to a better sex life is the fact that happily married couples are less likely to commit acts of sexual infidelity, a fact that has already been addressed.

**Improved family finances.** Finances are a critical factor in marriage health. Disagreements over the use of finances, as well as the stress which results from financial abuse or indebtedness, can have an adverse affect many marriages. Despite the struggles which sometimes result in marriage over finances, healthy marriages, in general, create a more pleasant financial environment. Research indicates that married persons “generally can afford better housing, food, and services than never-married, divorced, or widowed persons.” 40 Married couples also appear to build more wealth on average than singles or cohabiting couples. 41 Maggie Gallagher reinforces this thought when she writes,

Married people not only make more money, they manage money better and build more wealth together than either would alone. At identical income levels, for example, married people are less likely to report “economic hardship” or trouble paying basic bills. The longer you stay married, the more assets you build; by contrast, length of cohabitation has no relationship to wealth accumulation. On the verge of retirement, the average married couple has accumulated assets worth about $410,000, compared with $167,000 for the never-married and $154,000 for the divorced. 42


40 Stack, “Marital Status and Happiness: A 17-Nation Study,” 528.


Contributing to the larger financial base is the fact that “married men earn more money than do single men of similar education and job histories.”\textsuperscript{43} By some estimates, men may make as much as 40 percent more money than comparable single men, even after taking into consideration their education and job history.\textsuperscript{44}

Healthy marriage also contributes to future financial well being of children. Children from healthy marriages are more likely to succeed academically and to attend college than children who have experienced parental divorce or who have had parents who failed to marry.\textsuperscript{45} Lower academic achievement, failure to receive higher education, and the inability to acquire higher-status jobs deprives children of the potential of obtaining financial well-being.

**Benefits to Family Members**

The benefits which have already been mentioned in the previous sections have an effect on the individual members of families. These benefits will not be rehearsed here again; however, the following lists will serve to as a summary of the benefits men, women, and children experience as a result of healthy marriages. These lists come from the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services.\textsuperscript{46}

**Benefits for men.** Researchers have found many benefits for men who are in healthy marriages compared to those in unhealthy marriages, including the following qualities:

1. Live longer

\textsuperscript{43}Wilcox, *Why Marriage Matters*, 10.

\textsuperscript{44}Gallagher, “Why Marriage Is Good for You.”


\textsuperscript{46}Ibid.
2. Physically healthier
3. Wealthier
4. Increase in the stability of employment
5. Higher wages
6. Emotionally healthier
7. Decrease risk of drug and alcohol abuse
8. Have better relationships with their children
9. More satisfying sexual relationship
10. Less likely to commit violent crimes
11. Less likely to contract STD’s
12. Less likely to attempt or commit suicide

**Benefits for women.** Researchers have found many benefits for women who are in healthy marriages compared to those in unhealthy marriages, including the following qualities:

1. More satisfying relationship
2. Emotionally healthier
3. Wealthier
4. Less likely to be victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, or other violent crimes
5. Less likely to attempt or commit suicide
6. Decrease risk of drug and alcohol abuse
7. Less likely to contract STD’s
8. Less likely to remain or end up in poverty
9. Have better relationships with their children
10. Physically healthier
Benefits for children. Researchers have found many benefits for children who are raised by parents in healthy marriages compared to those raised by parents in unhealthy marriages, including the following qualities:

1. More likely to attend college
2. More likely to succeed academically
3. Physically healthier
4. Emotionally healthier
5. Less likely to abuse drugs or alcohol
6. Less likely to commit delinquent behaviors
7. Less likely to be a victim of physical or sexual abuse
8. Have a better relationship with their mothers and fathers
9. Decreases their chances of divorcing when they get married
10. Less likely to become pregnant as a teenager, or impregnate someone
11. Less likely to be sexually active as teenagers
12. Less likely to contract STD’s
13. Less likely to be raised in poverty

Benefits of Healthy Marriage for the Church

When asked by a group of researchers from Ellison Research to identify the three strongest threats to families in their own community, a representative sample of 695 Protestant ministers nationwide indicated that divorce was one of the top three threats to their congregations. A total of 43 percent of those asked marked divorce as one of their top three threats to families, making it the highest rated threat.47

47“Protestant Clergy Name Divorce, Negative Influences from the Media, and Materialism as the Greatest Threats to Family in Their Community” (report from Ellison Research Group, 28 October 2004) [on-line]; accessed 02 November 2009; available from http://www.ellisonresearch.com/ERPS%20II/release_13_family.htm; Internet.
These results are not surprising, as so many churches are dealing with couples who are contemplating divorce, or have already divorced, and are experiencing their second and third marriages. Ministers and counselors spend hours providing guidance, direction, and biblical counseling for individuals affected by divorce or other family-related difficulties. Youth and Children’s ministries have to take extra steps to minister to children who have more than one set of parents. These same programs see some students only half the year as they spend one weekend with mom and the other with dad. People fail to keep their commitments in ministry and volunteer roles because they are having troubles at home or have a spouse who does not want to be a part of the church. Couples show up on Sundays distracted and emotionally unstable because they have been fighting. The list could go on and on of the negative effects unhealthy marriages have on the church and the health of the church.

Like society, families are important building blocks for the church. Churches need healthy marriages and families, and churches need to do all they can to promote marital and family health. In this section of chapter 3, details are presented indicating the benefits of healthy marriages for the church. Although some of the benefits listed in the first half of this chapter are applicable for the church, they will not be reviewed in great detail again. Items reviewed in this portion of the chapter will focus more on biblical, rather than worldly perspective.

**Stronger Building Blocks**

As indicated in chapter 2, God ordained that families are to be the major building blocks for society. Families were given stewardship responsibilities, part of which included their relationship with God and with the people around them. With the birth of the New Testament church, families were placed alongside other families in the local church with a command to carry out the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20. Commenting on this line of thought, T. Degol writes that “the Church is made up of
families – people whose lives are intricately woven together for better and for worse. Everyone in the Church is a family person. In fact, families are the most basic expression of Church.”\(^48\)

Family dynamics have a major effect on churches. God uses these dynamics as a platform to reach out and minister to other families and individuals who are a part of the church, or who may be considering being a part of the church. He can even use negative circumstances in family life to show His love, as it “is through the nitty-gritty, sometimes painful events of family life that God’s ‘way of love’ is lived and made evident to others.”\(^49\)

Churches need healthy building blocks to promote healthy growth and carry out ministry effectively. Healthy marriages are a necessary part of this equation.

**Healthy Leaders**

Healthy, growing churches need healthy, growing leaders. Families, as building blocks for the church, are a good source of leadership and volunteer personnel for serving in the ministries of the church. These leaders come from various sources, backgrounds, and socioeconomic statuses, depending on how God is working and the culture where the local church is located; however, having leaders who are financially secure, physically and emotionally healthy, well-educated, and who are members of stable homes provides the church with great human resources for God to use. What pastor would not like to have leaders and volunteers who are not struggling with their home life or are distracted by their current marriage problems?


\(^{49}\)Ibid.
Addressing elders in the New Testament church, Peter exhorts these leaders to be good examples to the flock (1 Pet 2:3). Starting with the pastor, churches need leadership who set good examples, especially in their marriages and family life (Titus 1:5-9). Additionally, churches need non-staff men (and women) who live according to God’s Word and set positive examples by having healthy marriages and families. Members of local churches are exhorted in Hebrews 13:17 to “obey your leaders and submit to them.” Having leaders who are setting good examples and who live godly lives (especially in the home) creates an environment which makes obeying this command much easier. How can church membership “imitate their faith” (Heb 13:7) if they are not living according to that faith in their marriages and home life?

A Source of Biblical Teaching

One of the stewardship responsibilities given to families by God is the teaching and training of family members in the Word of God. Families, “founded by a divine directive and regulated by divine ordinances” are to be “the normal school in which faith in God and obedience to His law are taught.” In a healthy covenant marriage, husbands love their wives as Christ loved the church, while wives submit to the headship of their husbands as the church is to submit to the headship of Jesus Christ. Husbands and wives teach each other the Word of God by living the Word and being Christ-like to one another. Husbands and wives spend time together reading the Word, praying to the Lord, and serving in His kingdom. In turn, these parents teach and model the love of God to their children, all of which becomes easier as they live according to God’s subscription for marriage. As the relationship between husband and wife is tested, changed, and grown, family life “becomes the school for discipleship, not just for children, but also for

Healthy marriages and families play an essential role in teaching and exemplifying biblical truth.

Husbands and wives who adhere to covenant marriage principles manifest the presence of God in one another’s lives, as well as their family as a whole. In their book *Husbands and Wives: The Best of Friends*, Otis and Deigie Andrews emphasize this truth when they write, “We believe Christian couples have the greatest potential of anyone to experience the presence of God in their lives. For us the image of God is reflected in our union as husband and wife; our opportunities to experience Him are greatest in the midst of our relationship with each other and Him.” The relationship couples share gives testimony of the perfect relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Not only do covenant marriage relationships serve as a human example of a heavenly relationship, but they also serve as an example of the relationship between Jesus Christ and the church. God created marriage so human couples can experience His love through the mutual commitment, trust, forgiveness, and sacrifice practiced in covenant marriage.

In addition to teaching God’s love, adherents to covenant marriage also teach other biblical truths, including accountability, authority, and grace. Husbands and wives should be accountable to one another for the integrity of their relationship with one another, as well their relationship with God. Jesus Christ served as the perfect model of accountability, as He did not do or say anything apart from His Heavenly Father’s perfect will. Spouses should encourage and admonish one another to be obedient to the Word of God and to continually seek the will of the Lord.

The headship of the husband (Eph 5:23) in conjunction with the submission of the wife (Eph 5:22) serves as an illustration of divine, transcendent authority. Jesus

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recognized and submitted to the authority of the Father. His obedience and submissive spirit were not a sign of weakness or an indicator of Him being less than the Father. A wife’s willing submission to a husband who loves her serves as a teaching point for parents to children, as well as married women to other women who are considering marriage.

Without God’s grace we would all be lost in our sin and separated from Him for all eternity. By God’s grace we are saved (Eph 5:25), and there is no other means by which man is saved. As such, the proclamation of the gospel of grace is absolutely vital. Covenant marriage serves as a testimony of God’s grace and His willingness to forgive those who come to Him in faith. In Ephesians 5:22 and following (a passage previously examined), Paul equates Christ’s relationship with the church to that of the relationship between husband and wife in marriage. Couples who willingly choose to live according to Paul’s prescription in Ephesians 5 serve as witnesses of the gospel of grace. A good biblical witness is certainly of benefit to the church.

**Teaching of Children**

As noted in the previous paragraph, the teaching of biblical truth in the home is critical for spiritual growth and maturity, especially for the children. Religious education for children must begin at home and at an early age. School and church should not be the only sources of biblical teaching for children, as these two sources “can never replace the power of example and instruction at home. Mother and father will always be the primary instructors of the child in morality and values.”

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God designed the family to be “a spiritual entity and to provide for the training up of children into mature adult character.”\textsuperscript{56} In the home, parents and children practice the Christian faith in the most intimate way, making the home the “basis of Christian nurture and the laboratory of daily life.”\textsuperscript{57} Children observe their parents’ actions and begin to develop their first sense of what is important, what life is all about, and what meaning they have in this world. Parents, then, must give attention to the cultivation of their relationship with God. By working to “keep up their own spiritual and emotional health, they will influence their children for the good.”\textsuperscript{58} Additionally, parents must practice what they preach or they “become the surest means yet devised by man or devil of sending their children to hell.”\textsuperscript{59}

Not only must parents give attention to growing in their faith as an example to their children, they must also be active in teaching and training the children in the Word of God. According to Ligon Duncan and Terry Johnson, “The family is the first place that God has appointed for teaching and learning about God and godliness. Children are to be instructed (Gen 18:18-19, Deut 4:9, 6:6-8, 11:18-21, Prov 22:6, Eph 6:4), guided in the way of life (Prov 1:8, 6:20), and disciplined both directly and correctively (Prov 13:24, 19:18, 22:15, 23:13-14, 29:15, 17).”\textsuperscript{60}

One of the most critical ways parents live their faith and teach the love of God is through healthy covenant marriage. By living according to God’s biblical guidelines for marriage and healthy relationships, parents fulfill a responsibility “to live out a

\textsuperscript{56}Duncan, “A Call to Family Worship,” 6.

\textsuperscript{57}Drescher, \textit{Parents Passing the Torch of Faith}, 13.

\textsuperscript{58}Ibid., 15.

\textsuperscript{59}Duncan, “A Call to Family Worship,” 14.

\textsuperscript{60}Ibid., 7.
passionate love for God in their lives.”61 Children need to see that their parents love God, as well as one another in the Lord. If parents want their children to understand God’s love, His grace and mercy, and His forgiveness, they should strive to practice a covenant marriage relationship.

**Promoting Other Healthy Marriages**

Children follow the lead and example of their parents. This writer has all too often seen the children of divorced parents follow in the footsteps of their parents by themselves becoming divorcees. Even if they do not divorce, these children may have unhealthy, unhappy marriages which do not serve as a source of joy in their lives. Some even choose not to get married, fearing their marriage will end in divorce. The opposite, thankfully is also true. Children who have parents with healthy marriages tend toward healthy marriage relationships (certainly, this is not true in all situations). Generally speaking, “children will walk in the steps of their parents. At least in most cases, the parents will determine more than anyone else the direction of the lives of their children.”62 Ed Young adds to this line of thought by stating that “there is no adequate substitute for the intact family unit. Nothing that educators, the government, psychologists, or sociologists can offer us successfully replaces a strong, supportive family in the life of child.”63

Parents who have established, or who have at least tried to establish, a healthy marriage based on the covenant principles of Scripture serve as a catalyst, promoting the future marriage and family health of their children. Those who refuse to let divorce be

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the course of action instill a sense of just how important the wedding vows really are. When couples do divorce, the “children lose their family structure, the very thing that they depend on to support their development from childhood, through adolescence, and into adulthood.”

In addition to promoting the future marriage health of children, covenant marriage couples are also a source of counseling, encouragement, and training to couples who are already married or who are considering marriage. Churches benefit from the presence of couples who are willing to teach discipleship classes, conduct counseling sessions (when properly trained), and/or mentor other couples in the practice of covenant marriage. These couples serve as positive examples and role models for other couples in the church. They are also a resource pastors and other ministry leaders can turn to when additional voices are needed or when a ongoing, longer-term relationship is needed to provide support and accountability for a couple. By mentoring newlyweds or individuals about to be married, covenant marriage couples offer biblical knowledge, as well as personal testimony to the faithfulness of God in blessing covenant marriage.

Adherents to covenant marriage offer one more benefit to the church in the area of promoting marriage. With divorce as prolific as it is (both inside and outside the church), husbands and wives who are willing to speak the truth of God’s word in love are needed. Churches need couples who give testimony to the joy of doing marriage God’s way. They also need the testimony of couples who will speak and encourage couples to say no to divorce. Couples who are struggling “need encouragement to be stronger and more courageous in saying no to divorce when conflict erupts. They need moral support for the hard work of making marriage healthy.” The option of divorce has been made

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64 Ibid., 43.

too easy and too quick. Churches need people who are willing to encourage and educate struggling couples on marriage as God intended it, as well as show them how God is available and willing to help them through whatever struggles they are facing.

**Encourages Church Attendance**

The author of Hebrews reminds readers to “consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near” (Heb 10:25-26). Practicing consistent fellowship through church attendance and ministry involvement is one application of this verse. Churches need couples who attend church regularly and who are involved in the life and ministries sponsored by the church.

Couples who have healthy marriages understand and recognize their need to worship and to be discipled alongside other Christians. They understand the first and primary key to their “family’s spiritual health is a commitment to the weekly public worship services of the church.” With this understanding, married couples who desire to grow in Christ, and therefore grow in their marriages, make the effort to attend and participate in the life of the church. When they do attend, couples find they “are happier in their marriages than couples who rarely or never attend services,” according to sociologist W. Bradford Wilcox.

Healthy marriages also promote church growth by removing one of the reasons some people do not attend church – i.e., divorce. According to Ken Sande, “Thousands of Christian children are robbed of the security and unified guidance that God intended their parents to provide, and they learn at an early age that vows to God are less important

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66 Duncan, “A Call to Family Worship,” 11.

than seeking personal pleasure. Many adults and children who have gone through divorce leave the church altogether.”\textsuperscript{68} Couples with healthy marriages are less likely to experience a divorce which causes them to leave the church. These same couples, as noted above, help encourage struggling couples not only to stay married, but also to stay in the church to receive the teaching, support, and accountability they need to grow a healthy marriage.

**Influencing Society**

 Churches are in the business of fulfilling the Great Commission (Mat 28:18-20). As they are fulfilling the Great Commission, they are not to be shaped and influenced by society. Neither are they to be so sheltered from the communities where they are located that they have no impact at all on the community around them for the Lord. Instead, they are to be a godly influence which actively seeks to take the Light of Jesus Christ into the world.

 Families who have healthy, happy marriages based on God’s principles are one source of potential influence. These “building blocks,” as they have been referred to, are positioned in their communities to make an impact for the Lord. Elizabeth Caldwell recognizes this truth when she writes, “I believe that faith, life in a faithful family, and participation in a congregation shelters families. Nurturing faith in a child, honoring Sabbath, and struggling with theological questions also give families identity and power to make a difference in the culture.”\textsuperscript{69} Couples who maintain a covenant marriage have the power of God available to them, and God is willing to work through them as part of the local church to impact communities.


\textsuperscript{69} Caldwell, *Making a Home for Faith*, 22.
Glorifying God

Writing on marriage, R. Albert Mohler states “our chief end is to glorify God – and marriage is a means for His greater glory.”70 He goes on to write that “the ultimate purpose of marriage is the greater glory of God – and God is most greatly glorified when His gifts are rightly celebrated and received, and His covenants are rightly honored and pledged.”71 Marriage is a celebration of two people – one man and one woman – who have become one flesh through the sovereign hand of God. Husbands and wives celebrate the joys and pleasures which God allows them to experience through sharing, sacrifice, and a willingness to give of themselves to one another physically, mentally, and emotionally. Marriage is a celebration of life through procreation, which is God’s plan for mankind to multiply and subdue the earth. As parents, covenant marriage couples have the joy of raising children and making a witness to their children of God’s great love, His forgiveness, and His saving grace.

As a testimony of Christ’s relationship to His church, covenant marriage reveals how important commitment, trust, and personal sacrifice are in God’s plan for blessed relationships. Couples become living examples of Christ to one another as they live according to God’s plan for marriage. Their testimony ultimately becomes an illustration to the world of God’s love for His people and of His willingness to save those who, in faith, call upon the name of Jesus Christ for salvation.

Covenant marriage also glorifies God by holding in high regard the permanence and seriousness of the marriage relationship. According to Mohler, “Marriage is not greatly respected in our postmodern culture. For many, the covenant of marriage has been discarded in favor of a contract of cohabitation.”72 Too many couples


71 Ibid.
enter marriage with a mindset that they can always “get out of it if it doesn’t work.” This contract mentality was never intended by God to be applied to marriage before or after the sinful fall of mankind in the Garden of Eden. Instead, God’s intention is for marriage to be a covenant relationship in which couples worship and honor Him through a lifetime of obedient commitment to the husband or wife He gives them.

**Conclusion**

Healthy marriage is of benefit to communities, as well as to the churches found in these communities. Leaders in the secular community and in God’s church would do well to promote marriage done God’s way. Unfortunately, secular society does not always promote God’s Word or will; as such, churches must preach, teach, and take a stand for God’s standard of marriage. Ligon Duncan and Terry Johnson reinforce this thought when they write,

> Our goal in evangelical churches ought to be (1) for every family unit to become a discipleship group; (2) for every husband and father to become an active, self-denying, spiritual leader in his home; (3) for our congregations to have as many families functioning as “family-based growth groups” as there are families; and (4) for family religion to be the fountain of healthy, robust, corporate worship, as well as worship in all of life.  

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72Ibid.

73Duncan, “A Call to Family Worship,” 7.
CHAPTER 4
THE PROJECT

On May 5, 2011, the project design and format were shared with a group of adults attending a Sunday evening Bible study hosted by a church family who had offered their home as an off-campus meeting sight. The topic of the evening, a need for healthier marriages, had been advertized and stressed several weeks in advance during Sunday morning announcements. Additionally, the specific study had been publicized via the Sunday morning bulletin and electronic announcements. Response at this initial meeting was favorable, with a number of couples (and divorced singles) expressing interest in attending the class which would eventually be entitled “Building a Healthy Marriage.” The starting date for the class was discussed, and a decision was made to begin on July 10, 2011.

In the introductory meeting, a number of issues were addressed with those who would potentially be participants in the class. First, those interested in attending were encouraged to talk with and invite other couples to be a part of the class. Invitations could be extended to couples who were or were not currently attending the church. As the class was also intended to be an outreach ministry of the church to the community, special emphasis was placed on being intentional about inviting unchurched couples or couples who did not currently have a church home. Emphasis was also placed on inviting couples who were potentially having troubles in their marriages. Second, participants were asked to volunteer and help distribute advertisement fliers in the neighborhoods surrounding the community. Finally, attendance and wholehearted participation in the class was stressed to those who were potentially considering being a part of the class.
The importance of total involvement on the part of the class members was critical to the project.

Each individual who decided to participate in the class was asked to fill out a pre-class survey and questionnaire form (see Appendix 1). The purpose of the survey was to (1) ascertain and identify the type of problems the couples have faced or are currently facing in their marriages; (2) measure the amount of knowledge the participants have with regard to covenant marriage and the biblical guidelines for marriage; and (3) evaluate the confidence level each participant placed in his or her Christian faith for dealing with marital problems. The form also provided information on the person’s age, how long he or she had been a Christian, church involvement (church attendance; membership; ministry participation), and marriage history (length of marriage(s); number of marriages; number of children). Additionally, participants were asked to reflect on how they felt marriage health affects the health of the church.

The participants in the classes were comprised of 4 married couples and 3 singles (2 male, 1 female). The married participants consisted of individuals in their 40s and 50s. Only one of the couples represented a marriage with both husband and wife in their first marriage. This couple had been married for 19 years, but unfortunately, they were facing significant challenges in their marital relationship. Due to these problems, they were unable to complete the class. In the other three marriages, both husband and wife were in at least their second marriages. One of the previously married individuals was in a second marriage due to the passing of a spouse. The other 5 had been previously divorced. Seven of the 8 married individuals were recently active in church-related ministries. Six of the 8 were members of the church, with the 2 nonmembers representing the couple experiencing significant problems.

All three single participants were divorced, with previous years of marriage ranging from 5 to 45. Two of the singles were in their 30s. These two individuals had
previously been engaged to one another, only to have their relationship end before the marriage took place. In the early weeks of the class, these two individuals once again started a dating relationship, and as the class progressed, both asked if the class could be considered their premarital counseling (if they decided to get married). I informed them the class would benefit them, but they would have additional requirements in order to complete my premarital counseling. One week after the class was completed, the couple became engaged. The other single taking the class was a 71-year-old who had been divorced in the past year. He chose to take the class because he felt it might help him improve himself. Of the three singles, the female was a member of the church, while the two males were not. None of the three was active in a church-related ministry.

The original intent was to conduct the class at the home of a couple who were members of the church, in order to provide a venue that would be more appealing to unchurched couples. For couples with children, childcare was to be provided at another couple’s home just a few houses down. Unfortunately, the couple who had offered their home for the class chose to leave the church prior to the starting date of the class. With no other viable location that could provide both a place for the class and for childcare, the decision was made to hold the class on the church property.

At the beginning of each class, participants were provided a student handout and a mechanical pencil. The student handouts consisted of fill-in-the-blank outlines, various passages of Scripture, and additional questions for discussion.

The class began on July 10, 2011 and continued through September 25, 2011. It consisted of eleven one and one-half hours sessions. Only one interruption was placed in the scheduled class meetings – a cookout held on Labor Day weekend. The class consisted mostly of a teaching-type lecture (augmented with electronic slides), which dealt with various topics pertinent to the study. These topics are discussed in the following section. In addition to the lecture, various questions were asked in order to
encourage participation and input from the participants. Various activities (see the following section) were utilized at different points during the class schedule to reinforce the topics and to encourage interaction between the participants. A light snack was also provided for the participants at most of the class meetings.

Both prior to and during the class, I exhorted the participants, as well as the rest of the church, to be in prayer for the class, for my wife and me, for those taking the class, and for marriage in general. Spiritual warfare is a reality, and I could sense a battle raging in my own life and marriage, as well as in the lives of those attending the class. Prayer is a powerful spiritual weapon that had to be used for the class to be successful, and most of all, to honor God.

**Project Details**

**Week 1: Informational Class for Church**

This was an informational meeting conducted during one of the church’s Sunday evening Bible studies, and it was offered to all those who may have been interested in attending the “Building a Healthy Marriage” class. The class was held in the home of church members. To encourage attendance at the meeting, I treated those attending to a light meal, which was paid for at the expense of the church.

The publicity and promotion for the introductory class covered a period of about three weeks. It consisted of announcements in the bulletin, verbal announcements in worship, and electronic announcements via a projector. An announcement was also sent to associational churches via an email sent through the associational office. Attempts were made to ascertain if there were any couples in our associational churches who might be interested in being a part of the class.

Discussion during the session focused on why we need a class on building healthier marriages. Information used for teaching and to facilitate discussion on the need for the marriage class was taken from two sources. The first source was an article
written by R. Albert Mohler entitled “Killing off Marriage? Dr. R. Albert Mohler Reports – You Decide” (see Appendix 14). The article was written by Mohler in response to a world view which suggests that marriage is a source of suffering to many people who are married. I chose the article because it brought to light the negative view many people have with regards to marriage – a view that is certainly not in line with biblical teaching. Mohler emphasizes that marriage is essential to human happiness and to the organization of human society. He also correctly points to the need for making and keeping the sacred vows of marriage. Numerous quotes from the article were used in the visual presentation.

The second source of information consisted of quotes and statistics taken from Fred Lowery’s book *Covenant Marriage: Staying Together for Life*. Lowery’s book was used to present statistical information reflecting the poor state of marriage with regards to divorce and the negative impact poor marriage is having on the family in today’s culture. Additionally, quotes from the book were used to briefly introduce the concepts of “covenant” and “covenant marriage.” Emphasis was placed on the need to do marriage God’s way rather than man’s.

Pertinent biblical passages that would be used during the class were introduced and read by those in attendance. These passages included Genesis 1:26-27, Genesis 2:18-25, and Ephesians 5:22-25. Participants were encouraged to read these passages in greater length and to begin praying about how God would speak to them through His Word.

Individuals and couples attending the initial meeting expressed deep concern for marriage and marriage health. All agreed the class would be beneficial to them, as well as anyone else who might choose to participate. A challenge was given to commit to attending all sessions of the class, if possible. Participants were informed of the availability of alternate teaching sessions if they could not attend the regular sessions. They were also asked to help distribute advertisement fliers in the coming weeks.
Week 2: Flier Distribution/Advertisement

Three weeks prior to the starting date, several participants in the class gathered to distribute fliers in neighborhoods surrounding the church. The computer-generated flier (see Appendix 10) was copied on colored paper, folded, and placed on the sides of mailboxes. Approximately 500 fliers were distributed during the evening, with additional fliers being distributed by participants around their homes.

Advertisement for the class also took other forms. The class, its schedule, and topics to be addressed at each session were posted on the church website. The church bulletin and electronic announcements continued to contain information on the meeting times, the topics of discussion, and the need for prayer support. Church members were encouraged to spread information about the class by word of mouth. As with the initial meeting, an email/invitation was sent via the associational office to churches across the association. I spoke directly to a number of pastors in the area and gave them copies of the flier advertising the class. I also spoke with a local Christian counselor to see if he had any couples that might have interest in taking the class.

Week 3: Class 1 – Introduction

This was the first night of the “Building a Healthy Marriage” class. Following an opening prayer, a welcome, and a word of appreciation to those who had chosen to participate, I showed the wedding ceremony portion of Jennifer (my wife) and my wedding video. The intention of the video was to help focus the class on marriage and to help the class understand the material we would be studying over the next several weeks was pertinent to me as well. Jennifer, my wife, did not participate in the class, but she helped with the pre-class setup and provided snacks for the class on several of the nights.

Following the video, I explained the schedule for the first session and how it would be different from the other nights. The class was informed that the initial survey/questionnaire would consume a large portion of the opening session.
The initial survey/questionnaire was distributed to the class, and the agreement on the front of the handout was read to the class. Additional instruction was given to the class regarding the survey/questionnaire. Before they began filling out the forms, time was allotted for any questions.

Once the class had completed the handout and turned it in, I talked to them about the stress and spiritual warfare they may experience over the next several weeks as a result of their participation in the class. I talked about how marriage and discussions regarding various aspects of marriage could cause stress in their lives. In order to emphasize the potential for stress and to provide an example of the type of activities they would be doing in conjunction with the class, I next had them all make “stress balls” as an in-class activity (see Appendix 9). Instruction, demonstration, and supplies were provided for the class in order to facilitate the activity. Participants were further encouraged to bring the stress balls with them to the remainder of the classes.

After making the stress balls, I emphasized the importance of doing marriage God’s way and how over the next several weeks we would be focusing the God’s Word for the direction we need. I informed them that we would be examining marriage as a “covenant” relationship, and I assured them they would receive a definition of what that meant.

Following the lecture, a complete class schedule was distributed and reviewed. Students were given an opportunity to ask additional questions regarding the class and its content. The meeting time and topic for the following week were emphasized. Finally, the class closed in prayer.

**Week 4: Class 2**
**Purpose of Marriage (Part 1)**

This was the second night of the “Building a Healthy Marriage” class. Before the class arrived, I distributed the student handout for the evening and made sure pencils
and Bibles were available at all tables (and likewise for each class that followed). I also put Jennifer and my wedding photos on display for the students to look at. Following the welcome and an opening prayer, I once again expressed my appreciation and a word of thanks to those who had chosen to attend the class.

The class began with an “egg drop contest” activity (see Appendix 9). Each couple (or single) received a plastic bag with materials to be used in constructing a device which would allow a raw egg to be dropped without it being broken or cracked. Students were given ample time to plan and construct their devices using the materials provided. The activity was planned with the intention of getting the couples to work and interact together, as well as to provide an opportunity to introduce the topic of the night in an interesting way. Couples were observed during the activity to see how they related to and worked with one another. While students were working on the devices, I mentioned (with jest) the debate over which came first, “the chicken or the egg,” in order to get them thinking about creation. I also discussed the need and importance of developing a “firm foundation” which would be used later in the class to protect their fragile eggs.

Teaching during the class focused on how God’s plan for marriage in the Genesis creation story is the foundation upon which covenant marriage is to be built. Material for teaching the class was derived from the sections in chapter 2 which examine the first wedding in the Garden of Eden and the importance of the marriage relationship reflecting the image of God. Genesis 1:26-27 and Genesis 2:18-24 were the main passages utilized in the discussion. Additionally, I emphasized the importance of couples glorifying God through their marriages, as found in the latter portion of chapter 3. (See Appendix 7 for the teaching outline.)

Following the lecture and discussion, the class was given time to drop the devices they had constructed earlier in the evening to protect their eggs. As couples dropped and then examined their eggs, I took the opportunity to once again reiterate the
need to implement God’s plan for marriage as the foundational basis for healthy covenant relationships. Class was then dismissed following a prayer.

**Week 5: Class 3**
**Purpose of Marriage (Part 2)**

This was the third night of the “Building a Healthy Marriage” class. After greeting the students, I read Proverbs 24:3-4 and delivered the opening prayer.

The class lecture and discussion focused on the five stewardship responsibilities God has given to husbands and wives. These include, (1) being stewards of their relationship to the rest of God’s creation; (2) being stewards of the marriage relationship; (3) being stewards of the parent-child relationship; (4) being stewards of their vocations; and (5) being stewards of justice and morality. Scripture used during the teaching included Genesis 1:26-28, Genesis 2:16-17, and Deuteronomy 6:4-9. Emphasis was placed on the importance of covenant marriage as it relates to these stewardship responsibilities. Material for this teaching was derived from the section in chapter 2 dealing with stewardship responsibilities. (See Appendix 7 for the teaching outline.)

In addition to presenting material on stewardship responsibilities, I also provided the students a summary of some the benefits healthy marriage has on the community, the family, and the church. Before presenting the summary, which was compiled from chapter 3 material, I asked the class to offer what they felt were the benefits of healthy marriage in each of the three categories. They offered numerous suggestions (written on a dry-erase board), several of which were on the lists I eventually presented to them. Students took little time making a list of benefits for the community and the family; however, the list of benefits to the church seemed to take a little more time and effort. I wanted the class to understand that God’s design for marriage – covenant marriage – provides benefits which are often disregarded or blatantly ignored. I
also wanted them to begin giving greater thought on how the health of their marriages (and others in the church) can have an impact on the church.

Before concluding the class, I stressed the importance of maintaining a “balance” of time, resources, and effort in fulfilling stewardship responsibilities. A proper balance of these activities by both the husband and the wife is critical for building a healthy marriage.

**Week 6: Class 4**
**Covenant vs. Contract**

This was the fourth night of the “Building a Healthy Marriage” class. In addition to the regular setup, I also put a written copy of Jennifer and my wedding ceremony on display for the class to review in their own time. After greeting the students, I read Deuteronomy7:9 and delivered the opening prayer.

The purpose of Class 4 was to define a biblical understanding of “covenant relationships” and to distinguish the difference between a contract and a covenant. Before beginning the teaching time, I showed the class two contracts (my marriage license and a car purchase agreement) and asked them to suggest additional examples of contracts. Their list, which included home mortgages, employment contracts, land purchase agreements, construction contracts, and business agreements, was written on the dry-erase board. I also asked them to suggest characteristics of these contracts. Their characteristics, also written on the dry-erase board, included terms such as obligation, conditions, equality, agreement, expiration date, arbitration, breaking clause, and small print. One student observed that there was more paperwork involved with buying a car than with getting married. His remarks were intended to point out how much more one is scrutinized in the process of buying a car as compared to becoming legally approved for marriage.
The first portion of the teaching focused on defining the term covenant as used in Scripture. Multiple definitions were provided to the class from external sources (see chapter 2, “Covenant – A Biblical Definition”). Following a brief presentation of these definitions, I lectured on the term “covenant” as it is used in the context of the Old and New Testaments. The main Hebrew and Greek terms translated as “covenant” were examined. Next, we reviewed the different types of covenants in the Old Testament (man to man, God to man, and God to the nation of Israel) and where these covenants can be found in Scripture. Special emphasis was given to the Abrahamic Covenant in Genesis 15. Students were asked to turn to and read this passage.

Students were next asked to turn to and read Hebrews 9:13-22. Discussion of this passage relayed the concept of covenant being equated with a last will and testament. I showed the class a copy of my last will and testament as a visual illustration. Numerous characteristics of biblical covenants were suggested from both the Old and New Testament passages.

Next, students were introduced to the “triangular covenant arrangement” model of marriage as suggested by John Hayes (see chapter 2). Three Scripture references were examined to support Hayes model. These verses, along with Ephesians 5:21-33, provide a biblical basis for viewing marriage as a covenantal relationship.

The last portion of the class lecture was used to compare and contrast a contractual verses a covenantal view of marriage. I referred the class back to their listing of contract characteristics and then provided a comparison of the two views using a list from Fred Lowery’s book, Covenant Marriage: Staying Together for Life. Students were showed the book being used and were encouraged to write down as many of the comparisons as they could in their notes.
Week 7: Class 5
Roles and Responsibilities (Part 1)

This was the fifth night of the “Building a Healthy Marriage” class. After greeting the students, I shared 1 John 4:7-11 with the class and delivered the opening prayer.

God’s sacrificial, agape love was the central theme for the class. Students were reminded that God is love (1 John 4:8), and that His covenant relationship with mankind is based on this type of love. Covenant marriage relationships are, in turn, to be based upon and exemplify God’s love.

In order to help the class gain a better understanding of love in covenant marriage, I presented a lecture on four different aspects of marital love as observed in Ephesians 5:21-33 (see chapter 2, “Love in Covenant Marriage”). These aspects include, (1) sacrificially submitting to one another; (2) teaching of truth to one another; (3) leading one another to holiness; and (4) nourishing and cherishing one another. Each aspect of love was examined at length and the Scriptural basis for each was reviewed from the Ephesians passage. Additional nuances and application of the four different aspects of marital love were also included in the lecture (see Appendix 7, Session 5).

Student participation was encouraged during the lecture as I asked numerous questions related to the material being presented. Questions which were utilized included, (1) What are some of the selfish desires people have in marriage? (2) What are some of the ways one can lead his or her spouse “toward” Christ and Christ-likeness? (3) How can we work to protect one another from evil and ungodliness? (4) How does one help his or her spouse grow in favor with God and with man? (5) How does one help his or her spouse grow older physically and spiritually? (6) How does one protect his or her spouse from evil? (7) How does one value and show his or her spouse they are important? Answers to these questions were written on the dry-erase board for additional thought and reflection.
Before dismissing the class in prayer, I gave each person and/or couple an assignment. They were to read 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 and reflect on “how love acts.” These reflections and thoughts were to be recorded on their student handout from the night’s class.

**Week 8: Class 6**  
**Roles and Responsibilities (Part 2)**

This was the sixth night of the “Building a Healthy Marriage” class. After greeting the students, I read 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 to the class and delivered the opening prayer. Students were reminded that they were to have read 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 and to have made reflections on the passage in their notes from the previous week.

Ephesians 5:21-33 was once again the focal passage for the class. Rather than examining the passage from the perspective of what marital love looks like, as we had in the previous class, the focus was on headship and submission as God-ordained “role responsibilities” in marriage (see chapter 2, “Role Responsibilities in Marriage”).

The wife’s role responsibility of “willing submission” was first reviewed, with careful attention being given to the use and definition of the term “submit” (“be subject to”) in Ephesians 5:22. The ladies were reminded that being submissive does not make them less than or inferior to their husbands, just as Christ was not less than or inferior to His Heavenly Father. They were also reminded that their submission was to be given to the husband based on the authority granted him by God. To dispel any misconceptions about submission, a list of what submission is not was presented (see Appendix 7, Session 6). Additionally, practical application of this role responsibility was presented based on how the wife is to compliment her husband in covenant marriage.

Before examining the husband’s role responsibility, I took time to talk about the importance of building trust in marriage. A brief word was given to the class on
“trust markers” and how the building and maintaining of trust is a necessary part of healthy marriage. Students discussed how they could build trust in marriage.

The husbands were next challenged to fulfill their role responsibility of headship. Once again, careful consideration was given in the presentation and definition of this role responsibility as it is denoted in Ephesians 5:23 and 5:25. Husbands were reminded that they are to exemplify the love Christ showed the church as they are functionally positioned by God as head in the marriage. Seven aspects of headship were presented – (1) lead; (2) sacrifice; (3) human savior; (4) preparer; (5) nourish; (6) cherish; and (7) understand. In addition to the Ephesians 5 passage, I also used 1 Peter 3:7 in the discussion of the responsibility of the husband to understand his wife.

In order to help the husbands better fulfill their role (and to encourage romance in the marriages), I ended the class presenting a list entitled “Romance with a SMILE.” This list was taken from material Rick Williams presented in a marriage class entitled “Blessed Beyond Measure.” Couples were challenged to foster romance as they fulfilled their role responsibilities.

The class was given a task to compete before dismissal. Couples and/or individuals were given river rocks large enough upon which they could use paint pens or paint brushes. Students were asked to paint words or pictures depicting some aspect(s) of love they had learned in their reading of 1 Corinthians 13 or in class lecture. These rocks were to be a reminder of the importance of God’s love in their marriages.

**Week 9: Class 7**
**His Needs / Her Needs**

This was the seventh night of the “Building a Healthy Marriage” class. After greeting the students, I read Philippians 2:3-4 and delivered the opening prayer. Following the prayer, I showed the first portion of my wedding video which showed pictures of Jennifer and me as we were growing up. Using the pictures as a backdrop, I
suggested that men and women are different. I asked the class to mention ways men and women are different, and I wrote their list on a dry-erase board for reflection and consideration throughout the evening.

The class was reminded part of fulfilling their role responsibilities (Class 6) in covenant marriage is meeting the needs of their spouses. They were also reminded these needs are not the same for men and women.

The class lecture consisted of a presentation of the seven basic needs of women and the five basic needs of men. Material for the lecture was taken from notes presented by Daniel Akin in his “Family Life Seminar” (see Appendix 7, Session 7). The ladies’ needs were addressed first, followed by the men’s. Each of the basic needs in both lists were presented, along with a brief explanation and suggestions of application (where appropriate). Along with the discussion, students were provided detailed notes in their handout (see Appendix 8, Session 7). Some of the Scripture verses listed on their handouts were read in class, and students were encouraged to review additional verses in their own time.

**Week 10: Class 8
Growing Together**

This was the eighth night of the “Building a Healthy Marriage” class. After greeting the students, I read Romans 14:19 to the class and delivered the opening prayer.

The focus for this class was to underscore the importance of spiritual growth in the strengthening of the marriage relationship. Using a quote taken from Steven Grunlan’s book, *Marriage and the Family: A Christian Perspective* (see Appendix 7, Session 8), I emphasized the impact individual spiritual growth has on the couple in covenant marriage. Students were also reminded of John Hayes’ “triangular covenantal arrangement” for marriage, and how as each spouse gets closer to God, they foster the oneness which is characteristic of a healthy covenant relationship. Having made these
connections, I reminded the class that growth, both individually and as a couple, will only happen when they choose to take the steps necessary for spiritual growth – growth which results in them being more and more like Christ to one another.

A brief discussion was held on disciplines of the faith which can be (and should be) practiced for an individual to be growing spiritually. Before presenting a prepared list, I asked to class to brainstorm what they thought were spiritual disciplines. Their list was written on a dry-erase board and then compared to the list I had already prepared. Students were encouraged to practice these disciplines and to encourage their spouses to do the same.

The remainder of the class was dedicated to presenting nine ways the couples could develop spiritual intimacy in their marriages. These nine ways included, (1) talking about their spiritual status; (2) attending public worship together regularly; (3) establishing and conducting family worship; (4) spending time praying together and for one another; (5) spending time studying together; (6) reading together; (7) minister/serving together; (8) teaching children together; and (9) being accountable to one another. Each of these items was presented to the class along with guidelines and suggestions for practical application. Students were given an opportunity to discuss each item, as well as provide additional suggestions for application from their own lives.

Several of the books I used for research, preparation, and personal study were put on display for this class and the remaining classes. The display was used to offer suggestions for additional reading and study material as related to covenant marriage, marriage health, and other topics discussed during the class.

I finished the class by sharing a poem entitled “Build,” which was quoted by John Drescher in his book Parents Passing the Torch of Faith (see Appendix 7, Session 8). The poem was used to remind the class that the marriage they are now building will affect their children and their children’s children.
Week 11: Family Cookout

On this Sunday night, I gave the class a night off from lecture, discussion, and classroom activities. Instead, we scheduled a cookout on the church grounds and invited the rest of the church to join us for a fellowship. The evening gave the class a break, but it also provided an opportunity for the couples (and their children) to enjoy their church family and to minister to them through cooking and sharing a meal.

Week 12: Class 9
Better Communication

This was the ninth night of the “Building a Healthy Marriage” class. After greeting the students, I read Proverbs 15:23 and 25:11 to the class and delivered the opening prayer.

Class 9 was dedicated to providing guidelines and suggestions for helping the couples experience better communication in their covenant relationships. Students were reminded that good communication is necessary for their marriages to be all that God intended them to be. Numerous quotes from various sources (see Appendix 7, Session 9) were used to help the class understand the intent and importance of good communication.

Following the brief introduction of the topic, I explained several benefits of good communication in marriage. As communication affects nearly every aspect of marriage, these benefits touched on several of the topics which had been addressed in previous classes, including helping to deepen spiritual intimacy (Class 8) and helping to meet one another’s needs (Class 7). The importance of good communication for solving conflict (Class 10) was also briefly mentioned.

Next, I reminded the class that just as men and women are different in their basic needs, they are also different in the area of communication. Numerous differences between men and women in the area of communication were presented to the class. These differences involved the reasons men and women communicate, the type of things they communicate, and the amount of communication.
The majority of the evening’s presentation was dedicated to providing “tips” for better communication. These tips included, (1) being willing to share all types of information; (2) being aware of the whole communication package (words, tones, nonverbal signals); (3) being a good listener; (4) listening attentively; (5) listening intelligently; and (6) knowing the enemies of good communication. Special attention was given to being an “active listener.” Detailed explanations, as well as suggestions for practical application, were provided during the discussion.

The class ended with a special “building” activity, which I referred to as “Foreman and Builder.” Couples were given various kid-type building materials (blocks of various sizes and shapes, ©Legos, and ©Lincoln Logs). They then took turns being either the foreman or the builder as they erected a structure of their choice. The foreman could only communicate to the builder using nonverbal communication. Each person was given five minutes in the two roles. Once the couples changed positions they were to continue building using the same structure. After the time expired I took pictures of the couples and their structures. The intention of the activity was to remind the class of the importance of good communication and the need to watch for nonverbal signals.

Week 13: Class 10
Handling Conflict

This was the tenth night of the “Building a Healthy Marriage” class. After greeting the students, I read Colossians 3:8-17 to the class and delivered the opening prayer.

During my opening words, I informed the class that no marriage is perfect, so conflict would arise. A brief presentation was made on the potential sources of conflict in marriage, and students were given an opportunity to reflect on these sources, as well as offer a few of their own. In my final introductory words, I suggested that the way conflict is handled can be a determining factor in the success or failure of marriage.
The main portion of the lecture in Class 10 was dedicated to providing “tips for fighting fair.” Several guidelines were presented to the class, including, (1) getting right with God; (2) acknowledging there is conflict which needs to be handled; (3) confronting conflict in a timely manner; (4) being a good listener; (5) limiting the discussion of the conflict to the here and now issue; (6) using “I” messages to make his or her point(s); (7) avoiding exaggerations; (8) avoiding character assassination; (9) using appropriate words and actions; (10) not being concerned about winning or losing the argument; and (11) choosing to forgive. Special emphasis was given to looking to God for help in forgiving and handling the conflict resolution in a manner that would enable growth and maturity in the marriage relationship. Students were given opportunity to reflect and offer suggestions as information was provided during the lecture.

Week 14: Class 11
Review / Prayer / Closing Survey

This was the eleventh and final night of the “Building a Healthy Marriage” class. After greeting the students, I read Psalm 127:1a to the class and delivered the opening prayer. In order to provide something extra for the class on this evening, I showed them a video clip I had downloaded from the YouTube website, entitled The Best Movie Theatre Proposal Ever. This video can be found by searching on the YouTube website using the video title.

Following the video, I asked the class to reflect on what they had learned or what had made an impression on them during the class. Several of the students offered insight into what they had gained from the class. Some also spoke from the heart talking about the importance of building a healthy marriage.

After the review, I asked the students to offer suggestions as to how we might pray for marriages (theirs, others in the church, in general) based on the teachings from the class. These suggestions and requests were recorded on a dry-erase board.
Once the prayer needs were recorded, I handed the final survey/questionnaire to the class and gave them final instructions on filling them out. I attached an extra blank page to the handout to give them extra room for answering the questions. I encouraged them to use the extra space to make any additional comments they had with regard to the class. Time was given to see if they had questions regarding the form. Class members took forms home with them to fill out.

Class members were thanked again for participating in the class. I then requested the class enter into a time of prayer based on the requests previously recorded. Couples were given the option to pray where they were sitting or go to the altar together. After an opportunity was given to anyone who desired to pray out loud, I closed in prayer. Music was then played while any remaining couples completed their time of prayer together. As they finished praying, they were dismissed from the class.

**Week 15: Worship Service / Covenant Renewal of Vows**

Beginning in Class 9, I informed class members of my desire to have a covenant renewal of vows once the class was completed. Couples were given the wording to be used during the ceremony for their review. They were then given the option of participating in the ceremony on the Sunday following the last class. They were also encouraged to pray about the ceremony, as well as invite guests to attend. The three married couples who completed the class all chose to participate in the ceremony as part of the morning worship service.

On the morning of the ceremony, the focus of the worship service was covenant relationship (see Appendix 13). Songs were chosen which reflected God’s covenant relationship with and commitment to His children in Jesus Christ, God’s work in creation, and God’s exaltation through those who know Him personally. The sermon, prepared from Psalm 145:8-21, was titled “A Covenant to Live By” and focused on the
characteristics of a covenant-keeping God (see Appendix 12). The message was delivered in such a way that all in attendance could make application to their own lives.

Following the message, I prayed and then invited the couples participating in the covenant renewal ceremony to join me at the front of the sanctuary. Once the couples had joined me, each of the ladies was given a bouquet of flowers which had been prepared by a florist in the church. The couples then participated in the renewal ceremony (see Appendix 11). Once they had completed the ceremony, couples were asked to sign a certificate which I had printed using paper with a nice, preprinted border (see Appendix 11). As they were signing the certificates, the ladies returned their flowers to the vases. Couples were then asked to return to their seats.

For an additional focus on covenant, and as a reminder to everyone that covenant marriage is to give testimony to Jesus Christ’s love and sacrifice, the church observed the Lord’s Supper. Instruction was given for the observance, a time of preparation was observed, and then the church participated in the Supper together. Following the observance, a time of invitation and response was given.

The couples, as well as anyone attending the worship service, were invited to attend a reception in honor of the couples who had participated in the renewal ceremony. The reception took place immediately following the morning worship service. I purchased a cake and other food items for the reception. Jennifer (my wife) and I decorated the tables and set out the food as our way of expressing thanks to the couples. An additional floral arrangement was used as a centerpiece for the reception table (arrangement was loaned to the church by a local florist). Pictures were taken to commemorate the special occasion. As couples left, the ladies were instructed to take their bouquets with them.
CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE MINISTRY PROJECT

As I mentioned my desire to teach a marriage class, numerous people at Cornerstone Baptist Church eagerly anticipated the “healthy marriage” project. These people, along with myself, believed the class would be beneficial to all who chose to participate and apply the teaching they would receive. When I finally announced the starting date and format of Building a Healthy Marriage, people were genuinely excited and ready to begin. I am grateful to everyone who chose to assist me with the project, either through attending the class or by praying.

Although I thoroughly enjoyed the project, and most specifically the marriage class, I regret I waited so long to put the class together and offer it to the church body. Because I procrastinated and delayed, I believe I may have forfeited the opportunity to minister to other couples who had already left Cornerstone.

In the sections which follow, I provide a brief overview of the project. This review will offer an evaluation into how well the project fulfilled its stated purpose and goals. Strengths and weaknesses of the project will be highlighted, along with things I believe I could have done differently. Finally, I will provide theological and personal reflection, as related to the project and its content.

**Evaluation of Project’s Purpose**

The purpose of the project was to disciple married couples in order to increase church health at Cornerstone Baptist Church in Springfield, Georgia. Did it accomplish this purpose? In order to answer this question, I need to break the purpose into two sections.
First, I believe the project was successful in discipling couples at Cornerstone Baptist Church. All married couple members of the church participated in the class and expressed delight in having done so. In fact, these couples suggested I take the class and offer it as a marriage enrichment weekend where I charge money to those who attend. I took these remarks as a compliment, and I am giving their suggestion thought for the future. Positive comments were also made with regards to the content of the class. Several participants felt they could apply what they had learned in the class, and by doing so, have a healthier marriage. They also noted the emphasis on “covenant” relationship and doing marriage God’s way was very much needed.

The class was originally offered to disciple “couples” in the church; however, three singles showed interest and eventually took the class. Their participation was unexpected, but did provide an additional perspective, as they were all previously divorced. Two of the singles became engaged to be married during the class (not as a result of the class, as they were already dating). As these two were taking the class, they asked if their participation would constitute the entirety of what would be required of them for premarital counseling. I informed them the class content would be extremely beneficial to them, but they would still be required to attend additional counseling sessions and complete assignments I would give them for counseling purposes. Upon completing the class, the couple was still interested in having me conduct their wedding ceremony following the premarital counseling process.

In addition to the variation in marital status (married, single, divorced), the class also attracted and held the attention of a wide age range. Including the divorced singles, those participating in the class ranged in age from their early 30s to their early 70s, all of which had positive comments regarding the class and its content.

The last portion of the project’s stated purpose involved increasing church health at Cornerstone Baptist Church. Two factors affect my evaluation of the
effectiveness of the project in achieving this part of the purpose. First, due to the short period of time which has transpired since the marriage class ended, I cannot with complete certainly say if the class has helped increase the health of the church or not. I do not believe it has hurt the church, as the proclamation of God’s Word and truths are vital for the church body to be healthy and growing. Just by attending the class and listening, participants encouraged one another and promoted the importance of pursuing healthier marriages through the study and application of God’s Word. I also know one couple who contemplated divorce during the class chose not to pursue a divorce because they had been reminded of the commitment and longevity which are critical in covenant marriage relationships. They did not complete the class, but the classes which they did attend helped them to think about their marriage from a biblical perspective.

A majority of participants believed improving marriage health would benefit the church. They viewed the class as something which could help marriages and therefore be of great benefit to the church. One student suggested removing the “unhealthiness” of marriages would enable the church to be healthier.

The second factor influencing the evaluation of the effectiveness of the class in improving church health is the overall health of the church itself. Cornerstone has, unfortunately, experienced a decline in membership and regular attendance over the last several years. With fewer and fewer people attending due to people leaving for other churches, church finances and ministry effectiveness has already suffered. I would suggest poor marriage health has been one contributing factor to the church’s decline. As I write this final chapter, Cornerstone has tentatively made the decision to close its doors in only a few more weeks. With the closing approaching, discouragement has been the norm. All this being stated, what help the class may have presented the church has certainly been clouded by the current condition of the church. One couple even stated that the church’s health was such that the class would not be effective in producing
healthy benefits at Cornerstone. Although this couple enjoyed the class and had positive remarks, they chose to announce a departure from the church only a few days after they had completed the class.

**Evaluation of Project’s Goals**

Five goals were established for this project. I will attempt to address these five goals in the section which follows.

The first goal was to identify the spiritual maturity of couples with regard to marriage. The objective was to determine how the couples viewed marriage and to uncover problems they were facing in their marriages. This goal was accomplished mainly by having students complete a survey and questionnaire, both before and after the marriage class. Through this instrument, participants shared their definition of marriage, their opinions on various aspects of the marriage relationship, and their marriage problems (current and historical). In addition to the instrument, class discussions also provided insight into the participants understanding of marriage and the areas of contention with which they were dealing in their marriages. The participants were much more willing to reveal personal insights and problems via the instrument rather than in open class discussion. Based on observation, I believe there are additional, deeper issues on which some of the couples did not elaborate. Certain responses indicated additional counseling and teaching would benefit the couples.

The instrument also provided insight into the spiritual practices of class participants. Students were asked to record their participation in church ministries, as well as their practice of any spiritual disciplines (individually and as a couple). Special emphasis during the class revealed why answers to these questions were so important for marriage health.

The second goal was to disciple the couples in order to help them develop a biblical worldview as it relates to marriage. This goal was accomplished through the
content of Building a Healthy Marriage. Strong emphasis was placed on the importance of utilizing God’s Word for developing a correct view of marriage, for maintaining covenant relationships, and for handling certain problems within the context of marriage. The idea of covenant was familiar to most who participated in the class; however, none of the couples had emphasized the concept of covenant during their wedding ceremony or any type of vow renewal during their marriages. The covenant renewal of vows helped to reinforce the importance of covenant in marriage.

During the class, participants were informed of the biblical teaching and understanding of covenant, which is the biblical model for the marriage relationship. They were also taught to recognize the difference between a relationship based on covenant (biblical perspective) versus a relationship based on contract (worldly view).

In order to present a complete understanding of the biblical perspective on marriage, numerous Scriptural passages were examined. These verses provided insight into God’s purpose for marriage, God’s design of marriage, and God’s ordained role responsibilities for both husband and wife. Couples were especially responsive to the teaching of role responsibilities as mentioned in Ephesians 5. Several students expressed a need to do more to fulfill their God-given role responsibilities, given they now had a better understanding of them.

In addition to helping the participants develop an understanding of the foundational biblical truths for developing a covenant marriage relationship, I also provided the couples with teaching on topics that were meant to help them be more effective in fulfilling their roles and responsibilities in marriage. This teaching included classes on meeting the basic needs of men and women, practicing better communication, and handling conflict. Additionally, I offered a class on how couples could work together to grow spiritually, whereby enhancing their marriage relationship.
The effectiveness of the classes in discipling participants varied from individual to individual, according to the comparison of pre- and post-class survey results (see Appendices 3, 4, and 5). However, an examination of response averages from the entire class (see Appendix 6) connotes an overall growth in the students’ knowledge and understanding of the biblical teaching on marriage. Students now feel more prepared to teach their spouses about Jesus in order to show their covenant love. They are more convicted of their need to grow in Christ Jesus and spend time in God’s word in order to have a healthier marriage.

The third goal was to provide tools to help couples continue to grow together in their ministry within the church. As mentioned in the analysis of the previous goal, teaching in one class addressed the concept of growing together spiritually. During this class, the individual, as well as the couple, was challenged to develop healthy habits in practicing the spiritual disciplines. Couples had the opportunity to list these disciplines and discuss any which they did not understand.

Couples were exhorted to develop spiritual intimacy in their marriages through the practice of spiritual disciplines together. They were given practical instruction on areas such as, communicating with one another, studying together, serving together, worshiping together, and praying together. The classes on better communication and handling conflict were also presented with the intent of providing guides that, when practiced, would help the couples grow spiritually and enhance their service in the church.

In order to provide additional material to augment classroom teaching, as well as to provide books for the couples to share, I put several of the books which I had used for project preparation and study on display. Students were encouraged to write down titles and topics for later research and reading.
Attendance at classes not only provided participants an opportunity to learn, it also encouraged them to develop the positive habit of coming to Bible study on Sunday night. Cornerstone generally utilizes Sunday nights for Bible study.

The fourth goal of the project was to offer the class as an outreach to the community and to church members. The church was well-informed of the content and purpose of the class prior to its start, and as result, participation by members at Cornerstone was good. Even those who did not participate in the class provided support by keeping children. All involved felt the class was important and needed to be offered to the church and to the community where Cornerstone is located. My regret is there were not more people in the church to which I could offer the class.

The project did not accomplish the goal of reaching couples (churched or unchurched) in the community around us. Although efforts were made to inform and invite other couples, none chose to participate. At least the community around us was made aware that Cornerstone values healthy marriage and desires to help couples pursue healthy marital relationships.

Late in the project, I did have a couple who had just begun attending Cornerstone decide to participate in one of marriage classes. They attended only one session, however.

The fifth and final goal of the project was to increase the marriage health of the pastor at Cornerstone Baptist Church. This goal, as stated, was the one personal goal the project was meant to accomplish. I believe the project did help my marriage to be stronger and healthier, but not quite in the same manner as those who participated in the class. First, the time and energy spent in reading, studying and preparing for the class was worth the effort. Numerous times I was reminded of what I needed to be doing in order to be and become the husband God intended me to be. I continue to pray God will
enable me to utilize the knowledge I have gained to help me encourage my wife in her walk and to help us both grow together in the Lord.

Second, my level of accountability increased as I stood before the class and taught about how to have a healthier marriage. Accountability is vital in the Christian walk. Maybe I need to teach the class year around, so I will continually be thinking about how I can become a better husband.

Third, although Jennifer (my wife) did not participate in the class as a student, she was involved and repeatedly expressed her interest in the progress of the class. On numerous occasions we talked about the content of the class, which led to a more personalized conversation related to how the material applied to us. I was uplifted on numerous occasions by Jennifer’s prayers for me during the entire process, not just the class. Her encouragement means a great deal to me, and I do not know if I would have ever finished the project if she was not holding me accountable. Jennifer also directly helped me by preparing desserts for the class, by making copies of student handouts, and by helping setup the teaching area prior to classes starting. I found great joy in our serving alongside each other to accomplish this God-given task.

Finally, I feel our marriage is stronger by just having survived the entire project process. There certainly have been moments of tension and uncertainty, but by utilizing some of the very teaching from the class, Jennifer and I have been able to walk and grow together in our relationships with Jesus Christ. In fact, one participant in the class expressed appreciation to Jennifer and me for being a good example of a Christ-like couple who model the covenant marriage relationship.

**Strengths of the Project**

Based on personal observation and participant responses, the project had numerous strengths. Space does not permit me to address them all, but a few of the more outstanding ones are presented in this section.
First, and perhaps the greatest strength of the project, was the classroom presentation. Much time and effort was spent on creating the electronic slides, teacher notes, and student handouts which were used in each of the classes. The students were attentive to the slides, which helped them fill in blanks on their handouts. The use of handouts helped the students stay focused and provided a source of future study and conversation in their homes. Students expressed their appreciation for my preparation and presentation, as on numerous occasions they thanked me and commended me for the class. As mentioned above, several participants felt I needed to take the class and make it a weekend marriage enrichment event.

The second strength of the project was the content of the classes. The classes were designed so each class could constitute a stand-alone teaching event, while at the same time provide a reasonable transition into the following class and topic. Based on responses, I believe the topics chosen were relevant for the students to whom the class was presented. Students responded favorably to the topics being presented, especially to the discussions on role responsibilities, improving communication, and handling conflict. Additionally, a variety of techniques were used to communicate and reinforce the topics being taught, including the use of open ended questions to start discussions, the use of “fun” activities to involve participants, the use of visual aids to give concrete examples, and the use of “videos” to provide a personal touch and a little entertainment.

The third strength was the flexibility I had for presenting the class at alternate times. On occasion, there were students who were unable to attend the Sunday night class, so I arranged alternative times to meet with them and present the material they had missed. Not only did this allow participants to keep up with the rest the class, but it also allowed me an opportunity to spend some additional quality time with them in a smaller setting.
When I offer the class again, I will have flexibility in choosing the venue and the format. The initial presentation, although directed at Cornerstone Baptist Church, was generic and can be offered to various audiences in multiple settings. Yes, choosing a venue with proper equipment will be necessary, as a projector will be needed for the electronic slides. I do, however, have the ability to take a projector with me. The class format could also be altered, allowing me to offer it at an event such as a marriage enrichment weekend.

The fourth strength was the passion and personal touch I displayed when teaching the class. For several years, I had felt very strongly about the need to offer a marriage enrichment class. Only in offering this class have I seen this dream become a reality. I have seen so many lives torn apart or adversely affected by poor marriages and divorce. Time and time again church events and plans have been altered, postponed, or made less effective because families could not participate. I believe my passion and concern for marriages was apparent as I taught the classes.

The passion with which I taught was augmented by the personal touch I incorporated in the class. I used my wedding video as a visual. I used my wedding pictures and the words from my wedding ceremony as visual aids. I told personal stories of success and failure as related to the various topics being presented. My wife helped me set up for the class. She also prayed for and encouraged those who were involved in the class. On several nights, part of the group would go out to eat dinner together following the class. This gave me extra time to spend with some of the participants, as well as discuss certain issues from the class.

The use of the Bible as the main “textbook” was the fifth strength of the project. Certainly, a variety of additional resources were utilized, but the focus on God’s word was critical. Participants needed to see with clarity that the Bible is to be the main guide for determining the shape and function of marriage.
The final strength was the use of the covenant renewal service which was held in conjunction with the “covenant” focus Sunday worship service. The service gave me an opportunity to summarize the importance of “covenant” relationships to project participants, as well as other people in the church. The renewal ceremony itself was a blessing to everyone involved, and it helped those who renewed their vows to do so with a covenant relationship in mind. The service provided a strong testimony of God and His grace, and it also confirmed how Christian marriage is to be a witness of God and His work of salvation.

One couple was deeply blessed by the ceremony because the husband’s elderly parents were able to attend. Due to some negative circumstance surrounding the couple’s original wedding ceremony, the husband’s parents had not been able to attend. Now, these parents can at least say they attended the renewal ceremony, and they did so under much better circumstances than those surrounding the original ceremony.

All participating couples were pleased with the renewal ceremony. They were also delighted and very grateful for the reception which was held following the worship service. Jennifer and I rejoiced in the opportunity to express our appreciation to the couples who had participated in the renewal ceremony. By taking the extra steps to make the day memorable, I believe Jennifer and I reinforced our concern for the health of marriages at Cornerstone Baptist Church.

**Weaknesses of the Project**

Along with its strengths, the project did have a few weaknesses on which I will elaborate in this section. The first weakness was time constraints. The classes were one and half hours long, but on certain nights that was not enough time to cover all the material and leave time for additional discussion and questions. Not having taught the class previously, I did not know with certainty if I had chosen too much or too little material. Some of the nights I felt as if I were rushed or had not given enough time for
people to interject their thoughts and questions. With these constraints, I feel I did not give the participants ample opportunity to express their views or share their own experiences. Having more time to share practical stories and real-life illustrations would have been beneficial to the class.

The second weakness has already been mentioned. We would need more time to see if the class truly helped improve the health of the church. Unfortunately, time is a resource which is quickly being used up at Cornerstone, as its doors are about to close. Even if there was ample time, I do not know if we could accurately measure and statistically prove that the health of the church has increased. All this being said, I still believe my premise is good – healthier marriages make for healthier churches.

The third weakness involves the manifestation of marriage issues which arise during the class. Numerous comments were made, verbally and written, which indicated the topics being discussed in class ignited debate and discussion within participant homes. One couple indicated their amount of arguing went up while they were taking the class. Another couple, as previously noted, almost chose to file for divorce. Not all their problems arose from the topics discussed in class, but I do believe the truths being taught caused them to point fingers and place blame on one another. Potential problems such as these could surface as the class is taught, and I do not know if I am ready to handle all situations which could possibly arise. Certainly, the classroom is not the appropriate place to openly discuss and debate marital problems. Additional time and counsel needs to be provided for couples who face such problems. On the other hand, couples may choose not to announce to anyone that they are having problems, which is another potential risk. I can only pray for openness and honesty from participating couples, if they do need additional help.

Finally, the project failed to reach new couples in the community around us. I had great expectations of reaching at least two or three unchurched couples with this
ministry. Perhaps couples felt sitting through an eleven week course was too much. Or, maybe they felt the issues being addressed were too personal. Maybe the church needed to provide a more personal invitation. I do not know all the reasoning or excuses; but, the fact of the matter is that couples outside the church were not reached nor ministered to through this project.

What I Would Do Differently

Generally speaking, first time undertakings will provide insight into things which could have been done differently, and this project is no exception. As I have hopes to provide the class again in the future (in a different ministry setting), I need to ask myself what I can do differently. First, I would do more advertising in the community, and I would do so further in advance of the class. I would put ads in the local paper and would do more than one flier distribution. I would also spend more time speaking to other pastors and counselors in the community, so they would be better informed and more likely to recommend the class to couples they know.

Second, even though more sessions would be required, I would split some of the classes into two parts. Time in a few of the classes was dictated by lecture, which provided me very little time to interact with the class via their questions and discussion. By splitting these classes, I would allow more time for discussion and personal reflection, I would not feel as rushed, and I would be able to interject additional “fun” activities, which the class seemed to enjoy.

Third, I need to promote and provide opportunities for couples to meet with me privately. Couples need the opportunity to be open and honest with me alone and not with the entire class. They also need to know I am willing to do more to help them with their marriage than just stand in front of them and lecture. As noted earlier, issues and problems can arise, and a couple may need a little “coaching” to help them work through problems. Lecture alone may not be enough.
Fourth, I believe two more classes should be added to this course – one on sex and one on finances. Both of these issues, if handled properly in the confines of marriage, can be points of great blessing. If handled poorly, they can tear a marriage apart. I was not prepared to teach classes on these two issues during the project. I will need to spend additional time in study and preparation before these sessions can be added.

Theological Reflections

Marriage is a beautiful gift from God, and if done according to His prescription, it is a source of great blessing. Much of the world, however, is missing the fullness of God’s blessing because people are failing to base their marriages on the foundational truths in Scripture. As a result, many people are living in unhealthy marriages, while others (Christians and non-Christians) are joining the ever growing trend to use divorce as a solution to the “marriage problem.” At the same time, some have chosen to completely rebel against the biblical model of marriage by entering same-sex relationships or by refusing to get married at all.

The people of God can no longer idly stand by and watch the state of marriage deteriorate. We must be proactive in upholding and teaching the biblical standards of marriage as God intended from the very beginning of creation with the first wedding in the Garden of Eden. The church has got to take a stand on what true biblical marriage is – for society, for the family, and for the church.

Classes such as the one offered during this project will not bring healing to all marriages; but, I believe they are an important tool to be used by churches to teach and remind people what God intended marriage to be. God’s intention has always been for marriage to bring Him glory. He structured marriage to be an illustration of Jesus Christ’s love for the church and the church’s submission to Christ’s headship. Marriage
is meant to be a covenant relationship based on love, grace, forgiveness, and commitment. Marriages should be a testimony to the world of God’s saving grace.

With so much at stake, church leaders must strive to promote healthy marriage, especially for those who claim to be Christians. We must help men and women see how they can bring glory to God through their marriages. We must remind them marriage done God’s way is a source of blessing, and not an antiquated ritual which brings hardship to mankind. We must also continue to promote marriage as a foundational and necessary building block of society. We must continue to help people “build healthy marriages.”

**Personal Reflections**

In 2005, I felt God calling me to continue my education. He led me back to The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary to purse the Doctor of Ministry degree in the Billy Graham School. Reluctant at first, I soon found myself excited about the opportunity to honor God, while at the same time improving myself through continued education. Now, as this process draws to a conclusion, my prayer is that God has been honored, and that I will be able to apply what I have learned to be more effective in serving in the Kingdom of God.

God has blessed me throughout the doctoral program, but completing the degree requirements was not an easy task. I was challenged both physical and spiritually. Physically, I was diagnosed with a chronic drowsiness condition early in the program. As the condition manifested itself, I had difficulty completing school work in conjunction with my pastoral duties. Attempting to eliminate the drowsiness, a doctor prescribed several medications, some of which had side effects which were more problematic than the original symptoms. Giving up on medication, I trusted and leaned upon God to help me. Although He has not removed this “thorn in my flesh,” God has given me the strength to persevere.
Spiritually, I wrestled with God on numerous occasions because I was ready to “give up” and not complete the program. I was frustrated with my physical limitations. I was distracted by negative circumstances at the church. I also was, at times, angry with God (Lord forgive me) because He did not seem to be doing anything to “fix” my problems. I was resolved to forego the project and accept the additional education as all I needed. My wife and I prayed to God, asking Him if I was supposed to quit. The answer to our prayer on every occasion was, “NO!” God would not allow me to not finish the project on marriage health for the health of the church. I chose to obey Him.

I am grateful God did not allow me to quit. By challenging me, He has helped me grow spiritually and intellectually. I have learned to lean on Him and trust His direction. I have learned in an even greater way the importance of prayer in my spiritual walk with the Lord. I also have a greater appreciation for marriage, especially my own.

The biblical knowledge I have gained during the project will benefit me and the body of Christ. I am better prepared to counsel and teach married couples and those who are considering marriage. I am resolved that all couples can benefit from marriage enrichment classes, and these classes must be offered on an annual basis. The joy and excitement I found in preparing and offering the marriage class can now be carried to other churches and ministry settings. I pray God will give me the opportunities to use this class for His glory.

My deepest regret was waiting too long to complete the project. With my delay, I fear I missed opportunities to help other couples who had previously left Cornerstone Baptist Church. I also will not get the opportunity to see if the class has an ongoing positive impact on the health of Cornerstone. The church has seen continued decline, and is very close to closing its doors. May God forgive me if my delay had anything to do with the fate of this local body.
Conclusion

From my perspective, the project was a success. Even knowing what I know now, I am resolved that I would do it again, if I had to. The heartaches and headaches have all been worth the completion of the marriage class, if nothing else. With the class and the additional knowledge I have gained, I believe I am better prepared to be used by God to assist couples in pursuing a healthy marriage. May God use me to improve the health of the family and the health of the church.
APPENDIX 1

PRE- AND POST-CLASS QUESTIONNAIRE

Agreement to Participate: The research in which you are about to participate is designed to determine your current understanding and application of the biblical teaching on marriage. This research is being conducted by Duane Waddell Logsdon for purposes of gathering data needed for completing a doctoral project at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. In this research, you will be asked to: (1) provide biographical information related to you and your marriage; (2) complete a survey in which you will express your feelings in response to, or in your understanding of, numerous questions related to marriage; and (3) answer a number of open-ended questions focused on marriage and the practice of your religious beliefs. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

By your completion of this questionnaire and survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

General Information

Please list the last four digits of your social security number and that of your spouse (if applicable). This is for questionnaire identification only. The last four digits of my social security number are __________. The last four digits of my spouse’s social security number are __________.

1. How many years have you and your spouse been married? __________

2. Have you been married before? ________Yes ________No
3. If married before, how many years were you married? ______

4. Do you have any children? ______ Yes ______ No How many? _____

5. Are you a Christian? ______ Yes ______ No

6. How many years have you been a Christian? ______

7. What is your age?
   □ Less than 20
   □ 20-29
   □ 30-39
   □ 40-49
   □ 50-59
   □ 60+

8. Do you currently attend a local church? _____ Yes _____ No

9. Are you a member of that local church? _____ Yes _____ No

10. If yes, for how long have you been a member? ______

11. Are you currently involved in any ministries or activities in a church? If so, please list them and the amount of time you have been involved in each.

   Ministry: ___________________________________________ Years of service:
   ___________________________________________ _________
   ___________________________________________ _________
   ___________________________________________ _________
   ___________________________________________ _________
   ___________________________________________ _________
Opinion Survey

Using the following scale, please circle the number that corresponds to your feelings in response to, or in your understanding of, the following questions.

1 = Strongly agree
2 = Agree
3 = Slightly agree
4 = Undecided
5 = Slightly disagree
6 = Disagree
7 = Strongly disagree

1. God designed marriage to be between one man and one woman.
   1  2  3  4  5  6  7

2. As the creator of marriage God knows how marriage is to work.
   1  2  3  4  5  6  7

3. God cares whether or not my marriage is healthy.
   1  2  3  4  5  6  7

4. The Bible is to be the main source for describing marriage.
   1  2  3  4  5  6  7

5. Marriage is to be based on trust.
   1  2  3  4  5  6  7

6. I trust my spouse in all things.
   1  2  3  4  5  6  7

7. My relationship with God will have an influence on my spouse.
   1  2  3  4  5  6  7

8. I must be willing to sacrifice time and effort for my marriage to be healthy.
   1  2  3  4  5  6  7

9. My spouse has to change for our marriage to be healthier.
   1  2  3  4  5  6  7

10. God made me specifically for my spouse.
    1  2  3  4  5  6  7

11. The health of my marriage has an effect on the church I attend.
    1  2  3  4  5  6  7

12. I have used the Bible to provide guidelines for my marriage.
    1  2  3  4  5  6  7

13. I have to change in order for my marriage to be healthier.
    1  2  3  4  5  6  7
14. I am willing to sacrifice time, energy, and self interests in order to improve my marriage.
   
   1  2  3  4  5  6  7

15. It is okay for me to ask my spouse to change in order to make things better for me in the marriage.
   
   1  2  3  4  5  6  7

16. Being in church has helped my marriage.
   
   1  2  3  4  5  6  7

17. My Christian faith has helped me deal with marital difficulties.
   
   1  2  3  4  5  6  7

18. The church has taught me how to have a healthier marriage.
   
   1  2  3  4  5  6  7

19. I must willingly submit myself to my spouse.
   
   1  2  3  4  5  6  7

20. I should show my love for my spouse by teaching them about Jesus.
   
   1  2  3  4  5  6  7

21. It is okay for me to be married to a non-Christian.
   
   1  2  3  4  5  6  7

22. I must be growing as a Christian for my marriage to be healthy.
   
   1  2  3  4  5  6  7

23. Marriage is to be a testimony of Jesus’ love for the church.
   
   1  2  3  4  5  6  7

24. I know the main needs of my spouse.
   
   1  2  3  4  5  6  7

25. I consider my spouse’s needs to be more important than my own.
   
   1  2  3  4  5  6  7

26. Sexuality is a gift of God to be practiced only in marriage.
   
   1  2  3  4  5  6  7

27. Healthy marriage will bring sexual fulfillment.
   
   1  2  3  4  5  6  7

28. Husbands and wives have the same roles and responsibilities in the marriage relationship.
   
   1  2  3  4  5  6  7

29. The wife is always to follow the husband’s wishes.
   
   1  2  3  4  5  6  7
30. The husband’s role in the home is more important than the wife’s.

31. Submission is a sign of weakness.

32. Marriage is to be a permanent relationship.

33. My marriage is a testimony of Jesus’ love for the church.

34. I have experienced problems in my marriage for which I was not prepared.

35. My prayer life affects my marriage.

36. My spending time reading God’s Word affects my marriage.

37. Forgiveness is needed for a healthy marriage.

38. Good communication requires me to relate facts and feelings.

39. Communication requires asking proper questions.

40. Communication is not needed for healthy marriage.

41. I know how to improve communication in my marriage.

42. If I ignore conflict in my marriage, it will go away.

43. Conflict is never present in my marriage.

44. I know how to handle conflict in my marriage.

45. My spouse and I always agree on finances.

46. Finances are not a problem in my household.

47. I know how to improve the handling of family finances.
Questions

Please use the space provided to answer the following questions, based on your current marriage. If you are currently divorced, please answer the questions based on your previous marriage.

1. What are you currently doing to grow in your Christian faith?

2. What is your definition of marriage?

3. What do you consider to be the purpose of marriage?

4. What do you consider to have been (to be) the biggest challenge(s) in your marriage?

5. What do you believe are your spouse’s top four needs?

6. What problems have you experienced in your marriage?

7. How have you dealt with the problems you have faced?
8. Has your Christianity helped you deal with your marital problems? Why or why not?

9. How has the church helped you to deal with these problems? Were you willing to let the church help?

10. What can the church do to help you?

11. Have you ever received any counseling from someone outside the church to help you with your marriage? How did it help you and your spouse?

12. If your marriage were healthier, do you think it would help the church to be healthier? Why?
APPENDIX 2
POST-CLASS FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONNAIRE

Please use the space provided to answer the following questions, based on your experience in the Building a Healthy Marriage Class. If additional space is needed, please use the back of this paper.

1. What were the strengths and weaknesses of the class?

2. How would you describe your view of marriage before and after the class?

3. Do you feel better prepared to deal with your potential future marriage difficulties? Why or why not?

4. Have you been able to apply anything you learned in the class? If so, what?

5. Do you anticipate using anything you learned in the class? If so, what?

6. How would you describe your view on how marriage health affects the health of the church – before and after the class?
APPENDIX 3

PRE-CLASS QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES

Possible Responses: 1 = Strongly agree
2 = Agree
3 = Slightly agree
4 = Undecided
5 = Slightly disagree
6 = Disagree
7 = Strongly disagree

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<td>1. God designed marriage to be between one man and one woman.</td>
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<td>2. As the creator of marriage God knows how marriage is to work.</td>
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<td>3. God cares whether or not my marriage is healthy.</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>4. The Bible is to be the main source for describing marriage.</td>
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<td>5. Marriage is to be based on trust.</td>
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<td>6. I trust my spouse in all things.</td>
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<td>7. My relationship with God will have an influence on my spouse.</td>
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<td>8. I must be willing to sacrifice time and effort for my marriage to be healthy.</td>
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<td>9. My spouse has to change for our marriage to be healthier.</td>
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<td>10. God made me specifically for my spouse.</td>
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<td>11. The health of my marriage has an effect on the church I attend.</td>
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<td>12. I have used the Bible to provide guidelines for my marriage.</td>
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<td>13. I have to change in order for my marriage to be healthier.</td>
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Table A1 – Continued. Pre-class questionnaire responses

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<td>14. I am willing to sacrifice time, energy, and self interests in order</td>
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<td>15. It is okay for me to ask my spouse to change in order to make things</td>
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<td>17. My Christian faith has helped me deal with marital difficulties.</td>
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<td>18. The church has taught me how to have a healthier marriage.</td>
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<td>19. I must willingly submit myself to my spouse.</td>
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<td>20. I should show my love for my spouse by teaching them about Jesus.</td>
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<td>21. It is okay for me to be married to a non-Christian.</td>
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<td>22. I must be growing as a Christian for my marriage to be healthy.</td>
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<td>23. Marriage is to be a testimony of Jesus’ love for the church.</td>
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<td>24. I know the main needs of my spouse.</td>
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<td>25. I consider my spouse’s needs to be more important than my own.</td>
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<td>27. Healthy marriage will bring sexual fulfillment.</td>
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<td>28. Husbands and wives have the same roles and responsibilities in the</td>
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<td>29. The wife is always to follow the husband’s wishes.</td>
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<td>30. The husband’s role in the home is more important than the wife’s.</td>
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<td>31. Submission is a sign of weakness.</td>
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<td>32. Marriage is to be a permanent relationship.</td>
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<td>33. My marriage is a testimony of Jesus’ love for the church.</td>
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<td>34. I have experienced problems in my marriage for which I was not prepared.</td>
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<td>35. My prayer life affects my marriage.</td>
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<td>36. My spending time reading God’s Word affects my marriage.</td>
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<td>37. Forgiveness is needed for a healthy marriage.</td>
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<td>39. Communication requires asking proper questions.</td>
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<td>40. Communication is not needed for healthy marriage.</td>
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<td>41. I know how to improve communication in my marriage.</td>
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<td>42. If I ignore conflict in my marriage, it will go away.</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>43. Conflict is never present in my marriage.</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<td>44. I know how to handle conflict in my marriage.</td>
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<td>45. My spouse and I always agree on finances.</td>
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<td>46. Finances are not a problem in my household.</td>
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<td>47. I know how to improve the handling of family finances.</td>
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APPENDIX 4

POST-CLASS QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES

Possible Responses:  
1 = Strongly agree  
2 = Agree  
3 = Slightly agree  
4 = Undecided  
5 = Slightly disagree  
6 = Disagree  
7 = Strongly disagree

Table A2. Post-class questionnaire responses

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<td>2. As the creator of marriage God knows how marriage is to work.</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>3. God cares whether or not my marriage is healthy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. The Bible is to be the main source for describing marriage.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Marriage is to be based on trust.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. My relationship with God will have an influence on my spouse.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I must be willing to sacrifice time and effort for my marriage to be healthy.</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. My spouse has to change for our marriage to be healthier.</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. God made me specifically for my spouse.</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>11. The health of my marriage has an effect on the church I attend.</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>6</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I have used the Bible to provide guidelines for my marriage.</td>
<td>4</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. I have to change in order for my marriage to be healthier.</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. I am willing to sacrifice time, energy, and self interests in order to improve my marriage.</td>
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<td>15. It is okay for me to ask my spouse to change in order to make things better for me in the marriage.</td>
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<td>17. My Christian faith has helped me deal with marital difficulties.</td>
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<td>18. The church has taught me how to have a healthier marriage.</td>
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<td>20. I should show my love for my spouse by teaching them about Jesus.</td>
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<td>23. Marriage is to be a testimony of Jesus’ love for the church.</td>
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<td>30. The husband’s role in the home is more important than the wife’s.</td>
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<td>33. My marriage is a testimony of Jesus’ love for the church.</td>
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<td>34. I have experienced problems in my marriage for which I was not prepared.</td>
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<td>38. Good communication requires me to relate facts and feelings.</td>
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<td>39. Communication requires asking proper questions.</td>
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<td>40. Communication is not needed for healthy marriage.</td>
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<tr>
<td>41. I know how to improve communication in my marriage.</td>
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<td>42. If I ignore conflict in my marriage, it will go away.</td>
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<td>43. Conflict is never present in my marriage.</td>
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<tr>
<td>44. I know how to handle conflict in my marriage.</td>
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<tr>
<td>45. My spouse and I always agree on finances.</td>
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<tr>
<td>46. Finances are not a problem in my household.</td>
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<tr>
<td>47. I know how to improve the handling of family finances.</td>
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### APPENDIX 5

**INDIVIDUAL RESPONSE VARIANCES**

Table A3. Individual Response Variances

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>#1</th>
<th>#2</th>
<th>#3</th>
<th>#4</th>
<th>#5</th>
<th>#6</th>
<th>#7</th>
<th>#8</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. God designed marriage to be between one man and one woman.</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. As the creator of marriage God knows how marriage is to work.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. God cares whether or not my marriage is healthy.</td>
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<td>4. The Bible is to be the main source for describing marriage.</td>
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<td>5. Marriage is to be based on trust.</td>
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<td>6. I trust my spouse in all things.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. My relationship with God will have an influence on my spouse.</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. I must be willing to sacrifice time and effort for my marriage to be healthy.</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. My spouse has to change for our marriage to be healthier.</td>
<td>-2</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. God made me specifically for my spouse.</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. The health of my marriage has an effect on the church I attend.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. Marriage is to be a permanent relationship.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. My marriage is a testimony of Jesus’ love for the church.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>34. I have experienced problems in my marriage for which I was not prepared.</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35. My prayer life affects my marriage.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36. My spending time reading God’s Word affects my marriage.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>#3</td>
<td>#4</td>
<td>#5</td>
<td>#6</td>
<td>#7</td>
<td>#8</td>
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<td>----</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>37. Forgiveness is needed for a healthy marriage.</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38. Good communication requires me to relate facts and feelings.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39. Communication requires asking proper questions.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40. Communication is not needed for healthy marriage.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41. I know how to improve communication in my marriage.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42. If I ignore conflict in my marriage, it will go away.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43. Conflict is never present in my marriage.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44. I know how to handle conflict in my marriage.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45. My spouse and I always agree on finances.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46. Finances are not a problem in my household.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47. I know how to improve the handling of family finances.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Appendix 6

## Class Response Averages and Variances

Table A4. Class Response Averages and Variances

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Pre-Average</th>
<th>Post-Average</th>
<th>Variance</th>
<th>% Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. God designed marriage to be between one man and one woman.</td>
<td>1.125</td>
<td>1.125</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. As the creator of marriage God knows how marriage is to work.</td>
<td>1.125</td>
<td>1.125</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. God cares whether or not my marriage is healthy.</td>
<td>1.125</td>
<td>1.125</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The Bible is to be the main source for describing marriage.</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.125</td>
<td>0.375</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Marriage is to be based on trust.</td>
<td>1.375</td>
<td>1.375</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I trust my spouse in all things.</td>
<td>1.625</td>
<td>1.625</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. My relationship with God will have an influence on my spouse.</td>
<td>1.375</td>
<td>1.125</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I must be willing to sacrifice time and effort for my marriage to be healthy.</td>
<td>1.125</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>-0.125</td>
<td>-11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. My spouse has to change for our marriage to be healthier.</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>4.125</td>
<td>0.125</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. God made me specifically for my spouse.</td>
<td>2.375</td>
<td>2.375</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. The health of my marriage has an effect on the church I attend.</td>
<td>2.375</td>
<td>2.125</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I have used the Bible to provide guidelines for my marriage.</td>
<td>2.125</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>0.375</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. I have to change in order for my marriage to be healthier.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. I am willing to sacrifice time, energy, and self interests in order to improve my marriage.</td>
<td>1.625</td>
<td>1.375</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. It is okay for me to ask my spouse to change in order to make things better for me in the marriage.</td>
<td>3.875</td>
<td>3.375</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>Pre-Average</td>
<td>Post-Average</td>
<td>Variance</td>
<td>% Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Being in church has helped my marriage.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.875</td>
<td>0.125</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. My Christian faith has helped me deal with marital difficulties.</td>
<td>1.375</td>
<td>1.375</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. The church has taught me how to have a healthier marriage.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.625</td>
<td>1.375</td>
<td>45.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. I must willingly submit myself to my spouse.</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. I should show my love for my spouse by teaching them about Jesus.</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>1.625</td>
<td>1.125</td>
<td>40.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. It is okay for me to be married to a non-Christian.</td>
<td>6.375</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.375</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. I must be growing as a Christian for my marriage to be healthy.</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>1.375</td>
<td>0.375</td>
<td>21.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Marriage is to be a testimony of Jesus’ love for the church.</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. I know the main needs of my spouse.</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>2.375</td>
<td>0.375</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. I consider my spouse’s needs to be more important than my own.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.375</td>
<td>-0.375</td>
<td>-18.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Sexuality is a gift of God to be practiced only in marriage.</td>
<td>1.875</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>0.625</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Healthy marriage will bring sexual fulfillment.</td>
<td>2.125</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>0.875</td>
<td>41.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. Husbands and wives have the same roles and responsibilities in the marriage relationship.</td>
<td>5.375</td>
<td>5.375</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. The wife is always to follow the husband’s wishes.</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>4.875</td>
<td>-0.625</td>
<td>-14.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. The husband’s role in the home is more important than the wife’s.</td>
<td>5.75</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. Submission is a sign of weakness.</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>6.25</td>
<td>-0.75</td>
<td>-13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. Marriage is to be a permanent relationship.</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. My marriage is a testimony of Jesus’ love for the church.</td>
<td>2.125</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.125</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34. I have experienced problems in my marriage for which I was not prepared.</td>
<td>2.375</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>0.125</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35. My prayer life affects my marriage.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.125</td>
<td>0.875</td>
<td>43.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table A4. Class Response Averages and Variances

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>% Change</th>
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<tr>
<td>36. My spending time reading God’s Word affects my marriage.</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>1.125</td>
<td>0.625</td>
<td>35.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37. Forgiveness is needed for a healthy marriage.</td>
<td>1.125</td>
<td>1.125</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38. Good communication requires me to relate facts and feelings.</td>
<td>1.625</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>0.375</td>
<td>23.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39. Communication requires asking proper questions.</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40. Communication is not needed for healthy marriage.</td>
<td>6.875</td>
<td>6.375</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41. I know how to improve communication in my marriage.</td>
<td>3.625</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>1.875</td>
<td>51.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42. If I ignore conflict in my marriage, it will go away.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>-16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43. Conflict is never present in my marriage.</td>
<td>5.875</td>
<td>5.875</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
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<td>44. I know how to handle conflict in my marriage.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>31.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45. My spouse and I always agree on finances.</td>
<td>4.125</td>
<td>5.125</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>-24.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46. Finances are not a problem in my household.</td>
<td>4.625</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>0.125</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47. I know how to improve the handling of family finances.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX 7

BUILDING A HEALTHY MARRIAGE
TEACHING NOTES AND PRESENTATION SLIDES
PRE-CLASS SESSION

WHY WE NEED A MARRIAGE CLASS

Welcome and Prayer

Teaching

1. Why is there a need for a class on marriage health? Marriage is under attack.

2. An example of marriage under attack: “Killing Off Marriage? Dr. Ablow Reports – You Decide” by Dr. R. Albert Mohler.

3. Quoting Dr. Keith Ablow in Mohler’s article: “Marriage is “a source of real suffering for the vast majority of married people.”

4. Quote from Cameron Diaz in Mohler’s article: “I don’t think we should live our lives in relationships based off old traditions that don’t suit our world any longer.”

5. Quoting Dr. Keith Ablow in Mohler’s article: “As a healer, I can’t help looking askance at anything that depletes energy, optimism, mood and passion to the extent that marriage does. It is without a doubt, one of the leading causes of major depression in the nation.”

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6. Dr. Keith Ablow asserts four factors which are contributing to the ills of marriage.

   a. 1) GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT:
   “The involvement of the state in marriage has been a colossal mistake.”

   b. 2) INVENT OF ORAL CONTRACEPTIVE
   “Marriage is dying because of the invention of oral contraceptive.” Ablow states, “Once human beings understood that they could express themselves emotionally, romantically and sexually without necessarily creating multiple families and perilously dividing their assets, the psychological pain of living without sexual passion (even by choice) was significantly intensified.

Dr. Ablow does not believe most men and women are attracted to their spouses after multiple years of marriage. He writes: “The vast, vast majority of men and women, in fact, are no longer physically attracted to their spouses after five or ten years (that’s being kind), if they have seen one another most of that time. Human beings just are not built to desire one another once we have flossed in the same room a hundred times and shared a laundry basket for thousands of days.”

   c. 3) BEING ABLE TO CHOOSE DAILY
   “The third reason marriage is a dying institution is because it inherently deprives men and women of the joy of being ‘chosen’ on a daily basis.”

Dr Ablow: “Most married people “have to wonder whether their spouses really want to stay, or simply don’t want to go through the hassle of leaving.”
d. 4) UNDERMINED BY HYPOCRISY

“The fact that millions of Americans take vows to stay in marriages for life, then leave those marriages — once, twice, maybe three times — has so trivialized and mocked those vows that many silently chuckle to themselves while listening to them.”

7. Dr. Mohler’s response to: “No one can seriously doubt that this kind of hypocrisy is indeed weakening marriage both as an institution and as a personal commitment.”

8. We also need a healthy marriage class because marriage has seen better days.² (Note: Statistics which follow are taken from Dr. Fred
   a. 65% of new marriages will end in divorce.
   b. Marriages have a 75% failure rate.
   c. Christians in mainline churches are divorcing more rapidly than non-Christians (27% to 23%).
   d. Bible Belt states lead the nation in divorce.
   e. The number of unmarried partners living together increased 72% in the last decade.
   f. 55% of children will see their parents divorce before they leave home.
   g. 81% of divorced and separated Americans still believe that marriage should be for life.

9. We need Building a Healthy Marriage!

10. Dr. Fred Lowery: “Not only does the world not know how to divorce-proof its marriages, it is well on the way to making broken relationships the norm!”

11. Dr. Fred Lowery: “For the sake of marriages, we have to get with God, study the Scriptures, and begin to understand marriage as He created it to be: a sacred, permanent, covenant, commitment.”

²Statistics taken from Dr. Fred Lowery’s book *Covenant Marriage: Staying Together for Life.*
12. [READ] Ephesians 5:22-25 22Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the
Lord. 23For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the
church. He Himself being the Savior of the body. 24But as the church is subject to
Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything. 25Husbands,
love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.

13. Dr. Fred Lowery: “Our human marriages are designed to
mirror God’s marriage to Israel and Christ’s marriage to the
church in both purpose and permanence.”

14. Dr. Fred Lowery: “The only way anyone can become one with
God and with another human being is on the basis of
covenant.”

15. Dr. Fred Lowery: “Without a covenant relationship with your
spouse, your marriage is without hope.”

16. Dr. Fred Lowery: “Without covenant your marriage is without
God.”

17. Dr. Fred Lowery: We need to “know the difference between a
legal marriage and a biblical marriage; between marriage
based on contract and a marriage based on the blood
COVENANT of Christ.”

18. Abraham Lincoln: “The strength of a nation lies in the houses
of its people.”

19. [READ] Genesis 1:26-27 26Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image,
according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds
of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that
creeps on the earth.” 27God created man in His own image, in the image of God He
created him; male and female He created them.
20. [Have someone READ] Genesis 2:18-25

21. Marriage is…
   a. God’s plans for populating the world.
   b. Healthy marriage is good for society.
   c. Healthy marriage is good for the church.

22. We need to do marriage GOD’S WAY!
SESSION 1
INTRODUCTION

Welcome and Prayer

1. Distribute Survey / Questionnaire and give instructions.

2. Remind class we need to do marriage God’s way.

3. Discuss briefly the focus of this class on “covenant marriage.”

4. Marriage and this class on healthy marriage can be stressful. To help you with the stress you will face, we are going to make “stress balls.”

5. Review the schedule for the class.
SESSION 2
PURPOSE OF MARRIAGE (PART 1)

Welcome and Prayer
Welcome new participants
Make sure everyone has done and handed in surveys

Activity (25-30 min)

Egg Drop contest

Intended to have couples working and interacting together

Each couple should be given supplies and 25-30 minutes to build a device which will prevent their egg from being broken when dropped.

Mention the debate over which came first, “the chicken or the egg,” as the class focuses on the creation story.

Emphasize the firm foundation which is necessary to protect the egg.

Drop egg at the end of class.

Watch couples to see how they interact with one another.

Teaching Outline

6. God’s intention has always been for marriage to be a COVENANT RELATIONSHIP with Jesus Christ as Lord of the relationship.

The Foundation of Covenant Marriage

7. God is the SOVEREIGN CREATOR of the entire universe.

As the creation story unfolds, the reader finds God’s plan for creation, including the divine plan of man and woman and their relationship within the boundaries of marriage, as well as the relationship they are to have with their Creator.

8. God created MARRIAGE, a special relationship between one man and one woman, as indicated in the creation story, where it states that “God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female he created them” (Gen 1:27).
9. God knows how marriage **WORKS**.

   **[READ] Genesis 1:27** God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

10. God never intended for man to be **ALONE**.

   *The fact that such an observation is made by God “alerts the reader to the importance of companionship for man.”*

   **[Have someone read Genesis 2:18-24]**

   **Genesis 2:18-24**

   **18** Then the Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.”  
   **19** Out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name.  
   **20** The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him.  
   **21** So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place.  
   **22** The Lord God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man.  
   **23** The man said, “This is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man.”  
   **24** For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.

   *God cannot declare His creation “finished” or “very good,” because man by himself is in need.*

11. God took the initiative to provide Adam a suitable **HELPER**, one that will be able to correspond to and complement him.

12. “Helper” = **SAVE FROM DANGER** or **DELIVER FROM DEATH**

13. This helper is one who will **WORK ALONGSIDE** Adam to carry out God’s plan.

   *The new couple, Adam and Eve, will work together as “partners” to fulfill God’s purpose for the world and for marriage.*

   *Even in the methodology which God used to create woman, the reader becomes aware that this special helper is one who will work alongside Adam.*
[READ] Genesis 2:22-23  

22 The Lord God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. 23 The man said, “This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.”

God is the original “Match Maker.”

God defined marriage and its original purpose, and these biblical parameters have not changed since the first wedding in the Garden of Eden, when, after fashioning Eve, God “brought her to the man” (Gen 2:22).

14. The first words of man reflect a covenant statement of his COMMITMENT and LOYALTY.

A commitment and a loyalty that were never intended to be broken by Adam or Eve or any couple who enter into the marriage relationship.

Commitment and loyalty to one’s spouse are critical in God’s plan for marriage, as Genesis 2:24 indicates.

[READ] Genesis 2:24 For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.

“Leave and cleave principle”

15. “Joined” together suggests both the PASSION and PERMANENCE of covenant marriage.

Once a man, guided by the Lord, enters into the holy bonds of marriage, his first and foremost loyalty and obligation is to be directed toward his new wife – his lifelong helpmate and partner.

This marriage relationship was intended to be permanent until death.

[REFER TO] Genesis 2:24 For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.

16. Highlights the SANCTITY of the marriage relationship.

The new relationship which is formed between husband and wife is unlike any other type of relationship in God’s creation.
Reflecting the Image of God

[Have someone read Genesis 1:26-27]

Genesis 1:26-27 Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

In Genesis 1:26-27, the inspired author of Genesis states that God created mankind, both male and female, in such a way that they share the likeness of their Creator.

17. Notice the change from “LET THERE BE” to “Let Us make.”

Denotes that something special is about to happen.

18. The husband and wife relationship is to be a REFLECTION of the Holy Trinity relationship.

The relationship between husband and wife within the boundaries of marriage is to be a reflection of the beautiful relationship which exists between the members of the Holy Trinity – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

19. A marriage based on biblical guidelines should possess and portray these characteristics.

PERMANENCE
HARMONY
LOVE
COOPERATION
GOOD COMMUNICATION

20. Marriage should also be reflection of the relationship between GOD and His PEOPLE.

We will look more at this concept when we examine Ephesians 5 later.

21. Covenant marriage should GLORIFY God.

Writing on marriage, R. Albert Mohler states that “our chief end is to glorify God – and marriage is a means for His greater glory.”
He goes on to write that “the ultimate purpose of marriage is the greater glory of God — and God is most greatly glorified when His gifts are rightly celebrated and received, and His covenants are rightly honored and pledged.”

Marriage is a celebration — a celebration of two people, man and woman, who become one flesh as ordained by the sovereign hand of God.

Couples celebrate the joys and pleasures which God allows them to experience through sharing, sacrifice, and a willingness to give of themselves to one another physically, mentally, and emotionally.

Marriage is a celebration of life through procreation, which is God’s plan for mankind to multiply and subdue the earth.

As parents, covenant-marriage couples have the joy of raising children and making a witness to their children of God’s great love, His forgiveness, and His saving grace.

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Mohler, “Marriage and the Glory of God.”
SESSION 3
PURPOSE OF MARRIAGE (PART 2)

[SHARE] Proverbs 24:3-4 3By wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established; 4And by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches.

Welcome and Prayer
Review major concepts from previous session

Teaching Outline

1. God created man and woman to be STEWARDS of His creation.

   [READ]Genesis 1:26, 28 26 Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth”…28 God blessed them; and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

2. God has given man “functions,” or STEWARDSHIP RESPONSIBILITIES.

   These functions, or stewardship responsibilities, were intended for man and woman individually, but also as family.

   Looking at the creation story in Genesis 1 and 2, we will find five stewardship responsibilities which God purposes for mankind.

3. Five Stewardship Responsibilities

   Men and women are to be...

   3a. Stewards of the RELATIONSHIP to the rest of God’s creation

   The first responsibility is that man and woman are to be stewards of the RELATIONSHIP to the rest of God’s
creation.

- **PROCREATION**

Two assignments are associated with this responsibility.

The first is **PROCREATION**.

[READ] **Genesis 1:26, 28** Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth”… 28 God blessed them; and God said to them, “**Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth**, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

With God’s help, couples have the responsibility of populating the earth, rather than having God create more humans, as He had done with Adam and Eve.

The **FAMILY UNIT**, therefore, is to be the building block upon which society is to be structured.

- **DOMINION**

The second assignment associated with this responsibility is **DOMINION**

[Refer to “rule over” and “subdue it” phrases in Genesis 1:26, 28 on next slide]

**Genesis 1:26, 28** Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them **rule over** the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth”… 28 God blessed them; and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and **subdue it**; and **rule over** the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

Mankind is to rule the world on God’s behalf.

This command is given to man and woman, the family unit, here in the creation story.

3b. Stewards of the **MARRIAGE** relationship.

- **PERMANENCE**
• COMMITMENT
• EXCLUSITIVITY

Secondly, man and woman, as a family unit, are to be stewards of the MARRIAGE relationship.

God ordained marriage such that man and woman, in covenant relationship, would receive the blessings, joys, and benefits of being husband and wife.

In order to receive such merits, the marriage relationship must be guarded and held as sacred.

Married couples should consider the PERMANENCE, COMMITMENT, and EXCLUSITIVITY of the marital relationship.

Marriage done God’s way will be a healthy marriage.

Healthy marriages are a benefit to society as whole, the family, and the church.

[ASK participants to brainstorm and think of ways healthy families/marriages benefit society and then the family. Remind them to think from simply a secular perspective at this point. Write their responses on a dry-erase board.]

Benefits to the Community:

• Higher rates of physically healthy citizens
• Higher rates of emotionally healthy citizens
• Higher rates of educated citizens
• Lower domestic violence rates
• Lower teenage rates of pregnancy
• Lower rates of juvenile delinquency
• Decreased need for social services
• A happier community
• Improved social order
• Improved Building blocks
• Healthier future generation

Benefits to the Family:

• Better physical health
• Better mental and emotional health
• Improved safety
• Improved sex life
• Improved finances

For Men:

• Live longer
• Physically healthier
• Wealthier
• Increase in the stability of employment
• Higher wages
• Decrease risk of drug and alcohol abuse
• Have better relationships with their children
• Less likely to commit violent crimes
• Less likely to attempt or commit suicide

For Women:
• More satisfying relationship
• Emotionally healthier
• Less likely to be victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, or other violent crimes
• Less likely to attempt or commit suicide
• Decrease risk of drug and alcohol abuse
• Less likely to remain or end up in poverty
• Have better relationships with their children

For Children:
• More likely to attend college
• More likely to succeed academically
• Physically & emotionally healthier
• Less likely to abuse drugs or alcohol
• Less likely to commit delinquent behaviors
• Less likely to be a victim of physical or sexual abuse
• Have a better relationship with their mothers and fathers
• Decreases their chances of divorcing when they get married
• Less likely to become pregnant as a teenager, or impregnate someone
• Less likely to be sexually active as teenagers

[ASK participants to brainstorm and think of ways healthy families/marriages benefit the church. Write their responses on a dry-erase board.]

Benefits to the Church:
• Stronger building blocks
• Healthier leaders
• Source for biblical teaching
• Teaching of children
• Promote other healthy marriages
• Encourage church attendance
• Witness to society

3c. Stewards of the **CHILDREN** relationship.

• **SPIRITUAL**
• **PHYSICAL**
• **EMOTIONAL**
The third stewardship responsibility of man and woman is that they are to be stewards of the CHILDREN relationship.

Man and woman are given the critical task of parenting.

Children are to be the natural outcome of sexual intercourse within marriage.

The responsibility for these children does not end at birth.

Husbands and wives have the responsibility of providing for the SPIRITUAL, PHYSICAL, and EMOTIONAL well-being of their children.

- Proclaiming GOD’S WORD to the children.

Perhaps one of the greatest stewardship responsibilities parents have is proclaiming GOD’S WORD to their children.

God’s plan is for parents to have the lead role in teaching their children about the one true God – His will, His ways, His Word.

[READ] Deuteronomy 6:4-9 4 Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! 5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6 These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. 8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. 9 You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

3d. Stewards of their VOCATIONS.

The fourth stewardship responsibility, though not directly related to the marriage, is that man and woman are to be stewards of their VOCATIONS.

[READ] Genesis 2:15 Then the Lord God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it.

3e. Stewards of JUSTICE (MORALITY).

The fifth, and final, stewardship responsibility given to man and woman is that they are to be stewards of JUSTICE (MORALITY).

[READ] Genesis 2:16-17 16 The Lord God
commanded the man, saying, “From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; 17 but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.”

Mankind was originally only given one command of which they were to obey.

Obedience to this command was necessary for the continued fellowship which God intended to provide in the Garden of Eden.

Sin and the curse were to follow.

God has provided a remedy for the sin problem (Jesus’ substitutionary death of Calvary’s cross); but mankind is still has the responsibility of obeying the relevant commands from His Word.

Certainly, a number of these commands deal with marriage and family life. Additionally, man and woman should be good examples of those who obey the moral, ethical, and legal codes prescribed in society (as long as they are not contradictory to God’s Word).

4. As stewards, man and woman need to learn to **BALANCE** their responsibilities.

   *Each of these stewardship responsibilities has been given to man and woman.*

   *They must learn to BALANCE these responsibilities in their lives, with God as the first and foremost priority.*

   **[ACTIVITY]** Have couples work together to build card houses. Use this activity to reinforce the idea of balance in fulfilling stewardship responsibilities.
SESSION 4

COVENANT VS. CONTRACT

[SHARE] Deuteronomy 7:9 Know therefore that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness to a thousandth generation with those who love Him and keep His commandments.

Welcome and Prayer

Review major concepts from previous session

Teaching Outline

ASK students for examples of contracts. Write examples on a dry-erase board

[Fred Lowery, Covenant Marriage] “Covenant exchanges a piece of paper for a piece of the rock – the solid rock, Jesus Christ.”

Show several “contract” type documents, including a marriage license

Covenant

1. Marriage based on God’s biblical principles and guidelines is known as a “COVENANT MARRIAGE.”

   Marriage is much more than a contract drawn up in the form of a marriage license which is to be filed at the local courthouse.

   Marriage is a special relationship which God instituted as part of His plan and purpose for creation, and God takes these relationships very seriously.

   He ordained marriage to be a permanent relationship between one man and one woman who remain faithful in their commitment to one another.

   The type of marriage relationship which is based on the biblical principles and guidelines is known as a “COVENANT MARRIAGE.”

   Before we compare and contrast covenants to contracts, we are going to define covenant and see how it is used in Scripture.

Covenant – Biblical Definition

2. The process by which God established RELATIONSHIPS and made PROMISES to those who would be faithful in them are what is known as a covenant.

   God had to provide for the sin problem which Adam and Eve brought forth in the Garden of Eden.

   The process by which God established RELATIONSHIPS and made PROMISES to those who would be faithful in them are what is known as a covenant.

   Let’s look at few definitions for the term “covenant” as it is used in Scripture.

3. God’s “covenant” is a relationship of LOVE and LOYALTY between the Lord and His chosen people.

   According to the Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words, God’s “covenant” is a relationship of LOVE and LOYALTY between the Lord and His chosen people.

4. A clear statement of God’s PURPOSES and INTENTIONS expressed in terms that bind God by solemn oath to perform what He has promised.

   In the Expository Dictionary of Bible Words, Lawrence Richards defines a biblical covenant as “a clear statement of God’s PURPOSES and INTENTIONS expressed in terms that bind God by solemn oath to perform what He has promised.

   In brief: A “binding promise” or agreement.

5. Hebrew (OT) – בְּרִית (berit) Greek (NT) – διαθήκη (diatheke)

   The term covenant is found in the OT and NT.

Old Testament

6. Used of special relationships between GOD and man, as well as special relationships between MAN and man.

   In the Old Testament, covenant is translated from the Hebrew word בְּרִית (berit), and is used for special relationships between GOD and man, as well as special relationships between MAN and man.

7. *Berit* is used to describe such things as a pledge of friendship. 1 Samuel 18:3

*Berit is used to describe such things as a pledge of friendship (1 Samuel 18:3, 20:8; 23:18).*

8. *Berit* is used to describe agreements on a national level. 2 Samuel 3:21

*The term is also used to describe agreements on a national level between a ruler and those being ruled (2 Samuel 3:21; 5:3; 1 Chronicles 11:3).*

9. Examples of covenant promises God made to individuals include those He made to...

   - **NOAH** (Genesis 9)
   - **ABRAHAM** (Genesis 15)
   - **DAVID** (1 Samuel 7)

10. God also made a covenant with the nation of Israel as they were His special, chosen people.

   - **EXODUS 19-24**
   - **EXODUS 34**
   - **DEUTERONOMY 28-31**

11. In each of these incidences, whether to an individual or to a nation, God took the **INITIATIVE** to provide the covenant.

12. God is also the **GUARANTOR** of the covenant.

Abrahamic Covenant

[TURN TO and READ Genesis 15]

13. Two factors about this covenant:

   - **PROMISE OF BLESSING**
   - **SACRIFICE**

*Notice, first of all, that it is God alone who obligates Himself by enacting the covenant ceremony.*

*God alone makes this “promissory oath.”*
The verbs used in the passage give evidence that it is God who takes the sole initiative in covenant-making and fulfillment.

Via the ceremony and the oath, God makes a promise of blessing on Abraham and his descendents based on their faithful obedience to God and a trust in His promises.

Sacrifices, such as this one, foreshadow the great sacrifice God would make of His Son, Jesus, in providing the New Covenant for salvation to those who would place their faith in God’s ultimate provision and promise.

Sacrifice, like promise, is part of the biblical definition and description of covenant.

New Testament

14. The connection between the concepts of covenant and promise is also found in the New Testament.

Paul points out the nature of the biblical covenant as promise in various passages (Romans 4:13-17; Galatians 3:15-18).

- **ROMANS 4:13-17**
- **GALATIANS 3:15-18**

Like the promises God made in the Old Testament time period, the promises God makes in the New Covenant are not dependent on human reaction to them; rather, God will do what He promised.

Hebrews 9:13-22

15. Here you find the concept of covenant being equated with a **LAST WILL** and **TESTAMENT**.


[TURN TO and READ passage]

16. Points to the necessity of the **DEATH** of the one making the promise.

The writer of Hebrews uses the term diatheke to point out the necessity of the DEATH of the one making the promise in order for the inheritance to be given.

In other words, Jesus had to shed His blood and die in order to institute the New Covenant, as the will could be effective only after the testator had died (Heb 9:16-17).

Also, once the testator had died, the will became unalterable.
17. Clearly, **SACRIFICE** is critical if a covenant relationship is to exist.

Marriage as Covenant:

18.

19. **TRIANGULAR COVENANTAL ARRANGEMENT**

*John Hayes states that “marriage was understood in ancient Israel along the lines of a TRIANGULAR COVENANTAL ARRANGEMENT in which the spouses were the primary partners and God was the custodian and guardian of the marriage relationship.”*  

Hayes refers to three passages to make this argument.

20. Passages alluding to marriage as covenant: [TURN TO and READ]

- **PROVERBS 2:17**
- **MALACHI 2:14**
- **LEVITICUS 19:20-22**
- **EPHESIANS 5:21-33**

**PROVERBS 2:17**

*The writer of Proverbs 2:17 describes a woman who “leaves the companion of her youth and forgets the covenant of her God.”*

*The use of the Hebrew word berit implies both that marriage was covenant and that the covenant was under the sanction of God.*

MALACHI 2:14
A verse found in the context of God warning the children of Israel against sins of the family.

Through the prophet, God reveals the real reason behind his rejection of man’s offerings – they have not been faithful to the one who was chosen for their arranged marriage: “Yet you say, ‘For what reason?’ Because the Lord has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant.”

In the verse, the writer refers to God “as witness to a marriage arrangement and the wife is referred to as the covenant woman.”

LEVITICUS 19:20-22
Hayes believes that even in this passage, which refers to the betrothal process, the author is implying the triangular relation that is part of covenant marriage. He offers the following summary as the reasoning for his conclusion.

“An outside male who sexually interfered in a man-woman relationship was required to offer a reparation (guilt) offering which was demanded when on transgressed against God by profaning the divine name or desecrating something holy to the deity. This would suggest that an oath in the name of Yahweh was sworn (or assumed to be implied) in marriage-betrothal arrangements.”

EPHESIANS 5:21-33 [do not read]
As in the Old Testament, marriage is not referred to as a covenant relationship in the New Testament; however, in offering a prescription for healthy marriage in Ephesians 5:21-33, Paul makes an analogy which clearly depicts biblical marriage as an illustration of Jesus Christ’s love for the church in the New Covenant.

Christ willingly sacrificed Himself, dying on Calvary’s cross, in order that the New Covenant might be established.

The love which Christ showed His people (the church) is to be the same type of love the husband is to show his wife.

In Ephesians 5:25, Paul writes, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.”

The idea of sacrifice, commitment, and promise – covenant relation concepts – are therefore applied to the marriage relationship.
Covenant vs. Contract

21. Contrasting Characteristics:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COVENANT</th>
<th>CONTRACT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A covenant is an agreement made in trust.</td>
<td>A contract is an agreement made in distrust.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A covenant is based on unlimited responsibility.</td>
<td>A contract is based on limited liability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In a covenant, you tow the line.</td>
<td>In a contract, you sign on the dotted line.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A covenant is unconditional in nature.</td>
<td>A contract is conditional in nature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A covenant focuses on the giving of self.</td>
<td>A contract focuses on the growth of self.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A covenant says “How may I help you?”</td>
<td>A contract says, “You had better do it!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A covenant is predicated on relationship.</td>
<td>A contract is predicated on results.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A covenant is made at arm’s embrace.</td>
<td>A contract is made at arm’s length.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A covenant asks, “What am I bringing to this relationship?”</td>
<td>A contract asks, “What am I getting from this relationship?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A covenant is enforced by character.</td>
<td>A contract is enforced by a court.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A covenant is bound by love and loyalty.</td>
<td>A contract is bound by legalism and leverage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A covenant is commitment-based.</td>
<td>A contract is convenience-based.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A covenant is a “want-to” commitment.</td>
<td>A contract is a “have-to” commitment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A covenant is forever.</td>
<td>A contract is a specified period of time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In a covenant, two are committed “until death do us part.”</td>
<td>In a contract, two are connected until the agreement is broken.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In a covenant, nobody leaves – period!</td>
<td>In a contract, nobody leaves until the terms are met.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lowery, *Covenant Marriage*, 87, 94-95.
SESSION 5

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES (PART 1)

[SHARE] 1 John 4:7-11 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

Welcome and Prayer

Review major concepts from previous session

Teaching Outline

God and Love

1. God is LOVE, and He demonstrated to the world what love looks like when He sent His Son Jesus to die on the cross and provide the means by which man could have a restored relationship with Him.

   God is LOVE (1 John 4:8) and He demonstrated to the world what love looks like when He sent His Son Jesus to die on the cross and provide the means by which man could have a restored relationship with Him (John 3:16).

2. Mankind’s covenant relationship with God is based on the self-sacrificing AGAPE love.

   Mankind’s covenant relationship with God is based on the self-sacrificing AGAPE love...which Christ demonstrated by giving of Himself on the cross for the forgiveness of sins.

3. God, in turn, expects human covenant relationships, especially marriage relationships, to be based upon and EXEMPLARY of this kind of love.

   The question is, then, what does this love look like?
4. Paul, writing to the church at Ephesus, provides us with **FOUR** different aspects of marital love.

- **EPHESIANS 5:21-33**

5. The first aspect of love in covenant marriage is:

   ✧ **Sacrificially SUBMITTING to one another**

6. **Ephesians 5:21** …and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.

   *The Greek verb ἵπποποτάσσω, translated in Ephesians 5:21 as “be subject to” (NASB) or “submit to” (KJV).*

   - ἵπποποτάσσω
   - “BE SUBJECT TO;” “SUBMIT TO”

7. The term does not mean “LESS THAN” or “INFERIOR TO.”

   *The idea of “being submissive” or “being subject” to someone else is often regarded as a foreign concept or is rejected as a positive character trait.*

   However, God’s ways are not the ways of the world, and He commands us to “be subject to one another in the fear of Christ” (Eph 5:21).

   *It is often taken to mean “LESS THAN” or “INFERIOR TO,” which is not the case, as Jesus Christ submitted Himself to the will of His Heavenly Father (Mark 14:36).*

   **Mark 14:36** And He was saying, “Abba! Father! All things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will.”

   Jesus Christ, who is fully God, was never less than His heavenly Father.

   He did, however, willingly submit to the will and desires of the Heavenly Father, which included an obedient decision to give of His life on Calvary’s cross.

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8Based on Rick Williams, *Blessed Beyond Measure* (Nashville, GA: Like Skills Ministries, 2005).
Jesus willingly sacrificed Himself because He loved the Father and desired to obey Him.

He also willingly submitted to the Father’s will because He loved the church.

8. Submission, then, as it pertains to Christian relationships, is to be regarded as a positive trait, and is to be practiced between all Christians, both MEN and WOMEN.

9. Submission means you willingly choose to SACRIFICE SELFISH DESIRES for the betterment of one another.

10. [ASK] What are some of the selfish desires people have in marriage?

Jesus willingly sacrificed Himself because He loved the Father and desired to obey Him.
He also willingly submitted to the Father’s will because He loved the church.

11. Sacrificial submission helps to promote JOYFUL FELLOWSHIP.

- EPHESIANS 4:2-3

[READ] Ephesians 4:2-3 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, 3 being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

12. Couples should be willing to:

- **SERVE ONE ANOTHER**
- **LEARN FROM ONE ANOTHER**
- **BE CORRECTED BY ONE ANOTHER**

13. Husbands and wives should be willing to change THEMSELVES for the betterment of their spouses, rather than expecting their spouses to change.

“...the filling and control of the Holy Spirit will lead us to a spirit of humility, to the spirit that gives us the desire to seek the welfare of others before our own and to be mutually
14. The second aspect of love in covenant marriage is:

- Teaching of **TRUTH** to one another

15. **Ephesians 5:26** ...so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,

- ἁγιάζω
- “TO SET APART”

The term sanctify (ἁγιάζω), which Paul uses in this verse, means “to set apart.”

God’s intention is to “set apart” those who are His people.

Through His sacrificial death on the cross, Jesus’ purposed to “separate for Himself a people for His own possession.”

In Paul’s culture, “before the bride was presented to the bridegroom she received a cleansing bath and was then dressed in her bridal array...So here, the purpose of Christ’s giving Himself up for the church is said to be her sanctification and cleansing in water.” - F.F. Bruce

Therefore, through His death, Christ provided the means by which His bride, the church, would be cleansed and purified.

16. Husbands and wives show great love by living in such a way that they “TEACH” or “EXEMPLIFY” Christ and His sanctifying love.

17. Love your spouse in such a manner that you lead them **TOWARD** Christ and Christ-likeness – i.e., encourage the sanctification process in them.

John MacArthur writes that “for husbands to love their wives as Christ loves His church is to love them with a purifying love. Divine love does not simply condemn wrong in those loved but seeks to cleanse them from it.”

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18. [ASK] What are some ways you can lead your spouse “toward” Christ and Christ-likeness?

19. Hold in high regard the **READING** and **TEACHING** of God’s Word, as it is through the Word, the truth, that mankind is sanctified.

[READ] John 17:17

20. You should lead one another toward a closer **RELATIONSHIP** with God, and at the same time increase the health of their marriage.

*Although Ephesians 5:26 focuses on the husband’s love for his wife, certainly wives should reciprocate this type of love, by living like Jesus Christ and teaching the truth of God’s Word in love.*

Each spouse should encourage the spiritual growth and maturation process in one another.

21. The third aspect of love in covenant marriage is:

[LEADING ONE ANOTHER TO HOLINESS]

22. Ephesians 5:27 …that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.

*Christ’s intent is to work in such a way that He improves the lives of the people who are His church.*

He wants to protect them from evil and lead them from sinful activities (Eph 5:27, spots and wrinkles), so that at the “end of the age He might be able to present her to Himself in unsullied splendor as a bride adorned for her husband” (Rev 21:2).\(^{12}\)

**Revelation 21:2** And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.

23. Love works to **PROTECT** your spouse from the evil and ungodliness which exists in the world

\(^{11}\)MacArthur, *Ephesians*, 299.

The practice of love by couples in a covenant marriage not only teaches the sanctifying truth of Christ Jesus and the Word of God, it also works to **protect** them from the evil and ungodliness which exists in the world.

Emphasize again – covenant love leads people toward holiness.

Each spouse in a marriage should desire to see their counterpart “holy and blameless” (Eph 5:27).

24. **[ASK]** How can we work to protect one another from evil and ungodliness?

25. Love desires the **spiritual protection** and well-being that comes from pursuing a life of Christ-likeness.

They should desire for one another the spiritual protection and well-being that comes from pursuing a life of Christ-likeness.

They should also want the best for one another, according to MacArthur who writes:

“Love wants only the best for the one it loves, and it cannot bear for a loved one to be corrupted or misled by anything evil or harmful. When a husband’s love for his wife is like Christ’s love for His church, he will continually seek to help purify her from any sort of defilement. He will seek to protect her from the world’s contamination and protect her holiness, virtue, and purity in every way. He will never induce her to do that which is wrong or unwise or expose her to that which is less than good.”

26. The fourth aspect of love in covenant marriage is:

 afirmation** NOURISHING and CHERISHING** one another.

27. **Ephesians 5:28-29** 28 So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; 29 for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church.

28. Loving your spouse is like loving your OWN BODY.

**Having become one flesh in covenant marriage, when a husband loves his wife, he is in reality loving himself, for she is an extension of him.**

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13 MacArthur, Ephesians, 300.
29. **Ephesians 5:28-29** 28 So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; 29 for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church.


   - ἐκτρέφω
   - “TO FEED, TO NURTURE, TO LOOK AFTER”

30. Help them to mature in **FAVOR** with God and man.

31. [AKS] How do you help your spouse grow in favor with God and man?

32. You nourish your spouse by helping them grow older **PHYSICALLY** and **SPIRITUALLY**.

   You nourish your spouse by providing for the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being of a spouse, and by helping a spouse grow older physically, as well as spiritually.

33. You nourish your spouse by **PROTECTING** them from the evil in the world.

   Ephesians 6:19 and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel,

34. [ASK] How do we help our spouses grow older: (1) physically? (2) spiritually?

35. [ASK] How do we protect our spouses from evil?

36. **Ephesians 5:28-29** 28 So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; 29 for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church.

   - ὅλωσις
   - “TO USE TENDER LOVE AND PHYSICAL AFFECTION IN ORDER TO GIVE WARMTH, COMFORT, PROTECTION, AND SECURITY.”
37. You cherish your spouse by regarding them as more **IMPORTANT** than you.

38. Communicate the **VALUE** and level of **IMPORTANCE** with which you regard one another.

39. **[ASK]** How do we value and show our spouses are important?

40. **TO DO (HOMEWORK):** Have them look up and read 1 Corinthians 13:4-8. Have them reflect on “how love acts” from these verses. Write these reflection in the space provided on the student handout.

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SESSION 6
ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES (PART 2)

[SHARE] 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Welcome and Prayer

Review major concepts from previous session

Teaching Outline

1. God has given men and women specific instructions, or ROLE RESPONSIBILITIES, in marriage.

   HER Role Responsibility

2. SUBMISSION – her role responsibility.

3. If she is to fulfill her covenant role responsibility, she must make a choice to WILLINGLY submit to her husband, who is to be the “head of the wife” (Eph 5:23).

4. [READ] Ephesians 5:22 Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord.

   The Greek verb ἑπτάσσω, translated in Ephesians 5:22 as “be subject to” (NASB) or “submit to” (KJV).

   Word was originally a military term meaning TO ARRANGE OR RANK UNDER.

   Paul uses the term 23 times in his NT writings.
5. Where “submit” is used the word “denotes subordination to those considered WORTHY of RESPECT, either because of their inherent qualities or more often because of the position they held.”¹⁵

6. The one submitting recognizes the AUTHORITY of the one to whom they are submitting.

   Jesus serves as a biblical model of submission, as He, empowered by the Holy Spirit, recognized and willingly submitted to the authority of the Heavenly Father.

   Jesus gave testimony that He did not speak or act except that He was under the direction of His Heavenly Father (John 5:19).

   [READ] John 5:19 Therefore Jesus answered and was saying to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.

7. Just as Jesus submitted to the Father, wives are to submit to their husbands, whose authority and headship position has been GRANTED them by God.

8. The wife’s submission is FUNCTIONAL and RELATIONAL.

9. The wife’s MOTIVATION for submitting to her husband “is the fact that he is her functional head in the family, just as Christ is also the head of the church.”¹⁷

¹⁵Skevington, Ephesians, 75.

¹⁶Daniel L. Akin, “Family Life Seminar” (notes presented at seminar held at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, 1999), 7.

¹⁷MacArthur, Ephesians, 276.
[READ] Ephesians 5:23 For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body.

*The man’s role as “head of the wife” is a God-given function.*

10. Like Jesus, the wife is not considered **INFERIOR** or **LESS** than the one to whom she is submitting.

11. In the eyes of God she is morally and spiritually **EQUAL** to her husband.

12. She is not less than her husband in the eyes of God; however, she is to submit to her husband based on his God-given function of being the **HEAD OF THE WIFE.**

**What does submission look like in covenant marriage?**

13. First of all, let us look at what submission is not…

- **SHE IS NOT A DOORMAT**
- **SHE IS NOT A “YES MAN”**
  - She is not in the “hands of one who has authority to command what he pleases.”
- **SHE IS NOT A SLAVE**
  - She is not to be walked on or abused by her husband as a slave.
- **SHE IS NOT A SILENT PARTNER**
  - She is not to be the one who never expresses opinion or gives input in making decisions.
  - She is to offer advice, encouragement, and times of warning.
- **SHE IS NOT A CHILD**
  - She should not be treated as such.

14. When a wife does submit, “she places herself under the authority of her husband’s leadership, working along with him to **SUPPPORT, ENCOURAGE,** and **COMPLETE** him.”

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15. As his “helper” (Gen 2:18), her goal should be to **COMPLEMENT** her husband and to meet his **BASIC NEEDS**.

    We will look at these needs next week.

16. Daniel Akin suggests that the wife works to accomplish this goal by:  

    • **YIELD VOLUNTARILY TO HIM**  
      o [READ] Ephesians 5:22 Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord.  
      o [READ] Colossians 3:18 Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.  
      o [READ] 1 Peter 3:1 In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives,

    • **ACKNOWLEDGE THE POSITION GOD HAS GIVEN HIM**

    • **SUPPORT AND ENCOURAGE HIS EFFORTS**

    • **LEND COOPERATION, IMAGINATION, AND IMPLEMENTATION**  
      o includes advising and taking responsibility

    • **TRUST THE LORD TO GUIDE THEM BOTH AND TO HONOR HER OBEDIENCE TO THE WORD**

    • **RESPECT HIM SINCERELY**  
      o [READ] Ephesians 5:33 Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband.

    • **BELIEVE IN HIM**  
      o Give him the benefit of the doubt  
      o Praise him rather than criticizing him  
      o Trust him to do the right thing

    • **GIVE HIM THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT**

    • **PRAISE HIM RATHER THAN CRITICIZING HIM**

    • **TRUSTING HIM TO DO THE RIGHT THING**

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19 Ibid.
17. **TRUST MARKERS**

- Trust is a **KEY INGREDIENT** in covenant relationship.

- Should be **PRESENT MARKERS**.
  - Need to realize that just because you have asked for forgiveness and have been forgiven, that you can just move ahead.
  - Should confess if you have sinned; repent; and must deal with the consequences.

- Need to “**BUILD**” trust markers.
  - [Use building block illustration where someone comes up to build and you say you are going to leave them alone, but instead you keep knocking down their blocks.]
  - **ASK**: How does it make you feel that I keep tearing down your block structure?
  - **ASK**: How can you build trust markers?

**HIS Role Responsibility**

18. **HEADSHIP** – his role responsibility.

19. **Ephesians 5:23** For the husband is the **head of the wife**, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body.

**Ephesians 5:25** Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her,

Whereas wives are exhorted in their role responsibility to “be subject to” their husbands, the husbands are commanded to love their wives, “just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her” (Eph 5:25).

20. Husbands are to exemplify the love which Christ Jesus showed the church, while functionally positioned in the marriage by **GOD** as the “head of the wife.”

21. The **PATTERN** for the husband’s love for his wife is the self-sacrificing love of Christ for the church.

His position as head and his responsibility to love and provide care are “pictures, imperfect, but the best that this life can offer, of Christ as head, of His love, self-sacrifice and concern.
for His church.”

In turn, the wife’s response to his headship is a picture of how the church should love and act towards the Lord.

Ephesians 5:21-33, in conjunction with 1 Peter 3:7, reveal seven aspects of the husband’s role responsibility as head of his wife.

Seven Aspects of HIS Role Responsibility

22. First, as head of his wife (Eph 5:23), the husband has a responsibility to **LEAD**.

23. He practices his leadership in the marriage based on the **AUTHORITY** which has been granted to him by God.

24. As a leader, he is not to be a **DICTATOR** who orders his wife around or treats her like a slave.

25. Nor is he to be a **FATHER FIGURE** who disciplines his wife and expects her to obey him like a child.

26. Rather, following the example of Jesus Christ, the husband is to be a **SERVANT LEADER** who willingly gives of his time, energy, and resources to better his wife.

27. Second, the husband is to love his wife by **SACRIFICING** (SACRIFICE) himself for her, like Christ sacrificed His life for the church (Eph 5:25).

**[READ] Ephesians 5:25** Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her,

Christ willingly laid down His life for the salvation of those who choose to receive His great act of love.

28. A husband should willingly give of himself, including his own **LIFE**, if necessary, to provide for his wife.

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20MacArthur, Ephesians, 269.
29. He is to die to **SELF** in order to live for his wife, and be example of Christ to her.

   *He should put “his own likes, desires, opinions, preferences, and welfare aside if that is required to please her and meet her needs.”*  

30. **Ephesians 5:23** For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body.

   *Paul refers to Jesus as “Savior of the body” (Eph 5:23), “body” referring to the church.*

   The term “Savior” (**σωτήρ**) is used only of Jesus in the New Testament, referring to His **PROVISION OF SALVATION AND DELIVERANCE** from spiritual death and separation from God.

   **Christ is the Savior of the church.**

31. Christ is the Savior of the church, and following His example, the third role responsibility of a husband is to be a **HUMAN SAVIOR**.

32. As her “human savior,” the husband is to function as the **PROTECTOR** of his wife.

33. The husband should strive to **PROVIDE** for her and to protect her physically, spiritually, mentally, and emotionally.

   *The husband should also strive to provide for his wife’s basic needs, which we will look at next week.*

34. The fourth role responsibility of husbands in covenant marriage is to prepare (**PREPARER**) their wives.

   *Christ’s work on the cross not only “saved” the lost, it also provided the power by which the sanctification process takes place.*

   **Jesus desire is to sanctify His bride (Eph 5:26), the church, making her ready for His second coming.**

   *READ* Ephesians 5:26 so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,

   **He is continually at work, through the Holy Spirit, transforming the lives of individual members of the church into His likeness.**

Following Christ’s model, husbands should strive to encourage Christ-likeness in their wives.

35. Husbands should desire to see their spouses be **TRANSFORMED** more and more into the image of Jesus Christ.

36. **[READ] Ephesians 5:29** for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church.

37. The fifth role responsibility is that of a **NOURISHER**.

Daniel Akin suggests that in order to nourish his wife, a husband should strive to spiritually enrich her by:²²

- **MODELING GODLY LIVING (AND TRUST)**
  - Mention “trust markers” and the need for trust in relationships.
  - Trust is very important in covenant relationships.

- **SHARING AND INSTRUCTING IN BIBLICAL UNDERSTAND**

- **BY SEEKING TO MAKE HER A SUCCESS**

- **BY PROVIDING GUIDANCE AND ENCOURAGEMENT IN PERSONAL AND FAMILY AFFAIRS.**

38. The sixth role responsibility is that of a **CHERISHER**.

In order to cherish his wife, a husband should **TREAT HER WITH TENDERNESS, CARE, AND ROMANCE**, as well as **PROTECT HER FROM DISTRESS AND DANGER** (physically, emotionally, and spiritually).²³

39. The final role responsibility, the need to understand her, is found in 1 Peter 3:7, where Peter writes:

**[READ] 1 Peter 3:7** You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered.

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²³Ibid.
40. The final role responsibility, the need to **UNDERSTAND (ER)** her.

41. Husbands are to treat their wives as **EQUAL** partners, honoring them as sisters in Christ.

   *Husbands, while given authority in headship (Eph 5:23), “should exercise their authority with proper deference.”*  

24

42. Husbands should strive to show understanding in their **MARITAL RELATIONSHIP** – an understanding of what God demands them to do for their wives.

43. Husbands should have an **EVER-GROWING** understanding of their spouse personally.

   *They need a “PhD” in their spouse.*

   *This is a **LIFELONG PROCESS**.*

44. **Romance with a SMILE**

25

44. Special **MOMENTS** I least expected.

45. Special **MESSAGES** I least expected.

46. Special **MOMENTOES** I least expected.

47. Special **MOVIES** I least expected.

48. Special **MUSIC** I least expected.

49. Special **MOVES** I least expected.

50. Special **MOTELS** I least expected.

51. Special **MEALS** I least expected.

52. Special **MODIFICATION** I least expected

53. Special **MOTIVATION** (sexual motivation) I least expected.


[ACTIVITY] Have couples paint a rock depicting aspects of love they learned tonight in this class and/or in their reading of 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 from the previous session.
SESSION 7

HIS NEEDS / HER NEEDS

[SHARE] Philippians 2:3-4 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

Welcome and Prayer

Review major concepts from previous session

TO DO: Show early part of a wedding video with pictures of the husband and wife growing up. Use video to emphasize they are two different people.

ASK: How are men and women different?

Teaching Outline

Men and women are DIFFERENT.

- PHYSICALLY
- MENTALLY
- EMOTIONALLY

NOTE: The following “needs lists” are derived from notes presented by Daniel Aiken in his “Family Life Seminar” which was presented at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY in 1999.

[Review slide from Session #6] As the wife’s “human savior,” the husband should strive to PROVIDE for her and to protect her physically, spiritually, mentally, and emotionally.

Husbands should also strive to provide for their wives’ basic needs.

Her Seven Basic Needs

1. Her need for a SPIRITUAL LEADER.

[READ] Ephesians 5:23 For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body.

He is a man of courage, conviction, commitment, compassion, and character.
He takes the initiative in cultivating a spiritual environment for the family.

He becomes a capable and competent student of God’s Word and lives out before all a life founded on the Word of God.

He leads his wife in becoming a woman of God, and he takes the lead in training the children in the things of the Lord.

[Turn to and read Psalm 1]

2. Her need for personal **AFFIRMATION / APPRECIATION**.

[READ] Proverbs 31:28 Her children rise up and bless her; Her husband also, and he praises her, saying:

He praises her for personal attributes and qualities.

He extols her virtues as a wife, mother, and homemaker.

He openly commends her, in the presence of others, as a marvelous mate, friend, lover, and companion.

She feels that to him, no one is more important in this world.

[Proverbs 31:28-29; Song of Solomon 4:1-7, 6:4-9, 7:1-9]

**ILLUSTRATION: BURNED BISCUITS (source unknown)**

When I was a kid, my Mom liked to make breakfast food for dinner every now and then. And I remember one night in particular when she had made breakfast after a long, hard day at work. On that evening so long ago, my Mom placed a plate of eggs, sausage and extremely burned biscuits in front of my dad. I remember waiting to see if anyone noticed. Yet all my dad did was reach for his biscuit, smile at my Mom and ask me how my day was at school. I don’t remember what I told him that night, but I do remember watching him smear butter and jelly on that ugly burned biscuit. He ate every bite of that thing...never made a face nor uttered a word about it!

When I got up from the table that evening, I remember hearing my Mom apologize to my dad for burning the biscuits. And I'll never forget what he said: "Honey, I love burned biscuits every now and then."

Later that night, I went to kiss Daddy good night and I asked him if he really liked his biscuits burned. He wrapped me in his arms and said, "Your Momma put in a hard day at work today and she's real tired. And besides – a little burned biscuit never hurt anyone!"

As I've grown older, I've thought about that many times. Life is full of imperfect things and imperfect people. I'm not the best at hardly anything and I forget birthdays and anniversaries just like everyone else. But what I've learned over the years is that learning to accept each other's faults and choosing to celebrate each other's differences – the good, the bad, and the ugly parts of your life – is one of the most important keys to creating a healthy, growing, and lasting relationship.
Don’t put the key to your happiness in someone else’s pocket – keep it in your own.

So, please pass me a biscuit, and yes, the burned one will do just fine.

3. Her need for personal **AFFECTION** (ROMANCE).

   [READ] Song of Solomon 6:10 ‘Who is this that grows like the dawn, As beautiful as the full moon, As pure as the sun, As awesome as an army with banners?’

   He showers her with timely and generous displays of affection.

   He also tells her how much he cares for her with a steady flow of words, cards, flowers, gifts and common courtesies.

   Remember: Affection is the environment in which sexual union is enjoyed and a wonderful marriage developed.

   [Song of Solomon 6:10, 13; Ephesians 5:28-29, 33]

4. Her need for **INTIMATE CONVERSATION**.

   [READ] Song of Solomon 2:14 “O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, In the secret place of the steep pathway, Let me see your form, Let me hear your voice; For your voice is sweet, And your form is lovely.”

   He talks to her at the feeling level (heart to heart).

   He listens to her thoughts (i.e., her heart) about the events of her day with sensitivity, interest, and concern.

   Conversations with her convey a desire to understand her, not to change her.

   [Turn to and read Song of Solomon 8:13-14]

   [Song of Solomon 2:8-14; 1 Peter 3:7]

5. Her need for **HONESTY** and **OPPENNESS**.

   [READ] Ephesians 4:15 …but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ,

   He looks into her eyes and, in love, tells her what he really thinks (Ephesians 4:15).

   He explains his plans and actions clearly and completely because he regards himself as responsible for her.

   He wants her to trust him and feel secure.

   [Turn to and read Proverbs 15:22-23]
6. Her need for **HOME SUPPORT** and **STABILITY**.

   **[READ]** 1 Timothy 5:8 *But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.*

   *He firmly shoulders the responsibility to house, feed, and clothe the family.*

   *He provides and protects, and he does not feel sorry for himself when things get tough. Instead he looks for concrete ways to improve home life.*

   *He desires to raise their marriage and family to a safer and more fulfilling level.*

   *Remember: the husband/father is the security hub of the family (1 Timothy 5:8).*

7. Her need for **FAMILY COMMITMENT**.

   **[READ]** Ephesians 6:4 *Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.*

   *He puts his family first.*

   *He commits his time and energy to the spiritual, moral, and intellectual development of the children.*

   *For example, he prays with them (especially at night by the bedside), reads to them, he engages in sports with them, and takes them on other outings.*

   *He does not play the fool’s game of working long hours, trying to get ahead, while his children and spouse languish in neglect.*

   *[Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:19-20]*

   **[Review slide from Session #6]** Last session, we discussed that as the husband’s “helper” (Gen 2:18), the wife’s goal should be to **COMPLEMENT** her husband and to meet his **BASIC NEEDS**.

### His Five Basic Needs

1. His need for **ADMIRATION** and **RESPECT**.

   **[READ]** Ephesians 5:33 *Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband.*

   *She understands and appreciates his value and achievements more than anything else.*
She reminds him of his capabilities and helps him maintain his walk with God and also his self-confidence.

She is **proud of her husband**, not out of duty, but as an expression of sincere admiration for the man she loves and with whom she has chosen to share her life.

**[Turn to and read Ephesians 5:22-23]**

2. His need for a **SEXUAL FULFILLMENT**.

[READ] **Proverbs 5:18-19** Let your fountain be blessed, And rejoice in the wife of your youth. As a loving hind and a graceful doe, Let her breasts satisfy you at all times; Be exhilarated always with her love.

She becomes an excellent sexual partner.

She studies her own response to recognize and understand what brings out the best in her; then she **communicates** this information to her husband, and together they learn to have a sexual relationship that both find repeatedly satisfying and enjoyable.

**[Turn to and read part of Song of Solomon 4:9-5:1; 1 Corinthians 7:1-5]**

(Proverbs 5:15-19; Hebrews 13:4).

3. His need for **HOME SUPPORT**.

[READ] **Proverbs 21:19** It is better to live in a desert land than with a contentious and vexing woman.

She creates a home that offers an atmosphere of peace and quiet and refuge.

She manages the home and care of the children.

The home is a place of rest and rejuvenation.

Remember: the wife/mother is the emotional hub of the family.


4. His need for her **ATTRACTIVENESS**.

[READ] **Song of Solomon 2:2** “Like a lily among the thorns, So is my darling among the maidens.”

She is possessed of inner and outer beauty.

She cultivates a Christ-like spirit in her inner self.

She keeps herself physically fit with diet and exercise, and she wears her hair, makeup, and clothes in a way that her husband finds attractive and tasteful.
Her husband is pleased and proud of her in public, but also in private

[Turn to and read 1 Peter 3:1-5]

[Song of Solomon 1:8-10; 2:2; 6:13-7:9]

5. His need for a **LIFE COMPANION**.

[READ] Song of Solomon 8:6a “Put me like a seal over your heart, Like a seal on your arm. For love is as strong as death, Jealousy is as severe as Sheol; Its flashes are flashes of fire, The very flame of the Lord.

She develops mutual interests with her husband.

She discovers those activities her husband enjoys the most and seeks to become proficient in them.

If she learns to enjoy them, she joins him in them.

If she does not enjoy them, she encourages him to consider others that they can enjoy together.

She becomes her husband’s best friend so that he repeatedly associates her with the activities he enjoys most

[Song of Solomon 8:1-2, 6]
SESSION 8
GROWING TOGETHER

[SHARE] Romans 14:19 So then let us pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.

Welcome and Prayer

Review major concepts from previous session

Teaching Outline

1. “A marriage is a relationship between two people; the spiritual dimension of that relationship can be no stronger than the SPIRITUAL LIVES of the INDIVIDUALS. It is obvious that as a couple draws nearer to God, they will draw nearer to each other.”

2. Triangular Covenantal Arrangement

3. In covenant marriage, husbands and wives should strive to GROW TOGETHER spiritually.

4. You should desire to become more like JESUS CHRIST to one another.

Romans 8:29 For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;

5. Your #1 source of guidance and instruction is the WORD OF GOD!

6. Individually, you need to practice DISCIPLINES of the FAITH.

7. [ASK] What are some of the disciplines of the faith?
   - Reading the Bible
   - Prayer/meditation
   - Personal devotional time
   - Scripture memorization
   - Note taking
   - Journaling
   - Bible Study (independent and classroom)
   - Paul/Timothy relationships
   - Tithing
   - Witnessing

8. ENCOURAGE one another in the practice of these disciplines.

9. Your need to develop a SPIRITUAL INTIMACY.

10. TALK about your spiritual status.
   - What did your PARENTS believe about God, Jesus, church, prayer and the Bible?
   - How and where did you FIRST learn about God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit? At what age?
   - What QUESTIONS did you have as a child, as a teenager, and as an adult, about faith? Who gave you the answers?
• Did you MEMORIZE any Scripture as a child? Which of those verses do you remember now?

• As a CHILD, if you could have asked God any questions, what would they have been?

• If you could ask God any questions NOW, what would they be?

• Did anyone you looked up to as a Christian DISAPPOINT you as a child? If so, how has that affected you as an adult?

• When you have gone through DIFFICULT times (at any age), how has it affected your faith?

• What has been the GREATEST spiritual experience of your life?

• What can I DO to help you grow spiritually?

11. When having a spiritual discussion, both of you should TALK and LISTEN.

Additional suggestions to encourage/facilitate talking:

12. ONCE A WEEK share one thing you have read in the Bible, why it impressed you, and how you are trying to apply the verse to your life.

13. Select and read a BOOK on Christian living. Read one chapter a week and share one thing you found helpful in the chapter that you are trying to apply to your life.

14. Share one QUESTION you have about the Bible or Christian living. Attentively listen as your spouse shares any insights about your question.
15. Share ways you are and are not becoming CHRISTLIKE in your life. Ask for PRAYER where needed.


Hebrews 10:24-25 24 and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, 25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

After attending a worship service, share with each other one thing you found helpful or encouraging from the SERMON.

17. Establish and have FAMILY WORSHIP.

With just fifteen minutes each day, day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year, for eighteen years?

At the rate of six days a week (excluding Sunday), you will spend...

An hour-and-a-half a week in family worship

78 ours a year

1,404 hours over the course of eighteen years

18. Spend time PRAYING together and for one another.

- MAKE TIME to pray together.
  
  First thing in the morning.
  Sunday evening
  While taking a walk or driving in the car.

- Read SCRIPTURE together.
  
  Try the Psalms.
  Use passages to guide prayer time

- Make a prayer request LIST.

- Talk about ANSWERED prayers.
• Pray for one another, your MARRIAGE, and your family.

Ask your spouse how can pray for them.

19. Spend time STUDYING the Scriptures.

• Study Bible lessons SEPARATELY.
• Talk about QUESTIONS you may have.
• Talk about how you can APPLY what you have learned.
• Read a DEVOTIONAL book together.
• ATTEND discipleship classes and Sunday School together.
• Do a Bible study ON YOUR OWN together.

20. READ together.

• Pick a topic and book you both AGREE upon.

A Christian book
Suggest some books (covenant marriage?)
• Set aside a TIME.
• Read OUT LOUD to one another.

Take turns reading.

• TALK about what you have read.

Answer discussion questions.
Address questions that may arise in your own mind.
Look up Scriptures where you need to.

21. MINISTER / SERVE together.

• REJOICE and ENCOURAGE one another in your individual ministries.
• **SHARE** what God is doing in your life through ministry.

  *Pray about each other’s ministry.*

• Look to see what God is **CALLING** you both to do.

22. **[ASK]** What are some ways you can minister together?

23. **TEACH** together.

• The Bible is your **TEXTBOOK**.

  *2 Timothy 3:16-17* 16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

• Talking to children about where they are **SPIRITUALLY**.

• Instruct them about the great issues of **SALVATION**.

• Talk with them about **SERMONS** and **SUNDAY SCHOOL** lessons.

• Ask them about Scriptures that they have **MEMORIZED**.

• Aim to see how much they **UNDERSTAND**.

24. Be **ACCOUNTABLE** to one another.

• Ask **QUESTIONS** in love.

• **RESPOND** in love.

• Practice **FORGIVENESS**.

• **PRAY** for and **ENCOURAGE** one another.
[Share] the poem “BUILD” in closing.

Build, but not for today alone.
Build with such solid stone,
And enduring inner structure,
That in the years to come
Your children’s children
Will see and touch
And say with honor and with love,
“These are the stones
Our parents laid.
This is the building
Our parents built.”

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SESSION 9
BETTER COMMUNICATION

[SHARE] Proverbs 15:23; 25:11 23A man has joy in an apt answer, and how delightful is a timely word!...11Like apples of gold in settings of silver is a word spoken in right circumstances.

Welcome and Prayer

Review major concepts from previous session

Teaching Outline

1. “Did you know that the average couple spends about 26 MINUTES per week in conversation, and most of that is superficial talk? Compare that with nearly seven hours that men spend each week watching sports on television!”

2. We will never experience all God intended for covenant marriage if we do not COMMUNICATE with each other.

   In fact, lack of communication is one of the major problems in marriage.

3. Communicate: “TO IMPART; TO MAKE KNOWN”

4. “The process of REVEALING yourself or making yourself known to another person in verbal and nonverbal ways so that the person UNDERSTANDS and accepts what you are communicating.”

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28 Lowery, Covenant Marriage, 195.

29 Ibid., 177.
5. “If you compare your marriage relationship to a garden, then communication is the **WATER** for the garden. You can destroy a garden with a **FIRE HOSE**! By contrast, a good **STEADY RAIN** will provide a garden with the life-giving water it needs to produce healthy growth. No skill is more critical to your **ONENESS** than good communication.”

### Benefits Of Better Communication

6. Good communication helps husbands and wives **ENCOURAGE** one another.

   *Friends (which you should be as covenant partners in your marriage) encourage each other by their presence and the way they share with each other.*

7. Good communication helps husbands and wives show **RESPECT** for one another.

   *We honor or dishonor simply by the way we address one another.*

8. Good communication helps to **DEEPEN** your relationship and build **INTIMACY**.

   *Husbands and wives deepen their relationships when they find the courage to be more self-revealing to each other.*

9. Good communication helps to build **SPIRITUAL INTIMACY** in marriage.

   *Couples need to develop spiritual intimacy in their relationship, as we saw in the session on “Growing Together.”*

10. Good communication helps husbands and wives get to **KNOW** one another better.

    *How can your love grow if you do not get to know one another better and better?*

    *Communication is a vital part of getting to know one another on an ongoing basis.*

---

11. Good communication helps husbands and wives meet one another’s NEEDS.

“God designed covenant marriage as the perfect environment for husbands and wives to meet one another’s needs. But we’re not mind readers. Knowing what those needs are is not always easy. That’s where communication comes in. We need to go to school on the opposite sex in general and on our spouses in particular. Then we must learn to talk about our needs with each other.”

12. Good communication helps you not have to GUESS what your spouse is thinking or feeling.

Better to “know” than to guess or assume.

13. Good communication helps to GUARD against external attack.

“Marriages are sometimes at war with genuine threats from without. It is imperative, therefore, that husband and wife, in their joint defense against the threats, keep themselves open so that they can communicate their plans and be informed about their own expectations and their resources to fulfill the expectations.”

14. Good communication helps to RESOLVE conflict in marriage.

Chances are, you are going to have conflict. You need to resolve conflict in your marriage. A failure to communicate will not help. Good communication is needed for the conflict resolution to take place. You need to have reconciliation conversation for this process to take place. (We will talk more next week about conflict resolution.)

Differences

15. Women often communicate to start and sustain RELATIONSHIPS.

They want to connect with people. They want closeness.

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31 Lowery, Covenant Marriage, 187.

16. Men usually communicate to give and receive **INFORMATION**.

17. Women usually like to talk about their **PROBLEMS**.
   
   *Helps them to process stress.*

18. Men generally want to **SOLVE** rather than talk about problems.

19. According to widespread but unscientific observation, men believe they are allotted only **2,500** words per day while women believe they are allotted **25,000**.

20. Women **LOVE DETAILS**.
   
   Men want the **BOTTOM LINE**.

21. Women want to talk about **FEELINGS**.
   
   Men want to talk **FACTS**.

22. Women want to talk about **IMPROVE THE WORLD**.
   
   Men will refer to it as **NAGGING**.

   *The bottom line is nagging not only doesn’t work, it actually works against you. It is demotivating…If you want to motivate your spouse, thank him and praise him for the things he does –*

   

---

even the little things – instead of nagging him about the things he doesn’t do. Men, you need to be about getting the work done.

Tips for Better Communication

23. Be willing to **SHARE**.

   Learn to share more than “facts,” such as:

   - **THOUGHTS**
   - **FEELINGS**
   - **EXPERIENCES**
   - **VALUES**
   - **PRIORITIES**
   - **JUDGMENTS**
   - **DEEPEST HURTS, FEARS, AND FAILURES**
   - **GREATEST HOPES, DREAMS, AND SUCCESSES**

24. Be aware of the whole communication **PACKAGE**.

   - **WORDS**
     - The words you speak only make up a small part of the message you are sending
     - Perhaps even more critical are the...
   - **TONES**
     - Tone of your voice
     - Volume of your voice
   - **NONVERBAL SIGNALS**
     - Eye contact
     - Mannerisms
     - Facial expressions
     - How you say what you say is even more significant (at times) than what you are saying.
25. Be a good **LISTENER**.

*You have got to want to listen to your spouse!*

Being a good listener says…

- **YOU ARE IMPORTANT TO ME.**
- **YOU ARE VALUABLE TO ME.**
- **I CARE ABOUT YOU.**
- **I WANT O KNOW YOU.**
- **I WANT TO HEAR WHAT YOU HAVE TO SAY.**
- **I WANT TO KNOW HOW YOU FEEL.**

26. Listen **ATTENTIVELY**.

27. **POSITION** yourself to hear.

- **LOOK AT YOUR SPOUSE.**
- **LEAN FORWARD.**
- **ARMS SHOULD BE OPEN.**
- **HEAD SHOULD BE SLIGHTLY TILTED.**
- **YOU SHOULD HAVE PLEASANT FACIAL EXPRESSIONS**
- **REMOVE DISTRACTIONS.**

*This positioning says you are interested in your spouse and what they have to say. It says they have your attention.*

28. Listen with your ears and **EYES**.

- **MAKE SURE YOU ARE GETTING THE WHOLE MESSAGE.**

---

34 Lowery, *Covenant Marriage*, 196.
• **PAY ATTENTION TO NONVERBAL CLUES.**

By focusing your eyes on your spouse you not only express interest, you also receive additional information by noticing facial expressions and body posture. Look for signs of satisfaction, frustration, weariness, etc.

If you do not look at your spouse, you may only get part of the total message.

29. Listen **PATIENTLY**.

- **DON’T INTERRUPT.**

  Listening without interrupting does not mean you agree. It simply means you are respecting your spouse by letting him/her say whatever it is he/she has to say.

- **WAIT FOR THE PROPER TIME TO RESPOND.**

- **DO NOT LOOK AT YOUR WATCH.**

30. Listen **INTELLIGENTLY**.

31. Listen for the **WHOLE** message.

- **MEANINGS**

- **FEELINGS**

32. **RESPOND** to let them know you are listening.

- **ASK QUESTIONS**

  *How can you know and/or understand unless you ask questions?*

  Ask when, where, what and how question.

- **REPEAT / REPHRASE**

  Reflective listening lets them know you have heard and understood what they are saying and/or feeling.

  Report to your spouse in your own words what you are hearing.

  You do not necessarily have to be word-for-word.

  Helps you to know if you are understanding correctly.
Your spouse can correct your understanding if it is inaccurate.

Clarify what you are hearing – DO NOT ASSUME!

- **ACT**

  Not enough to just understand the need(s). You need to act.

  Does not mean you have to solve their problem for them.

  Act in love.

  Lets the other person know we have heard and understood what he or she is feeling.

The other value of reflective listening is that the other person can correct our understanding if it is inaccurate.

33. Know some of the **ENEMIES** of good communication.  

- **CRITICISM**
- **BLAME**
- **CONDEMNATION**
- **SARCASM**
- **INTERROGATION**
- **ARGUMENT**
- **CORRECTION**
- **THREATS**
- **INTIMIDATION**

[**ACTIVITY**] Building project – foreman and builder. Couples take turns being the foreman and the builder as they erect a structure from various kid-type building toys. The couples can only communicate with nonverbal signals in order to complete the project. Each person takes five minutes in a role. Once the change is made the couples are to continue building using the same structure.

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35Ibid., 185.
[SHARE] Colossians 3:18-27 8But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. 9Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, 10and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him—11a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all. 12So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; 13bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. 14Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. 15Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. 16Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 17Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.

Welcome and Prayer

Review major concepts from previous session

Teaching Outline

Conflict and Marriage

1. No marriage is “perfect” – **CONFLICT** will arise.

   We need to be willing to work through conflict rather than walking away from the marriage.

   We must be determined to think about the longevity of our marriage – “I am in this for the long-haul and am willing to work through my problems.”

2. Potential sources of conflict include:

   - TASTE
   - HABITS
   - VALUES
   - THINKING
   - TEMPERAMENT
   - MONEY
   - SEX
   - COMMUNICATION
   - CHILDREN
   - HOUSEHOLD CHORES
   - RELATIVES
   - TIME/HOBBIES
   - WORK
   - RELIGION
   - COMPETING
   - RELATIONSHIPS

[ASK] Can you think of other areas of conflict?
3. It’s not the **PRESENCE** of conflict that will determine the success or failure of your marriage; it’s the way you **HANDLE** conflict.

   *It is how these conflicts are handled that determines the outcome of the marriage.*

4. Will you **MANAGE** your conflicts, or will they **MANAGE** you?

**Tips for Fighting Fairly**

5. **GET RIGHT** with God.

6. “When we choose not to forgive, **BITTERNESS** is automatic, freedom becomes bondage, joy turns to sadness, and frustration leads to depression.”

7. **ACKNOWLEDGE** there is conflict which needs to be handled.

   *Do not ignore the problem/conflict. Conflicts seldom, if never, go away.*

   *Problems don’t dissipate by pretending they do not exist or separating from them; THEY ONLY GET BIGGER.*

   *Conflicts do not solve themselves.*

8. Confront problems **WHEN** they arise.

   - **DO NOT ALLOW CONFLICT TO FESTER AND CAUSE BITTERNESS.**

---

• **NO SILENT TREATMENT MARATHONS.**

• **YOU MAY NEED A “COOL DOWN” PERIOD.**
  
  So the conflict does not become a fight.
  So you can collect your thoughts.
  So you can have time to think and pray.

• **BE CARE OF “JUST BEFORS”**
  
  Conflicts should not be raised just before going to bed, just before sex, just before leaving the house, or just before anything that will not allow adequate time to deal with an issue.

• **NOT IN PUBLIC.**

  9. Master the art of **LISTENING.**

• **SHOW RESPECT.**
  
  If we fail to show others respect by listening to them, we shouldn’t be surprised if they show us the same discourtesy.

• **ASK FOR CLARIFICATION.**
  
  You need to understand what they are saying.
  Not a good time for assumptions.

• **WAIT UNTIL YOUR SPOUSE HAS FINISHED SPEAKING.**

  *Proverbs 18:13* He who gives an answer before he hears, It is folly and shame to him.
  
  *James 1:19* This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger;

  10. **LIMIT** the discussion of the conflict to the here and now issue.

• **DO NOT DRAG OUT YESTERDAY’S (OR LAST YEAR’S) DIRTY LAUNDRY.**
• DO NOT GET “HISTORICAL” DURING THE CONFLICT.

• DO NOT ALLOW THE PAST TO CONTROL THE PRESENT.

11. Use “I” messages in making your point.

• TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR FEELINGS.
  Allows you to take responsibility for your feelings,

• ALLOWS THEM TO HEAR WITHOUT FEELING DEFENSIVE.
  Allows the other person to hear about your feelings without feeling defensive.

• USING “YOU” MESSAGES MIGHT NOT BE TAKEN WELL.
  “You” messages tend to be perceived as attacks and criticisms (because that is what they usually are!).

12. Avoid EXAGGERATIONS.

• WORDS LIKE “NEVER” AND “ALWAYS.”

• WE ARE INCONSISTENT HUMAN BEINGS.
  Such statements are very seldom true, simply because as inconsistent human beings we very seldom “always” or “never” do anything.

13. Avoid character ASSASSINATION.

• NAME CALLING

• PUTDOWNS

• POINTING OUT CHARACTER FLAWS

• DEMEANING ANOTHER PERSON
Using these actions will do nothing but stir up a greater disharmony.

14. Use appropriate **WORDS** and **ACTIONS** for the matter at hand.

15. Watch your **WORDS**. The tongue can be deadly.

**Proverbs 18:21** Death and life are in the power of the tongue, And those who love it will eat its fruit.

**Proverbs 12:18** There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, But the tongue of the wise brings healing.

**Proverbs 15:1** A gentle answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger.

- **THINK FIRST – DO NOT BE HASTY.**

  **Proverbs 15:23** man has joy in an apt answer, And how delightful is a timely word!

  **Proverbs 15:28** The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer, But the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things.

**Proverbs 21:23** He who guards his mouth and his tongue, Guards his soul from troubles.

- **WATCH YOUR “LANGUAGE.”**

- **BE UNDERSTANDABLE.**

- **SPEAK TRUTH IN LOVE.**

  **Ephesians 4:15** but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ,

  **Ephesians 4:25** Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.

  **Colossians 3:9** Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices,

- **WATCH YOUR VOLUME AND TONE.**

- **AVOID “HOT BUTTONS.”**

  Do not push those “hot button(s)” which will hurt the one you love.

  Do not take delicate information given to you by your spouse and use it as a platform to launch verbal attacks.
16. Watch your ACTIONS.

- **AVOID QUARRELING.**

  It is possible to disagree without quarreling.

  **Proverbs 17:14** The beginning of strife is like letting out water, so abandon the quarrel before it breaks out.

  **Proverbs 20:3** Keeping away from strife is an honor for a man, But any fool will quarrel.

  **Ephesians 4:31** Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

- **DEAL WITH YOUR ANGER.**

  - **BE SLOW TO GET ANGRY.**

    **Proverbs 14:29** He who is slow to anger has great understanding, But he who is quick-tempered exalts folly.

    **James 1:19** This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger;

  - **DO NOT SIN IN YOUR ANGER.**

  - **DO NOT “SLEEP” MAD AT ONE ANOTHER.**

    **Ephesians 4:26** Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger.

17. Don’t be concerned about **WINNING** or **LOSING** the argument.

  “The object of conflict is not to win but to resolve the problem. Marriage is meant to be a cooperative effort not a competitive sport. When there is a problem, the goal is not to find fault or assess blame, but to find a solution.”

- **REMEMBER YOUR ARE A “TEAM.”**


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• **BE WILLING TO LOSE IN ORDER TO WIN.**

   *Never let ego get in the way of your covenant commitment.*

   Be willing to “give in” in order to “grow up.”

• **PURSUE GOD’S RESOLUTION.**

   *It’s better if both parties be more concerned about resolving the conflict God’s way rather than who “wins” or “loses.”*

18. Choose to **FORGIVE.**

   • “When we choose not to forgive, BITTERNESS is automatic, freedom becomes bondage, joy turns to sadness, and frustration leads to depression.”38

• **ASK FOR AND GRANT FORGIVENESS.**

   *In a covenant marriage, you must have a willingness to forgive.*

   Forgiveness cannot be experienced and the relationship restored, unless we are willing to be responsible for our actions and acknowledge our failures.

• **ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR ACTIONS AND FAILURES.**

• **DO NOT “APOLOGIZE.”**

   *An apology is making a defense for what you think is right.*

• **NO LONGER HOLD THE FAILURE AGAINST YOUR SPOUSE.**

   Forgiveness is not a feeling, but rather a promise.

   *Forgiveness is the promise that I will no longer hold that failure against you.*

   In order for us to have this kind of forgiving attitude, we need to keep asking God to help us get to the point where you can truly forgive.

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Conflict and Marriage

19. “The presence of conflict is never a reason to give up. It’s a reason to **LOOK UP** to God. In Christ, the ultimate example of conflict resolution, we find our hope and our answer every time.”

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Lowery, *Covenant Marriage*, 223.
[SHARE] Philippians 2:3-4 3Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; 4 do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

Welcome and Prayer
Review major concepts from previous session

[SHOW] The Best Theatre Proposal Ever video

23. Remind class we need to do marriage God’s way.

24. Ask class to reflect on terms, concepts, and truths which have impacted them during the class.

   What terms stand out to you?

   What has impacted your life?

25. Ask class to offer suggestions on how to pray for their marriages, as well as marriage in general.

26. Distribute Survey/Questionnaire and give instructions.

27. Talk about the covenant renewal ceremony.

28. Spend time in prayer, praying for marriages.
APPENDIX 8

BUILDING A HEALTHY MARRIAGE
STUDENT HANDOUTS
SESSION 2
PURPOSE OF MARRIAGE (PART 1)

1. God’s intention has always been for marriage to be a ________________
   ________________ with Jesus Christ as Lord of the relationship.

The Foundation of Covenant Marriage

2. God is the ________________  ________________ of the entire
   universe.

3. God created ________________.

4. God knows how marriage ________________.

   *Genesis 1:27*

5. God never intended for man to be ________________.

   *Genesis 2:18-24*

6. God took the initiative to provide Adam a suitable ________________,
   one that will be able to correspond to and complement him.

7. “Helper” = ________________

   ________________

8. This helper is one who will ________________  ________________
   Adam to carry out God’s plan.
Genesis 2:22-23

9. The first words of man reflect a covenant statement of his ______________ and ______________.

Genesis 2:24

10. “Joined” together suggests both the ______________ and ______________ of covenant marriage.

Genesis 2:24

11. Highlights the ______________ of the marriage relationship.

Reflecting the Image of God

Genesis 1:26-27

12. Notice the change from “_________ _________ _________” to “Let Us make.”

13. The husband and wife relationship is to be a _______________ of the Holy Trinity relationship.

14. ________________

________________

________________

________________

________________
15. Marriage should also be reflection of the relationship between _______________ and His ________________.

16. Covenant marriage should ________________ God
SESSION 3
PURPOSE OF MARRIAGE (PART 2)

1. God created man and woman to be ________________ of His creation.

   Genesis 1:26, 28

2. God has given man “functions,” or ________________ ________________

3. Five Stewardship Responsibilities

   Men and women are to be...

   3a. Stewards of the ________________ to the rest of God’s creation

       • ________________
       • ________________
       • ________________

   Genesis 1:26, 28

   3b. Stewards of the ________________ relationship.

       • ________________
       • ________________
       • ________________
       • ________________
Benefits to the Community:

Benefits to the Family:

Benefits to the Church:

3c. Stewards of the ________________ relationship.

• ________________

• ________________

• ________________

➢ Proclaiming ________________ ________________ to the children.
Deuteronomy 6:4-9

3d. Stewards of their ________________.

3e. Stewards of ________________.

Genesis 2:16, 17

4. As stewards, man and woman need to learn to ________________ their responsibilities.
SESSION 4
COVENANT VS CONTRACT

Know therefore that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness to a thousandth generation with those who love Him and keep His commandments. (Deuteronomy 7:9, NASB)

Examples of contracts:

Covenant

1. Marriage based on God’s biblical principles and guidelines is known as a “_____________ _______________.”

Covenant – Biblical Definition

2. The process by which God established _______________ and made _______________ to those who would be faithful in them are what is known as a covenant.

3. God’s “covenant” is a relationship of _______________ and _______________ between the Lord and His chosen people.


4. A clear statement of God’s _______________ and _______________ expressed in terms that bind God by solemn oath to perform what He has promised.

5. Hebrew (OT) - _______________ Greek (NT) - _______________

6. Used of special relationships between ________________ and man, as well as special relationships between ________________ and man

**Old Testament**

7. *Berit* is used to describe such things as a pledge of friendship.

_______________

8. *Berit* is used to describe agreements on a national level.

_______________

**God to Man**

9. Examples of covenant promises God made to individuals include those He made to...
   - _______________
   - _______________
   - _______________
   - _______________

10. God also made a covenant with the nation of Israel as they were His special, chosen people.
   - _______________
   - _______________
   - _______________
11. In each of these incidences, whether to an individual or to a nation, God took the ________________ to provide the covenant.

12. God is also the ________________ of the covenant.

Abrahamic Covenant

13. Two factors about this covenant:
   • ________________
   • ________________

New Testament

14. The connection between the concepts of covenant and promise is also found in the New Testament.
   • ________________
   • ________________

Hebrews 9:13-22

15. Here you find the concept of covenant being equated with a __________ ________ and ________________.

16. Points to the necessity of the ________________ of the one making the promise.

17. Clearly, ________________ is critical if a covenant relationship is to exist.
Marriage as Covenant:

18.

19. __________________  __________________  __________________

20. Passages alluding to marriage as covenant:
   
   - __________________
   - __________________
   - __________________
   - __________________
   - __________________
Covenant vs. Contract

21. Contrasting Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COVENANT</th>
<th>CONTRACT</th>
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</table>

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Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

(1 John 4:7-11, NASB)

**God and Love**

1. God is _______________, and He demonstrated to the world what love looks like when He sent His Son Jesus to die on the cross and provide the means by which man could have a restored relationship with Him.

2. Mankind’s covenant relationship with God is based on the self-sacrificing _______________ love.

3. God, in turn, expects human covenant relationships, especially marriage relationships, to be based upon and _______________ of this kind of love.

**Biblical Text**

4. Paul, writing to the church at Ephesus, provides us with _______________ different aspects of marital love.

   • _______________
Love in Covenant Marriage

5. The first aspect of love in covenant marriage is:

   ❖ Sacrificially _______________ to one another

6. Ephesians 5:21 ...and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.

   • _______________
   
   • _______________

7. The term does not mean “______ _______” or “____________.”

8. Submission, then, as it pertains to Christian relationships, is to be regarded as a positive trait, and is to be practiced between all Christians, both _______________ and _______________.

9. Submission means you willingly choose to _______________

   _______________ _______________ for the betterment of one another.

10. What are some of the selfish desires people have in marriage?

11. Sacrificial submission helps to promote _______________

    _______________.

   • _______________

12. Couples should be willing to:

   • _______________
   
   • _______________
   
   • _______________
13. Husbands and wives should be willing to change _______________ for the betterment of their spouses, rather than expecting their spouses to change.

14. The second aspect of love in covenant marriage is:

   ❖ Teaching of _______________ to one another

15. **Ephesians 5:26** …so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,

   • _______________

   • _______________

16. Husbands and wives show great love by living in such a way that they “_____________” or “_____________” Christ and His sanctifying love.

17. Love your spouse in such a manner that you lead them _______________ Christ and Christ-likeness – i.e., encourage the sanctification process in them.

18. What are some ways you can lead your spouse “toward” Christ and Christ-likeness?

19. Hold in high regard the _______________ and _______________ of God’s Word, as it is through the Word, the truth, that mankind is sanctified (John 17:17).

20. You should lead one another toward a closer _______________ with God, and at the same time increase the health of their marriage.
21. The third aspect of love in covenant marriage is:

- Leading one another to ____________

22. Ephesians 5:27 …that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.

23. Love works to ____________ your spouse from the evil and ungodliness which exists in the world

24. How can we work to protect one another from evil and ungodliness?

25. Love desires the ____________ ____________ and well-being that comes from pursuing a life of Christ-likeness.

26. The fourth aspect of love in covenant marriage is:

- ____________ and ____________ one another

27. Ephesians 5:28-29 28 So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; 29 for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church.

28. Loving your spouse is like loving your ____________ ____________.

29. Ephesians 5:28-29 28 So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; 29 for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church.

- ____________
- ____________________________
30. Help them to mature in _______________ with God and man.

31. How do you help your spouse grow in favor with God and man?

32. You nourish your spouse by helping them grow older _______________ and _______________.

33. You nourish your spouse by _______________ them from the evil in the world.

34. How do we help our spouses grow older: (1) physically? (2) spiritually?

35. How do we protect our spouses from evil?

36. Ephesians 5:28-29  28 So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; 29 for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church,

   • _______________

   • __________________________________________

37. You cherish your spouse by regarding them as more _______________ than you.

38. Communicate the _______________ and level of _______________ with which you regard one another.
39. How do we value and show our spouses are important?

40. 1 Corinthians 13:4-8
SESSION 6
ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES (PART 2)

Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

(1 Corinthians 13:4-8, NASB)

1. God has given men and women specific instructions, or ______________ _______________, in marriage.

   HER Role Responsibility

2. _______________ - her role responsibility.

3. She must make a choice to ________________ submit to her husband, who is to be the “head of the wife” (Eph 5:23).

4. Ephesians 5:22 Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord.
   • ________________

5. Where “submit” is used the word “denotes subordination to those considered _______________ of ________________, either because of their inherent qualities or more often because of the position they held.”
6. The one submitting recognizes the ______________ of the one to whom they are submitting.

7. Wives are to submit to their husbands, whose authority and headship position has been ______________ them by God.

8. The wife’s submission is ______________ and ______________.

9. The wife’s ______________ for submitting to her husband is the fact that he is her functional head in the family.

10. Ephesians 5:23 For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body.

11. The wife is not considered ______________ or ______________ than the one to whom she is submitting.

12. In the eyes of God she is morally and spiritually ______________ to her husband.

13. She is to submit to her husband based on his God-given function of being the “______________________.”

14. What submission is not…

   • ______________
   • ______________
   • ______________
   • ______________
   • ______________
   • ______________
15. When a wife does submit, “she places herself under the authority of her husband’s leadership, working along with him to ______________, ______________, and ______________ him.”

Daniel L. Akin, “Family Life Seminar” (seminar lecture delivered at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, 1999), 7.

16. As his “helper” (Gen 2:18), her goal should be to ______________ her husband and to meet his ______________ ______________.

17. Daniel Akin suggests that the wife works to accomplish this goal by:

• ______________
• ______________
• ______________
• ______________
• ______________
• ______________
• ______________
• ______________

18. TRUST MARKERS

• ______________
• ______________
• ______________
HIS Role Responsibility

19. ____________ - his role responsibility.

20. **Ephesians 5:23** For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body.

**Ephesians 5:25** Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her,

21. Husbands are to exemplify the love which Christ Jesus showed the church, while functionally positioned in the marriage by ____________ as the “head of the wife.”

22. The ____________ for the husband’s love for his wife is the self-sacrificing love of Christ for the church.

**Seven Aspects of HIS Role Responsibility**

23. **#1 ____________**

24. He practices his leadership in the marriage based on the ____________ which has been granted to him by God.

25. As a leader, he is not to be a ____________ who orders his wife around or treats her like a slave.

26. He is not to be a “_____________ _______________” who disciplines his wife and expects her to obey him like a child.

27. The husband is to be a ____________ _______________ who willingly gives of his time, energy, and resources to better his wife.

28. **#2 ____________**

29. A husband should willingly give of himself, including his own ____________, if necessary, to provide for his wife.
30. He is to die to ______________ in order to live for his wife, and be example of Christ to her.

31. **Ephesians 5:23** For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body.

   - _______________
   - ________________

32. #3 ______________

33. As her “human savior,” the husband is to function as the ______________ of his wife.

34. The husband should strive to ______________ for her and to protect her physically, spiritually, mentally, and emotionally.

35. #4 ______________

36. Husbands should desire to see their spouses be ______________ more and more into the image of Jesus Christ.

37. **Ephesians 5:29** for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church,

38. #5 ______________

   - ________________
   - ________________
   - ________________
   - ________________
   - ________________
39. #6 _______________
   • ___________________________________
   • ___________________________________

40. 1 Peter 3:7 You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered.

41. #7 _______________

42. Husbands are to treat their wives as _______________ partners, honoring them as sisters in Christ.

43. Husbands should show understanding of their _______________ _______________.

44. Husbands should have an _______________-______________ understanding of their spouse personally.
   • __________________________________
Romance with a SMILE

45. Special _____________ I least expected.

46. Special _____________ I least expected

47. Special _____________ I least expected

48. Special _____________ I least expected

49. Special _____________ I least expected

50. Special _____________ I least expected

51. Special _____________ I least expected

52. Special _____________ I least expected

53. Special _____________ I least expected

54. Special _____________ I least expected
SESSION 7
HIS NEEDS / HER NEEDS

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

(Philippians 2:3-4, NASB)

29. Men and women are ________________.
   • ________________
   • ________________
   • ________________

Her Seven Basic Needs

8. Her need for ________________ ________________. He is a man of courage, conviction, commitment, compassion, and character. He takes the initiative in cultivating a spiritual environment for the family. He becomes a capable and competent student of God’s Word and lives out before all a life founded on the Word of God. He leads his wife in becoming a woman of God, and he takes the lead in training the children in the things of the Lord. (Psalm 1; Ephesians 5:23-27).

9. Her need for personal ________________ / ________________. He praises her for personal attributes and qualities. He extols her virtues as a wife, mother, and homemaker. He openly commends her, in the presence of others, as a marvelous mate, friend, lover, and companion. She feels that to him, no one is more important in this world. (Proverbs 31:28-29; Turn to and read Song of Solomon 4:1-7, 6:4-9, 7:1-9).
10. Her need for personal ______________ (______________). He showers her with timely and generous displays of affection. He also tells her how much he cares for her with a steady flow of words, cards, flowers, gifts and common courtesies. Remember: Affection is the environment in which sexual union is enjoyed and a wonderful marriage developed (Song of Solomon 6:10, 13; Ephesians 5:28-29, 33).

11. Her need for ______________ ______________. He talks to her at the feeling level (heart to heart). He listens to her thoughts (i.e., her heart) about the events of her day with sensitivity, interest, and concern. Conversations with her convey a desire to understand her, not to change her (Song of Solomon 2:8-14; 8:13-14; 1 Peter 3:7).

12. Her need for ______________ and ______________. He looks into her eyes and, in love, tells her what he really thinks (Ephesians 4:15). He explains his plans and actions clearly and completely because he regards himself as responsible for her. He wants her to trust him and feel secure (Proverbs 15:22-23).

13. Her need for ______________ ______________ and ______________. He firmly shoulders the responsibility to house, feed, and clothe the family. He provides and protects, and he does not feel sorry for himself when things get tough. Instead he looks for concrete ways to improve home life. He desires to raise their marriage and family to a safer and more fulfilling level. Remember: the husband/father is the security hub of the family (1 Timothy 5:8).

14. Her need for ______________ ______________. He puts his family first. He commits his time and energy to the spiritual, moral, and intellectual development of the children. For example, he prays with them (especially at night by the bedside), reads to them, he engages in sports with them, and takes them on other outings. He does not play the fool’s game of working long hours, trying to get ahead, while his children and spouse languish in neglect (Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:19-20).
His Five Basic Needs

6. His need for _______________ and _______________. She understands and appreciates his value and achievements more than anything else. She reminds him of his capabilities and helps him maintain his walk with God and also his self-confidence. She is proud of her husband, not out of duty, but as an expression of sincere admiration for the man she loves and with whom she has chosen to share her life (Ephesians 5:22-23; 33).

7. His need for _______________ _______________. She becomes an excellent sexual partner. She studies her own response to recognize and understand what brings out the best in her; then she communicates this information to her husband, and together they learn to have a sexual relationship that both find repeatedly satisfying and enjoyable (Proverbs 5:15-19; Song of Solomon 4:9-5:1; 1 Corinthians 7:1-5; Hebrews 13:4).

8. His need for _______________ _______________. She creates a home that offers an atmosphere of peace and quiet and refuge. She manages the home and care of the children. The home is a place of rest and rejuvenation. Remember: the wife/mother is the emotional hub of the family (Proverbs 9:13; 19:13; 21:9, 19; 25:24).

9. His need for her _______________. She is possessed of inner and outer beauty. She cultivates a Christ-like spirit in her inner self. She keeps herself physically fit with diet and exercise, and she wears her hair, makeup, and clothes in a way that her husband finds attractive and tasteful. Her husband is pleased and proud of her in public, but also in private (Song of Solomon 1:8-10; 2:2; 6:13-7:9; 1 Peter 3:1-5).

10. His need for a _______________ _______________. She develops mutual interests with her husband. She discovers those activities her husband enjoys the most and seeks to become proficient in them. If she learns to enjoy them, she joins him in them. If she does not enjoy them, she encourages him to consider others that they can enjoy together. She becomes her husband’s best friend so that he repeatedly associates her with the activities he enjoys most (Song of Solomon 8:1-2, 6).
SESSION 8
GROWING TOGETHER

So then let us pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.
(Romans 14:19, NASB)

1. “A marriage is a relationship between two people; the spiritual dimension of that relationship can be no stronger than the ____________ ____________ of the _____________. It is obvious that as a couple draws nearer to God, they will draw nearer to each other.”

2.

3. In covenant marriage, husbands and wives should strive to ____________ ____________ spiritually.

4. You should desire to become more like ____________ ____________ to one another.

Romans 8:29 For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;
5. Your #1 source of guidance and instruction is the _______________ ______ _______________!

6. Individually, you need to practice _______________ of the _______________.

7. What are some of the disciplines of the faith?

8. _______________ one another in the practice of these disciplines.

9. Your need to develop a _______________ _______________.

10. _______________ about your spiritual status.

    a. What did your _______________ believe about God, Jesus, church, prayer and the Bible?

    b. How and where did you _______________ learn about God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit? At what age?

    c. What _______________ did you have as a child, as a teenager, and as an adult, about faith? Who gave you the answers?

    d. Did you _______________ any Scripture as a child? Which of those verses do you remember now?

    e. As a _______________, if you could have asked God any questions, what would they have been?

    f. If you could ask God any questions _______________, what would they be?
g. Did anyone you looked up to as a Christian ______________ you as a child? If so, how has that affected you as an adult?

h. When you have gone through ______________ times (at any age), how has it affected your faith?

i. What has been the ______________ spiritual experience of your life?

j. What can ______________ to help you grow spiritually?

11. When having a spiritual discussion, both of you should ______________ and ______________.

12. ______________ share one thing you have read in the Bible, why it impressed you, and how you are trying to apply the verse to your life.

13. Select and read a ______________ on Christian living. Read one chapter a week and share one thing you found helpful in the chapter that you are trying to apply to your life.

14. Share one ______________ you have about the Bible or Christian living. Attentively listen as your spouse shares any insights about your question.

15. Share ways you are and are not becoming ______________ in your life. Ask for ______________ where needed.


a. Hebrews 10:24-25 24 and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, 25 not forsaking our own
assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

b. After attending a worship service, share with each other one thing you found helpful or encouraging from the _____________.

17. Establish and have __________________ _________.

18. Spend time ____________ together and for one another.
   a. _________________ to pray together.
   b. Read ____________ together.
   c. Make a prayer request ____________.
   d. Talk about ____________ prayers.
   e. Pray for one another, your ____________, and your family.

19. Spend time ____________ the Scriptures.
   a. Study Bible lessons ____________.
   b. Talk about ____________ you may have.
   c. Talk about how you can ____________ what you have learned.
d. Read a _______________ book together.

e. _______________ discipleship classes and Sunday School together.

f. Do a Bible study _______________ together.

20. _______________ together.

a. Pick a topic and book you both _______________ upon.

b. Set aside a _______________.

c. Read _______________ to one another.

d. _______________ about what you have read.

21. _______________ / _______________ together.

a. _______________ and _______________ one another in your individual ministries.

b. _______________ what God is doing in your life through ministry.

c. Look to see what God is _______________ you both to do.

22. What are some ways you can minister together?

23. _______________ together.
a. The Bible is your _______________.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

b. Talking to children about where they are _______________.

c. Instruct them about the great issues of _______________.

d. Talk with them about _______________ and Sunday School lessons.

e. Ask them about Scriptures that they have _______________.

f. Aim to see how much they _______________.

24. Be _______________ to one another.

a. Ask _______________ in love.

b. _______________ in love.

c. Practice _______________.

d. _______________ for and _______________ one another.
SESSION 9
BETTER COMMUNICATION

23 A man has joy in an apt answer, and how delightful is a timely word!
11 Like apples of gold in settings of silver
is a word spoken in right circumstances.
(Proverbs 15:23; 25:11, NASB)

1. “Did you know that the average couple spends about ______
______________ per week in conversation, and most of that is
superficial talk? Compare that with nearly seven hours that men spend
each week watching sports on television!”

Fred Lowery, Covenant Marriage: Staying Together for Life
(West Monroe, Louisiana: Howard Publishing Company,
2002), 195.

2. We will never experience all God intended for covenant marriage if we
do not ________________ with each other.

3. Communicate: _______________________________________

4. “The process of _______________ yourself or making yourself known to
another person in verbal and nonverbal ways so that the person
_______________ and accepts what you are communicating.”

Fred Lowery, Covenant Marriage: Staying Together for Life
(West Monroe, Louisiana: Howard Publishing Company,
2002), 177.

5. “If you compare your marriage relationship to a garden, then
communication is the ______________ for the garden. You can destroy
a garden with a ________________ ________________! By contrast, a
good ________________ ________________ will provide a garden with
the life-giving water it needs to produce healthy growth. No skill is more
critical to your ______________ than good communication.”
6. Good communication helps husbands and wives ______________ one another.

7. Good communication helps husbands and wives show ______________ for one another.

8. Good communication helps to ______________ your relationship and build ______________.

9. Good communication helps to build ______________ ______________ in marriage.

10. Good communication helps husbands and wives get to ______________ one another better.

11. Good communication helps husbands and wives meet one another’s ______________.

12. Good communication helps you not have to ______________ what your spouse is thinking or feeling.

13. Good communication helps to ______________ against external attack.

14. Good communication helps to ______________ conflict in marriage.

**DIFFERENCES**

15. Women often communicate to start and sustain ______________.
16. Men usually communicate to give and receive ______________.

17. Women usually like to talk about their ______________.

18. Men generally want to ______________ rather than talk about problems.

19. According to widespread but unscientific observation, men believe they are allotted only ______________ words per day while women believe they are allotted ______________.


20. Women ______________ ______________.
   Men want the ______________ ______________.

21. Women want to talk about ______________.
   Men want to talk ______________.

22. Women want to talk about ________________.
   Men will refer to it as ______________.

**TIPS FOR BETTER COMMUNICATION**

23. Be willing to ______________.

   • ______________
   • ______________
   • ______________
   • ______________
   • ______________
   • ______________
24. Be aware of the whole communication _____________.

25. Be a good ________________.

Being a good listener says…

26. Listen ________________.

27. ________________ yourself to hear.
28. Listen with your ears and ______________.

29. Listen ______________.

30. Listen ______________.

31. Listen for the ______________ message.

32. ______________ to let them know you are listening.

33. Know some of the ______________ of good communication.
SESSION 10
HANDLING CONFLICT

8 But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, 10 and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him—11 a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all. 12 So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. 14 Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. 15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 17 Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father. (Colossians 3:8-17, NASB)

Conflict and Marriage

1. No marriage is “perfect” - ________________ will arise.

2. Potential sources of conflict include:

3. It’s not the ________________ of conflict that will determine the success or failure of your marriage; it’s the way you ________________ conflict.
4. Will you _______________ your conflicts, or will they _______________ you?

**Tips for Fighting Fairly**

5. _______________ _______________ with God.

6. “When we choose not to forgive, _______________ is automatic, freedom becomes bondage, joy turns to sadness, and frustration leads to depression.”


7. _______________ there is conflict which needs to be handled.

8. Confront problems _______________ they arise.

   • _______________ 
   • _______________ 
   • _______________ 
   • _______________ 
   • _______________ 
   • _______________ 

9. Master the art of _______________.

   • _______________ 
   • _______________ 
   • _______________
10. ______________ the discussion of the conflict to the here and now issue.

  • ________________
  • ________________
  • ________________

11. Use ______________ messages in making your point.

  • ________________
  • ________________
  • ________________
  • ________________

12. Avoid ______________.

  • ________________
  • ________________

13. Avoid character ______________.

  • ________________
  • ________________
  • ________________
  • ________________
  • ________________

14. Use appropriate ______________ and ______________ for the matter at hand.
15. Watch your WORDS.

• ___________________________
• ___________________________
• ___________________________
• ___________________________
• ___________________________
• ___________________________
• ___________________________

16. Watch your ACTIONS.

• ___________________________
• ___________________________
• ___________________________
  o ___________________________
  o ___________________________
  o ___________________________

17. Don’t be concerned about _______________ or _______________ the argument.

• ___________________________
• ___________________________
• ___________________________

18. Choose to _______________.

  • “When we choose not to forgive, _______________ is automatic, freedom becomes bondage, joy turns to sadness, and frustration leads to depression.”

- 
- 
- 
- 
- 

**Conflict and Marriage**

19. “The presence of conflict is never a reason to give up. It’s a reason to __________________ _________ – to God. In Christ, the ultimate example of conflict resolution, we find our hope and our answer every time.”

APPENDIX 9

INSTRUCTIONS FOR FUN ACTIVITIES

Stress Ball Activity

Objective:

To make a stress ball which participants can bring to remainder of class sessions.

Materials:

- Latex balloons (several colors)
- Fold-top sandwich bags
- Uncooked dry rice
- Scissors
- Tape

Procedure:

Fill a fold-top sandwich bag will ¾ cup of rice. Close the bag and fold over to make a ball. Tape the bag closed in the ball shape. Choose a colored latex balloon. Cut the nozzle (tip) off of the balloon and insert the bag of rice into the balloon. Select another balloon and cut the nozzle off of it also. Cut little sections out of the balloon to make different patterns. Take the second balloon and place it over the original balloon (some of the original balloon colors should show through small holes in second balloon). Once you have designed the pattern you like, insert the rice filled balloon into the designed balloon. You can continue to make different patterns by cutting different designs in other balloons, or you can stop. Your stress ball is complete.
Egg Drop Activity

Objective:
To combine imagination with physical and mechanical knowledge to build a structure that will prevent a grade a large egg from breaking when dropped from increasing heights.

Materials:
- 10 tongue depressors
- 10 popsicle sticks
- 10 jumbo paper clips
- 5 soda straws
- 1 plastic bag
- 5 rubber bands
- 3 pipe cleaners
- 2 feet of yarn
- 10 cotton puffs
- Elmer’s white glue

Procedure:
Each couple must build a device from the above materials.
The device will be loaded with a grade a large egg provided during the class.
Completed egg devices will be dropped first from 12 feet.
If the egg is broken or cracked, that package is eliminated.

Rules:
Only the materials listed may be used to build the egg drop device.
The use of other materials will result in disqualification and a grade of zero.
Glue may be used only to hold parts of the device together.
Excessive amounts of glue may not be used as part of the structure of the package i.e., the packages may not be completely covered with glue.
The device must be easy to open and secure. (The egg should fit easily into the package.)
The device should be easy to open for inspection after each test.
APPENDIX 10

BUILDING A HEALTHY MARRIAGE FLIER

Figure A1. Building a Healthy Marriage Flier
INTRODUCTORY WORDS

Church family, friends, guests, and those of you who have come to renew your vows in covenant marriage, having heard God’s word concerning covenant relationship, let us now enter into a special time of renewal. This is a time of ceremony, recommitment, and celebration. It is also a time of introspection for those of us who are married as we carefully and prayerfully examine our own lives to see if we are standing strong and fulfilling the marriage covenant we have made with our spouse and with Holy God.

(An optional processional can take place at this time, with participating couples proceeding to the front of the church. If there is no processional, couples can be asked to come to the altar or to stand at their seats.)

God is a covenant God. The Bible is a covenant book. We are a covenant people. In Genesis 2, we see clearly that God designed marriage as a covenant relationship: “For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). Two become one, never to be separated again. That is a covenant. This basic description of marriage is quoted by Jesus and reported in the Gospels. It is used by Paul in Ephesians 5 as the biblical foundation for marriage.

Ephesians 5:21-33

22 Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. 24 But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything. 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, 26 so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. 28 So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; 29 for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, 30 because we are members of His body. 31 For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. 32 This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church. 33 Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband.
It is evident that the Bible portrays marriage as a sacred and permanent covenant, witnessed and protected by God Himself.

Marriage is a contract, but it is so much more. A contract is based on limited liability; a covenant is based on unlimited responsibility. A contract calls for a signing of names; a covenant calls for the binding of hearts.

Marriage is designed by God as a binding covenant – broken only by death.

(Time of prayer)

THE WEDDING CHARGE

Before God and these witnesses, we acknowledge marriage as a divine institution and celebrate what God is doing in the lives of these couples. We charge you – church family, friends, and loved ones – to stand behind these couples with your prayers and encouraging words as they confirm and renew their marriage covenant.

In the words of Christ, stated as a command: “Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate” (Mark 10:9).

TIME OF CONFIRMATION

(To couples)

Do you, as husbands and wives, understand that God designed marriage as a serious and sacred covenant that is to be broken only by death? If so, please join hands as we come to this serious and sacred time of renewing covenant vows to each other.

MINISTER: Do you now promise to renew the vows you made when you were first united in marriage?
COUPLE: We do.

MINISTER: Believing that marriage is a covenant intended by God to be a lifelong fruitful relationship between a man and a woman, do you vow to God, each other, your family, your church, and your community to be committed to one another in a Covenant Marriage relationship?
COUPLE: We do.

MINISTER: Do you promise to remain steadfast in your unconditional love for each other through discipline, understanding, trustfulness, compassion, thoughtfulness, patience, and mutual consideration?
COUPLE: We do.

MINISTER: Do you promise to seek reconciliation in times of trial and tribulation in your lives together?
COUPLE: We do.

MINISTER: Do you promise to remain sexually pure in mind and body as you relate to one another as partners in God’s gift for sexual fulfillment as individuals?
COUPLE: We do.
MINISTER: Do you promise to endeavor to continually grow in your Covenant Marriage relationship by creating a Christian environment in your home in which you can help each other live godly lives in Christian service?

COUPLE: We do.

THE VOWS

(To husbands)
Husbands, face your wives and repeat after me:

Husbands speaking to wives:

(Minister leads husbands through these statements.)
I thank God for our covenant marriage and the gift of your love. In the presence of God, family, and friends, I renew my covenant marriage vows to you as my loving wife.

I joyfully renew my vow to placing our relationship above all earthly relationships. I promise to love you, to honor you, to cherish you, and to care for you at all times in all ways for as long as you live.

I covenant to validate your needs and to give myself to unselfishly meeting your needs. I will be faithful to you and to you alone and will always treasure you as God’s special gift to me.

With God as my helper, I joyfully make a covenant vow that I will keep every one of these promises.

Minister (To wives):
Wives face your husbands and repeat after me:

Wives speaking to husbands:

(Minister leads wives through these statements.)
I thank God for our covenant marriage and the gift of your love. In the presence of God, family, and friends, I renew my covenant marriage vows to you as my loving husband.

I joyfully renew my vow to placing our relationship above all earthly relationships. I promise to love you, to honor you, to cherish you, and to care for you at all times in all ways for as long as you live.

I covenant to validate your needs and to give myself to unselfishly meeting your needs. I will be faithful to you and to you alone and will always treasure you as God’s special gift to me.

With God as my helper, I joyfully make a covenant vow that I will keep every one of these promises.

(A time of prayer)
Believing that marriage is a covenant intended by God to be a lifelong fruitful relationship between a man and a woman, we vow to God, each other, our families, our church, and our community to remain steadfast in unconditional love, reconciliation, and sexual purity, while purposefully growing in our covenant marriage relationship.

Covenant Marriage

Wife’s Name

Covenant Date

Husband’s Name

Wedding Date
APPENDIX 12
COVENANT SERMON OUTLINE

“A Covenant to Live By”

Text
Psalm 145:8-21

Context
Psalm 145 is a psalm of praise from King David directed toward the King of kings. The psalm reveals much about the covenant relationship God offers those who come to Him in faith.

Theme
God’s covenant relationship with His children is a model to live by.

Outline

1. PROMISE KEEPING

Exodus 34:6 Then the Lord passed by in front of him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth;

2. LOVING

Psalm 145:8-9 8The Lord is gracious and merciful; Slow to anger and great in lovingkindness. 9The Lord is good to all, And His mercies are over all His works.

3. THANKSGIVING

Psalm 145:10 All Your works shall give thanks to You, O Lord, And Your godly ones shall bless You. 11They shall speak of the glory of Your kingdom And talk of Your power;

4. ENDURING
Psalm 145:12-13  
12 To make known to the sons of men Your mighty acts And the glory of the majesty of Your kingdom.  
13 Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, And Your dominion endures throughout all generations.

5. GIVING

Psalm 145:14-16  
14 The Lord sustains all who fall And raises up all who are bowed down.  
15 The eyes of all look to You, And You give them their food in due time.  
16 You open Your hand And satisfy the desire of every living thing.

6. FORGIVING

Psalm 145:17-18  
17 The Lord is righteous in all His ways and kind in all His deeds.  
18 The Lord is near to all who call upon Him, To all who call upon Him in truth.

7. BLESSING

Psalm 145:19-21  
19 He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; He will also hear their cry and will save them.  
20 The Lord keeps all who love Him, But all the wicked He will destroy.  
21 My mouth will speak the praise of the Lord, And all flesh will bless His holy name forever and ever.
APPENDIX 13
ORDER OF WORSHIP

Show Video: “Someone Worth Dying For” by MikesChair
Welcome and Prayer
Song: “He Knows My Name”
Congregational Reading: John 13:34-35

John 13:34-35 34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Song: “Never Let Go”
Song: “God of Wonders”
A Time of Giving
  Song: “I Exalt Thee”
  Prayer
Altar Time
  Song: “Came to the Rescue”
  Prayer
Covenant Marriage Vow Renewal Ceremony
Observance of the Lord’s Supper
Time of Decision
  Song: “I Exalt Thee”
  Prayer
APPENDIX 14

R. ALBERT MOHLER BLOG REPRINT

“Killing Off Marriage? Dr. Ablow Reports — You Decide”
By Dr. R. Albert Mohler
May 9, 2011

“Marriage is so essential to human happiness and to the organization of human society that it simply cannot be ignored or denied.”

Dr. Keith Ablow thinks that marriage is “a source of real suffering for the vast majority of married people.” As a matter of fact, that is only one of the accusations Ablow hurls against marriage before eventually calling for its demise. Marriage, he insists, is a dying institution — and he celebrates its death.

Few might know or care of Ablow’s thoughts on the matter but for the fact that he is a psychiatrist and a member of the “Fox News Medical A-Team.” FoxNews.com recently published his assault on marriage, and the essay is sure to gain attention.

Ablow begins by quoting actress Cameron Diaz, who recently asserted that marriage is a “dying institution.” She added this comment: “I don’t think we should live our lives in relationships based off old traditions that don’t suit our world any longer.” Well, maybe that says a lot about her own world of experience and influence, but it is a breathtakingly audacious statement. It also reflects a view held by many among the intellectual and cultural elites, among whom marriage has been seen as a retrograde institution for some time.

Keith Ablow adds his hearty approval to Cameron Diaz’s indictment of marriage, adding that he is “not certain marriage ever did suit most people who tried it.”

He elaborated:

From what I hear in my psychiatry office, and from what I hear from other psychiatrists and psychologists, and from what my friends and relatives tell me and show me through their behavior, and from the fact that most marriages end either in divorce or acrimony, marriage is (as it has been for decades now) a source of real suffering for the vast majority of married people.
The physician claimed the mantle of a healer in diagnosing the epidemic consequences of humanity’s most enduring institution: “As a healer, I can’t help looking askance at anything that depletes energy, optimism, mood and passion to the extent that marriage does. It is, without a doubt, one of the leading causes of major depression in the nation.” Note his concern for “energy, optimism, mood and passion” — as if these constitute the greatest needs or aspirations of humanity. Dr. Ablow may be a psychiatrist, but a quick look at his books indicates concerns more in line with pop psychology.

The doctor diagnoses the ills of marriage with four arguments. First, he asserts that “the involvement of the state in marriage has been a colossal mistake.” Governmental involvement “debases” marriage, which is properly a religious institution. Government involvement renders marriage “sterile, linked to legislation and weighted down with legal implications that are psychologically suffocating.”

He adds this: “Smart, aware people feel consciously or unconsciously disempowered from the moment they say, ‘I do.’” Really? Just because marriage is a legal institution? This is sheer nonsense, of course, and it is a very unintelligent argument as well. Marriage is granted legal recognition precisely because it is a public declaration with public meaning. The law, he says, should not distinguish between single and married persons (or, he offers as well, three cohabitating people), and individuals or couples could merely go to lawyers for contracts as needed.

That would lead to legal, moral, and cultural chaos. If the state were to “have no role in marriage, whatsoever,” it would simply mean that the government has decided to call marriage by some other name. Given the realities of human life, some standardized means of recognizing privileged relationships is a necessity. No civilization exists without it. This is true even in societies that separate the religious and legal definitions and authorizations of marriage. There is no major society that exists without marriage, and those rare movements in history that sought to eliminate marriage led to disaster.

Secondly, Ablow argues that marriage is dying because of the invention of oral contraceptives. Brace yourselves for this one. “Once human beings understood that they could express themselves emotionally, romantically and sexually without necessarily creating multiple families and perilously dividing their assets, the psychological pain of living without sexual passion (even by choice) was significantly intensified.” If you are looking for a prime example of the psychiatric subversion of all morality, look no further. Keith Ablow is arguing, quite straightforwardly, that The Pill offers a chemical means of allowing adultery, and that this is liberation for humanity. Marriage, in his view, kills sexual passion. “The vast, vast majority of men and women, in fact, are no longer physically attracted to their spouses after five or ten years (that’s being kind),” he says. “If they have seen one another most of that time.”

He doesn’t stop there. Few “normal people” maintain sexual interest in a marriage, he insists. “Human beings just are not built to desire one another once we have flossed in the same room a hundred times and shared a laundry basket for thousands of days.”

Third, and most inanely, Ablow argues that marriage “inherently deprives men and women of the joy of being ‘chosen’ on a daily basis.” No kidding. He argues that the vows of marriage deprive us of the experience of being chosen by our spouse every
single day. Most married people “have to wonder whether their spouses really want to stay, or simply don’t want to go through the hassle of leaving.”

This argument is not only nonsensical, but it makes us wonder if Dr. Ablow has any real understanding of human beings. Does he really believe that — even if marriage were to disappear as a legal institution — men and women would re-decide their most intimate relationships and commitments every day, free to come and go without emotional pain and complication? Seriously?

Finally, Dr. Ablow argues that marriage is being undermined by hypocrisy. In his words: “The fact that millions of Americans take vows to stay in marriages for life, then leave those marriages — once, twice, maybe three times — has so trivialized and mocked those vows that many silently chuckle to themselves while listening to them.”

Well, now he is on to something real and important. No one can seriously doubt that this kind of hypocrisy is indeed weakening marriage both as an institution and as a personal commitment. But, in a strange way, the hypocrisy accidentally affirms the importance of marriage and the marital vows. Even those who break their marital vows do so after affirming in public what marriage ought to be and was always meant to be. The answer to hypocrisy is moral correction and a return to integrity in making and keeping the sacred vows of marriage. We do not solve the hypocrisy of the liar by rejecting the very idea of truth.

Coming to the end of his argument, Dr. Ablow insists that the end of marriage is “only a matter of time now.” Marriage is passing away, and we should plan for “what might replace it.” His great goal: “We should come up with something that improves the quality of our lives and those of our children.”

We can only wonder at the audacity of a man who champions the impermanence of relationships, argues that couples cannot long remain attracted to each other, celebrates the sexual liberation from marriage made possible by The Pill, declares marriage “a source of real suffering for the vast majority of married people,” and then calls us to something better for our lives and those of our children.

The current controversies over marriage, oddly enough, affirm what Dr. Keith Ablow denies. Marriage is so essential to human happiness and to the organization of human society that it simply cannot be ignored or denied. Of course, there are those who want to deny the obvious — apparently even on the “Fox News Medical A-Team.” Keith Ablow’s assault on marriage is a sign of our times — and an embarrassment.

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**Internet Resources**


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**Unpublished Resources**


ABSTRACT

STRENGTHENING MARRIAGE FROM A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE
AT CORNERSTONE BAPTIST CHURCH
SPRINGFIELD, GEORGIA

Duane Waddell Logsdon, D. Min.
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Adam W. Greenway

This ministry project was designed to disciple married couples in order to increase church health at Cornerstone Baptist Church in Springfield, Georgia. Chapter 1 offers the purpose and goals of the project, as well as a brief analysis of the history and congregation of Cornerstone Baptist Church.

Chapter 2 analyzes the biblical and theological foundation of covenant marriage as designed and purposed by God.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of the benefits of healthy marriage to society, the family, and the church.

Chapter 4 is a step-by-step description of the ministry project as conducted at Cornerstone Baptist Church.

Chapter 5 provides an evaluation of the ministry project goals, along with any changes that could strengthen the project for future use. The chapter also contains sections on theological and personal reflection.
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