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IMPLEMENTING A PREMARITAL CURRICULUM USING
BIBLICAL COUNSELING PRINCIPLES AT BAY LIFE
CHURCH IN BRANDON, FL

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APPROVAL SHEET

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BIBLICAL COUNSELING PRINCIPLES AT BAY LIFE
CHURCH IN BRANDON, FLORIDA

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To my wife, Brittany and our children,
Silas, Simeon, Lieren, and Blaise.

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PREFACE

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Finally, I am thankful for my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who loved me and gave his life for me. Thank you Jesus for rescuing me from my sin. Thank you Father for adopting me as your son. Thank you Holy Spirit for empowering me to live for eternity. May this project glorify God at Bay Life Church and in my own marriage. To God be the glory forever and ever! Amen (Gal 1:5).

Shane Drury

Seffner, Florida

May 2021

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the beginning, the LORD God Almighty created everything out of nothing, then looked upon it all and declared it very good. Soon after, God said it was not good that man was alone. It was the first time in history God declared something not good. Therefore, the LORD majestically created woman out of man and the two became one flesh, establishing the first marriage. This union was established for God's glory and man's good, but soon after, the fall took place and sin corrupted the human heart and the marriage union. Man no longer sought to glorify God and serve his wife but contrarily sought to serve himself and the marriage union was forever marred with sin. To restore God's primary purposes for marriage, God-centered biblical instruction must reign in the church. The love of God through the Word of God must penetrate and transform the heart of man calling him back to his original design to glorify God and serve his wife. This type of biblical instruction is desperately needed at Bay Life Church in Brandon, Florida where many young people get engaged to be married, but the current man-centered, needs-based premarital curriculum is not offering this restorative hope through the gospel of Jesus Christ. This reveals the need for a new premarital curriculum using biblical counseling principles to be developed and implemented so God's intended purposes for marriage can be restored for God's glory and man's joy.

Context

This ministry project will be implemented in the context of Bay Life Church in Brandon, Florida. There are two factors related to the ministry context of Bay Life that are applicable to this project. First, as the high school pastor at Bay Life, I perform a

majority of the premarital counseling for young couples connected to our college and career ministry. There are two primary reasons for this. One reason is many of these young people were a part of the high school ministry I lead at Bay Life, so there is a strong existing relationship and a high level of trust between these couples and myself. A second reason is Bay Life's college and career pastor is single and does not feel comfortable leading premarital counseling, so the responsibility gets passed on to me. This gives me a great opportunity to help prepare these young couples to develop a marriage centered upon the glory of God.

Second, the premarital curriculum currently being used and offered to me at Bay Life does not use biblical counseling principles. The curriculum does not emphasize transformational heart change through the faithful application of Scripture for the glory of God. It instead emphasizes behavior modification and is largely man-centered. The current curriculum is a combination of secular, needs-based, and integrationist resources.¹ These resources fundamentally focus on seeking to understand one's spouse to meet her greatest needs so that she will be motivated to meet one's own greatest needs. These principles are man-centered and self-centered and place an unhealthy emphasis on giving to get rather than focusing on God with an emphasis to selflessly give for His glory.

Many of these resources also present an inaccurate and unbiblical perspective of the human heart. For example, in *Love and Respect*, Emmerson Eggerichs encourages the reader to believe that her spouse is a person of goodwill, well-intentioned, and good-hearted. Therefore, when a husband sins against a wife, the wife should conclude it was not his intention because he has a good heart and can be trusted.² This conclusion stands

¹ Emmerson Eggerichs, *Love and Respect: The Love She Most Desires, the Respect He Desperately Needs* (Nashville: Integrity Publishers, 2004); Gary Chapman, *The Five Love Languages: The Secret to Love That Lasts* (Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 1995); Les Parrott and Leslie Parrott, *Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts: Seven Questions to Ask Before (and After) You Marry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995); SOI Systems, "Structure of Intellect Testing," accessed August 25, 2020, <http://www.soisystems.com/index.html>.

² Eggerichs, *Love and Respect*, 290.

in great opposition to the teaching of God's Word on the condition of the human heart and inhibits counselees from seeing their need for grace and a Savior.

The premarital counseling resources and curriculum from this man-centered, needs-based methodology are not preparing young couples at Bay Life to build a marriage centered upon God and his glory. The current curriculum does not help couples understand the heart of the issues they will encounter in marriage or how to pursue lasting transformation. As a result, many couples at Bay Life are going through our premarital counseling and getting married without a biblical understanding of the primary purposes of marriage and the means to fulfill them. This has contributed to the development of many troubled, self-centered marriages at Bay Life where spouses seek to have their ultimate needs met by each other rather than by God. As these married couples attempt to work through these issues on their own, they do not have a biblical understanding of the heart issues they are dealing with which leads to greater marital strife. This lack of biblical understanding and preparation has contributed to many unhealthy marriages and even divorces in our church.

Rationale

As evidenced from the contextual factors described above, there is a great need at Bay Life Church for the development of a premarital curriculum using biblical counseling principles. First, because the current curriculum being used does not teach people the ultimate purpose of marriage is to glorify God. Glorifying God is our ultimate goal in all things and marriage is not excluded from this. We see this from Isaiah 43:7 where the Lord says, "Everyone who is called by my name, *whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made*" as well as from 1 Corinthians 10:31 where Paul says, "Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." From these verses we can conclude that God created us for His glory and whatever we do, including marriage, we should do to the glory of God. This is not the message that is taught from

our current premarital curriculum at Bay Life. Our current curriculum largely communicates that the ultimate goal of marriage is to understand the greatest desires of one's spouse and then seek to fulfill those desires so one's spouse will fulfill one's own desires. This is the fundamental message of *The Five Love Languages* by Gary Chapman. David Powlison says of Chapman, "His ultimate goal in marriage, and his evaluation of the significance of love languages are deplorable."³ Using this curriculum leaves our couples with a very shallow, man-centered purpose of marriage that will rob God of the glory he deserves and limit the joy they will experience in marriage. We must offer them a more God-centered curriculum that points them to the ultimate purpose of marriage, which is to glorify God.

Secondly, the premarital curriculum Bay Life is currently using is teaching unbiblical ideas about the condition of the human heart which must be corrected. As previously mentioned, this is seen in the teaching of *Love and Respect* by Emerson Eggerichs and is also seen in *The Five Love Languages* where Chapman says our misbehavior, harsh words, and critical spirit occur because of our empty emotional love tank which can be fixed by our spouse filling our tank by meeting our needs.⁴ Statements like these and many others found in our current premarital curriculum are unbiblical and dangerous because they do not accurately describe the condition of the human heart. They claim that the human heart has good intentions and can be trusted. They claim that our sin is the result of others not meeting our desires and demands. These teachings remove our need for grace and the gospel of Jesus Christ and place the blame of our sin on others rather than on our own hearts. Scripture strongly opposes these ideas. Jeremiah 17:9 says, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick" and Jesus says in

³ David Powlison, *Seeing with New Eyes: Counseling and the Human Condition Seen Through the Lens of Scripture* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P and R Publishing, 2003), 229.

⁴ Chapman, *The Five Love Languages*, 23.

Mark 7:21, “For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts.” These texts, and many others in Scripture, clearly teach that the human heart is not good as our curriculum suggests. The heart is deceitful, sick, and evil and therefore cannot be trusted. These texts also show our sin is not the result of others failing to meet our needs. Our sin comes from within us and overflows out of our wicked hearts. These are the truths our engaged couples need to hear to show them the root of their sin and their need for grace and the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Purpose

The purpose of this project is to develop and implement a premarital counseling curriculum using biblical counseling principles at Bay Life Church in Brandon, Florida.

Goals

These three goals guided the development and teaching of a premarital counseling curriculum using biblical counseling principles at Bay Life Church:

1. The first goal of this project was to develop a six-week premarital curriculum using biblical counseling principles.
2. The second goal of this project was to assess the knowledge of biblical marriage in a group of engaged couples and singles ages eighteen to twenty-eight at Bay Life Church.
3. The third goal of this project was to increase the knowledge of biblical marriage in the same group of engaged couples and singles ages eighteen to twenty-eight by teaching a six-week premarital class.

The completion of each goal relied upon a defined means of measurement and a benchmark of success. The research methodology and instruments used to measure the success of each goal will be detailed in the following section.

Research Methodology

Three goals determined the effectiveness of this project.⁵ The first goal was to develop a six-week premarital curriculum using biblical counseling principles. This goal was measured by a panel composed of three biblical counselors and three experienced senior pastors. This panel utilized a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the curriculum.⁶ This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion meet or exceed the sufficient level. If the 90 percent benchmark was not initially met, the material was revised until it met the standard.

The second goal was to assess the knowledge of biblical marriage in a group of engaged couples and singles ages eighteen to twenty-eight. This goal was measured by administering a pretest to these individuals before the premarital class began.⁷ This pretest included questions about God's plan for marriage, God's purposes of marriage, and God's pattern for marriage. This goal was considered successfully met when all of the individuals completed the pretest and the information was analyzed yielding a clearer picture of the understanding of biblical marriage among these couples.

The third goal was to increase the knowledge of biblical marriage in the same group of engaged couples and singles ages eighteen to twenty-eight at Bay Life by teaching a six-week premarital class. This goal was measured by administering the premarital pretest a second time as a post-class test which was used to measure the increase in knowledge.⁸ This goal was considered successfully met when the t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a statistically significant positive difference in the pre

⁵ All of the research instruments used in this project will be performed in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

⁶ See appendix 3.

⁷ See appendix 2.

⁸ See appendix 2.

and post survey scores.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

The following definitions of key terms will be used in the ministry project:

Biblical counseling. Biblical counseling is the process of addressing a person's problem by displaying the relevance of the gospel to help a person grow in Christlikeness.⁹

There are two delimitations of this project. First, the project will be limited to fifteen weeks which will include curriculum development, pre-assessment, curriculum implementation, and post-assessment. Second, the project will be limited to newly married couples, engaged couples, and singles ages eighteen to twenty-eight at Bay Life Church.

Conclusion

Premarital counseling is a critical component of restoring the primary purpose of marriage, to glorify God. The premarital counseling curriculum that most effectively achieves this restoration uses biblical counseling principles which seeks to restore the primary purpose by applying the truth of Scripture to the hearts of individuals which results in lasting sanctification and puts God on display.

⁹ Jeremy Pierre and Deepak Reju, *The Pastor and Counseling: The Basics of Shepherding Members in Need* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 48.

CHAPTER 2

MARRIAGE FOR THE GLORY OF GOD

A farmer in Michigan had been using what he thought was a large rock on his property as a doorstep for a number of years. He later found out it was a meteorite that was worth one hundred thousand dollars. An Indiana man went to a thrift shop to purchase an item to cover a hole in his wall. He purchased a painting for thirty dollars and hung it over the hole. Years later he was playing a board game featuring famous art and realized the painting covering the hole in his wall was a masterpiece that he later sold for over a million dollars. A man's grandmother had a woven blanket for many years. When she passed away, no one in the family wanted it because it was old and dirty and had been used for a cat and its kittens. The man decided to keep it and later saw a similar blanket on an episode of "Antique Roadshow" appraised for five hundred thousand dollars. He took his old blanket to an expert who confirmed it was a Navajo Native American blanket which he later sold for one million five hundred thousand dollars.¹ The items these individuals acquired were of far greater importance than they realized. They did not know the items were created by a famous artist or woven by an ancient seamstress or had arrived from another world. Since they did not know the item's creator, they did not know the proper plan or purpose of these items. What should have been exhibited in museums was instead used to hold open a door, cover a hole in a wall, and keep kittens warm. What was treasurable was used to meet an individual's simple desires rather than used to display its glory to the world. In the same way marriage is of far greater

¹ Lia Ryerson and Frank Olito, "Twenty-Three People Who Discovered That Their Junk Was Actually Worth a Fortune," Insider, accessed March 2, 2020, <https://www.insider.com/what-is-my-stuff-worth-2018-3#a-woman-gifted-her-daughter-a-brooch-that-turned-out-to-be-a-bona-fide-royal-gem-20>.

importance than many realize. It is a sacred covenant planned and created by an ancient artist from beyond this world who weaves the hearts of men and women together for a purpose far greater than earthly desires. God planned and created marriage to be a beautiful exhibit, put on display for all the world to see his glory. For this majestic purpose of marriage to be fulfilled, it is essential for a husband and wife to know God's plan for marriage (Gen 2:18-24), God's ultimate purpose of marriage (1 Cor 10:31), God's pattern for marriage (Eph 5:22-25), the preventer of fulfilling God's ultimate purpose in marriage (Jas 4:1-3), and God's power to fulfill this purpose in marriage (2 Cor 5:14-15).

Genesis 2:18-24: Marriage As The Plan Of God

Genesis 2:18-24 reveals marriage as the plan of God. In verse eighteen, God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make a helper fit for him." By verse twenty-four, God created woman out of man to be his helper, brought the woman to Adam, oversaw the first wedding, and established the plan for all marriages that would follow. God declaring Adam's aloneness as not good in verse eighteen is a striking statement for up until this point, God had looked upon all things in creation and declared them to be good and very good (Gen 1:31). It is important to realize that God himself was not surprised when he looked upon Adam and stated it was not good that he was alone. God did not realize for the first time in this moment that it was not good for the man to be alone. This was not a discovery made by God but a statement of a reality already known to him. A reality known by God before the creation of Adam and time and space itself. For God is an omnipotent God who is perfect in knowledge (Job 37:16). He knows all things past, present, and future simultaneously and his knowledge never changes. Therefore, God did not devise his plan for marriage when he surprisingly discovered Adam's unforeseen solitude and realized it was not good. It was a plan he had made in eternity past.

It is also essential to recognize that marriage was not the plan of Adam devised to meet his unfulfilled needs. Before Eve was created, Adam was not lonely or feeling needy. He did not need anyone or anything else to make him complete or to attempt to make him happy. He was in perfect relationship with a perfect God and he had no unmet felt needs. Even the concept of being in need would have been a foreign concept to Adam that had never crossed his mind.² Adam did not ask God for a woman or for marriage. Marriage was not Adam's plan. It was the plan of God. This can be seen throughout the narrative of Genesis 2:18-24 for it was God who said it was not good that man was alone. It was God who decided to make Adam a helper. It was God who caused Adam to go into a deep sleep. It was God who took a rib from Adam's side and formed it into a woman. It was God who brought the woman to Adam to marry him in verse twenty-two just as a father brings a bride down the aisle to her groom.³ And it was God who united them together in marriage. As Jesus quoted this passage to the Pharisees in Mark 10:9, he himself said it is God who joins a man and a woman together in marriage. From the very beginning, marriage was the plan of God.

Since God is the sovereign and wise creator of all good things, including marriage, he has the authority to plan how all things will be. From this narrative in Genesis 2:18-24, it can be seen that God planned for marriage to be between one man and one woman. God could have chosen to provide many wives for Adam or he could have chosen to create another man to join Adam in marriage, but he instead chose to create one woman to join one man in marriage and for this to be the plan for all future marriages.⁴

² John Henderson, *Catching Foxes: A Gospel Guided Journey to Marriage* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P and R Publishing, 2018), 75.

³ Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1967), 71.

⁴ R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 63.

Genesis 2:24 reveals several other pieces of God’s plan for marriage. First, upon marrying, “A man shall leave his father and his mother.” At first glance, this is a striking and surprising command for two reasons. First, Adam had no earthly father and mother to leave. From this we can conclude that a man leaving his father and mother upon marrying is a timeless principle rather than a command specific to only Eden.⁵ A second reason the command for a man to leave his father and mother is surprising is that most Israelite men continued to live with their parents after marriage and it was the woman who left her home to join her husband and his family. This custom continued after God gave this command through Moses indicating that the command for a husband to leave his father and mother was not directly tied to who he lived with but to who had the greatest priority in his heart. Before marriage, a man’s greatest priority, next to honoring God, was to honor his parents. In this existing patriarchal society, a man’s parents had significant authority over him. When a marriage was arranged for a son by his parents, as often was the case, the groom’s parents often sought to continue to exercise this authority over their son because of the substantial financial cost to arrange the marriage.⁶ This, however, was not God’s plan for marriage. God calls a man to leave his father and mother by breaking the authority line to them and instead honoring his wife as his highest human obligation and greatest loyalty.⁷ The husband may continue to live in his father and mother’s house, but his wife must be first in his heart.

Genesis 2:24 further reveals God’s plan for marriage by saying that a husband should, “hold fast to his wife.” The husband is not only to leave his father and mother but he is to hold fast to his wife. Holding fast to one’s wife is a call for a husband to be united

⁵ John E. Hartley, *Genesis*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000), 63.

⁶ Hartley, *Genesis*, 63.

⁷ K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1996), 145.

to his wife, to cling to her, and to stick to her. In the same way, Israel is recurrently urged to stick to the Lord (Deut 10:20; 11:22, 13:5, etc.). The use of this term in marriage “to hold fast” or “to stick to” suggests that marriage is a covenant just as Israel is in a covenant relationship with God.⁸ The term “stick to” is also used in Numbers 36:7-9 to assure the Israelites that their inheritance will stick to them indicating that it will be theirs permanently.⁹ In the same way, God plans the marriage covenant between a man and a woman to be a permanent relationship. Jesus further affirms this in Mark 10:9 when referring to this passage by saying, “What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” God’s plan for marriage is to unite one man with one woman in a covenant relationship where the man sticks to his wife until God separates this union at death. While this covenant relationship exists on earth, the man should stick to his wife with not only permanence but with passion as well seeking to maintain the union in a loyal love that fosters an intimate bond, mutual trust, and an open vulnerability to secure a setting to explore their God-given sexuality.¹⁰ Holding fast to one’s wife is an essential part of God’s plan for marriage.

Genesis 2:24 reveals an additional part of God’s plan for marriage by saying that a husband and wife, “Shall become one flesh.” This further describes the distinctive unity that only a husband and wife share. This oneness is beautifully illustrated in Genesis 2:22 when God takes a rib from Adam’s side and uses it to form the woman literally making them each from one flesh so much so that when God brings the woman to Adam, he joyfully proclaims, “This is at last bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (Gen 2:23). From this it can be seen that when a man and a woman are united in

⁸ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary, Old Testament (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc., 1987), 71.

⁹ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 72.

¹⁰ Hartley, *Genesis*, 64.

marriage, they experience the closest of all human relationships becoming more closely bonded than even their blood kinship as they become one flesh.¹¹ This exclusive oneness is experienced and expressed through the sexual union a husband and wife share in marriage, through the conception and rearing of children in marriage, and through the spiritual and emotional unity that is created by becoming exclusively committed to one another in a one flesh, covenant relationship where everything is shared.¹²

Marriage is the plan of God. It is an exclusive, monogamous, covenant relationship between one man and one woman who are united by God as one flesh, leaving father and mother behind to hold fast to one another until death. When this plan for marriage was carried out in Genesis 2:24, what was once not good in the eyes of God became “very good” (Gen 1:31).

1 Corinthians 10:31: The Ultimate Purpose Of Marriage

Genesis 2:18-24 reveals marriage as the plan of God, but why did God make this plan? Is God’s ultimate purpose for marriage the emotional, physical, and spiritual intimacy a husband and wife shares together in marriage? Or is the ultimate purpose of marriage to create a stable environment for children to be raised? These are good things God gives people in marriage that are part of the purpose of marriage, but none are the ultimate purpose of marriage. Marriage is for our good but not primarily for our good.¹³ The ultimate purpose of marriage is to glorify God and put him on display which is the same ultimate purpose of everything God created. In Isaiah 43:7, the Lord says, “Everyone who is called by my name, *whom I created for my glory*, whom I formed and made” indicating that his people were created with the purpose of glorifying him. In 1

¹¹ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 71.

¹² Wenham, *Genesis, 1-15*, 71.

¹³ Henderson, *Catching Foxes*, 75.

Corinthians 10:31, Paul says, “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” Paul here is specifically referring to using one’s Christian freedom wisely by seeking the good of others and ensuring one’s choices do not cause another to stumble or sin. In its wider context, this verse reveals what should be the ultimate purpose of all things humans do, including marriage: which is to glorify God.

To glorify God largely means to put God on display. It is to display his character, his greatness, his holiness, his love, his mercy, his grace, his goodness, his forgiveness, his wisdom, his justice, his righteousness, and his truthfulness amongst other attributes he infinitely possesses. As John Piper argues, “Glorifying means feeling and thinking and acting in ways that reflect his greatness, that make much of God, that give evidence of the supreme greatness of all his attributes and the all-satisfying beauty of his manifold perfections.”¹⁴ When Adam was alone, he could fulfill his ultimate purpose to glorify God in many ways, but God in his infinite wisdom knew that Adam needed a helper to join him in marriage to help him more fully glorify God and put him on display. This is primarily why God said in Genesis 2:18 that it was not good that the man was alone. The phrase “not good” is strong language that not only means the absence of something good but also indicates a substantial deficiency.¹⁵ Adam’s ability to glorify God on his own was deficient in some ways, so God made a helper fit for him. The word “helper” in verse 18 is not a diminishing term that implies the woman is inferior to the man or made to be his servant. Elsewhere in Scripture the term helper is often used to refer to God himself as Israel’s helper who provides divine assistance (Exod 18:4, Deut 33:7, Ps 33:20). At the same time, the word “helper” does not imply that the helper is

¹⁴ John Piper, “Glorifying God...Period,” *Desiring God*, accessed April 20, 2020, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/glorifying-god-period>.

¹⁵ Hughes, *Genesis*, 58.

stronger than the one being helped and therefore his superior.¹⁶ As Matthew Henry so eloquently stated a truth that possibly originated with twelfth century theologian Peter Lombard,¹⁷ “The woman was made of a rib out of the side of Adam; not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved.”¹⁸ The need for a helper simply means that the one being helped is inadequate on his own to accomplish a task.¹⁹ The ultimate purpose for which Adam needed a helper was to glorify God in particular ways and put him on display. Eve made it possible for Adam to achieve this blessing that he otherwise could not do “alone.”²⁰ God created a helper for Adam and created marriage to help Adam more fully glorify God.

One way Eve helped Adam glorify God in marriage is through helping Adam play a role in creation to display God as creator. In Genesis 1, God displayed his glorious nature as creator as he created the heavens and the earth, the land and the sea, the vegetation and the animals, and man in his own image. God then commanded man to, “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it” (Gen 1:28), but Adam was unable to fulfill this command and display God as creator on his own. He was substantially deficient and in need of a suitable helper to play a role in creation and more fully glorify God. Therefore God created Eve and joined her together with Adam as one in marriage giving them the ability and the proper context to be fruitful and multiply and display their creator as creator.

¹⁶ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1-17*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1990), 176.

¹⁷ Matthew David Haste, “Marriage in the Life and Theology of John Gill, Samuel Stennett, and Andrew Fuller” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015), 112n.

¹⁸ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in Volume One*. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 10.

¹⁹ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 68.

²⁰ Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, 138.

Amazingly, God gave Adam and Eve the ability to play a role in creating other human beings made in God's image as they came together as one in sexual union in marriage. In doing so, God matched possibly the greatest human capability, to play a role in creating beings made in the image of God, with the greatest physical pleasure, sexual orgasm, allowing humans to be fruitful and multiply in marriage and put God on display.²¹ Without Eve's help in marriage, Adam would not have been able to glorify God in this way as creator.

Another way Eve helped Adam glorify God and put him on display in marriage is through the one flesh relationship they shared (Gen 2:23-24). When Adam was alone, he was one person in one being. This limited Adam's ability to display the majesty of the triune God who is three persons in one being. Adam was singular while God is a plurality. This was not good and a substantial deficiency that restricted Adam from fulfilling God's ultimate purpose for him in this way; Therefore God created a helper for Adam to help him image and gloriously display the triune nature of God. When God created Eve from Adam's side and joined them together as one flesh, their newfound oneness allowed them to uniquely display the eternal intimacy and order of the wondrous Trinity. Eve was Adam's daughter for she came out of him. Eve was Adam's sister for she shared the same creator and Father. And Eve was also Adam's wife for God joined them together as one flesh.²² No longer was Adam one person in one being. He was metaphorically joined together with Eve as one flesh creating the ability for the two who became one to intimately communicate and love one another in deep relationship displaying the glorious, eternal, communicative, loving relationship shared by the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit as three in one. Through this one flesh relationship, Adam and Eve were able

²¹ Bruce Ware, "Doctrine of Creation," unpublished class notes for Systematic Theology I (The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Spring Semester, 2008), 5.

²² Hughes, *Genesis*, 65.

to help one another glorify God and put his triune relationship on display fulfilling the ultimate purpose of their lives and their marriage.

The oneness and intimacy that Adam and Eve shared in marriage not only displayed what had always been true about the triune God, it also pointed to the intimacy and order of the future relationship between Jesus and his bride, the church.²³ Although this purpose of marriage was a profound mystery not yet revealed by God (Eph 5:31-32), this was another way Eve helped Adam glorify God in marriage. Through marriage, Adam could further glorify God and put him on display by illustrating the relationship Christ would have with his bride as Adam led Eve in the marriage relationship, sacrificially loved Eve, extended grace and mercy to Eve, and forgave Eve when she sinned against him post fall. Displaying this relationship between Christ and the church is not only part of the ultimate purpose of marriage, but it is also the pattern God gives his people to follow in marriage.

Ephesians 5:22-25: The Pattern For Marriage

Ephesians 5:22-25 reveals the pattern for marriage that is to be emulated to most effectively fulfill the ultimate purpose of marriage. This pattern that is to be followed in marriage is the marriage relationship between Christ and his bride, the church. It is a marriage that was established by Jesus as the head of the relationship through his self-denying, sacrificial love that culminated at the cross where he gave up his life for his bride. This astounding act of sacrifice and selflessness most fully displays the glorious and magnificent love of God. For as John said, “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends (John 15:13).” Jesus laid down his life for his bride demonstrating his great love for her. This self-sacrificing love of Christ for

²³ Hughes, *Genesis*, 65.

the church is set forth as the pattern for the husband's love for his wife.²⁴ In response to Jesus's sacrificial love, his bride, the church, is to joyfully and selflessly submit to his headship which is the pattern for the wife's love for her husband. This sacrificial love and joyful submission are two aspects of the same thing: selflessly giving oneself up for another.²⁵ The relationship between Christ and his bride described in Ephesians 5 sets forth this selfless giving as the pattern for marriage. When this pattern is replicated, marriage beautifully illustrates the gospel and the extent of God's great love for his people for all to see.²⁶

The detailed pattern of submission for wives to follow in marriage is clearly seen in Ephesians 5:22-24. In verse twenty-two, Paul tells wives to, "Submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord." The word submission here means "to voluntarily place oneself under" and was used in the military to describe the subordination of a soldier to one of a superior rank.²⁷ A good soldier voluntarily placed himself under the control of another and surrendered his own selfish agenda to live in submission for the good of others. In the same way, a wife is to voluntarily place herself under the control of another and surrender her own selfish agenda to live in submission for the good of another. Paul does not tell the wife that she is submit to every man, but only to her own husband. Her submission to her own husband is to be done, Paul says, "As to the Lord." This does not mean that the wife should treat her husband as if he were her Lord, but rather this submission is done in obedience to the Lord as a way of honoring God and putting him

²⁴ F.F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1984), 25.

²⁵ John Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1984), 214.

²⁶ Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 392.

²⁷ Grant R. Osborne, *Ephesians Verse by Verse*, Osborne New Testament Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017), 188.

on display.²⁸

The rationale for this headship is found in verse twenty-three where Paul says, “For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church.” The word “head” here for husbands does have the idea of authority attached to it, but this in no way implies that the husband is to harshly rule over his wife as a slave master rules over a slave.²⁹ A husband’s headship is patterned after Christ’s headship over the church which was used to save his bride rather than serve himself.³⁰ Therefore a husband’s authority over his wife is regulated by Christ’s example and is founded in love rather than in authoritarianism, self-assertion, self-centeredness or passivity.³¹

It is also important to note that a husband’s headship over his wife is not rooted in chauvinism or a belief that women are inferior to men in any way. Headship was rooted in creation before the fall evidenced by God choosing to create Adam first and then Eve (Gen 2:7), by God creating Eve to be Adam’s helper (Gen 2:18), by God giving Adam the authority to name Eve (Gen 2:23), by God speaking first to Adam after the fall (Gen 2:15-17), and by Adam representing the human race (Gen 3:6).³² Before the beginning of time, God chose this pattern of headship for the first marriage to point forward to the marriage relationship between Christ and his bride, the pattern for all marriages.

Just as a husband’s headship is to be patterned after Christ’s headship, a wife’s submission to her husband is to be patterned after the church’s submission to Christ. In verse twenty-four Paul says, “Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should

²⁸ Walter L. Liefeld, *Ephesians*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1997), 143.

²⁹ Bruce, *Ephesians*, 384.

³⁰ Thielman, *Ephesians*, 379.

³¹ Arthur G. Patzia, *Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1990), 269.

³² Hughes, *Genesis*, 65.

submit in everything to their husbands.” How does the church submit to Christ? The church’s submission to Christ is willing and free, not coerced. Her submission to Christ is complete and holds nothing back. The church’s submission should also be joyful recognizing the authority of a husband who sacrificially loved her, gave himself up for her, sanctified her, cleansed her, presented her, and provides and cares for her as seen in Ephesians 5:5-29. In the same way, a wife’s submission to her husband should be willing and free motivated by the desire to obey the Lord, glorify him, and put him on display. A wife’s willing submission to her husband is a selfless act of love to her husband and her God. As Paul noted in verse twenty-four, her submission to her husband should be in everything. Her submission should not be selective or refused when it becomes inconvenient. The wife should submit in everything with the exception of a husband asking her to sin against her God who holds first priority in her heart.³³ Paul pictures the wife’s submission as a joyful submission that recognizes the authority of a husband who imitates the self-sacrificial, provisional, protecting, nurturing, love that Christ provides for his bride, the church.³⁴ The ideal is a wife who does not withhold submission selfishly and a husband who does not demand submission unreasonably.³⁵ This is the pattern of headship and submission set forth by Christ and the church which husbands and wives should seek to emulate in their marriages to fulfill God’s ultimate purpose for marriage.

The detailed pattern of sacrificial love for husbands to follow is clearly seen in Ephesians 5:25-30. In verse twenty-five Paul says, “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” Here the self-sacrificing love of Christ for his bride the church is set forth as the pattern for a husband’s love for his wife.³⁶ The love

³³ Liefeld, *Ephesians*, 145.

³⁴ Thielman, *Ephesians*, 379.

³⁵ Liefeld, *Ephesians*, 145.

³⁶ Bruce, *Ephesians*, 386.

that Paul speaks of here in verse twenty-five is not an emotion of inner attitude, nor is it a feeling that men are invited to feel. It is a love of the will that seeks to sacrifice one's own desires for another. It is a self-giving love with the goal of a wife's good in mind. It is a love that selflessly cares for a wife without the expectation of a reward. It is a love that will make the ultimate sacrifice for a wife.³⁷ This is the type of love that Christ displayed for his bride as he gave himself up for her. In his love for his church, Jesus willfully took upon human flesh at the incarnation and "emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Phil 2:7-8)." Incredibly the Almighty, everlasting, holy, sufficient God of the universe willfully and lovingly came to this earth as a man allowing himself to experience hunger and thirst and tiredness and temptation and pain and ridicule for the first time. The God who once formed the stars in the sky with metaphorical hands washed the grimy feet of his brothers with literal hands. The God who was sovereign and master over all men who was without fault allowed himself to be wrongfully accused and tried, mocked and insulted, spit upon and stripped naked, his beard torn from his face, a crown of thorns placed upon his head, flogged, whipped, beaten and nailed upon a cross to die. The God who once spoke everything into existence and formed man out of the dust spoke his last words on the cross, "It is finished" and returned to the dust. Why would he do this? Why would he give himself up in this way? It was from a willful, selfless, self-giving love that was willing to make the ultimate sacrifice for the good of his bride with no expectation of a reward. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends! As John also said in 1 John 3:16, "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters." This love that

³⁷ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 374.

Jesus willfully demonstrated as he laid down his life and gave himself up is the same love that God calls husbands to give to their wives in Ephesians 5:25 when he commands them to love their wives as Christ loved his bride, the church. For husbands, marriage is a call to pick up one's cross and die to self, sacrificing one's flesh, one's temptations, and one's desires to give himself away for the good of his bride and for the glory of his God. When husbands follow this pattern of Christ's self-sacrificial love for his bride, God is glorified as the gospel and the love of Christ is put on display for all to see. Sacrificial love and joyful submission is the pattern set forth by Christ and his bride for marriage. When a husband and wife follow this pattern, these acts of selfless giving beautifully display the glory of God.

James 4:1-3: The Preventer of Glorifying God In Marriage

Marriage is the plan of God created with the ultimate purpose of glorifying him through husbands and wives following the pattern of Christ and his bride. Sadly, this plan, purpose, and pattern for marriage is not always carried out. What prevents husbands and wives from fulfilling this plan, purpose, and pattern in marriage? The preventer is not unmet felt needs by one's spouse that causes one to have an empty love tank as some would suggest.³⁸ The preventer is not compatibility issues that cause "irreconcilable differences" between a husband and wife such as personality differences or communication difficulties or disagreements on finances. This unbiblical needs-based approach makes self-fulfillment the purpose of marriage rather than glorifying God, which results in a pattern of selfishness rather than a pattern of mutual love and self-sacrifice. The true preventer of glorifying God in marriage is sin and selfish desires in one's heart. This is true even for a husband and wife who desire to glorify God with their marriage basing it on the pattern of self-sacrifice rather than self-fulfillment. As seen

³⁸ Chapman, *The Five Love Languages*, 23.

from James, sin and selfishness wage war within the hearts of God's people preventing them from glorifying God at times. In the same way, sin and selfishness prevents husbands and wives from glorifying God with their marriage.

In James 4, James is addressing dissension in the church that has fractured the community of believers. In verse one he asks, "What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you?" The original words for "quarrels" and "fights" here were most often used to describe physical conflicts between individuals and nations, but as with our English equivalents, they can also be used in a metaphorical sense to describe violent verbal disputes.³⁹ The believers that James was writing to were most likely engaged in these types of verbal disputes. The exact nature of the disputes are not known, but they likely involved harsh words, criticism, slander, and selfish inflexibility.⁴⁰ These are the same types of fights and quarrels that often take place between a husband and wife in marriage where there is a constant exchange of hurtful words.⁴¹ When these fights and quarrels take place within marriage, God's plan and pattern for marriage is not followed and his ultimate purpose for marriage is prevented.

Where do these quarrels and fights come from? Rather than replying to his own question with the answer of unmet felt needs or personality differences, James looks elsewhere for the cause. He looks to a more profound place deep within those involved in these conflicts. James looks to the desires of the heart. James answers his own question of what causes these fights and quarrels by saying, "Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?" Quarrels and fights are simply outward manifestations of what already

³⁹ Douglas J. Moo, *James: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries Revised Edition (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 175.

⁴⁰ Moo, *James: An Introduction and Commentary*, 175.

⁴¹ George M. Stulac, *James*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 140.

exists in the human heart.⁴² The word “passions” here in verse one means a desire for pleasure that is often sinful, unrestrained, and self-indulgent.⁴³ It is a self-centered desire for pleasure that does not have the glory of God or loving one’s neighbor as its purpose. These internal, selfish passions and desires in one’s heart “war within” the believer James says, as the Christian’s desire to glorify God and love his neighbor conflicts with his sinful desire to serve self.⁴⁴ This same conflict plays out within the hearts of husbands and wives on a daily basis as they decide if they will follow Christ’s pattern of sacrificial love to glorify God with their marriage or allow their sin and selfish desires to prevent them from loving one another and putting God on display.

James 4:2a shows how this internal conflict in the heart leads to external conflict. He says, “You desire and you do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel.” The word “desire” here is similar to “passions” in verse one. It does not have to be a negative term, but considering the context, as in verse one with “passions,” it is implied that this is a strong and unhealthy craving which is why the NASB translates “desires” as lusts.”⁴⁵ The desires or lusts that James speaks of are self-centered and cause quarrels and fights as James mentioned in verse one, but here it can be seen that the battle within escalates when one desires and does not get what he wants. James says, “You desire and you do not have, so you murder.” When one does not get what he wants, desire is frustrated and animosity escalates from quarrels and fights to murder as seen in verse two. The word “murder” here is most likely metaphorical similar

⁴² Dan G. McCartney, *James*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 208.

⁴³ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2000), 181.

⁴⁴ Daniel M. Doriani, *James*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P and R Publishing, 2007), 131.

⁴⁵ Craig L. Blomberg and Mariam J. Kamell, *James*, Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 188.

to the “fights” described in verse one. Even if murder is meant to be literal here, an increased internal frustration from unmet selfish desires that leads to increased external hostility can be seen by both interpretations.⁴⁶

James gives added explanation of the internal, self-centered cause of external troubles in verse two when he says, “You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel.” The cause of these quarrels and fights, James says, can be traced back to the frustrated, lustful desire to want more than we have and to be envious of what others have.⁴⁷ This same internal “bitter envy and selfish ambition” that James described in James 3:14-16 is the cause of the struggles that are producing great dissension in the church which is preventing them from glorifying God as they were created to do. In the same way, frustrated, sinful desires in a husband and wife’s heart that selfishly lust for more than they have can lead to increased animosity within the marriage causing great dissension and metaphorical murder of each other’s character. These self-centered desires that result in covetousness, quarrels, fights, and murder stand in great opposition to the self-sacrificing desires that Christ calls husbands and wives to in Ephesians 5. When these self-centered desires are acted upon in marriage, they prevent husbands and wives from following the plan and pattern for marriage and prevent them from fulfilling the ultimate purpose of marriage which is to glorify God and put him on display.

2 Corinthians 5:14-15: The Power For Glorifying God In Marriage

God’s plan, pattern, and purpose for marriage can be thwarted by the preventer of sin and selfish desires within the hearts of husbands and wives. Thankfully God provides power for believers that frees them from being enslaved to sin and empowers them to overcome selfish desires so that their marriages can glorify God. This delivering

⁴⁶ McCartney, *James*, 210.

⁴⁷ Moo, *The Letter of James*, 182.

power that enables believers to no longer live for themselves is the gospel and sacrificial love of Christ described by Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:14-15.

In 2 Corinthians 5:14, Paul speaks of the controlling force at the center of his being that empowers him to carry out the New Covenant ministry to which God has called him to. This compelling power is the love of Jesus Christ as Paul says, “the love of Christ controls us (2 Cor 5:14).” Here there is some debate as to what type of genitive “the love of Christ” is. It could be a subjective genitive meaning “Christ’s love for us” or an objective genitive meaning “our love for Christ.” Most agree that it is the former. There are two primary reasons that support this conclusion. First, the immediate context emphasizes Christ’s sacrificial death which is the clearest expression of Christ’s love for his people.⁴⁸ Paul says Christ “died for all” (v. 14) and Christ died for their sake (v. 15). Christ’s love for Paul demonstrated by his death is the reason for Paul’s love for Christ.⁴⁹ Second, when a personal use of the genitive follows the word *agape* in Paul’s writings as it does here, it describes a person “having or showing love, not the one receiving it.”⁵⁰ From this observation, it can be concluded that Christ has and shows his love for Paul in verse fourteen rather than receives it from Paul. It is this sacrificial, *agape* love that Christ has for Paul that controls him and empowers him to no longer live for self but for Christ.

This was not always the case for Paul. In his previous existence as a Pharisee, the controlling power in his life was sinful, selfish zeal for Yahweh that led him to persecute those who followed Christ. As with all unbelievers, Paul was enslaved to the controlling power of sin which prevented him from glorifying God and caused him to live

⁴⁸ George H. Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 263.

⁴⁹ Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, Word Biblical Commentary Testament (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc., 1985), 285.

⁵⁰ Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2005), 418.

for self. This all changed on the Damascus Road when the despised crucified one revealed himself to Paul. As a result of this divine encounter, Paul's conclusion of who Jesus was changed from blasphemer to Savior. Jesus was no longer the object of his hate for he realized that he, Paul was the object of Jesus's love. Jesus was no longer a heretical sinner to Paul but the one who died to save Paul from his heretical sin. This understanding that Jesus, in his death, loved Paul became the controlling force in his life because Paul concluded: "that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised" (2 Cor 5:14-15).⁵¹ Because of his faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus, the controlling power of sin in Paul's life was broken, freeing him to live a new way of life controlled not by sin and selfish desires but by the controlling power of the love of Christ to live sacrificially not for himself but for God and others.

The word "controls" in verse fourteen also carries with it the idea of constraint. Paul is not only controlled by the love of Christ but he is constrained by it as well. This love of Christ overpowers Paul and sets forth the direction of his life and actions. His own self-centered goals and plans are no longer ultimate.⁵² Christ's love for Paul has gripped him and constrains him to a self-sacrificial love patterned by his crucified Savior. This love constrains him from submitting to his own sinful selfish desires and compels him to joyfully submit to Christ placing himself under the orders of his King.⁵³ This can be seen by Paul's ministry to the Corinthians which he describes as "for God" and "for you" in verse thirteen. His controlling force is no longer sinful, selfish desires like it is for those leaders challenging Paul's ministry in Corinth. He is now controlled, constrained,

⁵¹ Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1997), 289.

⁵² Mark A. Seifrid, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2014), 243.

⁵³ Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 264.

and empowered by the love of Christ to live with selfless devotion to God and to others for the glory of his Savior's name.⁵⁴

In the same way, the controlling love of Christ has the power to free husbands and wives from the controlling power of sin and selfish desires that enslaves them to a life of selfishness and prevents them from glorifying God with their marriage. This transformation begins when a husband and wife individually conclude, as Paul did, that Christ has died for their sake and was raised so that they would no longer live for themselves but for Christ. When they believe and trust in Christ for salvation, the controlling power of sin in their lives will be broken, freeing them to a new way of life controlled not by the power of sin but by the love of Christ. This sacrificial love that controlled, constrained, and compelled Paul to sacrificially live for Christ and others is the same love that can empower husbands and wives to follow the pattern for marriage that God set forth in Ephesians 5 where husbands are to sacrificially love their wives as Christ loves the church and wives are to sacrificially submit to their husbands as the church submits to Christ.

Although the sinful, selfish desires of the heart no longer enslave or control the believer, these passions are still at war within the Christian as James described in James 4. Yet through the sacrificial love of Christ which leads to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, husbands and wives can be empowered to constrain themselves from submitting to their sinful selfish desires and be compelled to joyfully submit themselves to Christ placing themselves and their marriage under the orders of their King. The power of the constraining and controlling love of Christ can be seen when a husband is tempted to fight and quarrel with his wife. When a husband is tempted to harshly criticize his wife's sin against him, the love of Christ can constrain him from sinfully lashing out and criticizing his wife harshly because he is reminded that his own sin was so severe that it

⁵⁴ Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 286.

required the excruciating, sacrificial death of his Savior. He is instead compelled to be patient and gracious as Christ was patient and gracious with him knowing that when he deserved death, Christ sacrificially loved him and gave himself for him. Christ's love compels him to sacrificially love his wife in the same way, not demanding his way, but laying himself down to do what is best for her. This does not mean he does not speak truth to her or confront her sin when needed. Because of Christ's controlling love, he chooses to graciously let love cover a multitude of sins, but when her sin proves to be habitual or of a more significant nature, he chooses to gently and mercifully speak truth in love to her (Eph 4:15). He does not selfishly manipulate her into doing what he wants to attempt to satisfy his own felt needs. He instead speaks truth in love to her calling her back to her heavenly Father who waits for her with open arms, back to her Savior who loves her and gave himself for her, and back to the Holy Spirit who will convict and comfort her so that she may glorify God as she was created to do. This is the controlling, compelling, constraining love of Christ that can give husbands and wives the power to overcome sin and selfish desires to sacrificially serve one another for the glory of God.

It is our marriage to Christ and an awe of his love for us that transforms our hearts which transforms our marriages empowering us to overcome the preventer of sin and selfishness and live out God's plan, pattern, and purpose for marriage.

Conclusion

Scripture presents marriage as the plan of God, the display of God and his glory as the ultimate purpose of marriage, the relationship between Jesus and his bride as the pattern to fulfill this purpose, sin and selfish desires of the heart as the preventer of fulfilling this purpose, and the gospel and love of Jesus Christ as the power to fulfill this purpose. This foundational understanding of marriage is essential for a husband and wife to behold the sacredness of their union in Christ so that they might use their marriage for the glory of God.

CHAPTER 3
APPLYING THE GOSPEL TO HEART ISSUES IN
MARRIAGE

Within marriage there are common themes which often surface as heart issues that prevent couples from glorifying God with their marriage. Biblical counseling principles most effectively prepare couples to glorify God in marriage by applying the gospel to the following heart issues: marital roles, in-law relationships, and physical intimacy in marriage. The following is an attempt to examine these heart issues and apply the power of the gospel to them using exclusively contemporary sources.

Applying the Gospel to Roles in Marriage

In the beginning, God set forth a plan for complementary roles for husbands and wives in marriage. In Genesis 1, God created man and woman in his image and told them to subdue the earth and have dominion over all living things. They were both called to rule the earth together. However, they were not to do so as “unisexual” creatures ruling without roles or by roles of their own choosing. God established his plan for gender specific roles in Genesis 2 designating the husband to have ultimate responsibility and authority over the marriage and designating the wife to be his suitable helper (Gen 2:18). As Köstenberger and Jones argue in *God, Family, and Marriage*, “While the fall changed the marital relationship forever, God’s ideal for marriage as articulated in Genesis 1 and 2 nonetheless continued to set the standard for the responsibilities and roles of husbands and wives toward each other in the subsequent history of humanity.”¹ In Ephesians 5:22-

¹Andreas Köstenberger and David Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 28.

33, God further established his plan for the roles of husbands and wives in marriage by setting forth the relationship between Christ and the church as the pattern to be copied by husbands and wives. As Geoffrey Bromiley eloquently states, “As God made man in his own image, so he made earthly marriage in the image of his own eternal marriage with his people.”² Husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her and wives are to submit to their husbands as the church submits to Christ. God’s ultimate purpose for this plan and pattern of roles in marriage is not primarily to make marriages happier or to work better. As John Henderson says in *Catching Foxes*, “He is not chiefly concerned with keeping everybody fulfilled, or keeping societal harmony, or avoiding divorce, or cutting down on fights in the kitchen. Once more, those would be man centered reasons, not God centered reasons.”³ God is concerned with these things but they are not primary or central. God’s ultimate purpose for establishing this plan and pattern of roles within marriage is to glorify himself by putting the redeeming relationship of Christ and his church on display for all to see. When husbands and wives focus upon glorifying God through their assigned roles, everything else will fall into place by God’s design. As John Piper contends in *This Momentary Marriage*, “Keeping first things makes second things better” in marriage.⁴ This is God’s plan, pattern, and ultimate purpose for roles within marriage.

With this eternal significance and the secondary blessings of marriage roles in mind, what does it look like for husbands and wives to live out these assigned roles on a day to day basis? How can husbands and wives practically apply God’s plan, pattern, and purpose for roles in marriage? The role of husband will be considered first.

² Geoffrey Bromiley, *God and Marriage* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1980), 43.

³ John Henderson, *Catching Foxes: A Gospel Guided Journey to Marriage* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P and R Publishing, 2018), 102.

⁴ John Piper, *This Momentary Marriage: A Parable of Permanence* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 74.

As previously mentioned, the role of the husband is to have ultimate responsibility and delegated authority over the marriage and to love his wife as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. When these two descriptions are considered together, it can be seen that the role of the husband is to be a loving leader. Jesus set the pattern for this type of leadership by being a servant leader while on earth. He made himself a servant (Phil 2:6-8), came to serve and not be served (Mark 10:45), and displayed his servant leadership in acts like John 13:1-15 where he washed the feet of his disciples. Jesus did not use his authority as a leader to give orders and boss others around to serve himself. His concern was to meet the needs of others by sacrificing his own desires, comforts, time, and even his own life for the good of others.⁵ In the same way, a husband must use his authority and leadership to serve his wife for her good and for the glory of God. This servant leadership should not be done begrudgingly or out of disdain. A husband's leadership must be motivated by love as Christ's leadership over his bride was motivated by love.⁶ Christ's love for his bride is unconditional (Rom 5:8), volitional (Eph 1:6-7), intense (John 13:1), unending (Rom 8:39), unselfish (Phil 2:6-7), purposeful (Eph 5:26-27), sacrificial (Gal 2:20), and manifest in words and deeds (John 10:1-14).⁷ This is the same love a husband is to give to his wife as he joyfully serves her as the leader of their marriage.

For a husband to fulfill this role as a loving servant leader, he will be his wife's protector as Jesus protected his bride from the wrath of God by bearing her sins, becoming a curse for her, and dying in her place.⁸ This will require the husband to be both his wife's physical and spiritual protector. He must be her physical protector by

34. ⁵ Wayne A. Mack, *Strengthening Your Marriage* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P and R Publishing, 1999),

⁶ Kostenberger and Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family*, 59.

⁷ Mack, *Strengthening Your Marriage*, 40.

⁸ Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*, 86.

defending her from any physical harm or threats they encounter. He is to protect his wife spiritually by praying daily for her daily battle with the world, the flesh, and the devil. The husband should also be his wife's protector by taking the lead in setting standards on what will have influence over her and the family. This includes things like what television shows and movies will be watched, what music will be listened to, what spiritual authors and pastors will be listened to, and how social media will be used. The goal of the husband should be to protect his wife and his family from negative influences and practices that will draw them away from Christ. The husband should willingly seek input from his wife on these things as well, but he should be the initiator of these conversations and take the lead. He is to initiate but not dominate in these areas valuing the input of his wife.⁹ Another way a husband should lovingly lead his wife with spiritual protection is by taking the lead in seeking reconciliation with her when conflict emerges. In Ephesians 4:26-27, Paul says, "Do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil." Unresolved anger can be a great enemy in a marriage that causes strife and resentment. Therefore, a husband must take the lead in resolving conflict to protect his wife and his marriage. This means taking the initiative and humbly going to one's wife to seek reconciliation, even when she is the one at fault, just as Jesus took the initiative in reconciling his bride.¹⁰ This will be difficult for husbands, but as John Henderson says in *Catching Foxes*, "At the moment when love is the most difficult, it is most needed."¹¹ Husbands must follow the example of their spiritual protector and protect their marriage from sin and selfishness.

For a husband to fulfill his role as a loving servant leader, he will also need to be his wife's physical and spiritual provider. This includes loving his wife as he loves

⁹ Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*, 90.

¹⁰ Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*, 91.

¹¹ Henderson, *Catching Foxes*, 109.

himself and nourishing her as Christ does the church (Eph 5:28-29). In physically providing for his wife, the husband bears the primary responsibility of providing a roof over their head and putting food on their table through his work. This does not mean that a wife cannot work outside of the home or that she cannot make more money than her husband. It does mean under normal circumstances, that a husband will work and lay down his life and do whatever it takes to provide for his family. Although Christ is the ultimate spiritual provider for the wife, a husband is also to provide for his wife spiritually. This includes both informal spiritual provision by setting an example of godliness and formal spiritual provision by regularly gathering the family to provide spiritual nourishment through family worship, teaching, and prayer. This also includes choosing a gospel-centered church for the family to attend. Again, the husband is to initiate these things and not dominate them. He should seek wisdom and input from his wife and include her in the process. As John Piper asserts, the husband should take, “Primary responsibility, not sole responsibility.”¹² As Christ provides for his bride and nourishes her, so too must husbands provide for theirs.

Not only does Christ nourish his bride, but he cherishes her as well (Eph 5:28-29). This too is part of a husband’s role as a loving servant leader of his wife. The word “cherish” here is used one other time by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 2:7 to describe a tender love that a mother has for her nursing infant.¹³ This tender love is the same type of love that Christ has for his bride and the type of love a husband should give to his bride. It is the same type of love that Peter speaks of in 1 Peter 3:7 where he commends husbands to live with their wives in an understanding way showing honor to them. This includes joyfully making it a priority to spend quality time with one’s wife each day, carefully

¹² Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*, 89.

¹³ Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*, 87.

listening to her cares and concerns, willfully sharing one's own cares and concerns with her, expressing appreciation for who she is and what she does, speaking well of her to others and not belittling her, sacrificing for her, helping her, being courteous and kind, and telling her often that she is loved.¹⁴ This is how a husband fulfills his role in marriage and glorifies God by displaying the love Christ has for his bride.

The role of the wife in marriage is to be her husband's suitable helper and to submit to him as the church is to submit to Christ. One of the ways a wife helps her husband is through joyful submission. John Piper defines biblical submission as, "The divine calling of a wife to honor and affirm her husband's leadership, and help carry it through according to her gifts."¹⁵ As the wife submits to her husband and displays the same types of affections, attitudes, and activities towards him that the church is to display to Christ, she helps her husband display the relationship between Christ and the church glorifying God and honoring his Kingdom rather than her own.¹⁶ A wife's submission to her husband is commanded by God and should be continuous as the church's submission to Christ is continuous. Her submission should not be based on how her husband treats her or based upon her husband's intellect, talents, wisdom, or spiritual state. As John Henderson states, "Believing wives are to submit to their husbands not as the husband deserves but as Christ deserves."¹⁷ Jesus always deserves joyful and complete submission and wives are to submit to their husbands with this same type of joy and commitment.

A wife should also be willing to submit to her husband even when she does not agree with him or when she would make a different decision. In this case she must trust

¹⁴ Mack, *Strengthening Your Marriage*, 45.

¹⁵ John Piper, *Preparing For Marriage: Help for Christian Couples* (Minneapolis: Desiring God, 2012), 23.

¹⁶ Henderson, *Catching Foxes*, 125.

¹⁷ Henderson, *Catching Foxes*, 129.

God and submit believing God is sovereign and wise and will even use her husband's potential mistakes to conform them to Christ for his glory and their joy (Rom 8:28-29). This does not mean that there is no place for a wife to share her insight and opinions when decisions need to be made. Nor does it mean that a wife cannot disagree with her husband or seek to gently speak truth in love to him to promote change. A husband's headship should be used to serve his wife and minister to her and the wise husband will acknowledge that he is a sinner who needs help and will value and seek his wife's input. A wise husband will also want his wife to be excited about the decision that is made and trust that his wife will defer to him in the rare case to break a stalemate or for him to save her from choosing sin.¹⁸ This does not mean a wife will never make decisions on her own. There will be hundreds of decisions she makes every day without the need of consultation of her husband such as what shampoo she uses and what she has for lunch. This also does not mean that a wife should submit and follow her husband into sin. In this situation a wife must obey God rather than her husband (Acts 5:29). If a husband is oppressing his wife with his words or actions, the wife is free to seek help and should reach out to her church leadership (Matt 18) or to the police if necessary.¹⁹ A husband's authority should never be used to dominate or control his wife or passively follow her.

On a daily basis a submissive wife will honor and affirm her husband's leadership and help him carry it out in a number of ways. This includes respecting her husband (Eph 5:33) by making the home a place of encouragement where she does not unnecessarily criticize him, nag him, or remind him of his mistakes. It means choosing instead to dwell on the ways her husband blesses her, being grateful and expressing appreciation for all he does for her, praising him for his areas of success, and showing

¹⁸ Timothy Keller and Kathy Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the Wisdom of God* (New York: Penguin Books, 2011), 278.

¹⁹ Rob Green, *Tying the Knot: A Premarital Guide to a Strong and Lasting Marriage* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2016), 66.

confidence in his decisions.²⁰

Being submissive on a daily basis also includes being a loving companion (Gen 2:24). For husbands and wives to experience the full depth of companionship, Rob Green in *Tying the Knot* encourages wives to, “Seek to enjoy your husband emotionally, spiritually, and physically.”²¹ A wife becomes one with her husband emotionally by openly sharing her hopes and desires with him (Eph 5:25), giving attention to his interests and problems as significant (Phil 2:3-4), by being patient and forgiving with her husband as Christ has forgiven her (Eph 4:32), and by gently speaking truth in love to him when suggestions or corrections need to be made (Eph 4:15). A wife grows in oneness with her husband spiritually as his companion by maintaining a healthy spiritual life of her own through hoping in the Lord rather than living in fear, by focusing on the internal beauty of the heart which includes a gentle and quiet spirit rather than focusing on external beauty, and by seeking what is pure (1 Pet 3:2-6). A wife grows in oneness with her husband physically as she continually learns to joyfully give herself to her husband in sexual union (1 Cor 7:3-4).²² When a wife provides loving companionship and respectfully submits to her husband as the church submits to Christ, she fulfills her marital role and helps her husband display the glorious relationship between Christ and his bride.

Unfortunately this is often not the picture a husband and wife paints with their marriage. What prevents them from fulfilling their marital roles? It is the sin and selfishness that exists within their hearts. When Adam and Eve sinned and selfishly ate fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 3:6), God’s ideal for marital roles were corrupted. When Eve failed to consult her God-given leader in the garden and Adam failed to protect her, the divine pattern of marriage was broken resulting in a

²⁰ Mack, *Strengthening Your Marriage*, 23.

²¹ Green, *Tying the Knot*, 69.

²² Henderson, *Catching Foxes*, 129.

lasting pattern of struggle between husbands and wives (Gen 3:16).²³ Headship and submission are no longer used only to serve God and one another and display the relationship between Christ and the church. These roles are now commonly distorted, twisted, or abandoned with husbands and wives using marriage and their marital roles to fulfill their own desires and get what they want rather than serving their God and their spouse. Some husbands use their headship to aggressively dominate their wives while others passively dismiss their role of leadership in marriage and are lazy and indifferent. Some wives resist the role of submission and seek to take control of their marriage to fulfill their own desires while others attempt to manipulate their husbands and demand they take on the role of leadership.²⁴

The sinful flesh hates joyful sacrifice unto the Lord. When selfish desires rule the hearts of husbands and wives, selfishness will rule and reign in their marriage. What rules our hearts will rule our lives.²⁵ The desire for love, respect, honor, companionship, and sex are all good desires, but they are not essential for we have all we need in Christ. When these desires become demands that are exalted too highly, they will wage war on a marriage and prevent a husband and wife from fulfilling their marital roles and glorifying their God.²⁶

Having a “give to get” mentality in marriage will also prevent husbands and wives from joyfully fulfilling their roles in marriage. When a husband gives compliments to his wife to simply get her to have sex with him, his motives and intentions are not the same as Christ’s selfless motives to love his bride. When a wife gives sex to her husband to simply get his attention and affection, her motives are not the same as the church’s

²³ Kostenberger and Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family*, 27.

²⁴ Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*, 79.

²⁵ Paul Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands: People in Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P and R Publishing, 2002), 68.

²⁶ Henderson, *Catching Foxes*, 110.

motives are to be in her relationship with Christ. Having an “I will fulfill my role when you fulfill yours” mentality will also prevent a husband and wife from fulfilling their roles in marriage. As previously mentioned, a wife is to submit to her husband not as he deserves, but as Christ deserves and a husband is to love his wife not as she deserves but as Christ loved his bride and willingly gave himself up for her even when she was undeserving (Eph 5:22-33). Peter also instructs wives to be subject to their own husbands even if they are unbelievers not obeying God’s Word with the hope that they may be won by the conduct of their wives (1 Pet 3:1). From this we see that loving leadership and submission are not to be based on what one desires or deserves but instead based on what God commands for his glory and our good. When husbands and wives use marriage to try to get what they want, they will live a life of frustration and disappointment and fall short of living out their marital roles.

A final issue that may prevent husbands and wives from fulfilling their marital roles is a false picture of biblical submission. This can create a negative perception of submission and cause wives to see submission as a chore rather than a privilege. A false perception of submission can also cause husbands to misuse their authority. It is important for both husbands and wives to know that submission is not just for women. The headship/submission pattern began in heaven with Jesus submitting to his Father all the way to death (1 Cor 11:3). Men too are called to be submissive in some ways (Eph 5:21) such as submitting to the authorities God has placed over them (Rom 13:1). It is also crucial for husbands and wives to realize that the role of submission does not make the wife inferior. She is equally created in the image of God and has the same value and worth of her husband. Jesus too submitted to the Father while being equal in worth and personhood with him and Jesus submitted to his earthly parents yet was not inferior to them (Luke 2:51).²⁷ Husbands and wives must also believe that submission does not

²⁷ Köstenberger and Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family*, 64.

make wives silent slaves to their husbands. Submitting to one's husband does not mean a wife is to never have her own opinion, is always to agree with her husband, is never to use her gifts for the marriage, or to give her husband unconditional obedience. Her input and abilities should be greatly valued by her husband and used for serving the marriage and Kingdom of God. Her obedience to her husband should not extend beyond the parameters of godliness.²⁸ When a husband and wife reject these improper caricatures of biblical submission, the wife will find great freedom in submitting to her husband and will not be prevented from fulfilling her role in marriage by an improper view of submission.

The final matter to consider in this discussion of biblical roles in marriage is where husbands and wives find the power to fulfill these roles. When sin entered the world in Genesis 3, the marriage relationship became distorted and the openness, selflessness, and total oneness between a husband and wife were destroyed. As a result of their sin, husbands and wives are not able to fulfill these God ordained roles by their own power. The call for a husband to love his wife as Christ loves the church is too great for him. The ability for a wife to submit to her husband as the church is to submit to Christ is outside of her reach. They both need supernatural help. They need a Savior who can overcome the power Satan and sin has over humanity.²⁹ In Genesis 3:15, God promises that Savior who would come from the woman's seed and crush the serpent's head through his saving death and resurrection. It is through faith in this Savior, Jesus Christ, that people can be redeemed and brought into a right relationship with God which then allows them to rightly relate with each other. Jesus Christ breaks down the walls and barriers of sin that exist between both man and God and husbands and wives taking sinful, selfish

²⁸ Mack, *Strengthening Your Marriage*, 17.

²⁹ Kostenberger and Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family*, 28.

people and enabling them to fulfill their marital roles and become one flesh.³⁰ Jesus breaks the power of reigning sin and cleanses believing husbands and wives from unrighteousness (1 John 1:9) giving them the Holy Spirit who fills believers and enables them to overcome the cursed struggle by the power of Christ so they can rightfully fulfill their roles in marriage and love one another (Eph 5:18-21).³¹

Believing husbands and wives can choose to love and fulfill their marital roles because Christ first chose to love them (1 John 4:19). Jesus demonstrated his love for them by dying for them while they were still sinners (Rom 5:8). This love of Christ can compel, control, and empower husbands and wives to live not for themselves but for Christ which includes selflessly fulfilling their marital roles for the glory of God (1 Cor 5:14-15). When husbands are tired and selfishly want to use their wives to serve them, the Holy Spirit can remind them of the sacrificial love of Christ and compel and empower them to lay down their lives and desires for their wives as well. When wives are angry at their husbands and want to harshly criticize them, the Holy Spirit can remind them of the love Christ has for them and compel and empower them to selflessly submit and support their husbands not as they deserve but as Christ deserves. As Rob Green argues in *Tying the Knot*, “You can choose to give because Christ chose to give his life for you, and he continues to give you everything you need to enjoy God and glorify him (Phil 1:6).”³² This is the supernatural power husbands and wives need to fulfill God’s ordained roles for marriage that they might display the relationship between Christ and the church and glorify their God.

³⁰ Mack, *Strengthening Your Marriage*, 9.

³¹ Kostenberger and Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family*, 56.

³² Green, *Tying the Knot*, 60.

Applying the Gospel to Parent Relationships

For husbands and wives to most fully fulfill their roles in marriage and glorify God, they should establish biblical relationships with their parents and in-laws. This is no easy task. Wayne Mack contends in *In Laws: Married With Parents* that, “The matter of leaving is one of the most significant and problematic issues in marriage relationships.”³³ God anticipated this difficulty in marriage and therefore gave instructions for how husbands and wives are to relate to their parents in his first statements on marriage in Genesis 2.³⁴ God’s plan is for a man to leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife and become one flesh (Gen 2:24). This involves both a husband and wife leaving their family of origin and clinging to one another which signifies a new family unit that is distinct from their originating families.³⁵ God’s ultimate purpose for this plan is to glorify himself (1 Cor 10:31). This happens as husbands and wives follow the pattern of Christ and his bride. As Jesus left his Father and took on the church as his bride at the cost of his own life and held fast to her in a forever one spirit union, so too are husbands and wives to leave their parents and form a new one flesh union to display the glorious covenant keeping love of Christ and his bride.³⁶

How are husbands and wives to practically follow this plan and display this pattern to fulfill God’s ultimate purpose of glorifying him with parental relationships in marriage? It starts with husbands and wives moving their most important human relationship and highest priority from their own parents to their spouse. When a man and woman get married, they become one flesh. Scripture does not say this of any other God-honoring human relationship including the parent-child relationship. Therefore, there is

12. ³³ Wayne Mack, *In-Laws: Married With Parents* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P and R Publishing, 2018),

³⁴ Mack, *In-Laws*, 11.

³⁵ Kostenberger and Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family*, 77.

³⁶ Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*, 30.

something unique about the marriage relationship which gives it preference over the parent-child relationship. The husband and wife are to have a lifelong, exclusive relationship as one that they share with no one else. As one flesh, they are to have complete access to every aspect of each other's lives and there are to be no secrets between each other. This unique level of oneness and intimacy is to be exclusive and shared with no one else, including their parents.³⁷

As the loving leader of the marriage, the husband should take the lead in leaving his father and mother and holding fast to his wife. To follow the example of Christ leaving his Father and giving himself up for his bride, a husband must have the Lord as his head rather than his parents. He must learn to depend on the Lord as his leader, protector, and provider rather than his parents. His heart must be filled with God's desires to lead and love his wife rather than carrying out the ambitions of his parents.³⁸ A wife too should follow the command of her Lord to leave by holding fast to her husband and leaving the authority and oversight of her parents behind. She must put herself under the authority of her husband and joyfully submit to his leadership. She should no longer primarily seek care and protection from her parents but instead entrust herself to the provision and protection of her husband.

Leaving one's parents to become one flesh with a spouse in marriage does not mean abandoning or forsaking one's parents. Husbands and wives are to still honor their parents. As Wayne Mack says, "There is no time qualification in the fifth commandment (Exod 20:12)."³⁹ In marriage the command to honor one's father and mother changes from a call to obey one's parents to a call to show them gratitude and respect.⁴⁰ Honoring

³⁷ Mack, *In-Laws*, 11.

³⁸ Henderson, *Catching Foxes*, 118.

³⁹ Mack, *In Laws*, 12.

⁴⁰ Henderson, *Catching Foxes*, 119.

parents in this way includes thanking them for the valuable lessons they have passed on, praising them for the positive examples they have set, and showing appreciation for the love and care they have provided. Honoring one's parents as a married couple also means making time for them, actively seeking to know them and grow closer to them, and continuing to seek wisdom from them (Prov 23:22). Husbands and wives can also honor their parents by supporting them and caring for them by listening to their cares and concerns, praying for them, and seeking to meet their needs as they grow older (1Tim 5:8).

Leaving one's parents and holding fast to one's spouse in marriage also includes changing the type of relationship one has with his or her parents. A husband and wife should no longer relate to their parents as dependents or as those under authority, but should relate to them as peers or friends. This includes seeking wisdom from parents and receiving counsel from them, but never placing oneself under their direction or control. A husband or wife should instead receive counsel from parents as they would receive it from a friend.⁴¹ As husbands and wives develop this peer or friend relationship with their parents, they should also seek to contribute to the lives of their parents by offering them care, humble counsel, and correction speaking truth in love when asked to or when necessary. This type of change in relationship between a parent and a child who becomes an independent adult can be seen by Jesus's relationship with his earthly parents. When Jesus was a child, he honored his parents by submitting to them (Luke 2:51). However, when Jesus was an adult, he honored Mary by caring for her (John 19:27) yet he did not submit to her attempt to restrain his ministry (Mark 3:21, 31).⁴² In the same way husbands and wives should honor their parents but not put themselves under their

⁴¹ Henderson, *Catching Foxes*, 119.

⁴² James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2002), 124.

authority. Husbands and wives should seek to develop this type of friend relationship with their own parents and with their in-laws, placing them on equal footing and showing them both the same respect and honor.⁴³

Leaving parents and holding fast to one's spouse also means valuing and being more concerned with one's spouse's ideas, opinions, and practices than with one's parents. Husbands and wives should not need or seek the approval of their parents and should not place the desires of their parents over the desires of their spouse. This includes carefully examining one's beliefs and practices about family life and not just doing things because one's parents valued them or always did them. Husbands and wives should instead consider if the desires, beliefs, and practices they learned from their parents are biblical and beneficial to their own marriage. Making thoughtless decisions only because one's family has always done things that way is *not leaving*. Husbands and wives should examine their family beliefs and practices together and choose what they believe is most biblical and pleasing to God.⁴⁴

God's plan for husbands and wives to leave their fathers and mothers and hold fast to one another is clear, yet his plan is often prevented by the sin and selfishness of both the husband and wife and the parents of the husband and wife. If a husband or wife chooses to sinfully remain under the leadership, protection, and provision of their parents, it will have devastating effects on their marriage. Husbands will not be able to fully love their wives and lay their lives down for them and wives will not be able to freely submit to their husbands if they are wrongfully attached to their parents.⁴⁵

At the same time leaving the protection and provision of parents who have cared well for their child for twenty plus years can be a difficult task. Knowing this,

⁴³ Mack, *In-Laws*, 20.

⁴⁴ Mack, *In-Laws*, 14.

⁴⁵ Henderson, *Catching Foxes*, 118.

husbands and wives must be patient with one another in the early days of marriage as ties are broken. A husband should not see his wife's initial struggle to leave her parents as a discredit to his leadership, but rather as a statement of the strong love and care her parents provided her. For this he can be thankful rather than critical. If a husband is impatient with his wife in these early days as she learns to cut ties with her parents and leave, his sinful and selfish impatience will tempt her to run to her parents and further remain under their care preventing God's plan for her to leave and hold fast to him.⁴⁶ The process of leaving and holding fast must take place immediately upon marriage yet husbands and wives must also be patient and gracious with one another to prevent slowing down the process.

Another issue that can prevent husbands and wives from leaving their parents and holding fast to one another is not making each other their most important human relationship and highest priority in life outside of glorifying God. A marriage will slowly deteriorate if a wife believes that she is not the first priority in her husband's life. Husbands and wives cannot let their parents provide more joy, meaning, or influence in their lives than their spouse does or they will struggle to become one. The marriage relationship must be the most important human relationship for both husband and wife. No other person should get more of their love, energy, or commitment.⁴⁷ Generally this means a husband should not tell something to his parents that he does not share with his wife. A wife should not share big news with her parents before she shares it with her husband. A husband should not seek counsel from his parents without seeking counsel first from his wife. A wife should not do things for her parents that she is not willing to do for her husband. A husband should not forcefully push or demand his preferential family traditions and practices on his wife without first discussing them with her and deciding

⁴⁶ Green, *Tying the Knot*, 69.

⁴⁷ Keller and Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage*, 138.

together what best serves the Lord and their family. If husbands and wives do not make each other their top priority over their parents, God's plan for leaving and holding fast to one another will be prevented.

A final thing that can prevent husbands and wives from leaving parents and becoming one is the sin and selfishness of their parents. At times, parents will attempt to intrude, disrespect, disrupt, and create conflict between a husband and a wife. Parents may speak poorly about their daughter's husband tempting her to think less of him and to treat him accordingly. In these cases, husbands and wives must protect each other and their marriage by not allowing any man, including their parents, to separate what God has joined together (Matt 19:6). Husbands and wives should not allow their parents to demean their spouse. They should instead instruct their parents to lovingly confront their spouse in a biblical manner rather than gossip about them (Matt 18). At the same time, husbands and wives must be careful to protect the opinions their parents have of their spouse. A husband should not continually go to his parents and share all of the things he dislikes about his wife or tell them every detail of their latest conflict. Husbands and wives should instead seek to build each other up before their parents praising each other's character to help their parents grow in love and respect for their spouse. Lastly, husbands and wives must protect one another by making sure their spouse is included while spending time with in-laws. It can be easy for conversations with family to revolve around past memories and inside information which can make one's spouse feel like an outsider around his or her in-laws.⁴⁸ Husbands and wives must instead work to include each other into the lives of their in-laws.

If conflict does arise with either set of parents, the husband and wife should first take the issue to the Lord together, consider seeking counsel from a trusted pastor or friend, make a decision together about how they will move forward with the issue, and

⁴⁸ Mack, *In-Laws*, 21.

then go humbly to their parents to listen and speak truth in love to them. If the husband and wife still disagree with their parents after talking, they should not come under the authority of their parents and conform to their way.⁴⁹ Husbands and wives must instead hold fast to one another and protect one another so that their parents' selfishness does not prevent them from leaving and becoming one. As parents learn to adjust to these new roles early on, their adult children should be patient and willing to show grace as Jesus is patient and gracious with them.

Where does the power come from for husbands and wives to selflessly leave their parents and hold fast to one another while overcoming the sin and selfishness that seeks to prevent them from doing so? It comes from the volitional, unconditional, unending, unselfish, passionate, sacrificial, manifest love of Jesus Christ who left his own Father to take the church as his bride to be her leader, protector, and provider at the cost of his own life holding fast to her in a one spirit union for eternity.⁵⁰ It is Christ's love that can control, compel, and constrain husbands and wives to no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised (2 Cor 5:14-15). It is Christ's love that can empower and compel husbands and wives to live for him and selflessly love one another by leaving their parents behind to become one flesh following the pattern Christ set before them. It is Christ's love that can constrain husbands and wives from sinfully remaining attached to their parents by replacing this sinful desire with a desire for husbands to make Christ their head and wives to submit to their husbands as head rather than their parents. It is Christ's love that can control husbands and wives, empowering them to protect their marriage and one another from the sinful acts of disruptive parents by giving them the courage and power to confront their parents and speak truth in love when needed. It is because of Christ's sacrificial love so clearly

⁴⁹ Mack, *In-Laws*, 21.

⁵⁰ Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*, 30.

displayed on the cross that husbands and wives can be cleansed from their sin (1 John 1:9), become new creations in Christ (2 Cor 5:18), become filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph 5:18), and be ruled not by worldly desires or controlled by sin but ruled by Christ living by faith in him strengthened by his infinite power that his indwelling Spirit so richly supplies (Eph 3:20).⁵¹ As husbands and wives walk by the Spirit in this way, they will be empowered to not gratify the desires of the flesh being impatient and ungracious with their spouse and parents as this transition is made. They will instead be able to display the fruit of the Spirit offering patience, kindness, and love to each other and their parents (Gal 5:16-24). When husbands and wives are in awe of Christ's sacrificial love, their lives will be controlled by Christ and filled with the Spirit empowering them to lay down their selfish desires and leave their parents to hold fast to one another for the glory of God.

Applying the Gospel to Physical Intimacy

After telling husbands and wives to leave their fathers and mothers to establish their own family unit, God said they shall become one flesh (Gen 2:24). As Wayne Mack argues, "There is no place where this total sharing is more beautifully pictured or fully experienced than in the sexual relationship of the man and his wife."⁵² Sex was God's idea from the beginning. In Genesis 2, God established his plan for sex, restricting it to one man and one woman in a monogamous, covenant marriage relationship. In this context, God created sex to be good and pure as something husbands and wives experience without shame (Gen 2:25).

God created sex with many purposes that husbands and wives must practically seek to fulfill. The ultimate reason God created sex is to glorify himself. This purpose of

⁵¹ Henderson, *Catching Foxes*, 103.

⁵² Mack, *Strengthening Your Marriage*, 119.

sex transcends self-fulfillment and any other benefit between a husband and wife. According to Andreas Köstenberger in *God, Marriage, and Family*, sex, “is rooted in the heart and creative purposes of God and therefore should be oriented towards him.”⁵³ It is a vehicle a married couple should use to worship and glorify God by celebrating their spiritual union with Christ. Through this sexual union, the oneness of a husband and wife’s bodies paint a beautiful picture of both the oneness of their spirits with the Lord and of the union between Christ and the church.⁵⁴ Sex is also glorious because it points to the love that is shared within the persons of the Trinity and reflects the joy shared by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit within the Godhead. As a husband and wife adore one another, joyously give oneself to each other, and experience the pleasure of love while having sex, they reflect these same realities that eternally exist within the Trinity (John 1:18, 17:5). When sex like this happens between a husband and wife, God is worshipped and glorified.⁵⁵ As husbands and wives experience the physical union of sex, it can also give them a deeper understanding of the reality of the Trinity and Christ’s love for his bride. This will lead to a deeper understanding of God which should overflow into awe and worship of God that results in glorifying Him.

Another purpose of sex in marriage is service to God. After God created the man and the woman, He told them in Genesis 1:28 to, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it.” This was a command given to husbands and wives that is fulfilled by having sex and having children to continue the human race so that it can cultivate and subdue the earth for God. Therefore, having sex and having children is a service to God because it fulfills a necessary part of God’s plan for humanity.⁵⁶

⁵³ Kostenberger and Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family*, 80.

⁵⁴ Henderson, *Catching Foxes*, 177.

⁵⁵ Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage*, 271.

⁵⁶ Kostenberger and Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family*, 271.

A third purpose of sex within marriage is to deepen and maintain the oneness shared in marriage. Genesis 2:24 says that a man and his wife are to become one flesh. This union brings every aspect of a husband and wife's life together and sex is both the sign and means to accomplish this.⁵⁷ Sex is also a way of maintaining and deepening that union over the course of time. It is one of the most powerful ways for husbands and wives to give their entire selves to each other and to remind each other of the covenant they made to be each others wholly, permanently, and exclusively. In this way, Timothy Keller says sex functions as a husband and wife's "covenant renewal service."⁵⁸

A fourth purpose of sex is for husbands and wives to serve and give themselves to one another. One way they do this is by giving companionship. When God created man, He declared in Genesis 2:18, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." Then God created woman out of the rib of man and established the marriage relationship between them, including the sexual component, to provide companionship.⁵⁹ Another way husbands and wives can serve each other through sex is by giving pleasure. Sex within marriage is one of God's greatest gifts to humanity because of the exhilarating pleasure that can be experienced from it. Husbands and wives are called by God to sexually satisfy each other and give each other pleasure.⁶⁰ As Dave Harvey proclaims in *When Sinners Say I Do*, "Marriage means that our bodies are now claimed by God for the pleasure and service of another."⁶¹ This can be seen 1 Corinthians 7:3 where Paul says, "The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband." Here Paul is saying that a husband and wife are

⁵⁷ Keller and Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage*, 256.

⁵⁸ Keller and Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage*, 257.

⁵⁹ Kostenberger and Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family*, 81.

⁶⁰ Dave Harvey, *When Sinners Say "I Do:": Discovering the Power of the Gospel for Marriage* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 2007), 158.

⁶¹ Harvey, *When Sinners Say "I Do,"* 157.

obligated to give sexual intimacy within the marriage. The language used in this verse literally means “the payment of what is due,” which implies that a husband and wife are indebted to each other sexually.⁶² The reason for this is found in the following verse where Paul says that our bodies are not our own but belong to our spouse. Paul’s emphasis here is not on taking our rights from our spouse saying, “You owe me” but on giving our rights to our spouse saying “I owe you.”⁶³ In marriage, husbands and wives should be most concerned not with getting pleasure but with giving pleasure as they serve one another. When giving pleasure is more important than receiving it, husbands and wives will be living out what Paul describes in this passage.⁶⁴ Generously giving and serving one’s spouse is one of the keys to fulfilling sex and can solve many problems in marriage.⁶⁵

Another way husbands and wives serve each other through sex is by protecting each other from sexual temptation. In 1 Corinthians 7:2, Paul describes this protective purpose of sex by saying, “But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband.” He follows this with the command for husbands and wives to give up their conjugal rights to one another and then in verse five he commands husbands and wives to not deprive one another from sex except for an agreed upon short time for prayer. His purpose for giving this command is found in the latter part of verse five where he tells them to have sex so that Satan may not tempt them because of their lack of self-control (1 Cor 7:5). Abstaining from sex puts one’s spouse in danger of giving in to the great Tempter.⁶⁶ Dave Harvey asserts, “Sex in

⁶² Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians of The New International Commentary on the New Testament* ed. Gordon Fee (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1987), 279.

⁶³ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 280.

⁶⁴ Keller and Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage*, 268.

⁶⁵ Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*, 134.

⁶⁶ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 282.

marriage is to be a God-installed defense against temptation.”⁶⁷ A husband and wife are to serve one another and fight off sexual temptation with sufficient sexual intercourse. When sex is frequent in marriage, it diminishes temptations and helps prevent adultery. When sex is infrequent, it leaves one’s spouse unprotected and open to physical and emotional temptations that can lead to choices and actions that can destroy the marriage. Protecting one another by serving one another with frequent sex is a core purpose for marital intimacy.⁶⁸ As John Piper strongly proclaims in *Preparing For Marriage*, “A married couple gives a severe blow to the head of that ancient serpent when they aim to give as much sexual satisfaction to each other as possible.”⁶⁹ When these purposes of sex are regularly fulfilled in marriage, God will be glorified and husbands and wives will experience intimate oneness, intense pleasure, and protection against sexual temptation.

The pattern for sex in marriage that God set forth for husbands and wives to follow is the relationship between Christ and his bride. Just as Jesus took the lead and initiated an intimate relationship with the church, so to should husbands take the lead in sexual relations with their wives. When this pattern for sex in marriage is followed, the relationship between Christ and his bride is displayed, God is glorified, husbands and wives experience oneness, and God’s mission to be fruitful and multiply is fulfilled.

Sex in marriage is meant to be a beautiful, satisfying act of unity that glorifies God, but there are many things that prevent this from happening. As a result, sex often becomes an area of conflict and irritation in marriage. The greatest issue that prevents husbands and wives from fulfilling God’s purposes for sex in marriage is sin and selfishness which manifests itself in many different ways.

⁶⁷ Harvey, *When Sinners Say “I Do,”* 155.

⁶⁸ Harvey, *When Sinners Say “I Do,”* 156.

⁶⁹ Piper, *Preparing For Marriage*, 33.

Falsely Believing Sex Is Impure

One issue that prevents a married couple from fulfilling God's purposes for sex is the false belief that sex is impure, dirty, shameful, and not good. Some people grow up in churches and homes that only emphasize the wrong use and abuse of sex and place a disproportionate emphasis on abstinence before marriage. God's beautiful plan for sex in marriage is not taught which leads many, particularly women, to believe that being naked and having sex is unspiritual and shameful.⁷⁰ This unbiblical understanding of sex is a heart issue that can create a lack of desire for sex and cause anxieties and insecurities that prevent a couple from fulfilling God's purposes for sex. This heart issue can be changed by a proper biblical understanding of sex guided by the power of the Holy Spirit. This includes believing God created sexuality for good by giving a man and a woman to each other and telling them to become one (Gen 2:24).⁷¹ The Bible also contains many other passages that celebrate sex. In Proverbs 5:18-19, husbands are told to "Rejoice in the wife of your youth, a lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love." Similarly, the author of Song of Solomon says, "How beautiful and pleasant you are, O loved one, with all your delights. Your stature is like a palm tree, and your breasts are like its clusters. I say I will climb the palm tree and lay hold of its fruit (Song 7:6-8)." Song of Solomon 5:14 also proclaims the goodness of sex as a wife declares her physical attraction for her husband before having sex by saying, "His abdomen is like a polished ivory tusk, decorated with sapphires." Of this text, Tremper Longman says, "There is no shy, shamed, mechanical movement under the sheets. Rather, the two stand before each other, aroused, feeling no shame, but only joy in each other's sexuality."⁷² These are just a few examples of the many biblical

⁷⁰ Mack, *Strengthening Your Marriage*, 132.

⁷¹ Keller and Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage*, 253.

⁷² David B. Allender and Tremper Longman III, *Intimate Allies: Rediscovering God's Design for Marriage and Becoming Soul Mates for Life* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1999), 254.

passages that affirm the goodness and purity of sex. In *The Meaning of Marriage* by Timothy Keller, Keller argues “If anyone says that sex is bad or dirty in itself, we have the entire Bible to contradict them.”⁷³ Husbands and wives need to believe this biblical truth that sex is not dirty but is created by God and is good and pure for those who believe and know the truth.⁷⁴

To overcome feelings of shame while being naked with one another, husbands and wives need to believe the biblical truth that being naked with one’s spouse is not dirty or shameful, but rather how God originally created and intended things to be. This right understanding of nakedness with one’s spouse can be seen in Genesis 2:25 which says, “the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.” From this text it can be seen that nakedness was not always a shameful condition between a husband and wife.⁷⁵ Adam and Eve were unabashed like young children who are not ashamed of their nakedness as God intended them to be.⁷⁶ Even though this reality existed before the fall, Genesis 2:24-25 is meant to provide lasting foundational insight into marriage long after the fall. Therefore, being naked and unashamed does not relate only to the pre-fall situation.⁷⁷ This can be further seen from Hebrews 13:4 where the author says, “Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled.” What creates the context for a shame-free, honorable, and undefiled marriage is not simply perfect pre-fall bodies, but the one-flesh union and marriage relationship that was created in Genesis 2:24. This long-lasting covenant love relationship allows husbands and wives

⁷³ Keller and Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage*, 253.

⁷⁴ Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*, 131.

⁷⁵ K.A. Mathews, *The New American Commentary Genesis 1-11:26* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 159.

⁷⁶ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary, Old Testament (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc., 1987), 71.

⁷⁷ Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*, 32.

to be naked and unashamed without fear or worry or insecurities about their bodies because of the gracious nature of covenant love that covers a multitude of flaws.⁷⁸ To break free from the feelings of shame when being naked with one's spouse, husbands and wives need to believe the truth that God created them to be naked together and unashamed because of the covenant commitment that they share.

Guilt From Past Sexual Sin

A second issue that can prevent a married couple from fulfilling God's purposes for sex is feelings of guilt from past sexual sin. Memories of impure sexual relations may continue to return and harass them making it difficult for them to desire and enjoy sex with their spouse. Husbands and wives must realize that the power to overcome this guilt lies not within themselves but in the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ who has forgiven all of their trespasses by canceling the record of debt that stood against them with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross (Col 2:13-15) so that now if they confess their sins, he is faithful and just to forgive their sins and to cleanse them from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). Because of this truth, there is now no condemnation for them if they are in Christ (Rom 8:1). Their sins are covered and the Lord does not count their iniquity any longer (Ps 32:1-2). He has removed their sins as far as the east is from the west (Ps 103:12). Therefore as John Piper says, "There is no need for a child of God to carry any guilt into the marriage bed."⁷⁹ Christ died for their sins so that in him they could have guilt free sex regardless of their past. The cross was enough to satisfy the Father, so it should be enough to satisfy them and free them from the guilt of past sexual sin that attempts to prevent them from fulfilling God's purposes for sex in marriage.⁸⁰ Because of the cross of Jesus Christ, believing husbands and wives

⁷⁸ Piper, *This Momentary Marriage* 33.

⁷⁹ Piper, *Preparing For Marriage*, 38.

⁸⁰ Henderson, *Catching Foxes*, 195.

no longer need to hide from God in shame because of their past sexual sin as Adam and Eve sought to hide from God in shame in the Garden of Eden because of their sin (Gen 3:8). For husbands and wives struggling with shame from past sexual sin, Paul Tripp reminds them that, “The cross of Jesus Christ welcomes you out of hiding, because on the cross Jesus endured your punishment, he bore your shame, and he endured your rejection. He did all of this so that you wouldn’t have to hide from God.”⁸¹ Husbands and wives struggling with shame from past sexual sin can instead run to God, receive his grace and forgiveness, and find freedom from their shame in the goodness and loving kindness of their sacrificial Savior. When husbands and wives embrace this forgiveness through the cross and view themselves as God sees them, they will praise God for his mercy and will be freed from their guilt no longer seeing themselves as unworthy of God’s great gift of sex in marriage or underserving of their spouse’s affections. Being free from this guilt can also create an increased desire for sex with one’s spouse and allow one to enjoy sex as God intended it to be.

Selfishness

A third issue that can prevent married couples from fulfilling God’s purposes for sex is selfishness. This includes serving oneself with sex by focusing on getting rather than giving, forcing preferences upon one’s spouse, manipulating one’s spouse for sex, bargaining for sex, and being impatient with one’s spouse when making the transition into sex after getting married. The power to free oneself from this selfishness does not come from within. This power comes only from the love of Christ who laid down his life for us and was raised so that we may have the power to lay down our lives for him and for others (2 Cor 5:14-15). It is Christ’s love that can constrain us from selfishly using sex to serve self and instead compel and us to serve our spouse with sex. This includes

⁸¹ Paul David Tripp, *Sex and Money: Pleasures That Leave You Empty and Grace That Satisfies* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 138.

taking into consideration one's spouse's past experiences with sex and being patient and understanding. If a new wife is a virgin, she may want to take things slowly and not try everything new at once. A husband should be okay with this and patiently move at her pace. Or a husband may initially struggle with guilt over past sexual sin and need his wife to be patient and graciously remind him that there is now no condemnation for him because he is in Christ. Serving one's spouse in sex also includes willingly and joyfully giving up one's own preferences rather than forcing them on one's spouse. Husbands and wives should follow the example of Paul who chose not to demand or exercise his rights but instead focused on others serving them and caring for them with compassion (1 Cor 9:15).⁸² Selfishly using sex to serve oneself will prevent God's purposes for sex in marriage, but the love of Christ can empower husbands and wives to instead serve one another.

Misunderstanding a Spouse's Desires

A fourth issue that can prevent married couples from fulfilling God's purposes for sex is not understanding each other's desires. As Wayne Mack says in *Strengthening Your Marriage*, most husbands are more easily aroused than their wives and can be quickly and intensely stimulated simply by the sight of their wives. Husbands generally desire sex more frequently than their wives largely because of this.⁸³ This intense, visual stimulation may be why Jesus warned men about the danger of looking at women who were not their wives (Matt 5:28) and why Proverbs gives so many warnings to men about the danger of being seduced by women.⁸⁴ When wives do not understand that God has created their husbands to be different from them in this way, they can be tempted to believe that their husband's desires for them are wrong or perverted and then become

⁸² Green, *Tying the Knot*, 140.

⁸³ Mack, *Strengthening Your Marriage*, 129.

⁸⁴ Mack, *Strengthening Your Marriage*, 129.

resentful of their husbands' frequent desire for sex. A wife should instead be understanding of her husband's desire for sex and seek to be his helper by being willing to give herself to him to fulfill his desires for sex (1 Cor 7:3). If a wife does not seek to understand her husband's desires for sex, she may prevent God's purpose of sex of being a weapon against temptation and in doing so put an unnecessary burden on her husband.

A husband can also prevent God's purposes for sex by not understanding his wife's desires. As Wayne Mack observes, "As a rule, women are not aroused as easily as men. The sight of the male anatomy is not nearly as stimulating to a woman as is the sight of a woman to most men. Soft words, unselfishness, consideration, genuine love, patience, kindness, appreciation, compassion, acceptance, and tenderness are the things that excite a woman and prepare her for satisfying sex relations."⁸⁵ When a husband does not understand that God has created his wife to be different from him in this way, he can be tempted to believe that there is something wrong with her and become resentful of her perceived infrequent desire for sex. A husband should instead be understanding of his wife's different temperament and desires and seek to live with her in an understanding way (1 Pet 3:7). He must deny himself, put his wife's interests ahead of his own, and seek to treat her with gentleness and kindness not just when he wants to have sex but in a continuous way. This will create an environment that develops sexual unity within the marriage and will keep the differences between husbands and wives from preventing God's purposes for sex in marriage.⁸⁶

Other Underlying Problems

A fifth and final issue that can prevent married couples from fulfilling God's purposes for sex in marriage is other underlying problems between husbands and wives.

⁸⁵ Mack, *Strengthening Your Marriage*, 130.

⁸⁶ Mack, *Strengthening Your Marriage*, 131.

This can include conflicts about money, unhealthy in-law relationships, distorted marital roles, communication, and a general lack of love shown to each other. Conflicts in these areas over time will have an adverse effect on the couple's sexual harmony and make it difficult for them to achieve oneness in sex.⁸⁷ Frustrations, hurt, and resentment, will prevent a couple from experiencing oneness even while they engage in the physical act of sex. However when these underlying problems are solved by putting on love which binds everything together in perfect harmony (Col 3:14), a husband and wife's sexual problems will likely also be eased and God's purposes for sex will not be prevented.⁸⁸

The power for husbands and wives to move past an improper view of sex, guilt from past impure sexual experiences, sinful selfishness, misunderstanding, and other underlying problems is found only in Christ's sacrificial, immeasurable love for them, displayed so clearly as he hung on the cross being humiliated and forsaken for this sin. This is the only source of power that will enable them to say no to sin and lay down their selfishness as Christ laid down his life for them (2 Cor 5:14-15).⁸⁹ Knowing they are deeply sinful yet forgiven and loved by Jesus will empower them to love much and use the gift of sex in marriage to glorify God and serve their spouse.

Conclusion

Roles in marriage, in-law relationships, and physical intimacy often become heart issues in marriage that prevent couples from glorifying God. Biblical counseling principles that apply the gospel to these heart issues gives couples the power they need to overcome their sin and selfishness in these areas and fulfill God's plan, pattern, and purpose for marriage.

⁸⁷ Hervey Small, *After You've Said I Do: New Ways to Communicate in Marriage* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H Revell, 1968), 228.

⁸⁸ Mack, *Strengthening Your Marriage*, 127.

⁸⁹ Elyse M. Fitzpatrick and Dennis E. Johnson, *Counsel From the Cross: Connecting Broken People to the Love of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 69.

CHAPTER 4

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROJECT

The purpose of this project was to implement a premarital curriculum using biblical counseling principles at Bay Life Church so that young couples and singles would be more fully prepared to glorify God with their marriages. The project included three key components: recruiting participants for the class, developing the curriculum for the class, and teaching the curriculum.

Recruiting Participants

The targeted demographic for the premarital class was people between the ages of eighteen and twenty-eight who were either single, engaged, or married within the last year. This is the same demographic of the college and career ministry at Bay Life Church. To recruit people for the class in this demographic, I went to our college and career small groups three weeks before the class began and cast the vision for the class. I passed around a sign-up sheet and later contacted each individual who signed up to verify their attendance. Bay Life's College and Career Pastor also announced the class at their weekly large group gathering the same week and passed out invite cards to all who were interested. Sixteen people expressed interest in attending and nine of them attended each week of the class in person or online. This included three males and six females, of which seven were single and two were engaged.

Preparation of Curriculum

A six-week curriculum was developed entitled, "Marriage for the Glory of God." Each of the six lessons was written over the course of a single week. The first lesson was designed to lay a biblical framework for marriage that included the plan,

pattern, purpose, power, and preventer of biblical marriage. Each subsequent lesson then sought to apply this biblical framework to common matters experienced in marriage such as gender roles, physical intimacy, and communication. When the curriculum was completed after six weeks, it was reviewed by a six-person expert panel which included three lead pastors and three biblical counselors. Each individual reviewed the curriculum and filled out the provided curriculum evaluation rubric to provide feedback. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive and minor revisions were made to the curriculum.

Teaching Marriage for the Glory of God

This six-week class was taught on Tuesday nights at Bay Life Church. The duration of each class was one hour and fifteen minutes. The class was mostly lecture-based but did include time for questions and discussion as well. Each class was recorded and uploaded to YouTube each week so that individuals who were unable to attend a week in person could later watch online. Participants were given an outline of the lesson each week that included statements with fill-in-the-blanks and space to write notes.¹

Lesson 1: A Biblical Theology of Marriage

The objective of this first lesson was for the participants to embrace the plan, purpose, pattern, power, and preventer of biblical marriage. Before I started teaching, I gave everyone the premarital pretest to fill out. I then began this lesson by sharing real-life stories of people who did not realize they had valuable items. This included a man who owned a priceless painting without realizing its value, so he used it for the simple purpose of covering a hole in the wall. I then explained that people often treat marriage the same way because they do not understand who created it or what it was created for, so they use it only for simple purposes such as self-fulfillment. It is when we understand that God created marriage for his glory that we see the purpose of marriage goes beyond

¹ See appendix 1.

our individual felt needs. For husbands and wives to fulfill this greater purpose of marriage, they must know and embrace God's plan, purpose, pattern, preventer, and power to fulfill this greater purpose of marriage.

We then turned to Genesis 2:18-24 to take a more in depth look at God's plan for marriage. From this text I explained that marriage was not the plan of man. Adam does not ask God for the woman or for a wife. It is God who caused Adam to sleep. It was God who created the woman out of man to be his helper. It was God who brought the woman to the man. And it was God who performed the first wedding ceremony. Marriage was the plan of God not the plan of man and it was God who created marriage. We then discussed how God is the sovereign and wise creator of all things, including marriage, so he has the authority to plan how it should be. From Genesis 2:24, we see God's plan for marriage is for one man and one woman to be married for a lifetime and for this to be the plan of all future marriages.

From Genesis 2:24, I talked about other pieces of God's plan for marriage. First we see that a husband and wife are to leave their mother and father and establish a new family unit. I explained how since this was written by Moses when most Israelite men continued to live with their parents after marriage, this leaving is metaphorical rather than literal. It is to be a leaving in one's heart in which one's spouse takes greater priority than one's parents.

We also see from Genesis 2:24 that part of God's plan for marriage is for a husband and wife to hold fast to one another and become one flesh. This is to be a passionate and permanent relationship that is the closest of all human relationships where everything is shared including one's heart, body, and finances.

Next I talked about God's ultimate purpose for marriage. We first discussed some of God's secondary purposes of marriage such as companionship, a safe place for sexual pleasure, and a stable environment to raise children. I then emphasized that these things are good things that God gives us in marriage and part of the purposes of marriage,

but they are not primary. We then looked to 1 Corinthians 10:31 to see that the ultimate purpose of marriage is the same ultimate purpose for everything that God created which is to glorify himself. I explained how when this ultimate purpose of marriage is made primary, all secondary purposes will be more fully fulfilled.²

I then described how marriage specifically helps us to glorify God in ways we are unable to when we are single. This includes displaying God as creator by playing a part in creation when having children, displaying God's triune nature being three in one through the one flesh relationship becoming two in one, and by displaying the relationship between Christ and his bride the church. These are all things Adam was unable to do on his own, so God gave him a helper to help him glorify God in these ways.

Lastly I taught about God's pattern for marriage from Ephesians 5:22-25. The pattern that God gives us to emulate is the marriage relationship between Christ and his bride the church. We briefly discussed how the husband is to be the head of the marriage who leads by serving and selflessly laying down his life for his bride as Christ laid down his life for the church. And the wife is to joyfully and selflessly submit to her husband's leadership as the church is to submit to and follow the leadership of Christ. I explained that when this pattern is replicated, marriage most fully displays the gospel and the glory of God.

I had planned on teaching about the preterit and the power for a marriage that glorifies God, but we ran out of time due to the amount of time it took to cover preliminary issues such as the pretest and introductions. Therefore, we ended the class with a discussion on the importance of finding the right person to marry that will help one emulate the pattern for marriage that God has given and I closed in prayer.

² John Piper, *This Momentary Marriage: A Parable of Permanence* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 74.

Lesson 2: The Preventer and Power and Parent Relationships for the Glory of God

The focus of the second week of the class was to explain what prevents a husband and wife from glorifying God with their marriage and what empowers them to overcome this preventer. This was followed by instruction on how to develop parent relationships in marriage that glorify God. The first objective for the class was for the participants to understand the preventer and power for biblical marriage. The second objective was for the participants to embrace the plan, purpose, pattern, and power for biblical parent relationships in marriage as well as what prevents them.

I began the lesson by sharing some of the intense conflicts my wife and I and others have faced in marriage. This led to the question of what prevents a husband and wife from glorifying God with their marriage? I explained that the answer is sin and selfishness rooted in a disbelief of who God is and what he says is best. We then looked to Genesis 3 where the first marriage was prevented from perfectly glorifying God when Eve sinfully chose to believe Satan and herself over God when she ate the forbidden fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Gen 3:6). When Adam sinfully followed her and also ate from the tree, their marriage that once perfectly glorified God became sinfully filled with blame, shame, hiding and fear which prevented them from most fully glorifying God with their marriage. I then explained how this same preventer plays out over and over again in marriages and leads to fights and quarrels that prevent couples from glorifying God with their marriages. This led to a discussion on James 4:1-2 where James says the cause of these fights are the passions that are at war within us (Jas 4:2). I talked about how the heart is our control center which is full of desires. I explained that when Christ is ruling our hearts, he will rule our lives as well.³ But when our desires are

³ Paul Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands: People in Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P and R Publishing, 2002), 68.

not met, they can become ruling desires which we will sin to get or sin if we do not get.⁴ When these idolatrous desires begin to rule our hearts, they will rule our lives and cause fights and quarrels with our spouse that prevent us from glorifying God with our marriages.

We then discussed how husbands and wives can overcome these selfish desires that prevent them from glorifying God with their marriage. I explained that the power to do so does not come from within. Nor does the power to overcome come from better communication strategies or trying to fulfill each other's love languages. The power comes only from the gospel of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit which we receive through faith and repentance by the grace of God. I shared how the gospel frees us from the controlling power of sin and empowers us to live a life for God and our spouse for the glory of God. To further expound on this we turned to 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 where Paul says that the controlling force at the center of his being that empowers him to lay down his life for God is the love of Jesus Christ evidenced by his sacrificial death and resurrection. In the same way, I explained that as our understanding of Christ's love for us grows, it will have more control over our lives, freeing us more and more from sinful desires and compelling us to love God and love our spouse for God's glory. I then used the Cross Chart⁵ to demonstrate how our understanding and awe of Christ's love for us can continually increase as our understanding of our sinfulness and God's holiness continues to increase.⁶ This results in the cross and the power of the gospel growing larger in our hearts which empowers us to live for God rather than self. I ended this part

⁴ John Henderson, *Catching Foxes: A Gospel Guided Journey to Marriage* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P and R Publishing, 2018), 110.

⁵ See appendix 7.

⁶ Robert H. Thune and Will Walker, *The Gospel-Centered Life* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2009), 13.

of the discussion by saying if we want a better marriage, above all else we need to be more in awe of Christ's love for us which will control our hearts as it controlled Paul's and will lead us to love God and love our spouse more.

I then moved on to parent relationships in marriage and sought to apply the plan, pattern, purpose, preventer, and power framework to this topic. We turned to Genesis 2:24 to see that God's plan for parent relationships in marriage is for the husband and wife to leave their family of origin and cling to one another establishing a new family unit that is distinct from their parents.

I stated that God's pattern for parent relationships in marriage is Christ and his bride. As Jesus left his heavenly father in a sense and took on the church as his bride in a forever one spirit union, so too are husbands and wives to leave their parents and form a new one flesh union.

From here I moved on to God's ultimate purpose for parent relationships in marriage which is to glorify himself as husbands and wives leave their parents and form a new one flesh union putting on display the glorious covenant keeping love of Christ and his bride.

We then discussed how husbands and wives are to practically apply this plan, pattern, and purpose for parent relationships in marriage. I shared how this largely includes a shift in their primary human allegiance to one another and a shift in the type of relationship they have with their parents. This includes valuing and being more concerned with one's spouse's ideas, opinions, and practices than with one's parents. It also includes coming out from the authority of one's parents and treating the relationship more like a peer relationship than one of authority while still honoring one's parents by showing them gratitude and respect and spending time with them.

I then explained how the sin and selfishness of both husbands and wives and their parents can prevent them from having relationships that glorify God. This can include a wife remaining sinfully attached to her parents and seeking their approval and

permission. It can also include a husband valuing the opinion of his father more than his wife's. I also shared how the sin and selfishness of parents can also prevent godly relationships if they attempt to intrude, control, disrespect, exclude, and create conflict between a husband and a wife. When these things happen, God's plan, pattern and purpose for parent relationships will be prevented.

I ended this lesson by discussing the power available to husbands and wives to overcome this sin and selfishness which is the power of the gospel and the Holy Spirit. When husbands and wives are in awe of Christ's sacrificial love, their lives will be controlled by Christ (2 Cor 5:14-15) and filled with the Holy Spirit empowering them to lay down their selfish desires and leave their parents to hold fast to one another for the glory of God.

Lesson 3: Gender Roles in Marriage for the Glory of God

The focus of the third week of class was gender roles in marriage. The objective was for the participants to embrace the plan, pattern, purpose, power, and preventer of biblical gender roles in marriage. I began this lesson by talking about the success of the 1996 Chicago Bulls who many consider to be the greatest NBA team of all time. A big part of their success was each player knowing his role, seeking to stay within his role, and seeking to fulfill his role for the good of the team. I then explained that in the same way God designed roles for husbands and wives in marriage. When they know these roles, seek to stay within them, and seek to fulfill them, they will more effectively accomplish God's greatest goal for marriage which is to glorify himself.

I then discussed God's plan for gender roles in marriage which is a complementary plan that he set forth in Genesis 2 designating the husband to have primary responsibility and authority over the marriage and designating the wife to be his suitable helper. This plan was further clarified in Ephesians 5:22-33 where God set forth the pattern for gender roles in marriage which are the roles of Christ and his bride the

church. Next I stated God’s primary purpose for gender roles in marriage is not to make marriages happier or to work better but to glorify himself by putting the redeeming relationship of Christ and his church on display for all to see.

After this I shared how a husband and wife are to practically apply these roles in daily life. The husband is to be the loving leader, protector, and provider for his bride just as Jesus is the loving leader, protector, and provider for the church.⁷ The husband is to use his leadership role to love his wife and serve her. In expressing his leadership he is to initiate but not dominate.⁸ He is to protect her physically and spiritually by defending her from both physical and spiritual threats. He is also to provide for her both physically and spiritually as well. The husband is to provide physically by taking the primary responsibility for meeting their physical needs. He is to provide spiritually by setting an example of godliness, by regularly leading her in family worship, and by taking the lead in choosing a gospel-centered church for them to join. As Jesus provides for his bride by nourishing her and cherishing her (Eph 5:25-29), so too are husbands to nourish and cherish their wives.

After talking about the husband’s role, I moved on to how the wife is to practically apply her marriage role in daily living. She does this by being her husband’s suitable helper who submits to him as the church is to submit to Christ (Eph 5:22-24). I provided a quote to define a wife’s submission to her husband by John Piper who says submission is, “the divine calling of a wife to honor and affirm her husband’s leadership, and help carry it through according to her gifts.”⁹ I explained that this includes praising her husband for his success and showing confidence in his decisions rather than dwelling on his failures and unnecessarily criticizing him. It also includes submitting and

⁷ Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*, 89.

⁸ Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*, 86.

⁹ John Piper, *Preparing For Marriage: Help for Christian Couples* (Minneapolis: Desiring God, 2012), 23.

supporting his leadership even if she disagrees with him trusting that God will use even her husband's mistakes for their good (Rom 8:28-29). As her husband's suitable helper, the wife is also to use her gifts to help her husband make decisions and make their home a place of encouragement as she helps her husband carry out God's purposes for their marriage.

Next I discussed how sin and selfishness prevents husbands and wives from fulfilling their God-given roles in marriage. We looked at Genesis 3 to see where these gender roles were first corrupted as Eve failed to consult her God-given leader in the garden before she ate the fruit and Adam failed to protect her. I explained how this broke the divine pattern for marriage roles and resulted in a lasting pattern of struggle between husbands and wives (Gen 3:16). This includes husbands who seek to use their role of headship to selfishly and aggressively dominate their wives while others selfishly and passively dismiss their role of leadership in marriage in their laziness and indifference. It also includes wives resisting the role of submission seeking to take control of the marriage to selfishly serve themselves. When husbands and wives allow selfish desires to rule their hearts and use their roles in marriage to serve self in these ways, God's plan and pattern for gender roles in marriage will not be followed and God's ultimate purpose for gender roles will be prevented.

I concluded this lesson by discussing how the gospel and the Holy Spirit gives us the power to overcome sin and selfishness so that we may fulfill these roles for God's glory. We once again looked to 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 to see that the love of Christ can empower us to lay down our lives and our selfish desires to live for God and serve our spouse. We also looked back to the Cross Chart to see how we often minimize the power of the gospel by trying to perform for God which minimizes his perfect holiness. We also pretend we are not as bad as we are which minimizes our sin and makes us think better of

ourselves than we ought.¹⁰ When we try to perform or pretend, the cross shrinks and the power of the gospel in our lives is diminished making it more difficult to fulfill our marriage roles. But when we continue to grow in our knowledge of God's holiness and our sin, the cross becomes greater to us empowering us to fulfill our roles in marriage for God's glory.

Lesson 4: Sex in Marriage for the Glory of God

The focus of week four of this class was sex in marriage for the glory of God. The objective was for the participants to embrace the plan, pattern, purpose, power, and preventer of biblical sex in marriage. I began this lesson by sharing a story about how my phone once auto corrected a word to "sex" when I texted a friend about fantasy football. I said that it was awkward and uncomfortable which is how many people feel when talking about sex in the church. However, I shared that the gift of sex should be celebrated in the church when God's design for sex is put forth.

I first discussed God's plan for sex which was established in Genesis 2:24-25 when God told Adam and Eve that they were to become one. Sex was God's idea from the beginning and he restricted it to one man and one woman in a monogamous, covenant relationship. In this context, God created sex to be good and pure as something husbands and wives experience without shame (Gen 2:25). I then shared God's pattern for sex in marriage which is modeled by Christ and the church.

Next I taught about God's purposes for sex in marriage. His ultimate purpose is to glorify himself which happens as a husband and wife become one displaying the intimate love that is shared between the three persons of the Trinity who are also one. God is also glorified as a husband and wife become one in sexual union illustrating the intimate love Christ has for his bride. I then explained a few other purposes of sex which

¹⁰ Thune and Walker, *The Gospel-Centered Life*, 21.

includes companionship, a deepening of oneness, serving one another by giving each other pleasure, and protecting each other from lust and temptation (1 Cor 7:2-5).

After this we discussed how husbands and wives practically apply this plan, pattern, and purposes for sex in marriage on a daily basis. This includes pursuing the Lord and each other's heart rather than sex alone, both the husband and wife initiating sex often, almost always agreeing to sex when your spouse initiates it, having fun and enjoying the process, and making time to have sex often.

We then moved to what prevents a husband and wife from having sex in marriage that glorifies God. It is typically sin and selfishness rooted in a disbelief of who God is and what he says is right and true and best. This can manifest itself in sex in many different ways such as falsely believing that sex is impure or dirty, feeling guilty about past sexual sin, using sex selfishly, misunderstanding a spouse's sexual desires, and other underlying problems such as conflicts about finances or parent relationships. When husbands and wives allow sin to rule their hearts in these ways, selfishness will rule their bodies and their sex life preventing them from fulfilling God's plan, pattern, and purposes for sex.

Lastly I talked about the power to overcome this sin and selfishness which is the gospel and power of the Holy Spirit. I drew the three tree model of sanctification¹¹ based on Luke 6:43-45 to show that continued faith and repentance in the gospel of Jesus Christ alongside the reading of the Scriptures and the power of the Holy Spirit can change the desires and beliefs in our hearts which can change our decisions and actions.¹² Related to sex in marriage, this includes believing sex is good and pure rather than dirty or impure, believing past sexual sin is forgiven and that there is now no condemnation for

¹¹ See appendix 8.

¹² Paul David Tripp and Timothy Lane, *How People Change: How Christ Changes Us By His Grace* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2008), 97.

those in Christ (Rom 8:1), and believing it is better to serve one's spouse with sex rather than taking from him or her. When a husband and wife are empowered by the gospel and the Holy Spirit in this way, sex in marriage will follow God's plan and pattern and fulfill his purposes for sex.

Lesson 5: Communication in Marriage for the Glory of God

The focus of week five of this class was communication and conflict resolution in marriage for the glory of God. The objective of this lesson was for the participants to embrace the plan, pattern, purpose, power, and preventer of biblical communication in marriage. I began this lesson by sharing a story about my dog locking himself in my car with the keys inside. I tried to communicate with him to get him to unlock the doors, but it was much more difficult than trying to communicate this message to a human. I explained the reason for this is that God uniquely created men and women with the ability to communicate in a detailed and intimate manner as beings created in his image.

I then shared God's plan, pattern, and purpose for communication in marriage. God's plan for communication in marriage is for communication to be a totally free and complete sharing among equals that proceeds from a husband and wife's love of Christ and love for one another. God's pattern for communication in marriage is the incarnation (Heb 2:17). As Christ took on flesh and entered into our experience to unite us with himself, so too should husbands and wives seek to enter into each other's experience to understand and be united with one another through the process of communication. God's ultimate purpose for communication in marriage is to glorify himself as husbands and wives help each other to become more like Christ and grow in oneness putting God on display.

Next I discussed practical ways husbands and wives can fulfill God's plan, pattern, and purpose for communication on a daily basis. I shared that the beginning of this process is to first desire God in your heart above all else. We turned to Luke 6:43-45

to see that our words are an overflow of our hearts. When Christ is desired most and is the ruler of our hearts, he will rule our mouths and our words as well. The words we speak to our spouse will be filled love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22-23). The good roots in our hearts, desiring Christ above all, will produce good fruit which will be words that point our spouse to Christ. I then shared some practical principles for communication in marriage that included setting aside time each day to share each other's cares and concerns, showing a genuine care for each other's thoughts (Rom 12:9), being quick to listen and slow to speak (Jam 1:19), and not complaining but instead expressing gratitude (Eph 5:4).

After this I shared what prevents married couples from communicating in a way that glorifies God. It is primarily sin and selfishness rooted in the disbelief of who God is and what he says is best that prevents God-glorifying communication. I explained that when we have a word problem, we really have a deeper heart problem because our words simply reveal what we desire in our hearts (Luke 6:45). When selfish desires begin to rule our hearts, sin will rule our mouths as well and our purpose for communicating will move from seeking to glorify God to seeking to gain what we selfishly desire. When this happens, God's plan, pattern, and purpose for communication is prevented.

I then stated that the power to overcome this sin and selfishness is the gospel of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. I shared how better communication strategies and principles are not the long term solution. They may result in short term change, but to change the fruit we have to change the root. The path to communication redemption is inside out and it starts with the heart.¹³ I once again drew the three tree model of sanctification and discussed how an awe of the gospel that results in continued

¹³ Rob Green, *Tying the Knot: A Premarital Guide to a Strong and Lasting Marriage* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2016), 77.

repentant faith matched with the power of the Holy Spirit can change our desires and change how we communicate with our spouse helping us to glorify God with our words.

Lastly I explained how we should seek to resolve conflict and forgive one another in marriage. Once again hearts that love and desire God more than anything is the key and more important than conflict resolution strategies. However, I did share some conflict resolution principles that included removing the log from your own eye first (Matt 7:5), considering overlooking an offense if it is minor (Prov 19:11), making sure the time and place is right, not using “you always” or “you never” statements, not letting the sun go down on your anger (Eph 4:26-27), and realizing only God can change people (Rom 12:18). I concluded this lesson talking about a biblical model of forgiveness that is based on Ephesians 4:32 and Matthew 18:21-35. I shared Ken Sande’s Seven A’s of confessing sin when seeking forgiveness as well as Sande’s four commitments of forgiveness.¹⁴

Lesson 6: Finances in Marriage for the Glory of God

The focus of week six of this class was finances in marriage for the glory of God. The objective of this lesson was for the participants to embrace the plan, pattern, purpose, power, and preventer of God-glorifying finances in marriage. I began this lesson by sharing a story about how one of my friends only allowed his wife to use air conditioning ten days a year in their house to save money. She did not think he was being very generous to her with their money. I then shared that our God, however is a generous God. His extravagant generosity is displayed in the giving of his Son. And the Son’s generosity is displayed by the giving of his own life for the sake of his bride. I explained

¹⁴ Ken Sande, *Peacemaking for Families: A Biblical Guide to Managing Conflict in Your Home* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2002), 52, 84.

that God, in his generosity, gives husbands and wives temporal gifts to wisely steward for his glory and their joy.

I then shared God's plan, pattern, and purpose for finances in marriage. God's plan for finances in marriage is for husbands and wives to be unified, generous, and wise stewards of the finances God has given to them (1 Pet 4:10-11). They are to manage their money as one managing and caring for God's money. God's pattern for finances in marriage is the willing and joyful obedient generosity of Jesus who gave his life for the good of others and for the glory of God (Matt 20:28, John 6:38). As Jesus gave himself for the glory of God and the good of others, so too should husbands and wives generously give of their finances willingly and joyfully for the good of others and the glory of God. God's ultimate purpose for finances in marriage is to glorify himself as husbands and wives display the generosity of God with their finances making the most impact for the cause of Christ (1 Cor 10:31).

Next I discussed practical ways husbands and wives can fulfill God's plan, pattern, and purpose for finances in marriage on a daily basis. I shared that the beginning of this process is to first desire God in your heart above all else. When Christ is our greatest desire, he will rule our hearts. And when Christ rules our hearts, he will rule our bank accounts as well.¹⁵ I then provided some practical principles that included having only one bank account, making and following a budget, giving sacrificially early and often, making a plan to get out of debt, having an emergency fund, and wisely and shamelessly using some of the finances God has given to celebrate his kindness and goodness to you (Deut 14:22-27).

After this I shared what prevents married couples from using finances in a way that glorifies God. It is primarily sin and selfishness rooted in the disbelief of who God is and what he says is best that prevents married couples from glorifying God with their

¹⁵ Henderson, *Catching Foxes*, 198.

finances. When we allow sinful beliefs and selfish desires to rule our hearts, we will lose sight of the mission of God and allow selfish lusts to rule our hearts. This will result in selfish spending and frequent disputes with one's spouse which will prevent husbands and wives from glorifying God with the finances God has given them to steward.

Finally, I explained the power available to Christian husbands and wives to overcome the sin and selfishness that prevents them from using their finances to glorify God. This power comes from the love of Christ and the Holy Spirit. It is Christ's love that can change our desires and compel us to lay down our selfish financial desires to live for another (2 Cor 5:14-15). I shared that we must dwell on gospel truths such as 2 Corinthians 8:9 to grow in our understanding of Christ's love for us. When husbands and wives are in awe of Christ's sacrificial love, their lives will be controlled by Christ and filled with the Holy Spirit empowering them to lay down their selfish desires and use their finances for the glory of God.

The last thing I had the class do was complete the post-test and return it to me. I prayed for those in the class to embrace God's plan, pattern, purpose, and power for marriage and dismissed class for the last time.

Conclusion

"Marriage for the Glory of God" was designed to prepare young couples and singles at Bay Life Church for marriage. The class focused on the plan, pattern, purpose, power, and preventer of biblical marriage. This framework was applied to various aspects of marriage each week of class. Many of the participants said they were thankful for the class and that it helped them develop a stronger biblical understanding of marriage. A formal evaluation of the participants' learning will be included in chapter five.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

There are many young couples at Bay Life Church that get engaged, receive premarital counseling, and get married. The existing premarital curriculum that Bay Life offers does not use biblical counseling principles. The current curriculum is a combination of secular, needs-based, and integrationist resources. It places an unhealthy emphasis on behavior modification and meeting each other's felt needs. This methodology is man-centered and self-centered. It does not help young couples understand God's purpose for marriage, what prevents this purpose, or what gives them the power to fulfill this purpose. This has contributed to the development of many troubled, self-centered marriages at Bay Life Church.

The intent of this project was to implement a premarital curriculum using biblical counseling principles at Bay Life Church so that young couples and singles would be more fully prepared to glorify God with their marriages. The announcement of this premarital class was met with great excitement by many in our college and career ministry. Several people expressed a desire to know God's purpose for marriage more deeply so they would be more prepared for marriage in the future.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

The purpose of this project was to develop and implement a premarital counseling curriculum using biblical counseling principles at Bay Life Church. The need for the project was based upon the existing needs-based premarital curriculum at Bay Life. Many of the young singles and couples at Bay Life desired to have a great marriage, but they did not know God's primary purpose for marriage or how to fulfill that purpose

to have a great marriage. Introducing these young singles and couples to a premarital curriculum using biblical counseling principles would give them a biblical framework for marriage and a model of sanctification to fulfill it by the grace of God.

I fulfilled the purpose of the project through teaching a six-week class called “Marriage for the Glory of God.” The class introduced these young singles and couples to the plan, pattern, purpose, power, and preventer of biblical marriage. The curriculum sought to apply this biblical framework to common challenges in marriage and emphasized lasting transformational heart change through the faithful application of Scripture for the glory of God.

Evaluation of the Project’s Goals

The project had three goals to evaluate its effectiveness. The first goal was to develop a six-week premarital curriculum using biblical counseling principles to teach to young singles and couples. The curriculum was called “Marriage for the Glory of God.” This goal was measured by a panel composed of three biblical counselors and three experienced senior pastors.¹ The panel utilized a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the curriculum.² This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level. One reviewer commented, “Each lesson is rich with Scripture. No stone was left unturned. I appreciate the fact that hard issues are addressed.” Another reviewer said, “I am looking forward to utilizing this curriculum with an engaged couple this month.”

The second goal was to assess the knowledge of biblical marriage in a group of engaged couples and singles ages eighteen to twenty-eight at Bay Life Church. This goal

¹ The six-person panel consisted of the senior pastor of Grand Ave. Baptist Church, the lead pastor at Forest Park Baptist Church, the lead pastor at Northside Church, two biblical counselors from Heart Song Counseling, and one independent biblical counselor.

² See appendix 3.

would be accomplished when all of the participants in the premarital class completed the premarital pretest and the information was analyzed yielding a clearer picture of the understanding of marriage among these individuals.

I used a six-point Likert scale which included 18 survey questions.³ Nine participants who fit the criteria completed the pretest. The data was beneficial in gaining a clearer understanding of what the participants believed about marriage. Fifty-five percent of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that they had a strong biblical understanding of God's plan for marriage. Fifty-five percent also agreed or strongly agreed that they knew God's pattern for marriage. Eleven percent of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that they knew how a marriage could fulfill God's ultimate purpose of glorifying him in marriage. Forty-four percent agreed or strongly agreed that they knew what prevents God's purposes in marriage from being fulfilled. And 44 percent agreed or strongly agreed that they knew what the necessary power is to fulfill God's purposes of marriage.

The third goal was to increase the knowledge of biblical marriage in the same group of engaged couples and singles by teaching a six-week premarital class. I taught the curriculum on six consecutive Tuesday nights from 7:00 pm to 8:15 pm. There were nine participants who attended each class in person or online on YouTube. This goal was measured by administering the premarital pretest a second time as a post-test used to measure the increase in knowledge. This goal was considered successfully met when the t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a statistically significant positive difference in the pre and post survey scores. The premarital class did make a positive statistical difference, resulting in the increase of knowledge of biblical marriage ($t_{(8)} = 6.22, p <$

³ See appendix 2.

0.05).⁴

The average total of the pretest was 71 and the average total of the post-test was 93. The pre- and post-test showed there was a positive change in all 18 questions.⁵ The percent of participants that agreed or strongly agreed they had a strong biblical understanding of God’s plan for marriage increased from 55 percent to 89. The percent of participants that agreed or strongly agreed that they knew God’s pattern for marriage increased from 55 percent to 100 percent. The percent of participants that agreed or strongly agreed that they knew how a marriage could fulfill God’s ultimate purpose of glorifying him in marriage increased from 11 to 100 percent. The percent of participants that agreed or strongly agreed that they knew what prevents God’s purposes in marriage from being fulfilled increased from 44 percent to 100 percent. And the percent of participants that agreed or strongly agreed that they knew what the necessary power is to fulfill God’s purposes of marriage increased from 44 percent to 100 percent. Table 1 below shows these questions that all had positive change.⁶

Table 1. Pre- and post-project marital assessment results sample

Question	Pre-project MA	Post-project MA	Change
I have a strong understanding of God’s plan for marriage.	40	50	10
I know the biblical pattern God has provided for marriage.	39	51	12
I can clearly articulate how a marriage can glorify God.	34	51	17
I know what prevents God’s purposes in marriage from being fulfilled.	38	51	13
I know the source of power is to fulfill God’s purposes for marriage.	38	51	13

⁴ See appendix 4.

⁵ See appendix 6 for full results of all eighteen questions.

⁶ The maximum score for these categories was fifty-four.

It was particularly encouraging to see a strong increase in the participants understanding of how to glorify God with marriage. The title of the class was “Marriage for the Glory of God” and its greatest purpose was to equip the participants to glorify God with their future marriages. The pre- and post-tests also showed a strong increase in knowledge amongst the participants in how to glorify God in marriage through communication, sexual intimacy, and being a good steward of finances. Overall, eight of the nine participants showed a significant positive change in their understanding of biblical marriage.⁷ Many of them thanked me for the class saying it gave them a new perspective of marriage.

Strengths of the Project

The first strength of the project was the primary focus on the glory of God. This emphasis could be seen in the title of the class, “Marriage for the Glory of God,” and was the central focus of each week of the class. From 1 Corinthians 10:31 and Isaiah 43:7, I explained that God created all things for his glory. This includes marriage and the different aspects of marriage that couples experience such as gender roles, sexual intimacy, and communication. With each of these topics, we turned to Scripture to show how we can put God on display and elevate his glory above our own felt needs. In many premarital books and curriculums, including the current curriculum at Bay Life, the primary emphasis is man-centered focusing on how to meet each other’s needs. Throughout this class, God’s glory in marriage was made primary acknowledging that when first things are kept first, all secondary things will be better.⁸

A second strength of this project was the cohesive outline that laid a biblical

⁷ See appendix 5.

⁸ John Piper, *This Momentary Marriage: A Parable of Permanence* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 74.

framework for marriage. The outline of the class was built on the plan, pattern, purpose, power, and preventer of biblical marriage. This outline provided a clear, concise overview of biblical marriage. It also defined what prevents biblical marriage and what empowers it. The alliteration of this outline made it easy for the participants to remember. The simplicity of the outline made it easy to understand. The progressive nature of the outline made it easy to follow as each piece built upon the previous piece. And the flexibility of the outline allowed it to be faithfully applied to common aspects of marriage such as finances and parent relationships. Applying the same outline to these topics each week of class created repetition that led to a stronger, lasting knowledge of this biblical framework of marriage.

A third strength of this project was the practical application of each lesson. After unpacking God's plan, pattern, and purpose for a particular topic each week, I would give the class many practical ways to apply this plan, pattern, and purpose on a daily basis. For parent relationships it included practices such as intentionally including your spouse in conversation when with your parents, not allowing one's parents to demean your spouse, and not continually speaking negatively to your parents about your spouse. For sexual intimacy it included practical practices such as initiating sex with your spouse as much as he or she desires, almost always agreeing to sex when your spouse initiates it, and serving your spouse through sex by joyfully giving up one's preferences rather than forcing them on your spouse. For finances these practical applications included only having one shared bank account, making and keeping a budget, and always having an emergency fund of at least one thousand dollars (preferably at least three months' salary). These practical applications helped move broad, theological concepts into daily practices that would result in God being glorified and couples experiencing the joy of the Lord.

Weaknesses of the Project

This project was effective in meeting the proposed goals, but some weaknesses existed as well. The first weakness was not having enough class time each week to more fully cover each topic. Trying to apply the plan, pattern, purpose, power, preventer, and practical application each week to a new topic proved to be very challenging. The first week of class I only made it through God's plan, pattern, and purpose for marriage largely because much time was spent dealing with preliminary issues such as the pretest. This forced me the next week of class to combine the general preventer and power for marriage with the whole topic of parent relationships in marriage which caused me to move faster through the material and cut some things out. Each week I was challenged to present the full material and allow time for questions and discussions. Making the class ninety minutes instead of seventy-five minutes would have been helpful.

A second weakness of this project was the inability of the participants to meet in person at times due to COVID-19. This class was taught in October and November in 2020 in the midst of the pandemic. As a result, some of the participants missed a class or two due to contracting COVID-19 or being exposed to someone who tested positive for COVID-19. There was one week in particular when only one participant was able to attend the class due to COVID-19. The lone participant was a female and the topic for the class that evening was sexual intimacy in marriage, so I sent her home and taught the class to an empty room while recording it so I could later post it to YouTube. Thankfully all of the participants were able to either attend each class in person or watch it on YouTube each week, but the inconsistency of in-person attendance had a negative effect on the momentum of the class and on in class discussions. Unfortunately there was nothing I was able to do to overcome this weakness, but God was still gracious in accomplishing his goals through the class.

A third weakness of the project was the lack of diversity in the participants. Most of the participants were between the ages of twenty and twenty-two and most were

Caucasian. This is reflective of the demographics of our college and career ministry that the participants were recruited from. Although the participants were great listeners and promoted great discussion, it could have been helpful to have some older participants and some participants of different ethnicities to see how effective the curriculum was for a more diverse group.

A final weakness of the project, or what may be considered a limitation, was that the class was primarily foundational in nature. The aim was to provide an introductory understanding of key topics in marriage and then assess the participants' perceived understanding. The introductory nature of the class limited the depth of the curriculum at times to fit the target audience.

What I Would Do Differently

After reflecting upon this project there are a few things I would do differently. First, I would have provided a more detailed note page for the first five weeks of class. During the first five weeks of class, I gave the participants a printed outline of the class each week. The outline was very general and only provided the main points of the lesson and empty space to take notes. I eventually realized that I needed to repeat myself often to help the class write down all the things they wanted to write down. This took up a lot of time and was part of the reason I was running out of time each week. On the last week of the class, I gave the participants a more detailed outline that included many of the subpoints with fill in the blanks that allowed the class to keep up with me without having to repeat myself. On the last week of class I finished early largely due to more detailed note page that was given.

Second, I would have provided articles or reflective assignments for homework each week. Giving articles to the participants to read could have either reinforced what I had taught that week in class or prepared them for the topic I was teaching the upcoming week. Giving reflective assignments, such as asking the participants to journal how they

are currently glorifying God with their finances, could have helped the participants more fully apply what they were learning now before they get married so they will be more prepared when they do get married.

Theological Reflections

The primary theological focus of this project was glorifying God through marriage. I wanted this to be the central focus of the project because it is foundational for the ultimate purpose of marriage to be fulfilled and for married couples to experience the greatest joy in marriage. Five Scriptures were used to build this foundation: (1) God's plan for marriage (Gen 2:18-25), God's ultimate purpose for marriage (1 Cor 10:31), God's pattern for marriage (Eph 5:22-33), the preventer of a God-glorifying marriage (Jas 4:1-3), and the power to glorify God in marriage (2 Cor 5:14-15).

First, I focused on God's plan for marriage. It was important from the beginning to establish that it was God who created marriage not man. Marriage was God's eternal plan and His plan is for one man and one woman to join together in a covenant relationship leaving father and mother to hold fast to one another becoming one flesh. It was important to establish this truth to help the participants understand who established marriage and what it is supposed to look like.

Second, I asked why God created marriage? What was his ultimate purpose in creating this plan for marriage? As with all things, including when we eat or drink, God tells us that he created marriage to glorify himself and put him on display. This was vital for the participants to understand that the ultimate purpose of marriage goes beyond companionship and meeting each other's felt needs. These are secondary man-centered purposes that are most fulfilled when the ultimate God-centered purpose of glorifying God is fulfilled.

Third, I asked how can we most fully glorify God in marriage? This happens as we follow the pattern for marriage that God set forth which is the relationship between

Christ and his bride the church. To glorify God with their marriage, it is essential for husbands to love and lead their wives like Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. It is also essential for wives to submit to their husbands as the church is to submit to Christ. When husbands and wives follow this pattern, God's plan and ultimate purpose of marriage will be fulfilled.

Fourth, I asked what prevents God's plan, purpose, and pattern in marriage from being fulfilled? James tells us that it is the lustful passions that are at war within our hearts. These sinful desires are rooted in a disbelief of who God is and what he says is best. When these sinful desires are not met, husbands and wives often fight and quarrel and God's plan, pattern, and purpose for marriage is prevented. Understanding the root of one's sin is inside one's heart rather than across the room was essential for the participants to understand what truly prevents God from being glorified in marriage.

Fifth, I asked where the power comes from to overcome this preventer in marriage? Paul tells us the power comes from the love of Christ which can control, compel, and constrain us from acting on our selfish desires and instead laying down our lives as Christ laid down his life for us. It was crucial for the participants to realize that the power to overcome sin does not exist within them. They need a savior to rescue them from their sin so they may be filled with the Holy Spirit and empowered to love as Christ has loved them. With this power, the participants can follow God's plan and pattern for marriage and fulfill his ultimate purpose which is to glorify him.

This project's focus on glorifying God through marriage was imperative because it moved the primary focus of marriage off of self and on to God. Laying this general biblical framework of how to glorify God in marriage created the context to help the participants understand how to glorify God in specific areas of marriage such as gender roles, sexual intimacy, and communication. Hopefully these participants will rely upon the power of God in marriage for his glory and their joy.

Personal Reflections

This project grew out of my desire to help prepare young couples for marriage. A few years before I started my doctorate in biblical counseling, I began to do premarital counseling. The curriculum my own church was using was too man-centered and needs-based, so I tried to find another curriculum that focused on the glory of God and heart change that would lead to lasting transformation. I had a difficult time finding a curriculum like this that was user-friendly and strong in application, therefore I decided to use this project to create my own curriculum to more effectively prepare young couples for marriage. I found this to be a challenging, yet rewarding process as it was the first time I had ever written a curriculum for a class in the church.

One of the greatest outcomes of this project was growth in my own personal understanding of biblical marriage. I celebrated my twentieth wedding anniversary while doing this project. My own personal marriage has been filled with many joys and struggles. All of the reading, writing, thinking, and praying I have done for this project has helped me to reconsider the purpose of my own marriage and how effectively I am relying on the power of God to lead my wife and I to glorify God with our marriage. This has resulted in moments of confession to my wife and to the Lord for using my marriage to serve myself at times rather than serve my wife and glorify my God. This project has also led me to be more in awe of God and his love for me as I have spent much time meditating on the love Christ has for his bride, the church, of which I am blessed to be a part. Dwelling on Christ's love for me has empowered me to more fully lay down my life for Christ and love my wife as Christ loves the church.

Lastly, this project increased my desire to help strengthen existing marriages in the church and further equipped me to do so. Every marriage in the church, regardless of its condition, has the potential to more fully glorify God. Although this project focused on preparing young couples for marriage, the time spent reading, writing, and teaching the curriculum imparted many valuable insights to me that are applicable to existing

marriages as well. It has already been encouraging to see God use this newly acquired knowledge to help me counsel married couples to follow God's plan and pattern for marriage.

Conclusion

The hope for this project was to create a premarital curriculum centered upon the glory of God rather than on the felt needs of man. By the grace and goodness of God, the project resulted in an increased knowledge of the plan, pattern, purpose, power, and preventer of biblical marriage in the participants. I hope God will use this increased knowledge to help produce marriages that beautifully illustrate the relationship between Christ and his bride for God's glory.

This project also provided a new premarital curriculum for Bay Life Church to use in the future to more effectively prepare people for marriage. Hopefully this will lead to healthier, God-centered marriages that strengthen the church and glorify him. For the husbands and wives of Bay Life Church I pray, "May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 15:5-6). Amen.

APPENDIX 1
PREMARITAL CLASS OUTLINES

MARRIAGE FOR THE GLORY OF GOD

_Week 1: A Biblical Theology of Marriage

_Objective: To embrace God's _____, _____,
_____, _____, & _____ of
marriage.

_Key Passages: Gen 2:18-24, Eph 5:22-25, James 4:1-2, 2 Cor 5:14-15

∴ God's _____ for Marriage (Gen 2:18-24)

∴ God's Ultimate _____ for Marriage (1 Cor 10:31)

∴ God's _____ for Marriage (Eph 5:22-25)

∴ The _____ of God's Purpose of Marriage (James 4:1-2)

∴ God's _____ for Marriage (2 Cor 5:14-15)

MARRIAGE FOR THE GLORY OF GOD

_Week 2: The Preventer and Power in Marriage & Parent Relationships for the Glory of God

_Objective: To Embrace God's Plan, Purpose, Pattern, Preventer, and Power for Parent Relationships in Marriage

_Key Passages: Genesis 2:18-24, Exodus 20:12, James 4:1-2, 2 Corinthians 5:14-15

∴ The _____ of God's Purpose of Marriage (James 4:1-2)

∴ God's _____ for Marriage (2 Cor 5:14-15)

∴ God's Plan, Pattern, and Purpose for Parent Relationships in Marriage

.: Practically Applying God's Plan, Pattern, and Purpose to Parent Relationships in Marriage

.: The Preventer of God Glorifying Parent Relationships in Marriage

.: The Power to Maintain Godly Parent Relationships in Marriage

MARRIAGE FOR THE GLORY OF GOD

_Week 3: Gender Roles in Marriage For the Glory of God

_Objective: To Embrace God's Plan, Purpose, Pattern, Preventer, and Power for Gender Roles in Marriage

_Key Passages: Genesis 2:18-24, Ephesians 5:22-25, 2 Corinthians 5:14-15

∴ God's Plan, Pattern, and Purpose for Gender Roles in Marriage

1. God's plan for gender roles in marriage

2. God's pattern for gender roles (Eph 5:22-24)

3. God's ultimate purpose for gender roles

∴ Applying God's Plan, Pattern, and Purpose to the Husband's Role

_Key Idea: God assigns the husband to be the loving _____,
_____, and _____ of his wife as Christ is the loving leader,
protector, and provider of his bride.

1. The Husband as Loving Leader

2. The Husband as Protector

3. The Husband as Provider

∴ Applying God's Plan, Pattern, and Purpose to the Wife's Role

_Key Idea: God assigns the wife to be her husband's suitable _____ who
_____ to him as the church is to submit to Christ.

1. Wives submitting to husbands as the church submits to Christ (Eph 5:22-24)

2. The Wife as a Suitable Helper by Using Her Gifts

∴ The Preventer of God's Roles in Marriage

∴ The Power to Fulfill Gender Roles in Marriage

MARRIAGE FOR THE GLORY OF GOD

_Week 4: Physical Intimacy in Marriage For the Glory of God

_Objective: To Embrace God's Plan, Purpose, Pattern, Preventer, and Power for Physical Intimacy in Marriage

_Key Passages: Genesis 2:24-25, 1 Corinthians 7:1-5, 2 Corinthians 5:14-15

∴ God's Plan, Pattern, and Purpose for Sex in Marriage

1. God's plan for sex in marriage

2. God's pattern for sex in marriage

3. God's purposes for sex in marriage:

_To glorify Himself

_Service to God

_Service to One Another:

1. Companionship and a Deepening of Oneness

2. Giving Each Other Pleasure

3. Protecting Each Other From Lust & Temptation

∴ Applying God's Plan, Pattern, and Purpose to Sex in Marriage

∴ The Preventer of God's Roles in Marriage

1. Falsely Believing Sex is Impure
2. Guilt From Past Sexual Sin
3. Selfishness
4. Misunderstanding a Spouse's Sexual Desires
5. Other Underlying Problems

∴ The Power for Sexual in Marriage that Glorifies God

MARRIAGE FOR THE GLORY OF GOD

_Week 5: Communication in Marriage For the Glory of God

_Objective: To Embrace God's Plan, Purpose, Pattern, Preventer, and Power for
Communication in Marriage

_Key Passages: Luke 6:43-45, Galatians 5:22-23, 1 Corinthians 13, 2 Corinthians 5:14-
15, James 4:1-3, 1 John 4:19

∴ God's Plan, Pattern, and Purpose for Communication in Marriage

1. God's plan for communication in marriage

-Communication between husbands and wives is to be a totally _____ and complete
sharing among _____ that proceeds from their love of Christ and love for one
another.

2. God's pattern for communication in marriage

3. God's purposes for communication in marriage

∴ Applying God's Plan, Pattern, and Purpose to Communication in Marriage

-Husbands and wives fulfill God's plan, pattern, and purposes for communication on a daily basis by first desiring _____ in their hearts above all else.

1. Our Words are an Overflow of Our Hearts (Luke 6:43-45)

2. Practical Principles for Communication in Marriage that Glorify God

∴ The Preventer of God Glorifying Communication in Marriage

1. Communication is not the problem

2. Your spouse is never the cause of your sin

3. Don't Trouble Your Trouble

∴ The Power for Communication in Marriage that Glorifies God

1. The Power of the Gospel and the Holy Spirit to Glorify God with Communication

2. The Power to Resolve Conflict in Marriage

3. The Power to Forgive in Marriage

MARRIAGE FOR THE GLORY OF GOD

_Week 6: Finances in Marriage for the Glory of God

_Objective: To Embrace God's Plan, Purpose, Pattern, Preventer, and Power for Finances and Everything Else in Marriage

_Key Passages: Psalm 127, Matthew 19:3-9, 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, 2 Corinthians 8-9, Philippians 4:13

∴ God's Plan, Pattern, and Purpose for Finances in Marriage

1. God's plan for finances in marriage

_For husbands and wives to be _____, unified, _____, and wise _____ of the finances God has entrusted them with (1 Pet 4:10-11).

2. God's pattern for finances in marriage

_The _____ obedient generosity of Christ giving his life for the good of others and the glory of God (Matt. 20:28, John 6:38).

3. God's purpose for finances in marriage

_God's ultimate purpose for finances in marriage is to glorify himself as husbands and wives display the generosity of God with their finances making the most impact for the _____ (1 Cor 10:31).

∴ Applying God's Plan, Pattern, and Purpose to Finances in Marriage

-Husbands and wives fulfill God's plan, pattern, and purposes for finances on a daily basis by first desiring _____ in their hearts above all else.

1. If God Rules Our Hearts, He Will Rule Our _____

_When Christ is the ruler of our heart and our greatest desire, we see ourselves as:

-Stewards of our money rather than _____

-We experience _____ rather than a love of money

-We are generous in our giving rather than _____.

__The foundation of unified, faithful stewardship in marriage is a shared _____ in life – John Henderson. As Christians that mission should be to _____ God, advance the _____, build the _____, and _____ one another.

2. Practical Principles for Finances in Marriage that Glorify God

_Only have one shared _____. You cannot fully be one with two separate bank accounts.

_Make a monthly _____ and minimally follow the 80-10-10 rule. Adjust now if the wife will _____ in the near future (Prov 6:6-8). Let wisdom and values determine your budget, not _____.

_Either spouse can keep the budget, but both should be _____ and the husband should carry _____ responsibility. He is to initiate not dominate.

_Give sacrificially _____ and _____. Prioritize expenses based on the desire to give generously for the glory of God (2 Cor. 8-9).

_Make a plan to get out of _____. When you get out of debt, start _____ what you were paying so you can pay for things like cars with cash.

_Generally use money in a way that allows you to do things with excellence without _____.

_Wisely and _____ use some of the finances God has given to celebrate his kindness and goodness to you (Deut 14:22-27). Budget for this. Spend more on _____ than stuff. Stuff depreciates and but memories never will.

_Never _____ more than you make on a monthly basis, never carry _____ debt, and rarely take out _____ (Prov 22:7). Do not try to live at your _____ standard. They did not have what they have in their 20's. Be patient, be wise.

_Always have an _____ fund of at least \$1,000 you are committed not to use (Prov 6:6-8). Preferably have an emergency fund of _____ salary.

_Find a good financial _____. Set up automatic _____ right away even if it is a small amount and increase it each year.

∴ The Preventer of God Glorifying Finances in Marriage

1. Money is not the problem

_When we have a money problem, we have a _____ problem. We lose sight of God's _____ of our finances. We lose sight of all God has given us in _____ who meets our every need. We lose sight of the _____ of God and allow self and selfish lusts to rule our hearts (James 4:1-2).

_This results in _____ which is an attitude of the heart that is unwilling to wait or do without. We falsely believe we do not have enough. We falsely believe we deserve more and have the right to acquire more. We falsely believe we will be satisfied if we get _____. We demand to have all that our parents or friends have now.

2. Financial Strategies and Techniques Are Not Enough

_Utilizing financial _____ such as a budget and strategic spending will not solve a couple's financial problems. These techniques may in fact allow one to more effectively feed their selfish desires by helping them acquire what they want.

_Financial techniques and strategies cannot help us _____ to love God and people with our finances.

∴ The Power for Finances in Marriage that Glorify God

1. The Power of the Gospel and the Holy Spirit to Glorify God with Finances

_Hearts fixed on selfish desires are the problem and hearts _____ by the power of the gospel and the Holy Spirit is the solution.

_The path to financial redemption is inside out. It starts with the heart. To change how we use our finances we must change what we _____. We must want to love and glorify God more than we want possessions and things of this world.

_It Is Christ's _____ that can change our desires and control, compel, and constrain us to lay down our lives and desire to live and use our finances for another (2 Cor. 5:14-15).

_To grow in our understanding of Christ's love for us, we must dwell on gospel truths such as 2 Corinthians 8:9 – For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was _____, yet for your sake he became _____, so that by his poverty you might become _____.

_As we grow in our love for Christ, our financial desires will change from serving _____ to serving him and the way we use our finances will change.

.: A Quick Word About Divorce and Seeking Help

.: A Quick Word About Having Children

APPENDIX 2
PREMARITAL SURVEY

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify your current understanding of biblical marriage. This research is being conducted by Shane Drury for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. In this research, you will answer questions before the project and you will answer the same questions at the conclusion of the project. 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 completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

I agree to participate personal ID# _____

I do not agree to participate

Section 1: General Questions

Directions: Please mark the appropriate answer. Some questions may ask you to give your opinions using the following scale:

SD = strongly disagree

D = disagree

DS = disagree somewhat

AS = agree somewhat

A = agree

SA = strongly agree

1. I have a strong biblical understanding of God's plan for marriage.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
2. I know where to find passages in Scripture about God's plan for marriage.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
3. The ultimate purpose of marriage is companionship between a husband and wife.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
4. I know the biblical pattern God has provided for marriage.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
5. I have a strong biblical understanding of a husband's role in marriage.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
6. As a man, I understand how to fulfill my role in marriage. (If you are a female, do not answer).	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
7. I have a strong biblical understanding of a wife's role in marriage.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
8. As a woman, I understand how to fulfill my role in marriage (If you are a male, do not answer).	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
9. I know where to find passages in Scripture about roles within marriage.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
10. I have a strong biblical understanding of how sex within marriage can glorify God.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
11. I know where to find passages in Scripture on how married couples can have God glorifying sexual relations.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
12. I know how being a good steward of finances can glorify God in marriage.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
13. I know how to be a good steward of finances in marriage to glorify God.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
14. I know how communication within	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

marriage can glorify God.

15. I know how to resolve conflict in marriage in a God honoring way.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
---	----	---	----	----	---	----

16. I know what prevents God's purposes in marriage from being fulfilled.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
---	----	---	----	----	---	----

17. I know what the necessary source of power is to fulfill God's purposes for marriage.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
--	----	---	----	----	---	----

18. I can clearly articulate how a marriage can glorify God.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
--	----	---	----	----	---	----

APPENDIX 3

CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC

Premarital Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
Lessons to be Evaluated:					
1 = insufficient; 2 = requires attention; 3 = sufficient; 4 = exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Biblical Faithfulness					
The curriculum is biblically and theologically sound. All Scripture is rightly interpreted and explained.					
The material is faithful to the Bible's overall teaching on marriage.					
Scope					
The curriculum sufficiently covers each issue it is designed to address.					
The curriculum covers all major expected issues in a premarital curriculum.					
Methodology					
The curriculum demonstrates a biblical counseling methodology.					
Overall each lesson is clearly presented.					
Practicality					
Each lesson contains sufficient points of practical application.					
At the end of the class, participants will be well equipped to fulfill the purpose of marriage and navigate conflict.					

APPENDIX 4
T-TEST RESULTS

Table A1. *T*-test: Paired two sample for means

	Pre-Test Total	Post-Test Total
Mean	71.11111111	93.22222222
Variance	33.61111111	51.94444444
Observations	9	9
Pearson Correlation	-0.3357205	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	8	
T Stat	-6.2233098	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.00012647	
t Critical one-tail	1.85954804	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.00025293	
t Critical two-tail	2.30600414	

APPENDIX 5
MARRIAGE ASSESSMENT RESULTS

Table A2. Pre- and post-marriage assessment results

Participants	Pre-project MA	Post-project MA
1	71	85
2	79	78
3	82	98
4	66	92
5	67	95
6	66	99
7	70	99
8	67	96
9	72	97
Average	71.11	93.22

APPENDIX 6
MARRIAGE QUESTION RESULTS

Table A3. Pre- and post-project marital assessment results

Question	Pre-project MA	Post-Project MA	Change
1	40	50	10
2	36	50	14
3	33	36	3
4	39	51	12
5	41	50	9
6	14	17	3
7	38	51	13
8	23	35	12
9	38	49	11
10	44	49	5
11	32	52	20
12	36	51	15
13	32	48	16
14	45	52	7
15	42	51	9
16	34	51	17
17	38	51	13
18	34	51	17

APPENDIX 7
THE CROSS CHART

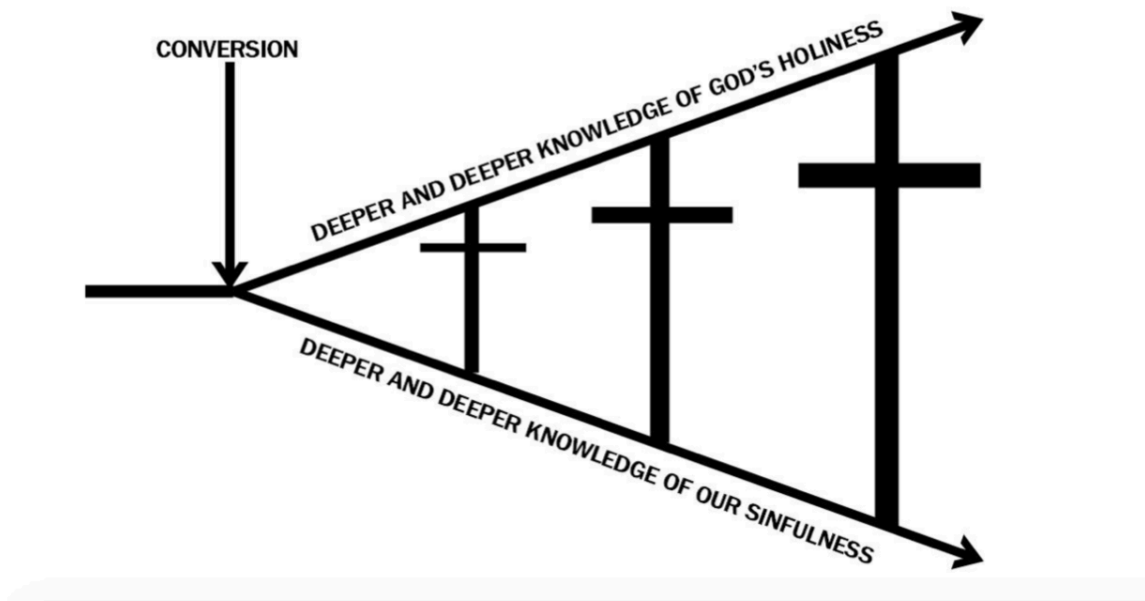


Figure A1. The cross chart¹

¹ Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2006), 104.

APPENDIX 8
THE THREE TREES

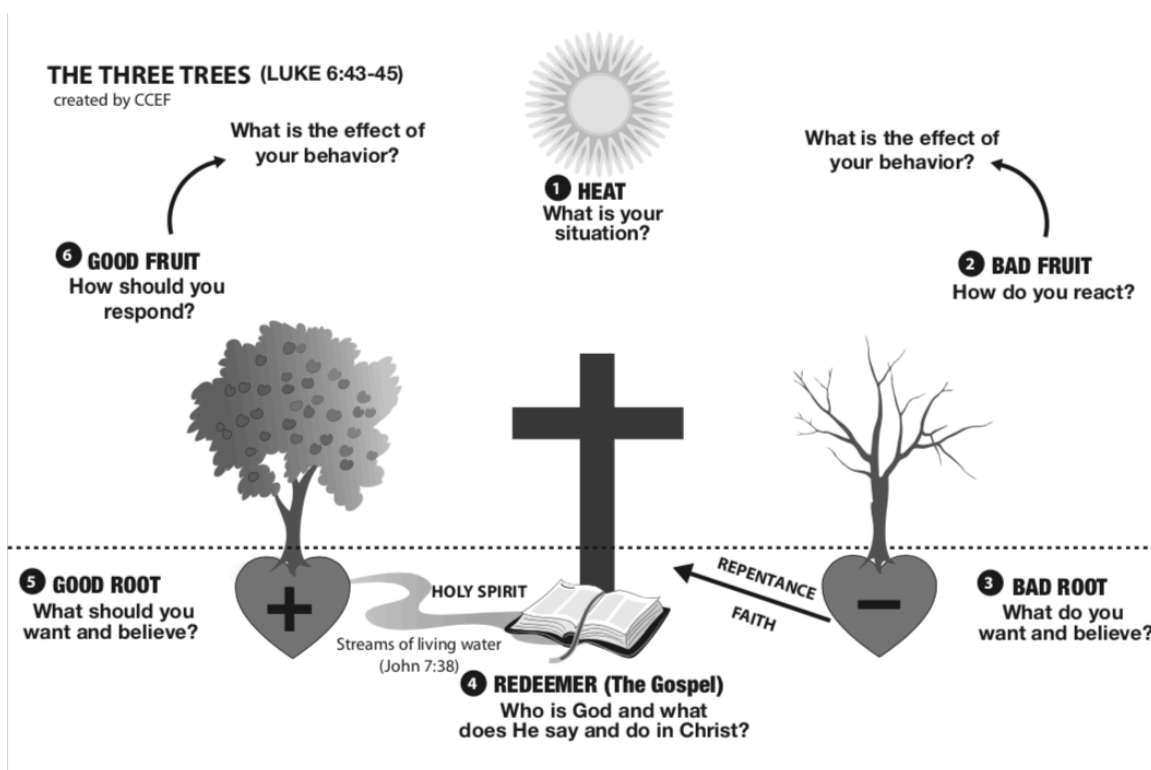


Figure A2. The three trees¹

¹ David Powlison, "The Three-Tree Model of Sanctification," unpublished class notes for *The Dynamics of Biblical Change* (Westminster Theological Seminary, 1993).

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ABSTRACT

IMPLEMENTING A PREMARITAL CURRICULUM USING BIBLICAL COUNSELING PRINCIPLES AT BAY LIFE CHURCH IN BRANDON, FL

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2021
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This project is designed to develop and implement a premarital counseling curriculum using biblical counseling principles at Bay Life Church in Brandon, Florida. The process involves assessing the knowledge of biblical marriage in newly married couples, engaged couples, and young singles and implementing a premarital curriculum using biblical counseling principles.

Chapter 1 introduces the context of Bay Life Church, along with the rationale, purpose, goals, and research methodologies of the project. Chapter 2 provides the biblical and theological foundation of marriage. Foundational to the design of this premarital curriculum are five biblical passages: Genesis 2:18-25, 1 Corinthians 10:31, Ephesians 5:22-25, 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, and James 4:1-3. Chapter 3 considers contemporary marital and premarital resources using biblical counseling principles and seeks to apply these principles to themes in marriage. Chapter 4 details the curriculum and weekly classes taught. Chapter 5 concludes with an overall evaluation of the project and recommendations for improvement.

VITA

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EDUCATION

BS, Southwest Baptist University, 2000

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MINISTERIAL EMPLOYMENT

Student Pastor, Second Baptist Church, Springfield, Missouri, 2004-2007

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