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EDUCATING MARRIED COUPLES FROM A BIBLICAL  
VIEWPOINT AT EVANGELICAL BETHEL CHURCH  
OF GOD IN BROCKTON, MASSACHUSETTS

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A Project  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Ministry

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by  
Herby Junior Jean  
December 2023

**APPROVAL SHEET**

EDUCATING MARRIED COUPLES FROM A BIBLICAL  
VIEWPOINT AT EVANGELICAL BETHEL CHURCH  
OF GOD IN BROCKTON, MASSACHUSETTS

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To the love of my life, Darline, and the people who inspired me, our children, Amanda,  
Dimitri, Olivia, Austin, Matthew, and Christian.

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## PREFACE

I am incredibly grateful to the Lord for allowing me to participate in the ministry of Evangelical Bethel Church of God by developing this project to educate married couples about marriage from a biblical viewpoint.

I want to thank my wife, Darline, for her prayers, support, and understanding while I worked to complete this doctoral degree in Family Christian Ministry. Her unconditional love and compassion have inspired me during frustration and struggle. I also want to thank our children, Amanda, Dimitri, Olivia, Austin, Matthew, and Christian, for their support and patience. I am blessed to have such beautiful children who keep me grounded despite unexpected situations.

I would also like to thank my pastor and spiritual mentor, Clifford Blanc, for the opportunity to work on this degree and write this project. I thank the Lord for his ministry in my life. He has discipled me and shown me sacrificial love for over ten years.

Last, I thank my professors at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Specifically, I am thankful to my doctoral supervisors, Dr. Kevin M. Jones, Dr. Matthew D. Haste, Dr. John Klaassen, and my project formatting editor, Betsy Fredrick, for their patience and guidance throughout this project. May the Lord continue to bless them and their family in the future.

Herby Jean

Brockton, Massachusetts

December 2023

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Members of Evangelical Bethel Church of God (EBCG) are committed to following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. EBCG recognizes the importance of teaching the Word of God to the most vulnerable. EBCG's theology of missions adheres to the Gospel according to Mark, emphasizing Christ's command that the Good News of eternal life is to be proclaimed to all creation. So "whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16)<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, our mission is to proclaim Jesus Christ to the world and to make his presence manifest through redemptive ministries of His Church—so that the Spirit of Christ may add many children of God into the sheepfold locally, nationally, and globally.<sup>2</sup>

Additionally, EBCG seeks to help married couples in the church live healthy marriages as God intended. By educating about the Word of God, EBCG will help married couples and people looking to be married by addressing biblical issues and questions regarding marriage. Educating married couples will also help them live Christ-centered lives, as demonstrated at Calvary by the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

#### **Context**

EBCG has served the Haitian community in Brockton, Massachusetts, and a sister church in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, for over twenty-six years. EBCG was founded on June 23, 1995, by Clifford Blanc. Blanc started the church with a small group of Haitian brothers and sisters looking for a place to worship and learn the Word of God to build

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the New International Version.

<sup>2</sup> Evangelical Bethel Church of God, "Mission Statement," accessed August 29, 2023, <http://evangelicalbethelchurchofgod.org/mission>.

intimate relationships with Christ and spread His gospel. EBCG follows the teachings of the fundamental truths of Christian orthodoxy. EBCG grew to over 250 members and now has 150 active members. Between 2004 and 2010, EBCG experienced a decrease in membership due to a leadership change under Blanc. The change in leadership occurred because some members had left the church and joined another church due to ongoing unsolvable problems. The congregation is 100 percent Haitian.

EBCG is a multigenerational community that serves the French/Creole Haitian population on Sundays and throughout the week. EBCG is committed to providing and maintaining for all people a place to worship God, where the Lord Jesus is glorified. The power of the Holy Spirit is honored, providing Christian fellowship and spiritual growth with love, acceptance, and forgiveness. EBCG proclaims Jesus's love throughout the community and beyond, teaching and preaching the Word of God and providing for the Christian education of all children and adults, preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ locally and worldwide to the salvation of lost persons. EBCG ministries consist of various prayer groups and small group ministries for youth and adults. The church's body is comprised of married couples in different stages of their marriage, including couples who have been married for more than forty years and couples who have been married for fewer than three years.

In Haitian culture, men usually make all decisions concerning family finances.<sup>3</sup> Often, a woman is dependent on her husband for financial support. Moreover, a husband may be involved in extramarital relationships, though the wife must remain silent to avoid repercussions from the husband. These mistresses are in relationships for

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<sup>3</sup> George E. Simpson writes,

In a legal marriage in the country of Northern Haiti where the principals look forward to an eventual marriage, the woman plays an important role. Haitian law does not permit a legally married woman to make an important decision involving money without her husband's consent. Twenty-five years ago, men whipped their spouses for disobedience, for criticizing their behavior with mistresses, because their meals were not ready or were insufficient, and because of jealousy, but such treatment is unusual today. (George E. Simpson, "Sexual and Familial Institutions in Northern Haiti," accessed October 15, 2021, <http://www.anthrosource.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1525/aa.1942.44.4.02a00080/>)

so long that they become common-law wives, resulting in a functionally polygamous relationship. These women who migrate from Haiti to the United States are looking to change their former lifestyle and seek counseling from church pastors to understand what it means to be in a sanctified marriage that pleases God. These women hope to be forgiven and liberated from their past ways of living. When they immigrated to the US and became members of EBCG, many of these women denounced their extramarital relationships and sought union with Christian men. EBCG is developing a counseling program to help married couples, including those previously involved in adulterous relationships, with finances, communication, and trust. EBCG does not support extramarital relationships and dedicates resources to help individuals abstain from such relationships.

Extramarital affairs are a growing problem in Haitian culture that needs attention. Many women are involved in adulterous relationships for financial gain but want to free themselves. According to Timothy T. Schwartz, “There are not many choices open to a woman to refuse an extramarital relationship, as these relationships provide a sense of financial security.”<sup>4</sup> For this reason, women often become isolated from the church because of the stigma associated with their past sins. If they have children born out of an extramarital relationship, they often feel isolated from not having the biological father present. Understanding the perception of a child born in an adulterous relationship, EBCG plans to incorporate counseling sessions to help these vulnerable children feel a sense of belonging when a parent seeks a marriage ordained by God.

Many women involved in extramarital relationships are more likely to feel a sense of brokenness and marginalization and wish they were never involved in a relationship outside God’s will. They often report a sense of guilt when trying to move forward in new relationships. EBCG is equipped to support these women while

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<sup>4</sup> Timothy T. Schwartz, *Sex, Family, and Fertility in Haiti* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2011), 177.

attempting to restore their relationships with Christ. Before becoming leaders in the church, women previously involved in extramarital relationships must complete a series of counseling sessions that teach the true meaning of spiritual relationships and marriage. In the past, EBCG church leaders have shied away from addressing the isolation issues felt by women who were previously involved in adulterous relationships. This has slowed women's recovery from traumatized pasts, preventing many from developing meaningful relationships with the Lord. Despite the hardships that remarried couples within EBCG endure, they still come to church to worship God because they have a strong sense of faith, hope, and desire to worship God.

Schwartz writes, "There can be no doubt that an extramarital affair in Jean Rabel, Haiti, is also somehow related to wealth. Most men who engage in an extramarital affair in Jean Rabel have a relatively high level of material resources in comparison to most other men in the commune."<sup>5</sup> Although charitable organizations from other countries give missionary aid to Haitian people, poverty remains a significant problem. As a result, men and women have participated in extramarital affairs for generations for basic survival. In extramarital matters, a woman secures herself and her children's home and basic needs. Many Christian missionaries have traveled to Haiti to help impoverished people and spread Jesus Christ's gospel. After realizing being in an extramarital relationship is not pleasing to God, many women choose to break away from their relationships and seek resources from charitable organizations. When these women immigrate to the US, they seek to live according to God's Word and decide to reach out to the church. EBCG has welcomed several women over the years who have reported being in extramarital relationships for financial benefits but now wish to obtain help to live godly lives, hoping to be in relationships accepted by God. In some cases, the women's partners have also come to see the light and convert to Christianity, letting go of

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<sup>5</sup> Schwartz, *Sex, Family, and Fertility*, 172.

adulterous relationships.

Some men use their financial status to lure single, vulnerable women into extramarital relationships in Haitian culture.<sup>6</sup> When individuals engaged in adulterous relationships come to Christ, they try to break the cycle of unholiness. However, they are often scrutinized by the church because of past sins. When these individuals who have engaged in extramarital affairs come to the Lord and want to serve in the church, they hope to eventually live healthy and spiritually pleasing to God through biblical counseling. Indeed, ending an extramarital relationship and seeking a godly marriage benefits women and men.

### **Rationale**

When exploring these complex problems related to marriage in the church, church leaders must examine the problems' roots and learn about cultural practices before making final decisions. The causes of these problems should be viewed with an open heart and mind. For EBCG members to overcome obstacles within their marriages, they must discuss issues such as extramarital affairs. God wants married couples to live holy

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<sup>6</sup> Schwartz, *Sex, Family, and Fertility*, 175.

In his research into infidelity, Schwartz randomly sampled the people of a small town in Haiti, Jean Rabel, where 71 percent of the male participants stated that women should leave extramarital relationships. Haitian men tend to understand that extramarital relationships are not in their best interest. When questioned about the advantages of extramarital affairs for men, 95 percent of the men reported no benefits. When they engage in extramarital affairs, Haitian men take on the financial burden of providing for another (usually poor) woman in addition to their own wives and families. In contrast, many Haitian women enter into extramarital relationships in an effort to achieve a measure of financial security. Women surveyed by Schwartz expressed that by engaging in extramarital affairs, they earned the right to property ownership and, in most cases, could have custody of their children.

lives, harmoniously with His law, and use Christ's life as the only role model. In the sight of God, Jesus and the church are the blueprints for holy marriage.

In the eyes of God, when married couples accept Christ, they become part of the kingdom of God. The Holy Spirit works through remarried couples so that they can be more Christ-like. In Exodus 6:6, God says, "I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them and redeem you with an outstretched arm and mighty acts of judgment." The Lord God delivered the people of Israel from Egypt, and in the same way, He can restore the sin of married couples to live Godly lives.

EBCG members have been quick to judge their brothers and sisters and have become desensitized to how they are, causing some members to feel unloved and unwelcome. As the apostle Paul states in Galatians 3:13-14, "The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, it says, 'the person who does these things will live by them.' Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us."

Married couples should seek healthy marriages, which can be viewed as safe environments where partners are comfortable expressing their feelings, building their self-esteem, and nourishing their relationships. Many women at EBCG feel they cannot address their marital problems with church leaders due to fears of being banished from the church, as is common in Haitian churches. When married couples are open to attending marital seminars to teach them the biblical view of marriage, they can transform troubled homes into places of love, security, hope, and growth for the kingdom of God. This project addressed issues of polygamy and marital concerns by helping married couples with poor communication, spiritual struggles, blended family complications, and relational issues. Additionally, this project addressed the issue of members feeling isolated and disconnected at EBCG. This proposal for the marital

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counseling ministry focuses on three topics currently affecting the lives of many EBCG families.

By attending weekly counseling at EBCG, women who have been in an extramarital relationship can share experiences and benefit from the guidance of a church advisor on how to live godly lives. Participants can also find satisfaction through Scripture while engaging in counseling at EBCG.

Through the resources available at EBCG, women can understand marriage according to the Word of God and become equipped for leadership, such as serving as deaconesses and leading church committees. Weekly biblical education for married couples at EBCG can provide an understanding of themselves as individuals in the light of God's Word and encourage follow-up to help them grow in their knowledge and experience of the Holy Bible. The teaching plan for married couples should focus on sound principles and approaches that will relieve many marital problems. A healthy relationship between two people should focus on mutual respect, equality, trust, communication, and freedom. Although each person is an individual within the relationship and may grow independently, the married couple becomes a one-flesh union in a godly marriage. In contrast, characteristics like disrespect, fear, jealousy, and possessiveness are traits of an unhealthy relationship. If one married partner is unsure about a specific situation, then they should check for these warning signs and contact the church for counseling.

This marital ministry curriculum focused on twelve weekly sessions to help couples learn skills to build loving and supportive relationships. This ministry used Scripture and biblical principles surrounding commitment, valuing one's spouse, forgiveness, and repentance.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to educate married couples from a biblical viewpoint at Evangelical Bethel Church of God in Brockton, Massachusetts.

## **Goals**

Three goals served as the criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of the project.

1. The first goal was to assess the spiritual maturity of married couples as related to marriage at EBCG.
2. The second goal was to develop a twelve-week curriculum to provide a biblical perspective on marriage and train couples in conflict resolution.
3. The third goal was to educate couples with a biblical perspective on marriage by teaching the curriculum.

## **Research Methodology**

The focus of this project was a twelve-week married couples' class that emphasized helping couples better understand the blueprint of marriage as designed by God. Successful completion of this project depended upon the three goals.

The first goal was to assess the spiritual maturity of married couples as related to marriage at EBCG. The first goal was measured using a pre-class questionnaire.<sup>7</sup> The first section of the survey collected demographic and church involvement data about the participants. Participants included the last four digits of their social security number to analyze and compare the pre- and post-class questionnaires. The second section consisted of statements related to marriage to which participants indicated their agreement on a seven-point Likert scale. The last section included open-ended questions about marriage and marriage health. Responses to these questions provided insight into the types of problems couples had faced in marriage and to what extent their Christian faith helped them deal with the issues. The pre- and post-class responses to section 3 and the responses to the statements in section 2 were compared and used to evaluate the effectiveness of the class.

Study participants included married couples and couples seeking to be married.

The methods for assessing the areas mentioned were a class survey/questionnaire and a

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<sup>7</sup> See appendix 1. All the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

focus group, which allowed for understanding and evaluation of each participant's knowledge of biblical marriage and guidelines for dealing with problems in marriage. This goal was successfully met when the twelve married couples completed the questionnaire. It was reviewed and analyzed, yielding a clearer picture of the current discipleship practices among the twelve married participant couples at EBCG.

The second goal was to develop a twelve-week curriculum to provide a biblical perspective on marriage and train couples in conflict resolution. The curriculum focused not just on the physical union of marriage but also on the spiritual and emotional union because marriages not built on the foundation between Jesus Christ and His church are at risk of failing. Couples can demonstrate commitment, compromise, communication, and sacrificial love by gaining biblical knowledge about marriage. The second goal was measured by the course evaluations submitted by project participants.<sup>8</sup> The goal was successfully met when participants completed the evaluations and indicated the curriculum scored a sufficient score (3.0) on each identified rubric category.

The third goal was to educate couples with a biblical perspective on marriage by teaching the curriculum. The pre-seminar questionnaire, an additional series of open-ended questions and a course evaluation were given to each participant to complete at the end of the last class.<sup>9</sup> Responses to these questions were also used to evaluate the effectiveness of the class. The benchmark for success of this goal was a *t*-test comparing pre- and post-survey scores. However, because a second set of questionnaires was not administered to participants, no *t*-test was conducted.

### **Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations**

Specific terms used throughout this ministry project are defined in this section.

*Marriage.* God defined marriage when He created Eve from Adam's rib to be a "suitable helper" for him and brought her to Adam (Gen 2:20-22). The Lord states, "For

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<sup>8</sup> See appendix 2.

<sup>9</sup> See appendix 1.

this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh” (Gen 2:24). This project relies on the nuanced description of marriage given by Don Campbell, Wendell Johnston, John Walvoord, and John Witmer:

This first union created by God was monogamous, and although polygamy was recognized in Scripture (Deut. 21:15-17), monogamy has always been the ideal. Similarly, the dissolution of a marriage by divorce was permitted (Deut. 24:1-4), but the intent was a lifelong union dissolved only by the death of one of the partners. Lamech, the fifth generation in the line of Cain, was the first to marry more than one wife (Gen. 4:19). A polygamous marriage always created tension in the family, as illustrated by Jacob’s experience with Leah and Rachel and Elkanah’s experience with Hannah and Peninnah. David had discord in the family with several wives, and Solomon’s many wives led him away from the Lord to serve other gods (1 Kings 11:4-6, 9-10). On the other hand, Noah, Isaac, and Joseph each had only one wife, and the Old Testament depicts domestic harmony and monogamy (Ps. 128:1-4; Prov. 31:10-31).<sup>10</sup>

*Christ-likeness.* The Bible teaches that Christians’ purpose in life is to conform to the image of Christ because they have the calling to think like Him, speak like Him, and behave like Him. Paul states in Colossians 3:5-10,

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature; sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. It would help if you walked in the life you once lived in these ways. But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Please do not lie to each other, since you have taken off yourself with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

Because the Creator sets Christians apart, believers must follow in the footsteps of Christ and surrender their lives to the Holy Spirit to experience the fruit of the Spirit. As Paul states in Colossians 3:11-15,

Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace.

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<sup>10</sup> Don Campbell et al., *The Theological Workbook: The 200 Most Important Theological Terms and Their Relevance for Today* (Nashville: World, 2000), 233.

Because the congregation at EBCG is Haitian-Creole speaking, one limitation of this project was the language barrier for the participants. Participants required translation from English into Haitian Creole during the marital seminars. (See Chapter 5 for a full explanation of the process.)

Several delimitations were placed on the project: participants had to be married or engaged to be married to participate in the study. Members and non-members could participate in the twelve-week course. A participation agreement served as a commitment to the project. The twenty-week project included curriculum development, course instruction, pre-assessment, and post- assessment. Participants may need additional time to be trained and supervised by church leaders following the completion of the project.

### **Conclusion**

Ministry leaders must take the time and effort to teach people the Word of God related to marriage. In John 8:31-32, Jesus says, “If you hold to my teaching, you are my disciples. Then you will know the truth, which sets you free.” The following two chapters provide a foundation for helping married couples discover God’s views of marriage to eliminate confusion and concerns about marriage. An informed understanding of marriage’s historical and cultural context is imperative for applying the message of Scripture.

CHAPTER 2  
BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL JUSTIFICATION FOR  
EQUIPPING COUPLES FOR CHRIST-  
CENTERED MARRIAGES

Marriage is an ordained institution created and designed by God. God reveals Himself in His creation and, above all, through His Word. Along with nature, the Bible can be described as God's self-revelation to His people. Knowing God to the extent that one is able through Scripture is at the heart of biblical faith. All people throughout history have some relationship with God, whether in rebellion and disbelief or in acceptance and faith. Men and women are on earth as a representation of the image of God. God ordained the union of a man and woman in marriage at creation (Gen 2:22).

In defining the word marriage, Katharine Doob Sakenfeld writes,

Among Jews and Gentiles in the period of the New Testament, marriage represents the cornerstone of the household. Closely related to concepts of kinship and family, marriage has essential social, economic, and spiritual dimensions. Men interact publicly with one another as married heads of households. The husband's authority over his wife is closely tied to property ownership. He has exclusive sexual access to his wife; children born in the household belong to him. As in the Old Testament, metaphorical references to marriage in the New Testament explore the nature of the community's relationship with God. In the New Testament, however, marriage is sometimes forsaken as a sign of the dawning of the kingdom of God.<sup>1</sup>

A Christian marriage is a covenant between a man and woman that originated and was designed with God's blueprint (Gen. 2:22-24). Marriage provides companionship and cultivates unity. God recognizes a man should not live alone. He created a suitable helper for man. Rob Green writes,

The Bible views marriage as a solution to being alone. There is something powerful about navigating through life with a companion in God's world. We saw earlier that marriage is an institution established by God for His glory and our blessings. Even

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<sup>1</sup> Katharine D. Sakenfeld, ed., *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of The Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2008), 3:812.

when sin entered the world, the blessing of marriage remained. God, in his grace, did not want you to have to celebrate victories and blessings alone.<sup>2</sup>

When the husband appreciates and respects the blessing of his wife that he receives from God, he will establish physical union and intimacy with his spouse (Gen 2:18-25; 4:1; Matt 19:5-6; Mark 10:8; Eph 5:31).

God felt that it was important for a man to have a companion. He said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him” (Gen 2:18). This chapter will consider the biblical and theological foundations of marriage by defining the marriage covenant, describing biblical roles and responsibilities in marriage, and setting forth several biblical principles for Christ-centered marriages. The final section of the chapter will offer biblical foundations for responding to sin in marriage.

### **Covenant: A Biblical Definition of Marriage**

God designed marriage to be a lasting covenant between a man and woman that should only be separated by death. A covenant based on love and loyalty that lasts as long they both shall live calls for the binding of hearts. The biblical model for marriage is for a man and a woman who have kept themselves pure to join together as “one flesh” (Gen 2:24). According to Joel B. Green, “Marriage is the joining of two lives in a ‘one flesh’ union to be characterized by fidelity. A ‘one flesh’ union is both a mutual and exclusive sexual union and a sharing of the whole life.”<sup>3</sup> Sex outside of marriage is forbidden, and men and women are given specific roles to fulfill (1 Cor 7:1-40). Matthew 19:6 contains the words of Jesus concerning marriage: “So they are no longer two, but one flesh, therefore what God has joined together let no one separate.” This divine principle applies to all married couples. Ephesians 5:31-33 should be a daily reminder in the hearts of every married couple, as Paul reminds all Christians, “For this reason a man

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<sup>2</sup> Rob Green, *Tying the Knot: A Premarital Guide to a Strong and Lasting Marriage* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2016), 68.

<sup>3</sup> Joel B. Green, ed., *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 508.

will leave his father and mother, and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery, but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you must love his wife as he loves; and the wife must respect her husband.” Paul also compared the nature and responsibilities of marriage to the marriage of Adam and Eve (Gen 2:18-24) to illustrate what has been true from the beginning.

Marriage is a divine institution with a purpose. Marriage partners are to leave all others and cleave to one another. It was designed by and originated with the instruction of God (Gen 2:24). First Corinthians 7:2 establishes that marriage is monogamous. God created for Adam what was needed for his marriage: one woman. The principle of monogamy is one man for one woman for life. Marriage is a permanent bond between a man and a woman. It is intended to last until death (Rom 7:1-3).<sup>4</sup> First Corinthians 7:2-3 says, “But because of immoralities, let each man have his wife, and let each woman have her husband. Let the husband fulfill his duty to his wife and also the wife to her husband.” God gave people bodies and sexual desires for each other. There is nothing evil, sinful, or shameful regarding the sexual relationship of husband and wife. However, sexual activity outside of marriage, either premarital or extramarital, defiles what God has made sacred and holy. Marriage is recognized by God when a man and woman resolve with mutual love and respect to live together as husband and wife and conform to whatever civil ceremonies are required (Rom 13:1).

God is the only one who knows what is good and necessary for the life of humankind. John Piper emphasizes, “The most foundational thing to see from the Bible about marriage is that it is God’s doing. And the ultimate thing to use from the Bible about marriage is that it is for God’s glory.”<sup>5</sup> The Lord God has set apart His beloved

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<sup>4</sup> One exception is found Matt 5:32 and 19:9, which I explore when discussing scriptures regarding marriage.

<sup>5</sup> John Piper, *This Momentary Marriage: A Parable of Permanence* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 21.



Son, Jesus Christ, for His church since the beginning and has appointed Jesus to be the groom and head of the church. The relationship between Christ and the church is the blueprint for all marriages. Heath Lambert notes, “The Spirit’s empowering is Christ-centered because he works to lead people to obey Jesus and to know his fullness.”<sup>6</sup> Couples in marriages that do not include an authentic relationship with Christ are much less likely to experience happiness and longevity.

God initially fixed the marriage law, knowing what is good and bad for the welfare of the family and humanity. Humans must follow God’s law to be happy in their marriage. It is biblical that God’s law on married life is supreme and above any other law or custom. The law of God must be followed and respected. No government on this earth should be entitled to deny God’s laws. Married couples who want to improve their family’s life should look to God’s will for guidance. They must put God’s law at the center of their marriage.

### **Roles and Responsibilities in Marriage**

Ephesians 5:22-25 says, “Wives, submit to your husband as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. As the church submits to Christ, wives should also submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” “Headship” means that the man should sacrifice his needs, desires, and dreams for the sake of his family. The man has the burden of taking the initiative to move things forward on behalf of his family. John Piper explains, “The main point here is simply that in Paul’s mind, the covenant union between a husband and wife

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<sup>6</sup> Heath Lambert, *A Theological of Biblical Counseling: The Doctrinal Foundations of Counseling Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 175.

is designed by God to reflect and display the spiritual union between Christ and the church. So he says, ‘he who is joined to the Lord becomes one Spirit with him.’”<sup>7</sup>

In the same way, Christ has given His life for the church on the cross; husbands must be willing to go as far as dying for their wives and families. The Bible teaches in Ephesians 5:23 that a godly husband is to provide for and protect his family. The husband is ultimately responsible before God for the welfare of his family. In Ephesians 5:25-26, Paul instructs husbands on developing Christ-like character: “Husbands love your wife, just as Christ loves the church and gave Himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word.” The Lord God commands both husband and wife to honor one another in mutual respect, not for the man to use his wife as his servant or property.

God calls men to bear the ultimate responsibility in the home (Gen 3:17-19). Therefore, women should respect the strength of men, being receptive to their responsibility as sacrificial home leaders. The Bible contains divine principles for good family relationships. Men are supposed to be willing to sacrifice their desires and welfare for the family’s overall good (Prov 11:29). Society has lost respect for the differences between men and women. Simultaneously, many churches have lost respect for the harmony that men and women can achieve together. God has given a specific role to a woman, such as a helper and homemaker (Gen 2:18; 1 Cor 11:3; Titus 2:5). There should not be a male or female dictator. Instead, the husband is to exercise self-sacrificial leadership in the house by putting the needs of his wife and children above his own (1 Tim 3:4).

God has ordained men to be the head and leader of their home (Eph 5:23; 1 Cor 11:3). Therefore, a husband must care for his wife and children. Husbands must depend on Christ with an open heart and seek guidance through prayer to effectively

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<sup>7</sup> Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*, 31.

minister to their wives (Col 1:16). Willie Richardson emphasizes, “Some of us don’t care enough to know where our wives are. A husband should build his wife up, support her, and give her strength. He is to show her warmth and tenderness. He is to shelter, protect, encourage, and minister to her needs as a husband. A husband is to cheer, comfort, and consider her a precious jewel.”<sup>8</sup> A husband must surrender his life to God the Holy Spirit, and minister to his wife as Christ did for His church. A woman is called to be a “helper” in the marriage relationship (Gen 2:18). A husband will always need his wife’s support and advice. Women are called to encourage their husbands to lead their families. For most men, their deepest fear is failure, and their most profound need is the confidence to know they can succeed, which is the kind of confidence only a wife can provide. Even when a husband makes mistakes, he needs encouragement as he tries to lead (1 Pet 3:1-6).

### **A Christ-Centered Marriage**

A Christ-centered marriage is a holy union that pleases and glorifies God. Before Christ came to earth, He had given up his glory, humbled Himself, and taken on the limitations of a human body for the sake of His church. Jesus Christ was humiliated, persecuted, and emotionally and physically abused because He loved the church. They treated Him like a criminal and killed Him (Matt 24:9). In the same way Christ showed love for His church and sacrificed His life, a husband must demonstrate unconditional love for his wife (Eph 5:29). Jesus is the key to a successful marriage. No one can experience real love or demonstrate love to another without receiving the Holy Spirit as promised by Jesus Christ (John 14:18). God the Father required all believers to put all their trust and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. As Hebrews 13:4-5 alludes, “Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.”

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<sup>8</sup> Willie Richardson, *Reclaiming the Urban Family: How to Mobilize the Church as a Family Training Center* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 185.

One of the most precious truths of the gospel is that those who believe are now “in Christ” (Eph 1:13). In Christ, believers are a new creation (2 Cor 5:17) and have become the righteousness of God (2 Cor 5:21). All faithful married couples have been raised with Christ and are seated in heavenly places (Eph 2:6). Because of their relationship with God in Christ, couples can experience the blessings that are only possible in a God-honoring marriage. Apart from a vital relationship with Jesus Christ, couples having problems in their relationship can do nothing to save their marriage (John 15:5). However, living in such a relationship, married couples can do all things through Him, and their marriage can be strengthened (Phil 4:13). All married couples who are followers of Christ ought to pursue keeping Jesus Christ at the center of their marriage. Married couples are to allow Jesus to live in them, help them overcome the temptation to sin, and follow God’s perfect law of liberty (Jas 1:25; 2:12).

The church must conduct intense spiritual marriage counseling for reconciliation, respect, repentance, responsibility, and forgiveness. If God is in the center of the marriage, He can turn things around and penetrate and cleanse the heart. Paul states, “For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it” (Gal 1:13). Paul persecuted Christians with zeal. He believed he was doing the right thing. God changed his life with a revelation, so Paul became a beacon for God. In the same way, God changed Paul’s heart and behavior, He can change the behavior of a spouse and transform marriages. When God’s love penetrates the soul, it changes an individual, enabling the person to return that same love to a spouse and family. Jesus Christ wants His followers to treat one another with love, gentleness, kindness, joy, peace, patience, faithfulness, and self-control (Gal 5:22-23).

Jesus sends the Holy Spirit to all believers to protect their homes and marriages. With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, married couples can transform troubled dwellings into places of love, security, hope, and growth for the kingdom of God. Church

leaders can train married couples to solve communication problems, sexual problems, spiritual problems, financial problems, and problems involving children. As couples explore problematic issues, they must reject cultural beliefs and view the root causes of these problems, which is sin. Couples must constantly pray to God and ask Him to send the Holy Spirit to transform hearts and minds so they can be kind and show love to one another.

The psalmist says of God, “Your name is good” (Ps 52:9; 54:6). Jesus says, “No one is good except God alone” (Luke 18:19). God’s goodness is most clearly evidenced in His faithful love for His people, whom He protects, cares for, and saves from judgment. This steadfast love for His people is sometimes called His “covenant love” or “faithful love” because God has bound Himself to demonstrate this to His people forever. Repeatedly, the Israelites praised the Lord for the extraordinary and unmerited eternal love He showed throughout their history (2 Chron 5:13; 17:3; Jer 33:11). In 1 John 4:16, the Beloved Apostle alludes, “And so we know and rely on God’s love for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.” Married couples should be aware for the sake of the kingdom of God; both partners need to be willing to submit to one another’s suffering. It is essential for a husband and wife to love one another as Christ loves the church.

Couples who experience difficulties in their marriage and are willing to attend marriage counseling are more likely to save their marriage than those who refuse it. In *Dysfunctional Family: Making Peace with Your Past*, June Hunt states, “Believing and accepting the truth about the depth, breadth, height, durability, and dependability of God’s love is the greatest need of those who live with the damaging effects of . . . a dysfunctional family.”<sup>9</sup> The apostle Paul demonstrates the kind of love God had for humanity in Romans 8:38-39: “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth nor

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<sup>9</sup> June Hunt, *Dysfunctional Family: Making Peace with Your Past* (Peabody, MA: Rose, 2014), 28.

anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Married couples should be aware that they can grow in God’s love, and nothing can break their marriage if they seek to make Christ its center and if each partner is willing to make the marriage work for the sake of the kingdom of God. God is the very essence of love. Church leaders must help married couples grow spiritually to reach their potential in Christ. Husbands, wives, and children must know their roles in the family and become familiar with the Word of God. The church needs married people who are faithful to God and one another. The marriages of many church members have ended because of unfaithfulness to the Lord. God wants married couples to pursue holiness and righteousness and deny ungodliness (Jas 1:21-27). Married couples cannot bring about real change in their lives unless they are in union with the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Paul elaborates in Galatians 5:16-17, “So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. The flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict, so you cannot do whatever you want.” The fruit of the flesh comes from one’s desires. The Holy Spirit is the agent of change. As married couples grow closer to Christ, He reveals the darkness in their lives. To better understand the change process in sinful behavior, married couples must admit evil and study God’s Word, which will help them know what sin is. In Ephesians 4:17-18, Paul notes, “So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.” Paul is asking believers to embrace “put[ting] off the old man,” crucifying the flesh and “put[ting] on the new man,” as believers are a new creation in Christ. A Christ-centered marriage will motivate a couple to become spiritually mature and live a godly life based on the Scriptures, not what the world has to

offer. The primary goal in a divine marriage is to submit to the Holy Spirit, deny the flesh, and walk humbly with Christ by displaying Christ-like character.

### **Identify Ways of Living a Healthy Marriage**

Another way to have a good relationship with one's spouse is to maintain a faithful relationship with Jesus Christ. A personal relationship with Christ requires fellowship, love, and trust. Andreas Köstenberger and David Jones state, "Leaving one's natural family behind, even literally, was regularly expressed by Jesus's first followers, at least for the duration of Jesus's three-year earthly ministry."<sup>10</sup> For many, the priority is to work hard and protect their family, but God wants believers to leave everything behind and follow Him, including their husband, wife, brothers and sisters, and mother and father (Luke 2:49). God needs no distraction in a married couple's life – He wants to be at the very center of the marriage. Although God has ordained marriage between a man and woman, He does not want to be on the sideline, while a partner focuses only on the spouse and family. It is best to rely on and meditate on the promises of a God who can see everything (Prov 15:3), knows everything about a married couple's life (Ps 139:1-2), and will bring all things to light in His timing (1 Cor 5:5).

Although many couples face difficulties in their relationships, following basic biblical communication principles can help them experience trust and happiness in their union. Good communication is essential and must be practiced. J. A. Alexandre notes, "Good communication is the key to enhancing the intimacy in the relationship. It serves to make the journey enjoyable for both partners. It is the key to building trust, respect, mutual understanding, and knowledge of each other. It also resolves conflicts."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Andreas Köstenberger and David W. Jones, *Marriage and the Family: Biblical Essentials* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 65.

<sup>11</sup> J. A. Alexandre, *Marital Happiness Is a Choice: Following the Path to an Enjoyable Relationship with Your Spouse* (Bloomington, IN: Crossbooks, 2013), 156.

Studying the Word of God together regarding marriage is essential to overcoming life obstacles. Colossians 3:13 teaches, “Bear with each other and forgive one another if you have a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.” Forgiveness will help believers release the pain and suffering endured in a marriage. It will also help believers process negative emotions toward their partners and strengthen their bond. William Spencer et al. reveal, “We have learned that forgiveness is as essential to marriage as love; these are really just two sides of the same coin. We are sinners who fail each other constantly, and only forgiveness, not score-keeping, will keep our marriage alive.”<sup>12</sup> Peter asked Jesus, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times? Jesus answered I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times” (Matt 18: 21-22). Marriage was originally designed and purposed to foster a spirit of worship, obedience, and faithfulness to God in the lives of husbands and wives. However, marital unions can draw the hearts of many away from God (1 Kgs 11:1-3). All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom 3: 23). In *Tying the Knot: A Premarital Guide to a Strong and Lasting Marriage*, Rob Green states,

First, you can see that forgiveness is required all the time. Jesus was not interested in a person counting to 490. He was interested in his followers’ forgiveness all the time. This does not mean that you will always feel like forgiving. The Lord often encourages us to do what is right even if we are struggling to do it. He knows what our hearts need. If someone is unwilling to forgive, he will function just like a hoarder. He will store up in his mind relationship hurts, pains, and struggles and dwell on them. It is a recipe for disaster.<sup>13</sup>

Married couples who face problems in their relationships may persist in disagreement if they fail to seek the guidance of Scripture, and they also risk violating their commitment to each other. God intended the marriage relationship to be a lifetime

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<sup>12</sup> William David Spencer et al., *Marriage at the Crossroads: Couples in Conversation about Discipleship, Gender Roles, Decision Making and Intimacy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 43.

<sup>13</sup> Rob Green, *Tying the Knot: A Premarital Guide to a Strong & Lasting Marriage* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2016), 50.



commitment; therefore, husbands and wives must be ready to forgive for the sake of the kingdom of God. Followers of Jesus Christ should grow spiritually and serve each other. In a healthy marriage, the husband and wife grow together as disciples of Jesus Christ.

### **Dealing with Sinful Acts in a Marriage**

Although God has called couples to honor Christ in their marriage, husbands and wives will inevitably sin against one another. Christian couples should deal with sin in their marriage through open communication, respect, honesty, and trust. Praying together is another key to a good relationship with one's spouse. Couples must maintain a faithful relationship with Jesus Christ. The Lord intervened on behalf of Christians to save humanity from sin and its consequences. God works all things according to His good purposes (Eph 1:11). God has included those who believe in Christ in His plan "to the praise of His glorious grace" (Eph 1:6) by reconciling all sinners to Himself (Col 1:22) and one another in the one body of Christ (Eph 2:11-22). In serving the needs of others without exalting self or seeking to fulfill selfish ambition, Jesus Christ set a high standard for all Christians to follow.

Millard Erickson describes sin as "any lack of conformity, active or passive, to God's moral law, which can be a matter of act, thought, or inner disposition or state. Sin is any evil action or evil motive that is in opposition to God. Simply stated, sin is failure to let God be God and placing something or someone in God's rightful place of supremacy."<sup>14</sup> Sin has separated humanity from having a good relationship with God. In Isaiah 59:2, the prophet states, "But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear." W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White Jr. describe sin as *hamartia* from the Greek word ἁμαρτία, meaning "a missing of the mark. It is the most comprehensive word for moral obliquity."

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<sup>14</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 579.

*Hamartia* is a principle or source of action, or an inward element producing acts.”<sup>15</sup>

Likewise, Justo L. González describes sin as

a barrier that separates humans from God, standing between what we are and what we are intended to be. Although a “sin” is any action against the mores of society in a common language, most Christian tradition has been aware that sin is both an action and a state. As an action, a sin is a willful violation of God’s will; therefore, one may speak of “sin” in the plural and classify them according to various criteria.<sup>16</sup>

The primary purpose of any marriage is to reflect God’s glory, which is to live a sinless life that models the life of Jesus Christ. The Lord God has designed marriage for a specific purpose and plan. When married couples ignore God’s plan for marriage, this often leads to chaos, confusion, pain, and suffering. Marriage is a longtime spiritual relationship journey that works best when two people are connected individually to their God, walking with Him, obeying Him through Scripture, and praying as individuals and as a couple. If a married couple decides to push the spiritual dimension to the side, then they ignore the God who created marriage and the One who can help them in their marriage. God sent his beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to free married couples from their iniquities. Paul gives hope in Romans 5:8 when he states, “God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Married couples need to seek help from the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit can guide and empower their marital lives and lead the couples toward a successful marriage. God gives believers the Holy Spirit to glorify Christ and be their counselor, advisor, advocate, and defender. Married couples should know that yielding to the Holy Spirit is vital if they want to grow spiritually in their marriage. John MacArthur affirms this: “The filling and control of the Holy Spirit will lead us to a spirit of humility, to the spirit that

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<sup>15</sup> W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White Jr., *Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996), 576.

<sup>16</sup> Justo L. González, *Essential Theological Terms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 160-61.

gives us the desire to seek the welfare of others before our own and to be mutually submissive.”<sup>17</sup>

When the couple is guided and walks by the Spirit, the Holy Spirit can help control their temper, impatience, and other immoral behaviors against the Word of God (Gal 5:16-24). A married couple may find it difficult to forgive one another for the pain and suffering inflicted on their marriage. John A. Huffman Jr. notes, “The difference between a healthy and unhealthy marriage is that in a healthy marriage, the couple acknowledges that they have problems, knowing that, with Christ’s help, nothing is too big to handle. Apparently, incompatibility doesn’t have to doom a marriage to failure.”<sup>18</sup> Married couples must be willing to repent and forgive each other for their sins. Timothy and Kathy Keller emphasize, “The experience of Jesus’s grace makes it possible to practice the two most important skills in marriage: forgiveness and repentance. Only if we are very good at forgiving and repenting can truth and love be kept together.”<sup>19</sup> Married couples must be willing to show humility and compassion for one another, as Christ proved at Calvary when He died on the cross for the sins of humanity. The practice of forgiveness and repentance by couples in a covenant marriage teaches the sanctifying truth of Christ Jesus and the Word of God. Forgiveness and repentance also protect them from evil and ungodliness in the world. Ultimately, accepting the truth about each other’s weaknesses will eventually lead to the married couple living a life of holiness that is pleasing to God.

Biblical counseling can be another effective tool for helping a married couple deal with sin in their marriage. Robert D. Jones, Kristin L. Kellen, and Rob Green

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<sup>17</sup> John F. MacArthur, *Ephesians, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1986), 269.

<sup>18</sup> John A. Huffman Jr., *The Family You Want: How to Establish an Authentic, Loving Home* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2001), 157.

<sup>19</sup> Timothy Keller and Kathy Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the Wisdom of God* (New York: Penguin Random, 2011), 182.

acknowledge, “Biblical counseling calls people to change, and true and lasting change requires repentance and living in light of God’s forgiveness. Biblical counselors delight in helping counselees resolve their guilt and joy the freedom that comes from a restored relationship with the Lord.”<sup>20</sup> Suppose a married couple takes the initiative to confess their sins faithfully. In that case, the Lord God will forgive and purify them from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). Curt Hammer et al. elaborate, “Moving toward forgiveness while embracing the mess and clinging to the peace only God can provide is radical acceptance in action. This approach to forgiving can transform us from the inside out, bleed into our relationships, and revolutionize our communities.”<sup>21</sup> God’s mercy is the most significant gift to creation. Man’s corruption is natural (Rom 3:23). Repentance and confession are the two most essential gifts that allow a sinner to restore his spiritual life with God. To restore what was broken by sin in a godly marriage, the husband and wife should accept forgiveness and move forward rather than looking back. Robert D. Jones conveys, “In all cases, whether the offender repents or not, we must begin with attitudinal forgiveness, always factoring in this unconditional component when responding to anyone who sins against us. It is the proper disposition—the Christian attitude of all who God has gloriously forgiven.”<sup>22</sup> The apostle Paul states in 2 Corinthians 7:10, “Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.” Married couples need to seek forgiveness and repentance in their marriage. Jay E. Adams echoes,

A request for forgiveness elicits a promise from the offended party to remember the offense no more and thus not raise it to him, others, or himself. The matter is closed. If the offended party refuses to grant that request, he, himself, becomes subject to

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<sup>20</sup> Robert D. Jones, Kristin L. Kellen, and Rob Green, *The Gospel for Disordered Lives: An Introduction to Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling* (Nashville: B & H, 2021), 83.

<sup>21</sup> Curt Hammer et al., *Biblical Guidance for Your Crucial Conversations: Marriage: Its Foundation, Theology, and Mission in a Changing World* (Chicago: Moody, 2018), 224.

<sup>22</sup> Robert D. Jones, *Pursuing Peace: A Christian Guide to Handling Our Conflict*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 134.

the church discipline outlined in Matthew 18:15 ff., which is designed to lead to forgiveness and reconciliation.<sup>23</sup>

Therefore, confession is critical in asking for forgiveness and reconciliation. Involved parties need to reach a mutual agreement that can bring satisfaction to the church as a body. Paul David Tripp concludes, “I cannot think of a more essential ingredient in marriage than forgiveness.”<sup>24</sup> Correspondingly, Timothy Keller says, “Forgiveness is at the very heart of what it means to be a Christian.”<sup>25</sup>

Married couples should consider God’s mercy as an investment in future growth. Jesus Christ is the only hope for married couples in darkness. Through the death of Jesus, married couples may receive God’s grace and unmerited pardon. Jonathan D. Holmes concurs,

Apart from the saving grace of Jesus Christ, we all stand condemned for our sins. It is only through the anointing work of Jesus Christ that we can have forgiveness of sin (Matt. 26:28), and this forgiveness we receive as a free gift is both our model (we extend forgiveness to others freely) and our motive (we forgive because we are forgiven).<sup>26</sup>

Through Jesus’s resurrection and his life (Rom 5:10), couples may overcome sin and build God’s holy, righteous character, which is vital for entering the kingdom of God. Adams echoes,

Conviction of sin, you may be thankful to learn, is the work of God the Spirit (John 16:8), who is at work in your life since he has convicted you of sinning. He has not left you. That same God graciously said (when commenting about the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit): “Every kind of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven to men,

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<sup>23</sup> Jay E. Adams, *How to Help People Change: The Four-Step Biblical Process* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 150.

<sup>24</sup> Paul David Tripp, *What Did You Expect? Redeeming the Realities of Marriage* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 86.

<sup>25</sup> Timothy Keller, *Serving Each Other through Forgiveness and Reconciliation* (New York: Redeemer City to City, 2005), 1.

<sup>26</sup> Jonathan D. Holmes, *Counsel for Couples: A Biblical and Practical Guide for Marriage Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 76.

except the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.” That promise includes the heinous sin that you have committed.<sup>27</sup>

God’s mercy prevents one from continuing in sin (Rom 6:1-2). God commands His followers to be perfect. One cannot be perfect and break God’s laws. Married couples are commanded to grow and overcome sin (Rev 2:26) and not continue in it. Obeying God and overcoming sin produces righteous character. Leslie Vernick argues, “One of the first things I look for to determine whether someone has experienced a change of heart is their willingness to see what they have done and take full responsibility for it. No blaming, rationalizing, lying, minimizing, or denying.”<sup>28</sup>

In 1 Corinthians 4:5, Paul asserts that Jesus will disclose the motives hidden in believers’ hearts. During a marital counseling session, the heart must be part of the conversation (Matt 23:26). Sin in the heart is the root of a person’s complications, which must transform through conversion and sanctification (Jer 17:9; Ezek 36:26; Rom 12:1-2; Heb 4:12). God will redeem all believers from their sins in the person of work of Jesus. God expects believers to grow progressively into the image of Christ. Jesus will reveal the true nature of a believer’s heart. Every rebellious act, wrong attitude, and cutting word will be reviewed. When the Bible says Jesus will wipe the tears from believers’ eyes, it refers to the end of times, the Last Day of Judgment (Isa 25:8). Those who believe in Christ will stand in the Holy Savior’s presence, grieving over his undeserving sacrifice. But the sorrow will last only a moment. On its heels comes the tremendous joy of having received forgiveness and living a life pleasing to him. God’s judgment is not a punishment but a reminder of His compassion and forgiveness for His children. Adams writes, “God forgives murder, sexual immorality of the basest sort, etc. The church must do so too! And it is important to note that forgiveness (even in the case of a repentant

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<sup>27</sup> Jay E. Adams, *The Christian Counselor’s Manual: The Practice of Nouthetic Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 427.

<sup>28</sup> Leslie Vernick, *How to Find Your Voice and Reclaim Your Hope: The Emotionally Destructive Marriage: Moving toward Healing; Deciding Whether to Stay or Go and Breaking Free From Damaging Patterns* (New York: Waterbrook, 2013), 182.

believer who sinned after conversion) involves not only cleansing but comfort and restoration to full fellowship among the members of Christ's church (2 Cor. 2:7, 8)."<sup>29</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Married couples must fully realize the depth and breadth of God's grace. They should know that God recognizes they live in a time of distress and darkness. However, married couples should be mindful that Jesus is the light of this world; He is the sacrificial lamb that died on the cross for the sins of humanity. Jesus is the hope and comfort for all believers, even during darkness. All the glory and praises belong to the Lord, Jesus Christ. Therefore, married couples should surrender their marriage to Christ so that their union can be a blessing.

Married couples should know that no matter how difficult life circumstances seem, God is conforming them to the image of Christ. Paul expounds in Romans 8:28-29, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters." The Bible teaches that God always keeps His promises (Rom 5:1-5; 1 Cor 10:13; Jas 1:2-4;), and with the help of the Holy Spirit, God will restore broken marriages into prosperous relationships that build mutual respect, love, and trust.

God established marriage as a covenant relationship and described roles and responsibilities for husbands and wives in His Word. Godly marriage is the one-flesh union of a man and woman in which they take vows to remain faithful until death. God designed marriage as a partnership that is pleasing and glorifying to Himself.

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<sup>29</sup> Jay E. Adams, *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the Bible: A Fresh Look at What Scripture Teaches* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 93.

CHAPTER 3  
PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR EQUIPPING  
COUPLES FOR CHRIST-CENTERED MARRIAGES

A Christ-centered marriage benefits the couple, the family, and society. For many Christians, the dinner table is where the family gathers to learn about the Word of God and talk about faith, strength, and courage to face the outside world. Learning the Word of God as a family will help family members deal with the challenges that come from the outside world. A marriage built on a solid biblical foundation provides the basis for making good decisions and informs the consequences of bad choices. To follow God's plan for Christian marriage, husbands and wives must understand the various challenges in marriage, each spouse's roles and responsibilities, and the heart's role in pursuing a Christ-centered marriage.

**Challenges in Marriage**

The apostle Paul reminds individuals seeking marriage in 2 Corinthians 6:14, "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?" In Haitian culture, marrying a spirit, also known as Maryaj-Lwa for many, is a common practice, even though God has forbidden anyone to commit such acts.

Haitian couples who experience extreme poverty tend to focus on marrying a Lwa (Spirit) to gain financial support. Tamara L. Siuda, also referred to as Mambo Chita Tann, elaborates in her book *Haitian Vodou: An Introduction to Haiti's Indigenous Spiritual Tradition*:

Maryaj-Lwa is precisely what it sounds like. Like a wedding ceremony between two human beings, a *Maryaj-Lwa* ceremony is complete with a priest, wedding rings, a marriage contract, and a reception with cake and champagne for guests after the



nuptials. What is different is that one of the participants is not a human being but a Lwa who has been called down for the ceremony into a participant's head via the mechanism of trance possession. The Lwa then enters into a contractual, spiritually binding marriage with the human being, promising various benefits in return for offerings and the dedication of one or more nights a month to the spirit spouse. A human who marries a Lwa must abstain from sexual contact or even sleeping in the same bed with another human being on the promised night (s), instead sleeping alone in a special room of their *peristil* or home that has been set aside for this purpose, having prepared offerings and other things for their spiritual spouse.<sup>1</sup>

Marrying one of the spirits (Lwa) is a common in Haitian culture. Many have been taught to believe that if they participate in such a marriage and commit to serving the Spirit, they will be blessed and live a prosperous life. However, that is far from the truth. In the book of Hosea 4:6, God says, "My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also reject you as my priests; because you have ignored your God's law, I will also ignore your children." The devil is a liar and very talented at turning people away from God. In the book of Revelation 12:9, the Lord God revealed to John the true enemy of this world: "The great dragon has hurled down-that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was thrown to the earth and his angels with him." God commands His people not to take oaths, worship, or bow down to idols or other gods. Our God is a jealous Lord who wants His people to fully commit to worshiping Him alone (Deut 6:13; Matt 4:10; Luke 4:8).

Kenaz Filan, author of *The Haitian Vodou Handbook: Protocols for Riding with the Lwa*, emphasizes,

I speak from experience here: for a long time, I feared Danto and avoided working with her. As I became more deeply involved in Vodou (and was married to Danto and Freda in January 2004), I discovered that Danto is above all else a loving mother who gives her children the strength to face any obstacles. She may be a fearsome warrior, but she is also a faithful protector who works hard and quickly for her devotees. Now that I have been fortunate enough to meet Danto face-to-face at

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<sup>1</sup> Mambo C. Tann, *Haitian Vodou: An Introduction to Haiti's Indigenous Spiritual Tradition* (Woodbury, MN: Llewellyn, 2016), 90-91.

several ceremonies, and now that I can call her my wife, my fear has been replaced by love and a deep respect for this powerful Spirit.<sup>2</sup>

Vodou has established itself in all Haitian territories, and the entire country has been dedicated to Lwa. Most of the population openly accepts Vodou as their religion, and although most intellectuals claim to reject it, they privately embrace it. Some aggressively advocate it, looking to impose it for social, political, or economic purposes. People practice Vodou to influence the political arena to conquer, dominate, or oppress people experiencing poverty.

The Bible teaches Christians to refrain from participating in these types of Vodou ceremonies (Num 25:1-2; 31:15-16; Acts 15:29; Rev 2:14). In 1 Corinthians 10:14, 19-22, the apostle Paul elaborates on such matters:

Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry. Do I mean then that a sacrifice offered to an idol is anything or that an idol is anything? No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons. Are we trying to arouse the Lord's jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

The Haitian people need prayer and mercy from God and are currently living under the enemy's bondage and spiritual attacks. Many evangelical missionaries continue to go to Haiti to share the gospel with the people. If non-Christian Haitian people want to be free, they must repent of their sins and follow Jesus as Lord Savior. Despite the difficulties this nation has endured over the past two centuries, there is always hope in the Lord Jesus Christ. In the same way that Jesus has defeated the world of darkness, He can free the Haitian people today after so many centuries of darkness under primitive religions. The Lord God is jealous and has commanded humanity not to worship other gods. He has been humankind's provider and protector and established His laws and commandments for society to follow. Marrying with a spirit is an abomination in the eyes of God.

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<sup>2</sup> Kenaz Filan, *The Haitian Vodou Handbook: Protocols for Riding with the Lwa* (Rochester, VT: Destiny, 2007), 144-45.

## Forgiveness

Marriage is a lasting commitment sealed by the oath made between two people before man and God. God has ordained marriage by uniting the two to care for and to love each other. The married couple has sworn before God to give all of themselves with no facade to their partner, to protect and love one another. When things get complicated in the marriage and one partner violates the marriage vows and promises both parties took at the altar, forgiveness may be the alternative to save the union. Gary Chapman writes in *The 5 Love Languages: The Secret to Love That Lasts*, “We can choose to live today free from yesterday’s failures. Forgiveness is not a feeling; it is a commitment. It is a choice to show mercy, not hold the offense against the offender. Forgiveness is an expression of love.”<sup>3</sup>

Michael Emlet emphasizes, “This is what the gospel is all about, the good news that God entered history as a man Jesus to bring about the redemption of a people and a world bound in sin and suffering.”<sup>4</sup> Just as Jesus Christ gave up his life on the cross and showed mercy for sinful humanity, “if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Stephan Labossiere echoes, “If you don’t properly address your past hurts, you will continue to experience pain in your present relationships. Forgiveness is a process, and healing is a process. Take the necessary time to complete both.”<sup>5</sup> The apostle Paul reminds in Colossians 3:13 to “bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.” Sacrifice from both partners is required for a marriage to last. A married couple must be willing to work on their

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<sup>3</sup> Gary Chapman, *The 5 Love Languages: The Secret to Love That Lasts* (Chicago: Northfield, 2015), 45.

<sup>4</sup> Michael R. Emlet, *CrossTalk: Where Life and Scripture Meet* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2009), 6, Kindle.

<sup>5</sup> Stephan Labossiere, *God Where Is My Boaz? A Woman’s Guide to Preparing to Receive the Love and Man She Desires* (Boston: Highly Favored, 2013), 96.

marriage whenever problems arise. A marriage based on sacrificial and agape love, where Jesus is at the center of the union, will be a lasting commitment that God will protect.

## **Finances**

Many factors can affect a healthy marriage, such as financial distress, extramarital affairs, and lack of communication. Married couples often bring strengths and weaknesses to their union. Forming these individual characteristics into a functional relationship is a matter of understanding the order of God and the gift of grace. Financial decisions impacting the family's success are a shared responsibility between partners. No matter the source of God's provisions, whether the husband's or wife's income, the assets accrued throughout the marriage are the couple's responsibility.

The critical principle concerning financial decisions is to "do all to the glory of God" (Rom 14:8; 1 Cor 10:31; Col 3:23-24). A married couple becomes a team and "one flesh," and whatever they do must be for the sake of the other person or at least must not be to the detriment of the other person. Each must be as concerned about the other person's needs as his own (Prov 31:12, 27; Eph 5:28). Dave Ramsey writes, "When you get married, you become a team. It is hard to have unity when you separate your bank accounts. When his money is over here, and her money is over there, it is easy to live in your own little financial world instead of working as a team."<sup>6</sup> All is shared equally in a faithful relationship; no partnership is more equal than two people united in the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, a couple should not have separate bank accounts. Usually, different bank accounts occur when there is a trust issue; in such a case, the marriage has more problems than just where the money resides. Lack of confidence is deadly to marriage, and if it exists, prayer is crucial to seek the wisdom of the Lord (Jas 1:5) on how to resolve this issue.

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<sup>6</sup> Dave Ramsey, *The Total Money Makeover: A Proven Plan for Financial Fitness* (Nashville: Nelson, 2007), 119.

A married couple committed to one another to become “one flesh” will be one in all areas of marriage. Without a doubt, they should seek one mind regarding spiritual matters and decision-making. However, this unity of a new Spirit must be present in all issues. The husband and wife are to be of one mind and heart, including in financial assets; possessions should be treated equally as belonging to both partners. There should be no discrepancy between “my money and your money.” Many times, Christians are angry with God concerning financial suffering, though Jesus said,

Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? So do not worry, saying, “What shall we eat?” Or “What shall we drink?” or “What shall we wear?” . . . The pagans run after all these things; your heavenly Father knows you need them. (Matt 6:25, 31-32).

God has not promised to make every married couple rich but promises to meet their needs. A married couple should also recognize everything they have belongs to God. In Psalm 24:1, David acknowledges, “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness of it, the world and they who dwell in it.”

Ramsey acknowledges, “After years as a financial counselor and working with marriage counselors, I know that money and money fights are the number one cause of divorce, not to mention the thing we fight about the most.”<sup>7</sup> God, the creator, has ordained married couples to be good stewards. As Willie Richardson concludes, “It has been estimated that 90% of the people in America are having financial problems. This does not mean that these people are poor, for this is an affluent nation, but it does mean that most Americans are not good managers of their income.”<sup>8</sup> In the very same way the Lord God filled Moses with the knowledge and talents needed to fulfill his mission for God, God created a covenant for married couples and made resources for them by giving

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<sup>7</sup> Dave Ramsey, *Financial Peace: Marriage, Singles, Kids and Families* (New York: Viking, 2003), 195.

<sup>8</sup> Willie Richardson, *Reclaiming the Urban Family: How to Mobilize the Church as a Family Training Center* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 141.

them gifts, skills, and abilities to be successful in marriage (Exod 31:3). The capitalist financial system in America has created a financial burden for many married couples who are not well trained to manage their income and often find themselves in more debt with fewer assets, which makes disarray in their marriage. If married couples realize they must live within their financial means and learn to manage their money accordingly, then they are more likely to live a prosperous life with less financial burden.

### **Infidelity**

In addition to experiencing problems caused by money, married couples often face the crisis of adultery. Just as the divorce rate in the United States increases each year, so does the incidence of infidelity in relationships. According to US divorce statistics,

It has been found the infidelity rate has increased significantly in the last twenty-five years in the United States. While extramarital affairs cause many divorces, most do not end in remarriage between the parties involved in the affairs. Seventy percent of married women and fifty-four percent of married men reported not knowing about their spouses' extramarital activity. Ninety percent of Americans believe it is morally wrong to commit an adulterous act; only sixty-one percent would like to see it punished as any other crime.<sup>9</sup>

On many occasions, unhappy, unfulfilling marriages among non-Christians and Christians today lead to extramarital affairs. This unhappiness is often caused by the failure to follow God's blueprint for marriage. An unfaithful married couple can become separated from God if they refuse to repent of infidelity.

### **Communication**

Both spouses need to have open communication and understand each other's needs. How a husband communicates with his wife can impact the relationship and lead to good or adverse consequences. Stuart Scott finds that "communication is the vehicle used to accomplish many responsibilities and relational aspects of marriage. Without it, a husband can neither lead properly nor communicate love effectively. One can neither

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<sup>9</sup> Divorce Statistics, "Latest Infidelity Statistics of USA," accessed September 24, 2022, <https://www.divorcestatistics.info/latest-infidelity-statistics-of-usa.html>.

address issues without it nor resolve conflict without it.”<sup>10</sup> James 1:19-20 helps us understand that “everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.” This passage informs married couples how to communicate in their marriage.

Lack of communication and misunderstandings often lead couples to file for a divorce or separation. Proverbs 18:21 teaches, “Death and life are in the power of the tongue.” A husband and wife need to support each other and be kind and gentle with their words. Bill Yeomans claims, “Poor communication in any relationship is never good. But to have a healthy marriage, good communication is essential.”<sup>11</sup> Implementing proper communication techniques and understanding each partner’s wants and needs can significantly impact the relationship and create a solid bond.

Effective communication is critical to building strong marriages, families, and relationships. Married couples must grow in good communication in words and actions to have a successful marriage. Wayne A. Mack alludes, “No two people can effectively walk together, work together, or live together without a good communication system.”<sup>12</sup> In *Christian Living in the Home*, Jay Adams emphasizes that communication comes first. Adams acknowledges that Christian communication is “the basic skill needed to establish and maintain sound relationships. A sound husband and wife relationship is impossible apart from good communication.”<sup>13</sup> The foundation of good communication is active listening. Often, a spouse responds to a partner without fully understanding what they are communicating, needing, or sharing. Proverbs 17:27 reminds, “The one who has knowledge uses words with restraint, and whoever has understanding is even-tempered.”

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<sup>10</sup> Stuart Scott, *The Exemplary Husband* (Bemidji, MN: Focus, 2002), 227.

<sup>11</sup> Bill Yeomans, *Christ Centered Marriages: Your Marriage Matters* (Fort Bragg, CA: William Yeomans, 2016), 97.

<sup>12</sup> Wayne A. Mack, *Strengthening Your Marriage* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1999), 55.

<sup>13</sup> Jay Adams, *Christian Living in the Home* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1989), 27-28.

Effective communication in a marriage requires mutual understanding and respect. Good communication also involves showing interest in what the partner is trying to convey. Jim Newheiser explains,

Good listening involves giving your full attention to your partner. Many of us like to multitask. We believe that we can carry on a conversation with a family member while also checking our email and watching sports on TV. Your spouse wants your full attention. Putting down your electronic gadget, turning off the television, and establishing eye contact means, “You are worth all my attention.”<sup>14</sup>

A marriage cannot expect to be long-lasting when there is a lack of communication. If a couple wants to establish a marriage based on Christ-like character, then they should respectfully listen to and understand each other’s concerns. Paul expounds in Philippians 2:3-7,

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Instead, in humility, value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; instead, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

The Lord has called Christians to seek unity in their marriage whenever necessary. In Romans 12:4-5 Paul explains, “For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ, we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.” Paul elaborates on the fruit of the spirit characteristics as an example for married couples. A marriage that focuses on maintaining peace, love, self-control, gentleness, kindness, faithfulness, joy, and patience (Gal 5:22-23) will have open communication where both partners put ambitions aside and continue to live for the glory of God.

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<sup>14</sup> Jim Newheiser, *Marriage Divorce and Remarriage: Critical Questions and Answers* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2017), 112.



## Roles and Responsibilities

### The Role of the Husband

God calls the husband to model Christ in all areas of life. God demands a husband to be like Christ in character, doctrine, and the world in which he resides. Stuart Scott conveys,

Every husband must continually see himself in submission to God and His authority Word. In doing so, he will desire to conform his life to the Word of God and seek to walk as Christ walked. The exemplary husband will also seek to do nothing of his own initiative (John 8:28-29) but rather place God's will over and above his own (Luke 22:41-42).<sup>15</sup>

The prophet Micah stresses, "God has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? Act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God." God called on man to develop Christ-like character in his marriage by loving one another, being patient, and being kind to one another (Eph 5:25; 1 Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:7-9; 2:2, 6-8). Devon Franklin substantiates, "Men, if you want to attract the woman of your dreams, be kind, considerate, and passionate about your purpose. Many women have told me how attractive seeing a guy on a positive life mission is."<sup>16</sup> The crucifixion of Christ on the cross reminds all men to remember how the Lord God has left His throne in Heaven to save a sinful human race from eternal death. God summoned men to imitate His Son's character, which is one of sacrificial love.

God also wants men to grow in Christ-like doctrine. Paul acknowledges that when men are spiritually immature in terms of theology, they open the door to demonic attacks and the influence of false doctrines (Eph 4:14; 1 Tim 4:2, 4:16, 6:3; Titus 2:1, 7, 10). Many people make decisions based on emotions, not on biblical principles. The husband is the family theologian and the head of his household, as Christ is the head of

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<sup>15</sup> Stuart Scott, *The Exemplary Husband: A Biblical Perspective* (Bemidji, MN: Focus, 2002), 27.

<sup>16</sup> Devon Franklin, *What Men and Women Need to Know: The Truth About Men* (New York: Howard, 2019), 113.

the church (Eph 5:23). A husband can lead his family and protect them from the devil's attacks by leading in daily family worship.

God calls men to be the primary providers and caretakers in their homes. God does not call them to understand every woman, but He calls them to understand their wives. Lou Priolo ascertains, "You're the one who must take the initiative to draw out of your wife the information necessary to develop and maintain the one-flesh intimacy God intends you to have with her."<sup>17</sup>

As the gatekeeper of his house, a husband should try to understand his wife's personality and meet his wife's needs and wants. God calls husbands to practice Christ-like leadership in their homes (1 Cor 11:3; Eph 5:23-24). Tony Evans expounds, "On a day-to-day basis, this may mean not always having to have your way just because you're the leader in the home. Sacrifice involves what is best for the other person, not necessarily what is best for us. Jesus gave up heaven to save us, not because He had to, but because He chose to."<sup>18</sup> As a servant, a husband must lead by an example of humble service (Mark 10:45; Phil 2:3-8). The husband is the shepherd of his home; therefore, God has given him the duty of caring for and protecting his dwelling (Ps 23; John 10:11-15; 1 Pet 5:1-4).

### **The Role of the Wife**

God created men and women equal but different. God made man and woman in His image and likeness (Gen 1:26-2:25). Although both man and woman are similar in person and essence, they are different in function and role. God created Eve to be the primary helper or influencer in the relationship. The word "helper" means "assistant," and the same word is used to describe God (Ps 10:14; 30:10; 33:20; 54:6; 70:5; 115:9-11;

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<sup>17</sup> Lou Priolo, *The Complete Husband: A Practical Guide for Improved Biblical Husbanding* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2017), 15-16.

<sup>18</sup> Tony Evans, *For Married Men Only: Three Principles for Loving Your Wife* (Chicago: Moody, 2010), 13.

118:7). Eve was formed from Adam and for Adam and made to be “one flesh” with him (Gen 2:18, 21-22, 24). Adam and Eve had the first marriage ceremony initiated by God.

God has assigned the wife to be the caretaker of the home and family (Titus 2:5). Although her primary responsibility is to look out for her household, she is not excluded from working outside her house (Prov 31:16, 19-20, 24). God has also given the wife the authority to use her gifts to minister in the local church (Rom 12; 1 Cor 12; Eph 4:11-16). God has called the wife to honor her husband. In its submission to Christ, the church models the wife’s submission to her husband (1 Cor 11:3; Eph 5:22-33).

Stephan Labossiere emphasizes, “You may think that being a provider and protector qualifies you as a man worthy of a woman’s submission. I agree that this plays a part in the bigger picture but goes much deeper. It’s not enough to provide and protect. If you truly want to position yourself as a man worthy of submission, there are some deeper principles to consider.”<sup>19</sup> Many view marital submission incorrectly, seeing it as a way for men to manipulate women under God’s law. A wife’s submission within a marriage does not permit her husband to abuse her physically or mentally (Prov 22:3; 27:12; Matt 18:15-17; Rom 13:1-4; Heb 13:17; 1 Pet 5:1-3;).

God calls a man to lead his household and wife with a humble spirit, kindness, and respect. Tony Evans acknowledges, “Ladies, your husband doesn’t need you to love him as much as he needs you to respect him. To respect your husband is to hold him in high esteem and honor. A wife can legitimately feed a man’s ego when she respects and honors him. There is nothing more dangerous to a marriage relationship than disrespect.”<sup>20</sup> Ephesians 5:33 instructs, “However, let each of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.” This passage informs that women need love and support from their husbands, and men need respect from their wives. Scott Lapierre

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<sup>19</sup> Stephan Labossiere, *He Who Finds a Wife: A Man’s Guide to Finding the Woman and Love He Desires* (New York: Highly Favored, 2019), 106.

<sup>20</sup> Tony Evans, *Marriage Matters* (Chicago: Moody, 2010), 68.

postulates, “Just as husbands are commanded to love their wives when they don’t feel like it, wives are commanded to respect their husbands when they don’t feel like it. As much as wives want their husbands to love them unconditionally, husbands want their wives to respect them unconditionally.”<sup>21</sup> A wife should avoid being disrespectful to her husband in front of others. Jennifer Smith concludes,

Being a good wife begins with your relationship with God. As you walk with God, the Holy Spirit will transform your heart and your character, teaching you what is right. With your eyes focused on God, you become a light to others through your words and through your actions. God is your source of energy, your source of hope, and your source of strength to endure every season of life. The closer you draw to God, the more your faith will grow, your joy will abound, and your desire to be a good wife will inevitably increase.<sup>22</sup>

A godly woman should be trustworthy and helpful rather than impede her husband’s work (Gen 2:18; Prov 31:10-12). A wife’s primary concerns in life and ministry should be her husband and children. Once she is done ministering to her family, she can assist others who need her help (Prov 31:12-20). A wife should exhibit characteristics traits such as (1) making good decisions for her family; (2) being a role model for her children; (3) having a positive attitude; and (4) having a gentle and quiet spirit. She is modest when dressing for an event and must be wise and kind with her words (Prov 31:13, 25, 26; 1 Pet 3; 1 Tim 2). Robert W. Kellemen suggests, “A godly wife encourages – she fills up her husband with courage. She clearly sees her husband’s strengths and consistently affirms them. She recognizes her husband’s victories and regularly applauds him. She esteems him, high-fives him, and fist-bumps him.”<sup>23</sup> A godly wife will support her husband through good and challenging times. She will call on God for guidance when things go wrong and wait patiently for God’s advice.

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<sup>21</sup> Scott Lapierre, *Your Marriage God’s Way: A Biblical Guide to a Christ-Centered Relationship* (Eugene, OR: Harvest, 2021), 141.

<sup>22</sup> Jennifer Smith, *Wife after God: Drawing Closer to God and Your Husband* (Logan, IL: Smith Family, 2016), 68-69.

<sup>23</sup> Robert W. Kellemen, *Gospel-Centered Counseling: How Christ Changes Lives*, Equipping Biblical Counselors (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 34.

## The Heart in Scripture

Addressing marriage challenges requires understanding the heart's role for couples to be closer to God. Many people use the term *heart* very lightly, which can create confusion. In the Bible, *heart* represents the inner man. Jeremy Pierre conveys the terms for the *heart* in the Bible as “heart, soul, spirit, mind, and more-to describe a simple, singular human experience.”<sup>24</sup> Moreover, Pierre states the heart could also function as a unified object that responds three-dimensionally (thinking, affections, and choosing). Likewise, Michael Emlet argues, “The word ‘heart’ captures the totality of the fundamental moral nature of a human being as creature-before-Creator.”<sup>25</sup>

The most critical location in the human body is the heart. God evaluates people's intentions by focusing on what comes from their hearts. God created the human heart as the wellspring of life, the mission control center for the rest of the human organs. He is concerned about what is going on in the heart (Prov 4:23). When addressing marital issues, the heart must be part of the conversation for positive change to occur in the marriage (Matt 23:26). In 1 Samuel 16:7, God said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” Scott concludes,

In order to have a heart of worship for God alone, we need to know what the heart of man actually is. It can basically be described as man's control center for living. It involves his thoughts, intentions, beliefs, desires, and attitudes. Because all these things really take place in the mind, we can say that the heart could be thought of as mind. What a man truly wants, thinks, and believes about something is his heart on the matter (no matter if his lips speak differently).<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Jeremy Pierre, *The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life: Connecting Christ to Human Experience* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2016), 62.

<sup>25</sup> Michael R. Emlet, “Understanding the Influences on the Human Heart,” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 20, no. 2 (Winter 2002): 47.

<sup>26</sup> Scott, *The Exemplary Husband*, 89.

If a married couple would like to see positive changes in their marriage, then their hearts should focus “after God” (Acts 13:22). In Colossians 3:23, the apostle Paul reminds, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart.” Marriage requires a conscious shift of mind and heart. God calls on every sinner to repent from their sins, which includes a change of heart and mind. When a married couple repents of their sins and puts off the old way of thinking and living (Eph 4:22), they are renewed in the spirit of their mind (Eph 4:23), and then they are putting on the new way of thinking and living (Eph 4:24).

People tend to focus on outward physical appearance. In contrast, God focuses on what is inside the heart; that is a person’s desire or motivation (Matt 5:28). The Old Testament laws teach that a person could become unclean by eating and touching certain animals (Lev 11). Both the Pharisees and scribes went beyond the Word of God by adding a requirement to wash their hands before eating, which was not part of the law (Mark 7:3). They were upset that the disciples were not obeying their tradition (Mark 7:5). However, God was concerned with their hearts, not the cleanliness of their hands. Jesus responded to them by quoting from Isaiah 29:13: “They honored God with their lips (external), but their heart was far from God (internal).” Jesus acknowledged that they “leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men” (Mark 7:8). According to Jesus, the real problem was not the commandment of God or eating with unwashed hands, but rather the heart.

Jesus understood the Old Testament law and used their understanding to teach a deeper understanding of humanity. The issue of purity and defilement for the Jews was crucial for their community. Jesus could see their intentions and wanted them to focus not on the outside of what an individual is supposedly doing or not doing, but to look at their heart and desires.

The heart is where most people’s desire and value in life begins. Jesus conveys to his disciples, “For what your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt 6:21;

Luke 12:34). The world is filled with messages influencing individuals' thoughts, desires, and actions. Instead of seeking God for guidance, many rely on their knowledge based on cultural, political, and social beliefs. Married couples are not immune to the messages of the sinful world. The apostle Paul warns that the heart can fall victim to lust and desire (Rom 1:24). Jesus said in Matthew 28:5, "But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Michael Horton echoes, "People were made to worship God with all their heart – the full breath of their internal experience and external conduct. God wants people to reflect his own complex beauty as they respond to him and to his world. God created people as responders, and they answer back to God according to the purpose of their existence."<sup>27</sup>

Many married couples choose to replace God with idols. Jeremy Pierre writes,

Sin corrupts the thoughts and beliefs of the heart. What this means in people's daily experience is that they believe many things that are untrue-about God, themselves, other people, and life. People believe that God is less glorious than He is, less relevant to their experience, less demanding of their worship, less worthy of their trust. People believe things about themselves that are distorted by pride and self-importance. People believe simultaneously that others are meant to serve them and that they must somehow gain their approval at all costs. People idiosyncratically believe that the world works a certain way and dismiss evidence to the contrary. Not only do people believe untrue things, but they also misuse and misprioritize true beliefs.<sup>28</sup>

Couples experiencing problems in their marriage may deny sinful actions (1 Pet 1:16; 1 John 1:8, 10). Married couples may believe that they are not enslaved to sin and "can stop at any time," even though they continue with the same sinful lifestyle (John 8:34; 2 Tim 2:22; Jas 2:10, 4:17; 1 John 3:3). Couples with conflict often seek to hide their sins (Ps 32:1-5). They repeatedly sin, knowing it does not please the Lord or bring glory to God (1 Cor 10:31; 2 Cor 5:9; Col 1:10).

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<sup>27</sup> Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 390.

<sup>28</sup> Pierre, *The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life: Connecting Christ to Human Experience*, 15.

Christians must examine their hearts and ask God to help them understand what is happening inside their thoughts and minds because thoughts and behaviors are all interconnected. The apostle Paul often refers to the reasoning functions of the heart in his epistles. He elaborates on the internal rationale of the human heart: “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (Rom 10:6). Paul also attributes human thoughts to the heart: “What no eyes have seen, nor heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love Him” (1 Cor 2:9). The heart also contains internal knowledge to help couples make better decisions in their marriage.

The heart can also lack knowledge at times. Sinful human nature can impact the marriage and relationship with God, for humankind does not repent from their sins. True repentance resides in the heart. Paul reveals in Ephesians 4:18, “They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance in them due to the hardening of their hearts.” People often practice sin and blame others for wrongdoings (Ezra 18:4, 20; Mark 7:20-23; Rom 14:12; 2 Cor 5:10). The internal part of the heart needs to be regenerated by the holy spirit, where Christ is the change agent for a broken world. From that point on, a married couple can genuinely have the desired heart that will please God.

### **The Regeneration of a New Heart through Christ**

Jesus offers faith, grace, and forgiveness through His redemptive work on the cross for sins. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life for marriage problems (John 14:6). Married couples seeking counsel need regeneration of their hearts and minds through biblical counseling. When Paul provides spiritual counsel for the concerned and disorderly Colossian Christians, he sees them “as God’s chosen people” (Col 3:12) and “members of one body” (Col 3:15), which is the church. Paul talks to them about the importance of growth in grace and sanctification through Christ: “We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ” (Col 1:28). Robert W. Kelleman emphasizes, “The war Christ wins for us provides



victory over sin and Satan where once we were their slaves. The wedding Christ prepares us for produces purity where sin and shame once existed. And it is all for God's glory."<sup>29</sup> Jesus wants every married Christian couple to have a heart that works to glorify God. He wants to present a new heart, Christ-likeness, which is "perfect," or mature, in Christ Jesus (Col 1:28). God has called His people to focus on eternal things instead of temporary things (2 Cor 4:18). As married couples begin to learn to trust Jesus Christ through their salvation and faith, their hearts will be restored from their sinful behaviors. They will start to follow Jesus's examples in their daily life.

The married couple who attaches themselves to idols has given their hearts to worldly pleasures and desires rather than God (Ezek 14:5). A married couple partially gives their hearts to God instead of faithfully worshiping God with a whole heart. They have chosen to divide their allegiance and be unfaithful to God (Jas 1:6-8). A heart designed by Jesus solely to honor and glorify God is something the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will always welcome in the kingdom of God. In Psalms 86:11-12, David asks God, "Teach me your way, Lord, that I may rely on your faithfulness; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name. I will praise you, my God, with all my heart and glorify your name forever." A marriage based on a solid foundation of the Word of God where both partners place their hearts in growing spiritually together will always find the pathway to live an abundant married life that pleases God. Every married couple should follow Jesus Christ's footsteps and seek a purified heart that is pleasing and glorifying God. Like David, married couples must seek God's instruction and be obedient to it.

### **Conclusion**

Learning the Word of God as a family will help family members deal with the challenges that come from the outside world. Some of those challenges include communication, finances, and infidelity. Each spouse has roles and responsibilities

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<sup>29</sup> Kellemen, *Gospel-Centered Counseling*, 34.

established by God. When the hearts of the husband and wife are regenerated through God, forgiveness is possible, and they are made a new creation through Christ Jesus.

One of the most precious truths of the gospel is that those who believe are now “in Christ” (Eph 1:13). In Christ, there is a new creation (2 Cor 5:17). Humanity has become the righteousness of God (2 Cor 5:21). In Him, married couples have been raised with Christ and seated in heavenly places (Eph 2:6).

Through Jesus’s resurrection and His life (Rom 5:10), married couples may overcome sin and build God’s holy, righteous character, which is vital for entering the kingdom of God. Couples living in a time of distress and darkness can turn to Jesus for help. Married couples should seek to welcome Jesus into their marriages by surrounding their lives with Christ to have eternal life. Couples facing problems in their marriage must learn to address their differences and focus on living a life that glorifies God.

## CHAPTER 4

### DETAILS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

For church leaders and many members at Evangelical Bethel Church of God (EBCG), marital counseling was not an option due to the lack of training within the church leadership in that area. Many members have tried to deal with the problem alone when facing marital conflicts but were unsuccessful. The elders and married couples at EBCG embraced the opportunity to participate in biblical marital counseling. The elders wanted the congregation to grow spiritually in understanding how the Word of God discusses the challenges of life and marriage. This project aimed to introduce leaders and married couples at EBCG to biblical marital counseling so that married couples can have an abundant, healthy marriage that is pleasing and glorifying to God. Through this project, I taught a twelve-week class that deals with marital issues from a biblical viewpoint. The project was implemented in four stages: (1) selection of participants, (2) preparation of the curriculum, (3) teaching the curriculum, and (4) evaluation.

#### **Selection of Participants**

The primary participants for the marital counseling class were members and non-members at EBCG and others who were eager to participate in learning about the fundamentals of biblical marital counseling. Clifford Blanc, the senior pastor of EBCG, announced to the church that there is a twelve-week class discussing marital issues from a biblical standpoint. He encouraged those looking to strengthen their marriage vows and commitments to sign up for the course. There was interest from twelve couples. Some served as deacons or Sunday school teachers; others were non-members who wanted to strengthen their marriage relationship.

Participants who signed up for the Biblical Marital Counseling class received a link to the Biblical Marital Counseling Assessment Survey. A hard copy was given to those who did not want to complete the survey online. The survey included three sections: (1) demographic information, (2) general questions about marriage, and (3) marital counseling statements with a Likert scale. The survey data was used to assess and analyze the couples' current understanding of views on biblical marital counseling and how the Bible describes people, problems, and solutions when facing marital conflicts.

### **Preparation of Curriculum**

A twelve-week teaching curriculum was developed to tackle marital conflicts from a biblical viewpoint. Twelve topics were chosen that married couples often need to address. The curriculum was designed to help married couples better understand God's original blueprint for marriage and the best ways to deal with marital conflict. Topics include the roles of a husband and a wife as related to marriage, what Scripture says about marriage, and why Christians need to have a Christ-centered marriage that is pleasing and glorifying God.

### **Teaching the Curriculum**

#### **Week 1: Lesson 1—Introduction, What Is Biblical Counseling?**

I welcomed the class with a prayer at the beginning of the first lesson. The first lesson focused on discussing the differences between biblical and secular counseling. Biblical counseling uses the Word of God as the primary source to help couples with issues in their marriage. In contrast, secular counseling uses methods developed by medical professionals and counselors to help clients solve their problems. Lesson 1 had three objectives: (1) help couples understand why Christian couples need to use the Bible as the primary guide to their marriage; (2) introduce issues married Christian couples may encounter by attending counseling sessions with a non-Christian counselor; and (3) inform

married couples that the primary objective of biblical counseling is to help a couple bring about heart and mind changes to live fruitfully for Jesus Christ and glorify God.

I introduced the first lesson by quoting 2 Timothy 3:16: “All Scripture is breathed out by God, and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.” This passage reminds that married couples can find all the instructions needed to strengthen their relationship in the Bible. This passage also clearly gives biblical counselors a roadmap for ministering God’s grace to others. I told them Paul used this Scripture to demonstrate that everyone should seek a relationship that pleases God.

Furthermore, I emphasized that believers in Christ Jesus agree that the Bible is inspired by God (2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Pet 1:20-21). I explained that Jesus makes a significant point about learning and living the Bible as God’s will for believers’ lives. In Matthew 4:4, Jesus says, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” As Harold L. Senkbeil, author of *The Care of Souls: Cultivating A Pastor’s Heart*, acknowledges,

Scripture is at the center of the care of souls. God’s word delivers the goods. Whether we’re dealing with a hurting soul, wounded and broken because of circumstances in life and the spiteful actions of uncaring people, or whether we care for a soul burdened and broken by its sin, the sensitive and attentive delivery of the word of God in either spoken or sacramental form is at the heart of the pastoral craft.<sup>1</sup>

Likewise, Hebrews 4:12 teaches, “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” This passage is vital to followers of Jesus Christ’s growth. I also used Luke 8:4-15 as an illustration. I told them Jesus compares reading the Bible with a seed planted in good soil. The seed planted in good soil represents those with an honest, good heart who hear the Word of God, apply it, and produce a crop or fruit with patience.

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<sup>1</sup> Harold L. Senkbeil, *The Care of Souls: Cultivating a Pastor’s Heart* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2019), 49.

In conclusion, I informed the participants that my main objective as a biblical counselor is to help them learn what the Word of God says concerning marriage. I quoted John 8:31-32 and explained the significance of this passage when Jesus says, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, which sets you free.” Our love for God, His Word, and His people should compel us to know Him better, which involves the study of His Word. Seekers of truth and lovers of God and others should set out to discover revealed truth and acquire biblical wisdom as they mine gold and precious stones. I talked to them about what to expect during the twelve sessions and reviewed the outline, class content, and homework assignments. The session closed with a word of prayer.

## **Week 2: Lesson 2—Purpose of Marriage**

I welcomed the class with a prayer and read Genesis 2:24: “That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.” I then read 1 Corinthians 7:1-4:

Now for the matters you wrote about: “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.” But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband. The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife.

The focus of the second lesson was to learn the importance of the Bible for marriage. I wanted participants to understand that God alone created and established the institution of marriage. The class lecture began by defining marriage from God’s point of view. I explained that a Christian marriage is an institution God designed to be between a man and a woman. I read Genesis 2:21-25, which states,

So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, He took one of the man’s ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and He brought her to the man. The man said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.” That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh. Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

I explained to the class that the significance of Genesis 2:21-25 is that God knew a man could not live alone without a companion to share life with. This union God created between man and woman is the cornerstone for establishing a family unit that catalyzes sanctification and holiness. In today's world, many try to redefine or replace marriage with something else. God created marriage for his purpose and realized it was a good idea for humanity. Therefore, I told them there was such a thing as a bad marriage.

People who have had bad experiences in their marriage are often ready to leave the union without seeking to work things out. God is not the one who should be blamed for a bad marriage. I explained that most of the time, marriages fail because the couple refuses to follow God's instructions as it relates to marriage. The main problem is that as sin entered the world, people drifted from God and started seeking self-satisfaction and worldly pleasures instead of doing things that pleased and glorified God.

I elaborated to the class that the institution of marriage does not belong exclusively to one racial or ethnic group. Marriage is a special gift God gave everyone, regardless of ethnicity or nationality. I then asked the class to read 1 Corinthians 10:31, which says, "Even as I try to please everyone in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved." In addition, Romans 12:1 implies, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship." These two passages explain that individuals should not seek revenge for a wrongful marriage; instead, they should try to resolve problems through reconciliation and forgiveness. God wants His people to remain faithful through repentance from sinful life.

I asked the class to describe in one sentence what marriage's nature is as a one-flesh in the marital union. Marriage is considered a lifetime commitment in the eyes of God. Jesus reminds in Matthew 19:5 and Mark 10:7-8 why God sees marriage as a permanent commitment: "For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." God does not discriminate

regarding His rules. The concept of becoming one flesh in marriage abides for everyone regardless of culture or religious beliefs. Marriage is not about seeking one's own desires but about having a long-lasting commitment to a partner and establishing a lifetime relationship with God.

### **Week 3: Lesson 3—Covenant versus Contract**

I welcomed the class with a prayer and read Deuteronomy 7:9: “Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; He is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love Him and keep His commandments.” In this lesson, I began by asking the class, when you think of marriage, do you believe marriage is based on a covenant or contract? I defined a *covenant* as a lasting commitment before God. A covenant implies that you and your partner will honor your vows and not seek a way out when troubles arise. A marriage is a holy covenant union characterized by a vow before God through sickness and good health. Both married partners have agreed to remain faithful and promise to love one another until death separates them. A marriage based on God's biblical principles and guidelines is known as a “covenant marriage.”

I instructed the class to use the triangular covenantal arrangement of God as the model for a holy marriage where God is always the head and works to perfect a marriage (see figure 1). Stephen A. Grunlan acknowledges, “A marriage is a relationship between two people; the spiritual dimension of that relationship can be no stronger than the spiritual lives of the individuals. It is obvious that as a couple draws nearer to God, they will draw nearer to each other.”<sup>2</sup> In this session, the class learned that husbands and wives should make every effort to grow spiritually together in a covenant marriage. The class read Romans 14:19 as a reflection on creating unity in marriage: “So then let us

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<sup>2</sup> Stephen A. Grunlan, *Marriage and the Family: A Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 216.



pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.” Three dimensions make a marital union work in marriage: God must be viewed as the head of the church, just like Christ is the groom of the church, and the husband and wife must become one flesh and represent the bride. This union will likely fall apart when God is absent in any marriage.

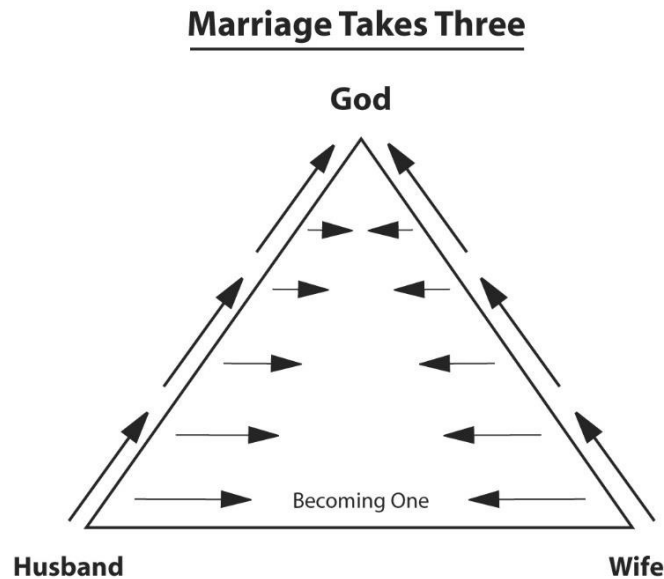


Figure 1. Triangular covenant

The term *covenant* is found in the Old Testament and New Testament as translated into the Hebrew (OT) language, ת'ברית, (*berit*), and Greek (NT), διαθήκη (*diatheke*). In the Old Testament, a covenant is translated from the Hebrew word *berit* (ברית). It is used for unique relationships between God and man, and special relationships between man and man.<sup>3</sup> John Hayes states that “marriage was understood in ancient Israel along the lines of a triangular covenantal arrangement in which the spouses were the primary partners, and God was the custodian and guardian of the marriage

<sup>3</sup> Lawrence Richards, “Covenant,” in the *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 194.

relationship.”<sup>4</sup> To make this argument, Hayes refers to Proverbs 2:17, Malachi 2:14, and Leviticus 19:20-22. I read each of these passages to the class.

Christians know that marriage is not just a covenant between both partners. It is also a legal contract. As such, I emphasized to the class that a contract is an agreement between two or more parties, signifying that all signing parties will adhere to the laws and take responsibility for one another as established by the government. Marriage is a contract with certain rights and responsibilities that protect the married couple. There is a distinction between legal and covenant marriages. In a legal marriage, if one party does not live up to the contract, legal actions can be taken, forcing either married partner to do so with an equitable settlement. Taking child support as an example, I explained that some refuse to pay child support or alimony after a marriage breaks up, which is why laws are needed to protect vulnerable people. Society could not exist without laws regulating marriage relationships. So, in this sense, marriage is a contract. However, for a Christian, marriage is more. It is also a covenant. Suppose Christians respect the holy marriage covenant they have made before God and the characteristics of the marriage covenant, such as viewing the covenant as a lasting commitment, maintaining steadfast love, forgiving one another for wrongdoings. In that case, they will have healthy marriages. As a result, Christians can achieve the high calling of a godly marriage, not simply the requirements of a legal contract between two people.

For the last portion of the class, I asked the class to read Hebrews 9:15, which states, “For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance – now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.” This passage reminds believers that they are no longer under the curse of breaking up the old covenant with God. They can now say they have a new covenant with God. Therefore, Christians must

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<sup>4</sup> John H. Hayes, “Covenant,” in *Mercer Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Watson E. Mills (Macon, GA: Mercer University, 1990), 180.

visualize marriage as Christ sees the church. Christ has made a tremendous sacrifice by sharing His blood on the cross and dying for the sins of humanity. At the cross, Christ reconciled humankind to God, the Father. This type of sacrifice requires a spouse who has taken a lasting marital covenant not to give up on their marriage easily. One student from the class was selected to end the session with a word of prayer.

#### **Week 4: Lesson 4—Roles and Responsibilities**

In lesson 4, I discussed the husband and wife’s roles within the marriage relationship. I asked the class to read Romans 8:28-29, which states, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.” Based on this passage, I told the class that God had prepared you for your spouse, and He is forming you into the image of Christ; therefore, you need to learn to trust God with whatever difficulties you are going through in your marriage. I reminded them that God knows what is best for you to live a happy married life, and that is the reason He calls you to deal with your sins – so you can please God, effectively minister to your spouse, and help them deal with their sins (Matt 7: 3-5). I informed the class that God offers grace, power, and joy as they faithfully obey Him, despite a spouse’s disobedience. He will honor and bless you as you endure unjust treatment (Matt 5:3-12; Jas 1:1-12; 1 Pet 2:19-24). At the beginning of the class, I asked, “Is that sufficient for you?” Then I explained that in most cases, we cannot fix our spouse, and we need to let Jesus be our spouse’s Lord and the sanctifier, as Christ is the one who can ultimately change the heart of a sinner.

I told the class that God calls a husband and wife to develop Christ-like character in their marriage (Eph 5:25; 1 Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:7-9). Husbands and wives vow to love, be patient, and be kind to one another. The class read Ephesians 5:25-27 together: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her

to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to Himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.” Paul tells husbands they must be ready to sacrifice their own lives for their wives, just as Christ died on the cross for the church. The primary role of a husband is to love and care for his wife unconditionally and unselfishly.

I asked the husbands of the class to reflect on Lou Priolo’s words: “You’re the one who must take the initiative to draw out of your wife the information necessary to develop and maintain the one-flesh intimacy God intends you to have with her.”<sup>5</sup> God called the husband to be the family unit’s leader, understand his wife’s character, and help her grow in knowledge and be ready to meet her basic and spiritual needs. The husband should act as an exemplary spiritual leader for the wife, as demonstrated by his moral and spiritual character within the family unit.

The class learned that a wife’s role in a marriage is to keep the family unit organized in the home. The wife ultimately became the better half of a husband. She is responsible for maintaining the house and recognizing the husband’s strengths and weaknesses. As a helper in the home (Gen 2:18), the wife is also called by God to intervene in house affairs to maintain stability in the home. A wife must honor and submit herself to her husband as modeled by the church to Christ (Eph 5:22-33). Submission means yielding or giving way to another person, whereas obedience is to do as an individual or institution orders by following the commands, restrictions, wishes, or instructions. I taught the class that in a sanctified marriage, the couple must submit to one another and complement each other to strengthen the marriage. A husband should not confuse submission with obedience. Submission does not grant a husband the right to abuse his wife in any situation (Rom 13:1-4; 1 Pet 5:1-3; Prov 22:3, 27:12). The session closed with a word of prayer, and the class was told to read Willard F. Harley Jr.,

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<sup>5</sup> Lou Priolo, *The Complete Husband: A Practical Guide for Improved Biblical Husbanding* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2017), 15-16.

*Participant's Guide His Needs, Her Needs: Building an Affair-Proof Marriage* for the next homework assignment.<sup>6</sup>

### **Week 5: Lesson 5—His Needs and Her Needs**

This session opened by sharing Philippians 2:3-4, which states, “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.” In this lesson, the class learned that for a marriage to work, both spouses must invest time in fulfilling each other’s needs as they grow together in their relationship and try to understand each other in their marriage journey. The class then read 1 Peter 3:7 together: “Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.” A husband is to understand his wife’s needs, meaning to have knowledge of her and gain insight into her. A husband must consider his wife’s needs and have sensitivity, courtesy, and tenderness in his heart.

Based on the homework assignment from reading Harley’s *Participant’s Guide His Needs, Her Needs*, the class was divided into two groups and asked to answer how men are different from women. Men and women are physically, mentally, and emotionally different from each other. The class agreed that women are more likely than men to have a higher grade in math, use fine motor skills, be nurturing, friendly, helpful, open, cooperative, trusting, and anxious, prefer an older mate with high earnings, want a spouse with the potential of good character, are threatened by emotional infidelity, and restrict sex to a potential long-term partner. In comparison, the class finds men are likely to be more driven by reason. Emotionally, men tend to be competitive, dominant,

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<sup>6</sup> Willard F. Harley Jr., *Participant’s Guide His Needs, Her Needs: Building an Affair-Proof Marriage* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013).

aggressive, and more likely to exhibit risky behavior. When choosing a partner, men prefer to have a younger mate who is physically attractive and has good housekeeping skills. Men are also threatened by sexual infidelity, sexually jealous and controlling, and comfortable with the idea of casual sex for themselves. Harley alludes,

The thing she needs the most is affection. In contrast, this may not be true for every woman. Would it surprise you to learn that this isn't true for most men? The only known aphrodisiac is testosterone; generally, men have more of it in their bloodstream than women. So for men, sexual fulfillment is nearly always at the top of their list of emotional needs.<sup>7</sup>

I read and explained the meaning of Ephesians 5:31-33, which says that marital intimacy is a shadowy picture of the relationship between Christ and His bride, the church. Married couples represent the church body when they give themselves to one another in marriage. They should have the most respect for how they intend to share their bodies in sexual intimacy with marriage partners. Scriptures such as Song of Solomon 4:16-5:1 commemorate the pleasures of what happens in the private moments between husband and wife. In other words, married couples should enjoy having sexual intimacy with one another to the fullest.

I asked the class to reflect on 1 Corinthians 7:2-5, where Paul states,

But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband. The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife. Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

As it is related to sexual intimacy, all participants in the study agree to follow God's Word and to continue to have respect and trust, as both partners must remain faithful to each other for the remaining years of their marriage until death does part. The class was informed that the Lord God delegated authority and responsibility to men in his household. Men have been ordained to lead their wives into a prosperous life. Genesis

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<sup>7</sup> Harley, *Participant's Guide His Needs, Her Needs*, 17.

18:19 says, “For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.” A man is responsible for providing wise and godly direction for his wife and family throughout life.<sup>8</sup>

God calls wives to love their husbands. The women in the class were asked what it means to love your husband. The class then read Titus 2:4-5, John 13:34-35, and Ephesians 5:1-2 together and discussed the meaning of each passage. Before the closing prayer for this session, the men and women in the class were given recommended reading for homework.

### **Week 6: Lesson 6—Becoming One Flesh**

In this session, after the opening prayer, the class was divided into two groups and was asked to describe the concept of “One Flesh?” During group discussion, participants agreed that “one flesh” comes from the book of Genesis 2:21:24, which describes how God created Eve from a rib taken from Adam’s side as he slept. Adam recognized that Eve was part of him, and they were “one flesh.” The term “one flesh” means that our bodies are one whole entity and cannot be divided into pieces and still be one whole body. Similarly, God intended the marriage relationship to be the uniting of two bodies into one flesh. In a marriage, man and woman are no longer considered two individuals, but the married couple becomes one, which means “one flesh.”

The class also discussed Ephesians 5:22-33 and Proverbs 31:10-31, which correspondingly apply this “oneness” to the role of the husband and the wife. The class

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<sup>8</sup> The men in the class were recommended to read for homework John Crotts, *Craftsmen: Skillfully Leading Your Family for Christ* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd, 2005); Dan Doriani, *The New Man: Becoming a Man after God’s Heart* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2015); R. Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Man* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006); Lou Priolo, *The Complete Husband: A Practical Guide for Improved Biblical Husbanding* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2017); and Stuart Scott, *The Exemplary Husband: A Biblical Perspective* (Bemidji, MN: Focus, 2002). The women in the class were recommended to read for homework Elyse Fitzpatrick, *Helper by Design: God’s Perfect Plan for Women in Marriage* (Chicago: Moody, 2003); Carolyn Mahaney, *Feminine Appeal: Seven Virtues of a Godly Wife and Mother* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003).

agrees that in a marriage union, emotionally, spiritually, intellectually, financially, and in every other way, a married couple is to become one. Even as one part of the body cares for the different body parts; just as the kidneys remove waste and extra water from the bloodstream (as urine) and help keep the body's chemicals, such as sodium, potassium, calcium, and glucose levels balanced; and the brain receives information through the five senses: sight, smell, touch, taste, and hearing. Each part of the body maintains its function, and every aspect must come together to do its job for the entire body to be functional.

Similarly, in a marital union, each partner must put aside selfish ambition by coming together as “one flesh” instead of seeing things as “mine” rather than accomplishments to build a healthy marriage. Class participants seemed to acquire the biblical knowledge that “God created one flesh” in marriage at the beginning of life. The class ended with a word of prayer, and I asked class members to be prepared in the next session to answer questions about what it takes to have good communication in marriage.

### **Week 7: Lesson 7—Better Communication in Marriage**

This session started with a word of prayer by asking God to guide the class and help them understand how to learn to communicate better with their partners. I then read Ephesians 4:15: “Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.” The class agreed that good communication is essential to a successful relationship. As a holy union (Gen 2:24), a sanctified marriage requires godly communication, which involves divine speaking and sacred listening. The class acknowledged that all communication occurs on two levels: the content level (truth) and the relational level (love).

The class was divided into two groups and was asked to answer questions regarding conflict from Family Life, *The Art of Marriage Manual: Getting to the Heart*



*of God's Design.*<sup>9</sup> The class agreed that conflict occurs when desires are not fulfilled, meaning when someone does not get what they want: rights have been violated; expectations have not been met; we have been hurt.

Unfulfilled desires may lead to anger, and both husband and wife must be committed to oneness to resolve conflict in marriage. The class was asked to reflect on Ephesians 4:29-30, which states, “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” Married couples learned from this session that open communication aims to restore oneness in the marriage. Because humans are fallen creatures, they can expect conflict in marriage. However, couples must address conflict by confronting relationship issues when they arise without taking too long to develop a resolution. The class participants agreed when preparing to talk with a partner about destructive behaviors in the marriage; they must examine the heart (Matt 7:4), pray, check their motives, and choose the timing wisely. When it is time to confront a partner, always speak the truth in love (Eph 4:15) and choose words carefully and with humility (Eph 4:29) to avoid escalating the situation into disarray.

The class learned the best way to communicate with their partner is to follow Jesus Christ as the perfect model and powerful representative of Godly speech. Then, the class read scriptures of John 7:46, which states, “‘No one ever spoke the way this man does,’ the guards replied.” The class also read Psalm 45:2: “You are the most excellent of men and your lips have been anointed with grace since God has blessed you forever.” Jesus set the standard for all believers to communicate with each other with a lovely and honest heart and come to the negotiation table ready to forgive one another for the sake of the kingdom of God.

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<sup>9</sup> Family Life, *The Art of Marriage: Getting to the Heart of God's Design* (Little Rock, AR: FamilyLife, 2011), 81.

The class was asked to review and discuss the “Four Rules of Communication” and “Ten Common Violations,” from John Bettler of Faith Baptist Counseling Ministries, as quoted in Robert D. Jones’s “Marriage and Family Counseling Manual.”<sup>10</sup>

Table 1. Four rules and ten common violations of communication

| Four Rules (Eph 4:25-32)                 | Ten Violations   |
|--|--|
| 1. Be honest (v.25)                      | 1. Double bind<br>2. Back door<br>3. Diversionary message  |
| 2. Keep current (v.26-27)                | 4. Bring up the past   |
| 3. Attack problems, not people (v.29-30) | 5. Exaggeration or universalizing<br>6. Trait names<br>7. Hitting below the belt<br>8. Psychoanalyzing<br>9. Blaming & defending |
| 4. Act, don’t react (v.31-32)            | 10. Losing temper  |

The class learned that Ephesians 4:25-32 calls on the married couple to be kind, compassionate, and able to forgive one another as Christ has suffered for the church and was willing to forgive all sins. Believers have been redeemed by the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. I taught, and the class participants agreed that good communication in a marriage should be built on trust, be able to accept full responsibility for wrongdoings, and be ready to confess all sins committed in the marriage to gain the other partner’s trust. In closing, one student ended the class with a word of prayer. For homework assignments for the next class meeting session on conflict resolution, the class was asked to reflect on the three steps to resolve marital conflict: (1) glorifying God, (2) repenting of sins, and (3) loving your spouse.

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<sup>10</sup> Robert D. Jones, “Lesson 10: Marriage and Family Communication” (classroom lecture, 80554—*Marriage and Family Counseling*, Winter 2020, photocopy), 106.

## **Week 8: Lesson 8—Handling Conflict**

This lesson began with a word of prayer and an open discussion about conflict resolution. The class pointed out that humility is the best way to handle conflict. The class read Proverbs 12:15, which states, “The way of fools seems right to them, but the wise listen to advice.” Humans live in a fallen world where everyone is subject to a sinful life (Matt 5:23-24; Luke 17:3-4; Col 3:12-15). God has called on married couples to make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace (Eph 4:3). The class also read Hebrews 12:14: “Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness, no one will see the Lord.” I taught, and the students agreed that every married couple should try to make peace with their partner to please God. I then used the two Scriptures to illustrate conflicts in marriage.

In Matthew 5:23-24 Jesus said, “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First, go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.” Later in Matthew 18:15-16, Jesus said, “If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’” Jesus says to go to your brother or sister and work things out with a pure heart. Christians ought to flee from the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace with our spouse and strive to keep our conscience clear before God and man (2 Tim 2:22; Acts 24:16). I discussed with the class the importance of repenting from sinful behaviors and seeking forgiveness, which is essential in a conflict resolution discussion in the marriage. It is not always easy for a married couple, but confessing sins to one’s spouse and seeking his (her) forgiveness is critical for bringing peace into the relationship. The class learned that if they properly handled their marital problems, then the conflict they experienced in their marriage could draw them into a deeper level of love, trust, and commitment. God can use the marital experiences for good in helping the spouse become like Jesus (Rom 8:28-

29). Romans 12:18 reads, “Therefore, allow God to have His way in your troubles, and watch what the devil intended for harm be used by God for good. And “as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.”

For homework, the class was asked to read the following passages carefully and reflect on them as they tried to deal with the ongoing conflicts in their marriage: Psalm 103:8-14; Isaiah 1:18, 44:21-22; Jeremiah 31:31-34, 50:20; Micah 7:18-20; Eph 4:1-3; and Colossians 3:12-14. Based on the reading assignment, the class was to write an application response regarding each Scripture of how God wants them to handle conflict in their marriage. At the end of the class session, I prayed and informed the participants that I would be available to answer any question for twenty minutes after class.

### **Week 9: Lesson 9—Breaking the Curse of Familiarity**

Lesson 9 began with a word of prayer. The class was very excited to learn about this topic of “Breaking the Curse of Familiarity.” The class was introduced to Frank Hammond’s *Confronting Familiar Spirits: Counterfeits to The Holy Spirit*. Hammond writes,

A familiar spirit is the designation of a specific type of evil spirit. It is so classified because of its chief characteristic: namely, familiarity. It is a relationship, a familiarity, with a person or personality. Familiar spirits are common amid the practices of spiritism and witchcraft, but their activity is by no means limited to persons and practices so obviously occult. Evil spirits are personalities. They can reason, decide, express emotions, and communicate. Personalities have the capacity to relate to one another. Two human personalities can form a relationship, which can be enhanced through communication and communion. Likewise, a person can form and develop a close relationship with an evil spirit. When a person creates a relationship with an evil spirit (which can be done either willfully or through ignorance), he then has a familiar spirit.<sup>11</sup>

Under the Old Testament law, God warned those who sinned to be involved with familiar spirits. In Leviticus 20:27, the Lord God declares, “A man or woman who is a medium or

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<sup>11</sup> Frank Hammond, *Confronting Familiar Spirits: Counterfeits to The Holy Spirit* (Kirkwood, MO: Impact Christian, 2011), 3.

spiritist among you must be put to death. You are to stone them; their blood will be on their own heads.” Familiar spirits are deceivers and counterfeits of the Holy Spirit’s work.

According to the Word of God, anyone involved with anything occult, or has involvement with familiar spirits, establishes spiritual defilement. Leviticus 19:31 reads, “Do not turn to mediums or seek out spiritists, for they will defile you. I am the LORD your God.” I used King Saul as an illustration when he pursued a woman with a familiar spirit. Because Saul requested help from the witch of Endor, God’s judgment came upon him. Because of Saul’s actions and refusal to obey God’s laws, “Saul died because he was unfaithful to the LORD; he did not keep the word of the LORD and even consulted a medium for guidance and did not inquire of the LORD. So, the LORD put him to death and turned the kingdom over to David, son of Jesse” (1 Chron 10:13-14). A married partner who has fellowship with God and is led by the Holy Spirit does not need to consult with a familiar spirit, for the Lord God will provide everything needed.

The question posed for the class was, what makes a person fascinated to be involved with familiar spirits? The class anxiously agreed that many are engaged with familiar spirits by curiosity or desire to know what is to come about in the future. The class also learned that familiar spirits can be acquired by those who practice divination. Divination includes the practices of spirits mediums, witches, and Haitian voodoo priests. Moses warns the Israelites in Deuteronomy 18:9-10, “When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. Let no one be found among you who sacrifices their son or daughter in the fire, practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft.” Scripture teaches that “there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 2:5). In John 14:6, Jesus acknowledges, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” Married couples should know that Jesus is the only mediator and way to access the Heavenly Father. The most important truth that all

married couples must remember is that Jesus has all power, and the devil is a fraud. The class ended with a word of prayer.

### **Week 10: Lesson 10—Handling Financial Issues in Marriage**

This session started with a word of prayer and thanksgiving. I then read the passage of Proverbs 22:7: “The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is a slave to the lender.” I asked the class, “What is the significance of that passage?” The class agreed that married couples must be willing to understand and discuss what money means to both partners and be ready to disclose financial information to each other. Thomas J. Stanley and William D. Danko emphasize, “Operating a household without a budget is akin to operating a business without a plan, goals, and direction.”<sup>12</sup> Married couples need to learn to live within their financial means. The class understands that they should put their hope and trust in God as stated in 1 Timothy 6:17: “Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.” In today’s world, the wife can have a higher income than the husband. Though the Word of God ordains the man as the headship of the household, it does not require the man to take full responsibility for the financial tasks in the home (Prov 31:10-31). Both partners should speak honestly about financial needs (Eph 4:25).

In 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12, the apostle Paul notes that believers should not depend on others for financial support. Married couples should work to be financially independent and, when encountering difficulties, seek out the answer from God with prayer. Married couples learned not to overwork themselves to make extra cash, but to try to earn enough money to provide for their family (1 Cor 9:4-5; 1 Tim 5:8).

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<sup>12</sup> Thomas J. Stanley and William D. Danko, *The Millionaire Next Door* (New York: Pocket, 1996), 78.

If not appropriately addressed, pursuing wealth can lead to compulsive behavior or mental breakdown for many couples. In Genesis 2:15, God commands believers to work hard to provide for the family financially. However, Christians must not forget to set aside quality time to spend with loved ones. The wealth a couple builds during the marriage will be passed away and forgotten but love for each other will have a lasting impact on their children and families. Jesus reminded His followers that one of the greatest commandments is to love God with all your soul, heart, and mind; the second is to love your neighbor (Matt 22:36-40). Married couples learned not to value money over love.

Married couples from the class learned that overspending and impulsive buying can drain the home's financial resources. I then shared the following Scriptures with the class to provide some financial safeguards and limits that should be set to ensure provisions for the family: Proverbs 25:28; Luke 16:13; Ephesians 4:28; 1 Timothy 5:8, 6:10, 6:17-19; Hebrews 13:5. After reading, the class discussed each passage.

The class learned that having enough money can create a sense of security, financial freedom, and fulfilling future accomplishments for the family. However, married couples also realized they must place all their faith and hope in God as their primary provider. The session ended with a word of prayer.

### **Week 11: Lesson 11—The Fundamentals of a Christ-Centered Marriage**

The session opened with a prayer from 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, "Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." The class needed to answer the question, what is a Christ-centered marriage?

A Christ-centered marriage is a God-ordained union between two sinners. The learned from Ecclesiastes 7:20: "Indeed, there is no one on earth who is righteous, no one who does what is right and never sins." Everyone on earth has turned their back on God and gone a separate way (Isa 53:6; Rom 3:9-20, 23; Gal 5:13-26). Believers cannot blame

the devil for marital problems or past mistreatment and abuse in relationships. Instead, sin is the root cause of marriage and family problems. When married couples confess their sins to God faithfully and decide to walk a straight path by following Christ's footsteps, then God will forgive them of the sins committed and purify them from all unrighteousness (Ps 32:1-5; Prov 28:13; John 1:8-9; Jas 4:6).

The class learned that a Christ-centered marriage must be focused on the cross's unconditional love in that even though no one deserved His grace, He endured the pain for sins. The apostle John reminds, "Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 John 4:11). At the cross, God showed unconditional love by giving up his beloved Son to die and sharing His blood for sins. At this point in the lesson, the class was divided into groups and answered the following questions.

1. Do you only love God when He pleases you, or do you love Him unconditionally even as He loves you?
2. Do you love your spouse conditionally?
3. Do you only care about your spouse so long as they treat you how you think they should?

When Christians look at the cross, they must see their sins and feel the pain God endured for the sins of humanity. Paul says, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners-of whom I am the worst" (1 Tim 1:15). The participants of this study learned from apostle Paul when he states in Ephesians 4:32-5:2, "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." Love could be challenging to give when couples struggle, but love can start to build a marriage again if one tries to show love through forgiveness, patience, comfort, and peace. It is often not easy for a spouse to forgive the other party for sinful acts; true forgiveness can only be possible through God's divine intervention. Ecclesiastes 4:10 says that if "either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up." Both partners must lift up each



other even through the worst moments, or if one spouse has struggled to remain faithful to God. The other spouse must become the comforter by showing love and support and helping the partner reestablish the relationship back to God.

The most crucial thing a couple can do is to have a marriage that flourishes with unconditional love and make every attempt to have an authentic connection with Christ. Robert Jones alludes that married couples must focus on having unity among themselves and communion with our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, in order to grow in their relationships. Jones uses the “indicative-imperative” dynamic table to make his case.<sup>13</sup>

Table 2. Indicative-imperative dynamic

| What We Are in Christ<br>(Our Identity in Christ) | What Christ Calls Us to Be/Do<br>(Our Growth in Christ) |
|---|---|
| Romans 6: 1-10                                    | Romans 6:11-14  |
| Philippians 2:1                                   | Philippians 2:2-4                                       |
| Ephesians 1-3                                     | Ephesians 4-6   |
| Colossians 3:1-4, 12a                             | Colossians 3:5-11, 12b-17                               |
| 2 Peter 1:3-4                                     | 2 Peter 1:5-9   |

The class was divided into two groups. The groups reviewed the Scriptures, discussed their spiritual growth in Christ, and the impact each passage has regarding their marital relationship.

After the group discussion, the class closed with the following prayer: Father God in Heaven, we come before you with sorrow and grief for marriages in turmoil today. We do not have the answers for what the married couples in this class are going through. Still, we ask that they put all their trust and lay all their marital problems at the feet of Jesus Christ, knowing He died on the cross for us so that we could learn to forgive one another as He had forgiven us for our sins. By laying all of the problems at Your

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<sup>13</sup> Robert D. Jones, “Lesson 1: What Is a Christ-centered Marriage?” (classroom lecture, 80554—*Marriage and Family Counseling*, Winter 2020, photocopy), 6.

Son's feet, we know the Holy Spirit will lead them on the paths of restoration and recovery to where these marriages will flourish with happiness, laughter, and peace again. We pray this prayer in Jesus Almighty's name. Amen.

### **Week 12: Lesson 12—Overall Review and Closing Prayer**

Throughout the twelve-week marital seminars, the class learned they must trust God in trials and tribulations. The class read 1 Peter 2: 22-23, which states, “‘He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.’ When they hurled their insults at Him, He did not retaliate; when He suffered, He made no threats. Instead, He entrusted himself to Him who judges justly.”

To follow Jesus Christ, one must live by faith (Rom 1:17). Jesus believed in the plan of God. He faithfully accepted His assignment from God the Father. The class learned that the cross was a test of faith for Jesus Christ. The married couples acknowledged that living by faith is not easy, and they learned that the cross and the resurrection gives them reasons for believing in God's promises. At the cross, Jesus proves that God will reward faith in the most challenging moments. Many have faced serious problems in their marriages but have learned that nothing is impossible for God. God has a way of penetrating the human heart, and only He can change a sinner's heart. The class learned that God holds the key to the New Jerusalem, where there will be no more pain, crying, or suffering, and every believer in Christ will live in harmony and peace (Rev 21:4).

The participants completed the Married Couples Course Evaluation at the end of class. The twelve-week marital seminar session ended with a word of prayer where we thanked the Lord for allowing us to have the opportunity to learn the Word of God as related to marriage.

### **Conclusion**

The twelve-week marital seminar sessions were successful. I made every effort to use the Scriptures as the guide to get closer and seek answers from God as the class

navigated solving problems in marriages. Participants appeared enthusiastic and receptive to the discussions when I read the Scriptures. The presence of the Holy Spirit was at the center of every dialogue from lesson 1 until lesson 12. The group was eager to learn what God said about a holy union in the Bible.

## CHAPTER 5

### EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

This chapter provides a brief overview and evaluation of the project. This evaluation includes a discussion of the project's goals, strengths, and weaknesses. Additionally, the chapter consists of a reflection on what could be done differently to improve the results.

#### **Evaluation of the Project's Purpose**

The project aimed to educate married couples from a biblical viewpoint at Evangelical Bethel Church of God in Brockton, Massachusetts. The project enabled married couples to view marriage as an everlasting holy union through the eyes of God. Many project participants seemed to have little knowledge or ideas about what the Scriptures say about marriage. Many couples who have been married through Evangelical Bethel Church of God did not have the opportunity to attend a marital counseling class before committing to getting married before the Lord. This project was beneficial for the church and the participants to be able to interpret and use biblical Scriptures when seeking guidance for a problematic marriage instead of relying on secular counseling for answers.

The project's purpose was fulfilled through in-depth twelve-week sessions focused on learning the blueprint of marriage initially designed by God, the Creator of the first holy union. The class discovered their marriages were at risk of failing because of their sins. The curriculum challenged participants to have a change of heart in terms of their views and deal with marital conflict. They realized they should place their faith in the Holy Spirit to be the mediator and comforter as they learn to forgive one another for

the sake of the kingdom of God. The project's participants now understand that Christ should be at the center of the marriage when making decisions. Just as Christ suffered for the church for His bride on the cross, a marriage union can be painful and stressful for some. If Christ did not give up on us, then we should learn to put our selfish desires aside and make peace with our married partner. This project elevated married couples' spirits to a dimension where they could see Jesus Christ as the only hope for a perfect marital union. Participants realized that marriage is based on unconditional love through Christ, and they must conform to the biblical instructions for marriage, replacing a worldly view of marriage with God's design. God ordained marriage for both men and women to be an everlasting covenant relationship, bringing many blessings to couples.

### **Evaluation of Project's Goals**

This project had three goals. The first goal was to assess the spiritual maturity of married couples as related to marriage at EBCG. The objective was to determine how much biblical knowledge married couples had about a union sanctified by God and to uncover how married couples deal with the challenges they face in their daily lives. This goal was accomplished by participants completing a questionnaire before the class and an evaluation after the marriage class. Through this instrument, participants shared their marital experiences. Participants expressed their feelings and the various problems they faced in their marriage. In addition to the survey instrument, group discussions helped participants better understand how other couples deal with conflicts in their marriage.

Participants were open about their views on marriage when answering the survey questions and seemed willing to share their traumatic experiences in their marriage. After reading and answering the questionnaire, participants felt more comfortable sharing their Christian faith and spiritual practices with other participants. Participants were also asked how important prayer, marrying someone with the same faith, and values are to their relationship. All participants overwhelmingly agreed that lifetime marriage glorifies and pleases God. Based on the stated objective, the first goal was met.

The second goal was to develop a twelve-week curriculum to provide a biblical perspective on marriage and train couples in conflict resolution. A twelve-week lesson plan focused on building a healthy marriage that followed God's blueprint of marriage was created for this project. Participants learned that a marriage made on solid rock is one where Christ is at the center, and the Holy Spirit is always present to maintain peace, good health, and prosperity. Participants learned that marriage is a lasting covenant built on trust, mutual respect, and good communication. The class learned that a marriage union without Christ's presence is at risk of falling apart, ultimately leading to separation or divorce. Goal 2 was successfully met when twenty-three participants completed the course evaluation. The average score for each of the categories identified on the provided rubric was approximately 3.5 out of 4.0.<sup>1</sup> The highest mean scores were for the following statements: (1) Each lesson was sound in its interpretation of Scripture, (2) The curriculum details how to develop a lesson to teach the Bible, and (3) At the end of the course, participants can better teach others the Bible. The lowest mean scores were for the statements (1) Each lesson was faithful to the theology of the Bible, and (2) The content of the curriculum sufficiently covers each issue it is designed to address.

The third goal was to educate couples with a biblical perspective on marriage by teaching the curriculum. Married couples were given instructions on how to pray together, practice good financial habits, be faithful to one another, and communicate through mutual respect. Goal 3 was unsuccessful because a second set of surveys was not collected; therefore, the study lacked a means of statistically measuring the impact of the curriculum. Participants enjoyed the seminar and expressed confidence that what they learned would help them in their marriages.<sup>2</sup> After participating in the course, approximately 10% more men began attending weekly church services.

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<sup>1</sup> See appendix 3.

<sup>2</sup> See appendix 3, table A1.

## **Strengths of the Project**

Based on my observation and the responses from the participants, the project has several strengths. Participants offered positive feedback regarding the PowerPoint presentation slides. Participants were attentive and engaged on each topic presented. They felt encouraged to participate in group discussions about marital conflicts, which helped them discover what adjustments they needed to make in their marriage. The Bible was one of the greatest resources used in the class to illustrate and find answers about marriage. Everyone had their Bibles open and was ready to discuss the topics. YouTube videos on current events were used to make the connection with present situations in their marriage. Participants were in tune and found these videos fascinating to watch and learn from other married couples who were having problems in their marriage.

The second strength of the project was that the participants learned how to manage their stress levels within their marriage by spending quality time together as a couple; this could take the form of attending a marriage seminar together. Most project participants admitted that they spent little time together. Instead, they worked overtime to save money, pay debt, and serve in the church. This project helped them realize that planning a vacation trip at least once a year is essential to maintaining a positive marriage bond.

The third strength of the project was that participants learned how to build trust, understand the importance of forgiving one another, and improve by learning new skills in how they communicated. Participants agree that a successful marriage requires a lifetime commitment. Married couples learned that they must show appreciation and affection toward each other, enjoy spending time together, manage stress, focus on having a good relationship with God, and continue to share common values. The topics chosen for this project were informative for the participants. Everyone participated in class discussions and acknowledged that they never had any opportunity before to be part of a Christian marital seminar.

This project's fourth strength was allowing participants to engage in group discussions instead of simply teaching through lectures. Participants also realized instead of just focusing on what studies and researchers say about marital conflicts, they can also learn from their mistakes and publicly confess sins, thus allowing God to change habits and give them a new heart, actions which can help them have a successful marriage.

The final strength of this project was to bring the PowerPoint slides and my screen projector to certain participants' homes because they could not travel to the church when the class was meeting for the sessions. I was delighted to make any effort necessary to keep all participants signed up for this project. The focus was to get everyone on board to fill out the survey questionnaires and complete all twelve-week marital counseling sessions.

### **Weaknesses of the Project**

In this section, I will discuss the project's weaknesses. The first weakness was that many participants lacked biblical knowledge about most discussed topics. Some participants did not understand how to read the Bible with proper context. Participants' Haitian-Creole culture also influenced their understanding of the Word of God. Many students read the Bible literally without applying proper historical context; therefore, these students required additional explanation to understand the Scriptures in a modern or familiar context. In addition to addressing the cultural issues, I had to verbally translate the questionnaire from English into the Haitian Creole dialect in order for participants to understand what was being asked. Participants verbally answered the questions (individually), I wrote down their responses, and then translated them back into English.

A second weakness was time constraints for the class meetings. Each class was one hour, and class discussions often had to end prematurely because the class time had ended. A more extended class period would have allowed participants to finish discussions in many cases.



The third weakness was that some of the topics presented were too broad and needed to be narrowed down because of limited time. The class met for twelve weeks. More class meetings would have been required to cover all the topics in the original class design.

The fourth weakness was that most of the participants' primary speaking language is Haitian Creole, and they required translation of the presented materials to have a better understanding. Translating took extra time from teaching the class effectively.

Lastly, certain biblical concepts related to marriage were too advanced for this group of participants. Some participants asked questions that reflected their lack of understanding of the Bible. They often needed to be redirected to focus on the questions and topics addressed in that day's session. Also, at times, some participants engaged in extensive debates during group discussions. They had to be reminded to treat each other respectfully and not share specific personal matters with the class. For example, some students discussed their husbands' infidelities as well as their personal financial issues.

### **What I Would Do Differently**

If I had the opportunity to lead another marital counseling project, I would contact other churches to advertise the project so more people could participate. I would visit other churches to describe the project. I would then extend an invitation for their members to join the classes.

Additionally, I would have one or two sessions to divide the men and women into two groups. Participants sometimes felt uncomfortable expressing their thoughts in front of their partners. Separating married couples by gender might alleviate the stress level among couples and encourage them to participate freely in crucial conversations.

I would also bring extra Bibles for the class to reference because some participants often did not have their Bibles present. I probably would dedicate the last class to reviewing and answering questions because there was not enough time to respond

to all of the participants' questions. Instead of teaching the twelve-week sessions alone, I could have one or two professionals from the field of marital counseling join the class for at least one session to share their experiences. Outside the one-hour window to teach the course, I should have made myself available for a minimum of thirty minutes after each session to answer questions.

Bringing refreshments for the class or giving each participant a ten or twenty-dollar gift card would help participants understand how vital their participation was for this project study. If time allows, extending the project's invitation to different ethnic groups of married couples would enable me to analyze how groups from different cultures respond to the survey questionnaire.

The project would have benefitted from an expert panel who could evaluate the effectiveness of the class. Additionally, the project would have benefitted from a post-class survey that could have produced a statistical means of determining the effectiveness of the curriculum. Running a *t*-test could also show the difference in the pre- and post-test survey results.

### **Theological Reflections**

Marriage is a spiritual gift from God given to humankind because the Lord God understands that man cannot live alone. God designed marriage as a holy union for married couples to serve and glorify God. In 1 John 2:17, the great apostle states, "And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever." This passage reminds married couples that everything they see on this earth, including their spouses, is temporary. For this reason, married couples should place God first in their lives, not just living a life that is pleasing to the flesh but a life that glorifies the head and the groom of the church, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

God tests His people by allowing immorality and decadence to enter society, thus looking to elect Christians to step forward who are unafraid to speak the truth about the Word of God. Government and elected officials have tried to redefine marriage. In

many cases, the family unit, male and female, that God originally designed has been broken. Currently, same-sex marriage is legal in the United States. Many have taken advantage of that law to practice sexual immoralities, and many churches remain silent. Christian churches should implement biblical marriage training for their members.

Marriage is living in harmony and peace with a partner. In Ephesians 4:2-3 the apostle Paul expounds, “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” Married couples must learn to carry each other’s burdens when problems arise.

They ought to support one another and forgive each other’s sins as Christ has done for them on the cross. The church must help married couples build healthy relationships that will encourage people to grow spiritually and then bring glory to God. Men and women in the church must know that marriage is a great sacrament designed by God to bring pleasure, not hardship, for both married partners.

### **Personal Reflections**

When I think about my life, I believe God has granted me a second chance to walk a straight spiritual life. I vividly recall when God showed me a vision through His beloved Son Jesus Christ in 2010. I became a police officer in May 2005 with the MBTA Transit Police Department. As a rookie cop, I was forced to work an extra forty hours of overtime a week during my initial five years. Although I was doing very well financially, I was burned out and depressed. When I worked those eighty hours a week, I was not spending enough time with my family and became agitated and lonely.

One night in the summer of 2010, I had an epiphany while sleeping. I saw a man dressed in a white robe take me by the arm and entered deep into the ocean with me. I began to scream and asked him to let go of me because I could not swim, and he would drown me and kill me. Then suddenly, I heard a voice saying, “I am the Alpha and Omega, don’t be afraid,” and he kept going deeper into the ocean. I continued telling him to let me go, and he was going to kill me because I could not swim, and he said, “I

am the beginning and the last; don't be afraid." Finally, he brought me back to dry land and told me, "You are free to go," then my eyes were eventually opened. After this vision from God, I was stunned and never experienced anything like that in my life. At that moment, I realized God was calling me for something greater than being a regular police officer. I immediately applied to Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary School for the spring semester and enrolled in the Master of Divinity program.

That experience made me realize that we live in a world where our environments are shaped by cultural, biological, political, and financial assets. Humankind came to the world where they were pre-conditioned to form their personal beliefs and alienate themselves from God, the Creator. Second Timothy 3:1-5 says,

But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people.

The Holy Spirit is the only trustworthy source where I place all my faith. For those who lack faith in Christ Jesus, I pray for God to reveal himself in the same way he revealed himself to me.

God has blessed me and my family tremendously, and I am grateful for his grace. I thank God for helping and sending spiritual mentors to help me achieve a doctoral degree in Christian ministry. God has given me a new vision to minister to other people. He helped me recognize my strengths and weaknesses during this journey. As a servant of God, I learned I must serve God's people with humility and compassion. The Lord God has never failed me throughout my difficulties in life. In Him, I found the strength and courage to continue my ministry. The biblical knowledge I gained during this project will assist me in the future to help couples build healthy marriages that will be pleasing and glorifying to God.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, the married couples project was a success. Evangelical Bethel Church of God did not offer marriage counselor classes before implementing this project. Church members were delighted and inspired by this project simply by being able to participate in a biblical marriage class, and now they can access resources to help them make positive changes in their relationships. I am grateful God elected me to improve families' lives at EBCG for the greater good of His kingdom.

## APPENDIX 1

### PRE- AND POST-CLASS QUESTIONNAIRE

#### **Agreement to Participate**

Evangelical Bethel Church of God is committed to preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ to believers and nonbelievers. We fulfill this commitment by encouraging church members to attend weekly Bible study and marital seminar retreats where participants can learn the marriage covenant as God designed. Our church believes in taking drastic action to reach out to families with problems in their marriage. EBCG is committed to creating strong family bonds among church members where everyone can live a productive Christ-centered life pleasing in God's eyes.<sup>1</sup>

Herby J. Jean is conducting this research to collect data for a ministry project. Participation is strictly voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time. By completing this survey, you are providing informed consent for using your responses in this project.

#### **General Information**

Because the ministry is relational, we prefer to include your name below rather than completing the survey anonymously. However, if you choose to be anonymous, please use the last four digits of your social security number or phone number for future reference.

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name (or 4-digit code):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Gender:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Age:** \_\_\_\_\_

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<sup>1</sup> Survey from Duane Waddell Logsdon, "Strengthening Marriage from a Biblical Perspective at Cornerstone Baptist Church Springfield, Georgia" (DMin project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012), 112-17. I (Herby Jean) translated the survey into the Haitian Creole dialect for participants. They individually provided verbal responses, which I transcribed and translated back into English.

**General Questions:**

1. How many years have you professed Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior? \_\_\_\_\_
2. How many years have you been a member of a Bible-believing church? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Are you currently serving as a ministry leader, teacher, or disciple of other believers?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
4. How many hours a week do you read your Bible for personal study or devotions?  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Is memorizing Scripture a current practice of yours?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
6. Do you have a daily discipline of praying for other people?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
7. Describe the Bible's description of marriage.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. Have you ever taken any classes in pre-marital counseling? If so, please describe.
  - a. Yes
  - b. No  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. Have you ever received any formal marital counseling? If so, please describe.
  - a. Yes
  - b. No  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. How often do people come to you for help with spiritual (non-physical) problems?
  - a. Daily
  - b. Weekly
  - c. Monthly
  - d. Seldom

11. How many children do you have?

- a. 0
- b. 1
- c. 2
- d. 3
- e. 3+

12. With the experience you have had in your current relationship, what are the chances of breaking up with your partner? (On a scale of 1 to 10, 1 being the lowest chance)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

13. What is the essential quality in your partner; what do you love the most?

- a. Good looks
- b. Shared interests
- c. Humor
- d. Intelligence
- e. Money
- f. Sensitivity
- g. Romance
- h. Friendship
- i. Others

14. If either of you has been unemployed for a long duration, did your partner support you during the whole period?

- a. Yes, for the entire period
- b. Yes, but for a short period
- c. No, there was no need for support
- d. No, did not support it at all

15. Is it easy to express your feelings to your partner, and why?

- a. Yes
- b. No

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16. Do you believe in love?

- a. Yes
- b. No

17. What are you most insecure about?

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18. What do you think will make your relationship even more robust?

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19. Were you ever involved in an extramarital affair relationship before coming to know Christ?

- a. Yes
- b. No

20. If so, for how long?

- a. Less than a year
- b. 1-4 years
- c. 5-8 years
- d. 9-11 years
- e. 12-15 years
- f. 15+ years

### **Agreement Survey**

Using the following scale, please circle the number corresponding to your feelings in response to, or your understanding, the following statements.

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

21. God designed marriage to be between one man and one woman.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

22. As the creator of marriage, God knows how marriage is to work.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

23. The Bible is the primary source for describing marriage.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

24. Marriage is to be based on trust.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

25. I trust my spouse in all things.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

26. My relationship with God will influence my spouse.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

27. I must be willing to sacrifice time and effort for my marriage to be healthy.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

28. My spouse must change for our marriage to be healthier.  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
29. God made me specifically for my spouse.  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
30. I use the Bible to provide guidelines for my marriage.  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
31. I must change for my marriage to be healthier.  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
32. I will sacrifice time, energy, and self-interest to improve my marriage.  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
33. Being in the church has helped my marriage.  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
34. My Christian faith has helped me deal with marital difficulties.  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
35. The church has taught me how to have a healthier marriage.  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
36. I must willingly submit myself to my spouse.  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
37. I should show love for my spouse by teaching them about Jesus.  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
38. It is okay for me to be married to a non-Christian.  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
39. Marriage is to be a testimony of Jesus' love for the church.  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
40. I know the primary needs of my spouse.  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
41. Sexuality is a gift of God to be practiced only in marriage.  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
42. A healthy marriage will bring sexual fulfillment.  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
43. Husbands and wives have the same roles and responsibilities in the marriage relationship.  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
44. The wife is always to follow the husband's wishes.  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
45. The husband's role in the home is more important than the wife's.  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

46. Submission is a sign of weakness.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

47. Marriage is to be a permanent relationship.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

48. My marriage is a testimony of Jesus' love for the church.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

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

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

50. Forgiveness is needed for a healthy marriage.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

51. Honest communication requires me to relate facts and feelings.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

52. Communication is not needed for a healthy marriage.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

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

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

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

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

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

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

56. My spouse and I always agree on finances.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

57. Finances are not a problem in my household.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

58. I know how to improve the handling of family finances.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

### **Open-Ended Questions**

Use the space provided to answer the following questions about your current marriage. If you are divorced, please answer the questions about your previous marriage.

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

60. What is your definition of marriage?

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

62. What do you consider having been (to be) the most significant challenge(s) in your marriage?
63. What do you believe are your spouse's top four needs?
64. What problems have you experienced in your marriage?
65. How have you dealt with the problems you have faced?
66. Has your Christianity helped you deal with your marital problems? Why or why not?
67. How has the church helped you deal with these problems? Were you willing to let the church help?
68. What can the church do to help you?
69. Have you ever received counseling from someone outside the church to help with your marriage? How did it help you and your spouse?
70. If your marriage were healthier, do you think it would help the church to be healthier? Why?

## APPENDIX 2

### STATISTICAL SUMMARY OF SURVEY RESULTS

The following table is a statistical summary of the survey results. One result that would have improved the analysis would have been to use the same set of questions before and after to independently determine major changes driven by the class.

Table A1. Statistical summary of survey questions

| Criteria                    | Mean  | Median | Mode | Standard Deviation |
|-----------------------------|-------|--------|------|--------------------|
| Years of marriage           | 19.56 | 15     | 15   | 18.21              |
| Years of church attendance  | 16.78 | 7.5    | 0    | 19.4               |
| Days per week reading Bible | 6.22  | 2.5    | 0    | 8.53               |
| Spiritual help              | 2.78  | 3      | 4    | 1.22               |
| Extra marital affairs       | 0.56  | 1      | 1    | 0.51               |
| God designed marriage       | 1.44  | 1      | 1    | 1.42               |
| God influence spouse        | 1.5   | 1      | 1    | 1.42               |
| Noticed change in spouse    | 2.94  | 2      | 1    | 2.21               |
| Bible guidance              | 1.72  | 1      | 1    | 1.41               |
| Submissive                  | 1.67  | 1.5    | 1    | 0.84               |
| Intimacy                    | 1.5   | 1      | 1    | 1.42               |
| Roles & Responsibilities    | 2.61  | 2      | 1    | 2                  |
| Forgiveness                 | 1.56  | 1      | 1    | 1.42               |
| Lack of communication       | 5.44  | 7      | 7    | 2.43               |
| Loneliness                  | 5.11  | 6      | 7    | 2.3                |
| Finance                     | 2.06  | 1.5    | 1    | 1.55               |

APPENDIX 3

MARRIED COUPLES COURSE EVALUATION

Evaluator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

| <b>Married Couples Curriculum Evaluation Tool</b>                                       |          |          |          |          |                 |
|---|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------------|
| <b>1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary</b>             |          |          |          |          |                 |
| <b>Criteria</b>   | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>Comments</b> |
| <b>Biblical Accuracy</b>  |          |          |          |          |                 |
| Each lesson was sound in its interpretation of Scripture.                               |          |          |          |          |                 |
| Each lesson was faithful to the theology of the Bible.                                  |          |          |          |          |                 |
| <b>Scope</b>  |          |          |          |          |                 |
| The content of the curriculum sufficiently covers each issue it is designed to address. |          |          |          |          |                 |
| The curriculum sufficiently covers a biblical pedagogical methodology.                  |          |          |          |          |                 |
| <b>Pedagogy</b>   |          |          |          |          |                 |
| Each lesson was clear and contained a big idea.   |          |          |          |          |                 |
| Each lesson provides opportunities for participant interaction with the material.       |          |          |          |          |                 |
| <b>Practicality</b>   |          |          |          |          |                 |
| The curriculum details how to develop a lesson to teach the Bible.                      |          |          |          |          |                 |
| At the end of the course, participants can better teach others the Bible.               |          |          |          |          |                 |

Other Comment

The average score for each item on the course evaluation exceeded 3.0 on the provided rubric. Students provided meaningful feedback on the course, including the following quotes:

“Participating in this marital seminar class has helped us develop better communication techniques, which brings us closer in our relationships.” (Female class participant)

“Through this marital seminar, my wife and I began to see improvement in our financial decision-making.” (Male class participant)

“This marital seminar session has helped us to see the importance of prayer and to remain faithful to one another by living a Christ-centered marriage.” (Male class participant)

Based on my observations from the course evaluations, Evangelical Bethel Church of God will greatly benefit from the course. Participants expressed that participating in the twelve-week marital seminar positively impacted their relationships. The course covered many topics, such as finances, infidelity, the roles of husband and wife in marriage, challenges and issues related to Haitian culture, and living a Christ-centered marriage. Participants from the class have learned how to address complex problems in their marriages and focus on having a lasting commitment to marriage that is pleasing and glorifying to God.

APPENDIX 4

STATISTICAL SUMMARY OF COURSE EVALUATION

Table A2. Evaluation results

| Criteria   | Mean     | Median | Mode | Standard Deviation |
|--|----------|--------|------|--------------------|
| Each lesson was sound in its interpretation of Scripture                               | 3.565217 | 4      | 4    | 0.50687            |
| Each lesson was faithful to the theology of the Bible                                  | 3.391304 | 3      | 3    | 0.499011           |
| The content of the curriculum sufficiently covers each issue it is designed to address | 3.434783 | 3      | 3    | 0.50687            |
| The curriculum details how to develop a lesson to teach the Bible                      | 3.521739 | 4      | 4    | 0.510754           |
| Participants can better teach others the Bible   | 3.565217 | 4      | 4    | 0.50687            |



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## ABSTRACT

### EDUCATING MARRIED COUPLES FROM A BIBLICAL VIEWPOINT AT EVANGELICAL BETHEL CHURCH OF GOD IN BROCKTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Herby Junior Jean, DMin  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2023  
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Matthew D. Haste

This marriage education project aimed to provide married couples at EBCG a biblical knowledge of a Christ-centered marriage. Chapter 1 presents the history of the ministry context of Evangelical Bethel Church of God and the goals of this project. Chapter 2 provides the biblical and theological foundation of covenant marriage as designed and purposed by God. Chapter 3 represents the abundance of resources available to married couples compared to the philosophies and practices that guide secular counselors for marriage. Chapter 4 describes the project implementation, recounting the content and teaching methodology of the course curriculum. Chapter 5 evaluates the project's efficacy based on the completion of the specified goals. The chapter also contains sections on theological and personal reflection.

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