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EQUIPPING WIVES USING BIBLICAL COUNSELING
PRINCIPLES AT BETHEL EVANGELICAL FREE
CHURCH IN FAIRMONT, MINNESOTA

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EQUIPPING WIVES USING BIBLICAL COUNSELING
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For the glory of God

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|-------|---|
| ICC | International Critical Commentary |
| NAC | New American Commentary |
| NICOT | New International Commentary on the Old Testament |

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PREFACE

I would like to thank my Lord Jesus Christ for beginning a good work in my heart and for his bringing me to completion one day. By his hand, I was admitted into the doctoral program, and, by his hand, he sustained me through it. I am thankful for his presence with me and for orchestrating different people in my life to assist me along the way.

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wisdom and gracious insight into human hearts has been invaluable to me. In addition, I would like to thank my editor, Hannah Miller, for making my project much better. Lastly, I would like to thank admissions counselor, Jared Mays, who went to bat for me, and consequently, program director, Matthew Haste, for signing his signature granting me contingent acceptance into the program in the first place. In essence, thank you for taking a risk on this homemaker to attain my doctoral degree.

Shelly Jostad

East Chain, Minnesota

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This project aimed to encourage women towards godliness in their marriages. A Christ-centered marriage ultimately brings glory to God. Focusing on the daily struggles of married life may often tempt one to lose sight of this end. A survey assessed the current knowledge of the biblical understanding of the expectations of wives at Bethel Evangelical Free Church in Fairmont, Minnesota. A six-session curriculum during a one-day seminar taught God's design of marriage, godly submission, and practicing forgiveness. The repeated marriage survey evaluated an increase in knowledge by a measurable standard of growth. The desired results of the seminar sought to accomplish (1) the knowledge of the ultimate end of growing in worship of God through the subordinate end of marriage, and (2) the lifelong application of growing in Christ likeness towards one's spouse as the lasting outcome.

Context

The Bethel Evangelical Free Church (BEFC, or "Bethel") in Fairmont, Minnesota began around 1899. Within the demographics of a rural community, BEFC is a larger congregation with its approximately three hundred members. Before the COVID pandemic, there were on average around five hundred attendees. Currently, BEFC is averaging closer to two hundred fifty to three hundred in attendance.

Most men and women work outside the home, maintain substantial involvement in extracurricular activities, and obtain a favorable reputation within the church body with a continual volunteering status. One of BEFC's strengths is impacting the community through its children's ministry. While desired, an area addressed too

infrequently entails the relationship of the family concerning the marital relationship of husband and wife. The marital relationship extends beyond the couple and affects its children within the community.

Consider an analysis presented to British Parliament encouraging increased financial support based on the empirical evidence of the positive impact of married families: “The help for married/two parent families should be increased because statistics show that children from married/two parent home families do better in almost all areas. So we should encourage married families and not feel bad about supporting them financially.”¹ If a government acknowledges marriage as a key component to familial units, then we, as a church (from which marriage originates), would certainly do well in seeking to support families by coming alongside them to help strengthen marriages.

Couples experiencing marital conflict may fear the gossip that permeates small-town communities and yes, sadly, even our churches preventing them from seeking help for their marriages. They require help, however, for recipients of a sinful fallen nature manifesting itself in self-centeredness. We tend to display the sinful nature most when relating to our spouse. A greater grievance than couples exhibiting their own self-centeredness occurs when a couple receives the encouragement to act in their own self-interest through seeking divorce. When people struggle within their marriages, we need to meet people with God’s Word by teaching them with true wisdom (Prov 2:6).

We require the wisdom of applying Scripture to our daily lives by living out godly principles. To help one another accomplish this, we counsel using the Scriptures. Currently, a couple desiring biblical counseling might travel one hundred miles before reaching a biblical counselor. Consequently, teaching biblical counseling principles to the congregation would greatly aid BEFC couples. John states that others will know we are

¹ House of Commons, Home Affairs Committee, *Young Black People and the Criminal Justice System*, 2d sess., HC181-II (London, 2007), 195.

Christians by our love for one another (John 13:35). Exemplifying loving marriages will serve as a witness within our community of Christ and his bride, the church (Eph 5:32). Receiving instruction from the Word of God will help us exemplify such marriages.

The women at Bethel seek to love one another (1 John 4:7-8). In a woman's desire for relationship, however, she may prioritize her friends over the relationship with her own family members. If, or when, this happens, a woman may refocus her priorities considering both the time and attention allotted towards her family. The coronavirus pandemic allowed wives at BEFC more time to contemplate our homes.

Considering a more holistic representation of the Proverbs 31 woman may benefit us in our role as women. From Proverbs 31:10-31, we might often applaud a wife who "considers a field and buys it" or a wife who focuses on "her children rise up and call her blessed" while perhaps neglecting developing the qualities necessary for her husband praising her as his wife (Prov 31:16, 28-29).² We might neglect the importance of developing qualities such as submission and forgiveness.

An existing need within the church here at Bethel, and the church at-large, entails learning how to become a biblical wife. Contrary to the biblical teachings concerning a wife, the relativistic culture and infiltration of unbiblical lifestyles reflected in the entertainment choices of some directly oppose the biblical model. In an effort to obey the biblical command to hold marriage in honor and keep the marriage bed pure, one might consider the entertainment choices that one pursues (Heb 13:4). We may respond with a conviction to avoid any entertainment that demeans marriage and, therefore, dishonors God. This ultimately flows from a heart that wants to abstain from what dishonors Jesus and hurts our relationship with him.

² Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotation will be from the English Standard Version.

A worldly attitude that began to moderately influence Bethel involved flippant innuendos regarding the sexual differences between men and women. How a person honors marriage while participating in such discourse is troubling (Heb 13:4). As followers of Christ, we desire to attempt to avoid licentious comments and lewd behavior within a humorous context. After his own likeness and image, he made them male and female (Gen 1:27). Rather, out of respect and fear of God, it might cause us to tremble to speak in such ways. Those resisting coarse jokes may experience being viewed as “sensitive.” Sensitivity to the Holy Spirit remains a desirable outcome for a Christian. The Spirit convicts us, and we do not want to grieve him for whom we are sealed for the day of redemption (John 16:8; Eph 4:30).

Receiving a label as one having head-knowledge void of the heart may occur as a potential obstacle while teaching. Bethel emphasizes the heart, but it may over-emphasize the heart to the exclusion of knowledge. The Bible warns against both: head without heart and heart without head. Isaiah 29:13 reminds us that with our mouth we may verbally profess worship of God while the heart remains inactive in worshiping him. Conversely, Romans 10:2 admonishes, “For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge.” Both describe perceived blinders that require prayer for removing either of these hindrances to enable the audience to examine what the Scriptures teach. Scripture clarifies the difference between hearing versus doing; as well as, hearing, but instead walking in disobedience (Prov 21:13; Jas 1:22-25). In addition, the Pharisees modeled a type of general knowledge of God and the command of his ways without the saving faith in God (Rom 1:21).

Another potentially difficult obstacle might center around the fact that, as a woman, I am pursuing a Doctor of Ministry. Further resistance may relate to raising my children simultaneously while pursuing this degree. A reliance on God through prayer remains central in softening hearts to grasp the truth of God’s Word (even if brought by someone pursuing her doctorate). Regardless of the potential hindrances, pursuing Jesus

through pursuit of this degree remains my ultimate aim. Although accomplished imperfectly, I desire to glorify him more after earning this degree.

Learning requires training. We receive training in allowing God's Word to transform us through its principles. We refer to these principles as biblical counseling principles with the outcome of learning to apply God's Word to our lives. This project sought to instruct wives to be who they are in Christ as they rightly applied the Word of God in their marriages.

Rationale

The well-known incidences of breakdowns within marriages occur even among our Christian marriages. We fail to understand the biblical principles instituted by God: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two will become one flesh" (Gen 2:24; Matt 19:5; Mark 10:7; Eph 5:31). Adam received the command to work the garden, but no suitable helper was found (Gen 2:20b). Then Eve was created (Gen 2:21-22) as a helper towards this end, but also to the ultimate end of displaying God's glory.

Some more seasoned in marriage accept a cohabitation mindset where both spouses individually pursue what he or she desires, remaining satisfied if one's spouse refrains from interfering with these desires. Couples have memorized the instances of interference and avoid those situations that present as problematic. God does not desire mere coexistence within his design of marriage, but he desires couples to work alongside each other—a synergistic togetherness. God instituted a task for Adam and made a helper suitable for him with reference to the completion of this task (Gen 2:15). There remains no greater task as husband and wife than reflecting God's glory and the lifelong task of pursuing him together.

Perhaps, in today's world of isolated pleasures, the wedded couple prefers seeking individual pleasures separate from one another. A false contentment with the

reasoning, “*He has what makes him happy and I have what makes me happy,*” pacifies the couple’s marriage. Seeking one’s happiness and pleasure apart from one’s spouse sinfully contradicts God and his intention for oneness in marriage. Proverbs 5:19b reorients such a wrong thought pattern: “Be intoxicated always in her love.” Song of Solomon 1:16 concludes with the wife enjoying equal pleasure with her husband: “Behold, you are beautiful, my beloved, truly delightful.” Although, biblically, this demonstrates the pleasure of finding one’s satisfaction physically with one’s spouse, we may also assume that the joy experienced by companionship throughout life with one’s spouse is pleasurable.

Wives require help from God’s Word to live out the principles established and to be the godly wives that he intended. It must look different from the world. The “I’ll scratch your back if you scratch mine” mentality is far from the biblical model of laying down our lives for one another (John 15:13). Spouses are rarely each other’s second priority, only second to Christ. A vibrant relationship with one’s spouse begins with a vibrant relationship with Christ which is only found as we seek the principles of Scripture and apply them to our lives.

Through some biblical counseling training years ago, my husband and I received help, received the Spirit’s conviction, and then began to apply the materials taught within our own marriage. This marriage seminar aimed to bring to light some of the means that were beneficial in our marriage through biblical counseling principles taught to us and to seek to use these to help other individuals as well. The Scriptures are the foundation for biblical counseling, and I will use truths grounded in God’s Word to help strengthen marriage.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to equip women to be godly wives using biblical counseling principles from God's Word at Bethel Evangelical Free Church in Fairmont, Minnesota.

Goals

There were four goals that needed to be completed in order to accomplish this project:

1. The first goal was to assess the women's understanding of being a godly wife.
2. The second goal was to develop a six-session curriculum that equipped women to apply the biblical expectation for wives. The teaching materials covered God's design of marriage, submission, and forgiveness in six sessions during a one-day seminar.
3. The third goal was to equip women to implement the biblical expectation for wives using the teaching material in six sessions during a one-day seminar.
4. The fourth goal was to reassess the women's understanding of being a wife after the seminar.

A particular research methodology was created that measured the successful completion of these four goals.³ This research methodology is described appropriately in the following section.

Research Methodology

Successful completion of this project depended upon the completion of these four goals. The first goal was to assess the women's perceived biblical understanding of the expectations of wives by conducting a survey for women. This goal was measured by a pre-seminar survey that assessed their current biblical understanding of the expectations

³ All of 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.

of wives.⁴ This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of ten married and church women responded to the survey.

The second goal developed curriculum that equipped women to apply the biblical expectations for wives. The teaching materials covered God's design for marriage, submission, and forgiveness in six sessions during a one-day seminar. This goal was measured by an expert panel that utilized a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the curriculum.⁵ This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level. The material was not revised because it met the standard of the second goal.

The third goal was to equip women to implement the biblical expectations for wives using the teaching material in six sessions during the one-day seminar. Attendance during at least five of the six sessions during the seminar was considered sufficient. This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of ten married and church women successfully attended five of the six sessions.

The fourth goal was measured by the same survey given in goal 1, which measured the perception of their biblical understanding of the expectations for wives after attending the day's seminar. The goal was successfully met when a t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-seminar survey scores.

Definitions and Delimitations

The following definition of a key term was used in the ministry project:

⁴ See appendix 1.

⁵ See appendix 2.

Biblical counseling. This project uses Robert Jones’s definition of biblical counseling: “Biblical counseling is the Christlike, caring, person-to-person ministry of God’s word to people struggling with personal and interpersonal problems to help them know and follow Jesus Christ in their hearts and behavior amid their struggles.”⁶

There were two delimitations in this project. The first delimitation project was the limited number of six sessions for the curriculum that resulted in a one-day seminar. The purpose of this was to manage attendance and hold the attention of the women: the more days required, the less likely people would attend multiple days. Therefore, in order to have a more accurate survey, I allotted one day for training to achieve a more attainable outcome.

The second delimitation concerned the inability of a one-day seminar to track progressive growth and knowledge over time. In addition, the immediate application of the knowledge gained was hindered, as the volume learned might have proven more challenging to apply to one’s life. Usually, it is best to choose a specific issue that can be observed over time to see a measurable amount of growth. However, having a seminar in which the women may attend each session seemed more desirable. Therefore, the seminar implemented multiple sessions within the one-day format.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I surveyed the women at BEFC concerning their initial knowledge of God’s expectations for wives. We assessed their understanding on two basic levels: (1) their understanding of the biblical model of marriage, and (2) their understanding of the woman’s role as wife. The curriculum addressed wives as the target audience. Lastly, the same survey was utilized to measure standards of growth.

⁶ Robert D. Jones, “What Is Biblical Counseling?,” in *The Gospel for Disordered Lives: An Introduction to Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling*, by Robert D. Jones, Kristin L. Kellen, and Rob Green (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2021), 20.

CHAPTER 2

A BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR A WIFE'S MINISTRY

God orchestrated the world into existence. As the Creator, his design manifests the original prototype under which his creation will flourish when followed. He breathed into Adam—life (Gen 2:7). Victor P. Hamilton addresses the Hebrew *nesama* versus *ruah* as it “may employ the less popular word for breath because it is man, and man alone, who is the recipient of the divine breath.”¹ From the man, God then fashioned woman (Gen 2:21-22). “Then the Lord brought her to the man.” This passage states the first account of the biblical institution of marriage by God. For this reason, God maintains the unification of one man with one woman in marriage today. Marriage, as part of that created order, functions as intended to function prior to the fall, when patterned after his design. Any deviation from marriage as understood from Scripture undermines the authority of the Creator who designed it.

God's unique creation of Adam and Eve was multi-faceted in nature. Adam foreshadows Christ who was to come (Rom 5:12-21). Christ models for us what marriage is designed to reflect (Eph 5:25). Eve resembles the church. Proclaiming Christ rightly together in marriage is of utmost concern to a couple desiring to reflect the wisdom, grace, and kindness of God. This chapter will discuss (1) the biblical model of marriage as God designed to reflect Christ's relationship to the church, (2) the entailment of wives imaging the church's submission to Christ in their marriages, and (3) the loving extension of forgiveness to their husbands.

¹ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1990), 159.

God's Design for Marriage

As the Creator of the world and everything in it (Col 1:16), God designed marriage for a specific purpose.

Genesis 2

Genesis 2 reminds us of God as the Creator of human beings. The Bible reiterates the invaluable truth of the aforementioned creation of man and woman in Genesis 1, thus emphasizing its importance. John Sailhamer highlights the necessity of the dual account regarding the inclusion of the forming of man *from the dust* in Genesis 2:7. He writes,

Man, though a special creature made in God's image, was still a creature like the others God had made . . . in light of other special treatment into man's creation in chapter 1, this emphasis on man's "creatureliness" in chapter 2 is important. This narrative deliberately negates the notion that man's origin might be connected with the divine. Man's origin was from the dust of the ground.²

The transcendence of God above his creation demonstrates the proper order. He reigns over what he created. Man shows forgetfulness of his own creation, instead preferring the idea of autonomy. He was created as a dependent being. In order to understand himself rightly, he must see himself rightly in relation to God. Man is the creature while God is the Creator. Man must understand the relation of marriage as created from God. God's design of marriage maintains appropriate authority concerning it.

In Genesis 2, a more detailed description of man and woman's creation unfolds. Man was taken from the dust and woman from the man. The Hebrew word *adamah* (Gen 2:7) and its cognate *adam* (Gen 2:20) enable us to see what is apparent from the English words of "man" and "woman."³ Adam comes from the Hebrew word

² John Sailhamer, *Genesis Unbound: A Provocative New Look at the Creation Account* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1996), 154.

³ William Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament: Based upon the Works of Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1971), 4.

adamah, meaning “ground.” The parallelism used with the woman, for she was taken out of man, is essential in understanding man and woman’s unique roles (Gen 2:22-23). Adam will care for and work the ground, and Eve will be a helper to her husband (Gen 2:24). Their God-given origination preambles their functional roles.

The imago Dei

Man and woman are both declared by God to have been made in his image (Gen 1:26), the *imago Dei*.⁴ Examining the individual roles of each Person of the Trinity assists in understanding the fellowship within the *imago Dei*. In creation, the role of the Father was to “speak the creative words to bring the universe into being,” the role of the Son “carried out these creative decrees,” and the role of the Holy Spirit was “sustaining and manifesting God’s immediate presence in his creation.”⁵

The fellowship of God displays itself within the Godhead of the Trinity.⁶

Perhaps no theologian captures the intra-Trinitarian love better than Jonathan Edwards:

Therein consists our fellowship with the Father and the Son, even in partaking with them of the Holy Ghost. And this also eminently consists our communion with the saints, that we drink into the same spirit: this is the common excellency and joy and happiness in which they are all united; ‘tis the bond perfectness by which they are one in the Father and the Son, as the Father is in the Son, and [he in him].⁷

Marriage would reflect the fellowship of the Trinity while remaining distinct from the Trinity. A reflection by nature is not the object itself. Husband and wife do not partake of the divine nature through the covenant of marriage with one another. Rather, faith in Jesus unites a husband or a wife to God, together enjoying fellowship with the Holy

⁴ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 1244.

⁵ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 249.

⁶ Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1986), 14.

⁷ Jonathan Edwards, *Writings on the Trinity, Grace and Faith*, vol. 21 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Sang Hung Lee (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 130.

Spirit (John 14:15-17).

The New Testament maintains the distinction of the Creator from his creation in Romans 1:25. Considering this distinction, a suggested understanding would be a subordinate role of both husband and wife with respect to their relationship to God while still maintaining the husband's headship as also being distinct from the wife's role as helper. This role of God-given authority implies the Christ-like sacrificial love of the husband giving himself up for his bride (Eph 5:25). Scripture declares, "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion'" (Gen 1:26). The pronouns in this verse are paramount: the "us" of the Creator comparatively to the "them" of creation.

Part of displaying the glory of God was in the creation of the woman. Her creation manifests the fellowship that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit share in the monotheistic Godhead better than man could alone. God stated that it is not good for man to be alone, so he will make a helper suitable for him (Gen 2:18). Kenneth A. Mathews observes, "Unique to the creation account is God's declaration that man alone is 'not good.'"⁸ Eve's primary role in helping Adam was reflecting God's glory.

Here, it is necessary to repeat that she remains only *part of* displaying the glory of God. Let one not err on emphasizing her creation apart from man's creation. Adam's creation remains equally as crucial. In fact, he is essential for her creation. The Bible explains the perfection of creating both male and female in the declaration after they were created as "very good" (Gen 1:31). The Bible emphasizes the beauty of God's design as Adam praises her in Genesis 2:23: "Then the man said, 'This is the last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.'" An inferior creature is not the anthropology described in Genesis 1. Genesis 2

⁸ Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, New American Commentary, vol. 1a (Nashville: B & H, 1996), 212.

also explains the unity of the man and the woman as becoming one flesh (2:24); they are, to a lesser degree, experiencing the unity of the Godhead within the covenant of marriage.

*Parallels of Headship and Childbirth
Existing Pre-Fall*

The Lord desired to find a helper suitable for the man but found none (Gen 2:20). This verse implies the role of the headship of man existing prior to the fall.⁹ The reason for emphasizing this point is that submission tends to possess negative connotations in our culture.

Individuals may point to the curse of the woman as the beginning of her submission. Genesis 3:16b states, “Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you.” Some may read the text to mean that the headship of the husband’s ruling is the result of the fall. Gilbert Bilezikian is a strong advocate of this position. He reasons, “The ruler/subject relationship between Adam and Eve began after the fall. It was for Eve the application of the same death principle that made Adam slave to the soil. Because it resulted from the fall, the rule over Eve is viewed as satanic in origin, no less than death itself.”¹⁰ Bilezikian would have to explain how what he calls satanic could be carried out by God. God is the one who curses the man, the woman, and the serpent (Gen 3:14-19). Understanding what the curse actually is, is essential. Ideally, an individual would want to seek to refrain from calling what is good evil and what is evil good (Isa 5:20).

Instead, a suggested interpretation of that text would be that the *desire* to rule over the husband is the result of the fall. Bruce K. Waltke and Cathi J. Fredricks state,

⁹ E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, Anchor Bible Commentary, vol. 1 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964), 17.

¹⁰ Gilbert Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles: A Guide for the Study of Female Roles in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 58.

“Male leadership, not male dominance, has been assumed in the ideal, pre-Fall situation.”¹¹ Waltke and Fredricks observe of the biblical text in Genesis 2:18: “The word *help* suggests that the man has governmental priority, but both sexes are mutually dependent on each other.”¹² Again, in Genesis 2:23 with regard to the word *called*, they explain, “The twofold naming of his wife entails his authority in the home (3:20; cf. Num 3:6-8). In ancient times the authority to name implied the authority to govern (Gen 1:5; 2:19).”¹³

In other words, it is not the husband’s ruling itself that exists as the woman’s curse. Rather, the woman’s desire to rule over the man now demonstrates her corruption. While Christian scholars differ on the meaning of the curse, for the purpose of this paper I assume the previously stated meaning. Woman desires the role that belongs—and always has belonged—to the man but to no avail: “He will rule over you” (Gen 3:16b). John Skinner expounds, “The idea of tyrannous exercise of power does not lie in the vb.; but it means that the woman is wholly subject to the man.”¹⁴ The role reversal of the serpent tempting Eve, as Adam apparently stood passively by, is telling of the struggles within the marriage covenant.

Likewise, women were always going to have children, but, after the fall, God increased the difficulty of birthing children into the world (Gen 3:16a). Concurrently, the man’s curse also seems to favor such an interpretation: “Cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life . . . by the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust

¹¹ Bruce K. Waltke and Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 94.

¹² Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 88.

¹³ Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 89.

¹⁴ John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, ICC, vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1910), 83.

and to dust you shall return” (Gen 3:19). Working the ground was inevitable, but enduring hardships while working the ground demonstrates man’s curse.

Distinguishing the Suggestion of Sin

In addition, Eve seems to have usurped the man’s role and God’s role. God said to Adam, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it’” (Gen 3:17). A plausible misunderstanding of the passage entails that listening to the voice of his wife was wrong in and of itself. Listening to her voice, when her voice contradicted the direct command of God, is what made listening to her voice sinful. Listening to anyone’s voice over God’s is sinful. His wife had suggested a path of sin.

Consider another marriage that sinned similarly to that of the first man and first woman. Abraham also “listened to the voice of his wife,” and God did not regard this favorably. Again, a potential conclusion drawn is not that her voice naturally spewed forth sin, but that Abraham chose to listen to her voice over God’s voice (Gen 16:2c). Later in Scripture, God even commands Abraham, “Listen to whatever Sarah tells you, because it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned” (Gen 21:12).

When Sarah devised a plan directly opposed to God’s design and his direct promise to Abraham, and then Abraham chose to listen to her, it was sin. God had promised Abraham a descendant while married to Sarai at the time of the promise (Gen 15). A couple chapters later God clarifies for Abram that the promised offspring would come through his wife Sarah (Gen 17:16). Taking Hagar was contrary to the words God had spoken to Abram as he was married to Sarah at the time of the original promise (Gen 15). The monogamous relationship modeled in creation, “the *two* will become one flesh,” (emphasis added) modeled for creation God’s intent for two people. Humanly speaking, Sarah would not yet know that the promised offspring would certainly come through her to Abram. However, given the creation account of marriage, and when Abram received

the promise—for she was married to him at the time of the promise—she advised contrary to God’s design. Another example of an individual regarding someone’s voice over the voice of God’s would be the old prophet of 1 Kings who chose to listen to the voice of another prophet instead of God’s command, resulting in his death (1 Kgs 13:11-25). In addition, Aaron listened to the voice of the Israelites and sinned by building the golden calf (Ex 32: 1-7).

Disturbing Effects of Sin

One could potentially ask, did the fall nullify woman’s being made in God’s image? The fall greatly impacted both man and woman. Sin and death entered the world. There are multiple implications of the effects of the fall on the image of God within a woman, but there is a redeeming factor for a woman (and man). As John Calvin taught, “The image of God, which had been effaced by sin, may be stamped anew upon us, and that the advancement of this restoration may be continually going forward in us by little and little.”¹⁵ Calvin’s quote demonstrates that, although tainted by sin, God’s imprint on his imperfect human creatures remains. His imprint was stamped on us in regeneration, and continually goes forward in us through our sanctification. James 3:9 further emphasizes God’s image remaining in people as the explanation for prohibiting the cursing of individuals. In addition, the fact that God made man in his own image validates the reason that murder requires justice (Gen 9:6). Therefore, mankind still bears God’s image post-fall.

Disconcerting for any woman is the familiar language God uses in the woman’s curse comparable to the language that God uses to admonish Cain in Genesis 4:7. God instructs, “If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. *Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it*”

¹⁵ John Calvin, *The Commentaries of John Calvin on the Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, trans. John Pringle (1847; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 187.

(emphasis added). God’s discussion with Cain is merely fifteen verses following the woman’s curse. The Hebrew words for “desire,” *teshuqah*, and the word for “rule,” *mashal* are the same words used in both passages. Its echo from the woman’s curse in the fall lingers in the mind. God warned Eve, “Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you” (Gen 3:16).

While woman sinned in the fall, man did as well; both are true. Woman does not live in a perpetual state of deception post-fall. John Piper and Wayne Grudem further discern this point:

Even if 1 Timothy 2:14 meant that in some circumstances women are characteristically more vulnerable to deception, that would not settle anything about the equality or worth of manhood and womanhood. Posting in either sex as superior to the other is folly. Men and women, as God created us, are different in hundreds of ways. Being created equally in the image of God means at least this: that when the so-called weaknesses and strengths column for manhood and womanhood are added up, the value at the bottom is going to be the same for each and when you take those two columns and put them on top of each other, God intended them to be the perfect complement to each other.¹⁶

The complementarian role distinguishes between the equality in value and the equality of imaging the Creator in the distinctness of their differing roles following their creation (of dust and of man).

Ironically, instead of first addressing the woman after she sinned, God held the man accountable (Gen 3:9-11). God sought Adam as the head of the marriage. God’s action determined that the man bears the ultimate responsibility for the choices that occur within the marriage.

A Wife’s Submission is Prescribed by God

A wife responds in submission to her husband because God, in his Word, commands her to honor him.

¹⁶ John Piper and Wayne Grudem, “An Overview of Central Concerns: Questions and Answers,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991), 73.

Ephesians 5

The role of the wife, specifically as it relates to submission, is found in Ephesians 5:22. However, before Ephesians 5, the context of wives submitting to their husbands as to the Lord comes directly out of Ephesians: in chapter 1, being in Christ; in chapter 2, who we once were, who we are now; in chapter 3, Paul and his intercessory prayer, and in chapter 4, life in the body. Paul is building the argument for submission from the previous chapters.

Wives submitting to their husbands is an outflow of their identity in Christ, as Clinton E. Arnold attests: they are being filled with the Spirit. Christ by his Spirit enables Christian wives to submit. Arnold remarks,

A surprising feature at the beginning of 5:22 is that it lacks a finite verb. This is due to the fact that the force of the preceding participle (“submit” in 5:21) is carried over into the next verse, where it functions as the principal verbal idea. This grammatical approach has the effective of closely tying this section to the receding one, which has its main assertion, “be filled with the Spirit.” We could graphically depict the progression in the following way:

Be filled with the Spirit. . . . (5:18)
by submitting to one another (5:21)
and, specifically, by wives submitting to their husbands (5:22).¹⁷

In Ephesians 5, Paul is encouraging within the home the application of the previous chapters. Ernest Best translated this insight: “The household was a social institution in all areas of the Greco-Roman world and especially important for Christians because it was the place where groups met to worship, the base for missionary activity, and the place of reception for traveling Christians.”¹⁸ Aquila and Priscilla are a biblical example of such ministry. This couple explained the Word of God more accurately in their home (Acts 18:26).

How are Christians to understand that this couple presented the Word of God

¹⁷ Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 365.

¹⁸ Ernest Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians*, ICC (London: T & T Clark, 2010), 521.

more accurately in their home? Why would Paul not have rebuked Priscilla by explaining that she had overstepped her womanly role and sinned by joining her husband in teaching? Surprisingly, Paul refrained from correcting the couple. Paul is not typically known as one who avoids rebuking another. He certainly did not dismiss Peter for refusing to eat with the Gentiles (Gal 2:11-14), nor relinquish his stance on the ability of John Mark to do ministry (Acts 15:36-41), nor shrink back from declaring the whole council of God to the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:27).

When considering that the homes in Aquila and Priscilla's time were places where the church body gathered to worship, one might suggest reflecting more on their ministry as a couple. The local church body of Aquila and Priscilla's time was not the local institution that it is today. In this time period, the inclusion of Acts 18:26 and the fact that Paul does not chastise them may suggest that within marriage, a husband and wife may together at least exhort another within their own home. Additional thought may be required towards a biblical understanding of the appropriate context of a woman's place teaching within the local church body, although not during the church service (1 Cor 14:33-35; 1 Tim 2:11-12).

In addition to the wife's identity being in Christ, she is also encouraged to live life within the body of Christ (Eph 5:26). Marriage reflects the greater relationship of Christ's relationship with the church. Anthony A. Hoekema illustrates,

The restoration of the image of God in man takes place in the church, through the fellowship of Christians with each other. Believers learn what Christ-likeness is by observing it in fellow Christians. We see the love of Christ reflected in the lives of fellow believers; we are enriched by Christ through our contact with them; we hear Christ speaking to us through them. Believers are inspired by the examples of their fellow Christians, sustained by their prayers, corrected by their loving admonitions, and encouraged by their support.¹⁹

Marriage is the union created by God to show one another Christ. A husband and wife must first exemplify the gospel towards each other and then together towards the world.

¹⁹ Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 89.

Wives are to submit to their own husbands as to the Lord (Eph 5:22).

Submission to a husband reflects that mankind is in subjection to God. In a way, then, a wife's failure to submit to her husband taints the message of communicating God to the world. Failure to submit to one's own husband is, by default, a failure to submit to God. Marriage is a smaller reflection of Christ and the church, and together, husband and wife are only a portion of the greater whole, the body of Christ. Fellowship with one another proclaims Christ to the world; disunity does not rightly proclaim him. Reconciling with one another demonstrates an additional way to redeem proclaiming him rightly again.

1 Peter 3:1-7

First Peter 3 admonishes believing wives to submit even to their unbelieving husbands. In saying this, it cannot mean that they are to submit to their husbands regarding sin. Erland Waltner and J. Daryl Charles remind us that in the time-period of the Greco-Roman world in which Peter wrote this book, wives normally joined their husband's religion, or, as pagan cults practiced, they were encouraged to leave their husbands.²⁰ In what way, then, must submission to their husbands take place? Thomas R. Schreiner raises this observation:

It is crucial to note that obedience and submission are different in various spheres. Peter was hardly suggesting that wives submit and obey the same way as children, for the relationship is between two adults. We also learned from Paul that mutuality also characterizes the marriage relationship (1 Cor 7:3-5). Reading the whole marriage relationship through the lens of submission is liable to distort significantly the Scriptures. Nevertheless, what cannot be washed away is the responsibility of wives to follow their husband's leadership.²¹

The English Standard Version translates 1 Peter 3:1 as "even if some of them do not obey the word." This verse primarily reminds wives to submit to an unbelieving husband. In

²⁰ Erland Waltner and J. Daryl Charles, *1-2 Peter, Jude*, Believers Church Bible Commentary 4 (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press: 1999), 95.

²¹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, New American Commentary, vol. 37 (Nashville: B & H, 2003), 131.

addition, it would be appropriate to understand this passage to include submitting to believing husbands even if they are walking in disobedience to God and his Word.

While wives are to submit to their husbands, it does not mean to accompany husbands in their sin as they are walking in disobedience. However, a wife may be required to walk alongside her husband for a period of time as her husband battles his own disobedience. The emphasis is on pleasing the Lord, not man (Gal 1:10). This would mean, in a sense, to disobey an earthly husband should he divert from God's permissive will.

For example, a husband may be walking in disobedience to the Word when correcting his children by failing to correct in the spirit of gentleness. A wife cannot emphatically declare that she will never again submit to such an irate husband who models being disobedient to the Word. The moment she would do this, she would be sinning as she would no longer be obedient to the Word herself.

According to 1 Peter 3:1, the woman is to combat such disobedience by modeling the appropriate conduct of behavior. Owen Strachan encourages wives: "The world views womanly submission as bad, even evil. Christians might fall prey to this thinking. But not Peter. Peter views womanly submission as God-honoring and even evangelistic."²² The basis for a wife's submission is best understood in her submission to God, not in the quality of our earthly husband, nor even in our husband's obedience to God in his Word.

This should give hope for wives to live God-honoring lives even if their husbands do not believe or if their husbands are walking in disobedience. If her husband committed a sin, she may alongside him reap the consequences of a failed mortgage payment. She does not, however, bear the sin of her husband's choice. There may be

²² Owen Strachan, "Ordered Love: An Exposition of 1 Peter 3:1-7," *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 21, no.1 (Spring 2016): 93.

much grief and financial devastation associated with such loss, but the wife may bear with her husband in love, knowing God is pleased with her long-suffering and her enduring faith in him (Eph 4:2).

First Peter 3:6 reminds wives of Sarah and calls them her daughters if they do what is right and do not give way to fear. Considering Sarah, a woman may reason that she had righteous Abraham as her husband, forgetting that Abraham also disobeyed God. He endangered his wife by suggesting that she answer that she was his sister, when asked. He advised this action twice, potentially exposing her to physical intimacy with someone other than her husband (Gen 12:11-14; 20:2). Sarah knows the kind of heartache that a husband might cause his wife. She also brought many griefs upon herself and Abraham.

A wife's conduct affects her husband. Those who have disobedient husbands may find comfort that God will use their submissive conduct in the lives of their husbands (1 Pet 3:1). The results may not be immediate, but the blessing of pleasing God is attainable. God declares the act of enduring injustice as "gracious" (1 Pet 2:19-20). A wife's ability to honor God by pleasing him is not bound by the obedience of her husband. She pleases God as she follows in Christ's steps by her obedience (1 Pet 2:21). Entrusting oneself to her faithful Creator by continuing to do good bears the weight of many trials (1 Pet 4:19). A wife chooses to entrust herself to God right now knowing such obedience pleases him. There is a future aspect to her Christlike obedience (1 Pet 2:23). The hardships of marriage are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed in a wife for her patient endurance towards her husband (Rom 8:18).

Proverb 31:10-31

Proverbs 31:10-31 speaks of an excellent wife. Her worth is similarly spoken of here as Adam praised Eve in the garden. There is a rareness established (31:10). She is for her husband and not against him (31:12). She is a trustworthy woman (31:11). She is industrious (31:13). She provides meals for those in her household and also considers

how to provide the food for those meals (31:15). She is full of strength (31:17). She shows restraint by wisely using her resources (31:18). She clothes her household (31:19). She remembers the poor by giving of her resources to them (31:20). She aids her husband in gaining respect within the community (31:23). She earns an income (31:24). She clothes herself with inner strength and dignity (31:25a). She does not worry about the future (31:25b). She is wise (31:26a). She teaches kindness (31:26b). She knows her family members, who they are, and where they are heading (31:27a). She does not waste time (31:27b). She earns the respect of her children and the praise of her husband (31:8). A God-fearing woman is to be desired more than charm or beauty (31:30). She is a worthy woman and gains the respect of her community (31:31). These are the qualities for which an excellent wife is known.

Wisdom remains the central theme of Proverbs 31, relating to the rest of the Proverbs as appropriated wisdom literature.²³ Would a wise wife attain a status of excellency because she has sought it out, or would she exemplify excellence because she fears the Lord? Interestingly, Proverbs 1:7 speaks of the fear of the Lord as the beginning of knowledge. Fearing the Lord is foundational for a wife's excellency.

The book of Proverbs begins and ends with the fear of the Lord. There is a cohesiveness to the book of Proverbs as a whole unit rather than a separate teaching on an excellent wife's qualities. The teaching of Proverbs 31 focuses on that of the wife and distinctly admonishes her with the same message as the rest of Proverbs, but, specifically for her this time, it seems to exhort the wife: "Fear the Lord, it is the beginning of wisdom, attain knowledge of the Holy One, for it is understanding" (Prov 9:10).

Proverbs 31:10-31 is best understood as wisdom personified. Tremper Longman III states, "Most pointedly, we read here of a woman who is the human reflex

²³ Ernest Lucas, *Proverbs*, Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2015), 131.

of woman wisdom herself.”²⁴ Relief floods the souls of women in this moment of clarity. The Proverbs 31 wife is not merely one woman. There are moments of displaying such wisdom, but this does not mean she simultaneously exhibits all these virtues at once. One woman may display many of these characteristics and attributes of wisdom throughout her life. Certainly, a woman may fear the Lord all her days, but she may not necessarily display all these virtues. Rather, as Christ has apportioned it, each woman will reflect him to a varying degree as she grows in him (2 Cor 3:18; Eph 4:7).

Waltke cautions a person between personifying the valiant wife as the Woman Wisdom or a historical woman. He advocates that “one should avoid emphasizing one of these applications at the expense of the other, forgetting that by nature proverbial material sets forth exemplars asking the audience to make appropriate application to their own spheres.”²⁵ Parallel applications remain undesired by many Western minds, but wisdom literature appeals to these dual applications.

God Commands Forgiveness

While forgiveness is not distinctively unique to wives, a wife will most likely have cause to forgive her husband more frequently than most individuals she encounters on a regular basis. For this reason, focusing on forgiveness is particularly beneficial in ministering to wives. Although not always the case, the issue of bitterness among wives often requires special emphasis.

Christ Forgives the Church

Forgiveness needs to be practiced by a wife toward her husband within marriage. Whether or not a husband is domineering, practicing forgiveness towards him

²⁴ Tremper Longman III, *Proverbs*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 540.

²⁵ Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs, Chapters 15-31*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), 251.

is non-negotiable. A woman's husband is not sinless. He will err, as will the wife. Why would a woman forgive her husband? At first, it may appear irrational to require forgiveness in the relationship of a husband and wife who reflect Christ's relationship to the church. Although the husband reflects Christ, the difference is that he himself is not Christ. Therefore, a husband may only be molded and shaped more into Christ's image (Rom 8:29).

While the marriage reflects Christ and his relationship with the church, and although the wife is submissive to the husband, the husband is still part of the church (Eph 5:30). A husband's Christlike role does not replace the wife's need for her Savior. Likewise, being her husband does not replace his need for his Savior. Although forgiven by God and accountable for his every choice, he will never be sinless like Christ. He will not completely cease from sinning this side of eternity; he will always need Christ.²⁶ The only man not requiring forgiveness is Christ. For this reason, God requires forgiveness from a wife in relation to her husband.

One's definition of forgiveness impacts the counsel suggested to a wife. Some biblical counselors adhere to a willingness of the wife to forgive while others express that willingness to be an attitudinal forgiveness of her heart.²⁷ Although Heath Lambert does not instruct others to practice this, he acknowledges that some biblical counselors teach that a person should forgive all people whether or not they asked for forgiveness.²⁸

For this paper, we will regard forgiveness as having two levels according to Robert D. Jones. Level 1 or attitudinal forgiveness is having a heart disposition to forgive

²⁶ A Christian acquires the righteousness of Christ as his or her own. However, a person still needs Christ in order for this righteousness to exist. A person cannot have any righteousness apart from him.

²⁷ Stuart Scott and S. Andrew Jin, *31 Ways to be a "One-Another" Christian: Loving Others With the Love of Jesus* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 2019), 52.

²⁸ Heath Lambert, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling: The Doctrinal Foundations of Counseling Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 243.

and is not dependent on whether or not the individual asks for forgiveness. Level 2 consists of an act of the offender repenting and asking the person sinned against to forgive them, with the person granting forgiveness.²⁹ In other words, unless there is repentance by the husband (offender), the one sinned against (the wife) refrains from the second level of transactional forgiveness towards her husband while maintaining attitudinal forgiveness (level 1) towards him.³⁰

Matthew 6:12-15

Matthew 6:12-15 stresses that individuals ought to forgive others their trespasses because God forgave their trespasses. D. A. Carson explains that in the original Aramaic text, it would be appropriate to understand the word for trespasses as “debts” as this was the common understanding of sin during this time period.³¹ Why then do individuals fail to forgive one another? A reasonable conclusion might suggest that individuals fail to understand the extent of their debt to God. Consequently, they lack the compassion to extend mercy to those who have inflicted pain upon the injured individual.

The withholding of forgiveness from another means that God will not forgive them their debts (Matt 6:15). Ulrich Luz expounds, “Matthew repeats the forgiveness petition of the Lord’s Prayer and puts it in parenetic form. Both the conditional wording and the ‘negative’ v. 15, missing from Mark 11:25, make clear that human forgiving is a condition for divine forgiving.”³² The Beatitudes teach one to respond contrary to their sinful nature. When reviled, the natural man’s heart response is to revile. However, an

²⁹ Robert D. Jones, *Pursuing Peace: A Christians Guide to Handling Our Conflicts* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 135.

³⁰ Jones, *Pursuing Peace*, 135.

³¹ D. A. Carson, *The Sermon on the Mount: An Evangelical Exposition of Matthew 5-7* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982), 68-69.

³² Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary*, ed. Helmut Koester, trans. James E. Crouch, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1989), 327.

individual responds in faith by forgiving. A heart forgiven by God quickly forgives others.

A dispositional heart-attitude towards forgiveness fundamentally manifests itself when given an opportunity to forgive. God is unable to be manipulated. An outward action flows from the inward heart stance before God (Luke 6:45). In addition, telling God that he must forgive you because you have forgiven another individual remains misguided. Many seemingly sincere individuals may have wrongly placed their hope in their own forgiveness.

The gospel does not permit trusting in the human heart or its converse, a heart filled with the fear of maintaining an unforgiving stance. The gospel reveals to whom an individual's heart belongs. An individual may experience fear in relation to discerning the truth regarding her soul if she continues with an unforgiving stance. In other words, those who forgive, God will forgive because the only way to be forgiven by God is by having faith in Christ. This heart stance operates as the posture from which one understands the merciful heart that forgives another. A redeemed woman functions out of a new heart of flesh, as Ezekiel 36:26-27 states, "And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from you and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you and caused you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules."

Within the earthly marriage relationship, a man and woman might potentially accumulate the greatest amount of debt against another. Man and woman sin against God daily. Wives sin against their husbands daily, and husbands daily sin against their wives. As sinners, both husband and wife struggle to put the other's interests before their own. Debts might accumulate.

For this reason, the marriage relationship exists as one of the most dangerous earthly relationships for a wife because of the fleshly desire to hold grievances against her husband. W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison refer to the preceding sections of

Matthew 18 before concluding, “The concern is to avoid any calculus of “less and more” and to make explicit the attitude that is necessary if one is to undertake the hard task of correcting a brother. Forgiveness, like love, must be limitless. Without such forgiveness the community cannot correct the wayward, cannot pray as united force, and cannot have Christ in its midst.”³³ Similarly, marriage remains a lesser part of the greater whole, the community of the body of Christ. Forgiveness leads to correction of the wayward. Interestingly, this mindset also correlates with God’s kindness leading to repentance (Rom 2:4). Submission does not mean that wives cannot lovingly approach their husbands to bring faults before them. Submission to God entails, however, the importance of forgiving these faults. Forgiveness leads a couple to pray together as a “united force.” Lastly, what marriage may stand if the wife fails to forgive and lacks Christ’s presence in the midst of the marriage? The marriage would then fail to accomplish that which it is created for—exalting Christ. Now, this paper will address more closely the last section within Matthew 18.

Matthew 18:21-35

Jesus, who knows the hearts of people, attests to their unforgiveness in Matthew 18:21-35. Peter’s question concerning forgiveness prompts the parable. David L. Turner discerns, “Peter thinks that it is adequate to forgive seven times . . . but Jesus’ hyperbolic answer indicates that forgiveness must be unending.”³⁴ All that the other servants had seen and heard appalled them. They went and reported it to the master, testifying that the servants were aware of the wickedness of the unforgiving servant. It also demonstrates the tendency of the awareness of other people’s sins, but blindness to

³³ Dale C. Allison Jr. and W. D. Davies, *Matthew: A Shorter Commentary* (London: T & T Clark, 2004), 791.

³⁴ David L. Turner, *Matthew*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 449.

their own, even after confessing and receiving forgiveness for their sins from God.

The offense scale against God appears reversed. Humanity perceives our offense against God to be minute and the offense by a brother or sister in Christ to be of chasmal proportion. The sinfulness of man is difficult to grasp. Rather, as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us (Ps 103:12). The offense of reversing the costly amount of sin we have done to God with the offense of a brother or sister is costly. From this parable, there is no confusion as to what will happen to those who refuse to forgive a brother or a sister. They will not be forgiven their debts by God.

Hamartiology aids individuals in developing a compassionate, forgiving heart towards others. Understanding the amount of debt against a person that has been forgiven is said to prompt others to love much (Luke 7:47). An uncareful observation of the parable may lead one to conclude that Matthew 18:21-35 seems to contradict the passage of Scripture in Luke 7. Scripture, however, does not contradict itself. There is a sense when one considers the amount forgiven, it compels him to forgive another. However, there is also a sense that a person, although forgiven an overwhelming amount of debt, remains unchanged when given an opportunity to forgive another. The deceitfulness of sin is great.

The parable illustrates to Peter an example of a person who fails to forgive another person for the same offense repeated multiple times. He (or she) immediately forgets the offenses he has committed and condemns another (Jas 1:24). In that moment, the individual failed to remember the debt that was forgiven him; therefore, he failed to love another rightly by forgiving the other individual his debts. The slave does the opposite of the master as John Nolland astutely observes of the master: “He acts in the interest of the slave and not in his own interest.”³⁵ According to the CBS 2020 and NIV

³⁵ John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), 758.

2011 translations, Paul asked us not to look out for our own interests but to look out for the interests of others (Phil 2:4).

The forgiveness spoken of in the parable is towards an individual in nature. It is person to person. R. T. France states, “The issue of personal grievances and personal forgiveness; one of the chief causes of this harmony within a group of disciples is the actions or attitudes of one individual which another member of the same group perceives to be ‘against me.’ So personal forgiveness is the key to good relationships.”³⁶

Likewise, personally forgiving one’s husband remains key to a good relationship in marriage. Also, reminding oneself that *God is for me and not against me*, which applies even in a difficult marriage, remains crucial (Rom 8:31-32). Reminding oneself that God guides her husband is part of trusting God and his sovereignty. He is for her in her marriage. God can give her the grace needed to forgive her husband. She may pray for him, knowing the prayers of a righteous person are powerful and effective (Jas 5:18b). He may come to repentance, but even if not, the wife can grow in daily reliance upon God through her prayers.

Conclusion

God designed the fellowship of husband and wife to resemble the fellowship of the Godhead, thus bringing him glory. The wife and husband together reflect Christ’s relationship with the church as a testimony concerning God’s love to the world. A wife submitting to her husband remains primarily about submission to her God. Relinquishing bitterness towards her husband grounds the wife in understanding that forgiveness flows from God through Christ’s redeeming her, empowering her through his Spirit to forgive her husband.

³⁶ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 699.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL BIBLICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR WIVES

Theology impacts the practical daily exercising of an individual's faith in God. As John Frame wisely taught, "Theology is the application of Scripture, by person, to every area of life."¹ While there is wholehearted agreement, many experience difficulty applying this principle to their lives. Scripture willingly attests that knowing truth is vastly different from doing the truth a person knows (Matt 7:24-27; Jas 1:24).

Biblical counseling comes alongside a person to help lessen this disjunct as they practically adhere to the teachings of Scripture. Many people quote, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you," yet fail to obey this truth by resenting people who they think should have looked at them differently (Matt 5:44). A person may be right, but a Christian, a "little Christ," may not withhold loving the person because the Christian was looked at peculiarly. Romans 5:8-10 attests to the truth that people are sinful, but that is precisely why God's love was made manifest for them. Likewise, God calls Christians to love people in their unkindness.

After having discussed some of marriage's theological aspects, this paper will address the transformation of the theological into the practical and theoretical issues of marriage as taught in biblical counseling. Biblical counseling teaches that practical hope is offered in marriage because of the person of Christ in living out of the reality of God's design, in submitting to our husbands, and in practicing genuine forgiveness toward them.

¹ John Frame, *Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Philipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2013), 8.

Re-Orienting Marriage

In Scripture, God has made manifest to humans the knowledge of living a life that is pleasing to him or not pleasing to him. Culture today has sought to redefine marriage. However, God has defined what marriage is and why creating marriage demonstrated his sovereignty of men and women's ruling together with his plan of redemption. The biblical counselor aids in redirecting a couple to God. Heath Lambert instructs,

Understanding that counseling requires some vision of life is crucial to understanding the theological nature of counseling. The reason is that such a vision of reality is *always* theological. God defines what it is to be a human being, and he describes that in his Word. God knows what is wrong with us and diagnoses the problem in the Bible. God prescribes a solution to our problems—faith in Christ—and reveals him to us in the Scriptures. God authorizes the process of transformation and shows what it looks like in the pages of the Old Testament.²

The couple must see the direct relationship of themselves as a couple before God and the reason for marriage's good creation. Acknowledging that marriage is God's creation and ultimately a reflection of Christ's relationship with the church, will help re-orient a person back to God both in marriage's difficulties and blessings.

Acknowledging God's Purpose in Marriage

One of God's good purposes in marriage post-fall is for each spouse to proclaim the hope of the gospel to one another. Spouses may fail to preach the gospel to one another. God may not enter into the couple's conversations. Common to the sinfulness of humanity is the self-absorption that permeates our marriages today. Rather than preach Christ to her husband, when trials prevail against a wife within their marriage, the immediate reaction is to assess one's own spouse as culpable for the present state of the marriage. Wives are masterminds at blame shifting. They may think, "*If only he was more loving, then I would be more ____*," or "*He makes me so angry!*" Genesis

² Heath Lambert, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling: The Doctrinal Foundations of Counseling Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 17.

3:13 shows wives that the woman did not react differently when questioned by God; Eve blamed the serpent.

Instead, couples must act against their sinful nature. The words of Dave Harvey must be exemplified in each spouse:

If . . . I recognize the enormity of my sin seeing myself as the worst of sinners, then I understand I have been forgiven *much*. That's when biblical reality begins to make sense. I start to see God as he truly is. His vastness becomes bigger than my problems. His goodness comes to me even though I'm not good. And his wisdom and power are visible in the perfect ways he works to transform me.³

The beauty of the gospel is that couples uniquely share that gospel within their marriage with one another. Once justified, the husband and wife are in the position of being the vessel God will work through to help sanctify their spouse.

Marriage's purpose is greater than the one man and one woman relationship, but it is certainly no less than this relationship. Matthew Haste writes, "The union of man and wife shapes their relationship with one another. As a husband is motivated by loving leadership because of his wife's nearness to him, so also the wife is encouraged in her submissions by the reality of this union."⁴ Beginning to cultivate such a caring relationship with one's spouse is advisable. Ed Welch teaches eight lessons to cultivate meaningful relationships in one another care. Marriage provides ample ground for practicing such care. Here is a summary of his lessons, followed by some potential applications for each lesson:

1. *With All Humility: To put this humility to the test, we ask for prayer.* A wife engages in prayer for her husband and seeks prayer from her husband. Asking for prayer reveals a greater dependence on Christ in his work in the wife's heart and in the heart of her husband.

³ Dave Harvey, *When Sinners Say "I Do": Discovering the Power of the Gospel for Marriage* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd, 2007), 38.

⁴ Matthew Haste, "A Type of the Marriage of Christ and the Church: John Gill on Marriage," *Puritan Reformed Journal* 6, no. 2 (July 2014): 300.

2. *Move Toward Others: We take the initiative towards others.* Moving toward another regarding one's spouse may look as simple as a wife sitting next to her husband. In conflict, it may require staying physically present in the room with a spouse when the wife would rather remove herself from the room. It may also include the wife initiating plans for relational and sexual intimacy with her husband.
3. *Know the Heart: Know the heart, know the person.* A wife should not assume that she knows everything about her husband nor how he will respond in every situation. Knowing the heart of one's spouse takes careful time to invest in the individual and is a lifelong process as much as the marriage covenant is a lifelong commitment. A wife must stay committed to knowing her spouse.
4. *Know the Critical Influences: Other people and our physical bodies.* A wife carefully observes her husband. She observes who are her husband's friends, who are his mentors, and who are additional people of influence in his life. She also considers her husband's physical health, his level of stress at work or church, the hours of his sleep, and his age and stage of life.
5. *Be Personal and Pray: Help by personally engaging, focusing on Christ, and praying together.* A wife who intently listens communicates care to her husband. Asking good questions that draw out his heart helps a wife minister to her husband. Intentionally helping him to focus his gaze on Christ and remembering that this is the reason God has established marriage will center the marriage appropriately. Marriage to Christ is the greatest priority. Praying together as a couple is spiritually uniting.
6. *Talk about Suffering: Scripture speaks to our troubles.* Wives are able to apply Scripture to their husband's troubles in gentle and respectful ways. It is important to hear what exactly troubles him. The truth that husband and wife operate in a fallen world gives grounds for listening to his sorrows. They are legitimate. The Scriptures are full of hope enabling her to give grace to her husband (Prov 24:26; 25:11; Eph 4:29).
7. *Talk about Sin: Talk about sin and offer help very carefully.* A wife fulfills the words of James 5:16 by confessing her sins to her spouse. Growing in Christlikeness is a wife's supreme desire. It is necessary that this desire rules her heart more than the desire to look good by avoiding acknowledgment of being wrong. Confessing the sin to her husband will help her throw off the sin that so easily entangles (Heb 12:1). Likewise, this desire to be Christlike must rule her heart when her husband confesses his sin to her. She will then be quick to forgive him.
8. *Remember and Reflect: Remember and live out gospel applications.*⁵ The gospel remains central in marriage. A wife reminding her husband of the grace that God has shown him by forgiving him on behalf of Christ, aids in the husband's ability to live

⁵ Edward Welch, *Caring for One Another: 8 Ways to Cultivate Meaningful Relationships* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 11, 17, 23, 33, 43, 51, 59, 67.

in that reality. The Bible commands believers to remember the things God has done. A wife may bring the gospel to the forefront of the conversation. She may also graciously remind her husband of the Holy Spirit's work in changing him when he becomes discouraged.

A couple may begin to practice these biblical lessons toward each other. God works through his people to grow and sanctify his bride, the church. The reality of the union of marriage displays the even greater reality of the union of Christ to the church.

A Marriage's Re-orientation Spurs Worship of God

God's good design of marriage reflects the spiritual reality and, when done rightly, it causes others to praise God (Matt 5:16). Tim Savage reflects,

But how can such a simple human relationship, a marriage between a man and a woman, possibly contain the wonder and the weight of divine glory? It becomes possible when two people manifest together the image of Jesus Christ and especially the image of his cross . . . It is an expression of the love of the Godhead, a love passed back and forth among Father, Son, and Holy Spirit from before the beginning of time . . . When we, . . . image within our marriages the miracle of intertrinitarian love, a union of supernatural beauty takes shape—an uncommon union, a union radiating with the glory of God in the shape of cruciform love.⁶

Marriage functioning as it is designed to function demonstrates a supernatural work, because it reflects God and his redeeming love.

When a couple known to experience marital conflict begins working toward each other's good, people notice. Christians will marvel at the Lord's work in the couple's life. Perhaps noticing not as drastic of a change may occur, too. The quiet love of a husband and wife of fifty years also displays the kindness of God to that couple. When asked how they stayed married for so long, they might correctly conclude the answer—God. James 1:17 tells us not to be deceived; every good gift and every perfect gift comes from God. A uniqueness of the couple themselves falls short of the explanation; rather, Christ happened in their marriage. He kept them faithful to himself

⁶ Tim Savage, *No Ordinary Marriage: Together for God's Glory* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 164.

and to each other. No one has the capability of living faithfully for God in and of themselves. Marriage demands a transforming demonstration of God by his Spirit to accomplish such a good work. He who began a good work in us will complete it, even if the good work is marriage (Phil 1:6). Why do marriages endure? God. The biblical counselor offers the couple hope for their marriage as they learn to trust in God. The couple responds by glorifying God for their marriage, for the longevity of other couples' marriages, and for their own spouse's uniqueness.

Paul David Tripp encourages couples,

Celebrate your Creator . . . The more you look at your spouse and see the imprint of God's fingers and are amazed, the more you will be able to resist the temptation to try to remake him into your own image. The more you esteem what God has created, the less you will want to remake it. The more you see divine beauty and divine glory and the differences between you, the less you will be irritated by them. Here is the bottom line: the more you look at your husband or wife and honor God as creator, the more you will tend to esteem and appreciate the person who you live with, who is so incredibly different from you.⁷

Understanding the truth of marriage as relating to God and one's husband, specifically, challenges married couples to view the spouse as God's good creation. When a wife puts this into practice, it brings glory to God for creating her husband and results in her praising and worshiping God.

Submitting to Husbands

A wife who knows she belongs to Christ lives first and foremost in submission to him (Eph 5:22-24). Another way to express this truth would be that a wife's submission to Christ is primary, and a wife's submission to her husband is secondary. She submits to her earthly husband because she knows the truth of Christ, her Maker, being her husband (Isa 54:5). Wives should seek to submit to husbands in a way that

⁷ Paul David Tripp, *What Did You Expect? Redeeming the Realities of Marriage* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 210.

pleases God. In regard for and out of love for Christ, she willingly submits to her earthly husband.

Christ demonstrates tender care toward her even if her husband fails to exemplify Christ to her. In such cases, God will, by his grace, enable her to entrust herself to her faithful Creator and continue to do good (1 Pet 4:19). This rich promise flows from her loving Father. Failing marriages have an ability to land wives into the arms of their heavenly husband. When this happens, the beauty of knowing Christ more results. The wounds inflicted on the wife bring her into the loving care of the Good Physician. He binds up her broken heart and heals her wounds (Ps 147:3). Even if he refrains from healing, he will love her in marriage's trials, providing comfort to her soul. When a mother comforts her hurting child without healing her daughter's wounds, her love does much to quiet and bring peace to her daughter's soul. God's love, to a much greater degree, comforts the aching heart without requiring healing, although he has the power to heal (Isa 53:5; 1 Pet 2:24).

Pleasing to the Lord

A wife's unique role is submitting to her own husband. The Bible seems to indicate the specificity of a woman's submission. Russell D. Moore exhorts,

Those of us who hold to so-called "traditional gender roles" are often assumed to believe that women should submit to men. This isn't true In Scripture, every creature is called to submit, often in different ways and at different times . . . and, yes, wives are called to submit to their husbands (Eph 5:22; 1 Pet 3:1-6). But that's just the point. In the Bible, it is not that women, generally, are to submit to men, generally. Instead, "wives" are to submit to your own husbands (1 Pet 3:1).⁸

A wife's initial priority is pleasing her heavenly husband, Christ (Isa 54:5). In addition, submission of a wife to her earthly husband necessarily entails submission to her heavenly husband. The exception would be following her earthly husband into sin. A

⁸ Russell D. Moore, "Women Stop Submitting to Men," *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 17, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 8.

wife would be free to follow Christ over her earthly husband's sinful inclination. John Piper gives six clarifying statements on what does not entail submission:

1. Submission is not agreeing with everything your husband says.
2. Submission does not mean leaving your brain or your will at the altar.
3. Submission does not mean avoiding every effort to change a husband.
4. Submission does not mean putting the will of the husband before the will of Christ.
5. Submission does not mean that a wife gets her personal, spiritual strength primarily through her husband.
6. Finally, submission does not mean that a wife is to act out of fear.⁹

Godly submission is, as Piper would suggest, "The divine call of a wife to honor and affirm her husband's leadership and help carry it through according to her gifts."¹⁰ A submissive attitude honors a husband as the head of the home.

A biblical counselor may teach through the aspects of what submission is and what it is not. Understanding how each spouse has defined submission will be insightful for the counselor. Asking them how they have applied this knowledge in their marriage will help the counselor reference the biblical principles necessary to aid in a more biblical understanding of the term. Our culture is sensitive to using the word submission. Slavery, loss of identity, and loss of freedom are some ideas commonly associated with submission today. Challenging these associations with the use of Scripture will help a couple adopt a more God-honoring view.

Pleasing the Lord in Abuse

Are men reflecting Christ's leadership especially within their marriages? Men may rule in sin in various ways. A domineering husband demonstrates one of these ways. Submission to a husband does not entail allowing a wife to be abused by her husband. Becky Larson advocates,

⁹ John Piper, *This Momentary Marriage: A Parable of Permanence* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 99-101.

¹⁰ Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*, 101.

She should be educated, for example, in the biblical view marriage: A man should lead his wife and love her as Christ loves the church. In turn, a wife is submissive to her husband, not in believing lies and condoning evil, but in response to his loving guidance. She respects his desires because they are not irrational or sinful. An abused woman needs help when her marriage contrasts with the biblical view.¹¹

God brought Eve to the man as one made in his image (Gen 1:26). The point of man and woman alike being made in his image simply cannot be stressed enough. Likewise, exemplifying this within marriage cannot be overstated.

A man who abuses his wife has a faith-based issue. He fails to recognize God's image in his wife. He fails to recognize that she belongs first and foremost to God. He fails to see the world rightly in relation to God. God is the center of all things, and this abusive husband is not. His wife does not exist solely to please or displease him. She lives to please and honor her Creator. God does not give his daughter away to a man when they are married as an earthly father would. Her heavenly Father is present with them in their marriage as the Creator and Sustainer. Both husband and wife will be held accountable for every careless word ever spoken (Matt 12:36). How much more will they be held accountable for every careless shove or thrown object?

When Jesus told his disciples in a parable that “whatever you do to the least of these, you do also to me” and “whatever you do not do to the least of these, you do not do to me,” it seems plausible to consider the way in which individuals treat another directly affects Christ for he is head over the body (Matt 25:40, 45; Eph 5:23). Restraint must be utilized toward this application, but it would certainly be a reality check to consider, *If I hit this person, it is like I am hitting Christ*. Additional thought would need to be demonstrated in understanding the motive behind the action. What desires are central in the husband's heart?

Another biblical passage to consider is Saul's conversion. Acts 8:1 states that “Saul approved of” Stephen's execution, and then in verse 3, Saul was “ravaging the

¹¹ Becky Larson, “Husbands Who Control,” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 24, no.1 (Winter 2006): 33-34.

church,” both men and women. When Jesus appears to Saul, on the road to Damascus right after Saul asks permission to arrest all those who belong to the Way, Jesus asks him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting *me*?” (Acts 9:1-2, emphasis added). The personal involvement of Saul in Jesus’s own arrest, trial, and execution would require more exploration. Yet, from this verse, Jesus appears to ask why Saul is persecuting *him*. To the best of our knowledge, Saul had not persecuted or mistreated Christ personally. At least, the Bible does not mention Saul before the book of Acts. What then might Luke, the author of Acts, mean here? In essence, Christ is saying, “*When you hurt those who are mine, you are hurting me.*” Herein lies the reasoning that demonstrates the weight given to the Golden Rule, “treat others the way you want to be treated,” because the way one treats another is the way he is treating God (Luke 6:21). A man cannot hate his brother, or in this case, his wife, and still love God (1 John 4:20-21).

A husband’s wife is the first person entrusted to his care. God commands the man not to lord it over his wife, but to live with her in an understanding way (1 Pet 3:7; 5:3). Justin S. Holcomb and Lindsay A. Holcomb explain concerning abused wives, “They are not expected to continue receiving abuse from anyone, especially in a way that enables the sin of their abuser to keep perpetuating itself.”¹²

The biblical account of Abigail and Nabal illustrates the wisdom needed for wives to avoid harm (1 Sam 25:1-35). Although not explicitly a case of abuse, Abigail acted righteously although her husband responded wickedly. The sins of her husband affected her directly (1 Sam 25:22, 34). The abusive spouse inflicts many wounds on his wife. More women need to respond as Abigail by asking for help. She did not seek her husband Nabal’s permission to intercede on his behalf. She saw the direness of the

¹² Justin S. Holcomb and Lindsey A. Holcomb, “Does the Bible Say Women Should Suffer Abuse and Violence?,” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 28, no. 2 (2014): 18-19.

situation and responded wisely (1 Sam 25:18). Asking for help not only benefits the wife, but it begins the process of loving correction for her husband.

Jeremy Pierre and Greg Wilson suggest the following caution to those helping the abused: “Do not act before the abused spouse has developed a safety plan or apart from her explicit advice and consent.”¹³ The pertinent concern in actuating care for the abused must be desired and initiated by the individual herself. Abigail sought the one (in this case, David) who might spare her life and the life of her husband. A counselor would do well to continue to point abused wives to God, who alone saves, while walking through the earthly hardships with them (Ps 62:5-8; Rom 12:15). The counselor helps by bringing her to a place of safety, both spiritually and physically. This topic is crucial and one that needs to be addressed more in-depth. However, this paper barely mentions the harmful reality experienced by many abused women.

Pleasing the Lord in Allowing Protection

First Timothy 2:14 may suggest that the man displays a godly protective mindset towards his wife. As a good shepherd protects the flock, so a husband has a role in protecting his wife from deception by helping to expose to her the wolves that are in sheep’s clothing (Matt 7:15; Acts 20:28). A wife submits to her husband’s loving leadership as he protects her.

The woman may also submit to her earthly husband’s protection if he thinks she may be deceived in a certain area, whether or not she agrees with him. The likelihood that a woman would agree when deceived, remains highly improbable. One cannot experience deception while she is aware of her deception. She may have her eyes opened to her deception immediately afterwards, like Adam and Eve’s eyes were opened after they sinned, or years later in her marriage (Gen 3:7).

¹³ Jeremy Pierre and Greg Wilson, *When Home Hurts: A Guide for Responding Wisely to Domestic Abuse in Your Church* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2021), 83.

When a husband protectively leads away from a situation that a wife considers best, it remains unlikely she will view his leadership as better than her own perception in the moment. Honoring God in that moment may manifest as deferring to her husband's leadership. Although she refrains from holding a similar view to her husband, her trust in God will bring blessing to her, because she has pleased God in her submission to her husband's God-ordained role as head of their marriage. She would then exemplify Sarah, who in 1 Peter 3:6 did not give way to fear and was blessed because of it. God blesses the wife who pleases him.

Pleasing the Lord in Differing Views

If not an issue of sin, the wife ought to submit her will to her husband's because God has designed him as the head over her. Counterintuitive to a wife's emotions, it is not punishment, nor does it entail that her husband does not love her. The husband receives both the blessing and the hardship from being the head of his wife. Individuals are not always that easy to lead.

Aiming for a united decision would be the better option than deferring to the husband's decision as the head of the family. There are instances when the front is not united within the marriage. In such cases, committing the matter to prayer together, and praying for one another and for a united heart in the matter would be advised. Andreas Köstenberger and David W. Jones emphasize, "The biblical model for marriage is that of loving complementarity, where the husband and the wife are partners who value and respect each other and where the husband's loving leadership is met with the wife's intelligent response."¹⁴

Complementarity is preferred over the "just submit and do it" mentality that the martyred-in-thought wife portrays. The final decision remains the responsibility of the

¹⁴ Andreas Köstenberger and David W. Jones, *Marriage and the Family: Biblical Essentials* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 38.

head—the husband—but that decision does not require an immediate conclusion. Often, decisions might be rushed because of failure to give it the proper time in prayer. Failure to commit a decision to the proper time in prayer results in a rushed decision. Prayer unites a couple, joining divided hearts together. Even with divided hearts concerning a decision, the couple may remain united in their resolve to respond according to their biblical roles.

The husband may also require the freedom to fail. Unlike God, he is not omniscient. He might genuinely believe that plan X is better than plan Y, but, in the end, plan X appears to be a mistake. Growing and maturing remain part of learning, and part of the role of the helper involves demonstrating the grace necessary for him to have the freedom to learn.

In our culture, perfection is frequently viewed as not producing any mistakes. Mistakes possess a high cost, but not all mistakes remain sinful. They may even feel sinful. Demonstrating one's faith in God must be practiced over human understanding. Some of the once-thought greatest mistakes in an individual's life may turn into a person's deepest well of blessing. Obviously, this may not hold true for every mistake, and not every mistake is redeemed. Sometimes, "mistake" may inaccurately be used instead of the word "sin." God will one day redeem all things (Rev 21-22).

Pleasing the Lord in Undesired Decisions

Furthermore, additional consideration might need to be given as to what the wife perceives as the undesirable option. Many wives may attest to decisions that they regret being made at the time, but later resulted in thankfulness for those decisions which at first appeared so undesirable. An undesirable decision may result in suffering. Sometimes God ordains suffering because, through suffering, he changes both the husband and the wife.

Whether or not one is currently suffering, one will encounter a trial. American Christians may benefit from being taught the doctrine of suffering. Individuals may not enjoy teaching on suffering, and likewise people often dislike hearing about suffering. However, learning this doctrine remains necessary because people experience suffering and often seek an explanation for it. D. A. Carson remarks,

Of course, when you stop to think of it, the prospect of discipline *must* be encouraging to those who genuinely want to please their heavenly Father. If he disciplines those he loves and punishes those he accepts as his children, then to chafe unduly under such punishment is to betray our immaturity—or even, finally, to call into question our desire to grow in conformity to our heavenly Father.¹⁵

There are other reasons people suffer, but, regardless, growing in conformity to the Father is the outcome of our sufferings (Rom 8:29). Some people reveal immaturity when faced with suffering. Carson displays a stark contrast to how a mature believer would perceive suffering. When a wife entrusts herself to her faithful Creator and continues to do good in the midst of her sufferings or an undesired decision, she pleases her Lord as she grows in imaging him (1 Pet 4:19).

Certainly, when viewing Scripture, even the patriarchs chose to sin, and yet, Hebrews 11 praises their faith. One understands Adam praising the untainted creation of Eve (Gen 2:23). Conversely, one may remain confused as to why the author of Hebrews sang the praises of these sinful individuals. If such godly men and women who sinned received acceptance from God because of faith in him, might not wives accept their godly, though imperfect husbands when they lead in an undesirable direction?

All humanity groans awaiting redemption (Rom 8:22-25). A wife's groanings in the midst of an undesired decision may be coupled with faith. Indeed, the way she responds to her husband's decision rests more on her trusting in God's work in spite of

¹⁵ D. A. Carson, *How Long, O Lord? Reflections on Suffering and Evil* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 64.

her lack of understanding. After considering these truths, one might understand why it is impossible to please God without faith (Heb 11:6).

Forgiven by God

Why forgive? A person forgives because God gives hope to forgiven individuals through faith in Jesus. Jay E. Adams reminds believers, “When our God forgives us, he promises that he will not remember our sins against us anymore.”¹⁶ Therefore, by being made into the image of Christ, one might also forgive those who have faith in him (Rom 8:29). A wife who demonstrates this indicates she has been forgiven much, enabling her to love much (Luke 7:47).

Part of the loving a wife does necessarily entails forgiving (1 Cor 13:5). The power of forgiving a husband comes directly from the cross. All of the wife’s sins were nailed on Jesus. All of her husband’s sins were nailed on Jesus (Col 2:14). The Bible’s record of the cross is where justice and mercy meet. The wrath of God receives atonement for sin, Jesus’s death: justice is met. Forgiveness is given to any who trust in Christ’s death and resurrection as payment for their sins: mercy is met.

Forgiveness remains challenging to articulate when attempting to explain it from a human viewpoint. Humans are more in concurrence with the ideas “the one who sinned should suffer” and “the one who does not sin, should not suffer” (Ezek 18:19-20). Romans 2:4 explains, “It is the kindness of God that leads us to repentance.” Counterintuitive to our humanity, God does the opposite: the one who did not sin, suffers; the one who did sin, does not suffer. The One who did not sin but suffered offers forgiveness to those who sinned. Romans 11:34-36 summarizes the correct response of our hearts: “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor? Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid? For from him and through him and

¹⁶ Jay E. Adams, *From Forgiven to Forgiving: Learning to Forgive One Another God’s Way*, Calvary Press Christian Counseling (Amityville, NY: Calvary, 1994).

to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen.” The forgiveness given by God on behalf of Christ is the basis for extending forgiveness to husbands.

Mercilessness Displays Pride

For wives who are aware of the difference between being justified and being sanctified, Galatians cautions the believer concerning the process of sanctification. Growing in Christlikeness is pertinent for counselor and counselee alike. Robert W. Kellemen explains, “The application of biblical wisdom to our lives, relationships, and ministries ought to be high on the list of qualifications for effective biblical counseling. God calls us not only to know his word richly, but to apply his word relevantly to our lives so that we grow in Christlike character.”¹⁷ Instead of growing in Christlike character, a Christian may revert back to a self-righteous attitude (Gal 3:1-6).

A potential difficulty in some wives being converted at a young age is not seeing as great of a contrast as those who once were in darkness but enabled to see their depravity. A wife experiencing this difficulty needs to learn to lean on God’s Word to show her who she once was and what she was saved from instead of relying on her own reasoning or understanding (Prov 3:5-6; Eph 2). She might need to see the contrast of what the Lord has saved her from by his keeping her from many sins. In this illusory state, she might tend to be blind to her own sin. Her prideful and sinful heart might continually fail to acknowledge her need for God. Here alone is enough sin to condemn her to hell. Yet, she may accuse those whom she considers worse than herself which, in this case, is her husband.

The parable of the Pharisee and the tax-collector might offer help to a wife in understanding her posture before God. In Luke 18:9, the Bible manifests those who trusted “in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt” versus

¹⁷ Robert W. Kellemen, *Gospel Conversations: How to Care Like Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 79.

“the one who was looking to another for repentance.” Proclaiming one’s spouse as the worst sinner remains an easier road. What does Scripture model? Scripture teaches one to exemplify Paul who declared, “I am the worst of sinners” (1 Tim 1:15). Wives must model humility in their marriage. An unmerciful attitude towards others might warn a person that she might be progressing in relying on and trusting in herself. The difficult aspect of sin is its deceitfulness in nature (Heb 3:13). Ken Sande stated, “One of the most subtle cloaking devices is to argue that we want only what God himself commands.”¹⁸ To avoid being bewitched like the Galatians, one needs to fix her eyes on Jesus who is both author and perfecter of her faith (Heb 12:2). When a wife considers Christ, the most merciful man, she may begin to grasp how to exemplify Christ’s mercy in her words and in her ways.

Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, was such a woman, casting her gaze on Jesus while sitting at his feet (Luke 10:38-42). It is difficult to humble oneself and not see him. It is also equally as difficult to look at Christ and not see oneself rightly in relationship to him. A tertiary effect would be the remaining difficulty that a woman would have while looking at Jesus and not seeing her husband rightly as one for whom Christ died. Seeing her husband rightly would result in extending forgiveness to him.

Extending Forgiveness

Trusting God, no matter what the circumstances and with the circumstances he has chosen for a wife, reveals her heart’s object of worship. The problem, or perhaps the blessing, of circumstances is that God uses them to display wives’ hearts. Sande teaches that “an idol is anything apart from God that we depend on to be happy, fulfilled, or secure.”¹⁹ Desiring a good marriage in which the husband leads family devotions,

¹⁸ Ken Sande, *Peacemaking for Families: A Biblical Guide to Managing Conflict in Your Home* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2002), 19.

¹⁹ Sande, *Peacemaking for Families*, 18.

sacrificially loves, and maintains integrity in all his relationships is a good, godly desire. There exists a potential for idolatry when one's happiness begins to rest on this good desire.

A marriage will have problems as two sinners have entered the covenantal relationship of marriage. One will inevitably sin and the other will be sinned against. What will a wife choose when sinned against? Will she acknowledge God has forgiven her and extend forgiveness to her husband, or will she choose to withhold forgiveness? There is only one judge and lawgiver, the man Jesus Christ (Jas 4:12). The alarming truth is that, when a person fails to forgive, she acts as a judge over the one who has transgressed. David Powlison strongly depicts,

We judge others—criticize, nitpick, nag, attack, condemn—because we literally play God. This is heinous Who are you when you judge your neighbor? None other than a God wannabe. In this we become like the devil himself We act exactly like the adversary who seeks to usurp God's throne and who acts as the accuser of the brethren. When you and I fight, our minds become filled with accusations: your wrongs and my rights preoccupy me. We play the self-righteous judge in the mini-kingdoms we establish.²⁰

One's own standard of righteousness is nothing but filthy rags in God's sight (Isa 64:6).

The beauty of a woman is exemplified most gloriously when clothed with Christ's righteousness as her own. The Bible commands her to put on the Lord Jesus Christ. There is hardly a more Christlike attribute than being a forgiving person. A righteous woman must care more about pleasing God than man, even if that person is herself.²¹

A particular challenge in wives forgiving their husbands is to the degree in which they have felt betrayed. A woman assumes that her man is for her good, as she is for her husband's good. The shock that the person closest to her on this earth performed the act of betrayal, coupled with the God-given command of her husband to be her

²⁰ David Powlison, "Getting to the Heart of Conflict: Anger, Part 3," *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 16, no. 1 (Fall 1997): 34.

²¹ Jonathan T. Pennington, *The Sermon on Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 210.

protector, is world-altering. When a wife discovers the complete reversal of her once-held perception of the truth, time will be needed for her to consider what this new gut-wrenching reality means. She will need to lift up her eyes by fixing them on Jesus and cling to the truth of him never leaving her nor forsaking her (Heb 12:2; 13:5b). Praying to Jesus begins the process of developing a heart-attitude of forgiveness.

Jesus knew gut-wrenching betrayal. As a human being, few would be willing to forgive fairly decent people. If a person knew someone was going to betray her, and she was still kind, loving, and kept this person close rather than at arms-distance, it would be inconceivable. Jesus does precisely the shocking, mind-altering, heart-probing reversal of human tendency; he accepts Judas as one of the twelve. In following Christ's example, wives are enabled to love their husbands, even when, or if, their husbands betray them.

Jesus commands Christians to follow in his example of forgiveness. Christ modeled for Christians the example of himself that they may follow him (1 Pet 2:21-23). Jesus teaches in the Sermon on the Mount that people are to forgive their debtors as they are forgiven their debts (Matt 6:12-15). Forgiveness then becomes an issue of obedience for the believing wife. Righteous obedience flows from a heart that loves God (John 14:15). Aaron Sironi offers a heart-probing exhortation:

Aiming for a forgiving attitude means working to forgive those who sinned against us in our hearts, being prepared to offer mercy to the offender if and when asked, and being ready to forgive even if reconciliation may not happen at this time. Attitudinal forgiveness paves the way for transactional forgiveness and readies your heart to fight temptations to rehash the person's sin.²²

Christ has a forgiving disposition towards people. A wife would do well to develop the Christlike attitude of forgiveness toward her husband. The change required in her heart to forgive receives its initiation by the Spirit (Gal 5:16). A wife, no matter how kind and

²² Aaron Sironi, "From Your Heart . . . Forgive," *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 26, no. 3 (2012): 48.

gracious her natural disposition, remains powerless to forgive apart from the Spirit's working in her heart.

A wife must purpose to refrain from re-examining past wrongs previously addressed nor rehearse these wrongs in her mind. During the process of regaining her trust, she may desire to talk through the issues as she wrestles with the pain and the hurt. This may at first appear as unforgiveness and a rehashing of the sin. However, wounds do not heal overnight. Healing is not instantaneous. Patiently allowing her to continue to bring the hurt to God will assist in the healing process.

A husband who understands the forgiveness he received from Christ listens to his wife as she walks through the process of learning to trust her husband. Remembering that forgiveness is a decision and not merely a feeling brings encouragement to a wife who may not feel the affections toward her husband as she once had before. With betrayal of trust, immediately regaining her trust would be unwise as he will require time to change.

In the process of learning to trust again, even though a wife does not hold her husband guilty for the past sin, the husband reaps the consequences of his sin against her. He must willingly work at rebuilding her trust with him. A wife's trust is to be in the Lord. A wife trusts Philippians 1:6 that "he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion." She trusts that God will do this for her while also trusting God to faithfully carry this out in the heart of her husband. A child is known by his conduct (Prov 20:11). For a husband to have a wife grow in trusting him again, his conduct requires change. This type of change in a husband requires time to rebuild that godly reputation. Sin separates us from God and one another (Isa 59:2). Forgiveness bridges the destructive gap, but time and effort are required to continue to move toward one another in love (restoring trust).

The good news is that real, full, and complete forgiveness is possible. It is possible because of Christ's work on the cross (Col 2:14). It is possible because of his

Spirit working in a wife pleasing in his sight (Heb 13:21). It is possible because God fully restores broken relationships (Col 1:20). God requires individuals to be active participants of this process, but he also promises to be with them (Col 1:10; Heb 13:5b).

Robert D. Jones invites Christians to remember what forgiveness is and what it means. He remarks,

Finally, our working definition of God’s forgiveness roots it in Jesus Christ. God does not ignore the sins of Christians. He punished our sins. But he does not punish us for our sins. He punished our substitute, the Lord Jesus For this reason, even the common evangelical expression “God forgives us as we are,” is insufficient, since “as we are,” apart from Jesus, we are sinful, lost, and unrighteous. Instead, God forgives us *as we are in Christ*. In the new covenant we find forgiveness only in a saving-faith connection with Jesus.²³

A wife forgives because the sin of her husband, which was committed against her, was not ignored. It was atoned for in both her and her husband’s substitute—Christ. A wife forgives her husband as he is in Jesus, not as he is in himself. The husband receives forgiveness because of his covenantal relationship with Jesus. The truth of Jesus being both author and perfecter of an individual’s faith flows over into acknowledging the same truth applied vertically: Christ is both author and perfecter of her husband’s faith (Heb 12:2). A wife’s hope of forgiveness toward her husband is rooted in her being forgiven by God on the basis of Christ.

Conclusion

Biblical counseling provides couples with hope. There is hope when a couple understands the creation of marriage as God designed. Marriage now uniquely points the couple to the hope of the gospel relationally to one another. Marriage also reflects and proclaims the union of Christ and the church to the world. A wife’s submission to her husband is pleasing to God when her hope is placed in God over her earthly circumstances. One specific avenue of extending hope to the world is the unique witness

²³ Robert D. Jones, *s: A Christians Guide to Handling Our Conflicts* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 124.

of forgiveness. The wife models Christ's forgiveness to her husband in such a way that others watching will praise God.

CHAPTER 4

DETAILS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

The project consisted of six different sections. Each section ranged from 20 to 23 minutes in length with a 7 to 10-minute break in between. The title of the seminar was, “A Grace-Filled Marriage: Becoming the Godly Wife Christ has Fashioned You to Be.” There were twelve attendees for this event. It was hosted at the East Chain Activity Center where I rented out the space for the event. We began ten minutes late due to only four people in attendance. Most of the women were in attendance by the time I completed my personal introduction and did not miss any of the content at the beginning of the seminar. I designed a workbook to assist in the learning of the content. With the pre-seminar survey, post-seminar survey, and the bibliography, the workbook contained thirty pages including additional space provided for notetaking.

Description of Preparation

The preparation of my project consisted of three parts: writing the manuscript of my curriculum for teaching the seminar, creating a workbook for the attendees of the seminar, and sending them to the expert panel to evaluate based on the rubric. After receiving the majority of the experts’ feedback, their suggestions were implemented into the curriculum. These edits were completed prior to the seminar. One member of the expert panel completed the rubric post-seminar. No additional edits were made.

Writing the Manuscript

Writing out the manuscript assisted in ensuring the desired content was clearly communicated. The manuscript was transcribed. Since I was born in the area, I thought

that simply speaking the manuscript by using every-day language would make the seminar more enjoyable.

The manuscript was rehearsed four times before the day of the project with an additional time that was 50 percent rehearsed. Each section was timed in order to project the length of the seminar. The original time was tested by a second timing of each individual part. After an accurate timeframe was established, the anticipated duration of the seminar was four hours and fifteen minutes scheduled for Saturday, April 15th, 2023, from 1:00-5:15 p.m. The teaching curriculum would be three hours and twenty-five minutes. The additional fifty minutes would allow for breaks and a time for questions in between some of the sessions. The supper following was scheduled from 5:15-6:30 p.m.

Creating the Workbook

The workbook for the attendees was written based on the manuscript, highlighting points, and including cited quotes. Additional space was provided for notetaking or writing down their own thoughts or questions. The workbook grew from simply a stapled copy into a spiral bound workbook printed by Minute Man. My brother-in-law, Christopher Dugan, designed the cover page, designed the session title pages, edited my simple font and formatting, and resolved the workbook's spacing issues.

Expert Panel

The expert panel consisted of four individuals: James Baker, Jessica Brown, ToniLynn Fleming, and Seth Watson. Associate Pastor James Baker, or "Pastor Matt" at Bethel Evangelical Free Church, has been on staff for two years. Jessica Brown studied Hebrew with me while at Northwestern. After graduation, she was a missionary to Papua New Guinea for a decade. She is currently with Wycliffe. She was part of a team that recently completed a translation of the book of Ruth into a Papua New Guinean language. She and her husband, Tim, are stationed in Alaska. ToniLynn Fleming grew up as a child on the mission field, became a missionary with her husband in Ireland, and moved back

to the United States with her husband, Jim Fleming, whom I had met as the Associate Pastor at Bethel Evangelical Free Church. Pastor Jim went home to be with the Lord, and ToniLynn continues to serve at Bethel on the mission's team. She has co-led a mission's team to Congo three times. She offered to help me with this project as she was furthering her own studies within the medical field. Pastor Seth Watson is the Senior Pastor at Bethel Evangelical Free Church. He graduated from Dallas Theological Seminary with his Master of Theology. He has been the head pastor at Bethel for around four years. They are complementarian in their view of the roles of men and women.

The rubric and the teaching curriculum (manuscript) were emailed to most of the expert panel on March 25, 2023. Jessica Brown responded on April 3, ToniLynn Fleming responded by April 10, and Pastor Seth Watson responded with content discussion and presentation ideas for the seminar. The recommendations of those who responded with suggestions on the rubric were included within the manuscript. Additional comments and suggestions were also adhered to, being altered within the teaching curriculum as deemed appropriate in relation to additional preparations occurring for the seminar. E-mails thanking the expert panel were sent. An additional panel member agreed to participate and responded post-seminar, James Baker. He received an email thanking him as well.

Bethel Church approved the details for the seminar. The details were then communicated to the congregation through the weekly letter the week before the April 15 seminar. A link was included in the letter to sign up online for the event. The East Chain Homeschool Co-op was also personally texted to help promote the seminar. The workbooks and food were ordered as a free supper was provided for those attending the seminar. Beverages and snacks were served throughout the seminar. These were all free of charge to the attendees.

Description of Implementation of Project

At the beginning of the seminar, I thanked the attendees for coming. I gave a brief personal introduction of myself and of the project. Then I prayed for the seminar along with those in attendance. The pre-seminar survey was administered. Once the surveys were complete, they were placed in an envelope.

Teaching Curriculum

The titles of the sections of the seminar were similar to the titles of their comparable sections in this paper. “Marriage: A Theological and Biblical Basis for a Wife’s Ministry” was the title of the first session. The attendees were asked to open their Bibles to Genesis 2:7. I explained the context of Genesis 1. Then we read Genesis 2:18-25. I listed some distinctions in Genesis. In the reflection point, the irrational nature of sin was addressed as we considered (1) in the past, the incredible blessings that Eve lived under, and (2) us, in our modern-day, desiring anything more than God. We reflected on what “fruit” or thing we were desiring more than him.

The first subsection was titled “Marriage’s Model.” This section targeted Genesis 2:22. We discussed the point that God is the Creator, the Author, and the Definer of marriage. Then we explored marriage consisting of two people. We also addressed the dual-purposed creation of Adam (1) propagation of God’s image bearers (Gen 1:28), and (2) a foreshadowing of Christ (Rom 5:12-21). Both passages of Scripture were read aloud together.

“Marriage’s Roles are Reflective of God’s Glory within the Godhead of the Trinity” was the title of the second subsection. The main lesson from this section was that marriage reflected the Trinity while remaining distinct from the Trinity. Another main point was the creation of both man and woman together reflected the fellowship of their Godhead.

Countercultural to some views being taught regarding submission, my third subsection was titled “Parallels of Headship and Childbirth Existing Pre-Fall.” We looked

at Genesis 2:20 which declared Adam needed a helper. Then we reasoned that the role of his headship existed pre-fall. Genesis 3:16 was discussed and Gilbert Bilezikian's (see chap. 2) view was given. I suggested Bruce Waltke's interpretation (see chap. 2) as an accurate view of the text. After this section, time was allowed for questions followed by a short break ranging from around five to seven minutes.

The second session titled, "Theoretical and Practical Implications for Wives," began with this question, "What do you think is the purpose of your marriage with your spouse?" The central theme acknowledged that marriage is God's creation and is ultimately a reflection of Christ's relationship with the church. This acknowledgment would help re-orient a person back to God in marriage's difficulties and blessings. In addition, in this section, I covered and discussed the quote from John Frame (see chap. 3), that reminded us of the practical application of the Scriptures to life as theology. We read Matthew 7:24-27 together. The definition of biblical counseling as defined by Robert D. Jones (see chap. 1) encouraged us to view counseling as helping people learn to please Jesus in their struggles and know him better in and through them.

"Acknowledging God's Purpose in Marriage" was the title of the first subsection. In this part, I emphasized preaching the hope of the gospel to your spouse. The wives attending the seminar were encouraged to assume responsibility for their own actions.

Further explanation of this concept was the subsequent point, "Failing to Proclaim the Gospel through Blame-shifting." The example given was of a husband failing to lead his wife spiritually. No matter how her husband failed at this, a wife was still accountable before God for her personal relationship with Jesus. I encouraged each woman to take responsibility for feeding her own soul. I read Proverbs 13:14, reminding the women of the importance to continue growing by fattening their souls. We read Genesis 3:13 together experiencing the first account of blame-shifting recorded. We then

discussed how complaining and gossiping were denoted as the fruit of blame-shifting. I sang the familiar camp song of Philippians 2:14 to conclude this subsection.

The next subsection was “Preach the Gospel within our Marriage” with the main teaching point being to remind a wife that her calling is as a vessel in her marriage to point her husband to God. In the final subsection, I taught “Cultivating a Loving Relationship with Your Spouse,” using Ed Welch’s eight lessons from his book, *Caring for One Another: 8 Ways to Cultivate Meaningful Relationships*, which I directly applied in the seminar in the context of their marriages.

The eight lessons were briefly taught individually. A summary of the eight lessons with my suggested applications were:

1. Lesson 1: *With All Humility: Ask for prayer.* Application: Humble yourself by asking your husband for prayer.
2. Lesson 2: *Move Toward Others: We take the initiative toward others.* Application: Choose to sit next to your husband in a room, stay in the room during a conflict, or initiate plans of relational and/or sexual intimacy.
3. Lesson 3: *Know the Heart: Know the person.* Application: A wife’s commitment to knowing her husband is a life-long process and consequently she should not assume she already knows everything about him or about how he will respond to every situation.
4. Lesson 4: *Know the Critical Influences: Other people and physical bodies.* Application: As psychosomatic beings, consider who impacts your husband’s soul: friends, mentors, etc. Also, consider his physical body: diet, amount of exercise as well his age and stage of life.
5. Lesson 5: *Be Personal and Pray: Help by personally engaging, focusing on Christ, and praying together.* Application: When asking heart-probing questions, a wife can engage her husband to refocus his gaze on Christ through prayer and reading God’s Word together. I used an illustration of the gentle nudge of a dog continuing to come over and swatting its owner’s hand up with its nose. I then correlated this gentle nudging to help portray a wife’s nudging her husband in the right direction of spiritual leadership.
6. Lesson 6: *Talk about Suffering: Scripture speaks to our troubles.* Application: We discussed acknowledging his pain and offering the words of Scripture to speak to these troubles. We addressed many Scripture passages together: Isaiah 53:3; Proverbs 24:26; 25:11; Ephesians 4:29; John 16:33; and Romans 12:15.
7. Lesson 7: *Talk about Sin: Talk about sin and offer your help very carefully.* We read James 5:16 as well as discussing the concept of Hebrews 12:1. Application: When a husband talks about his sin with his wife, a wife must care more about being

Christlike than about being sinned against in order that she may be able to extend him forgiveness. Then we read Matthew 7:13, focusing on how bitterness was the easier path, but that was not what God wanted from them. I encouraged them to consider the truth of 1 Corinthians 5:17 and exhorted the women not to view their husbands for whom Christ died as still stuck in their sins. We concluded together that this was not an accurate picture of their husbands.

8. Lesson 8: *Remember and Reflect: Remember and live out gospel applications.*
Application: A wife, reminding her husband of the grace God has shown him on behalf of Christ and of the Spirit's working in him, aids her husband in living in biblical reality. We concluded this section with another break that offered light refreshments.

“A Marriage’s Reorientation Spurs Worship of God” was the title of the third subsection. I used Matthew 5:16 along with Tim Savage’s quote (see chap. 3). Savage expounded on imaging the union of inter-Trinitarian love within our marriages. The focal point of this section was marriage functioning as it was designed to function was supernatural because it reflected God and his redeeming love which caused others who noticed and praised him, too.

The third session had an attention-grabbing title, “Wife, Submit!” I clearly stated that I knew it might sound culturally abrasive. While the audience turned to Ephesians 5:22, I addressed its context. I explained that we, who are in Christ, who were dead, have been made alive and are now part of the body of Christ. Understanding what Paul wrote launched us into Ephesians 5:22.

I used “Ephesians 5:22” as the title of the first subsection. Using Clinton Arnold’s quote (see chap. 2), the argument was made that a Spirit-filled wife submits to her husband; I connected this to a person being filled with the Spirit exemplifying the fruit of the Spirit. He explained the relation of the grammatical connection of being filled with the Spirit and submitting to one’s husband. This is similar to what we found when we read Galatians 5:22-23.

The women were encouraged to view this submission as evangelistic through the example of Acts 18:26. We discussed Ernest Best’s quote (see chap. 2), which stated that the home was where the church (body of Christ) gathered for worship in the early

church. We also addressed Anthony Hoekema's quote (see chap. 2), which illustrated functioning within the body of Christ. We reasoned together that the closest existing church member was a wife's husband. I taught the sober warning: you cannot dishonor your husband and be walking in obedience to God. However, I also explained the hope of reconciliation with your husband as an avenue to rightly proclaiming God again.

The second subsection was "1 Peter 3:1-7." We discussed the distinction of a wife submitting to her unbelieving husband versus a wife refraining from following her husband into sin, believer or unbeliever. We addressed Erland Waltner's and J. Daryl Charles's quote (see chap. 2), of how uniquely different the Christian woman's submission appeared to those in the culture around her. I also clarified a wife's submission to her husband as being different from a child's obedience to a parent using Thomas Schreiner's life-giving quote (see chap. 2).

In addition to the obvious situation of 1 Peter 3:1, we considered the example of a believing husband who walks in disobedience to God and his Word as still requiring a wife to submit to him. We examined that the way of fighting your husband's disobedience was by the wife modeling the obedience of faith. Subsequently, I proceeded to encourage a wife that she can still honor her God even when her husband walks in sin and ignorance. I explored the example of God protecting Sarah from Genesis 12:11-14 and Genesis 20:2. We discussed the hope of 1 Peter 2:19-20 and 1 Peter 4:19, and then we concluded the 1 Peter 3:1-7 section.

"Proverbs 31: A Godly Wife" was the final subsection of session 3. We read Proverbs 31:10-31 and the summaries were included in the workbook for the women. The poetry of Genesis 2:23 was read to introduce Proverbs 31. I presented Best's quote (see chap. 2), that reminded the participants that wisdom is central to all of Proverbs, including the last chapter. I showed, using the quote from Tremper Longman III, that wisdom was taught as the wife personified (see chap. 2), and addressed his explanation that a woman may display aspects of wisdom without requiring her to display all the

virtues. Additional scriptural evidences given were the parallels of Ephesians 4:7 and 2 Corinthians 3:18. A short 5 to 7-minute break followed the closing of session 3.

Session 4 was titled “Application of a Wife’s Submission.” I began this section with another time of prayer. We briefly reviewed the theological portion of Ephesians 5:22-24 together.

My main statement implemented was considering submission to Christ as primary and submission to her husband as secondary. I taught that the greatest comfort to a wife’s soul was the presence of Jesus with her, not in her healing or avoidance of pain, but in the presence of knowing her consistently-loving, omnisciently-wise God in and through those hurts and trials. I deduced with the women that submitting to one’s own husband was the point of Russell Moore’s quote (see chap. 3) that reminded women, in general, are not to submit to men in general, but a wife is to submit to her husband. We read through John Piper’s list (see chap. 3) of what submission is not. We also read what godly submission is: helping to use her God-given gifts to both honor and affirm her husband’s leadership.

The subsection “Pleasing the Lord in Abuse” was perhaps the most difficult topic addressed at the seminar. I read Becky Larson’s statement (see chap. 3), that stressed the importance of educating an abused woman in the biblical view of marriage. I further taught the lesson that an abusive husband has a faith-based issue. We read from Matthew 12:36 and addressed that more thought should be given regarding not only the careless words spoken, but also any type of physical abuse. We then considered Matthew 25:40, 45 and Ephesians 5:23 which supported the argument that if a husband hits his wife, it is like he is hitting Christ. We explored how the words in Acts 8:1, 3 were shown to be in preparation for the words of Christ in Acts 9:1-2 when Jesus asks Saul why he (Saul) was persecuting *him* (Jesus). We also read Luke 6:21 and 1 John 4:20-21 which showed how God cared about the way a husband treated God’s daughter.

We read 1 Peter 3:7, along with 1 Peter 5:3, which demonstrate to the women that a husband who abuses his wife hurts himself. In the seminar, I used Justin and Lindsey Holcomb's quote (see chap. 3), which further articulated that abused wives may stop undergoing abuse. In 1 Samuel 25:1-35, we reasoned that this passage showed Abigail wisely avoiding harm that saved not only her life, but those around her. In the same way, I mentioned that an abused wife bringing her husband's abuse to light potentially begins restoration for her husband. I explained Jeremy Pierre and Greg Wilson's caution (see chap. 3), to those desiring to help the abused by following her lead and her safety plan.

I addressed the converse of abuse in the subsequent subsection titled "Pleasing the Lord in Allowing Protection." Submission to a husband's protection was taught specifically with regards to when a husband perceives that his wife is being deceived, although she may disagree with him. Acknowledging his loving leadership, even though she currently is unable to see that she might be deceived, pleases the Lord.

The third subsection was "Pleasing the Lord in Differing Views." I argued that a unified decision was the goal. However, I reasoned that, since this was not always the case, praying together, praying for one another, and praying for a united heart in the matter was advisable. We examined Andreas Köstenberger's view of complementarianism (see chap. 3), which showed both the leadership of the husband and the intelligent response of the wife, and then we applied this concept to decision-making. When a husband and a wife were divided in a decision, I suggested being united in their resolve to respond faithfully according to their biblical roles. Although this will not necessarily entail a wife submitting, a desire to look out for her husband's interests might lead her to abandon her own (Phil 2:4). Another principle that I taught was giving a husband the freedom to fail. The section closed with a question asking if anyone in the audience had an example of a once-held view of a great mistake turning into a deep well

of blessing. The example I shared was moving from my home in the Twin Cities (Minneapolis and St. Paul) region back to my hometown area.

The next subsection was “Pleasing the Lord in Undesired Decisions.” Undesired decisions were taught that, although they might result in suffering, they do not always result in suffering. I encouraged the women to lean into God through faith and not in their own understanding. We read from Proverbs 3:4-5 and Hebrews 11:1, 6. The final break before supper followed this section.

The fifth session was titled “Discovering a Framework to Forgive.” I related this teaching to the necessity to learn to forgive your husband on a regular basis. The session discussed that although both the husband and the wife are forgiven by God, they will continue to sin. During the teaching, I stressed that in heaven, everyone will still need Christ.

The Scripture for the subsection was the same as the title “Matthew 6:12-15.” After addressing the context of the Sermon on the Mount, I used D. A. Carson’s quote (see chap. 2), which clarified understanding the word trespasses as “debts” as an accurate meaning for the time-period. The focal point demonstrated that when we fail to forgive another, we fail to understand how great our debt was toward God. We fail to remember how much we ourselves have been forgiven.

In the seminar, I argued for a dispositional heart-attitude of genuine forgiveness. We discussed Luke 6:45. I illustrated this point using the defensive athletic stance in basketball as becoming so natural that the defender automatically positions herself according to the individual coming towards her. I then explained that this is similar to what our natural heart-stance needs to be in our marriage: one of forgiveness. I then correlated the illustration as when the husband sins towards his wife, she automatically turns to forgive him, successfully avoiding her husband scoring points of bitterness against her. I sincerely hoped this illustration was helpful.

Within this subsection the truth, “forgiveness is telling of whom a person’s heart belongs,” was brought to light. I demonstrated that it was out of a position of a forgiven heart-stance that one chooses to forgive. In the seminar, Ezekiel 36:26-27 demonstrates this truth.

In the seminar’s curriculum, I noted that marriage is one of the most dangerous earthly relationships due to the potential amount of debt accumulated because of the fleshly desire to hold grievances against one’s husband. I concurred with scholars Dale C. Allison Jr. and W. D. Davies who implored forgiveness to be limitless (see chap. 2). The difference between a loving confrontation of one’s husband versus withholding forgiveness from him was addressed.

The title of the second subsection of session 5 was “Matthew 18:21-35.” In this passage of Scripture, the wickedness of the unforgiven servant was realized by the other servants so that they reported it. The truth that unfolded was how easy it was to see the sins of others and yet be blind to our own sin. In addition, the truth that we need the body of Christ to help show us our own faults was expressed. Within the seminar, I showed how the reversal of offenses, fixating on man’s offense to man rather than remembering man’s offense to God, might cost us eternity. John Nolland’s quote (see chap. 2), which reminded us that God acts in the offender’s best interest, not his own. His quote was supported with scriptural evidence found in Philippians 2:4. The original break scheduled for this time was skipped and I continued with the teaching for session 6.

The final session, session 6, was titled “Practically Forgiving.” Jay Adams’s quote (see chap. 3), reminded the attendees that God does not hold those sins against them. We read Colossians 2:14, demonstrating the point to see our own sin and the sins of our spouse as nailed on the cross. We read from Ezekiel 18:20-21 and surmised that we as humans are in concurrence with the law. Romans 2:4, however, taught that God gave us grace instead of keeping in concurrence with the law. Our heart’s response to this grace was one of Romans 11:34-36. The truth sought to be deeply rooted in our hearts

was that the forgiveness given by God on behalf of Christ was the basis of extending forgiveness to our husbands.

The first subsection was titled “No Mercy Is Prideful.” The seminar taught that forgiveness was a supernatural working of the Holy Spirit in a person’s heart enabling her to forgive. The process of sanctification was first addressed and then we read Robert Kellemen’s quote (see chap. 3), which reminded us that the application of Scripture would grow us in Christlikeness. Luke 18:9, 1 Timothy 1:15, and Galatians 3:1-6 warned the women at the seminar of a self-righteous attitude. Ken Sande’s warning (see chap. 3) addressed how subtle our self-righteous attitude manifests itself when we conclude we want only what God commands. We read the story of Mary and Martha in Luke 10:38-42 reminding us to look to Jesus to correct our view of ourselves and our husbands. The subsection was closed by inserting our husbands into John 3:16.

The second subsection for session 6 was “Extending Forgiveness.” The first part of this subsection laid the grounds of an idol by using Sande’s quote on idolatry. David Powlison explained that withholding forgiveness was comparable to playing God (see chap. 3). In addition, Isaiah 64:6 compared our own righteousness to that of filthy rags in God’s sight. The alternative was instead clothing ourselves with Christ. We read Jonathan Pennington’s quote (see chap. 3) about caring more about pleasing God than ourselves.

A challenging situation raised, concerned the degree to which a wife felt betrayed by her husband. The truth of turning to Jesus and acknowledging that he will never leave her nor forsake her was used to minister to the women from Hebrews 12:2; 13:5b. Jesus’s example portrayed someone who experienced betrayal by another close to him, and, yet, loved Judas his betrayer.

The exhortation from Aaron Sironi (see chap. 3), cautioned people away from rehashing the same sin, by practicing an attitude of forgiveness. I compared this truth in an illustration of a child who listens to the same song continuously. I taught that prayerful

work of the Spirit enabled us to forgive because of the atoning work of Christ. I proposed to the women to refrain from revisiting past wrongs done to us, that forgiving was a choice, that learning to trust will be a process, that forgiveness requires a lot of work, but that real lasting forgiveness was possible.

Robert D. Jones's quote (see chap. 3) reminded the attendees that God forgives sinners as they are in Christ. This truth was taught to enable a wife to forgive her husband as he is in Jesus, not as he is in himself. In closing, I stressed that a wife's hope of forgiving her husband rooted itself in her being forgiven by God on the basis of Christ. We ended this section with a time for questions from the attendees.

In closing, the main points of the seminar were restated. God designed marriage to reflect the unity of the Godhead as a testimony to the world (session 1). Marriage uniquely pointed to the hope of the gospel to one another and then together towards the world (session 2). Marriage reflected Christ's relationship to the church; therefore, submission to her husband was more about submission to her God (session 3). Submission was pleasing to God when a wife's hope was in God over her earthly circumstances (session 4). The wife's understanding of her own forgiveness from God, through Christ redeeming her, empowers her through his Spirit to forgive her husband (session 5). Forgiveness was a unique witness in that it offered hope to the world, and those watching will glorify God (session 6).

Conclusion of Seminar

The post-seminar survey was then administered. The survey was collected and was placed in a solid white envelope to help maintain the privacy of those in attendance. The seminar itself was closed by singing the Doxology. The meal was blessed and then food and fellowship were enjoyed by those who chose to attend.

Description of Follow-up Period

The pre-seminar survey and post-seminar survey answers were read within the week of completing the seminar. Both their pre-test scores and post-test scores were entered into a spreadsheet. The increase in knowledge was shown by a t-test: paired two sample for means to show that the growth was statistically significant. In order to show that the change in the results were not by accident, the p-value was $< .05$. After reviewing the results in table 1 (see below), the teaching of godliness in marriage through biblical counseling principles applied from God’s Word to the select group of median wives made a statistically significant difference in the increase of their knowledge ($t_{(12)} = 9.085$, $p < .00004$).

Table 1. T-test: Paired two sample for means

| T-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means | | |
|--|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| | <i>Pre-Seminar Total</i> | <i>Post-Seminar Total</i> |
| Mean | 7.4375 | 8.65 |
| Variance | 0.74602679 | 0.53142857 |
| Observations | 8 | 8 |
| Pearson Correlation | .09242785 | |
| Hypothesized Mean Difference | 0 | |
| Df | 7 | |
| t stat | -9.0851377 | |
| P(T<=t) one-tail | 2.0061E-05 | |
| t Critical one-tail | 1.89457861 | |
| P(T<=t) two-tail | 4.0121E-05 | |
| t Critical two-tail | 2.36462425 | |

Attendee 1’s pre-seminar survey was labeled A-1 and attendee 1’s post-seminar survey was B-1. Attendee 2’s pre-seminar survey was labeled A-2 with the post-

seminar survey being B-2 as was the case for all 12 attendees. A table was created to show the average growth per question of those in attendance (see table 2.)

Table 2. Averages of biblical marriage survey

| | Biblical Marriage Survey Questions | Pre-Seminar Average | Post-Seminar Average | Average % Growth |
|-----|---|----------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| 3. | Understanding God's design of marriage | 7.60 | 8.8 | 16.5 |
| 4. | Understanding role of husband | 7.80 | 9.0 | 14.9 |
| 5. | Understanding role of wife | 7.75 | 9.0 | 16.1 |
| 6. | Role of a wife's submission | 7.60 | 9.0 | 18.7 |
| 7. | Forgiveness in marriage | 7.75 | 9.0 | 16.1 |
| 8. | Conflict resolution in marriage | 6.75 | 8.5 | 25.9 |
| 9. | Counseling others with marital issues | 5.70 | 6.9 | 22.1 |
| 10. | Need for mentoring in marriage | 8.60 | 9.0 | 4.9 |

The attendees originally responded to the greatest problem(s) in marriage with: making assumptions, giving an honest opinion (saying one thing, but meaning another), communication, dying to self, loving through faults, honesty without retribution, resentment, money, absence of a devotional life, sin, differing values, understanding one another, unmet expectations, the sacredness of marriage, intimacy, unity, having a Christ-filled marriage, unfaithfulness, porn, and constant pressures from life.

At the end of the seminar the responses were: unforgiveness, self, not having relationship with God first, not understanding how you were forgiven, treating our spouse how Christ would treat us, submission, resentment, blame-shifting, seeing marriage as a

reflection of Christ and the church, differing values, communication, expectations, pridefulness in dealing with husband, not allowing the Holy Spirit to work in us, sin, porn viewing, and abuse.

After looking at the overall growth collectively, the individual growth percentage was calculated, and its data entered into an additional chart (see table 3).

Table 3. Average individual growth chart

| Attendees | Individual % Growth |
|------------------|----------------------------|
| Attendee 1 | 17.5 |
| Attendee 2 | 46.2 |
| Attendee 3 | 22.8 |
| Attendee 4 | 8.3 |
| Attendee 5 | 25.0 |
| Attendee 6 | 5.0 |
| Attendee 7 | 30.0 |
| Attendee 8 | 22.2 |
| Attendee 9 | 13.8 |
| Attendee 10 | 17.5 |
| Attendee 11 | 0.0 |
| Attendee 12 | 3.1 |

The collected information assisted in determining if the project was successful according to the requirements of the project. These will be evaluated in the following chapter.

Conclusion

This chapter summarized the project. The preparatory work entailed securing a venue for the project, creating the curriculum, creating the workbook, and reaching out to the expert panel. After altering the content from those that responded from the panel, the seminar implemented the curriculum within the six sessions. The main teachings were on marriage as God designed (sessions 1, 2), godly submission (sessions 3, 4) and forgiving one's husband (sessions 5, 6). Assessment of the pre-seminar survey and post-seminar scores showed significant growth. This project will undergo further assessment in the subsequent chapter.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

First, I evaluated the successful completion of the project's purpose. Then I assessed the project's four goals. The four goals were (1) assembling a pre-seminar survey, (2) developing a teaching curriculum of applying biblical principles for wives, (3) implementing the teaching of the curriculum at the seminar, and (4) conducting a post-seminar survey. Next, I considered both the strengths and weaknesses of the project and documented them. Based on these assessments, I determined what I might do differently if I attempted the project again. In conclusion, I discussed some theological and personal reflections.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

The successful completion of these two requirements resulted in (1) encouraging the women to be godly in their marriages, and (2) using biblical counseling principles from God's Word. The project's overarching purpose to encourage the women to be godly in their marriages was attained. Although not all the women showed significant individual growth, they all left the seminar encouraged in their marriages to reflect Christ more. The women expressed their gratitude at the end of the seminar and even weeks/months later. One attendee who demonstrated little growth during the seminar was instrumental in requesting both my husband and I as the guest speakers at an upcoming marriage event.

The curriculum implemented biblical counseling principles in order to encourage the women to grow in godliness within their own marriages. During the seminar, we read Scripture. We addressed a wife's ability to honestly accept

responsibility for her own actions. I taught the wisdom of viewing a wife's receiving forgiveness for her own sinfulness as the catalyst with which to extend forgiveness to her husband.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

The first goal of the project was a pre-seminar survey. The survey assessed the women's understanding of godliness pertaining to a wife. The survey consisted of ten questions. The first six questions related to questions about marriage, the next two questions dealt with forgiveness and conflict, and the last couple of questions related more to biblical counseling within marriage. I administered the pre-seminar survey at the beginning of the seminar. The minimum of ten women responded to the pre-seminar survey. Therefore, the project successfully completed its first goal.

The project's second goal involved developing a six-session curriculum to teach the women to apply the biblical expectations for wives. The curriculum specifically targeted God's design of marriage in sessions 1 and 2, submission in sessions 3 and 4, and finally, forgiveness in sessions 5 and 6.

The expert panel responses according to the rubric consisted of James (Matthew) Baker, Jessica Brown, and ToniLynn Fleming. They utilized a rubric which measured the biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the curriculum. The panel reported that the curriculum met 92 percent of the evaluation criteria which exceeded the 90 percent minimum to determine the successful completion of the second goal.

The third goal of the project concerned equipping the women to implement the biblical expectations for wives. Successful completion of goal 3 occurred by facilitating the developed marriage seminar curriculum with the women attending at least five of the six sessions during the event. The goal successfully met the requirements as more than

the minimum of ten married and churching women attended the mandatory number of sessions.

The fourth goal of the project was measured by the pre-seminar survey being administered for a second time as the post-seminar survey. The survey likewise measured the biblical understanding of the expectations for wives. Goal four was successfully met by the t-test for dependent samples demonstrating a positively statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-seminar survey scores (see table 1) in which the p value was $<.05$. The p value demonstrated genuine growth as the p value equaled $<.00004$.

Strengths of the Project

A strength of the project was that the women were encouraged in their marriages which indicated both the delivery and purpose of the project accomplished what it was meant to accomplish. The format of the seminar was communicated in an audience-friendly way. As a hometown speaker for the area, knowing the people helped tailor the application uniquely to the women in attendance, creating an up-lifting time.

Requiring the time-commitment for a one-day seminar allowed for many moms with children to be in attendance. A longer commitment might hinder some from attending. The one-day seminar also worked to the advantage of those coordinating the event around sickness or their husbands' schedules. Another strength would include scheduling it specifically on a Saturday when, ideally, the husband might be home, preventing the couple from the expense of hiring a babysitter.

The topic of marriage itself deeply applied to those who attended because all who came were married and churching women. The project allowed for immediate application within their own lives once returning home from the seminar. At various points during the seminar and within their workbooks, I specifically encouraged the women to take action that day towards their husband.

Although not required, the workbooks themselves existed as a strength for the project enabling the women to review their notes and to reference them as the need arose. One woman commented on her excitement that the workbook would allow her to review the seminar. All of the women did not comment about the workbook, but as a teaching tool, visual aid, and point of reference, it seems reasonable to assume it accomplished its intended purpose. If the women decided to participate in the Reflection Points, the workbook contained possible homework-like options for them. People tend to remember more when they actively record the lessons that they learn and review them.

The women in attendance at the seminar grew in their understanding of their roles as wives. The length of the teaching sessions allowed for the women to avoid any discomfort associated with sitting for long periods of time on less-than-ideal chairs. The length of the sessions also helped to hold their attention. They may have experienced less restlessness knowing that an additional break would occur soon. They enjoyed fellowship at the seminar with other like-minded women.

Another strength of the seminar related to its location. The East Chain Activity Center, once my former elementary school, helped to create an academic environment where learning and supporting educational endeavors thrive. In other words, by providing a learning environment, it assisted in the implementation of the seminar's format by allowing me to keep my manuscript notes present with me during the seminar. The gymnasium at the East Chain Activity Center proved to aid the women during breaks as we utilized the space. The second gym held the supper for the women which enabled my family to better prepare for us during the seminar.

Weaknesses of the Project

One possible weakness to consider was that the women already knew me personally, which might have initially posed some reservations. Questions like "*What could this person possibly know more than me?*" or "*Why should I listen to what she has*

to say?” might have been present in their minds. Whether this occurred or not is uncertain. However, it might exist as a possibility given the circumstance. While not the attitude of the majority, I do question what I might have done differently for the individual who demonstrated zero percent growth. An additional factor to consider would entail, if they know, love, and respect me that the desire to please me may have influenced their scores.

Few in attendance, had received an education beyond an undergraduate degree. Less than those who had an undergraduate degree, that I knew of, had familiarized themselves with biblical counseling. Many biblical counselors supposedly unknown to my audience, were the authors used in this project’s curriculum. Consequently, the potential for growth was, at least, possible for all the women in attendance.

An additional concern with regards to the pre-seminar survey and post-seminar survey scores was how high, in general, the women scored themselves. This hindered the project’s potential for demonstrating growth when many of the women scored high on the pre-seminar survey, decreasing the likelihood of a measurable growth increase on the post-seminar survey. Many women did grow, but I still ponder their high pre-seminar survey scores. I reasoned that I most likely would have scored myself lower on the pre-seminar survey. As one who completed more academic programs within this field, it perplexed me to consider their high scores. More objective questions would have better indicated the level of growth achieved by the women in attendance at the seminar.

One of my attendees commented that she did not even know what she did not know. Meaning, she felt that she scored herself higher on the pre-seminar survey before learning a more in-depth approach to marriage. She had thought, “*Because I am a Christian, I am doing marriage right. I am following what God wants me to do.*” But then, she concluded, “*There is so much more to having an exceptional marriage.*” She observed of herself that she initially thought about a surface-level marriage rather than an

in-depth marriage. Therefore, given the high scores, it might seem reasonable to conclude that she was not alone in her assessment of the pre-seminar survey.

With the survey questions 8-10 lacking a direct correlation with the teaching of the seminar, an explanation as to why the attendees scored higher on these questions in their post-seminar surveys remains difficult to ascertain. Although not exhaustive, listed below are a few suggested explanations (1) they all loved me and wanted me to succeed in my doctoral project, (2) their intelligence in applying the principles taught to the topics of questions 8-10, (3) God's kindness to me and the women who attended enabled the women to understand in spite of my shortcomings on my survey, (4) a combination of the previous suggestions, or (5) another possibility not yet listed.

Advertising the project more might have helped create more interest regarding the seminar. However, advertising alone does not motivate people to register. For example, when I led a Bible study, only three women committed to a six-week study with weeks of advertising the study in advance.

Perhaps, my own fears of rejection and failure played a significant role in postponing the initial advertising as well. This may prove similar to when I prepared a lesson for my children, and it was poorly received. If women, given ample, frequent, and multiple opportunities, would not have attended the seminar, this may have, to a greater degree, seemed more devastating.

More weaknesses relating to the timely completion of the project were the other demands and responsibilities upon myself as well as the unique additional responsibilities of home-renovations. One of those weaknesses, regarding home-renovations, centered around the intensity of the manual labor required. My husband, Kirk, and I found ourselves unable to think a thought after a physically exhausting day. Although one might conclude that the home renovations kept us more physically fit, there also existed days that drained our mental capacity from extreme exhaustion.

Another factor that proved a weakness for the project was the timing of the project based on its rural settings. Despite my best efforts at trying to avoid planting season (or harvest season), the project day commenced during the beginning of planting season. Some women may not have attended that day as their husbands needed them to remain home because of working in the field or wives might have stayed home because their husbands needed to prepare equipment for the planting season.

What I Would Do Differently

If I could go back and do something differently, I would have tried to secure a way of maintaining academic integrity while being able to do a marriage seminar alongside my husband, Kirk. My ideal project would entail a marriage conference where the couples in attendance enjoyed teaching and encouragement alongside other like-minded people who also wanted to grow towards God and in their own marriages.

I might have facilitated a six-week Bible study if that would have been better for more people than a one-day seminar. In order to measure growth, extending the timeframe required for the project would result in a longer time for change to occur and for homework, resulting in a more lasting impact. Administering an additional survey to discover whether a one-day seminar or a six-week Bible study would have greater interest for most women might have proven helpful. This would assist in tailoring the project even more to their own needs.

Ideally, I wanted to accomplish this program within the three-year timeframe rather than requiring an extension. If I would do the project all over again, I think I would put forth more effort in aiming to complete the program in three years. However, I do not know how that would have been possible, or how I would have accomplished that given all the other circumstances, responsibilities, and commitments that were happening simultaneously with the project—which is precisely why I did not attain this desire.

If training the women on how to counsel other women in their marriages had been included in this project, I think it would have been a better project. The academic expectations would have been better met if I would have looked at the seminar as more of a training ground rather than a marriage-enriching event. However, in order to accomplish that, it required training the women over a longer period of time besides the one-day training seminar which was the original thought-process behind the one-day event.

In order to strengthen the curriculum, I would enroll in the course, 80960: Foundations of Teaching, that the DEdMin students were required to take. Since I do not teach the Bible in a formal setting on a consistent basis, the course would assist in strengthening my communication of God's Word. I would receive additional guidance and instruction in creating the teaching material while participating in class. This would have proven to benefit myself and the women who attended.

In addition, a more thorough definition and distinction of what forgiveness entails and what forgiveness does not entail would have strengthened the seminar. The potential of concluding the expectation of wives to forgive their husbands in the sense of transactional forgiveness existed as a possible conclusion. Although the project contains the distinctions in chapter 2, the curriculum failed to clearly define the two levels of forgiveness as attitudinal and transactional. However, level 1 was taught, but not in these terms; and since level 1 is a prerequisite to level 2, the important heart-attitude of forgiveness was at least addressed.

The pre-seminar survey and post-seminar survey questions required alterations after I had created my seminar. Not all the questions were the most applicable for the content of the seminar itself. The survey would improve with revisions to the questions to correlate more directly with the seminar. In particular, questions 8, 9, and 10 required alterations. Question 4 might also benefit from change.

Theological Reflections

God's Word has impacted my life. The belief in the sufficiency of the Scriptures to minister to the common problems that people face in our everyday lives has only grown through this degree. I love God and his Word more than when I started. The conviction that God will speak his truth to people through his Word coupled with the active work of the Spirit's ministry in an individual's heart, rooted itself more deeply within my own heart.

My understanding of Genesis 1:27 grew as I pondered being made in God's image as a female. After meditating on these verses, I grew in viewing my worth as a woman to God. I had questioned how it was possible to be as valuable to him, while possessing a lesser role (one of submission). In our culture, we often equate a lesser value to those with a lesser position. I may have reflected a similar mindset, but God altered that mindset through having my mind renewed with Scripture. I followed the word "female" back to the phrase, "the image of God." What could be more valuable to God than God's own image? I then reread the repeated, "male and female he created them," with the "them" in verse 26. I had read the complementarian view numerous times. I could recite the concept "equal in worth and value, but different in their roles." As I focused on verse 27, however, God rooted his truth more in my heart: I bear his image. The value given to humans by God flows from the intrinsic value of God.

The study of Proverbs 31:10-31 caused me to consider the excellent wife in light of the whole book of Proverbs. I previously concluded that the woman in the proverb exceeded any woman I knew, including myself. It seemed reasonable to conclude that the Proverbs 31 wife of this caliber seemed unattainable.

Therefore, in my mind, I reconciled the passage with the excellent way in which love was explained in 1 Corinthians 12:31b. I thought that the excellent wife of Proverbs 31 simply meant a loving wife. While the connection appears plausible in our English language, and satisfied my mind at the time, further study would require

consulting the Hebrew, the Greek, and the Septuagint texts. I appreciated learning from my current study of the wife in Proverbs 31:10-31, to view her as wisdom personified, and that the goal to reflect some of these virtues did not necessarily entail reflecting all of the virtues.

The context of Ephesians 5 built a solid argument for Clinton Arnold (see chap. 2) who connects being filled with the Spirit (v. 18), to submitting to one another (v. 21), and, specifically, for wives by submitting to their husbands (v. 22). Showing the multiple parts, in a diagrammed form within his quote, assisted in my understanding the text. Galatians 5:22-23, which addresses the fruit of the Spirit correlated as further biblical support of the idea that a godly wife being filled with the Spirit submits to her husband. The pneumatology of the Spirit's working through me enabling me to submit to Kirk brought a greater understanding to light of his work in me.

The ministry of biblical counseling grew more pertinent, causing me to actively pursue counseling others in everyday conversations, starting with my own children. I understood biblical counseling as discipleship towards them. My husband, Kirk, and I applied God's Word to our everyday struggles as well. I desired for my own answers to grow to be more biblical instead of suggesting what I thought people might want to hear, or giving other worldly advice that, although not necessarily wrong or bad, fell short of edifying or building up God's church (Eph 4:29).

The truth of God's omnipresence significantly ministered to my soul multiple times throughout the program. Whether I was experiencing the common struggles of life, or struggles particularly challenging to my specific situation, Jesus's constant presence comforted me. Knowing Christ as Immanuel, "God with us" became more solidified during these struggles as knowing him as "God with me" (Matt 1:23). In difficult situations, the truth of Hebrews 13:5b aided my soul. He has not left me, nor forsaken me during this program, nor in any other season of my life.

The doctrines of pneumatology, ecclesiology, and sanctification directly correlate with biblical counseling. Biblical counseling reminded me that the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin and guilt and that he remains both the author and the perfecter of our faith (John 16:8; Heb 12:2). Understanding pneumatology humbles the counselor, gives hope that sanctification is possible, and reveals a powerful ally who is committed to the building of his church. God not only asks us to change, but he enables us through his Spirit to change, and he remains present with us as we change. While counseling, I need to walk alongside people as a member of the body of Christ. Also, as a counselor, I need to remember not only to tell people what they need to do differently, but to walk beside them like the role of the Holy Spirit who walks beside us as we change.

Personal Reflections

The Lord reminded me of my shortcomings as a wife in my study preparation, in the teaching itself, and in discussions. God used Powlison's quote in particular (see chap. 3) to reveal the need for change in me. In his quote, Powlison compares me with the devil when I act as judge over my husband and when Kirk's wrongs preoccupy me, and my rights preoccupy me. Even now, post-project, when I read the quote, I feel the sting of falling short of becoming the forgiving person that God desires.

The quote from Robert Jones (see chap. 3) stretched my understanding of forgiveness by reminding me to forgive my husband as he is in Jesus. Viewing my husband as one clothed with the righteousness of Christ as his own, changes, or at least should change, how I respond to him when sinned against. All too frequently, however, I have responded in self-righteous anger. In my sinful response, I assessed that I wore the righteousness of Jesus, but I viewed Kirk as wearing filthy rags. I neglected to remember, in those instances, that my righteous deeds, or my distorted view of myself and my husband, counts to God as filthy rags (Isa 64:6). Viewing Kirk's sins against me as nailed on the cross had helped me before when tempted with bitterness towards him, but

considering Christ's righteousness as Kirk's own in Christ grew my view of my husband as forgiven by Christ.

Thomas Schreiner's quote (see chap. 2) regarding the obedience of a child as distinct from a wife's obedience to her husband, provided great relief to me as a wife. I reasoned that my previous inclination leaned towards thinking that I ought to obey my husband similar to a child obeying a parent. Yet, I entirely disliked the thought. I reasoned that I differed significantly from a child. The relationship also appeared different as two adults rather than the child-to-adult relationship. I concluded that this only displayed my heart's sinful attitude towards submission. The quote brought a sense of freedom from my own misconceived notions of what submission or obedience to Kirk practically entailed.

Using the Scriptures, in general, was even more freeing when I considered the Bible's teaching on what it means for me to submit as a wife. I enjoyed wrestling through passages of Scripture and reading John Piper's conclusion (see chap. 3) that submission means using my gifts to carry out my husband's leadership. A lot of freedom resides in the biblically shaped view of a godly wife. Which begs the question of whether or not we biblically teach and apply these truths within our churches.

The Lord taught me a greater dependence on him through this degree. I depended on him for words for my papers, for the financial ability, for the sustaining grace in the program, for enough women showing for the seminar, for my requirements of my goals to resolve, and so much more. The Lord remained faithful. I waited on him repeatedly through prayer and often went for prayer walks down our driveway. On these walks, I recalled Scripture passages that comforted my soul. The Lord's Prayer, Psalm 23, and Psalm 139 were some of the more frequented passages.

Although a difficult topic to study and teach, I learned that a wife may stop undergoing abuse from her husband as stated in Justin and Lindsay Holcomb's quote (see chap. 3). I obviously knew abuse was wrong. I knew I felt uncomfortable with the idea of

a wife staying with an abusive husband, but given the requirement of submission, I felt conflicted in what would ultimately please God. Their quote both informed and helped spare me from giving unwise counsel to a wife. Jeremy Pierre and Greg Wilson's quote (see chap. 3) helped me know how to respond to the abused person by enabling her to develop her own safety plan and its actuation.

During this project, I learned to a greater degree the importance of my role as a wife and homemaker for my family. My temporary absence in performing some of my normal tasks around the house showed me the value of the work that God has given for me to accomplish. Since a noticeable difference presented itself when preoccupied with other responsibilities, I could conclude that performing the work that God has created for me to accomplish, according to the role that he gave me, mattered. My husband, my children, and my God care about having me complete the work that was given to me according to my role.

Another result of the project consisted in my impression that other wives needed to learn the truth concerning their roles, too. I needed to encourage other women to view their work as valuable when many opposing views argue otherwise. I want to assist in altering the focus on other views back to God and his Word. When a wife's schedule compounds to show her daily tasks incomplete, but another individual helps her by bringing a meal, she experiences the delight that her normal and seemingly insignificant role brings to her family. I may continue to remind her that regardless of the extent of her family's joy in her role, the significance of her role rests in the work God gave her and not in other people's views of her role's significance. Our role may seem insignificant to us until we experience the blessing of our role by another.

Conclusion

The truth of marriage ultimately reflecting the intra-Trinitarian love of the Godhead in the Trinity barely surfaces in the day-to-day occurrences within marriage.

Many marriages function in a horizontal relationship concerning the love between the couple, instead of focusing on God's love reflected as a couple. The project reminded me that God calls my husband and I to image the greater truth of God's love to the world. One way to accomplish the task of reflecting his love to the world requires women to receive training.

Training women to live out their God-given role as a wife in a way that pleases God according to the role of the Spirit's working this desire in their hearts, will help to bring about the change that many marriages desperately need today. Knowing the role we have been given is vastly different than living out that role in a way that honors the Lord. A wife may think that she pleases the Lord within her marriage, but unless she reflects what it means to exemplify a godly wife through the power of the Holy Spirit, she will fail to please God (Heb 11:6a). When a wife grows in her sanctification, bearing Christ more, she will bring glory to God.

Biblical counseling helps train wives according to God's Word to respond in their marriages according to their biblical roles. It continues to help point individuals and married couples to God. When a wife begins to view her role as God created—that pleases him. In counseling, the counselor reminds the counselee of the presence of God in the midst of their struggle. The counselor also assures the counselee that hope remains as God, through his Spirit, works in the hearts of his children (Phil 1:6; 2:13). Women are shown the truth of God's Word in a counseling setting while the counselor reminds them that God works alongside them, enabling change to happen in their hearts and in their marriage.

Mentoring women, according to Titus 2:3-5, needs to happen more within our local church body. The biblical model consists of older women training the younger women. The importance of a formal versus an informal setting seems less important than asking ourselves if either one happens in our church. More personally, am I intentionally pouring into a woman by helping to administer the Word to her particular life challenges

as a young mom? Informal biblical counseling happens during these types of relationships. The age that a woman goes from being mentored to mentoring remains unclear, but the clarity of the command for this to happen remains the same.

APPENDIX 1
BIBLICAL MARRIAGE SURVEY

The purpose of this survey was to establish the women's understanding of the biblical expectations for wives concerning God's design of marriage, submission, and forgiveness.¹ The survey sought to ascertain if there was a statistically significant level of growth between the pre- and post-seminar survey scores. The result of the survey given the first time aided in attaining measurable growth standards with repetition of the completion of the same survey the second time.

¹ Adapted from Christopher Dwight Aday, "Equipping Married Couples to Mentor Other Married Couples at Oakland Baptist Church in Corinth, Mississippi" (DEd Min diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2013), 108-9.

5. How well do you think you understand the biblical role of the wife?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not at All

Very Well

6. How well do you think you understand the biblical role of the wife submitting to her husband?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not at All

Very Well

7. How well do you think you understand the biblical principles concerning forgiveness in the marriage?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not at All

Very Well

8. How well do you think you understand the biblical principles concerning conflict resolution in the marriage?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not at All

Very Well

9. How confident would you feel ministering (counseling) with someone who is experiencing marital problems or issues?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not at All

Very Confident

10. How great do you believe is the need for mentoring in a marriage?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not at All

Very Important

APPENDIX 2
CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC

The curriculum evaluation rubric was originally given to three individuals. Two members of the initial panel provided accountability regarding the biblical soundness, scope, pedagogy, and practicality ensuring the curriculum met or exceeded sufficiently in these measures. An additional panel member joined after the seminar in order to receive feedback from three individuals.

Name of Evaluator: _____ Date: _____

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

Other Comments:

APPENDIX 3

A GRACE-FILLED MARRIAGE: WORKBOOK

The women received the workbook at the seminar. It aided the women as a learning tool, visual aid, and a place to record personal notes. The workbook also served as a potential for homework and for review once the women completed the seminar. The designed cover page of the workbook and the edited style of font are not shown below as they appeared within the pages of the spiral-bound workbook itself.

A GRACE-FILLED MARRIAGE: BECOMING THE GODLY WIFE
CHRIST HAS FASHIONED YOU TO BE

SESSIONS IN WORKBOOK

- 1. Marriage: A Theological and Biblical Basis for a Wife's Ministry**
- 2. Theoretical and Practical Implications for Wives**
- 3. "Wife, Submit!"**
- 4. Application of a Wife's Submission**
- 5. Discovering a Framework to Forgive**
- 6. Practically Forgiving**

BIBLICAL MARRIAGE SURVEY¹

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed for women to measure your knowledge, wisdom, and experience concerning marital issues. Shelly Jostad is conducting this research for purposes of evaluating knowledge of participants before the marriage seminar for doctoral research. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

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

Name _____

Signature _____

Date _____

1. How many years have you been married? _____

¹ Adapted from Christopher Dwight Aday, "Equipping Married Couples to Mentor Other Married Couples at Oakland Baptist Church in Corinth, Mississippi" (DEdMin diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2013), 108-109.

2. What do you consider to be the greatest problem (s) in marriage? _____

3. How well do you think you understand the biblical reason God designed marriage?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not at All

Very Well

4. How well do you think you understand the biblical role of the husband?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not at All

Very Well

5. How well do you think you understand the biblical role of the wife?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not at All

Very Well

6. How well do you think you understand the biblical role of the wife submitting to her husband?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not at All

Very Well

7. How well do you think you understand the biblical principles concerning forgiveness in the marriage?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not at All

Very Well

8. How well do you think you understand the biblical principles concerning conflict resolution in the marriage?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not at All

Very Well

9. How confident would you feel ministering (counseling) with someone who is experiencing marital problems or issues?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not at All

Very Confident

10. How great do you believe is the need for mentoring in a marriage?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not at All

Very Important

Marriage: A Theological and Biblical Model for a Wife's Ministry

The Creation of Man

Genesis 2:7, 18-25

Victor Hamilton distinguishes between “*nesema*” and “*ruah*.” The author’s use of, “*nesema*” is grammatical emphasis to show that man alone receives the divine breath.²

Man and woman bear the image of God (Gen 1:26-27).

Reflection Point:

1. *Why does Eve choose to sin the first place?*
2. *Why is the suggestion of freewill not enough to explain her choice to sin?*
3. *Sin is horribly irrational. Choosing anything over God and his ways is always mind-blowing. What is the fruit, as a now redeemed daughter of Eve, that you’re dealing with in your life?*

Think you don’t have any? Think again! We all have temptations that we deal with on a regular basis. What is it you’re wanting or feeling tempted by?

² Victor, Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans, 1990), 159.

What are you planning your life around? Or, what are you afraid of losing? If you can't think of anything, ask God to show you. He will.

Marriage's Model

Genesis 2:22:

“And the LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man” (NASB).

Marriage is designed by a Creator.

The design is the original prototype under which the creation will flourish when followed.

Any deviation from marriage as understood from Scripture undermines the authority of the One who designed it.

God's design of Adam is dual purposed:

1. Propagation of God's image bearers.
2. Foreshadowing Christ who is to come (Rom 5:12-21).

Marriage Reflects the Glory of the Trinity

Adam comes from the Hebrew word "*adamah*," meaning "ground."

What will Adam be working?

"Woman" is taken from man.

What is the Wife's unique God-given role?

In the *Imago Dei*, both men and women are declared by God as having been made in his image (Genesis 1:26-27).³

³ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 1244.

Reflection Point:

- 1. Whom or what does marriage reflect?*
- 2. How do husband and wife enjoy fellowship with the Spirit?*
- 3. Why is the creation of both man and woman crucial?*

**Parallels of Headship and Childbirth
Existing Pre-Fall**

Genesis 2:20b (NIV):

“But for Adam no suitable helper was found.”

1. It’s not a result of sin that we are made to help our husbands. The role of helping Adam is established pre-Fall.

Genesis 3:16b states,

“Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you.”

1. Some individuals may point to the curse of the woman as the beginning of her submission. Individuals who hold this view understand the text to mean that the headship of the husband's ruling is the *result* of the Fall.
2. Another suggested interpretation of that text would be that the *desire* to rule over the husband is the result of the fall.

Reflection Point:

1. *Read Genesis 3:16. It says God will multiply pain in childbirth. Again, women were always going to have children. Remember Genesis 1:28, "Be fruitful and Multiply". It's not an evil thing that women are going to have children to begin with, is it?*
2. *Read Genesis 3:17-19. Adam was going to work the garden, but now he will do so by the sweat of his face. Remember God puts him in the Garden to work and keep it. Work is not a lifelong punishment.*
3. *Then, women, is submission to our husband a lifelong punishment? Why or why not?*

Theoretical and Practical Implications for Wives

Reflection Point:

What do you think is the purpose of your marriage with your spouse?

Matthew 7:24-27

Sin is deceitful by nature.

Sometimes we need a person—a friend, a neighbor—to help us realign ourselves to God’s Word.

Biblical counseling is defined by Robert Jones as,

“...the Christlike, caring, person-to-person ministry of God’s Word to people struggling with personal and interpersonal problems to help them know and follow Jesus Christ in heart and behavior amid their struggles.”⁴

Reflection Point:

⁴ Robert D. Jones, “What is Biblical Counseling?,” in Robert D. Jones, Kristin L. Kellen, Rob Green, *The Gospel for Disordered Lives: An Introduction to Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2021), 20.

Think of a Time when someone has spoken truth to you and that God has used this to bring about a willingness to follow Christ. What was the circumstance?

How did you change?

Biblical counseling teaches that practical hope is offered in marriage because of the person of Christ.

Acknowledging God's Purpose in Marriage

Practical help within our marriages is proclaiming the gospel to our husbands.

Reflection Point:

When was the last time I chose to reflect the Gospel to my husband in my every day moments and conversations, rather than reverting to worldly attitudes or advice?

What do you think reminding your husband of the truth that he is forgiven by God on the basis of Christ when he's sinned, do for him? For you?

Do you think that your marriage would grow? Why or why not?

*Failing to Proclaim the Gospel through
Blame-shifting*

Your husband will be held accountable by God for his leadership within the home.

You are still responsible to God for your personal relationship with Him.

If you are a mom with children at home, you are still responsible to feed the souls of your children.

When you look at the Fall, Adam blamed Eve, and Eve blamed the serpent (Gen 3:13). Men and women alike fell, and we all are masterminds at blame-shifting.

Reflection point:

What are two sins that are under the over-arching sin of blame-shifting?

Do you hold your husband responsible for the amount of time you spend in the Word?

If you answered “yes” to the previous question, do you find yourself blame-shifting, complaining, or gossiping? Please list all that apply:

Now is a good time to practice 1 John 1:9, “If you confess your sins, God who is faithful and just will forgive you your sins and purify you from all unrighteousness.”

Be specific with which sin(s) you are confessing.

Don't Stop here! Tonight, go, and be reconciled to your husband. Ask him to forgive you. Be specific with him, too. You may get some surprised looks, but practicing confessing your sins to one another brings healing within marriage (James 5:16). End your time by praying for one another and for your marriage to Honor God.

If this is too much all in one night, start with confessing to your husband and know God is pleased with this act of obedience!

Preach the Gospel Within Our Marriage

The beauty of the gospel is that couples can share that gospel within their marriage uniquely to one another.

The purpose of marriage is greater than the one-man and one-woman relationship; We know that marriage reflects Christ's relationship with the church.

Cultivating a Loving Relationship with Your Spouse

Ed Welch's 8 Lessons:⁵

1. *With All Humility: Ask for prayer.*
2. *Move Toward Others: We take the initiative toward others.*
3. *Know the Heart, know the person.*
4. *Know the Critical Influences: Other people and physical bodies*
5. *Be personal and Pray: Help by personally engaging, focusing on Christ, and praying together.*
6. *Talk about Suffering: Scripture speaks to our troubles.*

⁵ Edward Welch, *Caring for One Another: 8 Ways to Cultivate Meaningful Relationships* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 11,17, 23, 33, 43, 51, 59, 67.

7. *Talk about Sin: Talk about sin and offer help very carefully.*

8. *Remember and Reflect: Remember and live out gospel applications.*

A Marriage's Reorientation Spurs Worship of God

God's good design of marriage is to reflect the spiritual reality, and, when done rightly, it causes others to praise God (Matt 5:16).

“Wife, Submit!”

Context of wives submitting to their husbands:

Ephesians 1: Being in Christ

Ephesians 2: Contrasts who we once were to who we are now

Ephesians 3: Intercessory prayer

Ephesians 4: Life in the body

Ephesians 5:22

Why is a wife's submission to her husband rooted in her identity in Christ?

What might not submitting to our earthly husband suggest? Why might it suggest this? Any other thoughts?

Marriage is reflecting the greater relationship of Christ's relationship with the church.

Anthony Hoekema illustrates, "...the restoration of the image of God in man takes place in the church, through the fellowship of Christians with each other. Believers learn what Christ-likeness is by observing it in fellow Christians. We see the love of Christ reflected in the lives of fellow believers; we are enriched by Christ through our contact with them; we hear Christ speaking to us through them. Believers are inspired by the examples of their fellow Christians, sustained by their prayers, corrected by their loving admonitions, and encouraged by their support."⁶

Where does the local church begin?

Marriage is the union created by God to show one another Christ. A husband and wife first exemplify the gospel toward each other and then together toward the world.

Submission is part of the reflection that mankind is in subjection to God.

Reflection Point:

What may my failure to submit to my husband communicate to the world? Why?

1 Peter 3:1-7

Submission to your husband does not entail following him into sin.

Thomas Schreiner raises this observation: “It is crucial to note that obedience and submission are different in various spheres. Peter was hardly suggesting that wives submit and obey the same way as children, for the relationship is between two adults. We also learned from Paul that mutuality also characterizes the marriage relationship (1 Cor 7:3-5). Reading the whole marriage relationship through the lens of submission is liable to distort significantly the Scriptures. Nevertheless, what cannot be washed away is the responsibility of wives to follow their husband’s leadership.”⁷

Wives, the basis of our submission is best understood in our submission to God, not in the quality of our earthly husband nor even in our husband’s obedience to God and his Word.

⁷ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, New American Commentary, vol. 37 (Nashville: B & H, 2003), 131.

A wife chooses to entrust herself to God knowing that such obedience pleases him.

Proverbs 31(10-31): A Godly Wife

There is a rareness established (31:10).

She is for her husband and not against him (31:12).

She is a trustworthy woman (31:11).

She is industrious (31:13)

She provides meals for those in her household, and, also considers how to provide the food for those meals (31:15).

She is full of strength (31:17).

She shows restraint by wisely using her resources (31:18).

She clothes her household (31:19).

She remembers the poor by giving of her resources to them (31:20).

She aids her husband being able to be respected within the community (31:23).

She has an income (31:24).

She has inner strength and dignity that she clothes herself with (31:25).

She does not worry about the future (21:25b).

She is wise (21:26a).

She teaches kindness (31:26b).

She knows her family members, who they are and where they are heading (31:27a).

She does not waste time (31:27b).

She earns the respect of her children and the praise of her husband (31:8).

A God-fearing woman is to be desired more than charm or beauty (31:30).

She is a worthy woman and gains the respect of her community (31:31).

Reflection Point:

How about you? Which characteristics of wisdom are you embodying currently as a woman?

Are they more or less developed in your life now than in your past? Why might this be the case?

One woman may display many of these characteristics and attributes of wisdom throughout her life, but she may not necessarily display all of these virtues.

Reflection Point:

According to Ephesians 4:7, what is producing wisdom in our lives dependent upon?

2 Corinthians 3:18 acknowledges whom as the guide in our reflection of Christ?

How might this correlate to the wisdom manifested in one's life?

Application of a Wife's Submission

Even if God does not heal you or your marriage, he will love you in marriage's trials bringing lasting comfort to your soul.

Submit to your own husband.

John Piper: What submission *does not* entail:

1. Submission is not agreeing with everything your husband says.
2. Submission does not mean leaving your brain or your will at the altar.
3. Submission does not mean avoiding every effort to change a husband.
4. Submission does not mean putting the will of the husband before the will of Christ.
5. Submission does not mean that a wife gets her personal, spiritual strength *primarily* through her husband.
6. Finally, submission does not mean that a wife is to act out of fear. ⁸

⁸ John Piper, *This Momentary Marriage: A Parable of Permanence* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 99-101.

Godly submission is, Piper would suggest, “*the divine calling of a wife to honor and affirm her husband’s leadership and help carry it through according to her gifts.*”⁹

Pleasing the Lord in Abuse

Submission to a husband does not entail the wife allowing herself to be abused by her husband.

An abusive husband has a faith-based issue:

1. He’s failing to recognize God’s image in his wife.
2. He fails to recognize that she belongs first and foremost to God, not him. He fails to see the world rightly in relation to God. God is the center of all things and this abusive husband is not.
3. The wife does not exist solely to please or displease her husband. She lives to please and honor her Creator.

⁹ Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*, 101.

If both husband and wife are going to be held accountable for every careless word ever spoken according to Matthew 12:36, how much more will they be held accountable for every careless shove or thrown object?

It seems plausible to consider the way in which individuals treat one another directly affects Christ for he is the head over the body (Matthew 25:40, 45; Ephesians 5:23).

Wisely asking for help not only benefits a wife's life, but it begins the process of loving correction for her husband.

Follow the safety plan of the abused.¹⁰

Pleasing the Lord in Allowing Protection

A wife should be submitting to her husband's loving leadership as he protects her whether or not she agrees with him.

¹⁰ Jeremy Pierre and Greg Wilson, *When Home Hurts: A Guide for Responding Wisely to Domestic Abuse in Your Church* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2021), 83.

Even though you don't see things the way in which your husband does, your trust in God will bring blessing to you.

Pleasing the Lord in Differing Views

A better option is to aim for a united decision when you have differing views.

Together committing the matter to prayer, praying for one another, and praying for a united heart in the matter would be advisable.

The final decision is your husband's, but that decision does not have to be reached immediately.

Even when divided, a couple can still be united in their resolve to respond according to their biblical roles.

You may also need to give your husband the freedom to fail.

Part of learning is growing and maturing in wise, godly decisions, and part of being his helper is giving him the grace necessary to have the freedom to learn.

Some of the once-thought greatest mistakes in a person's life may turn into a person's deepest well of blessing.

Pleasing the Lord in Undesired Decisions

Just because a decision is undesired at the time does not mean that later on that decision will be regretted.

The way you respond to your husband's decision, Ladies, rests more on your trusting God's work in spite of your lack of understanding.

Discovering a Framework to Forgive

A wife will most likely have cause to forgive her husband more frequently than most people on a regular basis.

Matthew 6:12-15

This is found in a well-known section of Scripture from Matthew chapters 5-7 known as the Sermon on the Mount.

D. A. Carson explains that the word used for trespasses should best be understood as “debts” as this was a common understanding of sin during this time period.¹¹

¹¹ D. A. Carson, *How Long, O Lord? Reflections on Suffering and Evil* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 64.

When an opportunity comes to forgive your husband, your heart's disposition towards him is already one of forgiveness.

Forgiveness is telling of whom an individual's heart belongs.

Marriage is one of the most dangerous earthly relationships for wives because of the fleshly desire to hold grievances against our husbands.

Matthew 18:21-35

We as people tend to be aware of another's sin, but, like the unforgiving servant, we are blind to our own sin even after receiving forgiveness from God for our sins.

Humanity perceives our offense against God to be minute and the offense of a brother or sister in Christ against us to be of chasmal proportion.

Sometimes we get so fixated on the wrongs that are done to us that we cannot remember the wrongs that we've committed that are forgiven by God.

Practically Forgiving

All your husband's sins were nailed on Jesus (Col 2:14).

The Bible's record of the cross is where justice and mercy meet. God's wrath receives atonement for sin, Jesus's death: justice is met. Forgiveness is given to anyone who trusts in Christ's death and his resurrection as payment for their sins: mercy is met.

The forgiveness given by God on behalf of Christ is the basis for extending forgiveness to our husbands.

No Mercy is Prideful

Reflection Point:

On what basis might you agree with someone if they say they can't forgive their husband?

We need to acknowledge the difference between being justified (the moment you believed and are saved) and being sanctified (the process of being made holy, or relationally, more like Christ).

A humble person is ready to be merciful because what she believes about herself is that she is a great sinner (Luke 18:9; 1 Tim 1:15).

Ken Sande stated that “one of the most subtle cloaking devices is to argue that we want only what God Himself commands.”¹²

When you consider Christ, the most merciful man, you may begin to grasp how to exemplify Christ’s mercy in your words and in your actions.

When a wife looks at Jesus, it changes her view of her husband by causing her to see her husband rightly, as one for whom Christ died.

¹² Ken Sande, *Peacemaking for Families: A Biblical Guide to Managing Conflict in Your Home* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2002), 19.

Reflection Point:

How does Christ view your husband?

How do you view your husband?

How may you begin to look at your husband differently?

Would Christ Condemn your husband for his sins against him?

Then neither should you.

Additional Reflection:

Help! You are still struggling to forgive your husband and you know you should.

Remember the woman caught in the act of adultery (john 8:1-11)? Go ahead and take the time to read it again. Remember God uses his word to speak to the heart of his child.

Now, in your mind, change the story to the particular sin that your husband has committed against you (And it may very well be adultery).

Who might your husband be in the story?

Notice that Jesus never declares the woman guiltless. It's obvious she's sinned as much as it's obvious your husband has sinned.

Who would you be?

Would you have been the one to cast the first stone?

Would it be possible? Why or why not?

Be patient, learning to forgive is a process. Time will be needed to heal.

Extending Forgiveness

Sande teaches that “an idol is anything apart from God that we depend on to be happy, fulfilled, or secure.”¹³

Reflection Point:

How might desiring a good marriage in which a husband leads family devotions, is sacrificially loving, and maintains integrity in all his relationships become an idol?

¹³ Sande, *Peacemaking*, 18.

Where should our happiness, fulfillment, and security be resting?

David Powlison strongly depicts, “We judge others—criticize, nitpick, nag, attack, condemn – because we literally play God. This is heinous... Who are you when you judge your neighbor? None other than a God wannabe. In this we become like the devil himself... We act exactly like the adversary who seeks to usurp God’s throne and who acts as the accuser of the brethren. When you and I fight, our minds become filled with accusations: your wrongs and my rights preoccupy me. We play the self-righteous judge in the mini-kingdoms we establish.”¹⁴

The alarming truth is that, when a person fails to forgive, she is acting as judge over the person who has transgressed.

Our own standard of righteousness is nothing but filthy rags in God’s sight (Isa 64:6).

¹⁴ David Powlison, “Getting to the Heart of Conflict: Anger, Part 3,” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 16, no. 1 (1997): 34.

There is hardly a more Christlike attribute than being a forgiving person.

Jesus knew gut-wrenching betrayal.

In following Christ's example, wives, we are able to be loving towards our husbands, and to love them even when, or if, your husband betrays you.

Instead of holding your husband's sin out in front of you like it's a diamond, rolling it over and focusing on every single facet of his hurt against you, you must reject obsessing over his sin against you.

Remember that forgiveness is a decision and not merely a feeling.

Forgiveness is a lot of work, but it is worth it. The good news is that real, full, and complete forgiveness is possible. It is possible because of Christ's work on the cross (Col 2:14). It is possible because of his Spirit working in you, wife, that which is pleasing in his sight (Heb13:21). It is possible because God can fully restore broken relationships (Col 1:20). God does require individuals to be active participants of this process, but he also promises to be with them (Col 1:10).

Wife, you forgive your husband as he is in Jesus, not as he is in himself.¹⁵

¹⁵ Robert D. Jones, *Pursuing Peace: A Christian's Guide to Handling Our Conflicts* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 124.

BIBLICAL MARRIAGE SURVEY¹⁶

1. How many years have you been married? _____

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4. How well do you think you understand the biblical role of the husband?

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5. How well do you think you understand the biblical role of the wife?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not at All

Very Well

6. How well do you think you understand the biblical role of the wife submitting to her husband?

¹⁶ Adapted from Christopher Dwight Aday, "Equipping Married Couples to Mentor Other Married Couples at Oakland Baptist Church in Corinth, Mississippi" (DEdMin diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2013), 108-109.

The Doxology:

“Praise God, from whom all blessings flow; Praise Him all creatures, here, below;
Praise Him above ye, heavenly host: Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.”¹⁷

Thank you for joining me today! I pray that God will use this time that we had together to be impactful in your own life and marriage. May you be brought into greater intimacy with Jesus.

¹⁷ Ken Thomas, “Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow” in *The Lutheran Service Book: Accompaniment for the Hymns*, no. 805 (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2006).

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APPENDIX 4
T-TEST RESULTS

| T-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means | | |
|--|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| | <i>Pre-Seminar Total</i> | <i>Post-Seminar Total</i> |
| Mean | 7.44375 | 8.65 |
| Variance | 0.74602679 | 0.53142857 |
| Observations | 8 | 8 |
| Pearson Correlation | .09242785 | |
| Hypothesized Mean Difference | 0 | |
| df | 7 | |
| t stat | -9.0851377 | |
| P(T<=t) one-tail | 2.0061E-05 | |
| t Critical one-tail | 1.89457861 | |
| P(T<=t) two-tail | 4.0121E-05 | |
| t Critical two-tail | 2.36462425 | |

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ABSTRACT

EQUIPPING WIVES USING BIBLICAL COUNSELING PRINCIPLES AT BETHEL EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH IN FAIRMONT, MINNESOTA

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2023
Faculty Supervisor: Robert D. Jones

This project aimed to equip wives using biblical counseling principles at Bethel Evangelical Free Church in Fairmont, Minnesota. Chapter 1 presents the reasoning for actualizing the project. Marriage, even among Christians, needs addressing. Chapter 2 provides the biblical and theological basis for the project. It discusses God's design of marriage, biblical submission for wives, and offers wives biblical support to forgive their husbands. Chapter 3 provides the practical implications of biblical counseling to help wives and their marriages by (1) reminding wives to acknowledge God's intention for marriage, (2) demonstrating practical ways to please the Lord in submission to her husband, and (3) encouraging wives to extend forgiveness to her husband. Chapter 4 describes the preparation for the project, the actualization of the project, and the follow up after the project. Chapter 5 assessed that the goals I gave the project were achieved. All the goals were met, demonstrating the successful completion of the project.

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