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TRAINING PRE-MARRIED COUPLES AT ST. MARK'S COPTIC
ORTHODOX CHURCH IN FAIRFAX, VIRGINIA, WITH
BIBLICAL MARRIAGE PRINCIPLES

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For the glory of God

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | Page |
|---|------|
| LIST OF TABLES | vii |
| PREFACE | viii |
| Chapter | |
| 1. INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| Context | 1 |
| Rationale | 4 |
| Purpose | 5 |
| Goals | 6 |
| Research Methodology | 6 |
| Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations | 7 |
| Conclusion | 8 |
| 2. MARRIAGE FOR THE GLORY OF GOD | 9 |
| Genesis 2:18–24: Marriage Is from God | 10 |
| Matthew 19:4–9: Marriage Is through God | 14 |
| Ephesians 5:22–33: Marriage Is for God | 18 |
| 1 Corinthians 7:2–5: Marriage Is for Unity and Intimacy | 21 |
| Conclusion | 25 |
| 3. APPLYING THE GOSPEL TO HEART ISSUES IN MARRIAGE | 26 |
| The Gospel and Roles in Marriage | 26 |
| The Role of Husbands | 29 |
| The Role of Wives | 31 |
| The Role of Making Disciples | 34 |

| Chapter | Page |
|---|-----------|
| The Gospel and Relationships in Marriage | 35 |
| Relationships with Parents and In-Laws..... | 38 |
| Relationships with Others..... | 39 |
| The Gospel and Intimacy in Marriage | 41 |
| Conclusion | 44 |
| 4. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROJECT..... | 45 |
| Recruiting Participants..... | 45 |
| Preparation of Curriculum | 46 |
| Teaching Marriage for the Glory of God..... | 47 |
| Session 1: Introduction and Overview..... | 48 |
| Session 2: Marriage Is from and for God | 49 |
| Session 3: The Role of Husband and Wife..... | 50 |
| Session 4: The Role of Husband and Wife to Make Disciples of Christ..... | 51 |
| Session 5: Relationships with Others | 53 |
| Session 6: Intimacy..... | 54 |
| Session 7: Communication, Conflict Management, and Money..... | 56 |
| Session 8: Conclusion and Post-Course Survey | 59 |
| Conclusion | 59 |
| 5. EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT | 61 |
| Evaluation of the Project’s Purpose..... | 62 |
| Evaluation of the Project’s Goals..... | 62 |
| Strengths of the Project | 66 |
| Weaknesses of the Project..... | 67 |
| What I Would Do Differently | 68 |
| Theological Reflections | 69 |
| Personal Reflections..... | 71 |

| | Page |
|--|------|
| Conclusion | 72 |
| Appendix | |
| 1. PRE-COURSE AND POST-COURSE SURVEY | 74 |
| 2. CURRICULUM EVALUATION TOOL..... | 77 |
| 3. BIBLICAL MARRIAGE PRINCIPLES CURRICULUM | 79 |
| 4. T-TEST RESULTS | 88 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY..... | 89 |

LIST OF TABLES

| Table | Page |
|---|------|
| 1. Pre- and post-project marital assessment results sample..... | 65 |

PREFACE

This project could not have been done without my God and the encouraging people that he has put around me. First and foremost, I am grateful to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It is he who strengthens me. I place this work into his beautiful, holy, and mighty hands so that he might make of it what he wills. My prayer is that he uses it for his glory through the lives of his people.

I also thank my beautiful wife, Jacky, without whose love, support, and prayers I could not have completed this program. I further thank my amazing kids, Nicholas and Lily, who patiently endured their daddy studying, traveling, and writing. Finally, I thank all my loved ones who prayed for me, my family, and this ministry. May God richly bless you all.

Peter Schnuda

Fairfax, Virginia

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

God is the focus of marriage. Therefore, healthy, God-honoring marriages must be built on the principles he has established in Scripture. Fr. Paul Girguis, the head priest (a.k.a. pastor or father) at St. Mark’s Coptic Orthodox Church, teaches that poor, unhealthy marriages not centered on God affect men, women, children, communities, and generations.¹ Consequently, the pastors of the church are desperate to help married couples. However, they do not feel that they have the bandwidth or the full equipping to ably help the many couples that require counseling—marriage and otherwise. Therefore, the priests have often referred its members for counseling outside of the church. Thus, church members must be equipped to enjoy a biblically based, God-designed marriage and be empowered to do so, ideally before they get married. Consequently, the aim of this project is to train pre-married couples at St. Mark’s Coptic Orthodox Church in Fairfax, Virginia, to live out biblically based principles in their marriage.

Context

St. Mark’s Coptic Orthodox Church is home to approximately 1300 families. People are attracted to St. Mark’s for its (1) ancient and relevant biblical faith; (2) dedicated pastors and church servants; (3) core values of worship, discipleship, and mission; and (4) evangelistic and cultural acclamation. St. Mark’s was the first church in the US with an American-born and native English-speaking Coptic Orthodox priest. In addition, in the mid-2000s, it was among the first US-based Coptic churches to stream its

¹ This was highlighted by Fr. Paul in a personal conversation in March 2022.

sermons online and make these available to all people throughout the world. St. Mark's has also sent many people to serve in missions throughout Zambia, Kenya, Egypt, and here in the US, among other countries.

While St. Mark's has a few weaknesses, one main weakness, given the context of this project, is that the church has absolutely no pre-marital or marital equipping program. When I asked Fr. Paul his thoughts as to the need for a pre-marital and early marriage course at St. Mark's, he was emphatic: the church needs an early and pre-marital marriage course because so many couples within the church have struggled in their marriages. As I told him my desire to create a course on marriage available to St. Mark's congregants, Fr. Paul expressed an eagerness and desire to have one at St. Mark's. There have been many couples who he has had to counsel. Some couples have stayed together, yet too many have not. As Fr. Paul explained, this reality has affected the children, church, and community greatly. He—along with the other priests at St. Mark's—has seen many children struggle mentally, emotionally, socially, and physically due to the traumatic effects of an unstable household caused by disordered marriages and divorce. He would like this spiraling ripple effect to stop. As one priest mentioned, if he had to choose one ministry to have at St. Mark's, it would be a marriage and family ministry—not Sunday school, not missions, not youth activities. A marriage course is, therefore, a priority at St. Mark's.

Culturally speaking, there are many possible factors behind why many experience struggles in their marriages. The Coptic Orthodox Church is native to Egypt. Many of the congregants are mostly either people who have come straight to the US from Egypt (often referred to as "Copts") or first-generation Copts raised by their Egyptian-born parents. While there are many strengths and advantages that come from this Church and its culture, there are also some setbacks that this Church and culture may bring about.

One characteristic is that there are often no pre-marital courses offered through the Coptic Church. This is the case for Coptic churches in Egypt, the US, and all over the

world. As a result, couples are often ill-equipped for marriage. People are expected to get married, stay married, and have children; God will take care of the rest. If there is any pre-marital equipping, it may come mostly in the form of a lecture or a brief series that focuses on communication and conflict-management tools. Pre-marital equipping may also be outsourced by the church for its congregants; they may be encouraged to attend a marriage weekend by “Family Life” or some other parachurch organization. Often times, these seminars contain humanistic recommendations with some biblical truths sprinkled in here or there.

Another characteristic of the Coptic Church and its culture is that the Church often does not support married couples with a biblically based, Christ-centered education. This has often times led to unhealthy, unbiblical marriages. For example, marriage counseling and small groups are not at all common for married couples. If or when they do exist, they are forced to put out extreme marriage problems instead of teaching a biblical marriage model that leads to healthy marriages (i.e., a focus on husbands’ loving their wives as Christ loved the church and wives’ submitting to their God-fearing husbands as the church submits to Christ; Eph 5:22–33). Thus, often times, the opposite is happening: husbands are not sacrificial in their love towards their wives, and wives are not submitting to their husbands. The children then observe this reality, and as they do, they learn from it and take it into their own marriages. Thus, the cycle of unbiblical marriage continues into the next generation.

Furthermore, the Copts, while native to Egypt as descendants of the ancient Egyptians, have mimicked the Muslim Arab culture. The Muslim Arabs entered and conquered Egypt and its Coptic Christians in the seventh century. Among the Christians who suffered most were girls and women. Approximately 1400 years later, they still suffer today. This culture has perpetuated—even among Copts—that men are above women. Instead of being protected, loved, and cared for, women are often thought of as inferior. This thinking has often led to neglect and abuse. Of course, not all Muslims

believe or practice this male-superior orientation, and not all Copts are affected by this view. However, it has occurred too often.

Rationale

There is a primary need to provide a biblical marriage counseling course for pre-married couples at St. Mark's Coptic Orthodox Church. A biblically based marriage program that utilizes biblical counseling principles can help to disciple people to imitate Christ and commit their lives to him.² Thus, a good marriage is a byproduct of a solid theological understanding of who Christ is, why he instituted the blessed sacrament of marriage for man, and how he expects men and women to serve, love, and imitate him through marriage. Husbands and wives further imitate Christ through marriage when they submit to and give their lives for one another (Eph 5:22–29).

Second, a biblical marriage program is necessary at St. Mark's since a humanistic, worldly view of marriage has spread among the global church, with St. Mark's being no exception. Effective communication skills, sharing duties within the home, and gifts that express our love towards one another are examples of nice things to do. Unfortunately, the ideas that happiness, knowing our spouse's wants and desires, and then aiming to fulfill these wants and desires have permeated the church as primary reasons (and solutions) for marriage. Books such as Gary Chapman's *The Five Love Languages*³ and Emerson Eggerichs's *Love and Respect*⁴ adhere to this man-centered way of thinking. However, Christians know from Scripture that man has acted sinfully and selfishly since the fall. Behavior modification will only take us so far. Scripture, on

² Robert W. Kelleman, *Equipping Counselors for Your Church: The 4E Ministry Training Strategy* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2011).

³ Gary D. Chapman, *The Five Love Languages: How to Express Heartfelt Commitment to Your Mate* (Bhopal, India: Manjul, 2010).

⁴ Emerson Eggerichs, *Love and Respect: The Love She Most Desires, the Respect He Desperately Needs* (Nashville: Integrity, 2004).

the other hand, calls us to something higher: to glorify God in all aspects of life (1 Cor 10:31), which includes marriage. It is God who said that it is not good for man to be alone, that he should have a helper (Gen 2:18), that he should leave and cleave to his wife (Gen 2:24; Eph 5:31), and that together they should multiply (Gen 1:28). Therefore, marriage is a blessed sacrament instituted by God himself that helps us to imitate our triune God in love, sacrifice, and fellowship. To glorify God in marriage, wives must respect and submit to their husbands, and husbands must love their wives as Christ loves the church and gave himself for it (Eph 5:22–33).

Third, divorce is on the rise. Divorce in the US alone has affected approximately 38 percent of married couples in 2020.⁵ Divorce has impacted the global church as well, including the people of St. Mark’s. Once, culturally and historically speaking, divorce was rare for the Copts. However, Coptic Christians are now experiencing divorce at alarming rates. Copts, who are known to be a proud people, enduring affliction even unto suffering, are now less willing to live and work out their marriages in accordance with what God’s Word says regarding our covenantal oneness with him through marriage (Gen 2:24; Matt 19:6). Therefore, it is time for us to recommit our marriages to the Lord by biblically discipling people according to his Word and for his glory.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to train pre-married couples at St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church in Fairfax, Virginia, with biblical marriage principles.

⁵ National Center for Health Statistics, “FastStats: Marriage and Divorce,” last updated March 25, 2022, <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/marriage-divorce.htm>.

Goals

Three goals guided the development and implementation of a marriage counseling curriculum using biblical principles at St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church:

1. The first goal was to assess a group of pre-married couples at St. Mark's concerning their knowledge of biblical marriage principles.
2. The second goal was to develop and teach an eight-session marriage curriculum using biblical principles to the group of pre-married couples at St. Mark's.
3. The third goal was to reassess the group of pre-married couples at St. Mark's concerning their knowledge of biblical marriage principles in order to determine if growth occurred.

A specific research methodology was created to measure the successful completion of these three goals.⁶ This methodology is described in the following section.

Research Methodology

Successful completion of this project depended upon the achievement of three goals. The first goal was to assess a group of pre-married couples at St. Mark's concerning their knowledge of biblical marriage principles. This goal was measured by administering a seventeen-question six-point Likert-scale pre-course survey to the participants (see appendix 1). This goal was considered successfully met when 90 percent of the participants completed the survey and the results were analyzed to yield a clearer picture of participants' knowledge of biblical marriage principles.

The second goal was to develop and teach an eight-week marriage curriculum using biblical counseling principles to the group of pre-married couples at St. Mark's. The curriculum was reviewed by an expert panel who utilized a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the curriculum (see appendix 2). This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criteria met or exceeded the "sufficient" level (score of 3).

⁶ 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.

The third goal was to reassess the group of pre-married couples at St. Mark’s concerning their knowledge of biblical marriage principles in order to determine if growth occurred. This goal was measured by re-administering the seventeen-question, six-point Likert-scale pre-course survey as the post-course survey (see appendix 1). This goal was considered successfully met when a t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-course survey results.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

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

Biblical marriage. Biblical marriage is the covenantal union that God created between God, one man, and one woman (Gen 2:24). Andreas Köstenberger and David Jones define biblical marriage as “one man and one woman united in matrimony.”⁷ Further, the *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* defines biblical marriage as “the joining of a man and woman in a relationship of mutual love, fidelity, and commitment that may be sanctioned by the church (and state) and that in Christian contexts is a spiritual as well as physical union to be blessed by God.”⁸

Biblical principles. The basis for Christian belief is the Bible, which is uniquely God-inspired, without error, and the final authority on all matters of faith and practice.⁹ While ideas and trends change, principles are basic rules or laws that remain unchanged.¹⁰ Therefore, biblical principles are steadfast pillars concerning how Christ-followers should think, speak, and act in a Christian manner.

⁷ Andreas J. Köstenberger and David W. Jones, *Marriage and the Family: Biblical Essentials* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), chap. 3, “Family in the Bible,” para. 1, eBook.

⁸ Donald K. McKim, *The Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*, rev. and exp. ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), s.v. “biblical marriage.”

⁹ Baytown Christian Academy, “Biblical Principles,” accessed July 19, 2022, <https://gobca.org/biblicalprinciples>.

¹⁰ Collins English Dictionary, “Biblical Principles,” accessed July 19, 2022, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/us/dictionary/english/biblical-principles>.

Pre-married couples. Pre-married couples include any two adults who are either engaged to be married or who are dating or courting.

Two limitations applied to this project. First, the pre- and post-course surveys completed by the people who chose to participate in the biblical marriage course relied on participants' honest answers. To help mitigate this limitation, the surveys were anonymous. Second, this course was voluntary; therefore, the number of participants may be interpreted as relatively low. To help mitigate this limitation, the course was advertised via the church website and announced at church services.

Two delimitations applied to this project. First, this training was limited to pre-married couples. Therefore, it was not open to the entire congregation. Second, while basic biblical marriage principles were taught within the eight-week timeframe, participants may have needed additional training to help further apply these principles. Yet, the project did not assess participants' *application* of biblical marriage principles; it only assessed participants' *knowledge* of biblical marriage principles.

Conclusion

Because marriage is from God, through God, and for God, teaching people towards godly marriage required study of the principles revealed in God's Word. The following chapters will demonstrate God's truth concerning marriage through spiritual resources that equip pre-married couples for God-honoring marriage. Chapter 2 focuses on Scripture's sufficiency for godly marriage. Chapter 3 focuses on spiritual resources that can train couples for Christ-like servanthood, intimacy, and discipleship. In addition, chapter 4 describes the implementation of the project as well as the content and teaching methodology of the course curriculum. Chapter 5 evaluates the efficacy of the project based on completion of the specified goals.

CHAPTER 2

MARRIAGE FOR THE GLORY OF GOD

There once was a man by the name of Abba Moses who lived in the fourth century. He was a villainous man who robbed people, committed adultery and murder, and worshipped false gods. Over time, this man realized that his pagan gods did not hear, speak, or answer the prayers of people. Instead, he realized, over time, that Jesus Christ was and is the one and only true God and to him alone should be the affections of our worship. Abba Moses repented of his life of evil deeds and committed himself to seek and worship God with other ascetics in the desert.

One day, one of these monastic brothers was put on trial for committing a certain sin. When the brothers were gathered together to cast judgment on their fellow monk, Abba Moses was called to join them but refused to attend this trial. He was urged to come by one of the priests and, when he eventually agreed, he came to the trial carrying a jug with a hole in it, filled it with water, and flung it over his shoulder. When the brothers asked Abba Moses what the meaning of this jug of water with a hole in it was, he explained, “My sins run out behind me, and I do not see them, and today I am coming to judge the errors of another.” At this, the brothers forgave the monk and released him from his upcoming judgment.¹

In this story, Abba Moses understood that the love of Jesus towards one another was for the glory of God. To glorify God, we must do the same in all of our relationships—particularly in marriage, the closest and most intimate of all human

¹ Benedicta Ward, ed., *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian, 1984), 138–39.

relationships. Instead, however, we often hold on to the sins of our spouse instead of letting them pour out through the acts of forbearance and forgiveness. Many do not practice these things towards their spouse as often as they should and thereby become judge, jury, and executioner to the one whom God has entrusted to them. To glorify God through the sacred covenant of marriage, Christians must strive to imitate Christ by loving one another so that we can forgive one another, thereby demonstrating the love of Christ to our spouse just as he loved us (John 13:34; 15:12), his church.

In order to glorify God through the sacred covenant of marriage, followers of Christ must understand that marriage is from God (Gen 2:18–24), marriage is through God (Matt 19:4–9), marriage is for God (Eph 5:22–33), and marriage is for unity and intimacy between husband and wife (1 Cor 7:2–5). When we fully comprehend these things, we glorify God and exalt his holy name. Thus, the covenant of marriage helps us to fulfill our end: to glorify and enjoy God forever.

Genesis 2:18–24: Marriage Is from God

We were made by God for marriage, and marriage was made by God for us.² Genesis 2:18–24 unfolds the revelation that marriage was from God since the beginning. It was God who said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him” (Gen 2:18).³ Therefore, God created man to be a social creature.⁴ Later in this passage, God created woman out of man, bringing Eve to Adam, establishing the marriage covenant, and celebrating the first wedding service as a plan for all mankind to follow. God made all things “good” except for the isolation of man; the only thing that

² Timothy Keller and Kathy Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the Wisdom of God* (New York: Penguin, 2016), 40.

³ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations come from the English Standard Version.

⁴ John Calvin, *Genesis*, Calvin’s Commentaries, 500th ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009), 128.

was described as “not good” was that man was alone. Thus, God planned for us to be married from the beginning.⁵

This plan for a unifying helpmate and companion is further revealed as God’s special gift of love from God to Adam through the making of Eve.⁶ God desired that Adam was not to be alone and therefore planned to create Eve from Adam’s rib as a helpmate comparable to him (Gen 2:22). The word we often translate as “helper” comes from the Hebrew word *‘ezer*. This word is often used to describe military help (i.e., reinforcements), without which there would be no possibility of victory. The word “helper,” on the other hand, often connotes someone of inferior status. However, the woman was not a helper to be inferior to man but an *‘ezer*—or “strong helper”—equal to man.⁷ Out of Adam’s side was this “strong helper” made. From his side to be next to him, comforted by him, comforting him, by his side, under his arm, near his heart. Thus, Eve was made to make Adam declare, “This is at last bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (Gen 2:23). Therefore, God’s beautiful love gift on Adam’s wedding day was a strong helper and companion.

Many reflections and allegories have been made based on God’s design for this oneness of both bone and flesh between Adam and Eve. One commentator has suggested that this was God’s plan from the start because Adam needed a helper as he had to be regenerated in Christ.⁸ God meant Adam’s wife not for his destruction but to help him on his road towards salvation.⁹ Ambrose intimated that Eve was made from Adam’s rib to

⁵ There are circumstances where singleness is enjoined, such as Matt 19:10–12 and 1 Cor 7:26–28.

⁶ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Genesis—Deuteronomy*, Bible Exposition Commentary: Old Testament, 2nd ed. (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2008), 23.

⁷ Keller and Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage*, 195.

⁸ Andrew Louth, ed., *Genesis 1–11*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Old Testament, vol. 1 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2001), 63.

⁹ Calvin, *Genesis*, 129.

demonstrate their equality. In his “Letters to Laymen,” Ambrose reflected that just as the union of Eve’s birth came from Adam’s rib to be bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh and was thus a precursor to and mystery of Christ and the church, so also are we members of Christ’s body, bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh.¹⁰ As some have meditated, the woman was not made from Adam’s head to be above him, nor from his foot to be below him, but from his side to be equal with him, to be protected by him, to be loved by him.¹¹ Thus, the woman was to be a helpmate, man’s equal, near his heart, within his protection. For these purposes, God had planned from the beginning to pair man with woman through the sacred covenant of marriage.

It is also notable that Adam had no hand or input in this great plan of God. Adam did not express his loneliness to God, nor did he plea for a helpmate. He did not request a friend or a life partner. Instead, this plan for marriage came from God. God was the one who recognized that Adam was alone. God was the one who saw Adam’s need for a helper comparable to him. God was the one who desired that mankind must be fruitful and multiply. God was the one who made the oneness of the man and the woman pleasurable through spiritual, emotional, mental, physical, and social intimacy.

Genesis 2:18–24 further elaborates on God’s plan for the sacred covenant of marriage to be between one man and one woman. The two sexes are identified here to be married to one another—the opposite sexes holding fast to one another—as in the case of Adam and Eve. Some may argue that this was only before the fall and that God’s plan changed as soon as Adam and Eve had been banned from Eden. However, the Lord clearly states that a man shall leave his father and mother (Gen 2:24). Since Adam had no earthly father or mother, this command and precedent of leaving father and mother—two people of the opposite sexes—was planned by God to be followed by all of mankind in

¹⁰ Louth, *Genesis 1–11*, 71.

¹¹ Wiersbe, *Genesis—Deuteronomy*, 23.

the coming generations. No matter what the courts may decree or what society may permit, God had the first word and will have the last word when it comes to marriage (Heb 13:4; Rev 22:15). This may be why the Lord views many unbiblical marriages today and says, “From the beginning it was not so” (Matt 19:8). His plan was and is that one man and one woman may be one flesh for one lifetime.¹²

In addition, when man was commanded to “hold fast to one’s wife,” God was establishing this covenant that a man cleave to his wife until death. This lifetime commitment makes the covenant of marriage between the man and the woman even higher than that of a child’s obligation and duty to his or her father and mother. This is not only a historical reality but also the expectation for the entire human race.¹³ God’s plan was and is that this union of man and woman in holy matrimony would bring about joy and companionship,¹⁴ fulfillment and passion (Prov 5:18; Eccl 9:9), servanthood and sanctification.

Genesis 2:24 demonstrates another part of God’s plan for marriage by saying that a husband and wife “shall become one flesh.” This is a uniquely intimate portrait of the covenantal union of husband and wife. No other human relationship shares this distinctive truth as the “one flesh” bond of husband and wife. As our Lord confirms, marriage is a covenant between God and man that creates a strong new unity. This exclusive union is demonstrated through the husband and wife’s spiritual, emotional, mental, physical (including sexual intimacy and the fruitfulness of rearing children), and social oneness. This is why marriage between a man and a woman is the highest and most intimate of human relationships.

¹² Wiersbe, *Genesis—Deuteronomy*, 23.

¹³ Louth, *Genesis 1–11*, 71.

¹⁴ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Chapter-by-Chapter Bible Commentary*, Nelson’s Quick Reference Series, reissue ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1994), 15.

Verse 24 also reveals God’s plan for the permanence of marriage. When quoting Genesis 2:24, Jesus denies that one can divorce for just any reason.¹⁵ Our Lord states, “What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate” (Mark 10:9). While the Lord does allow for divorce in cases of sexual immorality (Matt 19:9), it is clear that our Lord Jesus views marriage as a divine ordinance, an indissoluble union, and a divine institution that must not be destroyed.¹⁶

Marriage is from God. Man was designed for marriage, and marriage was designed for man. It was God who decided that it was not good for man to be alone but, instead, planned to have a helpmate comparable to him. God manifested this desire when creating Eve out of Adam’s rib. Man, starting with Adam and continuing with future generations, was therefore prescribed to leave father and mother, hold fast to his wife, and become one flesh with her. This actualized in the man and woman’s spiritual, emotional, mental, physical, and social intimacy. It was the plan of God to create man and woman for marriage and marriage for the man and woman. Thus, marriage is from God in order to glorify God.

Matthew 19:4–9: Marriage Is through God

Marriage is through God. It is he who planned and united man and woman to be one flesh permanently through marriage. In Matthew 19:4, a pharisee asks the Lord about the lawfulness of divorce. Christ answers, but not directly or immediately regarding divorce. He provides some context. First, he answers that God made male and female: “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female” (Matt 19:4). The Lord Jesus is affirming God’s creation of a monogamous union

¹⁵ Keller and Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage*, 93.

¹⁶ William Hendricksen, *Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), 715.

between the only two sexes.¹⁷ This does not change after the fall but continues throughout the fallen world.

Next, the Lord says and confirms that the two—man and woman—shall be made one flesh: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?” (Matt 19:5). They are no longer two but one flesh (Matt 19:6). This “one flesh” union did not and cannot happen with people of the same sex but only with two people of the only two existing and opposite sexes—male and female. In his perfection, beauty, design, and plan, God created marriage to be between one man and one woman, and he himself is the great uniter of souls and flesh between husband and wife. This unification of man and woman came through God’s working power and glorifies him through his creation and design.

As Jesus confirms this permanent unity between Adam and Eve, man and woman, he establishes that this was done through God not just “in the beginning” but also as his plan and intention through all time. If God wanted Adam to dismiss his wife, then God could have made many women.¹⁸ Instead, God has ordained that one man must live with one woman continually.¹⁹ Christ emphasizes that marriage is not just something to be disposed of, nor is it merely a legal bond. It is so much more: it is a holy covenant between man and woman and between them and God that declares that they are one forever and not to be separated. As our Lord Jesus says, “So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate” (Matt 19:6). God did not intend that man and woman be separated through divorce; Moses only granted this due to the hardness of the people’s hearts (Matt 19:8). The Lord Jesus

¹⁷ Manlio Simonetti, ed., *Matthew 14–28*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament, vol. 1b (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 91.

¹⁸ While there are evidences of man in the Old Testament perverting marriage into a flawed institution through polygamy, God in his sovereignty intended for man and woman to be monogamously united through the covenant of marriage.

¹⁹ Simonetti, *Matthew 14–28*, 91.

emphasizes, however, that this was not God’s plan, nor was it blessed or granted through God—as Jesus says that “from the beginning it was not so” (Matt 19:8). By quoting Genesis 2:24, the Lord confirms that marriage is a covenant. In contrast, adultery undermines the very fabric of society and the home. There must be commitment in marriage as well as faithfulness to each other and to God if there is to be stability in society and in the church.²⁰ When quoting Genesis 2:24, Jesus denies that one can divorce for just any reason, discarding the marriage union easily. Instead, marriage is the creation of a strong new unity that may only be broken under very serious conditions (Matt 19:6; 1 Cor 7:39–40).²¹

Therefore, whoever divorces one’s spouse goes against God’s plan, design, and will. Doing so creates a tearing between the two—man and woman now made one flesh—and God. The severing that occurs here can have a generational effect on couples, children, and generations thereafter. Thus, divorce is not part of God’s plan and does not glorify him. Rather, it goes against the plan, design, and will of God and dishonors God. Staying married glorifies God through keeping his covenant.

In contrast, some rabbinical schools in Jesus’s day insisted that a man could divorce his wife for any and every reason. This, however, would not be seen as a covenant relationship at all but what has been referred to as a consumer relationship. In addition, marrying after divorce was allowable as well. Jesus rejected this as he came to fulfill, not to abolish, the law.²² Marrying another after a divorce or separation commits adultery, a sin that breaks the covenant between God and his people (Exod 20:14). Furthermore, the Lord says, “And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery” (Matt 19:6).

²⁰ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Matthew—Galatians*, Bible Exposition Commentary: New Testament, vol. 1 (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 1989), 70.

²¹ Keller and Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage*, 93.

²² Keller and Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage*, 92.

Thus, according to this passage, the Lord does permit divorce due to sexual immorality. By this circumstance as well as through the death of a spouse, God permits remarriage (1 Cor 7:39–40). Otherwise, God intends for couples to stay “one flesh” with one another and not to divorce or to marry someone who is divorced. God’s dissoluble design for marriage is not compromised by the age, the culture, or even reasons outside of sexual immorality and the death of a spouse. Therefore, whether one marries someone who is divorced or acts in other immoral ways, adultery results in sinning against one’s own body (1 Cor 6:18) and is detested by the Lord.

A good marriage requires intentionality, hard work, commitment, prayer, and a common goal to help one another reach the summit of each person’s image in Christ Jesus. God ordered that the man and woman should leave, cleave, and cling so that a lifetime commitment to sanctification can take shape in one another. Spouses help one another in this sanctification process, which then leads to the goal of our lives, which is to reflect our almighty King in conduct and character. In this way, we imitate Christ and cooperate with the Holy Spirit as we further help to sanctify our spouses in the image of Christ. This is not an easy process; in fact, it is impossible to do in our own power and cannot be accomplished without the work of the Holy Spirit. However, with the Holy Spirit’s aid, Christ’s goal for us of holiness is very possible. After all, as Paul says, this is the reason that our Lord Jesus lived and died for us—it was not because we *are* holy and beautiful but in order to *make* us holy and beautiful.²³ Spouses are then fellow workers in this goal of making one another holy—to look more like Christ until we reach the full perfection of the image of our God. This is a process that takes a lifetime together. Thus, God desires, plans, and creates the holy one flesh union between husband and wife for the entirety of their lives. This is God’s plan for marriage through his uniting, sacred,

²³ Keller and Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage*, 135.

holy, covenantal, and life-giving power. Thus, God-honoring marriage is achieved through God.

Ephesians 5:22–33: Marriage Is for God

God created mankind not out of necessity but out of love. Likewise, God created marriage out of his love for mankind. Thus, marriage is for God and an illustration of the loving and intimate relationship between Christ and his church.²⁴ It also is a manifestation of the divine closeness that spouses can experience with God: the closer we get to God, the closer we get to each other. Likewise, the closer we get to one another (i.e., the more love we have mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and physically for one another), the closer we are to God. Marriage is the covenant with God and with one another wherein we can experience this closeness as one flesh. As the apostle Paul says, invoking Genesis 2:24: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh” (Eph 5:31).

But how can this one flesh union come to be? Paul says this a “profound” or “great” mystery (a “mega-*mysterion*”; Eph 5:32), something that conveys an extraordinarily great truth that is so wonderful that it can only be understood with the help of God’s Spirit.²⁵ The mystery to which Paul is referring is “Christ and the church.” As some have commented, even before God designed the original marriage between Adam and Eve, he already had Christ and the church in mind.²⁶

But what of Christ and his church? The metaphor is this: the groom represents Christ, and the bride represents the church. Just as Christ gave up his life for his bride (his church), so also must a husband give up his life for his bride (his wife). As Paul writes, “Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up

²⁴ Wiersbe, *Genesis—Deuteronomy*, 24.

²⁵ Keller and Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage*, 41.

²⁶ Keller and Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage*, 40.

for her” (Eph 5:25). Through marriage, a husband glorifies God by loving his wife and sacrificing his life for her, thereby imitating Christ’s love for his church. Some have suggested that much is asked of the husband, even more than what is asked of his wife: readiness to die for the other.²⁷ John Chrysostom further elaborated on the need for a husband to give his life for his wife:

Have you noted the measure of obedience? Pay attention to love’s high standard. If you take the premise that your wife should submit to you, as the church submits to Christ, then you should also take the same kind of careful, sacrificial thought for her that Christ takes for the church. Even if you must offer your own life for her, you must not refuse. Even if you must undergo countless struggles on her behalf and have all kinds of things to endure and suffer, you must not refuse. Even if you suffer all this, you have still done not as much as Christ has for the church So just as he, when she was rejecting, hating, spurning, and nagging him, brought her to trust him by his great solicitude, not by threatening, lording it over her or intimidating her or anything like that, so must you also act toward your wife. Even if you see her looking down on you, nagging and despising you, you will be able to win her over with your great love and affection for her.²⁸

Thus, God uses the sacred union of marriage as a way for husbands to become like Christ and imitate his love and self-emptying for his bride, the church, even unto death. This, then, requires that spouses submit to one another (Eph 5:21). Part of Christ-likeness is bearing an image of humility through submissive service to one another. This can sound humiliating, with one spouse appearing seemingly lower than the other. However, this is not the case. The degree to which we submit and serve one another projects our greatness (Matt 23:11) because when we serve one another in love, we imitate Christ. This greatness is not ours but a reflection of the grandeur of our Master and Lord who did not desire to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45).

²⁷ Mark J. Edwards, ed., *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament, vol. 8 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 183.

²⁸ John Chrysostom, *Interpretatio omnium epistolarum Paulinarum per homilias facta* (Oxford: T. Combe, 1849), TLG 2062.159, quoted in Mark J. Edwards, ed., *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament, vol. 8 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 185.

A marriage following Christ's example of submission and holiness leads to a healthy and holy union. Likewise, a union between husband and wife cannot truly be called holy if there is a disregard for the way of life taught by Christ.²⁹ Unfortunately, even the apostles argued who among them was the greatest (Luke 22:24–27). In contrast, when Christ washed his disciples' feet, he was teaching them (and us) that they must serve one another by washing each other's feet and submitting to one another. In the disciples' defense, they were yet to receive the Holy Spirit at the time of their conflict about status and rank. After the day of Pentecost, the disciples much more reflected Christ in their thoughts, words, and actions since they had the Holy Spirit dwelling in them. Christians, too, have the Holy Spirit. It is therefore within our ability—provided by God's Spirit—to deny ourselves, humble ourselves, and submit to one another. This is the context by which Paul is teaching. His request for wives to submit to and respect their husbands and for husbands to love and have affection for their wives follows the command to submit to one another (Eph 5:21).³⁰ It also follows a fundamental Christ-centered teaching of submission and service in love to one another. It is not to make the wife lower than the husband but to follow the foundational principle of lovingly obeying the Lord through imitating his example of humble submission.

Furthermore, Paul provides a few reasons for the command that wives submit to their husbands (Eph 5:22). The first reason is to mirror the lordship of Christ over us, and the second is the headship and stewardship of a husband in Christ and the responsibility that comes with this headship and stewardship (v. 23). When the Christian wife submits herself to Christ, she is then able to submit to her husband. This does not mean that she is a slave to her husband, for the husband is also commanded to submit to

²⁹ Edwards, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians*, 184.

³⁰ Edwards, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians*, 184.

Christ. Only when both husband and wife are submitting to the lordship of Christ can there be marital harmony.³¹

Many marriages—Christian and otherwise—struggle because there is neither submission to Christ neither submission to one another. Christian marriages are not without struggles. However, the husband and wife who submit to God and to one another have the ability to flourish within their marriage. When this type of Christian marital living takes shape, it is exhibited through prayer, family worship, serving alongside one another, and reading God’s Word together. Thus, a husband and wife will experience a life filled with richness and quality that come about by God’s blessing his children through their obedient service and submission to him and to one another. As John Chrysostom writes, “When they [husband and wife] are in harmony, and their children are being reared well and their household is in good order, their neighbors will smell the sweet fragrance of harmony, along with all their friends and relatives. But if the contrary is true, everything is overturned and thrown into confusion.”³² Therefore, as Jerome has said, true marriages are in Christ, bringing relationships into social harmony.³³ Thus, a beautiful and peaceful marriage and family life is at once simple and complex: emptying ourselves, submitting to Christ and to one another, and rearing our children well will lead to a harmonious life in Christ. Therefore, marriage can be a beautiful opportunity to worship and glorify God and to reflect how marriage is truly for God.

1 Corinthians 7:2–5: Marriage Is for Unity and Intimacy

Marriage provides the God-given right to enjoy genuine intimacy, including physical intimacy, with one’s spouse and to have children. As the Lord commanded

³¹ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Ephesians—Revelation*, Bible Exposition Commentary: New Testament, vol. 2 (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 1989), 50.

³² Edwards, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians*, 184.

³³ Edwards, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians*, 183.

Adam and Eve, we are to be “fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth” (Gen 1:28). Sexual love is not only for procreation, as many who are married are beyond the age of procreation or are unable to have children, but the bearing of children is an important part of the union of marriage.³⁴ We are to both enjoy intimacy and bear children in marriage.

Furthermore, marriage encourages self-control (1 Cor 7:1–7). The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman” (1 Cor 7:1). However, he meant this for people who were single or contemplating between singleness or marriage—so that their sole concern and focus was to serve God and to work for his kingdom. Some married men, however, took this advice in the wrong manner as they wished to abstain from sex after marriage for the sake of what they thought was the goal of holiness. However, Paul and other commentators have disagreed with this kind of thinking. As Origen explains,

You have given up your wife, to whom you are bound. This is a big step you have taken. You are not abusing her, you say, but claiming that you can be chaste and live more purely. But look how your poor wife is being destroyed as a result, because she is unable to endure your purity! You should sleep with your wife, not for your sake but for hers.³⁵

In contrast, because many struggled with the temptation of sexual immorality, Paul wrote that each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband (1 Cor 7:1–2). Paul endorsed the intent of those Corinthians who championed the cause of celibacy—even though he knew that uttering such a slogan would not keep a person from falling into sin—while providing a God-honoring blessing to enjoy sexual pleasure through the covenant of marriage.³⁶

³⁴ Wiersbe, *Genesis—Deuteronomy*, 24.

³⁵ Origen, *Commentary on First Corinthians* (TLG 2042.034), quoted in Gerald Bray, ed., *1–2 Corinthians*, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament*, vol. 7, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 59–60.

³⁶ Simon J. Kistemaker, *1 Corinthians*, *New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 211.

Paul continued to speak on this subject when he wrote that it is “better to marry than to burn with passion” (1 Cor 7:9). Even though sex is not the lone purpose for which marriage was created, sexual intimacy and the expression of it in marriage is necessary for some.³⁷ In his infinite wisdom, God commands that we should enjoy our spouses in the marriage bed and seek to please one another: “For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another” (1 Cor 7:4–5). Some have suggested that “great evils” spring from withholding oneself, if it is overdone, from one’s spouse. While affirming Paul’s teaching that abstinence can be useful for a time so that the couple can fast and pray together before coming together again (1 Cor 7:5), others have concluded that sins such as adultery, fornication, and the destruction of families have often resulted from abstaining from one another for a prolonged period of time. Instead, people who desire marriage should delight in their spouse and enjoy them. Solomon wrote that married couples should be filled with delight and be “intoxicated” with one another in lovemaking at all times (Prov 5:18–19). Thus, the Bible emphasizes the quality as well as the quantity of marital lovemaking.³⁸

While a marriage that is built primarily on attraction and sexual passion is neither mature nor sustainable, sexual attraction and physical intimacy are important parts of marriage. Sexual intimacy ought to be not only exciting for oneself but also enriching for and selfless towards one’s spouse as both partners love and respect each other.³⁹ Therefore, solid marriages are based on mutual respect, love, and intimacy.

³⁷ John Calvin, *1–2 Corinthians*, Calvin’s Commentaries, 500th ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2009), 225.

³⁸ Ray Ortlund, *Marriage and the Mystery of the Gospel*, Short Studies in Biblical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 67.

³⁹ Wiersbe, *Genesis—Deuteronomy*, 24.

Thus, a husband and wife must submit to one another, including physically. The two are one flesh through the covenant of marriage and therefore must serve one another in all ways. This submission to one another can help promote a healthy and happy marriage. However, a lack of intimacy is both unhealthy and detrimental to a marriage and can lead to anger for the deprived spouse(s). Instead, the covenant of marriage ought to be performed with submission, holiness, intentionality, and without passions displeasing to God.⁴⁰

However, prolonged abstinence is not an excuse for promiscuity and adultery. Throughout Scripture, sexual union outside of marriage is condemned. The author of Proverbs writes, “Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well. Should your springs be scattered abroad, streams of water in the streets? Let them be for yourself alone, and not for strangers with you” (Prov 5:15–17). God commands his people to enjoy their spouse while he simultaneously denounces spousal infidelity. He denounces this because it can most often be destructive to a marriage, leading to a broken covenant, a shattered home, and hurt, confused, and unsupported children. These ripple effects can last throughout generations to come as they can negatively lead to an unhealthy outlook on marriage, feelings of mistrust, and a lack of commitment in marriage.

Regardless of what judges, counselors, or the culture might say, in the end it is God who will judge the adulterer and the sexually immoral.⁴¹ The marriage bed must be kept honorable, pure, set apart, and undefiled. As the author of Hebrews says, “Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled” (Heb 13:4). Therefore, a physically monogamous relationship is vital to a pure, united, healthy, holy, and God-glorifying marriage.

⁴⁰ Bray, *1–2 Corinthians*, 60–61.

⁴¹ Wiersbe, *Genesis—Deuteronomy*, 24.

Therefore, marriage in all aspects—spiritual, emotional, mental, physical, and social—should be holy and without blemish (Eph 5:27). Husbands and wives both have a role in this. However, husbands must take the lead on this by being the spiritual leader of the home. Men’s taking up the mantle of leadership has waned over the years, and marriages and child-rearing have suffered because of it. Husbands must be ready to wash their wives by the water of the Word (Eph 5:26). In other words, the man must lead his home and family in their walk with God through worship, prayer, and reading the Word of God with his wife and his children. He must lead them into an unconditional and uncompromising faith and walk with Christ. Above all, he must do this with a heart of love, a spirit of servanthood, and the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:16).

Conclusion

Marriage is from God, through God, and for God. Additionally, husbands and wives unite as one flesh in marriage. This is a great mystery that draws men to the story of Christ and his love for the church. Just as Christ gave his life for us in love, so also he calls husbands to die for their wives. Just as he submitted to the Father, so also he desires that we submit to one another. Just as he loves us as much as an eternal, omnipotent God can love, so also he desires that we love one another with this same love. When we do this, we unite ourselves to him and to one another. Thus, marriage is a beautiful illustration of the gospel. It is in imitating God’s love for us that we truly become like our God. The fulfillment of growing in the image and likeness of God and in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ is found in the covenant of marriage. It is in marriage that we can attain the mind of Christ and the understanding of the will of God. He desires that we live in unity with him and with one another forever. Thus, marriage is from God, marriage is through God, marriage is for God, and marriage is for unity and intimacy between husband and wife.

CHAPTER 3

APPLYING THE GOSPEL TO HEART ISSUES IN MARRIAGE

Marriage is the most intimate of all human relationships, uniting a man and woman in a one-flesh bond (Gen 2:23–25).¹ Hence, it is vital to understand how to foster marriage, while avoiding obstacles, in order to further develop this intimate union instituted by God. To do this, one must understand and follow the teachings of God through his Word (Matt 7:24). Scripture is replete with instructions on how to develop godly roles, relationships, and intimacy within marriage as well as how to avoid the common obstacles that can lead to disobedience concerning these instructions. The wise adherence of fulfilling God-ordained roles, the development of healthy relationships, and the fostering of intimacy can lead to living joyfully, glorifying our God through godly fear and wisdom. Thankfully, the gospel gives us guidance on how to navigate ourselves, our lives, and our marriages in these areas. This project seeks to shed light on these scriptural instructions as well as to provide guidelines that couples can follow to promote a Christ-centered, God-honoring, and enjoyable marriage.

The Gospel and Roles in Marriage

Before one considers the roles of husbands and wives in marriage, it is essential to speak about the Holy Spirit. Being filled with the Spirit is the way that husbands and wives can fulfill the roles that God has intended for them. Without the Holy Spirit's help, our own individual efforts are useless against the power of the enemy as

¹ Andreas J. Köstenberger and David W. Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 90.

well as the individual lusts that reside within each of us. In the end, if we do not follow the commandments of God, then our selfishness will win and the high ideals of marriage will fail. However, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we can live a joy-filled, God-honoring life in and through our marriages. As Andreas Köstenberger and David Jones contend, the fullness of marriage is realized when Spirit-filled Christ-followers overcome the cursed struggles of manipulation and dominance (Gen 3:16) in the power of Christ as husband and wife relate to each other in Christ-like love.²

In fact, preceding the famous passage in Ephesians 5:22–33 on the role of husbands and wives is the passage on the need for the Holy Spirit and what being filled with God’s Spirit looks like in believers’ lives: “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, . . . giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Eph 5:18, 20–21). Being filled with the Holy Spirit, therefore, is the key to submitting to one another and to God and as well as fulfilling the roles that he has authored for husband and wife.

In his book *Catching Foxes*, John Henderson outlines the desperate need for God’s grace required for people to be filled with his Spirit. Without supernatural help, it simply is not possible for husbands and wives to fulfill the sacrifice and submission needed to satisfy our God-designed roles and responsibilities. Thus, we must be Spirit-filled. Everything depends on this occurring.³

But how does one become Spirit-filled? First, one must be initially indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Christ teaches us to ask our heavenly Father for the Holy Spirit as it is his good pleasure to give us his Spirit when we pray and ask for his Spirit: “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly

² Köstenberger and Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family*, 67.

³ John Henderson, *Catching Foxes: A Gospel-Guided Journey to Marriage* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2011), 94.

Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Luke 11:13). Then, the believer must be constantly filled with the Holy Spirit to produce the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22–23) while seeking the things of the Spirit and living according to what the Spirit wishes (Rom 8:5; Col 3:1–2). Simply, this means living for the things that God wants: to expand his kingdom by making disciples, baptizing them, and handing down to them the teachings of Christ (Matt 28:18–20); to love him with all of one’s being; and to love others as one loves oneself (Matt 22:37–39). Our love for God grows as we also grow in our understanding of his eternal love for us through Christ Jesus (Eph 3:19). Consequently, we are filled by his Holy Spirit.

What are the manifestations of being indwelt with the Spirit of God? As we are indwelt with the Holy Spirit, we become new creations in Christ (2 Cor 5:17).

Furthermore, as we continue to be progressively filled with the Holy Spirit, we love others more selflessly (1 Cor 13:4–8), our words and actions become more gentle (Eph 4:32), we seek to build up and not destroy (1 Thess 5:11), we rejoice, pray continuously, and give thanks to God for all things (1 Thess 5:16–18), and we seek the best for others and not just for ourselves (Phil 2:3–4). In short, we love others as Jesus loves (John 13:34).

Ephesians 5:19–21 outlines four characteristics found in the Spirit-filled person: (1) speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs; (2) singing and making melody in one’s heart to the Lord; (3) always giving thanks for all things in the name of the Lord Jesus, and (4) subjecting ourselves to one another in the fear of Christ. Thus, without the Spirit’s empowering help, we will not and cannot love our neighbor, let alone our spouses. It is only through God that we can do anything at all (John 15:5), especially to love when it is not always easy. Submission to one another in the roles that God designed for us must first come by being filled with God’s Spirit. In our humble submission to his will, the Lord conforms us to his will and to his roles for marriage. It is

by seeking the things of the Spirit and asking for the Spirit that God will empower us to fulfill our heavenly designed roles.⁴

Then, as we are filled with the Spirit, we are better able to participate in the great drama of God's love towards us, his church, through the parable of marriage. Christ's relationship with the church provides the pattern for Christian marriage, where the husband is appointed as the head (as Christ is the head of the church) and the wife is called to submit to and be led by her husband's loving headship (as the church submits to Christ).⁵

The Role of Husbands

In Genesis 1–3, in addition to the creation of man, the stewardship of creation by man, and the fall of man, we clearly see God's design for marriage. Within this design, man and woman are made in God's image and are responsible for ruling the earth for God, with the man being ultimately responsible while he is assisted by his wife as a suitable helper.⁶ Thus, man is a symbol of Christ as servant, leader, provider, and protector.

Jesus sets the pattern of manhood in the line of Judah and as the Lamb of God. He was, in his strongest and weakest moments, a leader, provider, and protector.⁷ The husband is the head of the woman as Christ is the head of the church. However, with that headship comes full and faithful responsibility. Headship is the divine calling of a husband to take primary responsibility for Christ-like servant leadership, protection, and provision in the home. The seventeenth-century Baptist theologian Thomas Grantham

⁴ Henderson, *Catching Foxes*, 95.

⁵ Köstenberger and Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family*, 66.

⁶ Köstenberger and Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family*, 33.

⁷ John Piper, *This Momentary Marriage: A Parable of Permanence* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 84.

confirmed the husband's God-given role in marriage and the home's impact on the greater commonwealth when he said that a husband's duty is to "love, defend, and provide for his wife."⁸ This supports the scriptural teaching that just as Christ loved the church and gave his life for her, so also a man must serve and lead his wife and family even to death (Eph 5:25).⁹

Christ here is showing husbands and wives his example, namely, that he took a very decisive decision in leadership. He did not respond to the church, nor did he wait to see that she was worthy. Instead, his love drove him to serve and even die for the church. Husbands must likewise be decisive. A husband's commitment is to love and serve his wife just as Christ loved the church. He does not wait to see she if she is worthy or kind or patient or loving. He loves in spite of and separate from these things.

Paul wrote, "Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Eph 5:25). A husband's giving up himself for his wife takes great courage, but it is more than that. It is nothing but the cross. Our Lord Jesus Christ commanded us, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matt 16:24). Thus, marriage is a type of discipleship and leads men to grow as Christ-followers as they imitate Jesus in their love and sacrifice for their wives. This is true leadership that takes its root in the imitation of Christ's life-giving love for his church. As husbands lovingly lead their wives, they are commanded to give up their lives for their wives and protect them from the many things in this world that can attack our marriages and our families. Thus, a husband must love his wife and fend off potential spiritual, emotional, mental, physical, and social enemies.

The husband must also provide for his wife. "In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one

⁸ Matthew D. Haste, *Helped on Our Way to Heaven: Eighteenth-Century English Baptists on Marriage* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2023), 61.

⁹ Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*, 84.

ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church” (Eph 5:28–29). Earning a living to provide for his wife and children is analogous to Christ providing for his church (Eph 5:29).

There are other types of protection and provision as well, including spiritual provision. The man is the priest of the home and must lovingly and wisely lead his wife and family in worship and devotion to God. Without this aspect, the marriage does not lead to Christ or make him preeminent (Col 1:15–19). Instead, the marriage is at risk of not fulfilling its purpose, and the husband is at risk of not fulfilling his role as spiritual leader in the home.

The Role of Wives

Wives’ roles and responsibilities have their roots in the Genesis account of God’s institution of marriage. First, wives are to present their husbands with children as they obey God’s commandment of being fruitful, multiplying, filling the earth, and subduing it (Gen 1:28). Second, wives are to be managers of their household. Third, wives are meant to provide companionship for their husbands (Gen 2:18). All of these roles and responsibilities are instituted by God himself.¹⁰ Just as Christ did not come to destroy the law but to fulfill it (Matt 5:17), so also the covenant of marriage instituted with its roles and responsibilities established in Genesis still holds true today. Thus, a wife’s role in marriage still includes the responsibilities of having children, managing the household, and providing companionship for her husband.

For women, in the past as well as today, having children is a sign of blessing and a life of faith. When women could not conceive, it was considered a reproach from God. Women who could not bear children were seen as being cursed by God. When this reproach was taken away, it was considered a great miracle of blessing (Gen 30:1, 23).

¹⁰ Köstenberger and Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family*, 41.

Paul further affirms the blessing of childbearing when he writes that a woman’s devotion to her family, including her bearing of children, is a vital part of a woman’s life of faith (1 Tim 2:15).¹¹ A woman’s willingness to bear children is a sign of her obedience to God’s command for fruitfulness as well as a sign of her faithful submission to her husband’s loving headship rooted in her hope in God.

A wife’s submission, then, is not rooted in her husband or in her circumstances but in God alone. In 1 Peter 3:1–6, Peter writes that a wife’s respect for and submission to her husband is rooted in her hope in God: “For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands” (1 Pet 3:5). Thus, a wife’s hope is not grounded in her husband’s worthiness or in her jewelry or in her clothing, appearance, or possessions—it is in God and God alone. Therefore, her submission to her own husband is rooted in her hope in God.¹²

In light of Ephesians 5:21, it is true that husbands and wives are to submit to one another, but when this verse is read in isolation from its context, one can surmise that this submission is mutual. However, when one reads further, one sees that Paul writes for wives to submit to their “own” husbands—the head—as Christ is the head of the church as well as for husbands to love their wives as Christ sacrificially loved the church (Eph 5:25–30).¹³ Thus, a wife’s submission to her husband is different than her submission to anyone else. Paul and Peter both write that wives should submit to their “own” husbands (Eph 5:22; 1 Pet 3:5). Therefore, they should not submit themselves to all men or even to all leaders as they do to their husbands.

Furthermore, Peter instructs wives to be submissive to their husbands, including husbands who are unbelievers. The great witness of wives for Christ can help

¹¹ Köstenberger and Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family*, 66.

¹² Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*, 96–97.

¹³ Köstenberger and Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family*, 69.

those husbands who do not believe to put their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁴ Peter writes, “Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct” (1 Pet 3:1–2). The work of winning souls, making disciples of all nations, and teaching them all things that the Lord commanded (Matt 28:18–20) is not just meant for the mission field outside of our homes—it is meant for the mission field inside of our homes as well.

Unfortunately, in this post-Enlightenment era, submission to another, let alone submission to God, has negative connotations. As Köstenberger and Jones contend, a more accurate way of looking at marital roles is to comprehend that a wife’s is called to follow her husband’s loving leadership in marriage while the husband genuinely values his wife’s companionship and counsel. One of the very unfortunate byproducts of radical feminism is that many see the male-female paradigm through an adversarial lens. This is contrary to God’s plan (his desire and design) for a beautiful, complementary relationship between men and women, husbands and wives.¹⁵

This complementary design, while forming clear roles for husbands and wives, allows for freedom of duties within marriage. The Bible is not a book of law for marriage, delineating duties for husbands and wives. While the Bible does generally describe men as working outside of the home and women as working inside the home, it does not prescribe a division of labor. For example, some husbands are gifted in cooking and may enjoy preparing meals more than their wives. Some wives may be more talented at keeping track of the family’s finances than their husbands.¹⁶ Thus, the difference between a traditional marriage (i.e., women cook; men pay the bills) and a biblical

¹⁴ Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*, 96.

¹⁵ Köstenberger and Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family*, 73.

¹⁶ Köstenberger and Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family*, 74.

marriage (i.e., wives submit to their husbands; husbands love their wives self-sacrificially) can be a stark one. What is vital is that husbands are to lovingly lead their wives, looking to their godly counsel and intelligent response, while wives are to respectfully follow their husbands' godly and loving headship.¹⁷

The Role of Making Disciples

Some argue that married couples do not have to procreate, but this is contrary to the shared role of husband and wife in having children and making disciples of Christ. While married couples who are unable to have children are not required by the Bible to have children by some other means (e.g., adoption, *in vitro* fertilization), the main purpose of marriage is to glorify God, in part, by having children and teaching them the ways of the Lord (Gen 1:28; Prov 22:4; Eph 6:4). Thus, one manner in which to glorify God is to add to his kingdom by having children and making them disciples for Christ. This shifts our attention from a false understanding of marriage's purpose of fun and pleasure alone to one of magnifying God and building his kingdom. Therefore, one vital aspect of marriage is not only for making children but also for making disciples of Christ.

This is why Dietrich Bonhoeffer contends that marriage is more than love between husband and wife; it is a higher dignity and power, for it is God's holy ordinance, through which he wills to perpetuate the human race till the end of time. Marriage acts as "a link in the chain of the generation which God causes to come into passage to the glory come and calls into kingdom."¹⁸ Thus, increasing the number of followers of Jesus is a purpose of marriage.¹⁹

¹⁷ Köstenberger and Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family*, 74–75.

¹⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, upd. ed. (New York: Touchstone, 1997), 27.

¹⁹ Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*, 138.

Therefore, a husband and wife share in the role of making disciples of Christ. It is not simply to have and enjoy children and it is not only to fill the earth with children. Rather, it is a place for adding to God’s kingdom by making disciples of Christ. Paul speaks to this when he writes, “Fathers do not provoke your children to anger but *bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord*” (Eph 6:1–4 emphasis added).²⁰

The Gospel and Relationships in Marriage

Scripture is clear in its teaching that husbands and wives must love one another, respect one another, and submit to one another (Eph 5:21–33). Each must do this not out of reaction or feeling but out of duty. The husband must love his wife whether or not she submits to him, and the wife must respect her husband whether or not he loves her. This is most certainly difficult; in actuality, it is impossible without the power of Christ, for without him we can do nothing (John 15:5). By the grace and power provided by God, we can do the impossible (e.g., love our enemies, do good to those who use us, bless those who curse us). Fulfilling God’s design for marriage likewise requires us to rely on God to do the impossible, thereby giving us a deep sense of our own feebleness and humility. However, we are also filled with great hope and power as we lean on God and his grace to fulfill our God-designed roles in marriage.

Thus, it is no surprise that this Christ-imbued power must also be expected and depended upon to love, respect, and submit to one another in marriage. Everything we do must be done with the power that Christ supplies us by his Spirit. Therefore, even if a wife is not worthy of love, a husband’s obligation is to love her. And likewise, even if a husband is not worthy of respect, a wife must respect him. This is juxtaposed with the position of the world’s view concerning who deserves love and respect. Similarly, this is further in contrast to some who contend that filling one’s spouse and their love tank in the

²⁰ Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*, 142.

language and the manner in which they feel loved will motivate one's spouse to love them back in the language in which they also feel loved.²¹ This is not Christian duty but a form of *quid pro quo* and a “you scratch my back, and I scratch yours” relationship.

John Chrysostom speaks to this Christian duty of husband and wives, regardless of feelings: “What if my wife refuses to obey me? Never mind! Your obligation is to love her, do your duty! Even when we don't receive our due from others we must always do our duty.”²² Paul tells us to be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. If one's spouse does not obey God's law, then the other spouse is not excused; a wife must show her husband respect even when she feels that it is not due. Likewise, a husband should love his wife even when she shows him no respect.²³

With regard to submission and love, we must follow the rule that God has established. Husbands must love their wives, and wives must respect their husband, just as Sarah did vis-à-vis Abraham, even calling him lord (1 Pet 3:6). It is a rule of life so important that God himself had to ordain it, for without it, marriage, life, and family would be disorderly. A family and its habits may look different from home to home, but in this thing—namely, Christian love in marriage between husband and wife—marriage roles must be present and primary.²⁴

The sacrificial love that a husband has for his wife and the respect that a wife has for her husband is vital. Marriage, specifically love in marriage, is the allegory with which the Lord translates his love for us, his church, and the love and submission that we, the church, must have for our Lord. Thus, marriage was designed by God most deeply to be a parable or drama for the way Christ loves his church and the way he calls the church

²¹ Gary D. Chapman, *The Five Love Languages: How to Express Heartfelt Commitment to Your Mate* (Bhopal, India: Manjul, 2010), 23.

²² John Chrysostom, *On Marriage and Family Life*, Popular Patristics Series (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1986), 54.

²³ Chrysostom, *On Marriage and Family Life*, 54.

²⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 28.

to love him. According to John Piper, this is the most important thing for all husbands and wives to know about the meaning of their marriage.²⁵

Therefore, with Christ as the model, Paul writes that as the head, a husband must continue to love and pursue his wife through protection and provision for her. If the head is sound, then the rest of the body will be sound. Thus, for a healthy union, a husband must be ready to lead his wife with spiritual provision (i.e., be the priest in the home, lead the family in devotion and worship for Christ), physical provision (i.e., provide money, food, and shelter), spiritual protection (i.e., teach one's family the truth, be ready to avoid and refute false doctrines and religions), and physical protection (i.e., keep one's family safe from harm and from potential enemies). A husband must be ready to do this whether or not his wife is lovable. For the sake of Christ in obedience to him, a husband must always love, protect, and provide for his wife.

This is why a husband must cling to his wife, love her, and defend her more than all others. Preferring and adhering to a third party over one's wife is detrimental and can be toxic to a marriage. A husband must do his duty and not choose his family members, friends, or career more than the bride whom God has given him. Thus, healthy boundaries must be established with others, and no other relationships should ever be preferred above one's wife.²⁶

A husband, therefore, must establish healthy relationships (and boundaries) with others. For example, he should not spend too much time with his friends at the neglect of his family. Even if he spends a portion of the evening with his wife, he may still be depriving her. If she is anxious or repeatedly requesting that he spends more time at home, this is a sign of a wife's affection for her husband. Thus, a husband should not be annoyed but honored that his wife desires him and the strengthening of their home.

²⁵ Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*, 137.

²⁶ Chrysostom, *On Marriage and Family Life*, 58.

Furthermore, if she fears that he may be spending too much time outside the home and is anxious about possible temptations for his attraction to others or an affair, then she has the right as a wife to wish for her husband to be home. A husband must honor this and protect his wife from stumbling and fearing possible adultery.²⁷

In addition, a wife must not nag her husband. She must lovingly and wisely guide him and be a help to him. In the story of Abraham and Sarah, Sarah suggested that he sleep with Hagar so that they can have children by her. When Hagar was found to be pregnant, Sarah blamed Abraham: “May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave my servant to your embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the LORD judge between you and me” (Gen 16:5). Many others would have responded with anger as Abraham did not suggest this idea but Sarah did. However, as Chrysostom argues, since Sarah had respected Abraham through their lives together and called him lord, he wished to obey her requests and cast Hagar out. A man must do likewise and love his wife—not according to his feelings and not in response to her actions but out of duty in imitation of and obedience to Christ as he loved us when we were not deserving.²⁸

Relationships with Parents and In-Laws

Since a husband and wife become one flesh once they are married, they must focus on and love one another more than anyone outside of that one-flesh covenantal union, even before one’s parents. This is a common mistake for many couples. They may prefer or even give more attention to their own father or mother more than their spouse. However, this is not biblical and not according to God’s command. A husband is to leave his family and cleave to his wife (Eph 5:31). Furthermore, the psalmist tells the bride to leave her own people and her father’s house (Ps 45:10). Thus, spending time with and

²⁷ Chrysostom, *On Marriage and Family Life*, 59.

²⁸ Chrysostom, *On Marriage and Family Life*, 59.

focusing on one's spouse with love more than all others is adhering to the biblical commandment within marriage. While it is true that parents are to be honored and obeyed, spouses are to submit to one another and not to their parents once they are bound by the covenant of marriage. Thus, it is best to honor and obey one's parents as long as one's spouse is not deprived, in his or her mind, of provision and protection, both spiritual and physical. A spouse's priority is his or her God-given duty through the covenant of marriage.

Relationships with Others

While seeking to honor God by keeping one's spouse the priority in marriage, a husband and wife should also seek to honor God by serving others through the ministry of their marriage. A husband and wife's union should act as a means to serve and bless others. While marriage certainly has its beautiful moments, its wonderful joys, and its times of elation, its main purpose is for the worship and glory of God. Certainly, we can worship and glorify him in these moments of great happiness. However, marriage is for God's glory and not our own. Therefore, we must see marriage as a means to glorify him by blessing and serving others.

One area in which marriage can bless others is hospitality. Paul writes, "Therefore, welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God" (Rom 15:7). Thus, we must be welcoming and hospitable to one another. Married couples can do this by opening up their home to invite others. Dinners, picnics, coffee or tea, or dessert at one's home can go a long way in welcoming others. When we do this and welcome others, we could be welcoming angels (Heb 13:2). So many people are alone, and welcoming others in Christian hospitality goes a long way to show love to one another and to glorify God in the process.²⁹

²⁹ Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*, 123.

The apostle John also teaches us to love one another and to be hospitable to each other: “By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?” (1 John 3:16–17). In addition, Bonhoeffer argues, “The physical presence of other Christians is a source of uncomfortable joy and strength to the believer The prisoner, the sick person, the Christian and exile sees in the companionship of a fellow Christian a physical sign of the gracious presence of the triune God.”³⁰

Hospitality is a grace and blessing given to us to offer to others. The means of hospitality makes us stewards of what we have to offer. The blessings God has given us provide us with a responsibility to be either faithful or unfaithful. Peter writes, “Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace” (1 Pet 4:8–10).

The apostle Paul created a deep friendship with one such married couple, Aquila and Priscilla, who exemplified these Christian qualities outlined by Peter. Aquila and Priscilla were an ideal example of a married couple committed to Christian ministry and missionary service. They joined Paul on his journey to Ephesus (Acts 18:18–19), staying there as he later continued his missionary travels. Sometime later, they heard Apollos, a very gifted Christian preacher, and seeing that some of his teaching needed correction, they wisely and lovingly took him aside and taught him the way more accurately (Acts 18:26). The two are mentioned again as Paul’s “fellow workers in Christ Jesus” (Rom 16:3). Paul further addresses and sends greetings to them from his Roman prison (2 Tim 4:19). Aquila and Priscilla were among Paul’s most trusted missionary

³⁰ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community* (New York: HarperOne, 1978), 8–9.

allies, serving the Gentiles in places such as Ephesus, Corinth, and Rome. They created house churches wherever they went and even “risked their necks” for Paul. Aquila and Priscilla are one of the most exemplary married Christian couples in the entire Bible who demonstrated Christian love and service for the cause of the kingdom as they together served Christ.³¹

The Gospel and Intimacy in Marriage

Intimacy is an expression of love in marriage. We do not belong to ourselves but to our spouse and must fulfill our marital obligations sexually in love (1 Cor 7:2–5). This is why we aim to love our spouse always through the many facets that make us human: spiritually, emotionally, mentally, as well as physically. Through the fulfillment and unification of these human facets, intimacy fully takes shape and sexually intimacy is wholly enjoyed. Thus, one experiences ecstasy through true and fully developed love. Song of Solomon accurately portrays this when it states, “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth! For your love is better than wine” (Song 1:2).

Sexual intimacy is a vital part of a healthy, God-honoring marriage. A void of sex in marriage is not seen as more spiritual; rather, this void can be driven by a false asceticism. This, then, can foster a misunderstanding that married couples are more spiritual or holy when abstaining from sexual union. Paul speaks about this when providing a very strong affirmation for sexual intimacy in marriage.³² While abstaining from sex for a time for the purpose of prayer can be beneficial, a couple should return to fulfilling their marital duty for one another in loving sexual union (1 Cor 7:2–5).

A threat to intimacy with one’s spouse and his or her union with Christ is adultery, whether that be in a physical adulterous relationship with another person or through adulterous thought or images. Therefore, all adulterous thought and the viewing

³¹ Köstenberger and Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family*, 77.

³² Köstenberger and Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family*, 65.

of pornographic material is forbidden for a married as well as single person. As the Lord taught, even if one has a sexual thought about another, adultery is committed (Matt 5:27–28). Thus, pornography must be extracted from both married and single people alike. For the married, it is because they are united to another in holy matrimony and made one flesh (Gen 2:24; Matt 19:5; Eph 5:31). Adultery leads to the rending of the one-flesh union between husband and wife covenanted together and united by God. For the single, pornography is forbidden because they may be united in marriage to another at some point. Pornography can sabotage this unity even before marriage as harmful habits and addictions with pornographic videos can develop and therefore affect sexual affection and union with one's spouse. Even if the single person never gets married, he or she stills belong to Christ and is bound to the command of not committing adultery (Exod 20:14). Holiness has no part with what is unclean. Therefore, we cannot mix an adulterous lifestyle filled with pornography and sexual thought with the one with whom we are united, our holy first love, Christ.

Thus, both the single and the married are called to holiness. Those who are single and married have a commanded obligation to be holy just as God is holy (1 Pet 1:15–16). Holiness in singleness and holiness in marriage are both considered pure when sexual union is reserved for the covenant of marriage and enjoyed with one's spouse alone. The Bible is clear that both marriage and sex are considered holy and pure, created by God to be enjoyed through deeper intimacy by those in marital unity.

Furthermore, intimacy and ecstasy are not only physical experiences. Sexual pleasure is experienced in its fullest sense when the body, mind, and soul are stimulated. The Lord did not make the elements that make us human to be in isolation but to be in united harmony—body, mind, and soul are all intertwined and affect one another. For example, when some people become nervous, their stomachs may hurt and they may eat less than they usually do. Others may eat more than usual when they are anxious. Some people may sweat when they are mentally distraught or have anxiety. At other times,

people may be happy or excited, so their hearts beat faster. When our souls are touched in a humorous way, we may laugh and even cry. Tears may come when our souls are distraught. The same applies to our sexual experiences. When we feel loved, elated, safe, protected, cared for, and attracted, we as humans may be more sexually aroused and thus experience a fuller and richer sexual experience.

While there are exceptions to this for some men and women, typically, sexual arousal by means of non-physical factors is especially truer for women. Thus, when the apostle Paul tells believers to care for our spouse and to not hold back our bodies from our spouse (1 Cor 7:2–5), it is also essential that we are sincerely loving and caring for our spouse, to help them feel safe, nourished, cared for, and at peace. This allows for greater sexual intimacy and ecstasy.

Oftentimes, people, even many Christians, may misunderstand that sexual pleasure is fully expected and experienced physically, as if humans can separate their physical experiences from their mental and spiritual experiences. However, this is of course untrue and contrary to how God designed us. As such, a spouse who feels loved and cared for will much more likely experience sexual arousal and enjoyment.

Therefore, we are commanded to keep the marriage bed pure by enjoying one another sexually in marital unity and to not give in to any kind of adultery. As the book of Hebrews teaches, “Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous” (Heb 13:4). To do this, we are instructed to enjoy each other in physical union. Solomon tells us this when he instructs, “Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, a lovely dear, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love” (Prov 5:18–19). All things that God has created are good and, when received with thanksgiving, are made holy by the Word of God and prayer (1 Tim 4:4–5). Thus, God made sex and the sexual union between husband and wife good in his sight. Therefore, husbands and wives are meant to have a beautiful, loving, and intimate

relationship through the enjoyment, fulfillment, and satisfaction of their bodies, minds, and souls.

Conclusion

The gospel is central to the many facets of marriage. It defines the roles of husband and wife in marriage, relationships within marriage, and intimacy within the marriage covenant. Taking guidance from Scripture, Christians can be confident that God has a wise plan for navigating his children through the many aspects of marriage. When making God supreme through maintaining the preeminence of Christ (Col 1:15–20), specifically in marriage, we can have faith that following God’s design for what he has created—the union of husband and wife through the covenant of marriage—will lead to a blessed, fruitful, and joy-filled life. This will require that we be filled with God’s Spirit to do his will in and through marriage.

CHAPTER 4

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROJECT

The focus of this project was to provide pre-married couples at St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church with biblical principles for a God-honoring marriage. The implementation of the project included planning how best to recruit participants, developing the pre-marriage curriculum, and teaching this curriculum to course participants.

Recruiting Participants

For several weeks, the church advertised the pre-marriage course. Several strategies were used to do this. First, the fathers of the church (i.e., the priests), shared announcements at the end of liturgy. As a graphic for the flyer of the course with a QR code for registration appeared on a large screen at the front of the church, the priests themselves announced the course and encouraged everyone who is eligible to take this course. In their experience of working with too many couples suffering through bad marriages, often without taking any sort of pre-marital course, at least one of the priests announced that no one can get married at St. Mark's without taking this course.

Additionally, the course with its flyer was also advertised via the church website as well as on the St. Mark's church application. The large television screen in the foyer of the church also included the flyer with its registration QR code advertising the course. Through these, people could get information and register online using the link or via the church application. These were posted for about three to four weeks prior to the start of the course.

Sharing information about the course may have most effectively been done through word of mouth. All of the fathers shared information about the course with people they knew who were either engaged or considering engagement. The priests were motivated to have these couples take this course so that they could be as prepared as possible prior to their marriages. Also, in this way, they could be more available to serve in their other responsibilities as they did not have to meet one on one with as many couples as they had previously. Through this, several people reached out to me via text, email, or phone, informing me that they had heard about the course from one of the priests and that they were interested in taking the course.

I, too, spread the word about the course to many people. I shared information about the course to some engaged people I saw at church. I also reached out to some people who were my former students or Sunday school youth. By the grace of God, the fact that I already had a relationship and a certain level of trust with them made sharing information with them and encouraging them to take the course a bit easier. Several of the people with whom I communicated registered for and completed the course.

Preparation of Curriculum

An eight-session curriculum, entitled “God’s Design: A Pre-Marriage Journey,” was created. This curriculum was sent to a five-person panel for review, and each person was very eager for the start of the course, sharing very gracious and encouraging feedback. The first introductory session presented what would be covered and what the learning goals were for the course. The second session presented that marriage is from God and for God, that marriage is not about us but about God, and that in order to have a healthy, joyful, and God-honoring marriage, we must rely on him and his life-saving grace to empower us to live and love selflessly for one another. The third session presented the God-designed roles in marriage for husbands and wives (Eph 5:22–33). The fourth session reviewed the duty of husbands and wives to make disciples of

Christ. The fifth session focused on how to best have healthy relationships with others, including parents, in-laws, friends, and co-workers. The sixth session covered having true spiritual, emotional, mental, physical, and social intimacy with one's spouse. The seventh session shared information on proper and effective communication, conflict management, and money. The eighth session concluded the course, culminating in the post-course survey.

Teaching Marriage for the Glory of God

This was an eight-session in-person class held over a weekend at St. Mark's Coptic Orthodox Church. In addition, each session was video-recorded for the purpose of sharing this resource with participants after the conclusion of the course for review and reinforcement of the concepts learned in the course. In addition, the intent was to share this resource with people who were unable to attend the course. Each session started with a few essential questions intended to help participants prepare their minds for what was about to be learned and discussed. After these questions were posed, the format for the rest of the session was lecture. During the lecture portion, I would pause to pose more questions, followed by a time for participants to discuss potential answers with one another. Also during this time, participants could ask me questions as well as share their thoughts with me. Participants were given a workbook with an outline of each class session as well as space for notes to write their questions, thoughts, and reflections during the lectures (see appendix 3).

Following the lecture portion, breakout discussion sections were implemented to help the participants process the information. I mostly directed them to discuss one on one with their fiancé. However, at other times, I directed them to share in small groups based on their gender. Several times, a discussion would spill over into our break times, resulting in a person or a couple approaching me to discuss a personal matter regarding their relationship or to ask a question that came up during the course of our session.

Session 1: Introduction and Overview

There were several objectives for session 1. First, it was for participants to understand what was to be taught in the course. Marriage for the glory of God is a novel concept, even among many Christians. This clarity given to establish that marriage for God's glory is the best understanding we have of marriage as well as that it is God's *only* design for marriage. Thus, I wanted to be extremely clear from the beginning that this was the focus of our course. After I felt this was established, I went into the overview of the course—what each session was to be about. I wanted their minds ready to know what to expect and what they were going to gain from our time together.

Another concept that I wanted us to really understand was that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are our first love (Rev 2:2–5) and that to love God with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength and to love one another as we love ourselves is our mission in life as commanded by the Lord (Lev 19:18; Deut 6:5). I aimed to start with radical, clear, and biblical standards in comparison to what the world teaches. I desired for the culture in the classroom to be counter-cultural to the world. Often, we hear that our spouse—and pleasing our spouse—is paramount in marriage. In reality, however, we are able to love our spouse in a greater fashion as we grow in love for the Lord. Therefore, we must focus on loving our first love, the Lord, and on aiming our students to know this from the beginning.

Also, I focused on making sure that all the participants felt welcome at our church. There were a few faces I had never seen before. This happens in a church with over 1200 families. Whether they were regular churchgoers or not, I did not want them to feel uncomfortable with one another, so I encouraged them to share their thoughts and to listen to one another's ideas during our discussion times. A spirit of Christian love as we welcome and are kind to one another should be present in every church and in every gathering. I encouraged the participants to introduce themselves to one another in our breakout sessions and during our meals together, communicating to participants that they

were welcome in this group and that their presence in this group was meaningful. Establishing that each person was welcomed with the love of Christ was vital to the success of our weekend together.

Finally, at the end of the first night, I directed participants to discuss with one another their own families. What were the roles like for their father and mother? If they came from a single-parent home, what was that like? Whether they came from a one- or two-parent home, how did what they observe in their own parents factor into and influence their own expectations for marriage? I wished for them to share the answers to these questions openly so that they could understand where the other is coming from and how these notions may or may not align with biblical principles. I then asked them to share their understanding of what Scripture said about marriage and how God specifically has designed the roles for man and woman in marriage.

Session 2: Marriage Is from and for God

The focus of session 2 was to establish that marriage is from God and for God, that is, for his glory. In the beginning, God's only "not good" was that man was alone. Thus, he made a helper fit for him, one born of his flesh. Therefore, God decreed that a man should leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall be one flesh (Gen 2:18–24). After reading this passage together, we learned and discussed that marriage is the plan of God for his children. Therefore, we can take confidence in the fact that marriage was created by him for our flourishing, for the good of men, from his goodwill towards us as his beloved children, and for his glory. It was not made by man or by the state but by God; therefore, neither man nor state can dictate how to practice our marital unions. We share in God's creation when we have children, thus obeying God's command to be fruitful and multiply and to fill the earth (Gen 1:28). Because we have synergy with our Lord in creation and in the union of flesh, marriage is a lifetime covenant with the Lord and with one another.

Therefore, in addition to studying the story of creation in Genesis 1–3, we studied God’s uniting covenant with man in Matthew 19:4–9. This passage, shared by the Lord Jesus, communicates that marriage is a lifetime commitment between man and woman, one that cannot be broken by man since it is a covenant with God. Therefore, the Lord goes on to say that divorce, except in the case of sexual immorality, is considered adultery. As is his wont, the Lord does not just want us to check off a box but to lovingly go further. Loving our enemies, blessing those who curse us, turning the cheek, as well as maintaining faithful and healthy marriages are not things we can obtain or accomplish on our own power but only by the power of God working in us. We must, therefore, cooperate with the Lord, clinging to him and being filled with his Holy Spirit so that we may move forward in our life of love towards our spouse and towards all people. By this, we glorify our God. Marriage is thus from God, for God, and lived through the power of God.

Session 3: The Role of Husband and Wife

The focus of session 3 was that men and women, while equal (Gal 3:28), have distinct roles. It is difficult to understand, especially in our culture, that two things can have equal value and at the same time have varying responsibilities. The one who submits can also be equal to the person one submits to. The one who receives submission must also serve, just as Christ does. These are the concepts we learned through studying Ephesians 5:21–33.

We discussed that while a woman submits to and respects her husband just as the church submits to Christ, a man is to love his wife self-sacrificially (Eph 5:22–33). Furthermore, a godly woman can win over her husband for Christ based on her true beauty—her quiet and godly conduct. In the manner of how Sarah respected Abraham, calling him lord, a wife through her respectful submission to her husband can help her husband greatly in leading a God-honoring home. For his part, a husband must

sacrificially love his wife and deal with her, the weaker vessel, in an understanding manner. Not doing so can result in the husband's prayers being hindered (1 Pet 3:1–7). In contrast, when a husband does deal with his wife in a loving, gentle, and understanding manner, his prayers can be heard by God and fulfilled according to God's perfect will and timing, just as in the case of Abraham, where his understanding love for his wife led to his heeding her requests (Gen 21:8–21). Based on the pre-course survey and what the world teaches (and even what some churches teach or do not teach), these biblical concepts may have been unfamiliar to these pre-married participants. Therefore, we discussed these points so that God's designed roles for husband and wife can be clearly understood and applied among these students in their future marriages.

Session 4: The Role of Husband and Wife to Make Disciples of Christ

The focus of session 4 was for participants to understand that according to God's great mandate for humankind to multiply and fill the earth (Gen 1:26–28), it is our blessing, pleasure, and duty to have children and to make them disciples of the most high God. To begin this session, I again presented these concepts as essential questions to the group (i.e., Do we *have* to have kids? If so, why? Why is it important to disciple them for Christ?). In his great sovereignty, God has made us co-regents and stewards of his creation, including that of the family.

Furthermore, we must raise children in the ways of the Lord so that they may not depart from the faith as they grow older (Prov 22:7). Doing so and discipling them in the teachings of Christ is to receive a child in the name of Christ (Matt 5:18). Great blessing and reward come with receiving and discipling all people (Matt 28:18–20), especially children (Matt 19:13–15). Teaching otherwise (or not teaching at all) leads to great disaster for children and for us (Matt 5:18). Therefore, we discussed the eternal fruit and immense honor that come with having and raising children for the Lord.

Additionally, I shared with participants a story of two of the Cappadocian fathers, St. Basil of Caesarea and St. Gregory of Nyssa, as well as their siblings St. Naucratus, St. Macrina, and St. Peter Sebaste. This was a family whose children truly served the Lord. With faithfulness, each one lived a life filled with the Holy Spirit, abounding in good works and love for God and their fellow man. Their parents were intent on teaching them the ways of the Lord; consequently, and by the grace of God, their lives were filled with the fruit of God’s goodness. This is the aim for all of us as we bring children into this world and raise them in it. It is not enough to have children; rather, it is our purpose and destiny to raise saints.

We then learned and discussed what a home that raises saints could look like. By the power and grace that God provides, we can cultivate an environment that helps us make disciples in a fruitful manner—that is, a home saturated in love, prayer, Scripture-reading, and worshipping in the church together. It is true that sometimes the greatest of saints come from unlikely places; sometimes these are people from dysfunctional homes or from no homes at all. However, in many cases, as prescribed by the Lord (Prov 22:7), couples who are intentional and prayerful towards this aim of glorifying God can enjoy these riches of Christ through their children. Doing this in the home benefits not only their children, their family, and the kingdom of God but also a society consisting of a healthy community and strong citizens.

We then reviewed the essential questions that we shared at the beginning of the session. Participants discussed these questions based on what they thought and learned. Some great conversations were experienced by several participants, and everyone seemed to be engaged and communicating freely together in a spirit of love, unity, and fellowship. Taking a page from Richard Baxter and George Mueller, I prayed for my “congregants”; for them to have great and God-honoring homes and families was and is my heart’s desire. To this end, I asked many people to pray for me and for us to be filled with wisdom and for the name of the Lord to be glorified through this course.

Session 5: Relationships with Others

The focus of session 5 was to prioritize our relationship with our family above our relationships with others—this is, of course, in light of having our ultimate relationship, namely, with our Lord Jesus Christ. Many relationships that we have with others, including and especially the relationship we have with our extended family, have deteriorated marriages. Certainly, it is not the extended family or any other factor that affects marriages; in reality, it is Satan who works through these avenues and tempts us to deteriorate our marriages and our families. Therefore, the objective of this session was to establish healthy boundaries with family members, friends, co-workers, and co-volunteers within and without the church for the purpose of a healthy, united, and God-honoring marriage and family.

I began by sharing that in the Coptic Orthodox crowning ceremony (i.e., marriage ceremony), a verse is chanted towards the bride: “Hear, O daughter, and consider, and incline your ear: forget your people and your father’s house” (Ps 45:10). This is said for the express purpose of reminding the bride and the groom that they no longer should put others before each other, especially those of their “father’s house.” When a bride and groom come together in holy matrimony, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore, they must intentionally unite together and stay committed to each other. Allowing others to share emotional and mental intimacy with them can disrupt and threaten this unity. This is why husbands and wives must stay closer to each other more than to any other person.

I asked the participants if there was still a need for discipleship then? Does the prioritization of one’s spouse contradict the Great Commission where the Lord commands us to make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:18–20)? In short, no—as long as we are careful to prioritize our unity and purity with our spouse. We discussed how a marriage committed to helping the church and those outside of the church to accept Christ is a husband and wife’s duty and privilege as Christians.

As in the case of Aquila and Priscilla, a husband and wife can form a dynamic team, assisting the church, helping others, and teaching the truth of God (Acts 18:18, 24–26; Rom 16:3). We are called to be welcoming towards one another, to be kind to one another, and to love one another (Rom 15:7; 1 John 4:20). In welcoming others and being hospitable towards strangers, we can even entertain angels (Heb 13:2). Thus, a husband and wife can and should help by loving and discipling others as they are able. This does not contradict prioritizing one another but helps us understand how to utilize our marriage as a powerful force for the kingdom of God.

After we learned and discussed this together, I tasked the couples to discuss with one another several questions. What does it look like to prioritize one's marriage? How does one care for family members and loved ones while prioritizing marriage? What does a husband-and-wife team serving and working for the kingdom of God look and act like? The goal was to help participants understand how to practically love others and be fellow laborers with God while prioritizing their marriage.

Session 6: Intimacy

The objective of session 6 was to learn what true loving intimacy is as designed by God as well as to understand the things that can threaten intimacy. Additionally, my goal for participants was for them to understand that while physical intimacy is a wonderful gift from God, there are many distinct types of intimacy that often lead to greater physical intimacy as well as negatively affect intimacy with one's spouse.

We can be affected both positively and negatively in a spiritual, emotional, mental, physical, and social manner. Specifically, I aimed for participants to comprehend what could enrich or threaten intimacy with one's spouse and in one's relationship with God himself. Thus, I wanted participants to learn God's design for real intimacy that further enriches the union with one's spouse as well as to know factors that have afflicted

so many—that is, the elements that could hurt our intimacy with God and with one another.

We began by reading 1 Corinthians 7:2–5 together. Sexual intimacy is a great blessing, designed by God from the beginning. He commanded and encouraged physical union and intimacy before the fall (Gen 1:28; Song 1:1–4) as well as after the fall (1 Cor 7:2–5). We discussed how sex in marriage not only is designed for one another’s pleasure but also is the right of each spouse to enjoy. Thus, sex should not be held withheld from one another, except for a brief period of time for the purpose of prayer and fasting. Then, when this brief time has concluded, the husband and wife should come together in sexual union so that temptation does not occur and so that the devil does not have a foothold on the marriage.

In Coptic culture, sex is not spoken about openly and is certainly not often spoken about as a gift. For too long, it has been a taboo topic. It is to be abstained from prior to marriage. Therefore, many Coptic Christians have misunderstood it and have consequently abused it both prior to and after marriage. This abuse has often manifested itself in people thinking that it is bad and therefore not to be enjoyed in marriage. Healthy marriages are ones that enjoy physical intimacy. Spouses should understand that the other types of intimacy—social, emotional, mental, and social—help bring about and enrich physical intimacy. The more individuals are stimulated in these areas, the more they can enjoy their physical one-flesh union with their spouse. My objective was to help them understand that sex is to be enjoyed (1 Cor 7:2–5) as designed and commanded by God (Gen 1:28; 2:24; Matt 19:4–9).

Therefore, we discussed how imperative it is to safeguard intimacy in marriage. Failing to do so can be devastating for intimacy with one’s spouse (Heb 13:4) and one’s relationship with God (1 Cor 6:9–10, 15–20). This damage is brought about by adultery (Exod 20:14). The Lord Jesus teaches us that even if one looks at another with

lust, one has already committed adultery in one's heart (Matt 5:27–28). In the Lord's genius, he knew and taught us that all sin starts in the heart (Matt 15:18–20).

Consequently, we learned how God has called us to a higher standard—one that strives for us to attain purity of heart and one that incriminates us not only for physical sins but also for mental ones. With the help of God, we must leave the passions that may be enslaving us and instead be sanctified, for God has commanded us to be holy as he is holy (1 Pet 1:14–16). This we learned and further discussed with one another in our small groups.

Session 7: Communication, Conflict Management, and Money

The focus of session 7 was to learn about healthy communication, effective conflict management, and godly money management. Based on some of the questions I received from participants, this seemed like an area in which people were very much interested, especially with regard to effective conflict management skills. As had often been the case, the information I shared seemed fairly novel to participants. It was then, and at other moments like this, that I was especially grateful that they were here in this course, studying, discussing, and reflecting on these principles.

We first watched a promotional video on Tony Reinke's book *12 Ways Your Phone Is Changing You*. This video shows a life-size phone that goes to church with his wife, attends his daughter's birthday, and hangs out with the guys. What many of us realize at the end is that the phone is a man who has become what he loves—in essence, his phone. I then shared how phones and other electronic devices (or “blue-light zombie machines,” as I like to call them) can, at best, take us away from quality, healthy communication with our spouse and loved ones and can, at worst, lead us to a path of destruction through the harmful content (e.g., pornography, gambling, gaming) it can help us access.

Certainly, poor communication comes in many forms. Stonewalling, yelling, sarcasm, and criticism are just some of the many ways we can poorly communicate with one another. Often, the roots of sin—pride, for example—can manifest themselves in many ways, particularly in how we communicate. Am I angry? Does that lead me to give my spouse the silent treatment? A temper tantrum? Cutting, sarcastic remarks? It is, therefore, important to recognize not only the symptoms of our poor communication but also, and more importantly, the roots of our poor communication.

What can follow, if done by adhering to biblical principles, is repentance and confession. When one exposes sin and releases it to God, healing can then occur. God is faithful and just in forgiving our sins (1 John 1:9). The world may tell us to communicate better by lowering our voices, speaking up, sharing, and then like. However, these practices can instead help us only mask the problem by merely addressing the symptoms (e.g., poor communication) and not the roots of the symptoms (e.g., pride). Scripture, rather, calls us to freedom and forgiveness through repentance and confession of our sins (Matt 4:17; Acts 2:38).

Scripture also guides us to think with the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:16). Even though we often do as we do not will and do not do as we will (Rom 7:15–20), we can be freed from the grips of sin by the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:2–8). We are called to be perfect as God is perfect (Matt 5:48). It is by his grace that we are able to love one another (John 13:35) in all of our actions, including in how we communicate with one another. The Lord would not command this greatest of commandments if he were not able or willing to equip us with the power to accomplish this. By the work of the Holy Spirit, we can be cleansed and purified to love God and love one another more effectively.

Additionally, we learned about quality conflict management techniques driven by selfless love. For example, we discussed how tabling a discussion to a later time can be more effective than obeying our desires to react, scream, stonewall, hit, and the like.

We also shared how interruption leads to escalation. While the symptom is manifested by interruption and the possible raising of voices in order to be heard by the other person, the underlying root cause may be a selfish desire (e.g., to be heard or to declare, “My opinion is more important than yours”) or passion at war within us (Jas 4:1–3). Thus, listening to the other person in a spirit of understanding and calmness can show great love for that person (Prov 16:32; 17:27).

Love for God and his Word can bring about in us a greater love for God and his commandments, resulting in obedient patience, kindness, tenderheartedness, and forgiveness towards one another (1 Cor 13:4–8; Eph 4:32). By this, our sins are forgiven, when we forgive one another (Matt 6:14–15). We must, therefore, set our minds on things above so that we can manage our conflicts selflessly with a spirit of love for one another, just as God commanded us (Col 3:2–13).

We further learned how to be faithful stewards of our marriage through money management. We read Malachi 3:8–12 together and discussed how not giving at least 10 percent of our money to God is robbing God of what is his. Alternatively, giving at least 10 percent of our money to God results in the Lord opening the “windows of heaven” with blessing so rich that “there is no more need,” and he will rebuke the devourer for us in such a way that “all nations will call us blessed” and a “land of delight” (Mal 3:10–12). Tithing honors God by giving to the Lord and his people (Matt 23:23). It also helps us to not idolize money, thereby making God our God and displacing any other gods away from us (Exod 20:3). When we hoard money, seek riches, find ourselves in a financial hole, and do not tithe, we threaten to make ourselves slaves to money, debt (Prov 22:7), and therefore sin.

Having discussed the underlying and unseen sin that resides in the backdrop of all seen or unseen thoughts and actions, I then asked participants to reflect on and discuss the following questions: What are some effective and godly ways to communicate? What are some ungodly ways to communicate? What are some proper and improper conflict

management skills? How much money should you spend? Where and to whom?

Participants, again, were engaged in their discussion of these questions.

Session 8: Conclusion and Post-Course Survey

We concluded this wonderful weekend together by closing with some helpful and biblical marital advice. I communicated with some godly friends of mine prior to the course, asking them to share their thoughts on what made for a good and God-honoring marriage. The answers ranged in comments. One of my friends replied, “We don’t have any marriage wisdom to offer If it weren’t for the Holy Spirit abiding in us, we would have divorced years ago.” Another friend shared, “Go ahead and be angry. You do well to be angry—but don’t use your anger as fuel for revenge. And don’t stay angry. Don’t go to bed angry. Don’t give the Devil that kind of foothold in your life (Ephesians 4:26–27).” Another friend mentioned that he and his wife try to resolve whatever dispute they have during the day before they go to sleep. Finally, one colleague commented, “Do at least one thing for your spouse each day that will cost you something. This models the sacrificial love and service Jesus has for us.” I thought these were all profound statements filled with wise and godly advice.

Conclusion

The purpose of this project was to train pre-married couples at St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church in Fairfax, Virginia, with biblical marriage principles. The course—“God’s Design: A Pre-Marriage Journey”—focused on the fact that marriage is from God, for God, and through God. When we abide in him, we are filled by his power to love one another in marriage as selflessly and sacrificially as he has commanded. Upon applying this framework to various aspects of marriage, we joyfully fulfill God’s design for marriage and thereby glorify him. In appreciation of the biblical principles they learned, many of the participants thanked me for the course. A formal evaluation of the

participants' learning based on their pre-course and post-course surveys will be presented in chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

Some couples who attend St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church have gone through a pre-marriage course in the past. These may have been provided by either a person (e.g., a counselor or layperson) or a priest. However, in past years, St. Mark's did not provide a consistently scheduled, biblically based pre-marriage course. Any courses received in the past by people were mostly secularly based courses with some Scripture sprinkled in; these appealed to people's needs and feelings and not on fact-based biblical truth. People did not receive training that satisfied the call for God's people to know God's gospel-centered purpose for marriage. Furthermore, people did not learn that marriage is from God, for God, and through God. Thus, many couples learned principles that addressed common challenges and possible solutions, how to have a "happy" marriage, and how to best communicate, among other things. These often appealed to one's self-centered nature, not to our God-centered call as image-bearers of the most high God.

The focus of this project was to provide pre-married couples at St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church with biblical principles for a God-honoring marriage. When applied, these principles glorify God while helping his children attain joy and sanctification through marriage. The marriage and family ministry welcomed this course as they have seen a great need for helping people in marriage. Twenty-two people completed this course in its entirety. Due to the interest shown in the course, there is a clear desire for people to have God-honoring, joyful marriages.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

The purpose of this project was to train pre-married couples at St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church in Fairfax, Virginia, with biblical marriage principles. The need for this project was based in the reality that many people in our church are struggling in their marriages. The priests of our church are overwhelmed with the number of couples needing marital counseling. Furthermore, young couples do not want to repeat their parents' marital dissatisfaction, nor do they want to follow their friends who are experiencing a lack of joy in their young marriages. Pre-married couples want to have great marriages, but many do not know the life-giving biblical marriage principles that, if understood, can help them learn God's purpose and plan for God-honoring, joyful marriage. Presenting these scriptural principles through a marriage course would greatly help these couples understand God's purpose for marriage and, by God's grace, see themselves and their future spouse through the lens of Scripture, providing them a biblical framework of how God wishes to love his children through the gift of marriage.

By the grace of God, I believe that I have fulfilled the purpose of this project through an eight-session course called "God's Design: A Pre-Marriage Journey." The course focused on the fact that marriage is for God, from God, and through God. In addition, application of biblical principles to common marital challenges were included in the curriculum, leading couples to Christ-likeness in their marriages through the transformational power of the Holy Spirit.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

This project had three goals to help guide participants' learning. The first goal was to assess a group of pre-married couples at St. Mark's concerning their knowledge of biblical marriage principles. This goal was met when the participants completed a pre-course survey regarding their understanding of biblical marriage principles. Their answers were analyzed to provide me with a clearer picture of their pre-course understanding of marriage as defined by Scripture.

I created a seventeen-question survey using a six-point Likert scale to assess participants' knowledge of biblical marriage principles (see appendix 1). Twenty-two participants completed this survey; this was 100 percent of the participants. Thus, my initial goal of having 90 percent of the participants completing the survey was met. The data gained and analyzed from these twenty-two participants was valuable in learning what participants understood about biblical marriage, specifically, the principles that one should abide by for a God-glorifying marriage. Out of the twenty-two participants, 73 percent agreed or strongly agreed that they understood what the Bible teaches about God's purposes for marriage. This is in contrast to 42 percent who agreed or strongly agreed with understanding what can prevent God's purposes in marriage from being fulfilled. Finally, 35 percent agreed or strongly agreed that they can articulate how marriage can glorify God.

The second goal of this project was to develop and teach an eight-week marriage curriculum using biblical principles to a group of pre-married couples at St. Mark's. The course was called "God's Design: A Pre-Marriage Journey," and it was assessed by a five-person panel consisting of our head priest, our three co-pastors, as well as a licensed professional psychologist who also serves as the head of our church's marriage and family ministry. The panel used a rubric to assess the biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the program (see appendix 2). The goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criteria met or exceeded the "sufficient" level (score of 3). By the grace of God, every panelist scored each category of the curriculum a 3 or higher, thus meeting the stated goal on the first attempt. The panelists were very encouraging as each expressed to me their approval, excitement, and full support for this course.

I taught the content of the curriculum as an eight-session in-person course (see appendix 3). The course was taught to pre-married participants over a weekend at St. Mark's. Twenty-two participants completed the course from start to finish. One of our

priests, Fr. Mark Aziz, along with the head of the marriage and family ministry also attended parts of the marriage course.

The third goal was to reassess the group of pre-married couples at St. Mark's following the conclusion of the course concerning their knowledge of biblical marriage principles in order to determine if learning and growth occurred. This goal was measured by re-administering the seventeen-question, six-point Likert-scale pre-course survey as a post-course survey (see appendix 1). This goal was considered successfully met when a t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-course survey results. The pre-marriage class did make a positive statistical difference, indicating an increase in knowledge of biblical marriage ($t_{(21)} = -8.082, p < .0001$; see appendix 4).

The average total of the pre-test was 87, and the average total of the post-test was 97. In relation to the pre-test, the post-test showed that there was a positive change for each question except for one: both the pre-test and post-test results showed that participants averaged a 5.86 on question 8: "The strength of my relationship with God affects the strength of my marital relationship." Based on the post-test, 100 percent of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that they understood what the Bible teaches about God's purposes for marriage (question 1). Furthermore, 92 percent agreed or strongly agreed with understanding what can prevent God's purposes in marriage from being fulfilled (question 11). In addition, 96 percent agreed or strongly agreed that they can articulate how marriage can glorify God (question 12). Table 1 below reflects the positive changes based on the survey items.

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

| Item | Pre-Project MA | Post-Project MA | Change |
|---|-----------------------|------------------------|---------------|
| I understand what the Bible teaches about God’s purposes for marriage. | 73 | 100 | 27 |
| I understand what the Bible teaches about what can prevent God’s purposes in marriage from being fulfilled. | 42 | 92 | 50 |
| I can clearly articulate how a marriage can glorify God. | 35 | 96 | 61 |

It was very encouraging to see that each participant experienced growth in learning—each of the twenty-two participants’ post-test scores indicated an increase from its corresponding pre-test score. Furthermore, every participant’s score increased on each of the seventeen post-test questions. It was particularly inspiring to see the growth in their understanding of how marriage can glorify God. Their learning this was further reflected in their answers regarding intimacy, communication, and spiritual growth. This, after all, was the purpose of the course—to understand that marriage was designed and created by God, that to thrive in a marital union is done through the power of God, and that marriage is ultimately for God and his glory. The title of the course, “God’s Design: A Pre-Marriage Journey,” was meant to intentionally drive our focus on the fact that God is the founder, the purpose, and the power behind God-glorifying marriages. Many participants shared their gratefulness for this course and have provided positive feedback. By the grace of God, one of our pastors has also asked me to teach this course again this year.

Strengths of the Project

The first strength of this project was the focus on the glory of God through marriage. Unfortunately, this focus is particularly uncommon in the world as well as in the church. That God created marriage, that it is for him, and that its purpose can only be fulfilled by the power of his grace can be novel ideas, especially in this day and age. I was so grateful that these concepts were introduced to the participants; I felt that they washed over participants like refreshing water—that marriage is not just a thing to do or to have or to be happy but that there is a greater purpose and joy created by the one who intended that man should not be alone but should have a companion and helper to fulfill God's great love and purpose.

The second strength of this project was the relationships that began to develop through the course. Most people who attended the course were people who attended St. Mark's. However, some attended who are not members at St. Mark's. Additionally, some participants were not even part of the Coptic Orthodox tradition (one man and his fiancée who attended are part of Protestant traditions). However, through discussion and break times, course participants interacted with one another, speaking and laughing with one another, with some even exchanging numbers with one another and planning to get together outside of the pre-marriage retreat. It was a joy to see that the body of Christ is one, that it goes beyond cultures and nations (Rev 7:9), and that the Lord's prayer for unity does not go in vain (John 17:20–23). Rather, God's intention for us to be united in one body and one spirit is a truth that was beginning to be fulfilled during this joyous weekend.

The third strength of this project is the implications that this course has created in the lives of the people of our church community. My hope is that we continue to faithfully teach this course and that the participants appreciate what is taught, apply what is learned, and share what they gain with others. Additionally, the pastors and I have been planning for me to teach this course again, ideally twice a year. In the meantime, the

priests have since referred couples to me for one-on-one pre-marriage counsel, two of whom I have met with already. This provides hope that if this course becomes a regularly scheduled course at St. Mark's, then it can equip many couples with the truth of God's design for marriage and thus glorify him. Knowing that many can know God's true purpose for marriage—that it is for his glory—gives me great hope and joy for our future married couples.

Weaknesses of the Project

In the process of helping our busy young professionals commit to the entire course, the priests and I scheduled the course to be a retreat-style weekend seminar. Due to this, the first weakness of this project that I observed was the short duration that a weekend retreat provides. Based on the post-course survey, the participants did learn. However, I believe that a multi-week course would foster greater reinforcement of what participants are learning simply by granting them more time to process information, discuss both simple and complex concepts, and ask meaningful questions.

In addition, a longer course would have offered participants more time and opportunities to develop relationships with one another. People can help build one another's learning through community. I believe people within a small group community can be one of the greatest sources of encouragement and accountability. This would be profoundly helpful in terms of supporting and encouraging one another towards godly, biblical, and joyful marriages. In planning with the priests to make this a consistently offered course, I have shared a proposal with the priests and the head of the family and marriage ministry that includes a multi-session format, coupled with at least one face-to-face meeting with each couple, to create a course more conducive to learning and relationship-building.

The second weakness of this project was the lack of a book study that accompanies a longer course. Whether it be a book of the Bible (e.g., Ephesians) or a

book on marriage (e.g., *When Sinners Say I Do* or *The Meaning of Marriage*), a book study would further reinforce biblical marriage principles in the lives of participants. Meaningful questions and rich discussion accompanying the books would help integrate key concepts of biblical marriage. Delving into a quality book based on a God-honoring marriage would be greatly beneficial in reinforcing learning.

The third weakness of this project was the limited homework assigned. While a brief assignment was given after the first night of our retreat (participants were asked to discuss their expectations for marriage and how that aligned with what was learned about biblical marriage on the first night of the course), a course that lasts multiple weeks would allow for more homework to be given in order for participants to further process and reinforce the biblical, God-honoring marriage principles they learn during teaching sessions. Homework supplements lecture and discussion, leading to greater learning and growth for participants and their marriages.

What I Would Do Differently

As I reflect upon this course, there are a few things that I would reconsider and do differently. First, I would have given participants homework leading up to the start of the course. This would have helped lead participants to a deeper understanding of biblical marriage principles. In addition, homework would have assisted participants to further build a foundation of what was to be learned in the course. This would have prepared their minds to absorb the content with greater ease, efficiency, and growth. Combined with a multi-week course, homework can allow people more time to process information, create space for questions, and permit an increased period of reflection.

Second, I would have focused more on the need for friendship between husband and wife. I was so intent on teaching a concept that many, if not all, of the participants did not know—namely, marriage is for the glory of God—that I believe I neglected to focus more on the great friendship between husband and wife that can bring

about rich blessings, peace, and joyful times. This friendship cannot be understated as such a sweet relationship can also spur one another towards affection and love for our Lord, thus bringing even greater glory to God.

Theological Reflections

The main theological goal for this course was to teach that marriage is for the glory of God. The rationale behind this goal was because glorifying God through marriage is not only by God's design but also because the way to achieve fulfillment and joy through marriage is to have our will for marriage align with God's will for marriage. Thus, I focused on four main scriptural passages to reach these objectives: marriage is created by God (Gen 2:18–24), marriage is through God (Matt 19:4–9), marriage is for God (Eph 5:22–33), and marriage is for unity and intimacy between husband and wife (1 Cor 7:2–5). When we comprehend and apply the aspects of marriage taught through these passages, we glorify God and exalt his holy name. Therefore, the covenant of marriage, when aligned with God's design, helps us to fulfill our end: to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

First, we focused on the fact that marriage is created by God. He was the one who said that it was not good for man to be alone; instead, a helper comparable to him should be created and given to him (Gen 2:18). I wanted the participants to know that it was God, not man, who created marriage to be the one-flesh life-long union that we were about to discover together. I desired for them to comprehend that the perfect God created marriage for us as a perfect gift so that we would attain perfect oneness in Christ.

Second, we learned that marriage is through God. In other words, only through the power of God can man and woman achieve true oneness and not separation. Husband and wife must be fueled by the Holy Spirit in order to die to self, submit to one another, and be united through the mystery of marriage. Otherwise, leaning on our own resources, and thus sinful nature, we would greatly fall short of God's purpose of marriage for his

children. From the beginning, God created them male and female to be united forever (Matt 19:4–9).

Third, we focused on the fact that marriage is for God. God created marriage out of his love for mankind. Furthermore, it is God’s illustration of the loving and intimate relationship between Christ and his church.¹ In God’s goodness, the closer we get to God, the closer we get to each other, making marriage rich, full, joyous, and God-glorifying. Likewise, the more we selflessly love one another, the closer we are to God, fulfilling God’s plan for mankind. Thus, marriage is for God since it is a means by which we point to God, glorifying him through our Christ-like love and submission to one another (Eph 5:21–33).

Fourth, we studied that marriage is for unity and intimacy between husband and wife (1 Cor 7:2–5). Be “fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth” (Gen 1:28) is God’s command for Adam and Eve. As such, sexual love, created by God, was designed to bring about this intimate unity for husband and wife. It is not only for procreation, as many are not able to have children; it is also a union that culminates the bonds of mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical intimacy.

The project’s main focus of glorifying God through marriage was the primary goal in teaching this course. Through looking at Scripture’s teaching on God’s design for marriage being from him (Gen 2:18–24), through him (Matt 19:4–9), for him (Eph 5:22–33), and for unity and intimacy (1 Cor 7:2–5), together we discovered God’s great gift and love for his children, thus fostering a greater understanding of God’s purpose for marriage. My hope and prayer are that this knowledge of God’s design of marriage enflames a greater love for God and for one another so that we may glorify him forever.

¹ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Genesis—Deuteronomy*, Bible Exposition Commentary: Old Testament, 2nd ed. (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2008), 24.

Personal Reflections

For the past several years, I either have been hearing of an increasing number of marriages crumbling—both secular and Christian—or have been speaking with people who are facing struggles within their marriages. This quite literally hits close to home. Sadly, our neighbors two doors to our left have gotten a divorce, as have our neighbors across the street from us. Our neighbors two doors to our right are currently separated (the husband just completed seminary, became involved in an adulterous relationship, and soon after moved out of the house apart from his wife and two sons). Our next-door neighbors' marriage also resulted in a separation (I do not know if they are currently separated or divorced as they have moved).

Additionally, broken marriages have become quite personal to me. My own parents had suffered a divorce years earlier. Furthermore, some family members of mine are currently facing horrible circumstances in their marriages. Many of the troubles they are experiencing could have been seen prior to marriage but were largely ignored. Pre-marital counseling was not received or sought after. This could have been of great benefit.

Moreover, many of these divorces and struggling marriages are occurring with young couples. These people, most of whom are Christians, may be a few years into marriage. Some have kids, and some do not. Regardless, the number of broken marriages is alarming. For a while now, I have very much wished to do what I could to help people—engaged couples as well as married couples—with God's help.

This led me to want to focus on biblical marriage for my project. Too many people are getting married today without knowing God's plan for marriage. They are often unaware that God is the one who has designed marriage, and it is only in following his plan by his power that one can attain a godly marriage. In addition, many of us are ignorant of God's purpose for marriage. To know his purpose can result in a complete mind shift, understanding that marriage is for God and that to be married means to

actively practice death to self and to actively serve one's spouse. This is the gospel—the married person is faced with the realization that God's way is to love him with all of our being and to love one another (i.e., our spouse) as we love ourselves.

Thus, I had to understand God's purpose for marriage and to truly come to grips with comprehending his gospel as much as possible. If I was going to help lead others in understanding God's rich design for marriage, then it was vital for me to practice God's ways for marriage in my own marriage. My wife and I have not been immune to struggles within our marriage. We have also gone through marital counseling and found it somewhat helpful but not saturated in Scripture. This project and teaching this course helped me understand what a biblical marriage looks like and that in order to fulfill God's purpose for us in marriage, I had to seek his grace, power, and plan. Often, when I was tempted towards selfishness, I would ask God to help me be selfless and loving, to serve my wife instead of righting wrongs or "getting back" at her. I knew that if I chose my ways and not God's (or my wife's), then I would be a hypocrite. How could I teach others about God's ways for a rich and abundantly fruitful marriage if I was going to practice against what I preached? While I am still a work in progress, my research—specifically, meditating upon Genesis 2:18–24, Matthew 19:4–9, 1 Corinthians 7:2–5, and Ephesians 5:22–33—has increasingly helped me know how to be obedient to God, serve my wife, and fulfill my role in marriage.

Conclusion

Marriage is from God, for God, and through God. It is by his design. Therefore, it makes sense to follow his plan for marriage. Many have needlessly suffered in marriage due to repeating the sin of Adam and Eve—living by *their* ways and not by *God's* ways. His thoughts are not our thoughts, and his ways are not his ways (Isa 55:8). Thus, if we seek his ways and his glory, then we not only honor God but also can joyfully thrive in our marriages. As the psalmist writes,

Blessed is everyone who fears the LORD, who walk in his ways! You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands; you shall be blessed, and it shall be well with you. Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table. Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the LORD. (Ps 128:1–3)

APPENDIX 1

PRE-COURSE AND POST-COURSE SURVEY

The following is a seventeen-question, six-point Likert-scale pre-course and post-course survey.¹ The survey's purpose was to assess each participant's present level of biblical and theological understanding of biblical marriage principles.

¹ Shane Patrick Drury, "Implementing a Premarital Curriculum Using Biblical Counseling Principles at Bay Life Church in Brandon, FL" (DMin project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2021), 109–11; Howard Simon, "Enriching the Marriages of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church in the Valley, Anguilla" (DEdMin project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022), 112–13.

Pre-Course and Post-Course Survey

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify your current understanding of biblical marriage. This research is being conducted by Peter Schnuda under the direction of the Professional Doctoral Studies office at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. In this research, you will answer questions before the project, and you will answer the same questions at the conclusion of the project. Any information that you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.* By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

Name _____ [] I agree to participate [] I do not agree to participate

Directions: Answer the following questions by placing a check mark in the box that most closely represents your current practices or beliefs.

The scale is as follows:

SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, DS = Disagree Somewhat,
AS = Agree Somewhat, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree.

| # | Question | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
|---|---|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 1 | I understand the what the Bible teaches about God's purposes for marriage. | | | | | | |
| 2 | Fulfilling one's spouse is the top priority in marriage. | | | | | | |
| 3 | Intimacy involves spiritual, emotional, mental, physical, and social components. | | | | | | |
| 4 | I understand what the Bible teaches of a husband's chief priestly role in marriage. | | | | | | |
| 5 | I understand what the Bible teaches of a wife's role in marriage. | | | | | | |
| 6 | Listening to my future spouse with undivided attention expresses love in marriage. | | | | | | |
| 7 | Clear and growing communication plays an important role in marriage. | | | | | | |
| 8 | The strength of my relationship with God affects the strength of my marital relationship. | | | | | | |
| 9 | I know how communication within marriage can glorify God. | | | | | | |

| # | Question | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
|----|---|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 10 | I know how to resolve conflict in marriage in a God-honoring way. | | | | | | |
| 11 | I understand what the Bible teaches about what can prevent God's purposes in marriage from being fulfilled. | | | | | | |
| 12 | I can clearly articulate how a marriage can glorify God. | | | | | | |
| 13 | Conflicts can serve as a catalyst to grow my relationship with my spouse. | | | | | | |
| 14 | I am committed to allowing the Bible to guide my marriage. | | | | | | |
| 15 | The Bible teaches that husbands should lovingly lead their wives. | | | | | | |
| 16 | The Bible teaches that wives should respectfully submit to their husbands. | | | | | | |
| 17 | Viewing pornography is destructive to marriage. | | | | | | |

APPENDIX 2
CURRICULUM EVALUATION TOOL

The following curriculum evaluation tool was sent to an expert panel.¹ This panel evaluated the course material to ensure it is biblically faithful, sufficiently thorough, and practically applicable.

¹ Adapted from Shane Patrick Drury, “Implementing a Premarital Curriculum Using Biblical Counseling Principles at Bay Life Church in Brandon, FL” (DMin project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2021), 112.

Name of Evaluator: _____ Date: _____

| Curriculum Evaluation Tool | | | | | |
|---|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------------|
| 1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary | | | | | |
| Criteria | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | Comments |
| Biblical Accuracy | | | | | |
| The curriculum is biblically and theologically sound, interpreted, and explained. | | | | | |
| The material is consistent with the Bible's overall teaching on marriage. | | | | | |
| Scope | | | | | |
| The curriculum sufficiently covers each issue it is designed to address. | | | | | |
| The curriculum covers many major expected issues in a marriage curriculum. | | | | | |
| Pedagogy | | | | | |
| Each lesson was clear, containing a big idea. | | | | | |
| Each lesson provides opportunities for participant interaction with the material. | | | | | |
| Practicality | | | | | |
| Each lesson contains sufficient points of practical application. | | | | | |
| At the end of the course participants will be well-equipped to fulfill God's purpose of marriage. | | | | | |

Other Comments:

APPENDIX 3

BIBLICAL MARRIAGE PRINCIPLES CURRICULUM

What follows is the curriculum for the eight-session course on biblical marriage principles.

+

God's Design: A Pre-Marriage Journey

Session 1: Introduction

Bible References:

- Revelation 2:2-5
- 1 Corinthians 10:31
- Colossians 3:17
- 1 John 4:20

The first thing to remember is...

Takeaways + Notes

Session 2 – Marriage is from God and for God

Bible References:

- Genesis 2:18-24
- Matthew 19:4-9
- Ephesians 5:22-33

Reflect + Discuss

Takeaways + Notes

Session 3 – Roles in Marriage: The Role of Husbands and The Role of Wives

Bible References:

- Genesis 1:28; 2:18
- 1 Peter 3:1-7
- Ephesians 5:21-33

Reflect + Discuss

Takeaways + Notes

Session 4 – Discipleship: The Role of Husband + Wife to Make Disciples of Christ

Bible References:

- Genesis 1:26-28
- Proverbs 22:6
- Matthew 18:5-6

Reflect + Discuss

Takeaways + Notes

Session 5 – Relationships with Others: Parents, In-Laws, Friends, Co-workers

Bible References:

- Psalm 45:10
- Matthew 28:18-20
- Acts 18:18-19; 24-26
- Romans 15:7
- Hebrews 13:2
- 1 John 3:16-18
- 1 John 4:20

Reflect + Discuss

Takeaways + Notes

Session 6 – True Intimacy: Spiritual, Emotional, Mental, Physical, Social

Bible References:

- 1 Corinthians 7:2-5
- Song of Solomon 1:2
- Genesis 2:24-25
- Matthew 19:5-6
- Ephesians 5:31
- Exodus 20:14
- Matthew 5:27-28
- 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, 15-20
- Hebrews 13:4
- 1 Peter 1:14-16

Reflect + Discuss

Takeaways + Notes

Session 7 – Communication, Conflict Management, and Money

Bible References:

- Proverbs 16:32
- Matthew 12:36
- James 4:1-3
- Ephesians 4:32
- 1 Corinthians 13:4-8
- Colossians 3:2-13
- Matthew 6:14-15
- Malachi 3:8-12
- Proverbs 22:7

Reflect + Discuss

Takeaways + Notes

Session 8 – Final Thoughts, Conclusion, and Post-Course Survey

Bible Reflections:

Q + A

Takeaways + Notes

APPENDIX 4
T-TEST RESULTS

| T-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means | | |
|--|-----------------------|------------------------|
| | <i>Pre-Test Total</i> | <i>Post-Test Total</i> |
| Mean | 86.77272727 | 97.36363636 |
| Variance | 64.66017316 | 23.00432900 |
| Observations | 22 | 22 |
| Pearson Correlation | 0.64675241 | |
| Hypothesized Mean Difference | 0 | |
| df | 21 | |
| t stat | -8.082217324 | |
| P(T<=t) one-tail | 3.49372E-08 | |
| t Critical one-tail | 1.720742903 | |
| P(T<=t) two-tail | 6.98745E-08 | |
| t Critical two-tail | 2.079613845 | |

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ABSTRACT

TRAINING PRE-MARRIED COUPLES AT ST. MARK'S COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH IN FAIRFAX, VIRGINIA, WITH BIBLICAL MARRIAGE PRINCIPLES

Peter Michael Schnuda, DEdMin
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2024
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Jay D. Owens

This project seeks to train pre-married couples at St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church in Fairfax, Virginia, with biblical marriage principles. Chapter 1 presents the history and ministry context of St. Mark's and the goals of this project. Chapter 2 exegetes four passages of Scripture (Gen 2:18–24; Matt 19:6–9; Eph 5:22–33; 1 Cor 7:2–5) to demonstrate God's design and purposes for marriage. Chapter 3 provides an abundance of practical resources and support that highlight the power, effectiveness, and godliness of biblical marriage principles. Chapter 4 describes the project itself, recounting the content and teaching methodology of the specific course curriculum. Chapter 5 evaluates the efficacy of the project based on the completion of the specified goals. Ultimately, this project seeks to glorify God by helping couples learn principles that are God-honoring, edifying, and purposeful through God's design for and gift of marriage.

VITA

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