

LIBERTY BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

A BIBLICAL FOUNDATION COUNSELING STRATEGY TO DIRECT COUPLES  
TO BECOME ONE FLESH IN MARRIAGE

A Thesis Project Submitted to

Liberty University: Baptist Theological Seminary

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

By

Colin Thane Seager

Lynchburg, Virginia

Copyright © by Colin T. Seager  
All Rights Reserved

## DEDICATION

*Mike* - my childhood pastor, who made devotion to ministry and happiness within marriage appear effortless.

*Dr. Mikhail* – my mentor pastor who encouraged me to enroll in seminary 12 years ago.

*Rob* - my uncle and closest confidant, who longed for marriage for so many years and then so tragically lost his beloved to cancer.

*Mom & Dad* - who demonstrated both honor for their marriage and perseverance within it.

*Granny & Granddad* – prayer warriors who took the Gospel to the ends of the earth and encouraged countless couples with their wise counsel and joyful countenance. In their latter years, they found great comfort and joy in the Lord...and, in each other.

*Christine* – my wife of 19 years and God's gift to me. I love your sincerity in serving the Lord, and I absolutely love raising our six kids with you.

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

THESIS PROJECT APPROVAL SHEET

---

GRADE

---

MENTOR: Dr. Charlie Davidson  
Director, Doctor of Ministry Program  
Associate Professor of Chaplaincy

---

READER: Dr. David W. Hirschman  
Acting Dean  
Assistant Professor of Religion

## ABSTRACT

### A BIBLICAL FOUNDATION COUNSELING STRATEGY TO DIRECT COUPLES TO BECOME ONE FLESH IN MARRIAGE

Colin T. Seager

Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014

Mentor: Dr. Charlie Davidson

This project will outline steps in counseling newly married couples to develop biblical, physical, emotional, social, and spiritual unity within marriage. A review of currently available marital and pre-marital counseling suggests the focus centers on intimacy, communication issues, and being happy together versus truly becoming one flesh. This ministry tool will enable pastors to counsel and prepare couples effectively for marriage with the richness God designed for marriage and to fortify them against marital temptation and marital fatigue. Based on a review of available resources and data collected from a control group comprised of sixty individuals, an implementable discipleship program will be developed to aid pastors in counseling new couples towards absolute oneness. Biblical oneness is most effectively forged within marriage when couples understand and are committed to God's vision for the union and are together growing in the knowledge and grace of their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ through prioritizing the ministry of prayer and the Word in their lives.

## CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ABSTRACT

CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Statement of the Problem .....	1
Statement of Limitations .....	13
Theoretical Basis for the Project.....	14
Theological.....	14
Social Sciences.....	16
Statement of Methodology.....	16
Review of the Literature.....	20
CHAPTER TWO: ASSESSMENT & COLLECTION OF DATA .....	43
Inventory of Spiritual and Emotional Health .....	45
Facilitating Open, Caring Communication, Understanding and Study Pre-Marriage Inventory .....	57
CHAPTER THREE: VISION CASTING .....	64
Personal Vision Casting .....	64
Nurturing One’s Personal Relationship with Christ.....	65
Operating as One Flesh .....	67
The Apostle Paul on Marriage .....	72
The Priority of Prayer.....	87

The Sure Foundation of the Word.....	91
A Word to Husbands and Wives.....	93
CHAPTER FOUR: MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT .....	97
The Crazy Cycle.....	97
The Energizing Cycle.....	98
A Husband’s Love for His Wife.....	99
A Wife’s Respect for Her Husband.....	101
Rewarded Cycle.....	103
CHAPTER FIVE: CEREMONY PLANNING .....	105
Mentor Couples.....	105
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION.....	106
APPENDIX .....	113
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	118

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Statement of the Problem**

Marriage is the centerpiece of God's design for mankind, and has been the primary societal building block from the beginning of history. It is first introduced in Scripture immediately after creation in the second chapter of the Bible. Its introduction is prior to the fall, which means it is not given to aid sinful people as they navigate through a corrupted creation. Rather, it is a part of God's creative genius and beauty, and meant to be for the joy and benefit of mankind. Unfortunately the entrance of sin into the world has marred the marriage experience, as it has the rest of creation. What was given as a gift to sinless Adam and Eve is now entwined with family-of-origin issues, selfishness, miscommunication, temptation, and other vices at the very heart of this relationship. Indeed, this author and his wife experienced many challenges and much heartache early in marriage. This author's marriage was the union of two kindhearted individuals who loved the Lord, yet who were unprepared and ill equipped to succeed in or enjoy marriage. Misunderstandings and insecurity pervaded the union from the beginning. The ambition through this project is to help couples avoid such misery and enjoy the fullness of God's blessings in marriage right from the start. The purpose of this project is to better equip pastors or other church leaders for their premarital counseling ministry, and to lead and guide couples to healthy and thriving marriages based on a biblical blueprint for their union. One may consider this project a personal journey on the part of this author: a path



leading others to mutual joy and fulfillment within their marriage, a guiding light to help others avoid common pitfalls when married.

There is no more basic building block of society than the family. From the very beginning, God gave this mandate: “therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the they shall become one flesh”<sup>1</sup>. When marriages are thriving, tension is reduced and children in the home are emotionally healthy. When marriages turn sour, it affects not only the spouses but children as well.<sup>2</sup> The wise pastor will proactively work to support and strengthen the marriages within his church, for the simple reason that by doing so he profoundly helps so many.

Everyone entering a church is the product of a family. Some come from a home where mom and dad were committed to each other and committed to investing in their marriage; they were given a strong foundation in life. Others come from homes where there is only one parent, others come from institutions where they do not even know their biological parents. Still others come from homes where a mom and dad were committed to each other, but carry the scars of their inability to solve problems and differences. Marriage is a foundational issue for the church, and more specifically, for pastors, because the state of one’s marriage has a direct impact on the emotional and spiritual health of an individual. Furthermore, it touches the lives of their children and people they serve alongside.

The challenge pertaining to marriage is two fold: the nature of the struggle and the dearth of biblically rooted instruction for the journey. First, attention must be given to

---

<sup>1</sup> Gen. 2:24, English Standard Version.

<sup>2</sup> Jim and Barbara Dycus, *Children of Divorce* (Elgin, IL: Cook Communications Ministries Intl, 1987), 22.

the nature of the struggle that many couples face in their marriage. The simple reality of joining two imperfect humans to an intimate and lifelong commitment in a fallen world needs no elaboration.<sup>3</sup> When counseling couples prior to marriage, this author always contemplates these challenges so the counselees gain a healthy perspective of what lies ahead. The nature of marriage challenges can be classified in four distinct areas.

One challenge every married couple will face is personality and gender differences.<sup>4</sup> If one is extroverted and the other introverted, they will need to learn how to live together in a way that does not drain the other. Simple habits gained over the years can easily irritate the other or cause a rift. The differences in thinking patterns and perceptions involving men and women have been well documented;<sup>5</sup> this makes it all the more vital that husbands “live with their wives in an understanding way”.<sup>6</sup> It is easy for a husband to express love in the way he would expect it, which often leads to a wife feeling unloved.<sup>7</sup> Likewise, women tend to give love in the way they want to receive it, which is sometimes meaningless to their husband.<sup>8</sup>

External pressures bring stress and can often alienate couples. Financial problems or a divergent approach to finances is a chief contributor for divorce. Couples often struggle with how to accommodate extended family: holidays frequently bring this to the

---

<sup>3</sup> Timothy Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the Wisdom of God*, Reprint ed. (New York: Riverhead Trade, 2013), 30.

<sup>4</sup> Wallace and III Mitchell, *Not Right, Not Wrong, Just Different* (www.h2hp.com: Partnership Publications, 2009), 95.

<sup>5</sup> David Murrow, *What Your Husband Isn't Telling You: a Guided Tour of a Man's Body, Soul, and Spirit* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2012), 52.

<sup>6</sup> 1 Pet. 3:7.

<sup>7</sup> Emerson Eggerichs, *Love and Respect: the Love She Most Desires, the Respect He Desperately Needs* (Colorado Springs, CO: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 1.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

surface. Unexpected challenges such as job loss, job stress, or physical illness must also be considered. Infertility or grief is another challenge that puts tremendous strain on a marriage relationship. Married couples must learn to navigate through these waters; awareness of such problems ahead of time can be as helpful as support and guidance during particular crises. In the midst of these life challenges, this author found in his research that most couples do not prioritize praying together. As will be noted later in this paper, prayer is glue that holds couples together and keeps them near to their God. Of thirty people polled by this author, only one stated that they prayed together regularly in their marriage. Twenty-two participants stated that they did not pray with their spouse because they did not prioritize it and found due to their own laziness it is not experienced often within their union. Difficulties abound, and yet couples often lack the very gifts within marriage that would give them strength in the storm. Further data from this same research indicates that different couples struggle with different issues; not all primary challenges are alike. This author submitted five areas of common tension within marriage: relationship with in-laws, finances, communication, praying together, and parenting. There was no discernable or significant rating as to which ones of these caused more or less stress within marriages. This points to the reality that the difficulties couples face are many and varied, so preparation for marriage should be broad based with principles capable of speaking to the many different aspects of married life.

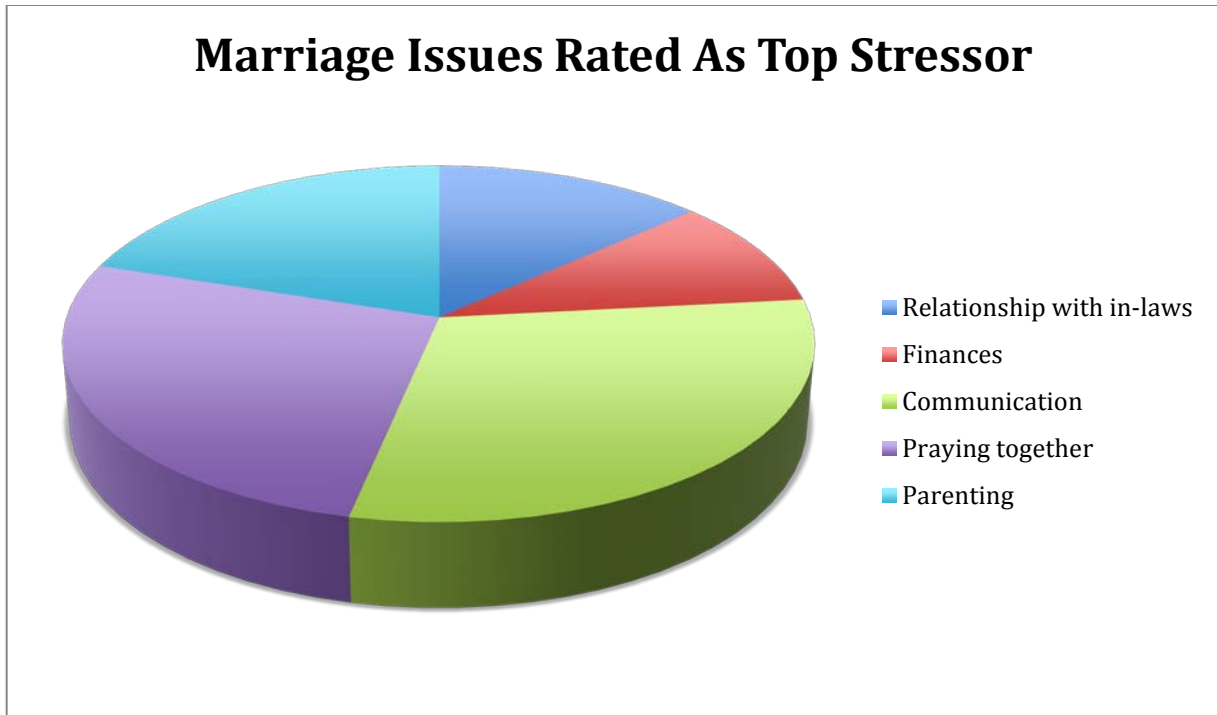


Figure 1. Marriage Issues Rated as Top Stressor.

Beyond challenges listed above, spiritual pursuits often prove elusive or difficult. Pursuing God passionately and instilling these practices in their own children are common hurdles couples face. It cannot be forgotten that each Christian marriage has an adversary who recognizes its importance and is determined to spoil the relationship by using deception, temptation, and discouragement. Scripture states, “Our adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour”.<sup>9</sup>

One’s family-of-origin has a massive impact on how one navigates through marriage.<sup>10</sup> If a spouse grew up in a home where marriage is honored, it become evident in his or her future relationships. Children who experience parents seeking to constructively problem solve will inherently more easily navigate through marriage’s challenges. Likewise, children whose parents avoid conflict refuse to forgive, or walk out

---

<sup>9</sup> 1 Peter 5:8.

<sup>10</sup> Tim Clinton and Joshua Straub, *God Attachment: Why You Believe, Act, and Feel the Way You Do About God* (Nashville, TN: Howard Books, 2010), 67.

of a marriage will face greater challenges walking through the mechanics of their marriage.<sup>11</sup> In actuality, many people who get married today are not the product of healthy marriages or strong homes. The prevailing attitude in society, particularly as portrayed by the media, is that it is permissible, even desirable, to follow one's one passions and path to happiness. Therefore, when many people face obstacles in their marriages, it is easy to take the comfortable path out or not meet their spouse where they are. A cycle too often seen is for young adults to fall in love (with all the feelings and trappings that come with it), yet then follow their parents' poor example of developing walls between one another.

Beyond the many struggles couples face in their marriage, often a clear and biblical vision for their marriage is sorely lacking.<sup>12</sup> Disney declares that love will carry them through life's storms, and that all relationships have a storybook ending.<sup>13</sup> Each is a gift to the other, to make them happy (read: fulfill their deepest longings and heal their past hurts) and nothing will stand between them and their love for one another. From the cartoon world of Disney princess movies, further vision correction is needed from Hollywood. Movie and sitcom story lines often portray men as dunces and also convey that commitment as unnecessary for marriage. As well, the not-so-subtle message is often, "who has moral restraint, anyway?" It is best for one to go for all the gusto now. These worldviews collide with the Biblical foundations for marriage, but they aren't the only two opposing views. A third script will color a couple's vision for their marriage,

---

<sup>11</sup> John M. Gottman and Nan Silver, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work: a Practical Guide from the Country's Foremost Relationship Expert* (Collegeville, MN: Harmony, 1999), 11.

<sup>12</sup> Lawrence J. Crabb, *How to Become One with Your Mate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 7.

<sup>13</sup> "11 Lies Disney Told Us About Love," <http://www.yourtango.com/2013189540/11-lies-disney-told-us-about-love>, accessed May 15, 2014.

and that is their own parents' marriages.<sup>14</sup> Soon to be husbands and wives carry into their marriage the family culture that shaped their childhood. Competing deficiencies on each side of the family tree often collide and produce loud explosions and lasting damage. With these three worldviews (and they are not the only three) influencing a couples' vision for their marriage, it is of absolute necessity that pastors, counselors and mentors paint a Biblical vision for marriage with an attainable road map for the journey.<sup>15</sup>

The biblical vision for marriage is presented in Genesis: "for this reason shall a man leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh."<sup>16</sup> A man is to leave his parent's sheltering relationship for the purpose of cleaving to his wife; he is to take the lead and assert leadership in his new relationship. What is meant by the goal of "the two shall become one flesh"? This is the vision couples must have for their marriage. The very process of becoming one flesh addresses at once, and at length, many of the problems that plague modern marriages. Imparting a couple with a Biblical vision and supporting worldview for their marriage, along with an executable game plan, will launch them on the path towards a healthy, holy and fulfilling relationship.<sup>17</sup> This vision casting helps them define the biblical vision so they can replace the world's lies for the truth. Data collected by this author revealed that when asked about oneness in marriage, individuals gave vague and somewhat mechanical descriptions. After listening to a presentation of material in this paper, when asked again

---

<sup>14</sup> Kevin Leman, *Home Court Advantage: Preparing Your Children to Be Winners in Life* (Wheaton, IL: Focus, 2005), 192.

<sup>15</sup> Timothy Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the Wisdom of God*, Reprint ed. (NY: Riverhead Trade, 2013), 14.

<sup>16</sup> Gen. 2:24.

<sup>17</sup> Wallace and III Mitchell, *Not Right, Not Wrong, Just Different* (www.h2hp.com: Partnership Publications, 2009), 14.

to describe marital oneness, responses were much more animated and expressive (passionate) regarding a vision for oneness in marriage. Pastors can play a unique role in creating not only a clear vision, but also excitement for developing and maintaining oneness throughout married life.

A survey of Christian counseling material shows that much of the available marital counsel does not address becoming “one flesh”, but rather focuses on surface level matters such as conflict resolution, attaining happiness, communication, and such.<sup>18</sup> These are all very relevant and helpful in attaining marital oneness, but focusing on these issues without starting at the root can be equated to putting the cart before the horse.

The purpose of this project is to clearly define the Biblical vision for marriage, as summed up in the statement, “for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh.”<sup>19</sup> In casting the godly vision, cheap alternate views will be identified and deconstructed.<sup>20</sup> In defining the biblical vision, tools and material will be provided for pastors, mentors and counselors to come alongside couples and launch them into a God-honoring and mutually satisfying relationship.

In working toward developing a biblical vision for marriage, it is necessary to define some key terms. First, the very term marriage must be clearly understood.<sup>21</sup> Marriage is

---

<sup>18</sup> Glenn T. Stanton, *The Ring Makes All the Difference: the Hidden Consequences of Cohabitation and the Strong Benefits of Marriage*, New ed. (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2011), 143.

<sup>19</sup> Genesis 2:24.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. Stanton provides an expanded discussion and analysis of this subject particularly in chapters 3, 4, and 7.

<sup>21</sup> Glenn T. Stanton, *The Ring Makes All the Difference: the Hidden Consequences of Cohabitation and the Strong Benefits of Marriage*, New ed. (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2011), 139-143. Stanton provides practical and non-technical explanations here.

the life long union of a man and woman, in a mutually committed and exclusive relationship, covenanted before God, for the purpose of mutual friendship and support and to possibly raise children, and this relationship is ideally to be broken only by death itself. For purposes of this project, it shall be assumed that couples preparing for marriage are themselves both true Christians and purpose to form a life long commitment. It must be noted as well what marriage is not. As marriage has been redefined by society of late, marriage is not homosexual in nature.<sup>22</sup> The account this project is working off of purposely and explicitly states that a man shall cleave to his wife; not, a woman shall cleave to another woman, or, a man shall cleave to his husband. What is commonly referred to as traditional marriage is what is in view here: one man, one woman, for life.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, this project is not designed to assist those who are cohabitating prior to marriage (trying it out) or pursuing a domestic partnership; rather, this author encourages pastors working with such couples to counsel them against such an approach.<sup>24</sup>

In defining marriage, this author will term it as Christian marriage. This means that both prospective husband and wife affirm their personal faith in the Jesus Christ, as Savior and Lord. Their rule of faith<sup>25</sup> is the sixty-six books<sup>26</sup> that comprise the Protestant Bible, and they look to the principles found therein to govern their convictions and framework for life marriage. While spiritual traditions vary and differences of

---

<sup>22</sup> Mark A Yarhouse, *Homosexuality and the Christian: a Guide for Parents, Pastors, and Friends* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2010), 183.

<sup>23</sup> Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Christian Marriage: from Basic Principles to Transformed Relationships* (Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 2012), 22.

<sup>24</sup> Glenn T. Stanton, *The Ring Makes All the Difference: the Hidden Consequences of Cohabitation and the Strong Benefits of Marriage*, New ed. (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2011), 13-15. An excellent discussion on the background and genesis of this now culturally accepted norm.

<sup>25</sup> "About Us," <http://www.sbc.net/aboutus/basicbeliefs.asp>, accessed May 3, 2014.

<sup>26</sup> "What We Believe," <http://derwoodbiblechurch.org/what-we-believe/>, accessed May 3, 2014.



interpretive opinions certainly exist amongst various Christian groups, a general deference to the authority of the Bible in ones life is a defining trait. And, this conviction generally begets a heartfelt desire to pursue a biblical lifestyle that pleases the Lord.

If marriages in general were in a good state in churches today, this project would not be necessary. The truth is, couples are divorcing not only outside the church, but within. Couples are hurting. In what other generation have women had to compete with pornography on demand?<sup>27</sup> Pornography today has been described as available, autonomous and cheap. Pornographic material is often just a click away, an unwelcome guest into living rooms and phones, or what generation has been so inundated with media, which spurns women to disrespect their husbands or entertain personal extramarital fantasies?<sup>28</sup> Even a cursory view of popular sitcoms almost always portrays men as incompetent and unhelpful, particularly around the home. Especially in American culture, people are by and large overloaded and busy; little time devoted to developing their marriage relationship. Many are operating on too little sleep and constantly connected to their tech toys with little time for personal interaction, let alone quiet time before their Lord and Savior.

One might expect there to be an exhaustive “How To” manual within Scripture for husbands and wives, given the complexities of human relationships in a fallen world. Such is not the case. It often strikes this author how God has given a handful of select

---

<sup>27</sup> Michael Leahy, *Porn Nation Discussion Guide: Conquering America's #1 Addiction* (Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 2008), 114.

<sup>28</sup> Emerson Eggerichs, *Love and Respect: the Love She Most Desires, the Respect He Desperately Needs*, 190.

pieces<sup>29</sup> of wisdom to married couples. From these principles, marriage maturity can be established through persistence and obedience to the truth.<sup>30</sup> Yet with the simplicity and direct wisdom of the Bible, there has arisen complicated array of resources for couples, which often cheapen or dilute Scriptural instruction. One challenge couples face is finding marriage instruction that is helpful and Scriptural. Too often, couples will turn to a quick fix approach on a topical study, rather than a book such as Dr. Martin Lloyd Jones' *Christian Marriage*.

Marriage care for pastors can be likened to preventative medical care for healthcare companies. If, under a pastor's leadership, marriages are not invested in they will often suffer loss. If a pastor is trying to stay on top of all couples that are struggling, he will burn himself out and deplete his study time or time useful for visitation.<sup>31</sup> It is to a pastor's great benefit to remain ahead of the curve and provide useful instruction and encouragement prior to a couples' wedding. Pastors should take a cue from the healthcare industry: preventative medical care cuts down on overall medical costs because disastrous illnesses are avoided. Likewise, by investing proactively in marriages within the church, pastors avoid a heavy toll on their own ministry priorities.

Instrumental for this author's vision of marriage is his grandparents' union. Both are now with the Lord, but have left an indelible mark not only on this author, but on countless other couples who knew them. Both stood about 4' 10" and exuded the joy of the Lord. They were physically inseparable. They prayed together for hours every day; by

---

<sup>29</sup> Verses such as Genesis 2:24-25, Ephesians 5:22-33, Colossians 3:18-19 and I Peter 3:1-7 speak directly to married couples. There are, of course others. It must be noted, however, that many verses that apply to everybody can particularly, and at a deeper level, apply to marriages.

<sup>30</sup> Elisabeth Elliot, *Shaping of a Christian Family, The* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1992), 102-103.

<sup>31</sup> John MacArthur, Jr., and the Master's Seminary faculty, *Rediscovering Pastoral Ministry: Shaping Contemporary Ministry with Biblical Mandates* (Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 216.

filling their minds with thoughts of God and petitions for others, they were remarkably unfocused on themselves. They served as missionaries in the Belgian Congo for thirty years, lived in France for seventeen years where this author's grandfather was a rural pastor, then returned to England where they anchored a church before retiring. While in the Congo, they experienced explosive revival and saw hundreds come to Christ. They also found themselves in the middle of a political upheaval and almost died from malaria. They made the difficult decision to leave their children in England to be raised by relatives, as they knew they were called to the mission field but could not adequately raise them in the heart of Africa. The many challenging experiences could have torn them apart, but rather, they drew them together. Their love for the Lord developed steadily as they grew older, and His love was reflected in their marriage. Their lives were built upon their Christian convictions and their actions backed that up. They were active in serving the Lord and remained faithful to each other and dedicated to their marriage. While a child, this author did not appreciate the beauty of their marriage; it was not until married that he truly appreciated all that they did right. One memory in particular moves this author to this day. During a visit when they were approaching 80 years of age there was heard loud rumbling noises coming from their room. Racing up to their room, this author found his grandfather pushing his bed towards hers. It was simply unconceivable to either of them to have four feet of dead space between their single beds. Their love and affection for each other motivated them to rectify the situation, although neither bed had wheels or were in any way easy to move. This beautiful image remains with this author to this day, as a demonstration of love that grew deeper throughout their lengthy marriage.

## Statement of Limitations

A project of this nature must be clearly understood not only in what it is designed to address, but also what it is not designed to speak to. It is not within the purview of this work to address couples in which both parties are not professing Christians,<sup>32</sup> where the desire to build a godly marriage is not present, where lifelong commitment is not in view, where one or both parties is not open to instruction or constructive input, a homosexual union, or where the couple is unwilling to put in the time to attend counseling and prepare for the marriage in a thorough fashion.

Pastors well know that a consequence of the fall is the straining of human relationships. In addition, common marriage struggles are often rooted in past emotional trauma or family of origin issues. This work shall not provide marriage counsel specifically to those who have been verbally, emotionally or physically abused prior to their marriage. By God's grace the devastating effects of past abuse need not damage a marriage relationship, but most often require specialized counsel to help individuals address their as they relate with their spouse. Sexual abuse and molestation leave deep emotional scars that often adversely impact one's marriage relationship; components can be added to this work to specifically help such couples but are not within the purview of this project.

Remarriage and blended families present specific challenge sets, and couples within these demographics will need to address these challenges throughout their marriage. The scope of this work does not involve issues related to stepsiblings, step parenting, or matters associated with grief or former spouses.

---

<sup>32</sup> Timothy Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the Wisdom of God*, Reprint ed. (NY: Riverhead Trade, 2013), 52.

## Theoretical Basis of the Problem

The impetus for this project is rooted in the divine mandate given for marriage in God's Word: first announced in Genesis and referenced in the New Testament. This author's personal experience bears witness to the need to educate and train others in the simple yet profound truth of Scripture. This is borne out first in his life and also repeatedly in pastoral ministry and involves theological and social influences.

### Theological

The first and foundational statement in Scripture that speaks to this subject is found in the book of Genesis: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."<sup>33</sup> The relationship between this project's thrust, towards becoming one flesh, and this verse is not difficult to envision. This statement sets the tone for marriage and defines it as a lifelong commitment between a man and a woman, in which the two are continuing to draw closer into each other and operating as one being. Against contemporary wisdom, marriage is not open for any number of two party combinations; rather, it is explicitly designed and reserved for a man and a woman: not, a man and another man, a woman and another woman, etc.<sup>34</sup> It is not temporary and nor is it a trial relationship.<sup>35</sup> Against this day's no-fault divorce, the Scriptures inform husbands they are to hold fast to their wife; where, in this picture, is

---

<sup>33</sup> Gen 2:24.

<sup>34</sup> John MacArthur, *The Fulfilled Family: God's Design for Your Home* (Chicago: The Moody Bible Institute, 1982), 11.

<sup>35</sup> Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People Are Happier, Healthier and Better Off Financially* (New York: Broadway Books, 2001), 6.

there room for separation or divorce? It is a lifelong process for the husband to hold tight to his wife and develop intimacy.

All the joys, sexual and otherwise, are to be found in one another. In the Hebrew Scriptures, husbands are implored to “Let them be for yourself alone, and not for strangers with you. Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, a lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love.”<sup>36</sup> Developing closeness and intimacy involves forsaking pursuing others and remaining monogamous at every level. To “hold fast” then, clearly reflects a rejoicing in, and happiness with, the other.<sup>37</sup> Marriage is an exclusive relationship in which mutual joy is encouraged and found, yet, once must not cross the bounds of marriage to find satisfaction elsewhere, for: “Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.”<sup>38</sup>

The permanence of marriage is seen in one of the closing statements of the Hebrew Scriptures:

Because the Lord was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth.<sup>39</sup>

What is plainly taught in Scripture has its corollary played out in everyday life.

Psychologists and counselors will note that the aforementioned principles and their

---

<sup>36</sup> Prov. 5:17-19.

<sup>37</sup> James Strong, *The Strongest Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, 2 century ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, ©2001), 1605.

<sup>38</sup> Heb.13:4.

<sup>39</sup> Mal. 2:14b-15.

effects are easily supported while observing couples as they navigate through their relationships. Input from the social sciences are helpful as they undergird the importance of this subject.

### Social Sciences

A life long union between a man and woman, based upon commitment, has been the norm through most of history.<sup>40</sup> The benefits of protecting this institution and helping couples strengthen their marriages are legion. First, it might just save one's life. Mortality rates among the unmarried are about 50% higher among women and 250% higher among men<sup>41</sup>; these basic findings are true in virtually every country that maintains accurate health statistics.<sup>42</sup> While a coronary disease might shorten a man's life by six years, being unmarried, statistically, will shorten his life by ten.<sup>43</sup> Though often viewed negatively, a wife's nagging will typically expand a man's life through guiding him to better eating habits. Emotional health is boosted for both men and women through the simple art of talking; having a close and dedicated friend to express emotions and gain support, as one works through them is immensely beneficial. Furthermore, marriage (particularly with child rearing) gives one a strong sense of purpose in life. One is no longer living for oneself, but others depend on them with their very lives (no victimless crimes in

---

<sup>40</sup> Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People Are Happier, Healthier and Better Off Financially* (New York: Broadway Books, 2001), 1.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>42</sup> Glenn T. Stanton, *The Ring Makes All The Difference* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2011).

<sup>43</sup> Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage*, 48.

marriage).<sup>44</sup> This sense of meaning and purpose is one of the wonderful and impactful benefits of marriage; when marriages are destroyed or lacking, these elements can falter. Strengthening marriages relieves the negative reality of losing these benefits, a well worthwhile endeavor!

### **Statement of Methodology**

This project is designed to promote a vision for true biblical oneness within marriage, prior to couples tying the knot together. This project shall utilize methods already in place in most churches, namely, pre-marital counseling. The most effective means to educate couples is through personal interaction; outside resources shall be recommended, but only in the context of foundational meetings involving the pastor (and perhaps his wife) and the couple. Personal meetings allow not only for conveying information, but provide the give and take, which is necessary for personal enrichment. When something is not clearly understood, or when questions arise on implementation, helpful conversation can ensue. This project shall consist of an Introduction and five chapters. The first chapter is the Introduction, which lays the groundwork for the project and why this author has undertaken this topic. The second chapter presents the pastor's assessment of the couple as he collects data via two separate inventories. The third chapter presents the vision casting, in which the pastor shows the couple how Scripture informs them on marriage. Further marriage enrichment is presented in the fourth chapter, helping both husband and wife see their duties to one another. The fifth chapter presents ceremony planning and the need for mentor couples, with the sixth chapter being the Conclusion.

---

<sup>44</sup> Glen T. Stanton, *The Ring Makes All The Difference*, 143.



Chapter One: the introduction shall present the problem at hand, to include this author's personal journey in marriage, and give an overview of how the problem will be solved. A statement of limitations shall be rendered, creating careful boundaries for what will and will not be addressed within the scope of this project. A theoretical basis shall provide the relationship between marital oneness and matters within the social sciences as well as the theological implications that inform this topic. The format of the project shall be laid out in the Statement of Methodology, in which the major components of the project are succinctly delineated.

Chapter Two: Assessment and Collection of Data. This can be accomplished in one or two sessions, depending on how well the pastor knows the couple. Two assessment instruments are suggested: the Facilitating Open and Caring Communication, Understanding and Study pre-marriage inventory, a marriage inventory which helps identify areas of divergent thought, and the personal inventory from *The Emotionally Healthy Church* which helps individuals better understand their personal life experiences and family of origin. Discussion of the data collected takes place during these sessions, as the data itself is collected prior to the first meeting.

Chapter Three: Vision casting. The third counseling session begins with the pastor brainstorming with the couple regarding all the life issues which might bring them apart and compromise their oneness. A reparative vision is cast for understanding the nature of true oneness and a Scriptural roadmap to arrive at that destination. Time will be spent developing a Biblical view of marriage, its purpose and foundation. Attention will be given to contrasting God's vision versus society's priorities in marriage.

Chapter Four: Marriage enrichment. The fourth counseling session addresses key

marital issues within a couple's upcoming union. A most excellent resource to be used is a DVD copy of *Love & Respect*, by Dr. Emerson & Sarah Eggerichs. This ministry tool addresses a key Biblical teaching regarding marriage, a husband's love for his wife and a wife's respect of her husband. Highly practical in nature, this ministry tool enables couples to see the big picture of what is before them, and how to facilitate growing together as one flesh.

Chapter Five: Ceremony planning and marriage mentor assignment. Two extremes are to be avoided in the preparation for marriage. One extreme is to be so preoccupied with the wedding details that proper attention is not given to what follows: a conjoined life together. This is a catastrophe which a pastor ought to ensure never happens. Of course couples want their wedding day to be just perfect, and, the very stress of all the details can be overwhelming. But the pastor should direct the couples' attention to their lives together, which will far outlast the wedding day festivities. On the other hand, this is not to say that the wedding itself is not important. On the contrary, the pastor should help the couple avoid the opposite pitfall, which is to belittle the importance of the ceremony itself. Some are far less formal and less interested in the wedding details themselves. Yet, the wedding ceremony and accompanying celebrations will be cherished for their lifetime, and their children will most likely at some point watch the footage. In this chapter, attention will be given to preparing fitting and honorable ceremony. While every couple has preferences, two specifics will be emphasized: symbolic acts and spiritual content. Some planning will take place, doubtless, in each of the sessions, but this final session will be dedicated to the preparation of the ceremony. Depending on the time frame, it could possibly be moved up to be one of the first sessions.

Chapter Six. This chapter shall present the conclusion, in which the basic ideas and applications are presented in a summative fashion.

## **Review of Literature**

### Books

*Christian Marriage*<sup>45</sup> is a helpful work not to be overlooked when addressing marriage. Using his renowned expository preaching style, the author unpacks a critical passage on marriage, Ephesians 5. The thrust of this work is to have the reader develop their convictions based on doctrine, not their feelings. He not only establishes a biblical theology for marriage, but also delineates a husband's duties and wife's privileges within their union. Because Lloyd-Jones completed his work in the 1950's, it is devoid of the common characteristics known as "pop-psychology."

*The Shaping of a Christian Family*<sup>46</sup> is a wonderfully practical work on the structure and function of a Christian family. Any family is anchored by the marriages that started it and holds it together. Elliot draws on the rich Christian heritage of her parents and gives specific instructions to husbands and wives today, noting that the marriage is the foundation of all family activity. Of note in what she shares is that her instruction is not merely theoretical; she pins it to the lives of her parents who fleshed it out in real time.

---

<sup>45</sup> Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Christian Marriage: from Basic Principles to Transformed Relationships* (Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 2012).

<sup>46</sup> Elisabeth Elliot, *The Shaping of a Christian Family: How My Parents Nurtured My Faith* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 2005).

*The 5 Love Languages*<sup>47</sup> is a practical work, which helps husbands and wives discern how to love each other. Many spouses know they are to love their mate, but what to do once crossed the gender barrier is critical. Dr. Chapman presents five very specific ways in which people typically like to give and receive love: words of affirmation, receiving gifts, quality time, physical touch, and acts of service. When husbands and wives identify which each prefers, expressing love becomes much more fruitful as the action is received, not just the intent.

*Solving Marriage Problems*<sup>48</sup> is a work for Christian counselors, but has wide application for pastors and married folk. From the nouthetic counseling approach, Adams draws from Scripture to give Biblical principles for helping marriages not only survive but also thrive. Adams begins with the root of the issue, that is, what is it that causes marriage problems. From there he presents unbiblical principles, which many people adhere to via society. His work presents Biblical truths as they apply to marriage, but for its foundation and also as they apply to solving friction and problems.

*The Family*<sup>49</sup> addresses key challenges impacting families today. Opposition which affects families are rooted in challenging marriages, for marriage is the foundation of any home. MacArthur follows Lloyd-Jones' pattern of expository preaching and uses this format to draw rich Biblical teaching and speak to key issues in marriage. He addresses general Biblical relationship principles and then speaks specifically to husbands and wives and their corresponding roles and responsibilities within marriage.

---

<sup>47</sup> Gary Chapman, *The 5 Love Languages: the Secret to Love That Lasts* (Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 2010).

<sup>48</sup> Jay E. Adams, *Solving Marriage Problems: Biblical Solutions for Christian Counselors* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986).

<sup>49</sup> John MacArthur and Jr, *The Family* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1982).

He exhorts spouses to be true to what God has to say in the Bible, not what culture throws at them.

*His Brain, Her Brain*<sup>50</sup> focuses specifically on brain function and thought patterns that are generally specific to men and women. How the two genders process information, situations and emotions differ greatly. This often presents as a weakness and detriment within relationships, but the authors demonstrate effectively how this can be used to strengthen marriages. The greatest contribution of this work is taking what is ordinarily in a fallen world a game breaker and effectively presenting it to be a positive influence. Their work skillfully takes the scientific data and makes it plainly clear how to implement this knowledge.

*Seven Principles For Making Marriage Work*<sup>51</sup> is a valued work on marriage for any author. His proven research in the field ensures this book will yield helpful information. It is a summary of much of his research. The seven principles involved nurturing intimacy and a shared life, while recognizing common pitfalls and skillfully and with determination pushing through them. His principles are both practical and profound, and, readily implemented if so desired.

*The Meaning of Marriage*<sup>52</sup> is an excellent work authored by a metropolitan pastor, one well acquainted with the many issues people face in marriage. Keller develops the contrasts found within any relationship: there are good points and

---

<sup>50</sup> Walt & Barb Larimore, *His Brain, Her Brain: How Divinely Designed Differences Can Strengthen Your Marriage* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008).

<sup>51</sup> John M. Gottman and Nan Silver, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work: a Practical Guide from the Country's Foremost Relationship Expert* (Collegeville, MN: Harmony, 1999).

<sup>52</sup> Timothy Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the Wisdom of God*, Reprint ed. (NY: Riverhead Trade, 2013).

challenging ones. He unpacks the mystery, which Paul spoke of in Ephesians 5. He addresses well the mission of marriage, and from there, pin points areas in which most couples struggle and how to overcome these very same struggles. He accurately points out that marriage does not create one's weaknesses, rather, it reveals them. He advises spouses to embrace the deepening effect of marriage and to choose to grow personally as marriage reveals the weaknesses within each person.

*Not Right, Not Wrong, Just Different*<sup>53</sup> is an engaging work written through the lens of personal failure and God's redemptive grace. In it, Mitchell relates his own marriage's demise, which would only be saved by his own salvation and persistent expressed love for his wife Linda. Mitchell explains how women think and perceive life around them, and helps men understand their perspective so they can better love their wives. One of the keys, he says, to a successful marriage, is to embrace differences and learn how those very differences can strengthen one's marriage.

*Things I Wish I'd Known Before We Got Married*<sup>54</sup> is a helpful work which helps couples understand the complexities of marriage; not only that, but how to successfully navigate through them. He takes time to develop and expound on romantic love; how to develop those deep feelings of personal fulfillment within one's marriage. Delving deeper than mere feelings, Chapman addresses sticky and vulnerable subjects such as sexual intimacy and also personality. He roots all these discussions on the spiritual plane: a deep walk with Christ is needed to support a thriving marriage, and that deep walk is not developed haphazardly but through persistent thought and choices.

---

<sup>53</sup> Wallace and III Mitchell, *Not Right, Not Wrong, Just Different* (www.h2hp.com: Partnership Publications, 2009).

<sup>54</sup> Gary D. Chapman, *Things i Wish I'd Known Before We Got Married* (Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 2010).

*The Excellent Wife*<sup>55</sup> is a scriptural work by a Christian counselor, which puts forth what God requires of wives: not what they feel like doing or behaving, but what is divinely required. She helps women see what Scripture says then strategizes with them on how to actually get there. She introduces an emotive element in sharing her own story, of how she became what she wrote about. She addresses a wife's obligations within her own heart towards her husband, her submissive spirit towards her husband, and, sins that often plague women in marriage. The most helpful treatment was on anxiety, in which she listed several practical and attainable remedies for this destructive sin. Peace' work serves as a practical blueprint for wives as they seek to understand their role within marriage and what God requires of them.

*What Husbands Need*<sup>56</sup> is a book for wives and its intended goal is to help them make up for lost ground. Wives often realize well into their marriage that they are not bringing out the best in their man but hindering him. For those women who are frustrated and feeling hopeless in this condition, Carden offers not only hope, but also practical guidance. The author points wives to practical ways in which they can reach their man's heart and relate to his masculinity via respect, rekindled romance, affirming his chivalry, implementing forgiveness, and overcoming jealousy. The work is intensely practical and helpful to women in that it sheds light on the masculine soul, much of which is not common knowledge to most women.

*Communication, Key To Your Marriage*<sup>57</sup> addresses what the author considers to

---

<sup>55</sup> Martha Peace, *The Excellent Wife: a Biblical Perspective* (Bemidji, MN: Focus Publishing, 1999).

<sup>56</sup> Judy Carden, *What Husbands Need: Reaching His Heart and Reclaiming His Passion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2006).

be a key factor in any marriage, and, a couple's ability to achieve oneness: communication. Wright lays a needed foundation about what the institution of marriage truly is, and, expectations that many have coming into marriage. He addresses key differences in communication styles between men and women, but spends more time giving instruction on what both genders can do to consistently to improve their communication within marriage. Most helpful are his contributions regarding the art of listening and resolving conflict; listening is the oft neglected aspect of communication while the ability to resolve conflict via effective communication is most desirable in any marriage. Wright's contribution to the pursuit of oneness in marriage is a tutorial on deepening one's marriage relationship through developing the skill of effective communication.

*The Case for Marriage*<sup>58</sup> confronts commonly held beliefs in contemporary society that marriage is bad for women and that divorce is preferable for children in unhappy homes. The authors make a valuable contribution to the cultural debate on marriage; after addressing commonly held assumptions about marriage they turn to the advantages of marriage on different levels. Their greatest contribution to the discussion on marriage is to enumerate the benefits of marriage for people sexually, emotionally, financially, and socially; and, to establish that expect in rare cases, marriage provides fertile ground for developing emotionally healthy children. Their work concludes with practical directives to renew marriage in society; having given the social science implications of marriage, they demonstrate how to preserve and cherish the institution.

---

<sup>57</sup> H. Norman Wright, *Communication: Key to Your Marriage: a Practical Guide to Creating a Happy, Fulfilling Relationship* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2000).

<sup>58</sup> Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People Are Happier, Healthier and Better Off Financially* (New York: Broadway Books, 2001).



The greatest contribution of this work is the fact that it is written from a non-faith perspective; the authors do not even introduce religious arguments in their presentation, but simply allow the findings of social science to speak for itself.

*The Exemplary Husband*<sup>59</sup> presents the calling men have in loving their wives, noting that much more is found in Scripture on that subject than on how women are to submit to their husbands. Scott breaks down this manual for men in four divisions: recognitions of foundational truths, a husband's responsibilities, a husband's resolves, and a husband's regrets. The author's treatment of these subjects is stellar, and provides men with a comprehensive chart for conducting themselves in marriage. The strength of this work is that it balances recognitions and responsibilities to the resolves; there is a theological framework from which everything is derived. Though husbands have a high calling, these callings are placed against the backdrop of Biblical truth and an overall big picture of God's order in creation. The greatest contribution of this work to the study of marriage is the last section, which addresses regrets. Anger, anxiety, fear, and lust are common vices in men's lives; if left unchecked, they will shipwreck not only a man's marriage, but also his very life.

*God Attachment*<sup>60</sup> is a helpful contribution to the study and discussion of marriage, though it is not a marriage work. The authors establish the fact that people are hard wired to relate to God; people were created with a need for relational intimacy. They explore the difficulties some face in connecting with and being attached to God. How do one's earthly relationships impact this most important relationship? The value of this

---

<sup>59</sup> Stuart Scott, *The Exemplary Husband: a Biblical Perspective*, Revised ed. (Bemidji, MN: Focus Publishing (MN), 2002).

<sup>60</sup> Tim Clinton and Joshua Straub, *God Attachment: Why You Believe, Act, and Feel the Way You Do About God* (Nashville, TN: Howard Books, 2010).

work to any discussion on marriage is found in reversing their priorities as they write. The very struggles in earthly relationships often surface in marriage, such as distant or abusive parents, divorce, commandeering parents, etc. These relationships make it difficult to relate to one's Heavenly Father. Yet this is exactly where many spouses find themselves, unable to healthily relate to their husband or wife due to past relationships, and therefore also hard pressed to attach to their Creator. Yet, it is their God who can help them through their marital distress. The value of attaching to one's Heavenly Father can often be seen first and foremost in one's marriage.

*Lovingly Leveling with Live-Ins*<sup>61</sup> offers practical advice to pastors regarding those who are cohabitating prior to marriage. Not all couples fully understand the Bible's teaching on living together, and while some may know they are breaking rules, others may be genuinely taken back when told it is an unscriptural practice. Three specific actions are suggested for pastors. First, when the issue arises, confront privately. There is no need to trumpet this to those nearby. Allow this sensitive subject to be handled privately. Furthermore, minister to the needs of the couple. What has brought them to this place? Has it been financial needs, lack of Bible knowledge, or a hard heart? Whatever the need is, seek to minister to and address such a need. Finally, develop wedding policies. If the church has policies in place, it relieves the pastor of having to carry the burden of addressing this with couples. Policies should be clearly written and cover most circumstances which will arise. This is helpful knowledge for pastors as they might frequently encounter this issue when first discussing pre marriage counseling with couples, particularly if he does not know them well.

---

<sup>61</sup> Stover, Gregory. "Lovingly Leveling with Live-Ins." *Leadership: A Practical Journal For Church Leaders* 9, no. 1 (1988): 136-38.

## Scripture References

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.<sup>62</sup> This grand statement regarding creation has many theological implications, particularly in marriage. People are created in the image of God; complete with body and spirit, humans reflect the very being of the Almighty. Such cannot be said of animals or plants. Animals, plants and the earth itself were said to be “good”, but humans alone reflect the image of the Creator and hold a privileged place within creation. The intrinsic value in human life is here declared.<sup>63</sup> More specifically, as it relates to marriage, people are created in the image of God as male and female. It is upon this building block that marriage will soon be established. The debate in this day and age regarding the institution of marriage calls into question whether marriage must be between a man and a woman, or, between men and men or women and women. As will be seen through Jesus’ clarification of this verse, marriage has been established by God for a man and a woman; reasons will also be described in Genesis 2:24 to this end.

Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.”<sup>64</sup> At the very beginning of human history, God articulated the fact that He created people to live in companionship with others. People were not meant to live in isolation, but rather in community. This statement undergirds one of the primary purposes of marriage: to provide people with companionship that provides intimacy,

---

<sup>62</sup> Gen. 1:27.

<sup>63</sup> While not within the scope of this project, this does speak to the sanctity of human life and abortion.

<sup>64</sup> Gen. 1:18.

security, and friendship. It must be noted that this statement is made prior to the fall. A person's innate need for companionship is not a result of a sinful trait within them; rather, it is intrinsically wired within a human to desire close friendship and intimacy with another. In addition, God's beautiful gift to man is evident: one's wife is a helpful suitable for him. That is, she will compliment him well and take him further in life than if he were alone. This then, is the heart of marriage: God provides for loneliness through the gift of marriage. His provision includes one suitable to uniquely compliment man so that together, they are better off than if they were alone. God's intentions in marriage are good and holy; they fulfill a natural yearning in people for close companionship that precedes the fall and therefore is in itself not unrighteous.

Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.<sup>65</sup> This is the foundational verse regarding marriage. Its place in the Book of Beginnings is critical; it is the first commentary on, and explanation of, marriage in the Bible. It states clearly that a man is to leave his mother and father, reprioritizing that relationship so it is now subservient to his new relationship with his wife. Through marriage, a husband's first priority becomes tending to and leading his wife; the significance of this cannot be lost when appreciating the value of the relationship a Jewish boy has with his parents: one of honor and respect. The goal of his marriage is to become one flesh with his wife. They are not to operate as two separate entities living together, but are to align their perspective and actions so they are operating as a united couple striving for oneness in all areas of their relationship together. This passage will serve as the underpinning for this project's scope: counseling newly married couples to become one flesh, as opposed to two people living together operating

---

<sup>65</sup> Gen. 2:24.

individually.

Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.<sup>66</sup> The two previous Scriptures noted reference a pre-fall creation. God created earth and its inhabitants free of sin, yet Adam plunged creation into sin and its consequences. The importance of this cannot be overstated. All of Scripture contains the unfolding drama of redemption. That is, all with the exception of two chapters on either end of the Holy Bible. The first two chapters describe life prior to the fall, and the last two chapters (Revelation 21 & 22) describe the eternal state, free from the effects of sin. Genesis 3:7 notes the immediate consequence of Adam and Eve's sin, their self-awareness of their own nakedness (shame). The introduction of sin and its consequences into creation mark a turning point in human history: no longer is man or the earth considered "good"; rather, both are marked by heartache and death. When a pastor prepares couples for marriage, he is operating within a fallen world. He is forced to address such heartache as infidelity, human loss, financial hardship, and the like. Marriage within God's original design was set within a perfect landscape; after that first marriage, all others were born in adversity and have had to succeed through many challenges. This will continue until the return of Christ, when he makes all things new.

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.<sup>67</sup> This verse does not fit chronologically after the Genesis account, but rather thematically. The effects of sin documented in Genesis chapter three are explained in theological terms in Romans

---

<sup>66</sup> Gen. 3:7.

<sup>67</sup> Rom. 5:12.

chapter five. The devastating effects of the fall upon mankind are clearly taught, creating a reference point for the terrible challenges that many face in their marriages. The Apostle confirms the Genesis account, noting that it was through Adam that sin entered into the world. The account in the Garden was neither mythical nor figurative. There was a man, Adam, who opened the floodgates of sin and its consequences. Sin and death are intrinsically connected: one is the natural consequence of the other. Death follows sin, and without exception. Therefore, when sin entered the world through Adam, death quickly followed. The old saying is true: there are two things certain in life, death and taxes. Theologically, the latter is more certain than the former. The significance of this verse is twofold: not only does it define the consequence of sin, but also it notes the scope of death as consequence. The consequence of death is spread to all peoples everywhere, because all have sinned in Adam. Adam was not the only one to experience death; all people are genetically wired to die. The consequences of the fall are widespread and impact every person who has ever lived (except Jesus). Therefore, the pastor takes this to heart when counseling couples regarding marriage. Life is full of challenges, and marriage is no exception. Couples must be prepared to face and navigate through challenges and heartache, because no one is exempt from the effects of the fall.

For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.<sup>68</sup> To further underscore the devastating effects of the fall, the Apostle notes that sin has not only affected *people*, it has negatively affected the earth itself and all of creation. Not only are people broken, but also the world they live in is broken. Therefore the challenges of life are manifold, ranging from natural disasters to disease to human loss and grief. This Scripture is noted so the pastor can soberly render

---

<sup>68</sup> Rom. 8:22.

to the couple he is counseling the nature of the challenge ahead in marriage. The institution of marriage is good and predates the fall. However, the execution of every marriage since Adam and Eve is marked by adversity, heartache and unexpected setbacks. The pastor does well to adequately inform the couple of this struggle; not because it may not already be readily apparent to them, but because every couple needs to have a sober mindset when launching their marriage.

And this second thing you do. You cover the Lord's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. But you say, "Why does he not?" Because the Lord was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant.<sup>69</sup>

This passage, in the last oracle prior to the Lord's advent, reflects the seriousness with which God views marriage. The picture is given of the people covering the altar with tears, weeping because God is not hearing them and nor is He accepting their sacrifices. They seemed befuddled and cannot understand why He is distant. They are informed that His distance is due to their own sin; specifically, how they deal with their wives. They do not regard their relationship with their wives of any importance, as they are faithless within their marriages. Because they transgressed their marriage commitment, God withdrew His presence. See, how highly God esteems marriage! They belittled it, and He withdrew His very presence and blessings. How He describes marriage is noteworthy: covenant and companionship. A marriage is described as a covenant, not a business contract (that topic will be picked up in a subsequent passage). Being defined as a covenant underscored just how valuable it is. And the very wives the men were being unfaithful to? They were the God-given companions, the ones to cheer them and walk with them through life. The price paid for trampling underfoot their covenantal promises

---

<sup>69</sup> Mal. 2:13-14.

towards their life long companions, was to experience the lack of God's presence as He simply would not tolerate such sinful behavior.

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love... And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.<sup>70</sup> The plain meaning of this straightforward text is not difficult to grasp: all Christians are to model love in their interactions with others, as is fitting for the children of God. Christians are to consider the needs of others before their own needs, living selfless lives. The significance of this text in reference to the topic at hand is the fact that while Paul calls husbands to love their wives, he is doing no more than what he's asked husbands to do with everyone else. Husbands are called to love others whether they feel like it or not and regardless of whether they fully understand the others. They are called to put others first even if the other person disrespects them. It is no different in marriage. He may not fully understand his wife, and she may not respect him fully on a regular basis, but he is called to love her. The mystery of the execution of this command is very simply disarmed: love her and give her the same consideration he would give anyone.

Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.<sup>71</sup> Prior to instructing wives to submit to their husbands, Paul makes it clear that all Christians should have a mindset of mutual submission. When husbands and wives are mindful of this injunction, three realities become readily apparent. First, wives aren't called to anything in marriage that all Christians aren't called to on a daily basis. All Christians should develop a mindset of

---

<sup>70</sup> Eph. 4:1-2 & 5:2.

<sup>71</sup> Eph. 5:21.



humility and submission to others, so it should be natural for wives to implement this within marriage. Similarly, because all Christians are called to submission, husbands must particularly recognize this truth in their marriages. While wives are singled out to flesh out their submission to their husbands (this was commonly accepted in marriage within their culture), it ought to be a mutual submission based on this previous command given to all Christians. Third, what underpins this mindset is reverence towards Christ. Both wives and husbands are to be mindful of the glory and beauty of Jesus Christ as they obey this command. It is not merely to satisfy one's husband, but an act of worship to the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.<sup>72</sup> This passage from Paul to the Ephesian church is a critical one regarding marriage. Genesis chapter two provides the framework of God's design for marriage, Paul now speaks to specific responsibilities within the relationship, to include the theological underpinning for what he instructs. Wives are not to deviate from social norms in their relation to their husbands. They are to be submissive to them; not in a few things, but in everything. But the inspiration for their submission does not lay in the cultural mandate. There is now a much higher calling upon women: their testimony and the relationship of the church to the Lord Jesus Christ. The church has a head, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ. As such, she submits to Him in all things, for He is Lord of all. Similarly, the husband is the head of his wife. As such, she ought to show honor and submit to him. Paul will later expound on the great mystery and correlation between

---

<sup>72</sup> Eph. 5:22-24.

human marriage and the church's relation to the Lord Jesus Christ. The wife's stance before her husband is clear: a submissive spirit is mandated. More importantly, she derives this stance through seeing the relationship of the church to her head, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.<sup>73</sup>

Paul's declaration to women to submit to their wives is quickly overshadowed by his command given to husbands. Husbands are to love their wives with agape love. They are not merely to provide shelter and clothing, they are to genuinely love their wives. The bar is set high: a husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church, giving Himself up for her. What a high standard! His love must mirror Christ's love for her. The purpose of his love for her is that he might promote godliness within the home, and press her to deeper trust and devotion to Him. The illustration is taken from Christ's sacrificial love for His church: His death produced positional holiness in her. Likewise, the end result of a husband's love ought to be a deeper spiritual maturity in his bride. Lest he balk at this responsibility, he is reminded that he only loves himself by loving her. Why? Couples are now a single unit. Loving her will only make his life easier and better; falling short of this will produce thistles and heartache.

For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This

---

<sup>73</sup> Eph. 5:25-28.

mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.<sup>74</sup> The successive verses sum up Paul's words to husbands. They provide the theological underpinning for his directives. Christ loves and nourishes His people, for Christians form His body, the church. So it is natural for Him to care for and sustain his own. Similarly, when a man takes a wife for his own, he becomes one flesh with her.<sup>75</sup> The logic is clear in making the correlation, yet the apostle is speaking of a mystery. A husband's love for his wife mirrors Christ's love for His church, therefore men ought to take very seriously their role and efforts as they are declaring the mysteries of the Gospel through their behavior and attitudes within their own homes. Husbands who spurn their wives desecrate the Gospel first to members of their own household, but then also to those on the outside, as well.

However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.<sup>76</sup> This final word on marriage from Paul in this passage and summative statement is crucial, not only to his original hearers but to society today. If there is any confusion on the roles of husbands and wives, he states once more what he has just expounded upon. Let there be no confusion: wives are to submit to and honor their husbands, and men are to love their wives unconditionally as Christ loved His church. Furthermore, no qualifiers are given: wives are to submit as unto the Lord, and husbands are to love freely as Christ loved. It is unacceptable for either spouse to decline

---

<sup>74</sup> Eph. 5:29-32.

<sup>75</sup> Note the reference to Genesis. The Biblical authors saw themselves as part of a larger whole; therefore the New Testament writers frequently tethered their statements to earlier writings in the Old Testament.

<sup>76</sup> Eph. 5:33.

their God given role based on the other's disobedience within their marriage.<sup>77</sup>

Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.<sup>78</sup>

This supporting passage on marriage and family is found in the apostle's letter to the Colossians. It mirrors his words to the Ephesians regarding family life. In just a few sentences, he teaches them how family members are to relate to one another in Christian love. In keeping with his words to the Ephesians, he stresses the importance of wives submitting to their husbands, as a beautiful outflow of their love for Christ. Husbands are to love their wives with tenderness and consideration and avoid the cultural tendency to be harsh with them. It is important to see that Paul's message to husbands and wives is consistent, as evidenced by placing this passage next to his letter to the Ephesians.

Though not within the scope of this project, it is helpful to see that children are to show honor to their parents and that fathers are to love their children, much as they are to love their own wives.

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...let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands.<sup>79</sup>

Peter offers direct and practical wisdom to wives that ran counter cultural to the accepted norm. It was common for wives to be subject to their husbands, but not common for this

---

<sup>77</sup> Wisdom and reason must be balanced here. One is not called to minister to their spouse based on the other's performance, yet care must also be given in helping those in an abusive or harmful relationship.

<sup>78</sup> Col. 3:18-21.

<sup>79</sup> I Pet. 3:1-5.

posture to be developed in the heart. Though they might obey their husbands, they found their status wrapped up in expensive and excessive adornment. Rather, Peter counsels them to honor their husbands from the heart, in such a way that will directly impact them even to repentance. Their personal pursuit should be developing a gentle and quiet spirit, which God highly values and which has the potential to impact others. By so doing, wives align themselves with their godly heritage, identifying with giants of the faith such as Sarah who left a beautiful legacy for others to emulate. The key in this passage is developing the spirit, as submission is beautiful when it flows from fertile ground within the heart.

Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.<sup>80</sup> Crucial issues are raised in this complimentary passage on marriage. It was not uncommon for husbands in that era to rule with an iron fist, maintaining a distance between them and their wives (no intimacy). Against such cultural norms, Peter admonished husbands to see to understand their wives: to be well acquainted with her physical, emotional, social, sexual and spiritual needs. The posture for such involvement is recognition that wives hold an honored place in the Kingdom of God. Though they may not possess many rights and privileges in Roman society, wives are to be held in high esteem, as they are heirs in the grace of life. Again, such posture must be developed in the heart, just as a wife is to develop her honor for her husband in her heart.<sup>81</sup> The crucial consequence for a husband's obedience will be

---

<sup>80</sup> I Peter 3:7.

<sup>81</sup> Note that wives are also called to honor their husbands; honor is a two-way street within marriage.

manifested in his prayer life; if he neglects his wife, his prayers will be futile. This presents a close parallel to Malachi's statement that tears on the alter are of no value when men neglect their wives. The great Puritan writer John Bunyan captured the folly of allowing one's prayer life to be impaired due to sin:

O silly soul! What a fool sin has made of thee? What an ass art thou become to sin! That ever an immortal soul, at first made in the image of God, for God, and for his delight, should so degenerate from its first station, and so abase itself that it might serve sin, as to become the devil's ape, and to play like a Jack Pudding for him upon any stage or theatre in the world!<sup>82</sup>

Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.<sup>83</sup> It is instructive at this point to insert a passage that deals with Christians at large. While there are Scripture passages that offer specific marriage counsel, this one represents the many that speak to general Christian relationships. Brotherly love, tender heart, and humility of mind should dictate how believers in Christ relate with each other on a regular basis. What a beautiful way to punctuate friendships! These very norms ought to be heightened within marriage. When giving marriage instruction to couples pastors ought to incorporate the larger body of texts within the New Testament that govern Christian relationships. All these commands – and more – should reign in one's marriage, and in a heightened sense.

### **Surveys Utilized**

To help inform the direction and conclusions of this thesis project, this author

---

<sup>82</sup> John Bunyan, *Prayer* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1989), 168. A Jack Pudding is a buffoon.

<sup>83</sup> I Pet. 3:8-9.

presented the process by which couples would be counseled prior to their wedding. From the collection of personal data to the Scripture principles to the exhortations given couples, this author presented the essence of this project to a total of sixty people. Of this group, 52 participants were currently married, and 8 were not. Prior to the presentation, a pre-presentation survey was given. After the presentation, a post-presentation survey was given. The primary goal was to see how people perceived the concept of oneness in marriage prior to hearing the material in this project, and, if that perception changed once being exposed to it. In addition, having been exposed to this material, this author sought to measure people's perception of the importance of thorough marital counseling prior to marriage. Below is the text of the two surveys used; both were authored solely by this author, and were distributed and collected in printed form.

**Pre-Presentation survey**

**Thesis Project for Colin Seager**

**Marital Status:**

- Pre-married (are not & have not been married)**
- Married only once (how long? \_\_\_\_\_)**
- Married twice (how long? \_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_)**
- Married three or more times (how long? \_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_)**
  
- Male**    **Female**
  
- < 25 years**    **25-34 years**    **35-44 years**    **45-54 years**    **55+ years**

1) How do the following potential fears/stressors factor into your marriage (or your thoughts of marriage)?

- Relationship with in-laws
- Finances
- Communication
- Praying together
- Parenting

2) What is your biggest challenge/obstacle in praying together with your spouse (or what would you imagine it to be)?

3) Generally speaking and within reason, I believe a wife should submit to her husband  
Y/N

4) What responsibility does a husband have to his wife in marriage?

5) From your perspective, what does it mean for a couple to become "one flesh"?

Figure 2. Pre-Presentation Survey.



**Post-Presentation Survey**  
**Colin Seager**

**Marital Status:**

Pre-married (are not & have not been married)

Married only once (how long? \_\_\_\_\_)

Married twice (how long? \_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_)

Married three or more times (how long? \_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_)

Male  Female

< 25 years  25-34 years  35-44 years  45-54 years  55+ years

1) Please rank your perceived preparedness for marriage (if you are pre-married, at the present and if you have been married, at the time of your first marriage).

1 (least)      2      3      4      5 (most)

2) Have the materials/concepts within this presentation motivated you to prioritize praying with your spouse? Y/N

3) Having participated in this presentation, how would you describe Paul's picture of a wife's submission to her husband? And what do you believe is a husband's greatest responsibility to his wife?

4) How important do you feel comparable pre-marriage counseling/instruction is for developing healthy marriages?

1 (not very)    2      3      4      5 (very)

5) If you were to paint a picture regarding the concept of "one flesh" within marriage, how would you describe it?

Figure 3. Post-Presentation Survey.

## Chapter Two

### ASSESSMENT AND COLLECTION OF DATA

Pastors or counselors do not always have a set amount of time to prepare a couple for marriage. It is helpful for pastors have six sessions to work with a couple, particularly if they do not know them well; this gives time to evaluate their walk with the Lord, compatibility, and preparedness for marriage. This ministry tool is best implemented within a six week to six-month window of time; any less, and the preparation is hurried and much more, the instruction becomes too drawn out.

Most premarital counseling will take place in a setting where the counselor already knows at least one of the engaged individuals. At times, particularly for special situations, this is not the case. Before agreeing to officiate a wedding, the pastor should first confirm the salvation of both parties. A pastor should not join a believer to an unbeliever, as the Scriptures forbid this: “Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?”<sup>1</sup> If this information is not confirmed prior to the first meeting, it should be the first order of business when meeting for the first time. Furthermore, it is incumbent upon the pastor to confirm the marital status of both parties from the start. This author has been surprised on more than one occasion to find that one of the parties had already been divorced; this was not disclosed, nor did it come up in conversation until it was asked.

The recommended first step in pre-marital counseling is a survey to assess the compatibility of the couple and the individuals’ spiritual and emotional health. This step is not necessarily to determine whether or not the couple should get married, but to

---

<sup>1</sup> II Cor. 6:14.

ascertain the chemistry between the two. There are several factors to take into consideration: what influences or experiences in one's life have shaped how they think or respond in certain situations, how divergent are couples when approaching marriage related issues, and, how can the counselor best counsel a couple towards absolute oneness in marriage?

There are two surveys, which are highly effective to these two ends. The first is the Emotional/Spiritual Health Inventory.<sup>2</sup> The author of this inventory, Pete Scazzero, is himself a pastor who burnt out and almost lost his marriage in the process. He notes that as church leadership goes, so goes the church. Some of the very issues he was dealing with in his own life, and failing miserably, he found others were dealing with these challenges, as well. Some of the regular church programs and ministries simply were not touching the deep-rooted spiritual and emotional needs of his flock. This survey is an excellent indicator of one's spiritual and emotional health, on a very personal level, apart from issues pertaining to marriage. This inventory is a very helpful tool for the pastor to ascertain the spiritual maturity of the two getting married, and, areas where growth is needed. Before one can successfully develop oneness with his or her spouse, it is very helpful to have a pulse on one's own spiritual condition. This survey will take the participant thirty minutes to complete, and is easily scored by the counselor or their assistant. The results of this survey may very well indicate that a wedding day is best moved back due to needing to focus on personal issues; however, in most cases, the results will yield helpful data moving forward for the pastor to prepare the couple for

---

<sup>2</sup> Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church: a Strategy for Discipleship That Actually Changes Lives*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 74.

marriage. This author was first introduced to this survey through a seminary course at Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary on the subject of discipleship.

The second survey is geared towards the marriage relationship itself. There are many options available for premarital marriage inventories. The benefits of these inventories is the simple fact that they both educate the couple of challenges ahead, and, prepare the pastor to adequately and effectively speak to necessary issues. From the couples' perspective, premarital inventories help them to think about issues they might not have been prepared to venture in to. Often couples are not entirely thinking through their finances, parenting, personality traits, and such. The answers given are not necessarily right or wrong, but give a real time read on where each individual is on a particular issue. From the pastor's perspective, once he can see where divergence is most pronounced for specific matters, he can then skillfully and adequately offer counsel on how to come to agreement. For example, if one is a spender and one is a saver, he can infuse wisdom to the two so they have a workable plan moving forward. While it may not be necessary to offer in depth parenting counsel before marriage, the couple can be prepared to think through when they want children, how many, and the like. Helping couples see trouble spots before they are married and have to face them enables them to have a plan and minimize needless conflict or heartache.

### An Inventory of Spiritual/Emotional Health

It is most helpful to the pastor to first ascertain the spiritual and emotional health of each individual before engaging the couple on marriage issues. If a man is not walking with the Lord, how can he lead his home in righteousness? How can he assist in the

sanctification of his wife, let alone his children? If a woman is not walking with Christ, how can she rejoice in following her husband's lead? Developing marriage themes such as leadership, submission, and compatibility are futile if both parties are not walking with Christ and filled with the Spirit. The pastor is not to just see if the individuals want to serve Christ, but discern what might be holding them back from walking in the freedom of the Spirit. Are there family-of-origin issues that need to be addressed and better understood? Are there poor thought patterns that sabotage reliance on Christ? Are there past trauma or abuse that will prevent them from developing oneness of flesh? These are basic issues that the pastor would do well to explore with the couple, before he engages them on marriage themes.

An inventory that well prepares a pastor with this information is the Inventory of Spiritual/Emotional Maturity, as found in *The Emotionally Healthy Church*. During this author's studies at Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, this work was by far the most helpful and impactful. Through recognizing his own personal failures as a pastor, the author concluded that it is not possible for a Christian to be spiritually mature while remaining emotionally immature.<sup>3</sup> He advocates for a paradigm shift in Christian discipleship, and doesn't take that term lightly. He likens it to the scientific discovery that the world was indeed a sphere and not flat; all scientific thinking on this subject was turned on its head. His specific concern is the thinking within the church that states that Christians should merely repress or ignore their emotions. Such intense focus on spiritual

---

<sup>3</sup> Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church, Expanded Edition: a Strategy for Discipleship That Actually Changes Lives*, Exp. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 61.

matters often leaves Christians ignoring their emotional, physical, social, and intellectual components.<sup>4</sup>

In his work, Scazzero advocates for a holistic approach to discipleship. After all, Christian love in this life is not flawlessly perfect, but rather developed and mature, set fixedly upon God.<sup>5</sup> He commends integrating in particular one's emotional health into an overall personal discipleship diagnostic. He lists a number of compelling reasons for this, many of which will resonate with pastors today:

You can be a dynamic, gifted speaker for God in public and be an unloving spouse and parent at home.

You can function as a church board member or pastor and be unteachable, insecure, and defensive.

You can memorize entire books of the New Testament and still be unaware of your depression and anger, even displacing it on other people.

You can lead hundreds of people in a Christian ministry while driven by a deep personal need to compensate for a nagging sense of failure.<sup>6</sup>

He exposes the failures and hypocrisy that were present in his own life, and helps other see the same in their own lives. He asserts that Christians today allow for a broken paradigm of spiritual maturity that does not allow for emotional health, a reality that ought to feature prominently in one living in the newness of life. Past luminaries such as the great Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon have addressed this very matter.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, 54.

<sup>5</sup> John R.W. Stott, *The Letters of John: an Introduction and Commentary*, 2nd ed. (Leicester, England: Send the Light, 1988), 171.

<sup>6</sup> Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, 61.

<sup>7</sup> Tom Carter, *Spurgeon at His Best* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 137-138.

In his spiritual maturity inventory, Scazzero incorporates emotional health and tethers it to spiritual maturity. Attention to matters discussed will benefit greatly the individuals receiving counsel. The purpose of utilizing this inventory towards the beginning of the counseling is based on the simple concept that before one can understand and build a healthy marriage, one benefits greatly by performing healthy introspection, being then freed to pursue God's best in marriage. There are seven principles of emotional health which the author incorporates into the inventory: look beneath the surface, break the power of the past, live in brokenness and vulnerability, receive the gift of limits, embrace grieving and loss, make incarnation one's model for loving well, and slow down to lead with integrity. Understanding the significance of each is critical for the pastor to effectively administrate this inventory and use it to the couple's benefit.

In *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, Scazzero likens humans to icebergs. A small percentage of the iceberg is visible above the surface, but much more lurks under the water and unseen by the naked eye. Christians often focus on the upper level above the surface, which is exactly what the Pharisees made a living off of. So long as one can hold a respectable appearance on the outside, all is well. People can spend years fooling others, only to have life implode on them at some point in their lives. The author notes, "For the first fifteen years of my life as a Christian, I rarely took time to look deeply into (as the psalmist alternately calls is) my interior, my heart, my depths, or my soul."<sup>8</sup> He notes that pain is a powerful stimulus to choose to go beneath the surface and explore issues at hand. Indeed, it is often pain that inspires a drive for change. To assist in this

---

<sup>8</sup> Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, 73.

process, four themes are noted. First, one must develop an awareness of what one is feeling and doing. Scripture portrays Jesus as disturbed in spirit, weeping at the loss of his friend, angry with his disciples, furious at crass commercialism in the temple, astonished, longing to be with His disciples, and compassionate towards widows, lepers, and blind men.<sup>9</sup> Following Jesus' example, Christians need not run from nor ignore their emotions. In processing emotions, one must ask the "Why?" or "What's going on?" questions. Jesus did this when conversing with the woman at the well in John 4. It takes courage to ask questions that takes one beneath the surface, potentially facing deeper and more overarching problems. It can also be daunting and overwhelming for pastors as they tend to people asking such questions.<sup>10</sup> The following are suggested questions, in various circumstances, which give an example of what to ask. Why am I always in a hurry? Why am I so impatient? Why am I so anxious? Why am I overly concerned that others tell me I'm okay as a leader or teacher? Why am I so devastated that Malita told me after church on Sunday that she didn't get anything out of my sermon? Why do I dread this meeting today at 2 PM? Why am I so flooded with fear? Why am I over-concerned that I succeed in my ministry? Why do I avoid confronting difficult people at my church? Why do I have a need to immediately return all phone calls and emails? Or why do I avoid returning certain phone calls, emails or text messages?<sup>11</sup> Once Christians ascertain the depth of their emotional pain and hurt, it is crucial to then link the Gospel with emotional health. The Gospel is the answer to everything, but it must be properly linked to one's

---

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 78. Correlating Scripture references are John 11:33, John 11:33-36, Mark 10:14, John 2:13-17, Matthew 8:10, Luke 22:15, Matthew 20:34, Mark 1:41, and Luke 7:13.

<sup>10</sup> Gary R. Collins, *Christian Counseling: a Comprehensive Guide*, 3rd ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 15.

<sup>11</sup> Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, 82.



current condition. A very freeing step is to get rid of the glittering image. That image, which is so desperately longed for, must die. The fake “me” that leads others to believe non-truths about people must be cast aside. In its place, pursuit of authenticity is paramount to emotional and spiritual health.

Breaking free from the past is the natural progression at this point. This author once counseled a husband whose marriage was in distress. His wife had experienced much emotional and relational abuse during her childhood. Not surprisingly, the effects of her childhood experiences negatively impacted their marriage. He never pursued counseling because he believed the power of the Gospel alone was sufficient to heal her. While the trust in the Word of God is admirable, this disconnect between her emotional health and the Gospel contributed to both of them spiraling into emotional, spiritual and relational decline. He was unaware that her childhood experiences would so directly impact her relationship with both her Heavenly Father and husband. It was only after many years that he perceived the direct correlation between her past and her present behavior. What was the issue? He held a view that specific Biblical counseling was unnecessary and that all they needed was Christ living in them as new believers; he did not connect her spiritual health with her emotional health. As a result, their marriage suffered loss.

Scazzero notes the repetition of sin patterns in King David’s life. An examination of his family tree yields three sins repeated often: a degeneration of devotion towards God, sexual sin, and family division/sibling rivalry. Though David loved God, he allowed his love to run cold and his emotions became disconnected from his spiritual life.

Scazzero offers attainable steps in freeing oneself from the past. To begin with, identify how one's family has shaped them. There are many specific questions that will help uncover the influences of one's past. The pastor can have couples describe each family member with two or three adjectives, and even to describe their parents' and grandparents' marriages. How well did one's family do in talking about feelings, and what was considered success in one's family? Were there traumatic losses in the past or present, such as sudden death, prolonged illnesses, stillbirths/miscarriages, bankruptcy, or divorce?<sup>12</sup> Questions such as these will often be painful to answer; yet the process of identifying the primary impactful events/contributors in one's life yields helpful perspective.<sup>13</sup> Answers will give way to helpful ministry by exploring three specific questions: What one or two patterns might emerge of how one's family has impacted who one is today? In what area(s) might one shape one's life and marriage according to their past rather than Christ's family? What "hard work discipleship" might one have before them?<sup>14</sup>

The second step is to discern major influences in one's life. Specifically, identify a few events or people that have impacted who one is today and that will help one understand what makes one tick.<sup>15</sup> The third step is becoming reparented through the church. The Gospel is unleashed through the people of the church; it is a process, but it takes place through the encouragement, support, prayers, and service of others. In

---

<sup>12</sup> Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, 93.

<sup>13</sup> Tim Clinton and Joshua Straub, *God Attachment: Why You Believe, Act, and Feel the Way You Do About God* (Nashville, TN: Howard Books, 2010), 60-61.

<sup>14</sup> Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, 95.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

addition to life events, it is helpful to understand how one's attachment style governed particular responses. Straub lists four general attachment styles: secure, anxious, avoidant, and fearful.<sup>16</sup>

The third principle is to live in vulnerability and brokenness. This is where one most clearly sees the love of Christ.<sup>17</sup> This mindset enables people to effectively meet and ride out many storms in life. One's natural instinct in difficult life challenges is to flee, fight or hide. The characteristics of broken and humble people versus proud and defensive people are easily highlighted. One is transparent and weak, disclosing oneself to others when appropriate, whereas the other is guarded and protective of imperfections and flaws. A broken and humble person is approachable and open to input, the other is highly offend able and defensive. One delights in showing vulnerability and weakness, that Christ's power may be seen, while others keep people from really seeing what is going on inside of them. Often in his pastoral ministry, this author walks with those facing unwanted and unsolicited physical or relational pain. He often observes that some are present with people in their pain, and are comfortable with mystery and with saying, "I don't know." Others give answers and explanations to those in pain, hoping to fix or change them. These and other indicators help reveal those who are broken and those who are proud and defensive.<sup>18</sup> Christians ought to accept their given thorn in the flesh, recognizing that God gives limitations so that His grace may be perfected in weakness. Scazzero traces Paul's personal development, showing that his rough sides are smoothed

---

<sup>16</sup> Tim Clinton and Joshua Straub, *God Attachment: Why You Believe, Act, and Feel the Way You Do About God* (Nashville, TN: Howard Books, 2010), 69.

<sup>17</sup> F. F Bruce, *The Gospel and Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub. Co, 1983), 112.

<sup>18</sup> Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, 118-119.

out over time and through growth in Christ. Transitioning to accepting and rejoicing in weaknesses corresponds with the many weaknesses highlighted in God's servants. This author finds that many are greatly encouraged when they realize biblical characters struggled greatly in life, as well as faced innumerable challenges. An entire passage is devoted to Moses' back and forth with God, as he argued he was not the one to be His mouthpiece to Pharaoh (he stuttered).<sup>19</sup> As the Gospel was beginning to spread, John Mark deserted Paul and Timothy had ulcers. Hosea endured the heartache of having a wife who was a prostitute and Naomi was a widow. The Old Testament prophets were clearly imperfect people. Amos' farming was his training for ministry, Jeremiah was depressed and suicidal, Elijah was burned out, Jacob was a liar, Jonah ran from God's will, Noah got drunk, and the author of most of the book of Psalms had an affair, murdered a man (as did Moses), and abused power. Gideon and Thomas both doubted, and Martha was a worrywart. Abraham was too old, and David was too young. Peter was afraid of death, and Lazarus was dead.<sup>20</sup> It is helpful for couples to realize that God helped and supported those in the Bible as they worshiped and served Him. It is important to be able to embrace the prodigal son, as he is the one who most reflects people in general. Few actually perform as the older son, most, along the way, make mistakes that are later regretted but experience God's grace in unforgettable ways.

A crucial step in developing emotional health is to receive the gift of limits. Jesus Himself embraced human limits, joyfully embracing the limits given him by His father; many Christians spend much of their lives trying to be someone they are not. In discerning one's personal limits, a number of factors should be taken into consideration:

---

<sup>19</sup> Ex. 3-4.

<sup>20</sup> Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, 124.

personality, season of life, life situation, emotional, physical and intellectual capacities, one's difficult emotions, and scars and wounds from one's family past. Emotional maturity enables one to look at such factors and determine where proper limits are, which guards one from striving to be someone they are not. A proper perspective will flow first from a basic understanding of one's position in Christ.<sup>21</sup> How does one know if they have wandered from their own God-given limits? Warning signals to watch for include anxiousness, feeling rushed or hurried, and having one's body in knots. Watching the schedule carefully to ensure not attempting to do too many things, which can result in one's mind continually racing or even driving too fast. One of the saddest results of exceeding limits is the inability to be fully present with people, particularly when they need help. Irritability with simple tasks often leads to skimming over time with God.<sup>22</sup> Much personal growth takes place when one is comfortable in the limitations God has given them, recognizing limitations as a sign of strength and not weakness. After all, Sarah was ninety and Abraham as good as dead when God made them a great nation. Moses had a speech impediment and was called to confront the most powerful person in the world. When one embraces their limitations and humbly has the Lord working through them, one's weakness is exchanged for strength.

Although profound loss is woven into the tapestry of human existence, people are often overwhelmed by and unprepared to face grief or mourning. Yet one's soul grows through mourning, and grief produces maturity in a person. When faced with great loss, it is tempting to view the grieving time as an interruption to life. It is not; rather, it is the

---

<sup>21</sup> John, R.W. McNeill, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion, Volume I* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 754-755.

<sup>22</sup> Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, 129.

pathway for God to deepen and develop a person to greater dependence on Him and awareness of suffering in others. People grieve any number of losses in life: a loved one, a job, a relationship, a church family, and so on. A component of grief is forgiveness; while tempting to speed through the process, forgiveness should never be rushed but done thoroughly and through the power of the Spirit. How can one grow through grief, and reap the benefits of processing great loss in an emotionally healthy manner? First, one must pay attention to what is being felt and experienced: pay attention to pain, to Jesus' grieving process, and to deaths of loved ones. One must under no circumstances shove these under the rug. An integral aspect of processing grief is waiting in the confusing in-between stage. Scripturally, the Psalms can be divided into three types: orientation, disorientation, and reorientation.<sup>23</sup> Often, when people can't see it directly, the Lord is working and creating something new and better during the transition. Emotional maturity is gained through prayerful patience during this time, though it is the valley of shadows.<sup>24</sup> The end result is seeing the Lord birth new life through the pain of grief and mourning. Some examples of the fruit of this season include:

- Greater capacity to wait on God and surrender to His will.
- People become kinder and more compassionate.
- One becomes less covetous and idolatrous.
- One becomes more comfortable with mystery.
- Humility and brokenness characterize.
- Fewer fears and willingness to take risk.
- Liberation from having to impress others.
- Greater sensitivity for the poor, the widow and the orphan.
- Greater sensitivity of heaven.
- One becomes more at home with themselves and God.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, 172.

<sup>24</sup> Dr. Tim Clinton and Dr. John Trent, *Quick-Reference Guide to Marriage and Family Counseling, The* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009), 175.

<sup>25</sup> Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, 183.

The final two components of emotional health that is supported by the Gospel, is to love through incarnation and slow down and lead well.<sup>26</sup> Entering people's lives requires the ability to grieve with them in their pain and to look beneath the surface of their lives. A key to this is to focus on listening versus speaking, and being more concerned with what the other is experiencing than looking for openings to talk or react to hot button issues. What is true in the church ought to be supremely true in marriage: one must set a course to love their spouse well, and this cannot be done without entering their world, seeking to understand them, engaging them in areas of pain. Both husbands and wives need to slow down and develop within themselves both spiritual and emotional maturity, for this is what will sustain and strengthen them as they build their marriage and raise their children. Integrity is neither born overnight nor birthed from indifference; one must pursue it and develop it through patient attentiveness on a regular basis. The fruit of such cannot be overstated, as it will impact all areas of one's marriage.

Most people will complete the inventory within twenty minutes. This is helpful, as it is not intimidating during what for most is a very busy time. There is a total of forty questions, each placed within a specific category of emotional health. Options for each answer are not very true, sometimes true, mostly true, or very true. Couples should complete the inventory individually and route to the pastor when upon completion.

Scoring the inventory is quick and easy for the pastor, and is not a subjective process. He needs to gain the total for each of the eight categories and insert numbers in the blanks on the scoring chart. Results may vary between categories. There are four levels represented: emotional adult (denoting the highest level of emotional maturity),

---

<sup>26</sup> These two points are aimed more to church leaders than people at large, but still have broad application to personal life and marriage in particular.

emotional adolescent, emotional child, and emotional infant. An emotional adult reflects the fact that one respects and loves others without having to change them or become judgmental. And emotional adolescent's Christian life consists more of doing versus simply being with God; though serving in church, actually delighting in Christ is elusive. An emotional child is content but only when life is going their way, and prayer is a duty and not a delight. An emotional infant looks to others to take care of them emotionally and spiritually; though they may experience God while with other Christians, they rarely experience Him when alone. The inventory is found in *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, and permission is granted to the purchaser to make copies of the inventory provided it is not altered or sold for profit, and, specific credit is included.<sup>27</sup>

The couple should be instructed to complete this survey and route it to the pastor prior to the first meeting, with enough time for him to score it and integrate the results into the discussion that first meeting. The first meeting, depending on how well the pastor knows the couple, may consist of general background information gathering (including personal testimonies) and discussion of this inventory results. If the pastor deems necessary, he may elect to spend two sessions on the topic of emotional health if he sees the need for growth in this area and direction.

#### Facilitating Open, Caring Communication, Understanding And Study Pre-Marriage Inventory

The recommended premarital inventory is the Facilitating Open, Caring Communication, Understanding and Study pre-marriage inventory.<sup>28</sup> It is entirely online,

---

<sup>27</sup> More information and further resources may be found at [www.emotionallyhealthy.org](http://www.emotionallyhealthy.org).

<sup>28</sup> Referenced from here by its professional acronym FOCCUS, a pre-marriage inventory.



and therefore should be completed prior to the first meeting, so the pastor can go over the results with the couple. This author has found that he can adequately lead couples through a discussion of the results in one to two ninety-minute sessions. The length of time will depend on the amount of divergence between the two and on how many topics. Most often, couples will speak freely on the findings and the conversation is almost always both engaging and stimulating. Usual responses include, “we thought of this issue, but not from this angle,” or, “we thought of this matter but not as deeply as we were forced to do so here.” The inventory begins by capturing some basic information on both individuals, and then has a battery of questions, which give options of Agree, Disagree or Undecided. There are five categories of questions: Match (lifestyle expectations, friends and interests, personality match, personal issues), Skills (communication and problem solving), Bonders (religion, spirituality & values, parenting issues, extended family issues, sexuality issues and financial issues), Integrators (readiness issues and covenant/commitment), and Summary Categories (family of origin and career choices/path). The tests are automatically scored for the counselor, and come with a handy report page which gives cumulative results in a summary format for easy reference; this option enables the counselor to highlight areas in which the couple needs more help. The inventory itself is a very reasonable price, and given its ease of implementation (online), it is a very helpful tool for preparing couples for marriage.

FOCCUS<sup>29</sup> gives several guidelines for administering the inventory. A trained FOCCUS facilitator, in conjunction with a FOCCUS Facilitator Manual, must administer it. Because of copyright restrictions, the report should not be given to the

---

<sup>29</sup> FOCCUS is the designated acronym for Facilitating Open, Caring Communication, Understanding, and Study Pre-Marriage Inventory.

couple to keep (but may be referenced during discussion). Clearly understanding its purpose and scope will prevent it from being misunderstood or misapplied. Basic demographic data is given in the report (including education completed and annual income), so the pastor should be diligent to protect the personal information.

The inventory must not be presented as a test, which the couple can pass or fail. It is specifically stated that, “This report and the facilitation process are intended to help couples affirm their strengths and discuss issues that could be problems for them or that need more communication between them.”<sup>30</sup> To this end, the pastor ensures the couple understand that it is a helpful aid to assist the pastor in developing conversation regarding particular issues which will come up in the their marriage. Couples should be put to ease if they are understandably concerned about their score or the mountains of work ahead in their relationship. Couples are far better off to discuss issues such as family planning or financial goals prior to marriage versus when they encounter them in marriage.

Helpful summaries are generated at the beginning of the report for the pastor to use as a guideline. This helps him see the big picture and choose where to focus his attention. The “Couple Agreement by Area” summary presents bar graphs, which show the percentage of items in each category in which the couples agreed with each other. Alongside, the preferred response is given.

Particularly helpful is the analysis given on areas of special or higher risk. The percentage of a couples’ agreement is given on crucial matters that might affect even their compatibility to get married. This portion is called “Special Sections.”

---

<sup>30</sup> Archdiocese of Omaha. *Facilitating Open, Caring Communication, Understanding and Study: An Inventory for Marriage Enrichment*, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed. Omaha, NE: Belman Publishing, 2014, 2.

In the broad overview, the most helpful section is entitled, “Overview of Individuals’ Response Patterns”. This portion analyzes data from all sections and summarizes it for the pastor. It presents three areas of summation: 1) percentage of times the couple agreed in their response 2) percentage of individual responses which correspond with inventory preferred responses 3) percentage of items individuals marked “uncertain”.<sup>31</sup> The value of this section cannot be understated, and should be studied by the pastor prior to the sessions. It yields valuable information even for couples the pastor knows well, but is invaluable for couples he may not personally know as well.

The lengthiest portion of the inventory report consists of the answer detail. Answers to each question are given, in a form that will help the facilitator prioritize and drill deeper where needed. The couples’ responses are placed side by side throughout, along with the preferred inventory response. This allows the pastor to not only see where couples agree or diverge with each other, but also where more attention might be needed based on the couple’s grasp of biblical or life issues. Another helpful tool for the pastor is the delineation of “Key Problem Indicators”. Marked with an asterisk, these critical issues are highlighted so the pastor can hone in on issues that will have greater impact in the marriage, regardless of their responses to the particular question.

Given the background of these details, how should pastors best utilize this inventory tool? First, ensure that the individuals do not collaborate on the answers. Let them know clearly that this is not a test in the traditional sense of the word; there are no right or wrong answers. Tell the couple to answer questions honestly and to not overthink their responses. When discussing results, pastors should spend more time on critical

---

<sup>31</sup> As with any formal test taking, sometimes individuals just don’t know and choose to remain undecided. Or, they are simply unfamiliar with this territory when they took the inventory.

issues, particularly when there is a divergence between individuals or the preferred inventory response. Using the responses, as a springboard for further and deeper discussion will very valuable to the couple. The pastor should look for trends throughout the inventory, so he can give general guidance in important areas.

It is often tempting for couples to be very self-conscious of their responses. What will others think (although, nobody else should see the results)? Is one's relationship good enough? Do they measure up? Will the marriage survive? What will the pastor think? This can lead to individuals fudging answers or discussing while taking the inventory. If the stated goal of the inventory is to help the pastor better know the couple and know how to navigate them through issues in preparation for marriage, than it follows that these actions will cloud results and prevent the pastor from using the inventory for their good. Clearly explaining this to the couple and reassuring them will help prevent this from happening and the pastor receiving skewed data.

Another temptation for couples is to overanalyze the questions. The inventory is well written, but some people have a tendency to overthink their responses. Frustration will set in as they spend too much time completing the inventory and the primary purpose of the individual questions gets skewed. It is helpful to advise couples to work through the inventory at a moderate pace and answer each question according to the first thought that crosses their mind.

Pastors should use the inventory as an unbiased way to familiarize themselves with the couple's thinking patterns. If he knows them well, he might belittle the importance of the test; it might be that both couples grew up in his congregation. That is dangerous thinking, particularly in today's society. There has been a seismic shift in

personal and societal values and norms. What was unimaginable generations ago is openly accepted now. Just because individuals were taught to live a certain way does not ensure that is actually how they navigate through life. Even when the pastor knows couples well, he should carefully analyze the data to not only determine salient points of interest but trends that might warrant further discussion as he shepherds the couple.

Pastors inevitably have the task of shepherding couples in which they don't know one of the individuals well, or, even both of them. This inventory provides him a very helpful tool, enabling him to get into the minds of those he's counseling. Certainly nothing replaces the importance or value of personal relationship, but when the pastor simply cannot enjoy the fruit of long term personal relationship with the couple he's leading, this inventory will enable him to lead them as efficiently as possible. He can use the inventory results to spot trends and weak points in the couple's relationship, as well as prioritize areas to focus on.

From time to time pastors are asked to officiate weddings where there are questions about the legitimacy of the relationship or concerns exist regarding one or both individuals. Parents of one of the individuals may express concerns about the values, past history, or spiritual vitality of their child's potential mate. Particularly when the pastor does not know the couple well, he should use the results to engage the concerned family members, where appropriate. Never divulging specific personal information, he can nevertheless paint an accurate picture of the couple that very well may reassure those concerned.

It must be noted that the FOCCUS inventory yields valuable data for the pastor, which can be viewed both as positive and negative in the counseling relationship. When

negative trends emerge, the pastor is duty bound to address and correct negative or faulty thinking. However, it must not be overlooked that the pastor should also take every opportunity to praise and affirm couples. Most anyone embarking on a new adventure needs affirmation and encouragement. Knowing there are areas of strength often motivates people to tackle areas of weakness. A well-placed word can solidify people's convictions or hard work, yielding invaluable fruit in the counseling process.

The goal of the first one or two sessions, then, is to give the pastor plenty of background information about the couple, while identifying key areas for attention during the preparation process. Naturally, if the pastor does not know one or both of the individuals, he is also getting to know their story as they relate. As the pastor will later cast a vision for marriage, he will take into consideration the issues that have arisen from these two inventories. He may or may not address the particular issues at this time. These two inventories should be completed prior to the first meeting, leaving enough time for both to be scored and analyzed by the pastor.

## **Chapter Three**

### **VISION CASTING**

With background information gathered, the pastor is now set to cast a vision of a godly and emotionally healthy marriage. This and the information already gathered are not mutually exclusive; rather, the former informs the latter. Achieving the vision is as important as casting the vision, and that cannot be done without analyzing the former.

#### **Personal Vision Casting**

This session should be divided up into three sections. The first section is having the couple collaborate on what their vision for their marriage. What are their goals and expectations? What do they primarily value? What challenges will they have to overcome? How will they gauge their success along the way? This is something to be done at first individually, and then together. They are synthesizing their own individual ideas to comprise their joint vision statement. This thought is being given spontaneously, although no doubt they have given great thought to this. The pastor leaves the room during this time and allows them fifteen minutes to come up with their ideas, at which point the three discuss their vision. Ideas will vary from couple to couple regarding their vision for marriage. At this point the pastor is not concerned with addressing every detail of their vision. Rather, he keeps in mind their ideas and incorporates feedback into their discussions on marriage as he instructs them from the Word of God, helping them see where they are thinking Biblically and where their vision needs to be remolding according to God's truth.

This exercise launches into a vision casting session with a solid foundation already laid, although that varies from couple to couple. The pastor then takes the opportunity to inform the couple on spiritual, emotional, and physical oneness in their upcoming marriage. Key passages are Genesis 2:24 and Ephesians 5:21-33. Instruction is given on the husband positively leaving his own parents to establish his own family; leading his wife and helping her sanctification by being the spiritual leader in the home. Having as the supreme goal to become one flesh and unified socially, spiritually and physically. When the pastor has sufficiently cast this vision, the three close out with a ten-minute exercise, which requires their participation. The pastor draws a circle and in it stands the couple, about to get married. They rehearse for a moment their dreams and vision for their lives together. Then, the pastor writes temptation outside the circle. He invites the couple to list other challenges, which will come against their union. At first, ideas might come slowly. Then, they usually flow quickly: financial pressures, job security, grief, and so forth. So this session provides a powerful lesson for the new couple: their own vision for their marriage enlarged upon by the Bible's view, followed by a potent reminder of all the ways a marriage can falter and lose strength. Before this takes place, however, the pastor takes time to exhort the couple to take seriously their own personal walk with Christ (and how to grow it) as well as developing a healthy view of the marriage commitment.

### **Nurturing One's Personal Walk with Christ**

There is much to talk about regarding marriage, as the pastor begins to cast a Biblical vision for the couple. However the genesis of any marriage counseling should



begin first with counsel to the two as individuals. Their own walk with Jesus Christ will be the foundation of their marriage. If either is not walking with Him closely in obedience, all the marriage counsel in the world will be of little help. At this point the pastor takes the time to speak to general and personal discipleship issues, striving to have the couple see how crucial it is to work out their salvation with fear and trembling, now more than ever. The first requirement for a healthy Christian marriage is for both husband and wife to value the effort required to nurture their own relationship with their Lord. To this end, the pastor will take them to a defining passage that underscores the importance – and the blessing – of a purposeful strengthening of one’s relationship with the Lord.

Psalm 1 is a passage that has ministered a great deal to this author. When this author was young, his grandfather pulled him aside and challenged him to memorize this Psalm. This was the first passage every committed to memory by this author and remains to this day a powerful influence in his life. This passage speaks clearly to the necessity of cultivating one’s walk with the Lord, placing primacy on His Word. A clear distinction is made between those who choose this path and those who disregard its importance. Its instruction is implementable and its message highly practical.

David says this in the very first Psalm:

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,  
nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scoffers;  
but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and  
night. He is like a tree planted by the streams of water that yields its fruit in its  
season. And its leaf does not wither. In all he does, he prospers.  
The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.  
Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,  
Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;  
For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will  
perish.

Of note is how the man of God relates with the Word of God. It is not a casual pursuit, but one which is intentional and given much time. Specifics on this will be touched upon when discussing the priority of the Word in a couple's life together.

### **Operating As One Flesh**

In seeking to grow as a pastor counselor, this author encountered an abundance of books and seminars that addressed surface level issues within marriage. A plethora of works dealing with conflict resolution and finding happiness fill the bookstores and draw the crowds. Many of these works can be extremely helpful to couples who need to fine-tune their relationship or who need help in a particular area. Yet the majority of couples are not being served well as they are tending to symptoms rather than root cause. When a child's cut gets infected, it is prudent to address the symptoms of pain or inhibited mobility to comfort the little one. But what is causing the discomfort? What is behind it all? The infection of the injury must be directly addressed through thorough cleansing and antibiotics. Once infection sets in, this process is undesirable to say the least but it yields good fruit: healing takes place. Too often, skilled pastor/counselors are required to help couples cleanse and purge, drilling deep, to restore a marriage to where it needs to be. Similarly, when owners neglect to regularly service their vehicles, it often then becomes necessary to perform costlier and more time-consuming diagnostics and repair. What was intended to be routine replenishing of fluids becomes flushing, replacing, and replenishing and often with repaired or replaced parts. Laying a vision of biblical oneness from the beginning of a marriage spares the couple the protracted pain and effort of extensive repair and healing along the way. It is, therefore, incumbent upon the pastor to

ensure this vision is clearly cast and understood by the couple; building on a solid foundation is crucial for long-term satisfaction and usefulness within marriage.

The foundation for marriage and key scriptural teaching is found in the book of Genesis: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”<sup>1</sup> Initial observations regarding this crucial text yield important underpinnings for marriage. First, this institution is for a man and a woman. A son is to leave, depart from, his parents and form his own home and new identity. In leaving his parents, he is to cleave and bond with his wife. It is to be no ordinary union, however. They are to form one seamless new identity: “one flesh”. They are not to be considered two people merely living together, conducting business together, or experiencing life together. They are one flesh, and what God has joined together, let not man separate.<sup>2</sup> It is this very vision of becoming one flesh that the pastor must define and develop for the couple. To aim for anything less is to miss the divine purpose for marriage, and to live in less than what He intended.

There are three actions given in this short passage, to which will be added three reasons for taking these actions. In depths study of this foundational statement is not necessary, for the truths contained within are self-evident.

First attention is given to the man. In God’s vision for marriage, he is the one who makes a move from someone in order to get to someone else. The pastor must speak directly to the prospective husband on this matter. He is leaving something behind in order to gain something that will require his complete attention and all of his efforts. Not

---

<sup>1</sup> Gen. 2:24.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. 19:6.

despising the first commandment with a promise<sup>3</sup>, a man is at the time of his marriage to move away from his parents. He is to leave them, making a clean break. He is not integrated in their lives while making a halfhearted effort to lead his bride. Marriage requires a man's full attention, as he facilitates physical, emotional, spiritual attachment to his new bride. Honor is still afforded his parents, but his focus of attention is now given to his new wife as they begin their lives together.

If a man is to shift his attention away from his parents, what is he moving towards? He is moving towards his prize, the one who will be the focus of his attention, love and efforts for the rest of his life. He shall hold fast to his wife. It is the husband who is initiating this effort. He is holding fast, connecting with his wife. She is the object of his thoughts, and the recipient of his love. Holding fast denotes his attention to her and desire to cover and protect this new relationship, that it might develop and thrive.

What is third statement? The two shall become one flesh. This is the heart of God's plan for marriage. The two shall live inseparably, growing closer with every passing season. Increasingly, they operate as one mind. They come to agreement on key issues and function as one person – nobody comes in between them. He becomes a protective canopy over her heart, leading her to Christ. Her femininity inspires and supports his walk with Christ, and he feeds and helps her as she follows Him. As they function as one flesh, nobody is closer in their inner sanctum than their own two hearts. A purpose and goal of marriage, then, is to grow closer together and operate as one person; thus, providing for companionship, love and strength for a husband and wife.

Special attention should be given to a key component of a couple's oneness. Prayer is sweeter, more intimate and more effectual between the two than with anyone

---

<sup>3</sup> Eph. 6:2.

else. This author has been profoundly affected by the prayer life of his grandparents, who served as missionaries in the Congo and later as a pastor in France and England. Their individual prayer life was only eclipsed in greatness by their marital prayer life. While church planting in France, they approached the work much differently than pastors usually approach ministry in today's day. They would spend hours each morning in their prayer room, first giving praise to their Heavenly Father and then petitioning Him with the needs of those close to by family and friendship. Indeed, this author's wife was prayed for even before she was born. They would pray for their immediate family first, then in concentric circles pray for ministry leaders close to them and others they had met with much distance at that time between them. They would visit this author's childhood church in the USA every two years, and leave a lasting impact on the congregants there. What were most impactful were their demonstrative joyful countenances and the sweet closeness of their marriage relationship. Friends throughout the world were so thankful for their faithful prayers on their behalf. All of this was made possible because an elderly Christian couple discovered the power of a husband and wife praying together. A key component of becoming one flesh in marriage will be discovered and realized when husbands and wives purposefully join together before the throne of grace, as will be addressed specifically in the prioritization of prayer.

With the three grand statements of leaving mother and father, holding fast to one's wife and becoming one flesh, come three compelling reasons for all of this which formulate God's chief purposes for marriage. Don and Sally Meredith present three

purposes for couples to strive after oneness of flesh in marriage: to reflect God's image, reproduce a godly heritage, and to reign on earth.<sup>4</sup>

Earlier in Genesis, God speaks of making man in His image. Redeemed humanity is, therefore, a unique reflection of God's image. How do others adequately see this most? God is neither male nor female, but the totality of what is seen in both. When couples come together in harmony and operate in one flesh and serving their Lord, God is most visible to those around them. The image of God is captured in husband and wife when they portray the oneness of the Trinity and the more complete picture of who God is. A vision therefore for a husband, as he holds fast to his wife is to reflect the image of his God through is unity with his wife in all that they do in life.

A second purpose of marriage is to reproduce a godly heritage. Truly it is the Lord who opens the womb, so such blessing comes from the Lord. The only ordained method for procreation is sexual union between a man and his wife. Sex is of course pleasurable for both, but it remains the avenue for procreation.<sup>5</sup>

Underpinning the concept of oneness in marriage is the purposeful commitment to the relationship by both spouses. Biblical oneness cannot be achieved without both husband and wife being supremely committed to persevering through difficult seasons within the marriage. If one or both is dedicated to their marriage only so far as their feelings presently register, true oneness will not be achieved. Those seasoned in marriage know that commitment to one's marriage is paramount, as marital happiness can wax and

---

<sup>4</sup> Don and Sally Meredith, *Two Becoming One Workbook: Applying the Power of Oneness in Your Marriage*, 26.

<sup>5</sup> For those unable to have biological children, adoption remains an excellent way to redeem a child from a life of hopelessness and solitude and gift them with a godly heritage.

wane over time and through challenging situations. Marriage is best viewed as a covenant within Scripture, not a union entered into lightly or unadvisedly.<sup>6</sup>

### **The Apostle Paul on Marriage**

Ephesians 5:21-33 is another key Scripture to consider in laying a foundation for marriage. In this passage, the apostle Paul casts a vision and assigns specific responsibility to both husbands and wives. It is not a comprehensive theological treatise on the subject, but yields powerful fruit when placed besides other Biblical teaching in both the Old and New Testaments. Key doctrinal and practical truths will be considered here, which pastors do well to convey to couples in their preparation for marriage.

Paul says this to the Ephesian church:

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the church, the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the

---

<sup>6</sup> Mal. 2:15.

wife see that she respects her husband.<sup>7</sup>

Dr. Martin Lloyd Jones has key insights on this passage, presenting eight underlying principles that govern the message Paul is imparting to the reader.<sup>8</sup> To begin with, the apostle does indeed call wives to submit to their husbands. The word submit is actually absent from verse 22, and in certain translations it is in italics to note that (other translations render as respect or honor). How then do translators know this is what Paul is saying? He is simply carrying it over from his previous statement to everyone; what one is called to do with everyone one interacts with, make it especially evident in ones marriage, to her husband.

It was important for Paul to assert this, as the new birth might cause some confusion in roles. Society at large required wives to honor their husband; that was the common way to relate within marriage. What if a couple had married as pagans with the wife later being saved? She could easily apply her freedom in Christ and assume she no longer is bound to her husband, or more specifically, to respect him. After all, if in Christ there is neither “male nor female”<sup>9</sup>, perhaps she is no longer bound to reverence her husband in the relationship. Paul begins by addressing this directly: yes, wives are to continue to submit to their husbands just as they do anyone else. This author’s research demonstrated that most women comprehend the basic directive to submit to their husbands; in his control group, every single person indicated that within reason, wives were to submit to their husbands. However, the research also brought out that many

---

<sup>7</sup> Eph. 5:22-33.

<sup>8</sup> Lloyd-Jones, Dr. Martin. *Christian Marriage: from Basic Principles to Transformed Relationships*. Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 2012, 1-11.

<sup>9</sup> Gal. 2:24.



women work this out somewhat mechanically. Given a greater vision of the glory of God and the relationship of Christ to His church, respect and submission becomes more of a joy and there is a desire to flesh this out with greater enthusiasm (descriptions of a wife's submission to her husband became more animated after being exposed to the material in this paper).

By addressing the marriage relationship specifically in this passage, Paul is driving home a crucial element for new Christians: one's faith enters all aspects of their life. It is not sufficient to assume that one possesses a religious component, but that that component only comes into play at certain times or in particular situations. Rather, the faith of a Christian permeates every aspect of his or her life. The totality of one's being and all areas of one's life come under the lordship of Jesus Christ.

What Paul teaches here correlates with, and does not supersede, what is taught earlier in Scripture (particularly in the Old Testament). It is an error when some Christians state that they ignore the Old Testament teachings on marriage or other topics, as if the God of Sinai is different than the God of Pentecost. Paul is being led by the Holy Spirit and is building upon what has already been taught on marriage and is in no wise altering what has already been presented and cherished through Judaism. Likewise, what Paul teaches here will not be unearthed later when people suppose the Scriptures cannot be trusted, or, that somehow society knows more now than Paul did when writing. Paul's teaching on marriage here is to be embraced in such a way that one recognizes its enduring value as it has been constructed upon the eternal Word of God and principles already laid down.

What Paul lays down must not be viewed as mere rules or regulations, given without context, reason or precedent. Sadly, Christians often view God's law as merely boxing them in and comprising a list of "do's and don'ts." His truths are given to maximize freedom and keep one from being polluted. There are always reasons for his laws; in this case they are to preserve order and blessing within the home. God's laws can be observed and kept joyfully, as one realizes in their live how they yield His peace, strength and joy.

A key element in the teaching on marriage is its relationship to doctrine. The letter to the Ephesians spends roughly the first three chapters on pure doctrine and the last three on the practical outworking of that very doctrine. He is now here addressing the fundamental relationships within the family. He is very practical and direct in his teaching; it is easily understood and, so long as one is inclined, not complicated in its implementation. Yet it is does not stand alone in its delivery, randomly appearing in Paul's stream of consciousness. It is rooted directly in theology, which Paul has already laid down. The marriage union is likened to the mystery of the union of Christ to His people, and the manner in which husbands are to love their wives corresponds to the love Christ has for His people. An informed theology will assist in comprehending Paul's directive. The Bible is stupendously tied together on so many levels, each aspect of His work supporting the other.

When addressing the pressing problem of marriage, Paul recognizes that it is an enormous facet of life for the married couple. One's marriage is not a sideshow for a husband or wife; it is the very cornerstone of their life. Yet he does not address it head on, rather, he eases into the discussion by touching on related subjects. He begins his

discourse on marriage by talking about relationships in general, and then carries these on into the specific teaching on marriage. It is often wise to do this. He warms up the mind by directing it to this place. The value of this approach is that he connects marriage to “real life” and shows how the two are connected and naturally flow into each other. Christians can then see the logic and eagerly implement it into their own personal marriages with greater applicability.

It must be noted just how Paul addresses the problem and challenge of marriage. Many a comedian have found abundant fodder in marriage humor. The epic fails, the humorous misunderstandings, and the prevalent miscommunications are well known to all, particularly those married. Yet he does not take on a jocular tone and make light of the significant problems faced by husbands and wives. He considers it no joking matter, yet, he is anxious to engage couples in a way they can receive what he says and apply it. He does not take sides and focus on the wife’s responsibilities, nor does he belittle their perspective. He gives equal airtime to both and calls on all parties to own their relationship and perform within it. He addresses marriage in the spirit with which he began this specific discourse: in the fear of the Lord. If individuals are to interact with each other in the fear of the Lord, how much more so should husbands and wives? He speaks to marriage in a reverent and sober tone, taking it seriously and letting both husbands and wives see the critical role and responsibility each has in the marriage relationship.

This majestic passage yields four primary gems for the pastor to relay to the couple he is preparing for marriage. One could spend endless hours plummeting the depth of this passage, particularly as it relates to marriage. But the pastor’s job is to cast a clear

and attainable vision for marriage and not drown the couple with an overwhelming tide of new information. Focusing on four aspects of this passage will convey key points that they can internalize and grow in their knowledge and understanding of. Two points are broad and conceptual in nature, and two are practical and specific.

Dr. Jones gives the first takeaway from this passage: one must view their marriage, and their responsibilities within marriage, as an extension of their overall calling as a Christian. This author finds it striking that given the complexities of human relationships, the differences between men and women, and the pervasiveness of the fall in people's lives, there exists only a small number of commands or instruction directed specifically to those who are married. Yet it is easy to forget that most of the commands given to Christians at large find perfect, if not heightened, application within marriage. Paul masterfully demonstrates this by connecting a command to all Christians (submit to one another) and then specifically applying it to wives. His point is, one is not immune from this command as it pertains to his or her marriage. If anything, one should be inspired to apply more effort in this area within marriage. His sole instruction to wives was to take the same respect offered to all brothers and sisters in Christ, and apply it in concentrated manner to their husband. He skillfully connects regular life and all spheres of relationship and merges it with marriage, with intentional application.

What are other broad applications that find heightened and specific usefulness within marriage? Among many, here are three. Bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.<sup>10</sup> As Christians, couples are called to forgive one another and bear with one another, because that is what they are to do outside their marriage. Inside their marriage,

---

<sup>10</sup> Col. 3:13.

their lives should reflect a working lab of what is lived on the outside. Almost without exception, individuals will need to forgive their spouse more – and more often – than anyone else. Pray for one another<sup>11</sup>; no human relationship requires prayer more than marriage. To replace bickering and fighting with the sweet promise to pray for one another is priceless. For a husband to know that his wife is praying for his success in his resolve for integrity in though an action, for a wife to know that her man is thinking about her throughout the day and committed to supporting her efforts in prayer brings such encouragement. Personal prayer is sweeter in the marriage relationship, as the proximity is closer and deeper. Through love serve one another<sup>12</sup>; a beautiful picture among Christians is for the fellowship to be known for serving and supporting each other. One person’s weakness is another’s strength, and God has designed fellowships to thrive on the emphasis of serving others. The hallmark of Christian fellowship and friendship is love, manifested in supporting, encouraging, praying for, and serving others. Having that “others focus” will only strengthen a marriage, and develop a healthy emotional attachment as a model for outsiders.

The second gem to display to the couple is the general concept of the mystery of one’s union with Christ. Paul specifically states that living as one flesh within marriage reflects the mystery of one’s union with Christ. Christians are members of the body of Christ, which He bore through great suffering. Woman was formed from the side of Adam, from his rib. Paul refers to him as the first Adam, and Christ as the second Adam. “As the woman was taken out of Adam, so the church is taken out of Christ. The woman was taken out of the side of Adam; and it is from the Lord’s bleeding, wounded side that

---

<sup>11</sup> Jas. 5:16.

<sup>12</sup> Gal. 5:13.

the church comes. That is her origin; and so she is flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bones. ‘This is a great mystery’.”<sup>13</sup> Here one can see the great majesty of the marriage union, one that reflects the very relationship redeemed sinners have with their Lord Jesus. It therefore is not to be entered into lightly but reverently and in the fear of the Lord; not only that but cherished and intentionally upheld throughout its duration. Pastors must cast a vision for the nobility and beauty of marriage, and the tremendous opportunity for Christian witness, against all that they will see and encounter within society at large.

There are two directives given to couples in this passage, instruction that is succinct and easily executable. The first is given to the wives, and as previously noted it flows from thoughts already developed: “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.”<sup>14</sup>

Just as women would submit to fellow believers in cultivating a spirit of humility and unity, wives are to particularly pursue this with their husbands. Their conversion to Christianity does not release them from submitting to their husbands, rather, it heightens this calling. As previously noted, Paul’s practical theology is tethered to doctrine. It is not a random thought to call wives to submission. In the mystical union, Christ is the head of the church and husbands are the head of their wives. A wife’s posture to her husband is largely determined to reflect Christian’s relationship to Christ Himself. Therefore, it is

---

<sup>13</sup> Lloyd-Jones, Dr. Martyn. *Christian Marriage: from Basic Principles to Transformed Relationships*. Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 2012, 192.

<sup>14</sup> Eph. 5:22-24.

not be treated lightly or mildly entertained. As Christ leads the church, husbands also lead their wives and wives should develop a spirit of submission within their marriage.

There are two qualifiers for wives' submission to their husbands: in everything and as unto the Lord. Instructions are given as to how to carry this out. The scope of submission is not limited to certain aspects of marriage or life situations. In all things, wives are to see their husbands as the head of the home. In all circumstances, decisions and at all times. How do wives carry this out? They do so in the fear of the Lord. In all things, Christians are to first worship and serve Christ. A similar injunction is given slaves, in which they are to honor their masters as an act of worship: "Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ."<sup>15</sup> If a wife finds it difficult to show her husband honor, she can focus first on worshiping the Lord Christ; her attitude and actions are to honor Him first. By doing this in the fear of the Lord, she is approaching this in an attitude of reverence and worship.

With Paul insisting the ladies honor their husbands, it might easily seem as if the apostle is chauvinist or conceited. Does he have anything to say to temper his instructions to wives? What does he have for the men? Summed up: love her. He does not allow men to capitalize on their wives submission to them and use it to their advantage or lead as a despot. To the contrary, he employs exacting terminology to call me to tender and considerate leadership, injecting a fine mix of instruction and theology in the process.

---

<sup>15</sup> Col. 3:22-24.

Husbands should ask themselves key questions. How did Christ love the church? Why did Christ love the church? And with this model, how does this correspond to family relationships? It is helpful to begin with an overall Biblical picture of love. Marriage principles are intended in many cases to be transferred from general principles given to Christians at large. This author always reads the following passage from the so-called “love chapter”, to give the underpinnings of a godly marriage not only to the couple but also to those in attendance on that day:

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.<sup>16</sup>

These words hardly need explanation. A picture of love in the Bible is that one refuses to harbor bitterness or keep count of wrongs, but always has the other’s best interest in mind and works towards the end of blessing others. One participant in this author’s control group described a husband’s greatest responsibility to his wife in this way: “to unconditionally love her to the end, in all circumstances, never quitting, and doing anything that it takes.” It is this author’s experience that this indeed is the heart cry of most women in their marriages. In the end of the day, it is a great cure all for general marriage maladies and has a stronger presentation than the negative aspects many inject into their relationships. This picture of love should be heartily embraced by both husband and wife, but should be studiously studied and perfected by husbands, as it is to this that they are specifically called.

Word choice is important in Scripture. There are at least three different Greek words used for love, each one has a specific meaning and application. Eros is a sexually

---

<sup>16</sup> I Cor. 13:4-8.



charged word which is of the flesh and selfish by nature. In English the adjective erotic is derived from this word and used frequently when describing physical lust. It is often associated with pornography or sexually explicit media. This word is not utilized in the New Testament. It is acceptable and even desirable for this type of love to be present in marriage, in so far as it is undergirded by a greater and selfless love. If it exists by itself, it can only harm. Phileo is another word that describes brotherly or companion type affection. Looking out for someone, caring for him or her, doing a kind act. This word is found in the New Testament and has broad application within the body of Christ. It can and should be found in marriage, for marriage is truly a friendship between two people. But marriage is more than being fond of someone; the Bible takes the reader higher and calls couples to a standard much more demanding and rewarding: agape love.

Agape love is a selfless love that focuses on the well being of others, and does not seek self-advancement. It is the type of love Paul was describing in I Corinthians 13. It is this love which comprises the essence of the most beloved and well known verse in the Bible: For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.<sup>17</sup> Paul's injunction to husbands, husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her is a powerful statement which calls husband to the highest level of loving leadership possible.

True to form, Paul develops a husband's love from two separate and previous founts. First of all, the agape love that God has for people naturally is developed in all Christians. The fruit of the Spirit, Paul told the Galatians, is love.<sup>18</sup> That love, which one first tasted in the goodness of God through Christ, is the underpinning of a husband's

---

<sup>17</sup> John 3:16.

<sup>18</sup> Gal. 5:22.

love for his wife. It is not foreign to him and he is not distanced from it. Rather, he has experienced the love of God deep in his own heart and this very love of God is born in him, as it is in every true Christian: Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.<sup>19</sup> The connection is clear: love flows from the believer, because love is from God. If one demonstrates agape love for others, their relationship with God is confirmed. Conversely, the absence of such love reflects the fact that one does not know God. As well, the command to love his wife is not a new one for the Christian husband. Just as Paul had already told all Christians to submit to one another, while calling wives to specific application of this within marriage, he also calls husbands to action that he has previously called all Christians. Earlier in the same chapter he states, “And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.”<sup>20</sup> Paul requires of the husband to do that which he is already called to at large: agape love his wife. He is to love all those around him in the same way Christ loved him; but he is to heighten that and to make specific application within his own home by loving his wife unconditionally throughout their marriage.

The questions must be answered for a husband to properly execute this command. How did Christ love him? In two ways: through the incarnation and through His death. Why did He love him? He loved him in order sanctify him and make him pure before God the Father through his justification. This then, is the high calling of a Christian husband, which can only be discharged through the gracious enabling of the Holy Spirit and the power of Christ. Before one examines the fact that Christ gave Himself for sinners, it must first be pointed out that the incarnation made that possible.

---

<sup>19</sup>I John 4:7.

<sup>20</sup>Eph. 5:1.

Consideration of this is sobering and places a husband's love in context:

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.<sup>21</sup>

Christ humbled himself by veiling His equality with God and taking on the form of a servant, being born as a human being. The Creator took the form of the creation. He willingly subjected Himself to the form of humanity, not as a king but as a servant. As a servant, he suffered and tasted death for others. Indeed, his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind.<sup>22</sup> Having tasted death for mankind, He has since ascended and been crowned King of Kings and lord of lords. Let it not be lost on men the indignity his Lord took on, experiencing grief, hunger and fatigue on his behalf. All of this happened, prior to His set suffering on his behalf at Calvary.

To fully appreciate Christ's love for him, a husband must now consider Christ's suffering. He loved him, and gave himself for him. How did He do this? What did this entail? The sufferings of Christ are the pinnacle of love that He showed for His people. The Son of God submitted Himself to lashes and insults, to the place of utter exhaustion in His mission of redemption. Both Old Testament prophets and New Testament apostles testify to the suffering of the Christ:

---

<sup>21</sup> Phil. 2:5-11.

<sup>22</sup> Is. 52:14.

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people?<sup>23</sup>

The trumped up charges, the crown of thorns, the lashes to the back, the stakes through the hands and feet, the struggle for each breath, the humility of hanging naked as a curse before those He created are all adequately summed up by both Peter and Paul:

He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.<sup>24</sup>

And as one untimely born, Paul would testify regarding the cross of Calvary: “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”<sup>25</sup> Christ suffered and died, not for His own sins but for the sin of the world. The agony of actually accomplishing that can only be adequately appreciated by incorporating one specific element of both the incarnation and Christ’s suffering: the Son’s separation from His Father. As Christ cried out, noting His Father’s forsaking Him, several natural phenomena accompanied this: earthquakes, darkening of the skies, and such. This stupendous moment was enormous, and demanded a husband’s attention. Quite clearly, Jesus conveyed His status prior to the incarnation: “And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.”<sup>26</sup>

Christ enjoyed glory with the Father before the world existed. He left that glory to live

---

<sup>23</sup> Is. 53:12-14.

<sup>24</sup> I Pet. 2:22-24.

<sup>25</sup> II Cor. 5:17.

<sup>26</sup> John 17:3.

among His people and then suffer and die for them. He was cut off from His Father, something that in eternity past had never occurred, nor will every occur in the future. All this, is the example of agape love which men are to live out for their wives. Where is there room for selfishness or record keeping? Husbands have a high calling before them, which will require His strength and enabling through every situation in their marriage.

A final thought on how Christ loved the church revolves around the intent of His love. What was the desired end result? And, how does this correlate to a husband's love for his bride? The above listed verses pin the intent to justifying sinners and releasing them from the effect of their sin, "that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish."<sup>27</sup>

What does a husband's love produce in his wife – romantic swoons and finer possessions? Of course a wife should feel the attraction, romance and friendship of her husband. But Paul is after something much grander. In the context of granting her affection and friendship, he is to give her so much more. He is to lead her to a deeper grasp of who she is in Christ, as she grows in the knowledge and grace of her Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He is to help her learn contentment in all things, rejoicing in Jesus. He is to lead her to the Word and feed and grow her. He is to reflect her Savior to her and provide her a safe place to be nurtured in her walk with Christ. He is to facilitate her following the Spirit and thus mortifying the flesh and sowing to the Spirit. When a husband does these things, he loves his bride as Christ loved the church.

---

<sup>27</sup> Eph. 5:27.

## The Priority of Prayer

Prayer is a gem often underutilized by couples as a means to knit their hearts together and experience rich mutual fellowship. Approaching the Throne of Grace for the purpose of communing with God is one of the highest and most precious practices a couple can partake in together. There is a richness of fellowship when men pray together, or when women pour out their hearts together in prayer. It is not often – and usually not appropriate – for men and women to share intimate prayer needs before the Throne. However, when husbands and wife join approach the Throne regularly, they are able to pour their hearts out to God regarding intimate and precious items. They can pray for their children (even if yet future), for struggles in their marriage, and for interests of intimate value.

The spiritual giant Paul Bunyan described prayer as “a sincere, sensible, affectionate pouring out of the heart or soul to God, through Christ, in the strength and assistance of the Holy Spirit, for such things as God has promised, or according to his Word, for the good of the church, with submission in faith to the will of God.”<sup>28</sup> What a wonderful gift for couples that want to grow closer together, which desire to both walk with God and delve deeper into the knowledge and grace of their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! This excerpt from Bunyan presents a strategic platform up which to understand the riches and benefits of prayer, as well as inspiration to make it a priority.

Prayer is described as sincere, sensible, and affectionate. These three elements capture the fertile soil from which prayers are offered to God. Husbands should be challenged to consider just how great an opportunity God has provided them, which they

---

<sup>28</sup>John Bunyan, *Prayer* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1989), 13.

could lead their wives in a ministry that is founded upon these descriptions. Sincerity in religion is highly desirable by God and yields great fruit. God tends to and support the one who is humble and broken before Him: “therefore the Lord waits to be gracious to you, and therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you. For the Lord is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him.”<sup>29</sup> Engaging in any ministry that encourages sincerity and develops it both personally and within a marriage is a highly beneficial. Bunyan also describes prayer as sensible. That is, it requires thought and analysis. Again, if prayer encourages thoughtfulness and analysis of Scripture, this is a wonderful gift! Too often today, people mindlessly absorb media and dumb themselves down. Prayer sharpens the mind, as it requires deep thought on matters of eternity and godliness. Prayer is intentional thought but it is also affectionate in nature. It involves the heart, one’s emotions. People love God because they first loved Him. What a wonderful truth to keep in mind. Prayer energizes the emotions, keeping them alive for Christ and His kingdom. What happens when couples pray, then? Individually, husbands and wives develop their mind and soul in their relationship with Jesus; and, they increase their fervency in serving Him. As a married couple, they spend their time focusing on what matters: eternity. As a couple, they grow together in the deep things of God. What is the overflow? The overflow of this perspective and joy will be poured upon their own children and others they minister to, both within the church and outside its four walls. Imagine a couple participating in a block party, interacting with unsaved friends around them. They are able to discern struggles others are facing, and speak the truth in love to them because they are spiritually alert and equipped. Pastors should, therefore, strive to inspire couples to incorporate prayer into their daily lives, and to make it a strong

---

<sup>29</sup> Is. 30:18.

foundation for their marriage.

With sincerity, affection and sensibility being it's fountain, what is the very nature of prayer? What action is taking place? It is pouring one's heart out to God. Oh, how couples need this in a fallen world! It is such a privilege to take one's burdens and cast them on God. It is such an honor to commune with the creator of the universe and confide in Him. It is a gift to take one's cares, worries and heartaches and place them at His feet. When a wife is storming the Throne of Grace with her husband and pouring out her heart to God, will not her husband better understand her? Will he not be cued in to the struggles she faces? As a man is honest with his Creator and levels with Him, will not his wife see his struggles and better comprehend how to support him? When couples are vulnerable before God and transparent with each other, what room is left for pride? Is it easy to hold on to grudges? The very act of praying, therefore, as couples call on Christ and pour their hearts out to Him, will draw them together and knit their hearts as one. This author's grandparents modeled this for so many. They spent their mornings in prayer together, praying around the world for the needs they knew of. Their love for God and for each other was humbling, and their affection for others only grew as they labored hours in prayer together. Their solid marriage was based upon the conviction of following hard after God and meeting together with Him regularly each morning. As a result of fellowshiping with Him daily as a couple, their faith was enlarged and their countenance shone with the joy of the Lord.

Two specific benefits of prayer are dependence upon the Holy Spirit and knowledge of God's Word. The application of these two to a marriage relationship are legion. Often, it is tempting for Christians to think, "I've got this. I can handle this



myself.” Believers often stray from dependence upon God and tend towards self-sufficiency. Prayer serves as a continual reminder of dependence upon the Lord. Specifically, when couples are reminded of this, it naturally brings them together and promotes humility towards each other. Upon this rock of humility and proper perspective, true prayer naturally directs believers to the Word. Christians pray according to the knowledge of the truth. Promises are claimed and wisdom is sought out. What is the result of this process? Men and women are feeding on the Word of God, seeking Him out and basing their decisions and actions on the truth of Scripture. Couples will together deepen their knowledge of their own salvation, as they meditate on the promises of God and cry out to Him together.

A final benefit of prayer is the intentional bending of the will to the Lord Jesus. How often do Christians sincerely need this grace, to be humbled before the Almighty and accept His will and leading in their lives! Submission to God facilitates mutual submission within marriage. How easy it is for the “little things” to burden a marriage and sabotage oneness! Consistent prayer together helps keep those in check. But one must consider the larger issues, as well. What of discontentment with God regarding a job move, infertility, or loss of friendships? Regularly submitting to the Lord’s will enables couples to better cope regarding larger disappointments or challenges. It keeps couples in a posture of humility as they serve the Lord, navigate through marriage, and (where applicable) raise their children.

The advantages of a praying couple are legion. Not only are couples obeying the Lord’s command to pray, they are enriching their lives together. “Real prayer is communion with God, so that there will be common thoughts between His mind and

ours. What is needed is for Him to fill our hearts with His thoughts, and then His desires will become our desires flowing back to Him.”<sup>30</sup> Couples now have the venue to commune openly with the Lord, together. Jointly, they bring their adoration and worship to Him. Jointly, they bring their cares and worries, their petitions and heartaches directly to the Throne of Grace. Together they are able to pray for the needs of the family, be it finances or the hearts of their own children. As well, they are able to join together to pray over ministry opportunities within their neighborhoods, workplace, or church. Such sweet fellowship ought not to be missed by couples. Pastors should impress upon husband and wife the importance and blessing of this ministry, so they pursue it wholeheartedly and prioritize it within their lives.

### **The Sure Foundation of the Word of God**

“He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.”<sup>31</sup> Here is a statement of blessing in a man’s life, one that is juxtaposed with the end result of living a life apart from God. It has broad application to life in general, but can be specifically be applied to marriage. Every husband should look hard at this passage as it speaks to blessing and destruction. Indeed, when this author was a youngster, his grandfather sat him down and had him memorize this entire passage as it yields great wisdom when charting out the course of one’s life. Pastors should impress upon engaged couples the absolute necessity of ground their lives and their marriages upon the Word of God; specific challenge should be given to

---

<sup>30</sup> Arthur W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God* (Radford VA: Wilder Publications, 2009), 1.

<sup>31</sup> Psalm 1:3.

husbands as they lead their families.

There are specific promises given in this verse, all which flows from one who embraces the Word of God in their life. First, like a tree firmly planted, one will be firmly planted in life and not easily tossed around by life's challenges. A stream of water, which provides precious nourishment for the tree, is near to the tree. One who loves God's Word bears fruit, and does so in God's timing. What a precious promise! In God's time, in His way, His children bear fruit and have meaning to their lives. When difficult times come, their leaf will not wither. They may feel compressed and beaten down, but they will not wither and die, because God's life sustains them. What is the general statement of promise to those who invest themselves in God's Word? Simply put, they prosper in all that they do. Their life has meaning and significance on many levels. It does not mean their life will be free from troubles, set backs or distractions. Rather, it means God's blessing will rest upon them as they seek to honor Him; He will bear lasting fruit in their lives.

The blessings of God's Word in one's life were specifically listed prior to the foundation of the passage: how one interacts with Scripture. A pastor can pose to a prospective husband: "How does one gain such security and blessing in his life?" The passage yields this answer:

"But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night."<sup>32</sup>

When one delights in something, that person does not need to be convinced to engage it.

When one delights in the Word of God, it is evident in their lives; it is a passion and an interest of theirs. How they engage the Scriptures is telling and very important. First, they meditate on it. They read it thoughtfully and allow it to permeate their mind and their

---

<sup>32</sup> Psalm 1:2.

soul. They don't rush through it or tack it on at the end of the day; it is a priority in their regular routine. When do they engage these oracles? Essentially, they pursue them as often as possible. It can be challenging to carve out a regular time each day for reflection on the Word as schedules and circumstances vary; demands are placed on people unexpectedly. Therefore, whenever possible, the godly man seeks out God's Word and feasts on it. Rather than waste time on frivolous matters, the godly man seeks out His Word when possible. This is what it means to diligently seek out the law of the Lord and incorporate it into one's life. In an age in which many forms of media are both easily accessible and profoundly unhelpful in granting a godly perspective, one must be vigilant in settling his or her mind on that which will aid spiritual growth and strength.

Pastors can take the tender time prior to the wedding to impress upon couples the value and importance of regularly engaging God in His Word. This is the time when couples are generally most open to input, as they are giving serious consideration to their future lives together and hopefully building from the ground up. Of all people pastors ought to be able to share experientially how the living Word settles and sanctifies both the mind and the spirit, both in particular situations and also for the long run.

### **A Word To Husbands And Wives**

A tandem that has been most helpful to this author and his wife is *The Excellent Wife* and *The Exemplary Husband*. If possible, it is suggested that the pastor gives these books to the couple as a wedding gift/keepsake that will serve them well as they pursue their marriage. During the vision casting session, the pastor can relay three fundamental truths from each book, three for each individual, as a way of previewing the

work for them.

Beginning with the husband, one point from each of these three categories: a Husbands Responsibility, Resolves, and Regrets. Regarding his responsibility, a reminder that he is the priest of his home is in order. A key verse is: “Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord! Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart.”<sup>33</sup>

God is looking for those who will adore and reverence Him in the deepest part of their being. This involves turning away from idols of the heart and choosing to seek after Him. When men do this, they set the tempo for their family and serve as an unspoken example to their wife and children. There is nothing more important in marriage for a husband than his own walk with Christ; everything else flows out of this.

A key resolve in a man’s marriage should be sensitivity to his wife’s needs and weaknesses. This often does not come naturally for men but should be a key component of his leadership of her. Following Peter’s admonition,<sup>34</sup> husbands should be challenged to truly understand his wife and give honor to her<sup>35</sup> as fitting to his heir of life with him. He should at all costs avoid living as a bitter man with her but should studiously seek to understand her thoughts and emotions better.

This author has seen many marriages shipwrecked due to a husband losing control in the area of lust. Husbands should be warned from the beginning to control their

---

<sup>33</sup> Ps. 119:1-2.

<sup>34</sup> I Pet. 2:12.

<sup>35</sup> Note the fact that what is required of wives is also required of husbands.

fleshy desires and not control his wife with them nor seek fulfillment outside his marriage. When temptation is knocking on the door, a helpful acronym is presented for men to use, F.L.E.E (from sin to God)<sup>36</sup>. Guiding principles include acting quickly to run away from sin, leaning on God and calling on Him for strength, entertaining the right thoughts (Philippians 4:8), and eagerly continuing to pursue love and righteousness. Accountability within and outside the marriage is a must, to maintain support during all seasons in life.

Three gems for the wives will give them good encouragement and a goal to strive after, falling under a Wife's Responsibility, Submission and Special Concerns. A primary responsibility a wife has towards her husband is to submit; this can prove challenging and overwhelming at times. Yet much joy can be derived from this posture, and four specific points of encouragement are delivered to this end: joy results from trusting and obeying God's Word, from knowing that God is working to accomplish His purpose even in difficult situations, and from following the example of the Lord Jesus in difficult situations. Joy results from a Spirit filled life<sup>37</sup>

A quiet spirit is highly valued in a wife, both in Scripture and by her husband.<sup>38</sup> Attitudes to avoid include, "He'll never change!", "He's impossible!", and "There's no hope!". To enhance biblical problem solving and conflict resolution, the author suggests the a few mindsets. What is God trying to teach one me in the midst of this conflict? And as one is a Christian, to initiate divorce because of marital conflict is not an option. He

---

<sup>36</sup> Scott, Stuart. *The Exemplary Husband: A Biblical Perspective*. Revised ed., Bemidji, MN: Focus Publishing (MN), 2002, 296. What is presented above is shortened version.

<sup>37</sup> Peace, Martha. *The Excellent Wife: a Biblical Perspective*. Bemidji, MN: Focus Publishing, Incorporated, 1998, 196-198.

<sup>38</sup> I Pet. 3:4.

will help one to endure such conflicts. If one must suffer through this conflict, he or she should want it to be for doing right, not because of personal sin. God has a purpose in this conflict. What can one do differently to resolve this conflict?<sup>39</sup>

Loneliness can be a great challenge for wives, and can be due to her own actions or those of her husband. Sometimes husbands are reluctant to open up to their wives because they routinely use anger and intimidation to manipulate their men. The biblical cure for the wife is to be gentle and kind, making it easy for him to open up to her.<sup>40</sup> Another specific challenge in this area is when wives disrespect their husbands because they feel to meet their expectations. To rectify this, she develops an attitude of gratitude<sup>41</sup>, being thankful for what her husband does offer her, which enables her to appreciate more what he gives.

---

<sup>39</sup> Peace, Martha. *The Excellent Wife: a Biblical Perspective*, 10th ed., 196-198.

<sup>40</sup> Jas. 1:20.

<sup>41</sup> I Thess. 5:18.

## **Chapter Four**

### MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT

Some years ago this author was struck by the practical wisdom found in the videoconference *Love & Respect*. This marriage conference flows from the ministry of Emerson Eggerichs and his wife Sarah. An effective expository preacher, Emerson had to admit that their marriage was weak. Their home, far from being a house of love, was indeed a very cold place due to the condition of their marriage. Often people assume a pastor has a strong marriage; yet, this is often not the case at all. The truth is, Emerson brought into his marriage some of his childhood baggage: his parents were divorced, and then married again. This might sound good, but they never addressed the root problems in their marriage, so their lives remained cold and full of conflict. After years in an unfulfilling marriage, Emerson set himself to study the Scriptures on the matter. He discovered much truth while studying Ephesians 5, and developed this into the *Love & Respect* ministry, which exists today. Its central theme is showing men how to love their wives and wives how to honor their husbands.

#### **The Crazy Cycle**

The central truth and core element of *Love & Respect* is demonstrating the masculine need for honor in marriage, while the feminine heart is looking for love. Instructing each to show the other what they're wired to receive is crucial. There are three main elements to this teaching series. The first is the Crazy Cycle. This is a masterful description of what many couples find themselves doing. When a wife feels unloved, she will tend to be critical and complain often. This is the very thing that wounds and irritates



most husbands. Unfortunately, when a husband faces this he often in return is cold and distant, which further compounds his wife's feelings of being unloved. So the two go round and round, his lack of demonstrating love feeds her lack of giving honor. Many marriages have been ruined and permanently scarred by this behavior. The Crazy Cycle well captures the sense of hopelessness and deep hurt that many couples feel.

### **The Energizing Cycle**

The second primary aspect of Love and Respect is the Energizing Cycle. This refers to when couples recognize the downward spiral they are on and choose to break it. He chooses to love her unconditionally and she chooses to honor him without respect to his performance. When these choices are made, apart from the feelings of anger, changes begin to appear in the marriage. Rather than draining each other's battery, they are each breathing new life into each other's souls and reviving the marriage. The husband is learning to implement principles from Ephesians 5, which says a husband is to love his wife unconditionally. What is very helpful about these lessons is that the husband is given many specific ways in which a man can love his wife. His need is not only to learn how to love a woman, but how to love his woman. A man is given clear instruction on how to implement this practically. Likewise, a woman is instructed on the needs of her husband, which generally speaking are not the same as her own. His need for honor differs greatly from her need for love. Wives are given practical teaching on the importance of sex for their husbands and how to come alongside and support them. With this knowledge, most good willed couples begin investing in their relationship in a

valuable way and breath life into their lives together. This segment includes teaching on conflict resolution, critical for marriage.

The specific input on how to love and respect one's spouse is most helpful and worth examining. This author recalls a distraught husband who later divorced his wife admitting in exasperation that he never understood how to love his wife. He knew he was to love his wife unconditionally, but he was at a loss as to how to do that. He sought to love her through his male lens, but that failed miserably. This then is the value of reviewing this material with couples: arming them with practical knowledge enables them to better execute in marriage and love and honor their spouse.

### **A Husband's Love for His Wife**

The men's section employs the acronym COUPLE<sup>1</sup> to convey practical ways for men to love their wives: closeness, openness, understanding, peacemaker, loyalty, and esteem. Wives appreciate their husband's relational closeness, choosing to be with her face to face. Pastors must emphasize to men the importance of setting aside quality time to listen to, interact with, and enter their wife's world. In today's day and age, that entails setting the cell phone aside and turning the television off. Surely, this is an aspect of holding fast to one's wife, as Paul mentioned to the Ephesians.

Being open is something most women greatly esteem in marriage: being open about emotions and thoughts, from big things even to daily mundane matters. This specifically comes into play during the inevitable conflicts or arguments. After there is a disagreement or heated exchange, men have a tendency to retreat or give the silent

---

<sup>1</sup> Eggerichs, Emerson. *Love and Respect: the Love She Most Desires, the Respect He Desperately Needs* Colorado Springs, CO: Thomas Nelson, 2004, 117-123.

treatment. All of this is troubling for wives, as they would far prefer their husbands express themselves openly and honestly in such a way that the couple can work through their problems and resolve them. The pastor should underscore for the groom to be that he should never secretly hold grudges in a passive aggressive manner, but openly and with sensitivity engage his bride. A supporting scripture for this is Paul's statement to the Colossians, in which he tells husbands not to be harsh with their wives;<sup>2</sup> the opposite of being harsh is considerate sensitivity.

Peter calls on husbands to live with their wives in understanding.<sup>3</sup> It might have been tempting living in that society to simply rule the home without meaningfully engaging one's wife. Peter extols a man's wife to a high place, noting that she is an heir together with her husband of eternal life. Seeking to empathize with her conveys clearly to his wife that husband is seeking to do just that. Pastors should encourage men to ask questions of their wives, to better understand how they are feeling or what challenges they have faced throughout the day.

Because of the inevitability of conflict and even arguments, husbands must be reminded of the importance of peacemaking within the home. Unresolved conflict leads to bitterness and resentment, both of which will kill any relationship. Husbands must take the lead to resolve conflict and subsequently reconcile, so Satan may not gain a foothold and cause division in the home. Highlighting this need and responsibility will be a very important aspect of the counseling session.

It can be said that most anyone values loyalty within a relationship. Women seem to need this even more than men: will their husband be faithful when apart, will their

---

<sup>2</sup> Col. 3:19.

<sup>3</sup> I Pet. 3:7.

husband still love them when they grow older, will their husband still love them after a heated argument? This letter in the acronym serves to remind men that if their wives sense they are not loyal in thought or deed, their ability for intimacy on any level will be greatly weakened and one can expect to be on the receiving end of anger and cold distance. Pastors should use this opportunity to stress the absolute need for a Christian husband to be completely committed to his bride in every way.

A final note to husbands comes via the letter “E”: esteem. It is no secret that women long to be esteemed and cherished by their husbands. The average Disney movie captures well a girl’s dream to be treasured by a very special man, and to have that esteem only grow with time. This author has four daughters, and each has expressed their dream for this in their own way, even when they were young. Eggerichs notes Paul’s words regarding one’s wife to the Ephesians in support of this: For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church.<sup>4</sup> Pastors should take the time to explain for a prospective husband the many ways in which he can cherish and treasure his wife in thoughtful ways; all without threatening his masculinity.

### **A Wife’s Respect for Her Husband**

One of the most striking portions of the videoconference is when Sarah Eggerichs takes the stage. Her husband is the primary presenter, drawing from his years of pastoral ministry. But she speaks clearly and directly to the women, confessing her previous lack of understanding regarding how to honor a man, much less her own husband. It is well known that men find women difficult to understand, but it can often be overlooked that men pose an equal challenge to women. To this end, the Eggerichs offer practical ways in

---

<sup>4</sup> Eph. 5:29.

which women can show respect to their man. The acronym for wives is CHAIRS<sup>5</sup>: conquest, hierarchy, authority, insight, relationship, and sexuality. They point out the need most men have for conquest; that is, to provide for and protect those they love. A wife does well to appreciate this drive and respect the fact that a husband might (for example) feel driven to work longer hours to better provide for his family. Appreciating his desires does not mean, however, that she does not offer accountability where needed with her husband.

The letter “A” is for authority. Deep within a man is a desire to lead and make decisions. Christian leadership in the home is a tempered leadership, one in which the husband loves his wife and leads her through understanding. Wives should seek to understand and fan into flame this desire within their husband.

Pastors should help women grasp the average man’s nature inclination to analyze and counsel as a part of giving insight. It is true that women often want their husband to simply listen and understand them; indeed, there is room for most men to improve in this area. Yet, women have a wonderful resource in their husbands when faced with difficult situations that might benefit from an analytical resolution.

Relationship is crucial in any marriage; that goes without saying. The question however, is how does one best and naturally relate? Generally speaking, women like to face each other when they talk, and, they like to talk a lot! It is quite unimaginable for women to get together and not converse. Men, however, are different. Conversation is important, but shoulder-to-shoulder relating is often preferred. Can a man’s wife attend a sports game with him? Will she sit in silence with him in the hunter’s stand or on the

---

<sup>5</sup> Eggerichs, Emerson. *Love and Respect: the Love She Most Desires, the Respect He Desperately Needs*, 183-192.

fishing boat? Will she do battle with him on his favorite video game? Sarah Eggerichs related a car trip she took with her son; two and one half hours on the road and not a word was spoken. She thought this was a failure until he thanked her profusely for her companionship on the journey. Pastors do well to convey to women how different and important male bonding is.

One of the most important truths a pastor can teach a prospective bride is the importance of sexuality to her husband. Sexual intimacy is often relegated to women, yet men have a profound stake in this aspect of their relationship. A man often gains the stereotype of being promiscuous and conquers when it comes to sex. While this stereotype may be well earned, it masks a need they have in a committed marriage relationship. Sexual intimacy helps reassure a man that his wife loves him and still adores him even after a fight or even after he has failed in a given area. Developing a healthy view of male sexuality will help a wife not only meet her husband's needs but deepen their marriage on many levels.

### **The Rewarded Cycle**

The third aspect of this ministry is the "Rewarded Cycle." This takes place when the principles in section two are fully implemented and become the norm for the couple. Perhaps they at one point were depleted; at this point they become strengthened and live in peace with each other. They are now living according to God's plan in Ephesians 5 and are breathing life into each other and also providing an emotionally secure home for their children, if they have any.

This videoconference is easily attainable via DVD. The DVDs are given to the couple to watch prior to the third session; it is suggested that the first three sessions are covered in the third meeting with the pastor and that the remaining two are covered in the fourth meeting. Though some of the material will be perceived as theoretical prior to marriage, the average couple has already experienced enough of the Crazy Cycle to understand the concepts and learn how to build an emotionally healthy marriage, which runs on the Rewarded Cycle. Couples should be given the DVDs at the beginning of the counseling sessions so they will have time to watch the DVDs and take adequate notes.

## **Chapter Five**

### **CEREMONY PLANNING**

In premarital counseling the pastor's focus is on giving the couple what he is uniquely equipped and gifted to give: godly vision casting and teaching regarding Christian marriage.

Crafting a memorable and God honoring ceremony will be touched on briefly here but is not the stated purpose of this work.

The value of a Christian wedding ceremony is twofold. It celebrates the love between two people as they commit to marriage, giving others the opportunity to witness and rejoice with them. This celebration with family and friends serves as a fond memory for the couple that they carry in their hearts in the future. In today's age, it can be preserved and enjoyed for the rest of their lives. It is also an opportunity to declare to non-Christians the Gospel of Jesus Christ, along with what marriage is and is not. As the latter is a picture of the former, it is a beautifully fitting place to have them receive this. As such, the pastor guides the couple to include elements desired in the ceremony that will be both memorable and fruitful. It is recommended that one session be devoted completely to this, to develop and tie up loose ends. However, it is expected that this discussion will take place in small parts in each session.

### **Mentor Couples**

As the details are being cemented, one final piece of business remains. It is excellent for a couple to receive instruction prior to the wedding. But couples need help fleshing out what they've learned and are experiencing in real time. To this end, pastors



ought to assign the couple to a mentor couple that can help them navigate through the course ahead. This couple should have a strong walk with Christ and a thriving marriage. It is recommended they be married for at least fifteen years; the more seasoned they are, the better. Their goal is to meet with the couple several times a year throughout the first years of their marriage, and stay connected as time moves on. Hopefully, a genuine friendship will develop, providing for both formal and informal connects. The goal is for the couple to have a continued advocate, a couple which understands the nature of the struggle and provides support, friendship, understanding, encouragement and wise counsel.

The rationale for a mentor couple is easy to see on the other side of the wedding ceremony, not so easy to see prior to the ceremony (for engaged couples). An enduring gift a pastor can give a couple is to help them see the value and benefit of engaging with a mentor couple; a team that can be there for them and help guide them through the challenges most newly marrieds encounter. Drs. Les & Leslie Parrot submit a number of areas newly marrieds inevitably will need to navigate through establishing marital roles and responsibilities through negotiation and adjusting expectations, providing emotional fulfillment and support for each other by learning how to give and receive love and affection, adjusting personal habits such as sleep patterns, spending behavior, and so on, negotiating gender roles that reflect individual personalities, skills, needs, interests, values and equity, making sexual adjustments with each other by learning how to physically discover mutual pleasure and satisfaction, establishing family and employment priorities by learning to balance and negotiate, developing effective communication skills that allow resolution to conflicts, managing budgetary and financial

matters, establishing relationships with extended family and managing to set boundaries between marriage and family of origin, participating in the larger community by making friends with other married couples and being involved in the community.<sup>1</sup>

As pastors walk couples through pre-marriage counseling, helping them see what's ahead will hopefully incline them to settling on a mentor couple prior to the wedding. The pastor can do his best to prepare husbands and wives for marriage, but everything before the wedding is marriage theory. Marriage *reality* occurs when the wedding guests have left and the couple begins to forge their own identity.

The flip side of the coin to convincing new couples of the need for mentorship is convincing more seasoned couples that it is worth their time and effort to invest in newer couples. The pastor's work here is to cast a vision to his congregation that will inspire others to step forward. He must regularly preach on marriage or make mention of it often, igniting couples to see the great need for marriage mentorship. Perhaps there are couples that were left all alone in their marriage after their wedding. Perhaps others have had a broken world experience and pressed on through much heartache and regret,<sup>2</sup> and have good counsel and encouragement to pass on to those newer to the marriage scene. Noted psychologist John Gottman lists "four horsemen of the apocalypse": criticism, contempt, defensiveness and stonewalling.<sup>3</sup> When these four habits and mindsets settle in to a marriage relationship, it is difficult to regain lost ground and make recovery. Mentor

---

<sup>1</sup> Drs. Les and Leslie Parrot, *The Complete Guide to Marriage Mentoring* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 59. For pastors needing resources, this is an excellent choice to equip mentor couples.

<sup>2</sup> Gordon MacDonald, *Rebuilding Your Broken World* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1988), 61.

<sup>3</sup> John Gottman, *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 68.

couples very well might have seen some of this in their own marriage, and be able to steer less experienced couples away from these tendencies. Depending on personal comfort level, mentor couples can also be utilized to speak to the tender issue of sexuality with new husbands and wives. This topic is often not including in standard premarital counseling, as it is a sensitive area, one not fully engaged until after the wedding date. There are helpful resources available, such as Ed & Gaye Wheat's straightforward and medically sound work on sexuality within marriage.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Ed and Gaye Wheat, *Intended for Pleasure* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 2010).

## Chapter Six

### CONCLUSION

Marriage is close to the heart of God and a critical piece of His plan for is people. Companionship and procreation are at the center, and, through walking in oneness of flesh couples brilliantly reflect the redemptive love of God to those around them. It ought to be an institution that churches wholeheartedly embrace and strengthen, and get behind. Employing effort and resources to encourage and guide couples should be a top priority for every pastor and his staff.

The benefits of marriage are legion. Both men and women are able to enjoy and satisfy their sexual passions together, doing so in righteousness and in the path of holiness. Their testimony to outsiders is enhanced as they turn away from prevalent sinful passions to display the love and unity found in the Trinity. Churches are naturally looking for ways to improve discipleship opportunities and grow Christians. A strong and spiritually vibrant marriage provides the fertile ground to develop young minds and souls. Is this not the focal point of God’s attention to this mater from the beginning?

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.”<sup>1</sup>

Before the children are discipled, husbands and wives are enjoying sweet fellowship before the Lord together. Both are stimulated to go deeper, and specifically wives experience deeper sanctification through the ministry of their husbands who are faithfully leading them in Christ.

---

<sup>1</sup> Deut. 6:4-7.

With all the blessings that marriage affords, why do so many struggle and live subpar relationships? Pastors need to be aware of the intense opposition against God's institution; naturally, if it fits prominently in God's program, Satan will relentlessly and violently oppose it. Passions run deep and rampant, as they did in the apostles' day. Fidelity to a life long commitment is not always appealing; whether to enter into it to begin with, or to honor it while in progress. Erotic love is glorified in media today, and not much thought given to those who break their marriage vows. Indeed, today the very institution of marriage is being redefined. No longer is it even conceptually a sacred trust between a man and a woman, but is now widely accepted (even legalized) to encompass homosexual unions. The adversary has launched an all out assault on the godliness of marriage, both within and outside the church. Public opinion on the institution has shifted, and many inside the church are confused regarding the true Biblical foundation of marriage, lacking Biblical counsel within marriage, and need encouragement to continue on as a married couple. To this end, pastors need to be vigilant and intentional in leading their people. Those under a pastor's leadership ought to appreciate and be able to articulate a godly picture of marriage. Those married should draw strength, guidance and encouragement from their church as they navigate through the various stages of their marriage and family life. Those advanced in years should be encouraged and equipped to help those who are married, giving them perspective, insight and encouragement for the journey.

While there are many opportunities for church members to grow in their appreciation and knowledge of marriage through sermons and education classes, there remains an opportunity unparalleled for those entering into marriage. Prior to officiating

a wedding, pastors should seize the moment and build into the new couple's marriage. As a couple is focused on and contemplating their marriage before entering into it, the pastor has the opportunity to speak into their lives and set them on the right path. Effective premarital counseling, like all counseling, incorporates intake information. By gaining information on individuals' emotional health, the pastor can help them as they get close to another in marriage; by gaining a perspective on their current attitudes towards marriage he can steer them in the right direction. Care and attention should be given to casting a godly vision for one's future marriage union. Couples need to hear what God sees in marriage: two individuals coming together as one, emotionally, spiritually, and physically. This high blessing is a goal they will pursue the rest of their days. Delineating specific responsibilities for husbands and wives is beneficial as couples can focus on that which most helpfully builds up their union. Having them watch Love & Respect together provides opportunity for couples to consider and discuss key concepts together before marriage, and provides opportunity to interact with them and guide their understanding, giving specific application to their personal relationship. The interaction between pastor and couples is priceless as it provides for personal engagement with a trusted shepherd who knows them. The final act of pairing a couple to a mentor couple will ensure continued help and assistance through the first years of marriage and through the various stages that follow.

When pastors are willing to engage a couple in premarital counseling, a set plan provides topics needed for discussion to ensure couples embark on their marriage adventure prepared and informed, equipped to live out and experience what God

graciously calls them to. May this work enable pastors to do just that, strengthening marriages and glorifying the reflection of God's image to a world that is watching.

## APPENDIX

### WEDDING CEREMONY TEMPLATE

# The Marriage Celebration of Bride and Groom Date

Prelude

Seating of the groom's mother

Men Enter

Processional

Entrance of the Bride

Welcome

We are here today to celebrate the union of and witness the vows and pledges that Groom and Bride are to make to each other. They thank each and every one of you for your presence here and for all that has and will be done to make this a memorable day. Your attendance at their celebration today greatly enhances its meaning and joy for them.

Marriage is an honorable estate, instituted by God, and signifying to us the union that there is between Christ and those who put their trust in Him as their Savior. Therefore, it is not to be entered unadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, soberly, prayerfully, and in the fear of the Lord. We believe that by His sovereign will, God has called Bride and Groom to be joined together as one to the praise of His glory.

You, Groom, and you, Bride, come now to be united in marriage in the sight of God and these witnesses.

Prayer

And now, Groom, the Scriptures say to the husband:



"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it; that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives."

And, Bride, the Scriptures say to the wife:

"Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church; and He is the savior of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything."

And to both of you the Scriptures say: "Submitting to one another in the fear of God."

Giving of the Bride

Who gives Bride to be married to Groom?

(Bride's Father. Replies: "Her mother and I.")

Congregational Hymn

(Congregation stand; sing all stanzas)

Reading of Scripture chosen by the couple:

Solo

Reading of Scripture chosen by the couple:

Congregational Hymn

(Minister, Bride, Groom, Matron of Honor, Best Man, Maid of Honor go up steps to stage)

The Bible says a man shall cleave to his wife and they shall become one flesh. The union into which you are now about to enter is the closest and most tender into which human beings can come. It is a union founded upon mutual experience and affection, and to believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, it is a union in the Lord. Marriage is God's institution, intended for the happiness and welfare of mankind.

It takes three to make a Christian marriage: a man, a woman, and the Lord. The heart of marriage is love and the purpose of life is to know God's love. We are informed by God's Word that:

"Love is patient, love is kind;  
It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

It is not rude, self-seeking, nor easily angered,  
and it keeps no record of wrongs.  
Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.  
It always protects, trusts, hopes and perseveres.  
Love never fails."

Message (With Gospel Presentation)

Charge to Bride and Groom

I now charge you both to remember that love and loyalty are required as the foundation of a happy, Christ-honoring home. And if the vows you are about to take are kept unbroken, your marriage will last, your home will endure and you will honor your heavenly Father.

Groom, do you take Bride to be your wedded wife? And do you solemnly promise before God Who knows all things and these witnesses that you will love, honor and cherish her, in plenty and in want, in joy and in sorrow, in sickness and in health; and that forsaking all others for her alone, you will perform unto her all the duties that a husband owes to his wife, as long as you both shall live?

Groom replies, "I will."

Bride, do you take Groom to be your wedded husband? And do you solemnly promise before God Who knows all things and these witnesses that you will love, honor, comfort and obey him, in plenty and in want, in joy and in sorrow, in sickness and in health, and that forsaking all others for him alone, you will perform unto him all the duties that a wife owes to her husband, as long as you both shall live?

Bride replies, "I will."

Facing one another, you shall now give and exchange your wedding vows.

Exchange of vows (pastor reads by sections, Groom and Bride repeat after him.)

"I Groom, take you Bride to be my wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward; for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, as long as we both shall live."

"I Bride, take you Groom to be my wedded husband, to have and to hold from this day forward; for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, as long as we both shall live."

Exchange of Rings

Groom and Bride, what token do you give each other to acknowledge that you will faithfully keep these vows?

Groom and Bride respond, "Rings."

These rings are of gold and are precious so let your love be your most cherished earthly possession. As Groom places a ring on the ring finger of Bride's left hand and Bride places a ring on the ring finger of Groom's left hand, they will by these symbols declare before us all their sincerity in pledging all their heart's faithful love and the genuineness of their affection for one another.

The Best Man gives Groom the ring.

With this ring, I thee wed and pledge all of my heart's love and affection to you.

Groom repeats this as he places the ring on Bride's finger.

The Matron of Honor gives Bride the ring.

With this ring, I thee wed and pledge all of my heart's love and affection to you.

Bride repeats this as she places the ring on Groom's finger.

The unbroken circle, the emblem of eternity, and the gold, the emblem of that which is least tarnished and most enduring, are to show how lasting and imperishable is the faith now mutually pledged by the giving and receiving of these rings. With this emblem of purity and endless devotion, you do each the other wed and these marriage vows you do now and forever seal.

Prayer of Consecration (Colin)

Lighting of the Unity Candle

The two outside candles on the candelabra were lit to represent Bride's and Groom's lives to this moment. They are two distinct lights, capable of going their own separate ways. To bring joy and happiness to their home, however, there must be the merging of these two lights into one light. This is what our Lord meant when He said, "On this account a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh." From this time on it is their desire that their thoughts shall be for each other rather than for their own individual selves. Their plans shall be mutual and their joys and sorrows shared alike.

As they each take a candle and together light the center one, they will extinguish their own candles, thus letting the center candle represent the union of their lives into one flesh. It is their purpose that as this one light cannot be divided, neither shall their lives be divided, but be a united testimony in a Christian home. May the radiance of this one light be a testimony of their unity and love in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Solo (during lighting of the unity candle)

Pronouncement to Congregation

Bride and Groom, inasmuch as you have mutually assumed this wedding covenant as a sacred vow taken before God and these witnesses, by virtue of the authority vested in me as a minister of the Word of God, I do now pronounce you husband and wife, united and bound in the pure and holy bonds of marriage, and those whom God has joined together let nothing and no one ever separate.

Groom, you may now kiss your bride! (The bride and groom kiss.)

May I present Mr. and Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_!!!

Recessional

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adams, Jay E. *Solving Marriage Problems: Biblical Solutions for Christian Counselors*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986.
- Archdiocese of Omaha. *Facilitating Open, Caring Communication, Understanding and Study: An Inventory for Marriage Enrichment*, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed. Omaha, NE: Belman Publishing, 2014.
- Bruce, Alexander B. *The Training of the Twelve*. Colorado Springs, CO: Kregel Publications, 1979.
- Bruce, F.F. *The Gospel of John*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983.
- Bunyan, John. *Prayer*. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1989.
- Carden, Judy. *What Husbands Need: Reaching His Heart and Reclaiming His Passion*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2006.
- Carter, Tom. *Spurgeon at His Best*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988.
- Chapman, Gary. *The 5 Love Languages: the Secret to Love That Lasts*. Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 2009.
- Chapman, Gary. *Things I Wish I'd Known Before We Got Married*. Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 2010.
- Clement, Dr. Chris. *With Hearts On Fire: The Story of Robert and Ivy Milliken*. Belfast, Ireland: Ambassador Productions, 1997.
- Clinton, Dr. Tim, and Dr. John Trent. *Quick-Reference Guide to Marriage and Family Counseling, The*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009.
- Clinton, Dr. Tim, and Dr. Mark Laaser. *Quick-Reference Guide to Sexuality and Relationship Counseling, The*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2010.
- Clinton, Tim, and Joshua Straub. *God Attachment: Why You Believe, Act, and Feel the Way You Do About God*. Nashville, TN: Howard Books, 2010.
- Clinton, Timothy, and George Ohlschlager, eds. *Competent Christian Counseling*. Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2002.
- Collins, Gary, Ph.D. *Christian Counseling*. Dallas: Word Publishing, 1988.

- Crabb, Lawrence J. *How to Become One with Your Mate*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986.
- Dobson, Dr. James. *Dr. Dobson Answers Your Questions About Marriage*. Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1989.
- Don, and Sally Meredith. *Two Becoming One: Experiencing the Power of Oneness in Your Marriage*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1999.
- Eggerichs, Emerson. *Love and Respect: the Love She Most Desires, the Respect He Desperately Needs*. Colorado Springs, CO: Thomas Nelson, 2004.
- Engle, Paul. *Remarriage After Divorce in Today's Church 3 Views*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2006.
- Evans, Tony. *Marriage Matters*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2014.
- Elliot, Elisabeth. *Shaping of a Christian Family, The*. Grand Rapids: Revell, 1992.
- Ethridge, Shannon, and Greg Ethridge. *Every Woman's Marriage Workbook: How to Ignite the Joy and Passion You Both Desire*. Workbook ed. Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 1996.
- Feldhahn, Shaunti. *For Women Only, Revised and Updated Edition: What You Need to Know About the Inner Lives of Men*. Rev ed. USA: Multnomah Books, 2013.
- Feldhahn, Shaunti, and Jeff Feldhahn. *For Men Only, Revised and Updated Edition: a Straightforward Guide to the Inner Lives of Women*. Har/Bklt ed. Colorado Springs: Multnomah Books, 2013.
- Fertel, Mort. *Marriage Fitness: 4 Steps to Building and Maintaining Phenomenal Love*. Baltimore, MD: MarriageMax, Inc., 2004.
- Gottman, John M., and Nan Silver. *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work: a Practical Guide from the Country's Foremost Relationship Expert*. Collegeville, MN: Harmony, 1999.
- Gottman, John. *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994.
- Hart, Archibald, Dr. and Dr. Sharon Morris. *Safe Haven Marriage: Building a Relationship You Want to Come Home To*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003.
- Hesch, Joel. *Proven Men: a Proven Path to Sexual Integrity; Help with Pornography, Masturbation or Sex Addiction from a Biblical Perspective*. Lynchburg: Proven Men Ministries, Ltd, 2013.
- Hendriksen, William. *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of Galatians, Ephesians,*

- Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996.
- “What We Believe,” Derwood Bible Church, accessed May 5, 2014, <http://derwoodbiblechurch.org/what-we-believe/>.
- “Basic Beliefs,” Southern Baptist Convention, accessed May 3, 2014, <http://www.sbc.net/aboutus/basicbeliefs.asp>.
- Kourtney Jason, “Lies Disney Told Us About Love,” accessed May 5, 2014, <http://www.yourtango.com/2013189540/11-lies-disney-told-us-about-love>.
- Jim, and Barbara Dycus. *Children of Divorce*. Elgin, IL: Cook Communications Ministries Intl, 1987.
- Keller, Timothy. *The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the Wisdom of God*. Reprint ed. NY: Riverhead Trade, 2013.
- Larimore, Walt & Barb. *His Brain, Her Brain: How Divinely Designed Differences Can Strengthen Your Marriage*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008.
- Leahy, Michael. *Porn Nation Discussion Guide: Conquering America's #1 Addiction*. Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 2008.
- Leman, Kevin. *Home Court Advantage: Preparing Your Children to Be Winners in Life*. Wheaton, IL: Focus, 2005.
- Lenski, R.C.H. *Commentary of the New Testament- Interpretation of Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, Ephesians and Philippians (Limited Edition)*. 2nd ed. United States of America: Hendrickson Publishers, 2001.
- Lloyd-Jones, Dr. Martyn. *Christian Marriage: from Basic Principles to Transformed Relationships*. Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 2012.
- MacArthur, John. *The Fulfilled Family: God's Design for Your Home*. Chicago: The Moody Bible Institute, 1982.
- MacArthur, John, Jr., and the Master's Seminary faculty. *Rediscovering Pastoral Ministry: Shaping Contemporary Ministry with Biblical Mandates*. Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 1995.
- MacDonald, Gordon. *Rebuilding Your Broken World*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1988.
- John, McNeill. *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion Volume I*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960.
- Meredith, Don and Sally. *Two-- Becoming One: Experiencing the Power of Oneness in Your*

- Marriage*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1999.
- Meredith, Don and Sally. *Two Becoming One Workbook: Applying the Power of Oneness in Your Marriage*.
- Murrow, David. *What Your Husband Isn't Telling You: a Guided Tour of a Man's Body, Soul, and Spirit*. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2012.
- Omartian, Stormie. *The Power of a Praying Wife*. Eugene: Harvest House Publishing, 1997.
- Parrot, Drs. Les and Leslie. *The Complete Guide to Marriage Mentoring*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005.
- Parrot and Parrot, Drs. Les & Leslie. *Trading Places*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2008.
- Peace, Martha. *The Excellent Wife: a Biblical Perspective - Study Guide*. 10th ed. Bemidji, MN: Focus Publishing, Incorporated, 1998.
- Pink, Arthur W. *The Sovereignty of God*. Radford VA: Wilder Publications, 2009.
- Scazzero, Peter. *The Emotionally Healthy Church, Expanded Edition: a Strategy for Discipleship That Actually Changes Lives*. Exp ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010.
- Schaumburg, Dr. Harry. *False Intimacy: Understanding the Struggle of Sexual Addiction*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1997.
- Scott, Stuart. *The Exemplary Husband: a Biblical Perspective*. Revised ed. Bemidji, MN: Focus Publishing (MN), 2002.
- Smalley, Gary. *If Only He Knew*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988.
- Smart, Dominic. *When We Get It Wrong: Peter, Christ and Our Path through Failure*. Waynesboro: Authentic Media, 2001.
- Stanton, Glenn T. *The Ring Makes All the Difference: the Hidden Consequences of Cohabitation and the Strong Benefits of Marriage*. New ed. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2011.
- Stott, John, R.W. *The Letters of John*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000.
- Stover, Gregory. "Lovingly Leveling with Live-Ins." *Leadership: A Practical Journal For Church Leaders* 9, no. 1 (1988): 136-38.
- Strong, James. *The Strongest Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. 2 century ed. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, ©2001.



- Vincent, Thomas. *The Shorter Catechism of the Westminster Assembly Explained and Proved from Scripture*. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1980.
- Waite, Linda, and Maggie Gallagher. *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People Are Happier, Healthier and Better Off Financially*. New York: Broadway Books, 2001.
- Wallace, and III Mitchell. *Not Right, Not Wrong, Just Different*. [www.h2hp.com](http://www.h2hp.com): Partnership Publications, 2009.
- Wheat, Ed and Gaye. *Intended for Pleasure*. Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 2010.
- Wright, H. Norman. *Communication: Key to Your Marriage: a Practical Guide to Creating a Happy, Fulfilling Relationship*. Ventura, CA: Regal, 2000.
- Yarhouse, Mark A *Homosexuality and the Christian: a Guide for Parents, Pastors, and Friends*. Bloomington, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2010.