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EQUIPPING MARRIED COUPLES TO ASSIST WITH
PREMARITAL COUNSELING AT FIRST CHINESE
BAPTIST CHURCH IN WALNUT, CALIFORNIA

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I dedicate this project to my loving, gracious, and godly, wife, Miranda Szeto, who has supported and encouraged me during this process even when I was ready to give up. As my greatest earthly blessing from God, she is the godly mother of our children and my beloved companion in premarital counseling.

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PREFACE

The journey to complete this project has been both rigorous and rewarding. First, I would like to thank God for calling me to ministry and providing me with this opportunity to sharpen myself as a minister of the gospel. This is grace upon grace.

Second, I'd like to thank my wife, Miranda, and our children for their forbearance of me. The doctoral program and project were difficult at times, but my wife was graciously patient with me. As for our children (Nathanael, Josiah, and Karissa), I think they just thought that Daddy had to work more.

Third, I'd like to thank FCBC Walnut for allowing me to complete this project and program. Without support from the church, this project would be impossible. In particular, I'm thankful for the group of couples who stepped forward to participate in this project. May God bring forth fruit from our time together!

Last, I'd like to thank my professors from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Specifically, I'd like to thank Dr. Stuart Scott for writing *Exemplary Husband* and for gently teaching me more about Biblical Counseling.

Jonathan Mark Szeto

Walnut, California

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to equip married couples to assist with premarital counseling at First Chinese Baptist Church in Walnut, California (FCBC Walnut).

Goals

The first goal was to assess the current understanding and practice of premarital counseling among a group of married couples selected by the pastoral staff. This goal was measured by administering a survey to the selected couples and would be considered successfully met when at least thirteen couples complete the survey (appendix 10).

The second goal was to develop a fourteen-week training curriculum that would equip couples to assist with premarital counseling. The curriculum covered foundational marriage topics such as the purpose of marriage, the importance of personal spiritual health, gender roles, communication, conflict resolution, leaving and cleaving, family planning, money, and sex. The goal was measured by an expert panel who utilized a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the curriculum. This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion meet or exceed the sufficient level (appendix 3).

The third goal was to equip married couples to assist with premarital counseling at FCBC Walnut. This goal was measured by administering a pre and post-

survey to measure the couples' level of knowledge and preparation to perform premarital counseling (see appendix 10). This goal would be considered successfully met when a t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference between the pre and post-survey scores.

Ministry Context

It is vital to understand the ministry context for the project. By understanding the strengths, weaknesses, and demography of the English congregation of FCBC Walnut, this project was more effectively and successfully implemented.

The first strength of FCBC Walnut is the positive attitude towards Scripture, which has been evident since its founding. In 1984, First Chinese Baptist Church Los Angeles (FCBC LA) planted FCBC Walnut.¹ FCBC LA has a reputation for focusing on God's word. Since many of the founding members came from FCBC LA, there has been a historical emphasis on Scripture at FCBC Walnut. As a result, FCBC Walnut is generally receptive to any teaching rooted in Scripture.

The second strength of FCBC Walnut is the strong interest in caring for the younger generations. The parents in FCBC Walnut are willing to make sacrifices to care for their children. For example, many of these parents moved to Walnut for the specific purpose of placing their children in a top-notch school district. This attitude is manifested in the church, where there are currently three dedicated positions for people under 18 years old—a High School pastor, a Junior High pastor, and a Children's Director. As the younger generations mature, they will need to be prepared for marriage.

In addition to the aforementioned interest in Scripture and caring for younger generations, there are also two primary weaknesses relevant to this project. The first weakness of FCBC Walnut is the general lack of openness in relationships within the

¹All information and statistics were obtained from church business meeting notes and the church database as of February 19, 2014.

English adult congregation. Though there are many small groups, these groups often times become too large for in-depth discussion.² Since many of the adults are themselves immigrants, they are not accustomed to talking about the details of their lives. Many couples refuse to talk openly about their marriages, even when they are having difficulty. Though this reluctance to be open about marriage may be generally true in all churches, the specific cultural background at FCBC Walnut further heightens this reluctance, making many couples hesitant to talk about their marriage with another couple unless they have developed a significant relationship with them.³

The second weakness of FCBC Walnut is the lack of trained lay leaders. In 2013, the weekly attendance for all congregations at FCBC Walnut was 1,039, for which there were nine pastors and eight deacons. The average weekly attendance for people in the English congregation at least eighteen years old was 376, with two pastors and four deacons. Currently, these deacons do not typically serve in a counseling capacity, having expressed a need to be trained better.

The final piece of information pertinent to understanding FCBC Walnut is the overall demography. The church database of attenders indicates that there are two dominant age groups present in the English congregation of FCBC Walnut. There are 102 adults in their fifties and 169 adults in their twenties, representing 25 percent and 42 percent of the congregation, respectively (see appendix 1). When compared to these two dominant groups, there seems to be an underrepresentation for adults in their thirties and forties, representing about 7 and 16 percent, respectively. The age category of adults in their sixties represents 7 percent of the English congregation. Finally, adults in their

²Although the stated goal for the small group ministry is to split groups when they become too large, some of the groups regularly have sixteen or more people.

³FCBC Walnut has three independent congregations based on language (English, Mandarin, and Cantonese). Since I cannot speak Chinese, my project will focus on the English congregation of FCBC Walnut.

seventies and older comprise the remaining 2 percent of the group.⁴ The demography reveals that the single largest group of attenders is people in their twenties, most of whom are single.

The strengths of FCBC Walnut include its attitude towards Scripture and focus on the younger generations. On the other hand, the weaknesses of FCBC Walnut include a lack of relational openness, limited lay leadership, and demographic challenges.

Rationale

The strengths, weaknesses, and demography of FCBC Walnut indicate that there was a suitable environment for equipping married couples to assist with premarital counseling in the English congregation of FCBC Walnut. Since the attenders of FCBC Walnut value Scripture, they wanted to learn how the Bible informs marriage. Furthermore, their attitude towards the youth inclined them to invest in future generations through premarital counseling.

This project also addressed the two aforementioned weaknesses of FCBC Walnut. Despite a culture where people don't talk about their marriages, couples who perform premarital counseling will be forced to be more open and transparent with their own marital struggles. In the absence of personal experience, engaged couples will ask for real-life examples of resolving conflict, communication, and common struggles in marriage. Additionally, engaged couples will have to also be transparent about their relationship during the premarital counseling sessions. The second noted weakness was the lack of trained lay leaders. By equipping couples to assist with premarital counseling, this project helped lay leaders become more skilled in personal ministry in the life of the church.

In light of the demography of FCBC Walnut, equipping couples to perform

⁴Statistics compiled from FCBC Walnut church database, as of February 19, 2014.

premarital counseling has addressed an immediate need. Historically, only pastors have performed premarital counseling. In light of the 163 single individuals in their twenties who will probably be getting married within the next seven years, the requests for premarital counseling will quickly exceed the ability of the two English pastors. By training other couples to assist with premarital counseling, leaders can more effectively and efficiently minister to engaged couples by preparing them for marriage.

Based on the strengths, weaknesses, and particular demography, FCBC Walnut was an optimal environment for the implementation of this project. In light of the large group of maturing singles in their twenties, preparing them for marriage using God's word was one of the most strategic ways to impact future generations.

Definitions, Limitations, and Delimitations

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

Premarital counseling. Premarital counseling is the advice and instruction given to prepare a couple for marriage. The goals of premarital counseling are three-fold—to educate the couple about marriage, equip the couple through practicing good communication in marriage, and to establish a relationship with the couple for the purposes of future ministry together.

Biblical counseling. For this project, biblical counseling is “the whole counsel of God delivered in a systematic, understandable, relevant, and loving manner.”⁵ More succinctly, biblical counseling is, “a way of speaking what is true and constructive into this person’s life right now. Good counseling is essentially wise love in action.”⁶

⁵Joshua Clutterham, *Men Counseling Men: A Biblical Guide to the Major Issues Men Face*, ed. John Street (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2013), 27.

⁶David Powlison, *Speaking Truth in Love: Counsel in Community* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2005), 5-6.

Complementarianism. At the foundation of any teaching about marriage is the understanding of roles in marriage. Complementarianism is the view God created men and women in His image with distinct roles in the home and church. Though equal in value and personhood, men and women are different in function.⁷

Submission. Specifically within marriage, wives are called to submit to their husbands. Piper and Grudem note, “Submission is a woman’s Spirit-enabled disposition to yield to her husband’s guidance and her inclination to follow his leadership.”⁸

Headship. God calls men to biblical headship in the home, which is, “the husband’s divine calling to take primary responsibility for Christlike leadership, protection, and provision.”⁹

General discipleship. Regarding Christian discipleship, Wilkins states, “we are speaking of what it means to grow as a Christian in every area of life...Discipleship and discipling imply the process of becoming like Jesus Christ.”¹⁰ In order to facilitate growth as a Christian, people have various practices at their disposal, which include personal devotional time, Sunday school, listening to sermons, attending retreats, etc.

Particular discipleship. One specific means of Christian growth is through particular discipleship, which is “a broader term that applies to the one-on-one Christ-centered mentoring that older Christians do with younger believers.”¹¹ In this relationship, there is a discipler who seeks to help his or her disciple grow.

⁷John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2012), 470.

⁸Ibid., 61.

⁹Ibid., 57.

¹⁰Michael J. Wilkins, *Following the Master: A Biblical Theology of Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 27. *Kindle*.

¹¹Deepak Reju and Mark Dever, “The Health of the Church and Biblical Counseling,” in *Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling: Changing Lives with God’s Changeless Truth*, ed. James MacDonald (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2013), 251.

Mentoring. People have used employed various terms to describe the process of mentoring. For the purposes of this project, mentoring is simply, “the process of raising others to a higher level.”¹²

There were two limitations for this project. First, the accuracy of the pre and post-series surveys were dependent upon the willingness of the respondents to be honest about their understanding of the topics. To mitigate this limitation, respondents were promised that their answers would only be available to the pastoral staff. Secondly, the effectiveness of the equipping would be limited by the consistency of attendance.

There were also three specific delimitations for this project. First, the project was limited to the English congregation at FCBC Walnut. Since I serve as a pastor in the English congregation and all of the training materials were written in English, couples who wish to be trained in premarital counseling had to be fairly proficient in English. The second delimitation is that the premarital curriculum would cover a limited number of topics. While there are many possible topics to cover, a curriculum must be focused. Third and finally, the equipping curriculum was limited to fourteen weeks of instruction. While there was an introduction to biblical counseling course taught prior to the premarital counseling course, the focus of this project was the premarital counseling course.

Research Methodology

The research methodology for this project included an evaluation rubric, a pre-series survey, and a post-series survey.¹³ There were three goals that will facilitate the completion of this project. To be considered for this pre-series survey, each married

¹²John C. Maxwell, *Mentoring 101: What Every Leader Needs to Know* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Publishers, 2008), 3.

¹³All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

couple had to be members who have served faithfully in leadership positions in the church, had been married for at least two years, and had been approved by the pastoral staff of FCBC Walnut to assist with premarital counseling. Out of the eighteen couples approached to serve in this capacity, seventeen committed to serving.¹⁴ There were two in their sixties, eleven in their fifties, two in their forties, and two in their thirties. In order to accomplish the first goal of assessing the current understanding and practice of premarital counseling, the couples filled out a pre-series survey (appendix 10).

The pre-series survey aimed to assess couples in two specific areas. First, the survey assessed their current understanding of premarital counseling. The survey also investigated the couples' familiarity with topics germane to premarital counseling. Specifically, the teaching series covered biblical teaching about the purpose of marriage, the importance of personal spiritual health, gender roles, communication, conflict resolution, leaving and cleaving, family planning, money, and sex. The second specific area of assessment was the couples' current practice of premarital counseling. The first goal was successfully met when a minimum of 80 percent of couples had completed the survey.¹⁵

The second goal was to develop a fourteen-week training curriculum that would equip couples to assist with premarital counseling. The fourteen-week training series took place during the church Sunday school period, which typically lasted around eighty minutes. To ensure quality, FCBC Walnut pastors who have performed premarital counseling examined the developed curriculum, utilizing a rubric to evaluate the content and organization of the curriculum, including biblical faithfulness, relevance to premarital counseling, and applicability of the curriculum (appendix 3). Using the

¹⁴At the request of the Mandarin pastor, a mandarin couple was also invited to the class. Since this project was limited to the English congregation, they were not included in the survey statistics.

¹⁵An 80 percent benchmark applied to the 17 participating couples equals 13 married couples, or 26 individuals.

provided feedback, the developed curriculum was modified until at least 90 percent of the evaluation criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level.

The third and final goal was to equip married couples to assist with premarital counseling at FCBC Walnut. Each session featured biblical teaching about the specific topic, important issues to explore with engaged couples, and a set of potential questions to ask during premarital counseling. Additionally, the class discussed how to approach various case scenarios to sharpen counseling skills.

In order to measure the effectiveness of the curriculum, a t-test for dependent samples was used to determine if there was a positive significant difference between the pre-series and post-series scores. The t-test was selected for this analysis as it compares the means of the scores from the pre-series surveys and post-series surveys which measured knowledge and readiness among the select group of median married couples.¹⁶ The group of married couples served as “a single group of the same subjects being studied under two conditions.”¹⁷ This goal was considered successfully met when a t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference between the pre and post-survey scores.

¹⁶Neil J. Salkind, *Statistics for People Who (Think They) Hate Statistics*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2008), 189.

¹⁷Ibid.

CHAPTER 2

GOD’S DESIGN FOR MARRIAGE

Located in central Italy, the leaning tower of Pisa hosts over one million visitors every year. From all over the world, people flock to this bell tower, which is as famous for its history as it is for its lean. Soon after building the second floor, the builders noticed that one side of the tower had begun to sink. Through the centuries, building experts have tried to address the lean by constructing uneven floors, injecting the foundation with cement, and placing counterweights. Modern analysis has proven that the tower of Pisa leans because it was built on an inadequate foundation. The clay soil beneath the tower was not strong enough to support the weight of the tower, meaning that it was doomed to lean before a single stone was laid.

Marriage is very much like a building. God is the designer and he has revealed the foundation, pillars, and support structures for marriage in Scripture. Despite having access to God’s blueprints for marriage, many Christian couples turn to wrong sources for wisdom and help in their marriage. Instead of consulting the designer of marriage, they turn to popular advice around them. One popular author asserts that keeping one’s “love tank” full is the key to making marriage work.¹ Another has offered that the “love and respect connection” is the secret to a healthy marriage.² While both authors provide helpful observations, their advice is not consistent with the counsel of God’s Word. If marriage is to work the way it was designed to work, couples must turn to the designer of

¹Gary Chapman, *The Five Love Languages: How to Express Heartfelt Commitment to Your Mate* (Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 2004), 23. Chapman’s view conflict resolution in marriage is based on psychological need and self-actualization.

²Emerson Eggerichs, *Love and Respect* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 2004), 4. While launched from Ephesians 5:33, Eggerichs does not address the rest of biblical teaching on marriage.

marriage by consulting Scripture. This project will equip married couples to assist with premarital counseling. In order to offer advice effectively, premarital counselors must understand God's plans for marriage. This chapter will unfold God's blueprints for marriage by examining three passages: Genesis 1-2, Ephesians 5:21-33, and Titus 2:1-8. For each passage, there will be an analysis of the text and some implications for marriage and premarital counseling.

God Establishes the Foundation for Marriage in Genesis 1-2

God is the ultimate architect. As the designer of the universe, the earth, and all the creatures in it, God had an overall plan for his creation. The first two chapters of Genesis offer insight into how God designed human beings and the institution of marriage.

Analysis of Genesis 1-2

From the very first words in Scripture, God is introduced as the creator of the heavens and the earth (Gen 1:1). In addition to creating the many types of animals, God specifically created human beings to reflect Himself and to rule over creation (Gen 1:26). As the Creator, God has a perfect and exhaustive understanding of human beings, knowing how they should live and relate to each other. In Genesis 1, the animals and plantation are repeatedly distinguished "according to their kind" (Gen 1:11-12, 21, 24-25). But when it comes to human beings, they are distinguished according to their sex, as "male and female" (Gen 1:27).³ God created human beings with the ability to relate to each other in a very special way—as male and female, yet both in his image (Gen 1:26). Despite declaring everything as "good" (Gen 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25), God himself declares that Adam's aloneness is "not good" and decides to create a helper suitable for him (Gen

³Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17* New International Commentary (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1990), 138.

2:18). The creation account provides the foundation for human marriage, which has three important implications for marriage.

Implications of Genesis 1-2

Like a building, the institution of marriage rests upon the foundation set forth by its designer. As the creator of the universe, God created human beings in his image and was personally involved in bringing together the first man and woman in marriage. To understand God's overall blueprint for marriage, it is necessary to consult Genesis 1-2, which provides three foundational implications for human marriage.

Marriage is between a man and a woman. The first implication from Genesis 1-2 comes from God's act of creating one woman for one man. In the first two chapters of Genesis, the word "good" is used repeatedly to describe the quality of God's creation, appearing nine times in forty-eight verses (Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31; 2:9, 12). But in Genesis 2:18, God states, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him." Given his divine power as creator, God could have created anything or anyone he desired. But in his infinite wisdom and abundant goodness, God created one woman to correspond to one man. Furthermore, it is important to recognize that God created the woman to address the man's state of aloneness prior to the entrance of sin and resulting curse upon the world. In other words, marriage was part of God's perfect plan for a sinless world, not a response to sinful conditions. Regarding God's pairing of one woman to one man, Burk affirms, "the one-flesh union of their bodies brings about a biological miracle neither could experience without the cooperation of the other: the begetting of children, procreation."⁴ God's design for marriage involves one

⁴Denny Burk, "Suppressing the Truth in Unrighteousness: Matthew Vines Takes on the New Testament," in *God and the Gay Christian: A Response to Matthew Vines*, ed. R. Albert Mohler, Jr. (Louisville: SBTS Press, 2014), 32.

man and one woman, confirmed by their physical bodies and complementary anatomy.⁵ In God's infinite wisdom, God decided to address Adam's aloneness by creating Eve to be Adam's suitable helper. Understanding God's design for marriage between one man and one woman brings clarity to many other prohibitions throughout Scripture. God intends to promote and protect what he has designed. As a result, marriage is to be honored (Heb 13:4) and protected from adultery (Exod 20:14; Matt 5:27-30), fornication (1 Cor 6:9-11), bestiality (Lev 18:23, 20:15-16), polygamy (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:6), and homosexuality (Rom 1:26-27).

Marriage provides permanent companionship. Having created a woman for the man, God designed marriage to be permanent and to provide companionship. The "one flesh" description is unique to the marriage relationship, which is why Jesus explains that God hates divorce (Mal 2:16) and never intended for divorce from the beginning (Matt 19:5-9). Furthermore, Jesus reveals God's personal involvement in bringing together a man and woman in marriage (Matt 19:6). Comparing the permanence of marriage to becoming a Christian, Mack writes, "God's kind of marriage involves a total and irrevocable commitment of two people to each other."⁶

In addition to designing marriage to be permanent, God also designed marriage for companionship by creating Eve to be Adam's "suitable helper" (Gen 2:18). The word "helper (עֲזָרָה)" reveals that God created Eve to assist Adam with his responsibilities, which included ruling over creation (Gen 1:26) and cultivating the garden (Gen 2:15). Far from being some thoughtless robot, God created Eve as a helper who was "suitable (כְּנַגְדּוֹ)," indicating that she was Adam's direct counterpart. Concerning Eve's relationship

⁵Due to the noetic effect of sin, there are some couples who are unable to conceive. Their infertility, however, does not invalidate God's original design for potential procreation through a man and a woman.

⁶Wayne Mack, *Strengthening Your Marriage*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1999), 5.

to Adam, Ortlund summarizes, “She was his spiritual equal and . . . ‘suitable for him.’ But she was not his equal in that she was his ‘helper.’ God did not create man and woman in an undifferentiated way, and their mere maleness and femaleness identify their respective roles.”⁷ In his perfect wisdom, God created marriage to provide a unique human relationship of permanent companionship.

With regard to premarital counseling, it is important to ask engaged couples what they seek from marriage. Some singles place unrealistic expectations on marriage, thinking that the spouse will solve personal problems and fulfill desires.⁸ Like the leaning tower of Pisa, the weight of a person’s unrealistic expectations can doom the marriage even before coming to the altar.

Marriage is the basis for a family unit. A third and final foundation from the creation account is that marriage is the basis for a family unit. In addition to revealing the permanence of marriage, Genesis 2:24 also reveals that marriage marks the beginning of a new family unit. The man leaves his father and mother to be joined to his wife. The leaving (עזב) means that the man’s primary relationship must be his marriage to his wife. While all people are still called to honor their parents (Exod 20:12), spouses are called to place a higher priority on their marriage.⁹ The word for joined (דבק) is used elsewhere to indicate physically possessing something (Deut 13:18) as well as contracting a condition (Deut 28:20). When God judged Gehazi for his greed, God decreed that Naaman’s leprosy would cling (דבק) to Gehazi and his descendants forever (2 Kgs 5:27), indicating the degree of permanence. The leaving and cleaving involves, “a declaration of intention

⁷Raymond C. Ortlund, Jr., “Male-Female Equality and Headship,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991), 91.

⁸David Powlison and John Yenchko, *Pre-Engagement: 5 Questions to Ask Yourself* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Co., 2000), 4-5.

⁹Mack, *Strengthening Your Marriage*, 3.

and a redefining of obligations and relationships in a familial and social setting.”¹⁰ While often times difficult, individuals must move from a relationship of obedience to one of independence from their parents in order to establish a new family unit.

As they prepare for marriage, engaged couples need to consider carefully their current relationship to their parents. The establishment of a “one flesh” relationship must eclipse all other human relationships—even between child and parent. Often times, this relationship change can be initially felt during wedding planning, where the engaged couple must make decisions for themselves after hearing the advice from their parents. Subsequent to marriage, the couples’ relationship to their parents will again be tested upon having children.

Summary of Genesis 1-2

The creation account establishes the foundation for marriage. Marriages will never stand properly unless they are built from God’s blueprints. Departures from God’s foundation for marriage help to explain many wrong practices in marriages today. Above-ground structures cannot compensate for faulty foundations. In his wisdom and sovereignty, God designed marriage to unite one man to one woman, to provide permanent companionship, and to form the basis for a family unit. Taken together, these three implications provide the foundation for marriage.

God Establishes the Structure for Marriage by Providing Roles in Ephesians 5:21-33

Building upon the foundation set in Genesis 1-2, God establishes the structure for marriage by ordaining particular roles for the husband and wife in marriage. Like players on the same team, God commends these roles for the sake of unity in marriage and ultimately, to provide an illustration of Christ and the church. Mack indicates, “When

¹⁰Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, New American Commentary, vol. 1A (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1996), 224.

two people know, accept, and fulfill their varying but complementary responsibilities, oneness in marriage is promoted. Conversely, when the husband and wife either do not understand or will not fulfill their God-given responsibilities, great confusion and frustration will result.”¹¹ In all of Scripture, Ephesians 5:21-33 offers the most extensive set of instructions concerning marriage.¹²

Background of Ephesians 5:21-33

Like most Pauline Epistles, the book of Ephesians can be divided into two major movements. The first section (chapters 1-3) provides practical doctrinal truths and the second section (chapters 4-6) offers specific exhortations and applications. Within the practical section of his letter, Paul begins chapter five by exhorting the Ephesians to be imitators of God and to walk in love just like Christ did. Paul argues that the Ephesians must conduct their lives in a manner consistent with their newfound identity as children of light (Eph 5:8). After making some broad applications about wisely using time, discerning the will of God, and being filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:15-20), Paul directly applies the general exhortation to imitate Christ to the concept of submission (Eph 5:21). Specifically, Paul addresses the household relationships between wives and husbands (Eph 5:22-33), children and parents (Eph 6:1-4), and slaves and masters (Eph 6:5-9).

The overarching theme of Ephesians 5:21-33 is “God’s design for submission and leadership in the marriage relationship.” Paul gives his readers the command and then supports it with reasons, linking the prescribed practice to biblical understanding. By understanding why they submit to their husbands, the wives gain a better appreciation for their husbands’ roles and responsibilities. By understanding that marriage is a “one flesh”

¹¹Mack, *Strengthening Your Marriage*, 16.

¹²A significant debate arises over whether there should be a paragraph break before or after Eph 5:21. The NAU, NIV, NKJV, NLT, NET, and ESV make v. 22 the beginning of a new paragraph while the KJV makes v. 21 the beginning of the new paragraph. The NCV and NRSV give 5:21 its own independent paragraph. For the purpose of this paper, v. 21 will be included in 5:21-6:9.

relationship, husbands better fulfill their responsibility to care for their wives as servant leaders.

God Calls Wives to Submission in Ephesians 5:22-24

Ephesians 5:22-24 contains God's instructions through Paul to the Ephesian wives. Ephesians 5:22 literally reads "the wives your own husbands as to the Lord." The participle indicating "submission" is supplied by verse 21 and limits the object of the wives' submission to their own husbands. Since these two verses employ the same participle, the quality of submission in view is the same as verse 21. Verse 22 also limits this submission, commanding wives to submit to their own husbands "as to the Lord." The identity of "lord" refers to Christ, since the near context contained an exhortation for Christians to "submit to one another in the fear of Christ" (Eph 5:21). The comparative conjunction (ὡς) indicates the manner of a wife's submission. Therefore, a wife's submission to her husband is an external manifestation of her internal submission to the Lord.

Ephesians 5:23 explains that the call to submission is based upon the husband's God-given role in marriage. The conjunction (ὅτι) functions causally and explains the basis for the action in 5:22.¹³ The noun (ἀνὴρ) occurs in nominative masculine singular, functioning as the subject of a finite verb,¹⁴ which indicates that the man presently exists as the head of the wife. To clarify, Paul compares the husband's role as the head of the wife to Christ's role as the head of the church (Eph 5:23), using the comparative conjunction ὡς. As with all comparisons between different objects, there is still a limit to the comparison, since only Jesus is the Savior of the body.

¹³Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 674.

¹⁴Ibid., 38-40.

Ephesians 5:24 further clarifies the type of relationship in view by examining the relationship between Christ and His church. The strong adversative ἀλλά can indicate contrast, highlight the other side of the issue, offer additional matters for consideration, or settle a matter.¹⁵ Given that 5:24 could stand as an independent clause, this strong adversative indicates that the preceding statement (a husband is the head of his wife) has been settled.¹⁶ This verse can also serve to reinforce the doctrinal truth in verse 5:23. When referring to the submission of the church to Christ, Paul uses the present tense of ὑποτάσσεται, indicating a continuous, ongoing action. The last phrase, “in everything (ἐν παντί),” modifies the extent of this submission. Lest husbands abuse their God-given leadership by leading their wives astray, the submission in view has already inherently been limited by how the church submits to Christ.

Implications for Wives from Ephesians 5:21-33

Based on Ephesians 5:22-24, a wife’s submission in marriage is the natural response to her husband’s role as the head. The wife’s submission is categorically limited by her submission to God, meaning that she does not have to submit to her husband when it would cause her to sin. More specifically, Ephesians 5:22-24 also reveals that a wife’s submission to her husband must combine an appropriate attitude with acceptable action.

Attitude. While other human beings may be fooled by the veneer of action, God knows the thoughts and intents of the heart (1 Sam 16:9; 1 John 3:19-20). Not surprisingly, God addresses the heart attitude as well as the action in Scripture (Heb 4:12-13). Within the text, Paul specifically refers to a wife’s attitude twice. First, he compares a wife’s submission to her husband to the church’s submission to Jesus Christ (Eph 5:24).

¹⁵W. Arndt, F.W. Danker, and W. Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 45.

¹⁶The headship of the husband has been debated. See appendix 2 for further discussion.

By considering how the church ought to submit, one can infer the attitudinal aspect of godly submission. Second, Paul briefly summarizes the teaching on marriage in Ephesians 5:33 by saying, “the wife must see to it that she respects her husband.” The word for respect can also be translated as “fear” (φοβῆται) is the same word Paul uses in 5:21 when commanding believers to “be subject to one another in the fear (φοβῆται) of Christ.” This fear is given to one who is in a position of authority.¹⁷

Other passages in Scripture reinforce the attitudinal aspect of a wife’s submission. In describing a worthy woman, Proverbs 31:13 indicates that she “works with her hands in delight.” Likewise, Peter urges wives to adorn themselves, “with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God. For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands” (1 Pet 3:4b-5). In the following verse, Peter uses Sarah’s respectful attitude towards Abraham as an example of God-honoring submission (1 Pet 3:6). In context, Genesis 18:12 records Sarah’s secret thoughts regarding the promise of a son to her and Abraham. By referring to her husband as “lord,” Sarah exemplifies the attitude of submission.

Christian authors also identify the attitudinal aspect of submission as well, with Piper and Grudem defining submission as “a woman’s Spirit-enabled disposition to yield to her husband’s guidance and her inclination to follow his leadership.”¹⁸ Words like “disposition” and “inclination” point to the attitude of proper submission in marriage. Mack adds that a wife’s submission must be respectful, “finding great satisfaction in using all of her God-given resources to fulfill the needs of her husband and family.”¹⁹

¹⁷Arndt, Danker, and Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 1061.

¹⁸John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2012), 470.

¹⁹Mack, *Strengthening Your Marriage*, 19.

Action. Scripture frequently connects attitude with action, with Jesus himself saying, “For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart” (Matt 12:34b; Prov 4:23; Luke 6:45). A wife’s attitude towards her husband leads to her willful submission to his leadership, knowing that God has made him the head (Eph 5:23) and that the two have become “one flesh” (Eph 5:24). O’Brien offers, “Just as the church is to submit to Christ in everything, so in every sphere wives are expected to submit to their husbands. The motivation for doing this is a true and godly reverence for Christ (Eph 5:21; cf. v. 33)”²⁰ It is important that wives understand that submission is a manifestation of their love for their husbands, which explains why it requires godly attitude and action.

Clarifications concerning submission. While the passage itself specifically applies to women in marriage, it is important to recognize that submission is a concept for all Christians. All believers are commanded to submit to God (Jas 4:7), their church leaders (Heb 13:17; 1 Pet 5:5), the governing authorities (Rom 13:1-8), supervisors (Eph 6:5-9), and one another in the fear of Christ (Eph 5:21). While the specific application may be different, submission is ultimately a concept for every Christian.

Although the concept of submission can be intimidating for wives, additional clarity concerning the definition of submission addresses many hesitations. Helpfully, Wayne Mack offers the following five statements about what submission is not:

1. Submission is not merely a concept for women.
2. Submission does not mean that the wife becomes a slave.
3. Submission does not mean that the wife never opens her mouth, never has an opinion, never gives advice.
4. Submission does not mean that the wife becomes a wall flower who folds up and allows her abilities to lie dormant.
5. Submission does not mean that the wife is inferior to the husband.²¹

²⁰P.T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 417.

²¹Mack, *Strengthening Your Marriage*, 17.

Providing comfort by way of clarification, Mack continues by offering seven additional statements about what submission is:

1. Scripture indicates that it is the wife's responsibility to make herself submissive.
2. Scripture indicates that the wife's submission is to be continuous.
3. Wifely submission is mandatory, not optional.
4. Wifely submission is a spiritual matter. It is to be done "as to the Lord" (Eph 5:22).
5. Submission is a positive, not a negative concept. It emphasizes what the wife should do rather than what she should not do.
6. Submission involves the wife's attitudes as well as her actions.
7. Wifely submission is to be extensive.²²

With regard to premarital counseling, many engaged women express a certain degree of hesitation with regard to submission. They are afraid of the extent and implications of biblical submission. Premarital counselors, therefore, must respond by way of clarifying what submission is and what it is not. It is particularly helpful to have an older woman explain how she practices biblical submission with her husband.

Summary. Within Ephesians 5:21-33, God reveals his design for roles in marriage, calling upon the wife to submit to her husband in attitude and action. Ultimately, the wife's submission is a response to her faith in God's plan for the husband to be head of the marriage relationship. Lest this truth lead to widespread confusion, God also addresses the husband's role as the servant leader in the home. Since husband and wife are supposed to work together as a team, it is essential to also examine the husband's role as leader.

God Calls Husbands to Leadership in Ephesians 5:25-32

In his infinite wisdom, God saw fit to address the wives using just three verses (Eph 5:22-24). In contrast, God used eight verses to address the husbands (Eph 5:25-32) and their roles. Of all the examples God could have used, he wisely chose Jesus Christ's

²²Mack, *Strengthening Your Marriage*, 18-20.

loving leadership, highlighting his sacrificial, sanctifying, and sensitive care for the church.

Ephesians 5:25-27 continues the pattern set forth Ephesians 5:22-24, wherein Paul offers the command (Eph 5:25) and then the supporting reasons for the command (Eph 5:26-27). Paul tells husbands to love (*ἀγαπάτε* 2nd person, present, active, indicative, imperative from *ἀγαπάω*) their wives (*τὰς γυναῖκας* accusative feminine plural nouns). This command echoes others in Leviticus 19:18, Matthew 5:43, and Matthew 19:19.²³ The accusative case makes it obvious that the direct object of this love is their wives.

As he did in 5:22-24, Paul likens the marriage relationship to Christ and the church, using a comparative conjunction (*καθὼς*) followed by an ascensive conjunction that expresses a point of focus.²⁴ This love (indicative aorist 3rd person singular active verb) was observed while Christ was on earth and documented for future generations in Scripture. The coordinating conjunction links the display of Christ's love to his sacrifice (again in the aorist, summarizing a past event) on the church's behalf, while the reflexive pronoun emphasizes Christ's personal act (John 10:18). The prepositional phrase *ὑπὲρ αὐτῆς* provides the purpose of Christ's sacrifice—the church's salvation and sanctification, which is further explained in verses 26-27.

Obviously, as sacrificial as the husband may be, he cannot save his wife like Christ saved the church. This distinction was previously highlighted in 5:23, where Paul reminds his readers that Christ alone is the Savior of the body. In addition to being salvific, Christ's sacrifice also brought forth sanctification of the church. Verse 26 begins with *ἵνα*, marking the beginning of a subordinate clause that explains that the purpose behind the main verb ("gave Himself up" in 5:25) was that the church's sanctification

²³Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics*, 569-70.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 670.

(αὐτὴν ἀγιάσει). The verb form ἀγιάσει (subjunctive aorist 3rd person singular active) carries the idea of consecrating, dedicating, or making something holy (Matt 23:17; 1 Tim 4:5).²⁵ The aorist participle καθάρισας appears next to the aorist main verb and will often be simultaneous to the sanctifying.²⁶ This verb is used often when describing the ceremonial ritual cleansing that the Jews would perform prior to entering the temple or eating food (Matt 23:25-26; Mark 7:19; Acts 11:19). Because of Paul’s Jewish upbringing, his ongoing interaction with Jews, and the Jewish presence in Ephesus (Acts 19), he likely had the picture of ceremonial cleansing in mind, especially since it was done with water. Paul urges husbands to love in a sanctifying manner, such that their wives would be washed on the inside so that their worship would be in spirit and in truth (John 4:24).

The next phrase “the washing of the water in the word” provides insight to how this cleansing takes place. The dative neuter singular noun λουτρῶ can be translated as “bath,” or “washing.” Since this is a process, it makes more sense to translate it as “washing.” Although the word is related to baptism, the context does not support that meaning. The phrase τοῦ ὕδατος ἐν ῥήματι specifies that the washing is further described by the water. Next, the preposition ἐν indicates the means by which this cleansing occurs—the Word of God. Though debated as to how exactly God’s Word functions in the sanctification of the believer in this passage, the surrounding context contains references to Old Testament passages, which would indicate that Scripture is associated with cleansing and ultimately, one’s sanctification.

Verse 27 employs the conjunction ἵνα, which introduces yet another subordinate clause that reveals the ultimate purpose of this cleansing and sanctification. To summarize, Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her for the *immediate*

²⁵Arndt, Danker, and Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9.

²⁶Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics*, 624.

purpose of her sanctification and for the *ultimate* purpose of her presentation. The presenting (παραστήση) is a subjunctive, aorist, 3rd person, active verb that means, “to present,” or “to render” with a nuance towards bringing something to completion.²⁷ Paul uses this same verb in Colossians 1:28 to describe the end goal of his proclamation. Christ lovingly cleansed the church in order to present her to himself in all her glory, looking to the future eschatological presentation of the church when she is perfected in sanctification.²⁸

More specifically, the church is described as “having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing,” referring to external perfection and flawlessness. Beneath the surface, the perfected church is described as “holy and blameless,” fully sanctified and without moral fault. Therefore, ultimate purpose of Christ’s sacrifice was perfect and holistic sanctification. It should be recognized, however, that every comparison has inherent limitations. No matter how holy he may be, the husband is not Christ. The husband is only able to encourage sanctification; only God can effect sanctification (Phil 1:6).

In Ephesians 5:28-30, Paul continues his exhortation to the husbands (Eph 5:28) before providing an explanation for the command (Eph 5:29-30), echoing the pattern from 5:25-27. Paul begins with a comparative conjunction (οὕτως) to specify the manner of love that husbands should have for their wives, like to resume the thought began in 5:25. Therefore, from a broader perspective, husbands are actually given two main commands from Paul. Husbands should love their wives through aiding in their sanctification (Eph 5:25) and through physical provision (Eph 5:28). The word ought

²⁷Arndt, Danker, and Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 778.

²⁸Glenn H. Graham, *An Exegetical Summary of Ephesians* (Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1997), 498-9.

(ὀφείλουσιν) communicates that husbands “owe” or “have a moral obligation”²⁹ to actively love their wives out of their own free will.³⁰

To illustrate the manner in which husbands should love their own wives, Paul again employs the comparative conjunction (ὡς) to say that husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies, adding the general principle that “he who loves his own wife loves himself” (Eph 5:28b). Expounding on this general principle, Paul argues that no one ever hated his own flesh (body). Though there may be hate for others, people generally nourish and cherish their own bodies. The first verb (ἐκτρέφει) usually means “nourish” when used with the accusative.³¹ The semantic range of “nourish” points to the kind of care needed for a person to develop healthily. The second verb cherish (θάλλει) further reinforces the concept of the kind of the care and comfort that a man would have for his own body.

To further clarify this concept, Paul likens the loving care one has for himself to Christ’s care for the church, borrowing the verb from the first part of 5:29. The subject (Christ) and direct object (the church) are in the same cases as “nobody” and “himself,” respectively.

Paul adds details in 5:30 to complete the comparison. Using a causal conjunction, Paul explains that Christ would care for the church as a man cares for his own body because Christians are members of the body of Christ. Regarding “member (μέλη),” Hoehner writes, “It [μέλη] is never used of a member of an organization but always used of a member of an organism.”³² Paul wrote more extensively about this concept in 1 Corinthians 12 when he compares Christians in the church to parts of a

²⁹Arndt, Danker, and Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 743.

³⁰Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 764.

³¹Arndt, Danker, and Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 311.

³²Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 768.

physical body. Paul concludes his exhortation to the husbands by quoting from Genesis 2:24, reminding all couples that in marriage, they become one flesh.

Having just referred to the relationship between Christ and the church (Eph 5:30), Paul commends on this “great mystery.” The other appearances of “mystery” in the New Testament (Rom 16:25; 1 Cor 2:7; Col 1:26-27; Eph 3:9) allude to some understanding that was not gained until God Himself revealed it. Given the rest of verse 32, Paul is most likely referring to the mysterious union between Christ and His church.

From the exegetical analysis of Ephesians 5:25-32, it is clear that God calls husbands to loving leadership that imitates Christ. A husband’s leadership in marriage is ultimately an expression of his submission to God and his love for his wife.

Implications for Husbands from Ephesians 5:21-33

Three main implications for a husband’s leadership can be derived from the teaching of Ephesians 5:21-33. By comparing the husband to Christ, God paints a sobering picture of the responsibility and weight of leadership in marriage.

Sacrificial. The first aspect of the husband’s leadership is that it must be sacrificial. Of all the comparisons to be made, God chose Jesus’ relationship to the church. Having lived a life of submission to God and service to mankind, Jesus paid the penalty for sin with his own blood. In other words, Jesus’ life was characterized by sacrificial service, culminating in his death for unworthy sinners (Rom 5:6-8). By comparison, the sacrifices husbands make in marriage seem paltry. All believers are called to be imitators of Christ (Eph 5:1-2; 1 Cor 11:1). The teaching in Ephesians rightly assigns personal and non-delegable responsibility to every husband.

In premarital counseling, it is imperative to review and reinforce the role of spiritual leadership for engaged men. Husbands are servant leaders who sacrifice for their wives, not entitled monarchs who demand to be served. The God who grants the title of

leader also prescribes the corresponding duties and responsibilities. In order to be the kind of sacrificial leader God calls him to be, a man must learn to set aside his personal desires to embrace what God would desire for him and his marriage.

Sanctifying. The magnitude of Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross is amplified by properly recognizing what his death accomplished. Similarly, a husband's loving and sacrificial leadership is meant for something greater—his wife's sanctification. While understanding that sanctification is ultimately a work of God (Phil 1:6), God uses a variety of means to accomplish that work. Whitney enumerates three main sources of sanctification—spiritual disciplines, trials, and other people.³³ Since the marriage relationship is deeper than any other human relationship, it follows that the husband has a degree of influence over his wife's sanctification. A husband's leadership can influence his wife towards or away from God. Even though Eve had disobeyed God first, God demands an explanation from Adam (Gen 3:9). God's dealing with Adam is a reminder to all husbands that God expects them to take their responsibilities as spiritual leaders seriously.

In the fury of wedding planning, premarital counselors ought to remind future husbands of their responsibilities to lead spiritually. In order to be the spiritual leader in marriage, he must be spiritual himself. A husband must lead by personal example.

Sensitive. The third and final facet of the husbands loving leadership is that it should be sensitive. Just as every man knows how to love and care for himself (Eph 5:28), a loving husband should know how to love and care for his wife. The painful reality in marriage is that this kind of love must be learned. First Peter 3:7 encourages husbands to, "live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker,

³³Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1991), 17-18.

since she is a woman.” Literally, this verse tells husbands to live with their wives “according to knowledge (γνῶσις).” Appropriately, this kind of knowledge is learned by means of experience.³⁴ Another way that a husband can love his wife as himself is through protecting and providing for her physically and spiritually.

The implication for premarital counseling is that each man must be sensitive to all that his wife is and learn how to love her appropriately. Every husband should endeavor to become an expert on his wife, knowing her strengths, weaknesses, desires, fears, and how to care for her spiritually and physically. In knowing his wife intimately, the husband must never abuse his privileged position as the leader by cutting her down, comparing her unfavorably to others, or joking about her fears. Future husbands must understand their responsibility to protect and provide for their families (Col 3:17; 1 Tim 5:8; 1 Pet 3:7).

Summary. By comparing the husband’s leadership to Jesus Christ, God is calling upon husbands to imitate Christ in their most important human relationship. According to God’s blueprints for marriage, a husband’s leadership should be sacrificial, sanctifying, and sensitive. Though regularly falling short of this kind of leadership, God still calls upon men to mimic Christ’s leadership, depending on the Holy Spirit to empower and enable them.

God Establishes Support for Marriage in Titus 2:1-8

Thus far, God has outlined the foundation for marriage in Genesis 1-2 and the structure for marriage in Ephesians 5:21-33. In wisdom, God has also provided a support system for marriage through fellow believers in the church. God knew exactly how difficult it would be for selfish human beings to prefer others in marriage. Nestled within

³⁴Arndt, Danker, and Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 203.

Paul's pastoral wisdom are important instructions concerning how more mature believers should teach and train younger believers in Titus 2:1-8.

Background of Titus 2:1-8

The consummate theologian and prominent missionary Paul had much wisdom to share with other pastors. Within the Pastoral Epistles, Paul wrote to his disciples Timothy and Titus about ministry in the local church. From one pastor to another, Paul wrote to men that he had personally trained (1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2; Titus 1:4). At the time this letter was written, Titus was ministering in Crete, trying to establish churches and appoint elders (Titus 1:5). Paul offers specific instructions about elder qualifications (Titus 1:5-9), naming and engaging opponents (Titus 1:10-16), Christian conduct in the church and home (Titus 2:1-15), and living in the world (Titus 3:1-11).³⁵ Within his instructions about Christian conduct, Paul urges older mature believers to teach younger believers how to live in a way that honors God (Titus 2:1-8; 2 Tim 2:2).

God Calls Fellow Believers to Support Marriage in Titus 2:1-8

The overall flow of Titus 2:1-8 contains two sets of general instructions. Paul's first set of instructions are directed to Titus specifically (Titus 2:1-2, 6-8), while Paul's second set of instructions are addressed to older women in the church (Titus 2:3-5).

Older men and younger men. In Titus 2:1-2, Paul commands Timothy to "speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine," meaning that Timothy's teaching must be consistent with Scripture and free from error. Then in verse 2, Paul addresses a particular group of individuals: men who are biologically older (Πρεσβύτας). These men

³⁵Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006), 77-79.

could have been in their fifties³⁶ and were likely beyond the age normative for having children (Luke 1:18). These older men were supposed to display a spiritual maturity consistent with their biological maturity. In describing these older men, Paul calls them temperate (νηφάλιος). While it can refer to one's appetite for alcohol (Titus 2:3), the word is employed to describe someone who is self-controlled and level-headed.³⁷ The older men were also supposed to be dignified (σεμνός), modeling a lifestyle that garnered respect. In terms of their thinking, older men should be mature and sensible (σώφρων), being prudent, thoughtful, and self-controlled.³⁸ To round out the description of the older man, Paul writes that they should be, “sound in faith, in love, in perseverance” (Titus 2:3), meaning that their beliefs and practice must align with Scripture. Fittingly, the description of an older godly man stands in direct contrast to Paul's warnings about opponents (Titus 1:10-16). Towner summarizes, “Older men are thus enjoined to live a holistic life of Christian dignity and dynamic faith.”³⁹

After addressing the older women and younger women, Paul addresses the younger men (Titus 2:6) and Titus personally (2:7-8) by using the word “likewise.” Compared to the seven character qualities for younger women (Titus 2:4-5), the younger men have one very simple command—to be sensible (σωφρονεῖν). Paul personally charges Titus to teach these younger men to be characterized by mental self-control that results in a lifestyle of self-control. The path to becoming a “sensible” older man (Titus 2:2) begins with being a “sensible” young man (Titus 2:6). The following two verses (Titus 2:7-8) specifically call upon Titus to be an example to other believers, a living illustration of Christian doctrine in practice as a testimony to the world.

³⁶Arndt, Danker, and Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 863.

³⁷Ibid., 672.

³⁸Ibid., 987.

³⁹Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 722.

Older women and younger women. In the section addressing older and younger women, Paul describes the older women using four adjectives: reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips, not enslaved to much wine, and teaching what is good (Titus 2:3). The reverent behavior (καταστήματι ιεροπρεπεῖς) is a sanctified behavior for the glory of God. This phrase was used to describe the behavior seen in priests or priestesses while performing duties at religious events.⁴⁰ In other words, this is holy character that results in holy behavior. The next two descriptions, “not malicious gossips (μὴ διαβόλους),” and “not enslaved to much wine (μὴ οἴνῳ πολλῷ δεδουλωμένας),” served to distinguish older godly women from older godless women. Older Christian women should refrain from the cultural practices of licentiousness and sexual promiscuity.⁴¹ The fourth and final characteristic from Titus 2:3 of an older godly woman highlights the quality of her speech, “teaching what is good (καλοδιδασκάλους).” Not to be confused with a formal teaching position within the church (1 Tim 2:12), these older women taught with their exemplary lifestyles and intentional conversations.

In Titus 2:4-5, Paul exhorts these older godly women to train up the next generation of women by encouraging them to live in a God-honoring manner. The conjunction (ἵνα) links godly living to training younger women. Based on the contrast between older and younger women, it is likely that Paul had biologically younger women in mind when he wrote these instructions. These younger women were called to seven specific virtues. The first two virtues involved loving their husbands (φιλόανδρους) and their children (φιλοτέκνους). In Titus’s day, arranged marriages were common, meaning that love had to be acquired within the marriage instead of being required before the marriage. Kitchen quips, “Mature love is not an emotion that wells up, but a discipline

⁴⁰Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 723.

⁴¹Ibid.

that is worked up.”⁴² Moving from the domestic to the personal, Paul calls upon the older women to teach the younger women to be “sensible (σώφρονας)” and “pure (ἀγνάς).” Used earlier in the passage (Titus 2:2), the idea of being sensible involved self-control and restraint. Though originally used to refer to ritual cleanliness, the exhortation to be pure connotes sexual purity.⁴³ The next pair of qualities had to do with the younger woman’s life in the home: workers at home (οἰκουροῦς) and kind (ἀγαθὰς). The word for “workers at home” is the combination of the word for “home” and “work,” speaking to the priority of the home. Additionally, the younger woman should be kind (ἀγαθὰς), showing a goodness towards others. The seventh and final quality listed here is that the younger women should be “subject to their own husbands (ὑποτασσομένας τοῖς ἰδίοις ἀνδράσιν),” a concept previously addressed in Ephesians 5:21-33. Paul’s instructions conclude with an appeal to Christian testimony. A woman’s faithful obedience to the Word of God can result in a strong witness to the watching world.

Implications for Marriage Support from Titus 2:1-8

Paul’s instructions to Titus place the support for marriage in the church. Although Christians are saved individually, they grow and mature alongside other believers in the local church. In Titus 2:1-8, there is a relationship between older and younger believers. Godly wisdom and practice should be passed on to future generations. Today, there is an opportunity for older believers to advise younger believers in premarital counseling. To be helpful to the engaged couple, premarital counselors should give advice that is characterized by six qualities, which can be summarized by the mnemonic SPREAD.

⁴²John Kitchen, *The Pastoral Epistles for Pastors* (Woodlands, TX: Kress Publications, 2009), 520.

⁴³Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 726.

Scriptural. First, spiritually mature believers should derive their advice and instruction from Scripture. First Corinthians 10:31 exhorts every believer, “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” The positive command of this verse implies that living for the glory of God means much more than just avoiding certain sins. A God-honoring lifestyle means that even mundane activities like eating and drinking must be seized as opportunities to glorify God. The proper exaltation of God in everyday life requires a thorough knowledge of Scripture. Based on the pattern proposed in Titus 2, older believers should offer advice to younger believers based on the teaching of Scripture.

Practical. In addition to offering biblical advice, spiritually mature believers should offer advice that is practical. While it may be easier to offer generalized principles that could apply to anybody’s life, Paul actually calls on older women to encourage the young women to love their husbands and their children (Titus 2:4). Since love results in action, these younger women must focus on loving their husbands and children in light of their unique interests and values.

Relational. Third, counseling between couples should be relational. People are much like different cities; in order to establish connections between cities, one must build roads. After developing the required infrastructure, there can be an exchange of ideas, services, and goods. True counseling happens with the context of a relationship. It is difficult for a couple to divulge the secret struggles of their marriage to complete strangers. According to 1 Corinthians 12, believers are fellow members of one another and “brothers and sisters in Christ.” Relationships in the church, therefore, should generally be amiable and friendly. With regards to a discipleship relationship between believers, Pierre and Shaw write, “it is ultimately about having an understanding and

insightful friend who points people to Christ and His word.⁴⁴ In his perfect wisdom and foreknowledge, God designed the church as the environment in which a believer will learn and grow to be more like Jesus Christ.

Empathetic. The fourth quality of God-honoring biblical counseling between couples is empathy. Older believers should be empathetic, having an attitude of understanding and compassionate care for fellow believers. Titus instructs the older women to encourage (σωφρονίζω) the younger women, offering them wisdom and urging them to heed it. Paul tells Titus to urge (παρακαλέω) the young men to be sensible, coming alongside them as a fellow saint. First Thessalonians 5:14 reminds believers to be sensitive to the attitudes of others, prescribing admonition for the unruly, encouragement for the fainthearted, help for the weak, and patience with everyone. Galatians 6:1 adds that spiritual restoration must be done in a spirit of gentleness without boasting.

Affectionate. Fifth, counseling between believers should be affectionate. Although specifically mentioned only for men in Titus 2:2, Christian love is implied throughout Scripture. Love is mentioned in the list of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23). Ephesians 4:15 combines truth and love in speaking. Jesus Himself emphasizes that Christians should be recognized by their love for one another, modelled after Christ's love for believers (John 13:34-35). When an older believer offers counsel or encouragement to a younger believer, it should be from a heart of love and compassion (Prov 17:17; Gal 6:1; 1 John 4:7).

Demonstrative. Sixth, the older couple should be a demonstration of sanctification in the marriage relationship. Sometimes, it is too difficult to explain a

⁴⁴Jeremy Pierre and Mark Shaw, "The Nature of the Biblical Counseling Relationship," in *Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling: Changing Lives with God's Changeless Truth*, ed. James MacDonald (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2013), 310-19.

biblical concept without offering an illustration. Within the context of a relationship, an older couple has the privilege of demonstrating a sanctified marriage for a younger couple. In Titus 2, Paul paints portraits of older godly women (Titus 2:3) and men (Titus 2:2). An older godly woman is to behave reverently, speak discerningly, manifest self-control, and teach what is good (Titus 2:3). An older man should be “temperate, dignified, sensible, sound in faith, in love, in perseverance” (Titus 2:2). These lists of qualities imply that such character is observable.

Summary

The exhortations in Titus 2:1-8 indicate that believers in the church should be involved in the spiritual development of other believers, like support structures for a building. Like members of a family, believers should do whatever they can do help fellow believers grow. One specific application presented in Titus 2:1-8 involves older believers encouraging younger believers. Specifically, older men should be instructing younger men and older women should be instructing younger women. The practice of premarital counseling presents the church with a wonderful opportunity for older men and women to help younger men and women grow. Having put into practice God’s commands for marriage, the older couple can encourage the younger couple through teaching from Scripture and demonstrating by example.

Conclusion

The master architect of marriage has left humanity with a blueprint for marriage. God laid forth the foundation of marriage in the creation account of Genesis 1-2. By creating one woman for one man, God has revealed that marriage is between one man and one woman. By bringing Adam and Eve together in “one flesh,” God conveys that marriage is to be a relationship of permanent companionship. By referring to the “leaving and cleaving” in Genesis 2:24, God communicates that marriage forms the basis for a new family unit. Having laid forth the foundation, God also establishes the visible

structure of marriage by providing roles for the husband and wife in marriage. By God's gracious enabling, husbands should be Christlike leaders who are sacrificial, sanctifying, and sensitive while wives submit to their husbands in action and attitude. As spouses fulfill their God-given roles in marriage, they are aided by fellow believers who offer advice that is scriptural, practical, relational, empathetic, affectionate, and demonstrated.

In God's sovereignty and perfect wisdom, he has designed marriage to be a witness to the watching world. When two believers become "one flesh" in marriage, God himself is personally involved, pointing them to his beloved son, drawing them to himself, and showing the world the glories of his magnificent design.

CHAPTER 3

THE BENEFITS OF MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS

In the previous chapter, marriage was compared to a building. Without the proper foundation, structure, and supports, marriages can crumble and deteriorate. As the Creator of marriage, God's instructions in Scripture provide a template for healthy marriages. While a marriage unites two individuals, every marriage is still part of a larger community where older couples can help newer couples prepare for and grow in marriage. Just as a new believer can benefit from the presence and advice from a more seasoned believer, a younger couple can also benefit from a mentor couple. Paul's letter to Titus specifically calls for intergenerational mentoring in the area of marriage (Titus 2:4-5), while Ephesians 5:22-33 present human marriage as an illustration Christ's relationship with the church. Clearly, marriage is important to God. Having examined God's design for marriage, this chapter will focus on the obstacles, keys, and benefits of mentoring relationships as practiced in the workplace and Scripture, concluding with some examples of mentoring from Scripture.

Mentoring in the Workplace

In practice, mentoring in the workplace can be implemented in many different environments. The concept of mentoring is applied in Fortune 500 companies, social welfare programs, and home-businesses. Nigro offers, "a mentor performs the role of a prudent counselor, dispensing advice on career paths, and offers beneficial problem-solving hints on the more immediate matters of the work at hand."¹ To understand

¹Nicholas Nigro, *The Everything Coaching and Mentoring Book*, 2nd ed. (Avon, MA: F+W Publications, 2008), 40.

mentoring from a secular perspective, I will examine some of the obstacles, keys, and benefits to mentoring.

Obstacles to Mentoring

For many people, mentoring is understandable conceptually, but confusing practically. Maxwell highlights the following five reasons why people don't mentor others.² The first reason is insecurity. When people do not feel secure in their own positions or roles, they often times feel threatened by the idea of other people becoming more successful. But mentoring expressly seeks out the improvement and advancement of others. The second obstacle to mentoring is one's own ego. Some people want to be the center of attention. Raising another person up would mean sharing the spotlight and attention. A third reason is the inability to discern another person's potential. Mentors must have the ability to see people for who they can become, not just for who they currently are. That ability comes from observing another's gifts, temperament, desires, and opportunities.³ The fourth obstacle to mentoring is having a wrong concept of success. If success is only measured by personal advancement, then mentoring will never become a worthwhile endeavor. Furthermore, mentors must be more concerned with developing others instead of the potential return. Lastly, people are afraid to become mentors because they lack training. Those who have never been mentored find it difficult to grasp the concept of mentoring in practice, as it is more easily caught than taught.

At the core, mentoring requires a degree of sacrifice for the benefit of others. Therefore, all potential mentors must be oriented towards others instead of oriented towards themselves. Aside from that requisite quality, mentors need to develop

²John C. Maxwell, *Mentoring 101: What Every Leader Needs to Know* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 4-7.

³John C. Maxwell, *The 360 Leader: Developing Your Influence from Anywhere in the Organization* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 220-27.

confidence and competence through training.

Keys to Mentoring

Like ingredients in a recipe, a mentoring relationship will require high quality individuals. As in baking, even high quality individuals need to be combined together skillfully. In order to successfully mentor others, one must embrace a proper perspective of mentoring and adopt the appropriate process of mentoring.

Perspective of mentoring. A proper perspective of mentoring rests upon two pillars: a basic understanding of people and a mentor's mindset. Maxwell highlights four fundamental concepts about people.⁴ First, people want to feel like they have worth. Some would call this a "healthy self-esteem." Workers who do not think they can contribute will never contribute. They need to believe in their own abilities and see themselves as valuable contributors. The second core concept is that people respond to genuine encouragement rooted in another person's belief in them. Intellectual belief must be expressed through explicit encouragement. Sometimes mentors hesitate to believe in others because they have been disappointed or hurt in the past. Maxwell wisely asks, "Why should one person's failure affect how I treat another person?"⁵ Third, people are naturally motivated. Though often times hampered from realizing their potential by adverse circumstances or a poor environment, they are intrinsically motivated by certain ideas and goals. Most people aspire to something. A mentor who recognizes a mentee's aspirations can access a strong source of motivation. Last, mentors must recognize that "people buy into the person before they buy into their leadership."⁶ Nigro adds, "Respect

⁴Maxwell, *Mentoring 101*, 7-10. Maxwell reiterates these ideas elsewhere as well. See John C. Maxwell, *Winning with People: Discover the People Principles That Work for You Every Time* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 97-106; idem, *The 360 Leader*, 214-20.

⁵Maxwell, *Winning with People*, 103.

⁶Maxwell, *Mentoring 101*, 10.

breeds respect. And those whom you respect, you trust. When you place your trust in a manager, you generally want to please that individual. Respect and trust are the two best motivating factors in town.”⁷ In order to mentor properly, mentors must recognize that they must prove themselves trustworthy. Potential mentees must be attracted and respond to their mentors in order for the mentoring relationship to progress.⁸

In addition to understanding a few principles about people, potential mentors also need to adopt the proper mindset for mentoring. Mentors must first value and make developing others a top priority in their lives, meaning that mentors must allocate time to mentor at the expense of other potential pursuits. Since time is a limited resource, mentors must also limit who they mentor. Maxwell recommends limiting mentoring to the top 20 percent of people in an organization.⁹ Another key perspective of the mentor is to recognize development as a long-term process.¹⁰ It will depend on the person being mentored, the relationship between the mentor and the mentee, the mentor’s leadership style, and the suitability of the environment for mentoring. Leadership takes time to develop and nurture. Those who expect immediate results will be quickly frustrated.

Process of mentoring. Mentoring is like a journey—having the right perspective helps a mentor pack, while understanding the process of mentoring provides the roadmap. The process of mentoring is lined by four roadmarkers.

Mentoring begins with the careful selection of people to mentor. Since mentors cannot mentor everyone, they must choose wisely, recognizing that some people are

⁷Nigro, *The Everything Coaching and Mentoring Book*, 17.

⁸Les Parrott and Leslie Parrott, *The Complete Guide to Marriage Mentoring* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 29

⁹Maxwell, *Mentoring 101*, 13. Maxwell reiterates these ideas elsewhere as well. See John C. Maxwell, *Developing the Leaders around You* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 3-15, 37-60; idem, *The 360 Leader*, 230-31.

¹⁰Maxwell, *Mentoring 101*, 95-105.

better to mentor than others. To maximize the impact of the mentoring relationship, Maxwell advises mentors to invest in people who will yield the greatest return in the long run—identifiable because they make things happen, see and seize opportunities, influence others, add value, attract other leaders, equip others, provide inspiring ideas, possess uncommonly positive attitudes, live up to their commitments, and have loyalty.¹¹ In short, the best person to mentor is someone who is effective in his work, positive in his outlook, and influential in his nature. Helping someone move from good to great will probably yield more than helping someone move from bad to good. Another way to maximize the impact of the relationship is to mentor a leader, who will in turn mentor others in the future.

The second step is to recognize the potential of the mentee. In order to gain insight, mentors must study their mentees, learning their strengths and weaknesses to identify areas for growth. Instead of only focusing on the person's inadequacies or weaknesses, mentors should strive to see and draw out their latent potential. Recognizing another person's potential also begins with believing the best about them and giving them the benefit of the doubt. Since mentoring aims to develop another, mentors must be able to identify their mentee's abilities.

Beyond the careful selection of mentees and the recognition of their potential, the third step in the mentoring process is to develop them to their potential, which requires securing commitment, setting goals, outlining responsibility, training, and checking on their progress.¹² Concerning the importance of commitment, Maxwell states that it is, “the one quality above all others that enables a potential leader to become a successful leader. Without commitment, there can be no success.”¹³ One of the ways to

¹¹Maxwell, *Mentoring 101*, 27-42.

¹²Ibid., 57-74.

¹³Ibid., 59.

inspire commitment is by highlighting the benefits to the process and appealing to their self-interest.¹⁴ It is easier for mentees to cooperate when they readily see how they can benefit from their investment in the mentoring relationship. Commitment becomes more effective when it is focused through goals that are appropriate, attainable, measurable, and clearly stated. Without these qualities, goals can become exasperating instead of encouraging. Even though goals may provide a destination, core responsibilities outline a mentee's basic responsibilities. Maintaining the distinction between core responsibilities and goals can help mentees distinguish between what they are required to do and what they could potentially do. Another way to help others develop involves directly training people how to be better by showing them. Steadily, the mentor moves from demonstrating, to overseeing, to entrusting the mentee with a specific task. During the training, the mentee gains responsibility, authority, and accountability for his new task. The basic framework for this training harkens back to concept of an apprenticeship, wherein the apprentice moves through the stages of observation, assistance, and participation before assuming full responsibility for the work. During the development and training, it is also important for mentors to check on their mentees depending on the importance of the task, the demands of the work, the newness of the work, the newness of the worker, and the responsibility of the worker.¹⁵

Once in process, the fourth and final step in mentoring is to sustain momentum, which can be fostered through equipping and environment. As the mentee grows, he will have to learn. By providing quality resources in addition to personal training, the mentee can be equipped for growth. Having access to resources also enables the mentee to pursue growth independently. Like plants, people also need suitable environments in which to grow. Mentors can provide suitable conditions by giving

¹⁴Nigro, *The Everything Coaching and Mentoring Book*, 25.

¹⁵Maxwell, *Mentoring 101*, 69-71.

genuine and thoughtful encouragement. They can also show their mentees the bigger picture, highlighting the overall significance of any given task. When a mentee sees his role in light of the overall picture, he can appreciate the value of his contribution. In order to build an appropriate environment, mentors must also reward people who do well, whether it comes by way of pay raises, additional perks, or recognition. Finally, mentors can sustain momentum through environment by establishing a support system to sustain morale and to encourage growth in tangible ways like compensation levels, good equipment, and sufficient staffing. To sustain momentum, mentors must minimize hindrances and recognize progress.

Summary. The two main keys to mentoring involve having the right perspective and process of mentoring. Like the two wings of an airplane, both are necessary. The right perspective involves having an informed knowledge of people while embracing the mindset of a mentor. Mentors also need to understand the process of mentoring in order to help people realize their potential, moving through the steps of selecting people, recognizing their potential, developing them, and sustaining the momentum.

Benefits of Mentoring

In order to embark on the path of mentoring, people must believe that mentoring is an investment, meaning that there are benefits for those involved. Though there are many potential benefits, there are three specific benefits to highlight—improvement in morale, multiplied influence and impact, and institutional growth.

Mentoring improves morale. People can reach their potential when they are trusted, trained, and ultimately empowered to fulfill their responsibilities. It is also decidedly easier for people to believe in themselves when someone else believes in them. Instead of fostering a work environment rife with distrust, suspicion, and negativity,

mentoring helps to foster a work environment characterized by positive encouragement and training. One of the foundations of mentoring involves recognizing the mentee's inherent potential to be better. By treating others well, mentors can help promote a positive work environment where people are seen for who they can become, not just for who they are. Investing in people affirms their value in the company and also sows seeds of loyalty to the institution. Maxwell summarizes, "When there is a heartfelt personal connection to another person, it becomes stronger than any other kind of business bond."¹⁶ In a company with a mentoring culture, the emphasis is on the future and the focus is on individual growth. Instead of feeling "locked in" to a certain position, workers are freed to dream and aspire to accomplish greater things. Workers are encouraged to commit because they know that there exists a plan for advancement and promotion.

Mentoring multiplies impact. Leaders face constant pressure and hold lots of responsibility. Often times, the demands of leadership can quickly overwhelm the individual. Through training and mentoring others, leaders enlist help for themselves. While the responsibilities may not decrease, more people can bear up under the weight of the responsibility. Maxwell asserts, "Rather than creating followers or even adding new leaders it [the equipping process] multiplies leaders."¹⁷ Every leader, regardless of gifting, has limited influence and impact. Covey points out, "people and organizations don't grow much without delegation and completed staff work, because they are confined to the capacities of the boss and reflect both personal strengths and weaknesses."¹⁸ Mentoring and raising up more leaders can address weaknesses and enhance strengths, providing an organization with greater potential through expanded capability. Without

¹⁶John Maxwell, *Winning with People: Discover the People Principles That Work for You Every Time* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 243.

¹⁷Maxwell, *Mentoring 101*, 73.

¹⁸Covey, *Principle-Centered Leadership*, 237.

the mentoring process, institutions resort to bringing in additional personnel, incurring additional hiring, training, and development costs, in addition to the additional time required for adjustment and assimilation to the institution. Leaders who successfully harness the power of mentoring multiply their impact.

Mentoring yields institutional growth. A third benefit of mentoring is institutional growth through individual growth. In highlighting a benefit to mentoring, Nigro states that mentoring, “links workplace performance growth with personal growth”¹⁹ An institution is inseparable from the people who work in the institution. When individuals improve, the institution improves. As individuals become more efficient, the institution becomes more efficient. When a mentor can align an individual’s goals with the needs of an institution, both derive benefit.²⁰ Individuals who see their growth in the company are more likely to stay and contribute. As a positive byproduct, the institution also receives benefits to its reputation, as potential workers prefer working in a place where people like to work. The positive workplace environment can attract a higher caliber of people.

Summary. An institution with a mentoring culture accesses significant benefits for itself. Maxwell posits, “The more you invest in people and the longer you do it, the greater the growth and the higher the return.”²¹ Since mentoring encourages believing in people, institutional morale improves. Since mentoring ultimately develops people, the institution increases its capabilities by enhancing strengths and addressing weaknesses. Finally, when individual goals are aligned with institutional goals, both can grow through mentoring.

¹⁹Nigro, *The Everything Coaching and Mentoring Book*, xii.

²⁰Maxwell, *Mentoring 101*, 100.

²¹John Maxwell, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 255.

Summary of Mentoring in the Workplace

This survey of workplace mentoring confirms that while it requires significant investment, mentoring can offer a number of wonderful advantages. Mentoring exchanges sterile workplace relationships with more familial relationships. Despite its many benefits, there are several obstacles, namely a person's insecurity, ego, inability to see potential, wrong view of success, and lack of training. In light of these obstacles, the two keys to mentoring are gaining a right perspective and process. The right perspective of mentoring addresses obstacles that stem from character, while understanding the process of mentoring will address obstacles related to skill. Equipped with a right perspective and process of mentoring, individuals can overcome the obstacles to reap benefits of mentoring, which include improved morale, multiplied impact, and institutional growth. At its heart, mentoring in the workplace is about a costly investment in people that eventually yields a tangible reward. While derived from the workplace, these mentoring principles prove helpful in the life of the church as well.

Mentoring in Scripture

Scripture also outlines a process of mentoring. But God's Word would typically describe mentoring as a specific practice within the general discipleship process. The nearest equivalent to workplace mentoring would be a particular discipleship relationship where both parties intend to grow as Christians. However, Scripture does not always make a distinction between general discipleship and particular discipleship. Therefore, one must rely upon the context to understand the distinction.

Mentoring and particular discipleship require a costly investment for a future return, a particular perspective of people, and a certain type of people. The main difference between mentoring and particular discipleship, however, is that particular discipleship is more expressly concerned with character that results in life practice. To help define particular discipleship according to Scripture, this section will examine references to the word "disciple" in Scripture before highlighting the obstacles, keys, and

benefits of Scripture.

References to Discipleship in Scripture

The process of particular discipleship is inseparable from the word, “disciple.” Therefore, this section will examine the usage of the word, “disciple” in the Old and New Testaments, and implied references to the concept of discipleship.

Old Testament references to disciple. The word “disciple” appears three times in the Old Testament (Isa 8:16; 50:4). The original Hebrew word is **לְמִידָה**, and it is closely related to the Hebrew verb **לָמַד**, which means “to learn.”²²

Written during the divided kingdom era in Jewish history, Isaiah’s prophecies are directed at God’s chosen, yet wayward people. After enumerating charges against Israel in the first five chapters, God promises to bring his people back after their exile in chapters seven through twelve. At the end of God’s message to the Israelites in chapter eight, God commands Isaiah “Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples” (Isa 8:16). In contrast to the disobedient Israelites, these disciples are faithful followers of God who will remember and respond to this message. These disciples are aligned with the plans and purposes of God, who would be like the discipler.

The other two instances of “disciple” in the Old Testament are found in Isaiah 50:4. At that point in history, both kingdoms had been taken captive. As a result, the Israelites felt that God had abandoned them, even though they were actually the ones who had abandoned God. In his mercy, God promises to send forth a servant to attend to the Israelites. This servant will be well-taught and will instruct the people in order to sustain them. The servant speaks in Isaiah 50:4, stating that God has given Him the “tongue of disciples” and has “awakened his ear to listen as a disciple.” In other words, this servant

²²L. Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, electronic ed. (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1999), 531.

will be well-versed in Scripture, a student of the Word of God. All three of the Isaiah references underline that a disciple is a student-learner of God, the discipler.

Other passages that use $\tau\alpha\lambda$ also reinforce the idea of a student-learner. First Chronicles 25:8 contains an organized breakdown of Levite musicians into twenty-four divisions. Within each division, the music teacher was kept with his pupil ($\tau\alpha\lambda$). The teacher is linked to his student. In Isaiah 54, God promises that the Jews will one day return to their homeland. During that time, “all your sons will be taught ($\tau\alpha\lambda$) by the Lord; and the well-being of your sons will be great” (Isa 54:13). Again, there is a link between $\tau\alpha\lambda$ and being taught. These passages all indicate that discipleship is a process by which someone has been trained and taught a specific pattern.

New Testament references to disciple. Compared to the Old Testament, the word “disciple” occurs far more frequently in the New Testament. The main Greek word for disciple is μαθητής (feminine form μαθήτρια), which means “one who engages in learning through instruction from another.”²³ Like its Old Testament counterpart, μαθητής is closely related to the verb μαθητεύω, which means “to become a disciple” or “to cause one to be a pupil.”²⁴ The word “disciple” shows up some 270 times in the New Testament, mostly from the Gospels.²⁵ When the word “disciple” is used in the New Testament, it usually highlights one or more of the following four facets of particular discipleship—association, education, representation, or submission.

In most of the references to “disciple” in the New Testament after their initial calling (Luke 6:12-19), there is an assumed association between the disciple and the discipler. Even if the disciples didn’t know Jesus initially, Jesus would spend the next

²³Arndt, Danker, and Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 609.

²⁴Ibid., 609.

²⁵NASB concordance, 313-14

three years ministering alongside them while traveling throughout Israel. These disciples were recognized as followers of Jesus Christ. For example, in Matthew 9:11, the Pharisees question the disciples about Jesus' willingness to eat with sinners and tax collectors, showing that the Pharisees could readily identify the disciples of Christ. The disciples were often found with Jesus as he travelled throughout the countryside (Matt 12:1) and the cities (Matt 21:1; 24:1). They would eat together (Matt 26:20), stay together (John 20:8), and attend social events together (John 2:2). Beyond spending time with Jesus, the disciples were commanded to abide in him in order to bear spiritual fruit (John 15:1-11).

In addition to their personal association with Jesus, the disciples were also associated with each other. James and John were Jesus' cousins and several of the disciples were in the fishing business together. Individual disciples are connected to a larger network of disciples. In Acts 16:1, Timothy is singled out by name as a disciple. But it is clear from that verse that Timothy was part of a larger group of disciples, one of them being his mother. As Wilkins succinctly expresses, "That the plural form is normally used expresses an important point: *individual disciples* are always seen in conjunction with the *community of disciples*, whether as Jesus' intimate companions or as the church."²⁶

The second facet of Jesus' discipleship relationship with the disciples was education. The original twelve disciples were present at the public and private teaching of Jesus. At times, Jesus would exclusively explain things to his disciples (Luke 9:18; 8:9; 10:23-24; 12:22-40). Before going to the cross, Jesus promised that the coming Holy Spirit would remind them of what Jesus had taught to them (John 14:26). MacArthur describes, "They had the example of Christ perpetually before them. They could listen to His teaching, ask Him questions, watch how He dealt with people, and enjoy intimate

²⁶Michael J. Wilkins, *Following the Master* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 26.

fellowship with Him in every kind of setting.”²⁷ Like the aforementioned Old Testament references, a disciple was a learner and a student of his master.

A third aspect of the discipleship relationship is representation. Jesus explicitly authorized the disciples to act as his representatives in doing ministry. On the two recorded occasions that Jesus sent out his disciples, Jesus gave them power and authority to heal diseases (Luke 9:1-6; 10:1-24). The disciples acted as Jesus’ official representatives to the people of Israel. In the famous “Great Commission” passage in Matthew 28, Jesus sends the disciples to go and “make disciples” in the knowledge and faith that Jesus has been given all authority and power.

The fourth and final facet of discipleship is the disciple’s submission to his master. In teaching his disciples, Jesus made it clear that they must obey his commands. Submission is one of the marks of a true disciple (Matt 7:21; Luke 11:28; John 14:15, 20-21, 23-24). Jesus’ teaching provided instruction so that the disciples would be transformed (Rom 12:1-2). Jesus authorized and commissioned the disciples to serve a grander purpose in God’s plan of redemption (Matt 28:16-20).

Summary. Discipleship in the Old Testament was associated with the idea of a student-learner’s faithfulness to God. In the New Testament, discipleship was illustrated by Jesus’ interaction with his own disciples, which featured an association with Jesus and each other, an education under the tutelage of the Son of God, an authorized representation of their Master, and a demand for submission to their Lord. In light of these Scripture references, the particular discipleship relationship can be defined as a close association with the discipler wherein the disciple submits to his discipler out of submission to Christ.

²⁷John MacArthur, *Twelve Ordinary Men: How the Master Shaped His Disciples for Greatness, and What He Wants to Do with You* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 25.

Obstacles to Particular Discipleship in Scripture

There are three main obstacles to particular Christian discipleship. The first main obstacle to particular discipleship in Scripture is the disciple's faith. Unless a disciple is truly saved, he cannot grow because he is incapable of growth apart from the enabling work of the Holy Spirit. After challenging the commitment of the rich young ruler (Luke 18:18-27), Jesus proclaimed, "For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (Luke 18:25). When the disciples responded by asking "then who can be saved?" (Luke 18:26), Jesus told them "The things that are impossible with people are possible with God" (Luke 18:27). In other words, God must enable and empower a disciple's growth (Phil 1:6).

The second main obstacle to particular discipleship is the discipler's spiritual maturity as expressed through obedience. Saved by Jesus' work on the cross, believers have a responsibility to submit to God as their Lord (Eph 2:8-10). To be a discipler, a Christian must respond earnestly to the commands of Scripture. In his second letter to Timothy, Paul exhorts, "The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Tim 2:2). There are four generations in view—Paul, Timothy, faithful men trained by Timothy, and the others who are taught. At this point, Paul has already discipled (mentored) Timothy. Now Timothy must be faithful to continue that pattern. Should Timothy fail, the chain of discipleship would break. Applied to the present day church, pastors must equip and train up others (Eph 4:11) and parents must faithfully disciple (mentor) their children (Eph 6:1-4).

A third and final obstacle to the particular discipleship relationship is the disciple's and discipler's availability. Every season of life can pose different challenges for believers. While all Christians are called to make the most of their time (Eph 5:15-16), changing seasons bring changing responsibilities. An older retired woman will probably have more time than a young working mother of preschoolers. Given the myriad

possible life situations, each believer must carefully consider how to be faithful in everything before the Lord (Rom 12:1-8; 1 Cor 4:1-2; 1 Pet 4:10-11).

Keys to Particular Discipleship in Scripture

Like a three-legged stool, particular discipleship (mentoring) rests upon three supports—a solid foundation, solid participants, and a solid goal.

Solid foundation. The particular discipleship relationship is built upon a solid foundation, a three-fold commitment. The first commitment is to Jesus Christ. Neither the discipler nor the disciple has the power to become holier and conformed to the image of Christ apart from the indwelling and enabling power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, both must be Christians. Having been sealed with the Holy Spirit upon conversion (Eph 1:13-14), believers are guided by God Himself (John 14:26) and live within the ocean of God's abundant grace. If true change towards godliness is desired, then the grace of God is the only suitable catalyst. As a result of conversion, the discipler and disciple must have a biblical view of sin. In order to grow in godliness, there must be a wholehearted repudiation of sin and a resolution to live for the glory of God (Titus 2:11-14).

The second commitment in the solid foundation is a commitment to the authority of Scripture. In addition to the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, true disciples must submit to the authority of God's Word (2 Tim 3:16-17). If someone wants to be on God's team, he must follow God's playbook. All believers must carefully examine everything, lest they be deceived (Col 2:8), striving to bring all thoughts, behaviors, and actions into conformity with the teachings of Scripture (2 Cor 10:5).

The third commitment for disciples is towards fellow disciples. Rather than seeking their own personal glory or fame, Jesus commanded His disciples to be servants of each other (John 13:14-15; Mark 10:42-45). Spiritual gifts should be employed in the service of others in the church (Gal 5:16; 1 Pet 4:10-11). When it comes to the process of

particular discipleship, it is ultimately about having an understanding and insightful friend who points people to Christ and His word.²⁸ One specific illustration of that commitment is mutual openness and honesty, resulting in conversations of substance leading to spiritual growth.

Solid participants. The second key to particular discipleship is the involvement of four solid participants—the Holy Spirit, the discipler, the disciple, and the church. Because of their shared relationship to Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior, the Holy Spirit will be present to guide and direct the entire process. In the plan of God, the Holy Spirit can work through individuals like the discipler and the disciple within the context of the church (a body of believers).

The first participant in particular discipleship is the Holy Spirit. Foundational to the work of all discipleship is the presence and work of the Holy Spirit. Upon conversion, God gives believers the Holy Spirit, sealing them (Eph 1:13-14), guiding them (John 14:26), and enabling them to bear spiritual fruit (Gal 5:22-23). The Holy Spirit's role in the discipleship process is so vital that Holcomb and Wilkerson quip, "In fact, rather than asking about the role of the Holy Spirit in counseling, we should be asking about the counselor's role in the Holy Spirit's counseling"²⁹ Rather than thinking of the Holy Spirit as a helpful tool in the process of particular discipleship, both discipler and disciple must recognize their utter dependence upon the enabling of the Holy Spirit in the sanctification process. "The Holy Spirit is called holy not only because He is to be distinguished from all other spirits, and in particular from unclean spirits, but also

²⁸Jeremy Pierre and Mark Shaw, "The Nature of the Biblical Counseling Relationship," in *Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling: Changing Lives with God's Changeless Truth*, ed. James MacDonald (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2013), 310-19.

²⁹Justin Holcomb and Mike Wilkerson, "The Ministry of the Holy Spirit," in *Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling: Changing Lives with God's Changeless Truth*, ed. James MacDonald (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2013), 51.

because He is the Source of all holiness.”³⁰

The second solid participant is the discipler (mentor). While each discipler may be uniquely created, every discipler should be characterized in four main ways. First, the discipler must be a spiritually mature believer who knows and regularly communes with God. He must be someone whose walk with Christ is trustworthy, characterized by faithfulness, and represents God well.³¹ A second important characteristic of the discipler is his ability to handle God’s Word accurately, requiring meditating on Scripture and applying its teaching (2 Tim 2:15; 3:16-17). He may be consulted on a variety of life issues. Therefore, he must know how to look for wisdom from God. Beyond knowing God’s Word, the discipler should be able to communicate God’s Word. Understanding truth is not the same as imparting truth. He should be able to suggest specific actions consistent with biblical principles. A third characteristic of a discipler is the ability to provide biblical counseling for his disciple when necessary. Although most disciplers may not think of themselves as biblical counselors, “counseling is any conversation intended to help someone solve a problem.”³² According to that definition, many Christians offer counsel all the time. The question, however, is whether they are offering biblical counsel. As disciplers, they have the unique privilege of ministering God’s grace on an individual level.³³ Fourth and finally, the discipler must be characterized by a deep love for people. The discipler needs to be person-oriented, not just problem-oriented.³⁴ Proverbs 27:9 adds, “Faithful are the wounds of a friend.” In other words, the stronger the relationship, the more potential progress can be made. There must be compassion,

³⁰Jay Adams, *The Christian Counselor’s Manual* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 6.

³¹Jay Adams, *How to Help People Change* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 47.

³²Powlison, *Speaking Truth in Love*, 160.

³³*Ibid.*, 47.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 102.

respect, and sincerity present in the discipling relationship.³⁵ This is nothing less than the display of Christlikeness in the form of a shepherd caring for his sheep.

The third participant is the disciple, who must be dedicated in three specific areas. First, the disciple must be dedicated to being as open and honest as possible with the discipler. If there is to be any degree of progress in the disciple's spiritual life, there must be vulnerability, as he subjects his life to the authority of Scripture. Proverbs 28:13 states, "He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion." Secondly, the disciple must dedicate himself to being teachable. While all believers should be committed to being teachable to God's Word, the particular discipleship relationship places two believers in very close contact. As a result, they have a better view of each other's lives, sinful tendencies and all. While the discipler has a responsibility to offer biblical wisdom and advice, the disciple must also be teachable to that advice, verifying its accordance with Scripture (Acts 17:11). The third dedication of the disciple is to embrace personal responsibility in his fight against sin. This involves acknowledging personal responsibility, choosing to look at circumstances from a biblical point of view, committing to eliminate whatever hinders biblical change, exerting energy toward the goal, persevering in obedience, and trusting God for the strength and resources to change.³⁶

The fourth and final solid participant in particular discipleship is the local church, defined as, "a group of Christians who regularly gather in Christ's name to officially affirm and oversee one another's membership in Jesus Christ and his kingdom through gospel preaching and gospel ordinances."³⁷ If the Holy Spirit is the enabling

³⁵Powlison, *Speaking Truth in Love*, 102-13.

³⁶Wayne Mack, "Biblical Counseling and Inducement," in *Counseling: How to Counsel Biblically*, ed. John MacArthur (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 177-78.

³⁷Jonathan Leeman, *Church Membership: How the World Knows Who Represents Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 62.

element of the particular discipleship relationship, then the church is the environment where that relationship takes place. Believers should be active participants and members of a local church. It is within this environment that a believer can love one another (John 13:34), rejoice and weep with one another (Rom 12:15), live in harmony with one another (Rom 12:16), serve one another (Gal 5:13), carry one another's burdens (Gal 6:2), and encourage one another (1 Thess 5:11). The particular discipleship relationship should be located within the local church, where the church can teach Scripture, reinforce biblical counsel, and provide resources.

Solid goal. The third and final key in particular discipleship is to have a solid goal. Without goals, people can often lose focus and direction. Such goals must be concrete enough that both individuals would be able to determine whether said goals were met. The intentional discipleship relationship exists for mutual edification and sanctification. It is geared for spiritual growth. Specifically, the intentional discipleship relationship exists for the increase of Christlikeness and the greater production of spiritual fruits through the enablement of the Holy Spirit. It is growing as a disciple of Christ in every area of life. Reinforcing this solid goal is important because it prevents the intentional discipleship relationship from decay and promotes health.

Remembering that the point of discipleship is spiritual growth will prevent the one-on-one discipleship relationship from decay in two specific ways. The first source of decay stems from the decline in spiritual conversation, leading to socializing. While socializing may be a part of the particular discipleship relationship, it should not be the primary emphasis. There will be no considering of other's interest (Phil 2:3-4) and believers will cease to consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds (Heb 10:24). A second potential pitfall of losing focus on spiritual growth is that relationship will become a place for problem discussion instead of being a place for problem solution. If the discipler and disciple are serious about spiritual growth, then

they will treat problems seriously and actively seek sanctifying solutions.

In addition to preventing spiritual decay, having a solid goal for the particular discipleship relationship will promote healthy interaction in three main ways. First, a solid goal will promote general concern for spiritual health. In the wake of new workout and diet regimens, spiritual health can be obscured. However, Jesus' desire for disciples is that they bear much spiritual fruit (John 15:8) and have full joy (John 15:11). Just as elite athletes are sensitive to their physical bodies, disciples should be sensitive to their spiritual condition. Second, having a solid goal for particular discipleship will encourage regular measurement of spiritual growth. While more abstract in nature, there are ways to measure one's spiritual growth. It is here that spiritual surveys and inventories may prove useful. The disciple can also examine himself, invite others to examine him, and consider his reactions to trials that he encounters. Third, a solid goal will promote continued changes in action. "Change is the goal, the objective, the target, the purpose of counseling. Often when people seek counseling, they desire some kind of change—in circumstances, in others, or in themselves."³⁸ While circumstances may be beyond a person's control, he can always address his own response to a specific situation. In light of the spiritual warfare in the world (1 Pet 5:8), believers are wise to arm themselves (Eph 6:10-17) and stand firm in the faith (1 Pet 1:13-16). The discipler and the disciple should wisely outline specific strategies for putting off deeds of the flesh and putting on deeds of righteousness. Knowing that the heart is home to the competing desires of the flesh and desires of the spirit (Gal 5:16), believers are to simultaneously suppress sin while cultivating righteousness. Ephesians 4:25-29 provides further insight on this strategy for fighting sin. Ephesians 4:25 offers the strategy of laying aside falsehood and speaking truth. Ephesians 4:28 instructs believers to stop stealing and start sharing. And

³⁸Kevin Carson, "The Personal, Private, and Public Ministry of the Word," in *Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling: Changing Lives with God's Changeless Truth*, ed. James MacDonald (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2013), 257.

Ephesians 4:29 prohibits unwholesome speech while encouraging edifying words.

Biblical change towards Christlikeness, therefore, is a lifestyle promoted in Scripture.

Benefits of Particular Discipleship

Rooted in the Great Commission, all Christians are called to go and make disciples (Matt 28:18-20). Beyond giving glory to God through obedience, there are three additional benefits to particular discipleship.

The first benefit from particular discipleship is spiritual fruit. God calls upon all believers to grow to become more like Jesus Christ. Davis points out,

Jesus spent a great amount of time with his disciples. He visualized and verbalized their future. He confronted their sins and errors; he honestly evaluated their progress; yet he unconditionally stood by them and affirmed them and encouraged them. He invited them to be close to him when he was vulnerable, when his heart was breaking in the last few hours before the cross. Most of all, he lived what he taught. Everything he wanted his learners to be, he *was*.³⁹

Particular discipleship is ultimately about reproduction. While it is not intended to result in an exact reproduction, it will ultimately result in a similar reproduction. Paul commands believers to, “be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1). In other words, Corinthian believers should imitate Paul to the extent that he models Christ-like behavior.⁴⁰

The second benefit of particular discipleship is a credible witness to the world. Jesus said, “A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40). Christians who live like Jesus present a more credible witness to the world. It is spiritual growth and maturation that allows Christians to act and converse wisely (Col 4:5-6). Jesus himself commanded believers to, “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your

³⁹Ron Lee Davis, *Mentoring: The Strategy of the Master* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1991), 51.

⁴⁰Craig L. Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), loc. 3782, Kindle.

Father who is in heaven” (Matt 5:16).

The third major benefit of particular discipleship is the growth of the church through the growth of individual believers. The discipler and the disciple will grow through the discipleship relationship as they observe and point one another to Christ. As each believer grows, the church grows. Davis emphasizes, “An effective mentoring relationship should enhance any and all ministry potential within the learner, be it leadership, service, encouraging, teaching, giving, mercy, helping, faith, discernment, administration, evangelism, or intercession.”⁴¹ The maturity of the individuals is directly related to the maturity of the church. Helping fellow believers grow in the knowledge and grace of Jesus Christ (2 Pet 3:18) is a direct response to the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20). That general discipleship process begins with conversion and continues teaching disciples all that Jesus has commanded (Matt 28:20).

A Particular Discipleship Example from Scripture

Of the twelve disciples, Simon Peter is mentioned far more frequently in Scripture than the others. Even within Jesus’ inner circle of Peter, James, John, and Andrew, Peter’s name appears more frequently in the Gospel accounts than the other three combined.⁴² Recognized as the “first among equals,” Peter is the functional leader of the disciples. His name appears at the head of every list of the twelve disciples (Matt 10:2-4; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:14-16; Acts 1:13).⁴³ In the early church, Peter is the primary focus in the first twelve chapters in Acts. Since there is more written about Peter in Scripture, an examination of his relationship with Christ offers a portrait of the discipleship relationship that reinforces the four facets of disciples—association,

⁴¹Davis, *Mentoring*, 52.

⁴²Information obtained through a Logos search, excluding references to John the Baptist and the other two men named James. By my count, Peter is mentioned in the Gospels 98 times; James (19), John (43), and Andrew (12) are mentioned 74 times combined.

⁴³Wilkins, *Following the Master*, 137.

education, representation, and submission.

Even within the inner circle around Jesus, Peter was more closely associated with Jesus than the other disciples. Jesus has more personal messages for Peter than the other disciples. Prior to following Jesus, there is a possibility that Peter was a disciple of John the Baptist (John 1:35-40).⁴⁴ When Peter decided to follow Jesus, Peter switched masters. After Jesus is taken into custody at the High Priest's home, Peter is one of the only two who resolve to follow Jesus' trial (Matt 26:58). Peter stumbles and denies Jesus Christ three times after being identified as one of Jesus' disciples (Matt 26:69-75; Mark 14:66-72; Luke 22:54-62; John 18:25-27). As the leader of the disciples, Peter also spoke on behalf of the other disciples (Matt 16:13-16; John 6:66-69).⁴⁵

Often times in the Gospel accounts, Peter seeks education from Jesus about various topics in order to learn. Jesus teaches Peter the meaning of parables (Matt 15:15-20), the promise of heavenly reward (Mark 10:28-30), the extent of His divine power to raise someone from the dead (Luke 8:51-56), and the right way to accept God's divine plan (John 18:11). In sum, Peter received an education from Jesus about what it really meant to live a life that was pleasing to God. When necessary, Jesus would rebuke Peter for focusing on his own plan over God's plans (Matt 16:21-13). On the other hand, Jesus would also offer encouragement and blessing (Matt 16:17), as well as restoration and forgiveness (John 21:15-17).

As a disciple, Peter was an authorized representative of Jesus Christ. Peter was one of the disciples sent out to proclaim the good news (Matt 10:1; Luke 9:1-11; 10:1-12). Like the others, Jesus sent Peter out with power, giving him, "authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness" (Matt 10:1). Peter and the disciples were given the ability to heal in the same way that

⁴⁴Wilkins, *Following the Master*, 139.

⁴⁵Ibid., 138.

Jesus did.

Since Jesus was their master, all of the disciples (including Peter) had to submit to His command and leading. Jesus commanded them to travel to certain places (Matt 14:19; Mark 6:45), distribute food to the crowds (Matt 1:36; Mark 8:6; Luke 9:14-16), procure transportation (Matt 21:1-6; Mark 11:1-6; Luke 19:29), make preparations for meals (Matt 24:18-19; Mark 14:12-16), and meet Him at specified locations (Matt 28:16). After His resurrection, Jesus commissioned the disciples to go and make disciples (Matt 28:16-20), a command that would direct the rest of their lives.

The life of Peter is an example of how God can use the process of discipleship in the Christian life. Though he was the natural leader of the disciples, Peter still had to be refined through his particular discipleship relationship with Jesus. Through life experience, teaching, and conversation, Jesus helped Peter become a better leader. MacArthur argues, “Peter is a strong argument for the belief that leaders are born with certain innate gifts, but must also be properly shaped and made into a true leader.”⁴⁶

Implied References to Particular Discipleship in Scripture

Although the majority of mentoring illustrations come from Jesus’ interaction with His disciples, there are also indications of mentoring in Scripture in the book of Acts. In the early church, the Christians were devoted to the apostles’ teaching, indicating a history of teaching. In order to reach out to Gentiles, God sent Philip to show the Ethiopian eunuch what Scripture taught about Jesus (Acts 8:30-39). In order to disciple believers in the church, Paul and other early missionaries visited churches in order to encourage them (Acts 9:31; 11:23; 16:40; 20:1-2). When Priscilla and Aquila heard Apollos preach, they realized that he did not fully understand the good news. As a result, they sat down and explain to Apollos (Acts 18:26). Towards the end of his life, Paul

⁴⁶MacArthur, *Twelve Ordinary Men*, 39.

knew that he would not see the Ephesian elders again. In his final exhortations to them, Paul reminded them how he faithfully declared God's message publicly and from house to house (Acts 20:20). Although Scripture does not provide as much detail of mentoring in the early church, many passages indicate the ongoing practice.

Conclusion

Mentoring is ultimately about training and developing others to realize their potential. Whether it is in the workplace or in the church, there is a constant need to develop and train people. The often-quoted proverb concurs, "give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime."

In the workplace, mentoring has the potential to enhance a leader's effectiveness and improve any organization. Instead of searching for more people to hire, the organization can use mentoring to develop from within. In spite of the many advantages of mentoring, mentors must overcome obstacles like insecurity, ego, the inability to discern potential, wrong notions of success, and lack of training. After overcoming initial obstacles, mentors must also pursue embrace a proper perspective and process of mentoring in order to reap benefits like improved morale, multiplied impact, and institutional growth. While there is some emphasis on character development, the majority of the focus for mentoring in the world is in developing skill in the workplace.

In the Bible, mentoring is synonymous with particular discipleship. While some Old Testament references allude to skill development, most scriptural references focus on the development of the mentee's character for God's purposes. The clearest picture of particular discipleship in Scripture comes from Jesus' interaction with the twelve disciples, which had a ripple effect that impacts every believer today. In order for the particular discipleship relationship to begin, disciples must have genuine faith in God and follow through in obedience. To make progress in the relationship, there must be a solid foundation, solid participants, and a solid goal in order to receive the benefits of

spiritual fruit, credible witness before the world, and growth in the church.

The apostle Peter serves as one of the clearest examples of the potential of particular discipleship from Scripture. Having started as a younger brash man with a habit of speaking before thinking, Peter was transformed into a sympathetic, compassionate man who comforted suffering people.

Though less detailed, it is clear that the pattern of particular discipleship modeled by Jesus continued during the early church area. Church leaders were developed and trained in order to equip others for the work of ministry (Eph 4:11). Paul calls upon his disciples to take note of his own walk and to imitate him as he imitated Christ (1 Cor 11:1; 1 Thess 2:1-2).

Whether in the world or in the church, mentoring is a valuable means of training. It combines teaching by instruction with observation through demonstration. Applied to premarital counseling, the process of training married couples to assist with premarital counseling can have a similar reverberating effect in the life of the church. Having been blessed by the relationship with a mentor couple, engaged couples can one day serve as mentor couples themselves, leading to a legacy of marriage mentoring through premarital counseling.

CHAPTER 4
DEVELOPING A CURRICULUM TO EQUIP MARRIED
COUPLES TO ASSIST WITH PREMARITAL
COUNSELING

While the first three chapters have laid forth the foundation for the curriculum, this chapter will focus on the preparation process for the Sunday school class, the background of the Sunday school class, and the curriculum content.

Preparation Process for Sunday School Class

The preparation process for the Sunday school class involved two major components—curriculum development and class member selection.

Curriculum development. In order to develop a curriculum to train married couples to assist with premarital counseling, the first step was to select a premarital curriculum. Over the course of premarital counseling sessions, I developed my own premarital curriculum (see appendix 5), consulting curricula from Grace Community Church, Wayne Mack, and a number of marriage books.

The second step in the curriculum process was to develop a curriculum to teach couples how to use the premarital curriculum (appendix 4). Most of the class sessions directly corresponded to the premarital curriculum, which consisted of the eight most common topics addressed in marriage books.

After developing the curriculum to teach couples how to use the premarital curriculum, I asked an expert panel to evaluate the curriculum using an evaluation rubric (appendix 3). I distributed a copy of the teaching curriculum on November 24, 2014 and asked them to return the curriculum with all comments to me by December 10, 2014. Since this project would primarily impact our entire church, I initially decided to consult

the 8 other members of our pastoral staff and one of our deacons who does counseling. But when I asked about their experience doing premarital counseling, I discovered that the deacon and four staff members had not performed very much premarital counseling due to inexperience in ministry.¹ So while I took everyone's feedback into consideration, I had to exclude them from being part of an expert panel. The remaining 4 pastors had at least 10 years of full-time ministry experience and had performed premarital counseling at least 3 times. The vast majority of their feedback related to grammatical mistakes, formatting, and spelling errors. One of the pastors asked for more content with regard to a theology of sex (topic 8). Another recommendation was to explicitly address cases in which one or both were not virgins. All 9 individuals (including the expert panel) who received the curriculum for evaluation marked that all sections were at the "sufficient" or better (see results in appendix 3).

After receiving the feedback from the expert panel (and from the other members of the pastoral staff), I edited accordingly prior to teaching the class beginning January 2015.

Class member selection. Because this project equips married couples to assist with premarital counseling, it was vital to select the participants wisely. Rather than opening it up to anyone in the church, couples had to be invited in order to attend the class. Beginning in August 2013, I began praying about who to invite to be trained. The selection process lasted about three months. The list of potential mentor couples was presented three times. If any member of the pastoral staff had reservations about any couple on the list, we would remove that couple. After conferring with the pastoral staff about a list of potential couples to assist with premarital counseling, I extended an invitation to the 18 couples in August 2014, giving them sufficient time to mark their

¹Out of the seven other pastoral staff members, four had less than three years of full-time ministry experience. As a result, they had not performed premarital counseling.

calendars and to step away from any conflicting ministry responsibilities. Seventeen out of the invited 18 couples committed to attend the class, meaning that for the purposes of this project, there were 34 students.²

Background of Sunday School Class

At FCBC Walnut, a weekly Sunday school officially begins at 9:00 AM and ends at approximately 10:25 AM. Due to the many activities taking place on a Sunday morning, most students will usually arrive to class by 9:10 AM, meaning that there is a maximum of seventy-five minutes of instruction per week.

Demography of Class

The age range of the couples in the class approximated the demography of the English congregation (appendix 1). There were two couples in their sixties, eleven couples in their fifties, two couples in their forties, and two couples in their thirties. All couples had been married for at least two years, served in leadership, and displayed a strong marital relationship. All four of the English deacons were numbered among the students.

The students themselves also had differing cultural backgrounds, which also influenced their view of marriage. Thirty-three of the students were children of parents who were born outside of the United States. Twenty-three out of the 34 students were themselves born outside of the United States, coming from Indonesia, China, Hong Kong, and Malaysia.

Due to the various commitments of the students in the class, I sent out handouts and links to video recordings of each class session in a weekly e-mail.

²There were five additional students who audited the class. One couple was invited at the Mandarin Pastor's personal request. Another couple was invited because the husband serves as a pastoral intern. The last individual is my wife. Since the scope of this project (see chapter 1) is limited to approved couples from the English congregation (excluding my wife and me), these five individuals will not be included in class statistics.

Premarital Background of Students

Prior to the instructional portion of the class, I asked all students to fill out a survey. One of the questions asked about whether the students themselves had ever received premarital counseling themselves. Of the 34 students, 26 had received premarital counseling, while 8 had not. Three individuals had already participated in formal premarital counseling, one of them being a Marriage and Family therapist.

Another facet of the background of the students is their exposure to Biblical Counseling. Aside from a class that I taught in the previous trimester, none of the couples in the class were previously familiar with Biblical Counseling. That class was conducted over fifteen weeks and presented a basic theology and practice of Biblical Counseling. However, given the parameters of this doctoral project, the “Introduction to Biblical Counseling” class was beyond the scope. However, it was important to recognize the training background these students have received prior to the “Marriage Matters” class.

Class Materials

In order to equip students, I gave each couple two books—a copy of Paul David Tripp’s, *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands* and Wayne Mack’s *Strengthening Your Marriage*. While I did not assign homework from Tripp’s book, I encouraged them to read it for their own growth as Christians who counsel others.

Each couple also received a binder for the class (see appendices 5-8). The binder contents were divided into five sections: class notes, premarital curriculum,³ and some appendices to the curriculum. The class notes section provided a place to store notes and handouts, which were distributed every week. Upon request, I also e-mailed digital copies of all class notes and handouts. To encourage note taking and active listening, the class notes had fill-in-the-blanks. The second section contained the teacher

³I developed this premarital curriculum after reviewing materials from Grace Community Church and The Master’s Seminary. See “Taking the Next Step” in appendix 5.

edition of the premarital curriculum used for counseling. In addition to all the materials that engaged couples receive, the teacher edition contains suggested questions and topics for further discussion as well as the answers to blanks. The first premarital curriculum appendix (appendix 6) is mainly a reference for the engaged couple, containing a typical order of a wedding service and three sample wedding vows. The second appendix (appendix 7) contains a bibliography of books about dating and engagement, spiritual growth for men and women, homosexuality, marriage, specific marriage topics, parenting, and family life. Beneath each book entry, there are some comments and a brief recommendation from me. The third and final appendix (appendix 8) contains eight documents, including the FCBC Walnut Marriage Policy, four articles about preparing for marriage, eight principles for dating wisely, a list of questions to discuss before getting engaged, and an article about attitudes in wedding planning.

Structure of Each Session

According to FCBC Walnut church practices, the Sunday school year is divided into trimesters, with approximately fifteen weeks of instruction in each trimester.⁴ For the Marriage Matters Sunday school class, there were only fourteen weeks of instruction due to a combined celebratory service commemorating the thirtieth anniversary of our church on March 1, 2015.

Every Sunday school session began with ten to fifteen minutes of dedicated prayer time. Instead of the customary beginning prayer, I invited students to share their personal prayer requests with the class, and I would pray for all of them to start off the class. While not exceeding fifteen minutes, this prayer time helped set the mood for every class, allowing couples to connect with and care for each other, in addition to

⁴FCBC Walnut also holds a Sunday school assembly in between trimesters to celebrate God's faithfulness in the previous trimester and to preview the new trimester. There are also a few combined services throughout the year, during which all Sunday school classes are cancelled.

demonstrating pastoral care for the students. As the course progressed, an increasing sense of camaraderie grew among the students. When making comments, students would often physically turn to address the entire class, not just me.

Following the prayer time, we would review and discuss any assigned homework, which ranged from reading chapters and answering study questions, to having guided discussions about certain topics. The homework review time provided the class members with an opportunity to share what they learned for their own marriage. The sharing time also helped students connect with each other and fueled additional discussion. Furthermore, the homework assignments were taken directly from the premarital curriculum that they would use when conducting premarital counseling, helping them understand what they would be asking future engaged couples to do.

The Content of the Curriculum

Within the basic structure of the class time, each session focused on a different topic. The curriculum used for premarital counseling covers eight distinct topics—getting to know you, personal spiritual health, roles in marriage, communication, money, in-law relations, family life, and sex. In practice, these married couples will meet with an engaged couple approximately eight times. To equip married couples to assist with premarital counseling, I taught the eight topics over fourteen weeks. In addition to teaching the topics, I also give the counseling couples suggested questions to ask and special areas of concern. The following will outline the goals and teaching content for each class session.

Session 1: Introduction to the Class

The main goals for the first session are to introduce the course, class expectations, review the plan for the fourteen sessions, and introduce the topic of premarital counseling. Due to the introductory nature of the class, I skipped the usual prayer time at the beginning in order to provide time to fill out the survey.

After having all the students register their attendance and confirm their e-mail address, I invited all of them to sit down and fill out the pre-class survey. I explained the purpose of the survey and asked them to be as honest as possible. Having collected all of the surveys, I reviewed the objective, time, style, homework, and topics for the fourteen-week class. I also distributed and reviewed the class materials, which included their binder and the two books. I compared the binder and *Strengthening Your Marriage* to a carpenter's tools and the class as an introduction to woodworking.

Session 2: Overview of God's Design for Marriage and Premarital Counseling

The goal of session 2 was to provide an overview of premarital counseling by way of establishing a biblical perspective of marriage and connecting premarital counseling to the larger practice of discipleship in the church.⁵ Comparing marriage to a building, I explained that God is the master designer. In his wisdom, God set forth the blueprint for marriage in Genesis 1-2, Ephesians 5:21-33, and Titus 2:1-8.

God pours the foundation for marriage in Genesis 1-2, where he establishes that marriage is between a man and a woman (Gen 2:18), provides permanent companionship (Gen 2:24), and is the basis for a family unit (Gen 2:24).

Having provided the foundation, God also provides the structure for marriage in Ephesians 5:21-33. Wives are called to graciously submit to their husbands, displaying God-honoring attitudes and actions (Eph 5:22-24). Meanwhile, God calls upon husbands to lovingly lead their wives in a way that is sacrificial, sanctifying, and sensitive (Eph 5:25-32; 1 Pet 3:7). By God's design, each spouse has a function to fulfill in the building of marriage.

Through human relationships, God also provides support structures for marriage (Titus 2:1-8). Premarital counseling can lay the groundwork for future ministry

⁵The majority of the content for this class came from the second chapter of this project.

and counseling within the body of Christ. More specifically, premarital counselors should seek to give advice that is spiritual (1 Cor 10:31), practical (Titus 2:4; Eph 4:15), relational, empathetic (1 Thess 5:14), affectionate (Gal 5:22-23; John 13:34-35; Prov 17:7; Gal 6:1; 1 John 4:7), and demonstrative. In the larger context of church ministry, premarital counseling is a very specific form of discipleship.

Session 3: Topic 1 – Getting to Know You

The goal for this session was to explain the purpose of the first meeting with an engaged couple. The first topic in premarital counseling was entitled, “getting to know you.” In a church of over 1,000 attenders, one cannot assume that everyone knows everyone. So when couples get together for premarital counseling, the first topic should be “getting to know each other.” Cultivating a strong friendship is like building a bridge between islands; the bridge needs to be strong enough to bear the weight of whatever is being transported across. Likewise, couples must endeavor to build a relationship with each other strong enough to bear the weight of premarital counseling topics. Over time, that relational bridge will have to support increasingly weighty, sensitive topics.

During the first premarital session, the counseling couple would hand the engaged couple a premarital workbook along with two copies of Wayne Mack’s *Strengthening Your Marriage*. Then both couples must establish some preliminary guidelines.⁶ The stated purpose of premarital counseling is “to discern together if God is calling you to move forward in pursuing marriage by getting engaged (if not engaged) or by getting married (if engaged).⁷ The stated goals are to educate the couple about marriage, equip the couple to communicate well, and establish a relationship for future

⁶appendix 5.

⁷Ibid.

care and ministry.⁸ The specific commitments for the engaged couples are to regularly pray for each other, be honest and transparent, and complete assigned homework.⁹

After establishing these guidelines, the counseling couple should explore four main topics with the engaged couple. The first and most important topic is their salvation testimony. Having a biblical perspective of marriage is impossible to implement without the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

The second topic to explore is the engaged couples' family backgrounds. Though a person's past does not determine his or her future, the past can be extremely influential. Within this topic, it is important to explore what kind of family life each person has witnessed in order to see how similar or how different the engaged individuals are from each other.

A third area to explore is prior relationship history. It is important that each individual recognizes the impact of past relationships upon the present relationship, which can include divorce, children, past sexual activity, past hurts, and present fears.

The fourth and final area for exploration is the engaged couples' relationship. They should be able to speak honestly and objectively about their own relationship—its strengths, weaknesses, joys, and past conflicts. It is also instructive for the engaged couple to look over the eight topics and identify which topic they would like to focus on the most.

Session 4: Topic 2 – Personal Holiness in Marriage

During session 4, we discussed the role of personal holiness in marriage, which is the focus of the second premarital session. Every recipe is inherently limited by the quality of the ingredients; in the same way, the overall health of a marriage is limited by

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

the spiritual health of the individuals. Therefore, it is important to help the individuals assess their own spiritual health.

To prepare the counseling couple to have this conversation, I explored the nature of biblical sanctification, which comes through three primary sources—other people, circumstances, and the spiritual disciplines.¹⁰ Through people, God providentially uses fellow Christians to bring us closer to himself (Prov 13:20; 25:11-12; 27:6, 9; 27:17; 28:23). Specifically, fellow Christian can offer biblical rebuke (Gal 6:1; Matt 18:15-20), admonition (Acts 20:31; 1 Thess 5:14), and discipleship relationships (2 Tim 2:1-2; Titus 2:1-8). One specific form of discipleship is premarital counseling. The second source of spiritual growth is circumstances, wherein God providentially puts people in situations for their good, including trials (Jas 1:2-4), affliction (Ps 119:71-72), suffering (1 Pet 1:6-8), and divine discipline (Heb 12:5-11; 2 Cor 12:7-10). The third source of spiritual growth is through spiritual disciplines, which is a Christian’s intentional and sustained effort to be taught and sanctified by God (1 Tim 4:7; Phil 2:12-13). Spiritual disciplines include Bible intake, prayer, worship, evangelism, service, stewardship, fellowship, meditation on Scripture, and others.¹¹

During the premarital counseling session, the counseling couple should follow up with the homework assignment, which involved reading four articles: the FCBC Walnut Marriage policy, “Guys, It Matters Whom You Marry,” “Ladies, It Matters Whom You Marry,” and “Should We Get Married: Five Questions to Ask before Getting Engaged” (appendix 8). Per the assignment list (appendix 5), the engaged couple should be prepared to discuss five or more lessons they learned from the reading.

After discussing the homework, the counseling couple should ask about each

¹⁰Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1991), 17-18.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 27-131.

person's spiritual health with a specific focus on the individual's devotional life, spiritual feeding, accountability, fellowship, and service in the church. Knowing the spiritual health of the individuals also helps the counseling couple embrace realistic expectations for the premarital counseling. In the end, much of the progress in premarital counseling depends on the willingness and spiritual health of the individuals involved.

Session 5 and 6: Topic 3 – Roles in Marriage

Due to the potential for misunderstanding and to address questions, I decided to allocate two sessions for marriage roles, one session for each spouse. In practice, however, marriage roles will be covered in one premarital counseling session. The overall goal for sessions 5 and 6 is to bring clarity to marriage roles in Scripture.

In session 5, the focus of the class was on the role of the wife, which mainly consists of a biblical explanation of submission. After reviewing the material presented in units 1 and 2 in *Strengthening Your Marriage*, I moved from discussing submission in general to submission for wives in marriage. All Christians are called to submit to God (Jas 4:7), their church leaders (Heb 13:17; 1 Pet 5:5), the governing authorities (Rom 13:1-8), supervisors (Eph 6:5-9), and one another in the fear of Christ (Eph 5:21). For wives, Mack skillfully explained submission by clarifying what it is not before stating what it is.¹² In addition to providing an explanation of a wife's submission in marriage, I also distributed an article entitled, "31 Days of Praying for Your Husband."¹³ Since attitude is part of submission, attitudinal adjustment can begin by praying for one's husband.

During session 6, our class examined the role of a husband in marriage, based

¹²Wayne Mack, *Strengthening Your Marriage*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1999), 17-20.

¹³Nancy Leigh DeMoss, "31 Days of Praying for your Husband," Revive our Hearts, n.d., accessed April 2, 2015, <https://www.reviveourhearts.com/articles/31-days-of-praying-for-your-husband/>.

primarily off of the description of leadership in Ephesians 5:21-33. The goal is to clarify the role of husbands in the home for the purpose of passing on that information to fiancés. Like Jesus Christ is for the church, the husband is the head of his wife. The husband's role as head entails a responsibility to lead in a way that imitates the leadership of Jesus Christ in three ways. First, husbands are called to lead in a sacrificial way, modeled after Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross. Secondly, husbands can lead in a sanctifying way, since Jesus died in order to sanctify the church. While husbands cannot sanctify their wives like the Holy Spirit (Phil 1:6), husbands can help the sanctification process by pointing their wives to Christ, leading in family devotions, and showing initiative in church involvement. The third facet of Jesus' leadership involves his nourishing and cherishing of the church, which is informed by Jesus' familiarity and sensitivity to the church. Likewise, 1 Peter 3:7 encourages husbands to live with their wives in an understanding way, which can be literally translated, "according to knowledge."

In order to avoid exasperating husbands when they fail to perfectly imitate Christ's leadership in the home, I also reviewed four substantial clarifications—that no husband has ever loved his wife exactly like Christ, that Christlike leadership should be seen as a goal, that every husband ought to consider how to love his wife well, and that a husband should seriously ask himself if he loves his wife as he loves himself.¹⁴ To help the husbands in the class teach engaged men how to love their future wives practically, I reviewed ten practical ways to communicate love from Mack's *Strengthening Your Marriage*.¹⁵ The class session ended with a brief discussion of biblical decision making.¹⁶ Of the many different tasks in leadership, decision making can be one of the most

¹⁴Mack, *Strengthening Your Marriage*, 41.

¹⁵Ibid., 42-44.

¹⁶Stuart Scott, "Decisions, Decisions: How to Know and Do God's Will," lecture notes, 80553: *Problems and Procedures in Biblical Counseling*, July 2014.

challenging. Therefore, as a class, we worked through an example of making a decision through consulting Scripture for direct commands, seeking out indirect principles from Scripture, and then considering the decision with the freedom permitted by Scripture and conscience. To end the session, I used a diagram to illustrate that biblical headship and leadership is a part of the love that the husband expresses to his wife, later handing out the article.¹⁷

To equip counseling couples for premarital counseling, I recommended that they talk to the engaged couples about how they specifically fulfill their marriage roles in the home. In that way, engaged couples can see how spouses may lovingly serve one another in the home. I also reminded the students of the class that in all likelihood, the engaged couples will be very intimidated by the expectations set forth in Scripture for them in marriage. So it is important to remind the engaged couples that marital roles must be cultivated and developed over time. Spouses will learn how to best serve each other in the home as they learn more about each other. It is also important to explore each other's personal history and exposure to marriage roles, since one's natural tendency is to replicate what he or she has observed growing up.

Session 7: Topic 4 – Communication (Encouragement, Care, and Clarity)

In beginning of the second class session, I polled the students to discover what they wanted to learn about. By far, the most popular topic of interest was communication in marriage. Having anticipated that answer, I allocated three consecutive sessions to cover the topic of communication in marriage.

The theme of the first session about communication focused on encouragement, care, and clarity. After reviewing the class topics covered, we discussed

¹⁷Winston Smith, "Understanding Headship and Submission," *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 16, no. 2 (Winter 1998): 54-55.

the homework assignment, which was to read unit 4 from *Strengthening Your Marriage* and discuss five lessons gleaned from the reading. During the open discussion time, several couples shared about what they had learned from the reading. Many couples remarked that the homework served as a timely reminder of biblical principles in communication.

I taught about communication from a biblical perspective, focusing on four particular truths from Scripture. The first truth about communication is that God cares about the things we say since it reveals what it is in our hearts (Matt 12:34). Also, communicating helps minimize unnecessary interpersonal conflict (Prov 21:23).

The second insight is that communication is very difficult (Jas 3:2-6). As a result of the Fall, human beings are fundamentally flawed communicators. Due to the noetic effect of sin, humans are susceptible to flawed interpretations of the world (Prov 18:17). Furthermore, human beings do not possess perfect reasoning (Rom 1:20-23), having been exposed to and influenced by the value system of the world (Col 2:8-9). On top of all of these things, James 3:1-2 emphasizes how easy it is to stumble in speech. To highlight the obstacles present in the communication process, I drew a diagram for the class (see appendix 9).

The third aspect of communication from Scripture is the prerequisite commitments necessary for healthy communication. In light of the inherent difficulty of interpersonal communication, I reviewed six prerequisites to good communication.¹⁸ First, each person must want to please God more than anything else. More than accomplishing one's own way, being right, or being vindicated (2 Cor 5:9). Secondly, each person must put on the attitude of humility instead of reacting in pride (Eph 4:1-3). Thirdly, each individual must remember that he is accountable to God for his own

¹⁸Stuart Scott, *Exemplary Husband: A Biblical Perspective* (Bemidji, MN: Focus Publishing, 2002), 230-33.

communication (Matt 12:36). Fourth, one must learn how to listen well (Prov 18:13) by concentrating on and carefully considering what the other person says, avoiding interruption, and asking for clarification. The fifth prerequisite for good communication is to know that communication involves more than just words. One's tone, volume, facial expression, body language, and reactions play a role in communication. Finally, a person must be willing to put forth the effort and spend the time required to communicate well. This involves preferring others and speaking the truth in love, realizing that communication is a learned skill (Eph 4:25).

When communicating, I also commended four specific principles to follow.¹⁹ First, people must learn to communicate in a holy manner. What they say must be truthful and righteous (Eph 4:25), meaning that they must avoid lying, exaggerating, offering half-truths, or evading the truth. Ephesians 4:29-32 also commands Christians to avoid bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander, and malice when communicating. The second principle for communication is to be purposeful. The goal of communication is to glorify God (1 Cor 10:31) and to benefit others (Eph 4:29). A third principle for good communication is to be clear (Matt 5:37; Prov 10:19; Prov 15:28). Wise people will pray about what to say, speak concisely, refrain from frustrating people, define vague terms, and avoid manipulation. Fourth and finally, good communication should be timely. In other words, one must consider the other person so as to communicate when it is prudent. While words must be spoken, one can choose better times to speak.

Sessions 8: Topic 4 – Communication (Conflict Resolution)

Since there was no assigned homework for this session, we began to discuss conflict resolution, which involved three keys to addressing conflict—sources of conflict,

¹⁹Scott, *Exemplary Husband*, 234-35.

avoiding conflicts, and resolving conflicts.²⁰

The first key to pursuing conflict resolution is to recognize that conflict can come from three main sources. The first source is people differences. These can include differences of interpretation, opinion, and values. While these differences are not always sinful, mishandled differences can lead to conflict. Rather than seeing differences as an opportunity to learn or pursue further study, spouses may forget to prefer each other with humility (Phil 2:1-4). The second source of conflict comes from an offense, which occurs when one person commits a sin against another. Proverbs 18:19 reminds believers that offended people can be closed off to others, especially to the offender(s). The third source of conflict is one's pride and flesh (Jas 4:1-3; Gal 5:19-21). Human desires must be informed and then transformed by God's Word. Every desire should be submitted to God's will in order to cultivate a healthy communication environment. Otherwise, encamped lusts will ultimately result in quarrels and conflicts as each individual seeks his or her own desires.²¹

A second key to conflict resolution is to avoid conflicts, which enumerated some unbiblical ways to avoid conflict and some biblical ways to avoid conflict.²² To make it more memorable, I took the four examples and renamed them: silence, shut down, redirection, and hiding. Ignoring the problem and keeping silent is an unbiblical way to avoid conflict. A relationship shutdown occurs when spouses just avoid each other, while redirection is changing the subject to avoid the conflict. Lastly, hiding involves avoiding conflict by keeping secrets. These unbiblical techniques only stall conflicts instead of working through them. Meanwhile, biblical ways of avoiding conflict include appreciating one another (1 Pet 3:7), gathering plenty of data before speaking

²⁰Material adapted, with permission, from Stuart Scott, *Communication and Conflict Resolution* (Bemidji, MN: Focus Publishing, 2005).

²¹Ibid., 18-20.

²²Ibid., 22-27.

(Prov 18:13, 17), listening more than speaking (Prov 10:19; 25:11), approaching one another in love (Eph 4:15; Col 3:19), preferring one another (Rom 12:10), and seeking solutions from Scripture (Prov 11:14; 2 Tim 2:15).

The third key to biblical conflict resolution is to pursue intentional conversation. The process of conflict resolution requires both parties to humbly communicate in a way that honors God, beginning with personal confession before God (Eph 4:32), asking for forgiveness for specific offenses, and expressing a genuine desire to resolve the conflict (Prov 15:28). Having agreed upon an appointed time to discuss the matter, the couple should pray for God's wisdom, self-control, and wise speech (Prov 16:32; Jas 1:5). During the conversation, they should take turns confessing sins to God and to each other, asking for forgiveness. When discussing the issue that precipitated the conflict, it is helpful to explore areas of agreement, areas of disagreement, and the nature of the issue in question (sin or preference) before taking specific steps to resolve the issue.

I concluded the session with a reminder that all of us are flawed listeners and communicators. Referring to a popular author who quipped that men and women interact with the world and each other with different color glasses and hearing aids,²³ I added that men and women also have different color lips and minds. Lurking deeper than different communication styles is the reality that all of human communication has been tainted by sin. Therefore, communication and conflict resolution is a difficult battle, which is why all Christians must put on the humility of Jesus Christ, preferring others above ourselves (Phil 2:5-11).

²³Emerson Eggerichs, *Love and Respect: The Love She Most Desires, The Respect He Desperately Needs* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 45.

Session 9: Topic 4 – Communication (Forgiveness and Reconciliation)

The third and final session on communication focused on biblical conflict resolution through the practice of biblical forgiveness. The homework was to have a directed conversation using the “Couples Conference Table” description.²⁴ The purpose of the assignment is to show the class that serious conversations should be done in a humble manner under self-control. Often, serious conversations between spouses can spiral out of control and morph into protracted arguments. Following the guidelines of the “Couples Conference Table” can minimize unnecessary conflict by providing an appropriate setting for a substantial discussion.

Part of that substantial discussion involves the practice of forgiveness, which is defined as “a commitment by the offended to pardon graciously the repentant from moral liability and to be reconciled to that person, although not all consequences are necessarily eliminated.”²⁵ Since believers live in a world impacted by sin and filled with sinners, conflict and offenses are an inevitable part of the human experience. The remaining time was therefore devoted to unfolding a process for pursuing forgiveness and reconciliation. When offended, a person has two options—to drop the matter or to pursue reconciliation as detailed in Matthew 18. In cases of a minor offense, one can choose to overlook the wrong of another by imitating God’s forgiveness (1 Pet 4:8; Prov 19:11).²⁶ Overlooking an offense is appropriate under two conditions. First, there should not be any long-lasting wall between the offended and offender as a result of the offense. Secondly, the offense should not be too serious to overlook. A serious sin brings significant dishonor to God (Matt 21:12-13; Rom 2:23-24), damages the relationship between the offended and

²⁴Appendix 5.

²⁵Chris Brauns, *Unpacking Forgiveness: Biblical Answers for Complex Questions and Deep Wounds* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 55.

²⁶Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 79-99.

offender, is hurtful to others, or hurts the offender.²⁷ Brauns also offers six helpful diagnostic questions for discerning whether or not to bring the matter up.²⁸ The first question focuses on self-examination (Matt 7:1-5; Prov 16:2). Before examining others, it is important to conduct a prayerful and candid self-examination. The second question involves the degree to which the person is certain that he or she is correct. Since interpersonal conflict can be complicated and often subject to interpretation, one must carefully consider whether he or she has an accurate understanding of the matter. The third question asks about the importance of the issue in light of the grand scheme of things. The fourth question involves examining whether the offender evidences a historical pattern of this kind of behavior. While every sin is offensive to God, habitual sins should be addressed with greater urgency. Individual sins that are atypical, on the other hand, should prompt the offended person to consider what the offender is experiencing at the moment. Confronting someone who is characterized by anger is different from confronting someone who is characterized by patience who said some words in anger. Another question involves seeking wisdom from other people, since their counsel is usually more objective and less emotionally charged. Lastly, the offended should consider what else may be happening in the offender's world. The offender may be under a lot of strain, making easier to offend others. In such cases, the offended can seek to pray for the offender to endure the difficult circumstance.

If, having worked through those questions, the offended reaches the conclusion that the matter should be pursued further, then he or she should pursue reconciliation using the four steps detailed in Matthew 18:15-20. The first step involves one-to-one confrontation (Matt 18:15). In particular, Brauns offered the following eight helpful guidelines for practice— to keep the circle small (Prov 16:28; 25:9-10; 26:20), be

²⁷Sande, *The Peacemaker*, 79-99

²⁸*Ibid.*, 95-103.

gracious (Eph 4:32), avoid seeking revenge (Rom 12:17-21), listen first and be prepared to ask forgiveness for oneself (Matt 7:1-5), take the other person at his word (1 Cor 13:7), choose the time and place carefully (Prov 27:14), choose words carefully (Eph 4:15; Prov 25:11), and be patient and have modest expectations (1 Cor 13).²⁹

The second step involves approaching the offender with one or two others (Matt 18:16). The others should be wise believers who can think clearly about the offense. When approaching the offender, all should seek to go humbly, go urgently, listen first, and remember all of the guidelines listed in the first step.

If, after an appropriate waiting period, the offender still does not respond in repentance, Matthew 18:17 commands believers to bring the matter before the church. As one body, church leadership should disclose the matter and call the church to pray regularly for this individual's repentance.

Fourth and finally, the church is instructed to excommunicate the unrepentant offender by treating the individual as an unbeliever (Matt 18:17-20). This would involve revoking the individual's church membership and refusing to treat him or her as a believer.

After teaching through the steps of church discipline, I reminded the class that the earnest intent behind this process is restoration. A doctor who refuses to tell his unhealthy patient the truth about his or her condition does not truly love his patient. Likewise, Christians cannot ignore sin because it would dishonor God's holiness (1 Pet 1:16). Additionally, Christians should not put off reconciliation because it is unloving (John 13:35; Eph 4:32).

Session 10: Topic 5 – Money

The goal for this class session was to teach that married couples need to be on

²⁹Sande, *The Peacemaker*, 55.

the same page with regard to how they use their money—in offering, purchases, saving, and investment.

After reviewing the homework with the students, I handed out an additional article about a couple keeping separate bank accounts who claimed to never fight about money.³⁰ I asked the class about why such a practice might sound strange. Then I highlighted that marriage involves completely sharing everything, which includes money.³¹

I then highlighted a few biblical truths about money. First, money matters to God. Eleven out of the thirty-nine parables from Jesus concerned money. Alcorn asserts, “In fact, 15 percent of everything Christ said relates to this topic—more than His teachings on heaven and hell combined.”³² God commands believers to store up for themselves treasure in heaven (Matt 6:19-21), reminding them of the fleeting nature of riches (Prov 23:5). The second truth about money from Scripture is that money is closely related to what we value (John 12:1-8). When the husband purchases a 49er football jacket for himself, it is because he is a fan who values and cares about the football team. People purchase products because they value them. The third truth concerning money is that it is a tangible form of security (Matt 6:25-34; Luke 12:13-21; 16:19-31). While God typically uses employment to provide for people, believers must recognize that God can provide by other means as well.

To help in the premarital counseling, it is vital to recognize that financial purchases and spending patterns can have deeper implications. Like a windsock reveals the direction of the wind, financial purchases can reveal priorities in an individual’s heart.

³⁰Marcus Geduld, “My wife and I have separate bank accounts, and we’ve never fought about money,” *Business Insider*, February 18, 2015, accessed April 23, 2015, <http://www.businessinsider.com/married-couple-keeps-separate-bank-accounts-2015-2>.

³¹Mack, *Strengthening Your Marriage*, 6.

³²Randy Alcorn, *The Treasure Principle* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2001), 8.

Therefore, a discussion about money can become heated because it may be a discussion about what a person values. Couples must be careful with money, lest it become a stumbling block for them. Proverbs 23:4-5 advises against relentlessly chasing after wealth. A relevant principle for engaged couples is to remind them that money makes a wonderful tool, but a terrible master. Then I offered a common example. Since most couples desire to purchase a home, they will have to evaluate how much they can reasonably afford. If they are unwise, that home purchase can become their master, requiring both spouses to work in order to make the monthly mortgage payment. Likewise, couples who do not exercise self-control over their living standard can quickly become enslaved to it (and to acquiring the money required to sustain that living standard). Even worse, couples could even entertain the idea of lowering their offering. In reviewing the suggested premarital counseling discussion questions, it is also important to talk about the each person's financial background and to identify any existing financial ties to their respective families. Given the upper middle class background of most of our church members, another area of concern is to see if engaged individuals are unintentionally living beyond their means. Some young adults do not know how much utilities or automobile insurance actually cost because their parents continue to pay for it.

I ended the class by calling upon the couples to speak candidly with engaged couples about their own financial situation when they first married. Many of the students in the room had relatively humble beginnings. Due to God's blessing through favorable market conditions and a booming real estate market, many of the older couples in the class own homes valued in excess of 700,000. Given current market conditions and employment difficulties, young couples must embrace humbler and more realistic expectations.

Session 11: Topic 6 – In-Law Relationships

The goal of this session is to examine in-law relationships from a biblical

perspective. While the popular advice is to establish boundaries with in-laws, one must consider how such boundaries are derived from Scripture.

We began by reviewing the assigned homework, which involved reading a handout entitled, “In-Laws: Keeping Parents from becoming Outlaws!”³³ as well as a handout entitled “In-Laws: a Biblical Perspective.”³⁴

In-law relationships are important because every married couple must establish independence as a couple (Gen 2:22-24). Unfortunately, most marriage books have little to nothing to say about in-law relationships, even though I believe that it is a source of tension for many couples. While marriage marks the beginning of a new family unit wherein individuals leave their respective families in order to be joined to their spouse (Gen 2:24), in-law relationships can still pose particularly perplexing problems for married couples. Ultimately, this becomes an issue of relationship priority. The marriage relationship is the highest and most important relationship humans can experience—for parents and for the newlywed couple. Even though one’s marriage becomes the top priority relationship, one’s relationship to one’s parents is the second most important relationship prior to having children. Even after the young couple has their own children, their relationship to their parents should still be the third most important relationship.

To help married couples counsel engaged couples, I reviewed five practical principles for cultivating a healthy relationship with in-laws using the acrostic, PEACE. First, the couple must prioritize their marriage. Spouses must value each other above everyone and everything, including their parents, children, grandchildren, friends, work, church, and hobbies. Regarding in-laws, Mack clarifies, “you should be concerned about being a good son/daughter—or mother/father, but you should be more concerned about

³³John Street, “In-Laws: Keeping Parents from becoming Outlaws!” printed lecture notes, *BI 506.01: Pastor’s Home*, May 2008.

³⁴The handout was condensed from a paper I wrote for my doctoral studies.

being a good husband/wife.”³⁵ Additionally, spouses must value one another’s opinion and approval more than any parent.

The second principle for healthy in-law relations is to explore each other’s family background and history. This requires opening up about one’s upbringing in order to identify underlying values behind respective family traditions. By candidly discussing and assessing one’s family background, a new couple can choose their own family practices fairly without wholesale rejection or acceptance.

Thirdly, couples should affirm respect and honor for their parents. While marriage changes the parent-child relationship, it does not overturn the biblical command to honor one’s parents (Exod 20:12; Matt 15:4), even when they are old (Prov 23:33). In Exodus 20, God commands all people to honor their parents, meaning to show them respect. In other words, to honor one’s parents means seriously thinking about what they say. Couples who desire to respect their parents should seek their parents’ insight in matters of discernment, involve their parents in their lives, disagree respectfully when needed, and explicitly expressing appreciation for them.

Fourthly, young couples must cultivate their own unity in marriage by learning to make decisions together. Also, spouses should be sensitive towards each other during extended family gathering and avoid leaving each other out of activities.

Finally, young couples need to establish adult relationships with their parents. They can make progress in this area by considering their parents’ advice thoughtfully, resolving conflict biblically, loving each other well, and sharing appropriately with parents without dishonoring their spouse.

In addition to these principles, counseling couples should try to identify any potential hindrances to the engaged couple’s independence, including ongoing financial ties, physical proximity to parents, inappropriate emotional ties, and decision-making

³⁵Mack, *Strengthening Your Marriage*, 3.

practices.

While the process of establishing independence can be a difficult and long journey, the aforementioned biblical principles can help outline a path forward.

Session 12: Topic 7 – Family Life

Before the instructional time, we reviewed a handout entitled, “Marriage Matters: Additional Resources.” Since this curriculum encompasses a variety of topics, I included my top book recommendations for each topic (see appendix 4).

The goal for session twelve is to talk about family life from a biblical perspective, which includes parenting. Every person has been influenced by his or her upbringing. Likewise, engaged couples will soon have an opportunity to influence their children through their family life.

After reviewing the material from units seven and eight with the students, I presented some material from Tedd Tripp’s *Shepherding a Child’s Heart*. Specifically, I reviewed the external and internal influences in a child’s life.³⁶ The external influences upon a child include the family structure, values, roles, conflict resolution pattern, response to failure, and history. As for the internal influences, engaged couples must understand that children will either turn towards God or towards idols (Pss 58:3; 51:5; Prov 22:15; Rom 1:18-32). In order to properly prepare for children, engaged couples must also recognize their God-given roles as parents—to reach the hearts of their children having delegated and limited authority. As parents, they also have a responsibility to discipline out of love and care, with self-control (Prov 3:12; 13:24; Heb 12; Rev 3:19). Having established their role as parents, the engaged couple will need to have a biblically evaluate common parenting goals in the world—special skills, psychological adjustment, salvation, family worship, good behavior, and education. In addition to eschewing

³⁶Tedd Tripp, *Shepherding a Child’s Heart* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd’s Press, 2005), 9-14.

problematic parenting goals, engaged couples will also need to embrace biblical methods of parenting, namely communication that is clear and corrective discipline that is controlled, accompanied by an explanation, and culminating in restoration (Heb 12:11).

At the end of the class, I reviewed some of the possible questions the students could ask an engaged couple during their seventh premarital session. Some of the suggested questions address how the engaged individuals were raised as children: how they were disciplined, their respective family values, who took care of them when they were children, and what they would have liked to be different about their childhood. The intent of these questions is to disclose past childhood experiences that could influence the future parenting practices of the engaged couple. The other suggested questions mainly focus on the couple's plans to have children, including the number of desired children and timing. One of the questions, however, brings up the issue of adoption to segue to the possibility of infertility.

As an additional reference, I also distributed an article outlining permissible options for a Christian couple facing infertility.³⁷ Since most couples do not openly discuss their ongoing efforts to conceive, I encouraged the students to talk about their own experiences and struggle to start a family. Two of the couples responded by sharing how they were surprised when they experienced difficulty conceiving.

I concluded the class by reminding the students that as Christians, our lights should shine before others and point them to God (Matt 5:14-16). As parents, our lights shine far brighter and longer before the children God entrusts to us. Our strong desire as parents to point our children to God must also be balanced with the knowledge that our children are still ultimately in God's hands. Like fish in our hands, as parents we try to guide our children. But we must recognize that all of us swim in God's ocean.

³⁷Megan Best, "Your Options in Infertility," The Gospel Coalition Blog, accessed April 7, 2015, <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/your-options-in-infertility>.

Session 13: Topic 8 – Sex

The goals for the penultimate class session are to speak candidly about sex in marriage and to present a biblical perspective on sex. There are a few barriers to overcome when it comes to discussing sex. In addition to being a more private and intimate matter, Asian American culture typically shies away from discussing sex at all. Based on conversations with various young adults, sometimes they don't even see their parents show physical affection towards each other.

We began the session with an open discussion of the homework, which was to read and complete the homework for unit six from *Strengthening Your Marriage* and to read “Jon and Miranda’s Letter to Friends,” a four-page letter written to prepare an engaged couple for their wedding night.³⁸ During this time, I also highlighted that silence regarding sex can actually be injurious to young adults as they enter into marriage. Absent of a biblical view of sex, young adults will bring a worldly perspective of sex into their own marriage.

After the discussion time, I presented a brief biblical perspective of sex. Based on Hebrews 13:4 and the creation account from Genesis 1-2, we know that God created sex. These passages also indicate that God designed sex to be enjoyed within the context of marriage. I then asked the class to offer practical implications of Hebrews 13:4 for their own marriages. If marriage is to be held in honor and the marriage bed is to remain undefiled, then couples must make an effort to intentionally protect their own marriages and to respect the marriages of others.

The second feature of a biblical perspective of sex is the purpose of sex. According to 1 Corinthians 7:1-6, the goal of sex is not primarily personal satisfaction. Instead, the primary goal of sex is to serve and care for one’s spouse. Though God often times allows sex to be pleasurable for both, problems can arise when a spouse only seeks

³⁸Appendix 5.

his or her own sexual pleasure. First Corinthians 7:5 also indicates that sex can also help protect spouses from the temptation to sexual immorality. Finally, sex in marriage is also a means to having children (Gen 1:28).

To help the mentor couples, I reviewed a series of questions they could ask the engaged couple. In particular, it is important to review each person's sexual history. If an individual is not a virgin, has the person repented and asked for forgiveness? If there is unresolved guilt or hidden sin, it can negatively impact the sex life of the newlywed couple. I also invited student couples to share about their own experiences and struggles (if applicable) in the sexual arena with engaged couples. In the absence of any conversation about sex, the engaged couple may set unreasonable and uninformed expectations. While no conversation could ever replace the experience of sex for the first time, informing expectations can still be helpful.

To conclude the class, I talked about sex within the larger picture of human relationships. Often times, we gravitate towards clothing that will accentuate our best physical features and minimize our worst physical features. In the marriage bed, however, we are laid bare for another to see. Our best features and our flaws are exposed. And within that vulnerability, we are able to experience love in a very deep and impactful way, having the commitment from our spouse to neither leave nor forsake us. Sex, therefore, is a tangible expression of mutual love at a very deep level.

Session Fourteen: Conclusion

For the final class, my goal was to bring closure to our time together by placing the class in the larger context of church ministry.

In reviewing our church demography (see appendix 1), I reminded the married couples that there is a need for additional help with premarital counseling. In all likelihood, the 163 single individuals in their twenties will be pursuing marriage. As a group of committed premarital counselors, we have an opportunity to help them start

their marriages well, with the result that the church will become stronger as a whole. Though the stated purpose of the class was to, “equip married couples to assist with premarital counseling,” I clarified that the class is merely a component of an overall process, which involves equipping through education in the classroom, observation of premarital counseling, and finally assisting with premarital counseling. In other words, the class is just the beginning of their training. The development of their skill and comfort in premarital counseling will come as they observe and assist. Even though the observation and practice of premarital counseling is not explicitly included in the scope of this doctoral project, by the end of the project, five of the seventeen couples had observed premarital counseling with engaged couples and one couple began meeting with a dating couple. In the broader picture of church ministry, during the project, six of the thirty-four students began meeting with young adults in the church for particular discipleship. Since the fourteen-week class was coming to an end, I previewed the next steps for the class students—I would ask them to observe premarital counseling as time and opportunity permitted.

I concluded the class teaching time with a vision for what this class could eventually become. When examining the eight topics covered for premarital counseling, it becomes apparent that almost every single marital conflict involves one or more of these topics. In other words, couples who understand how to skillfully counsel these topics will also be equipped to be marriage counselors in addition to premarital counselors. After having the class members fill out a post-class survey, we enjoyed a breakfast potluck together to celebrate God’s work through the class training time.

Conclusion

Over the fourteen weeks of instruction, the class became increasingly open to discussion. Couples would frequently tell me that they had not discussed some of these topics in a long time and were grateful for an opportunity to revisit these matters. In the

end, God was gracious to bless all of the students in the class. By reviewing these subjects, couples were prompted to examine their own marriages in light of Scripture.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

With the increasing confusion over the definition of marriage, God's Word has remained clear and unchanging. Like an architect, God provides the foundations for marriage in Genesis 1-2. In wisdom, God designed marriage as a relationship between one man and one woman that provides permanent companionship and forms the basis for a family unit. On top of this foundational definition, God outlines the structure for marriage in Ephesians 5:21-33, calling upon wives to submit to their husbands in attitude and action in the fear of the Lord. Meanwhile, God calls upon husbands to lead their wives in a sacrificial, sanctifying, and sensitive way. Even though each marriage stands as an independent building, God provides structural supports through the church, wherein other married couples can provide assistance and guidance (Titus 2:1-8). As Jesus mentored his original disciples, all believers are called to disciple others (1 Cor 11:1). This project has been designed to strengthen future marriages by providing couples with a solid start through premarital counseling with a special emphasis on providing married couples to support engaged couples. At the intersection of marriage and discipleship is premarital counseling.

Evaluation of Purpose

The purpose of this project was to equip married couples to assist with premarital counseling at FCBC Walnut. In order to accomplish this, a group of married couples were trained to use a developed premarital curriculum through a fourteen-session Sunday school class. Upon the approval of the pastoral staff, 18 couples were invited to participate in the training to become premarital counselors. To my surprise, 17 out of

these 18 couples committed to be trained, which far exceeded our expectations. Along with some guests, all 17 couples were equipped to assist with premarital counseling.¹

Evaluation of Goals

The first goal was to assess the current understanding and practice of premarital counseling among a group of married couples selected by the pastoral staff. This goal was measured effectively through a survey administered at the beginning of the class (appendix 10). In addition to establishing a starting point for their equipping, the survey also included questions regarding their background and exposure to premarital counseling. Their answers revealed a broad range of experience and exposure to premarital counseling. Thirteen of the couples had received premarital counseling prior to their wedding. Meanwhile, only 3 of the 34 individuals had performed premarital counseling.²

The second goal was to develop a fourteen-week training curriculum that would equip couples to assist with premarital counseling. In order to choose which topics to cover, I consulted resources focused on marriage, biblical manhood and womanhood, and premarital counseling. Added to these resources, I also spoke to fellow pastors about the kinds of marriage issues they encounter in our church. As a result, the curriculum covered the following topics: the purpose of marriage, the importance of personal spiritual health, marriage roles, communication, conflict resolution, leaving and cleaving, family planning, money, and sex. After creating the training curriculum, I asked an expert panel to evaluate the curriculum based on the biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the curriculum (appendix 3). Members of the expert panel

¹The Sunday school class represents a part of the overall equipping plan for couples to assist with premarital counseling.

²Two of the individuals were in the process of observing and participating in premarital counseling with me.

were required to have at least five years of full-time pastoral ministry, officiated at least two weddings, performed premarital counseling at least twice, and ministered in a Chinese church. This goal was successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion meet or exceed the sufficient level. The expert panel was comprised of four of the staff pastors of our church, who evaluated 100 percent of the areas at a sufficient or better level (results in appendix 3).

The third goal was to equip married couples to assist with premarital counseling at FCBC Walnut, which took place through a Sunday school class comprised of fourteen sessions. To measure the efficacy of the project, I employed a t-test for dependent samples to demonstrate a positive statistically significant difference between the pre and post-survey scores. The result of the t-test indicates that the equipping of a select group of couples to assist with premarital counseling made a statistically significant difference, resulting in the increase of their equipping ($t_{(33)} = 9.037, p < 0.05$).

Additional Statistical Insights

Since this project required the collection of information, the data can be analyzed to reveal deeper insights regarding how much the students learned from the class.

Attendance. Out of the 34 students, there was a significant range in attendance (see table A1 in appendix 11). Students attended an average of 12 out of the 14 sessions, for an attendance rate of 89 percent. As for highest-observed attendance, there were 11 students with perfect attendance (14 out of 14 class sessions). The lowest-observed attendance was 7 out of 14, or 50 percent. This particular couple missed half of the classes because they gave birth to their first child in February 2015.

Improvement in overall scores. While the t-test confirms a statistically significant increase in equipping, the data offers more detail (see table A2 in appendix

11). Out of a maximum of 252 points, the average pre-class score was 195 and the average post-class score was 220, indicating an average improvement of 25 points. The highest pre-class score was 238 and the minimum pre-class score was 148. The maximum and minimum post-class scores were 190 and 248, respectively. As for the change between the pre-class survey and the post-class survey, the maximum observed change was 66 points, while the lowest was a one point drop (-1).

Improvement according to topic. The average improvement across all topics was 2.82 points (see table A3 in appendix 11). The area of greatest improvement was “Topic 6: In-Law relationships,” which yielded an average gain of 4 points. The area of least improvement was in “General statements about marriage,” which yielded no change in the overall scores (see table A3 in appendix 11).

Strengths of the Project

There were several notable strengths of this project. The greatest strength of this project was the biblical teaching about the premarital counseling topics. Though often more complex, marital conflict usually features a combination of the topics covered in premarital counseling. As a result, learning what Scripture teaches about these topics helps to minimize marital conflict for engaged and married couples. Now that couples are better informed, whenever differences of opinion arise, they can both appeal to Scripture. Additionally, there were topics covered in the equipping that are not often addressed in sermons or other Sunday school classes like communication, money, in-law relationships, and sex. Based feedback from the students, they were very appreciative to learn more about these topics from a biblical perspective. Despite having attended church for many years, they said that they had never heard much about sex or in-law relationships, much less hearing about these topics from a biblical perspective.

The second strength of this project is the uniformity of premarital counseling through the equipping of couples to use a standardized curriculum. When talking to other

pastors about their premarital counseling practices, I discovered that each had a different approach and focus (number of sessions, number of topics, length of each session, assigned homework, etc). By offering training using a standardized curriculum, engaged couples know that they will discuss the same topics no matter which pastor they meet with. Even though the intended target for the premarital curriculum is the English congregation, as a result of this project, the Mandarin pastor also adopted this premarital counseling curriculum as well.

The third strength of this project that the students themselves were prompted to talk more about these topics as they relate to their own marriages. Having been married for many years, some of the couples had established marital practices without having considered the underlying rationale. Furthermore, married couples were prompted to examine their own marital health in light of the Sunday school class teaching. Even though I had repeatedly clarified that the training class was not a marriage class, many couples told me that their marriages had benefited from the class teaching.

The last strength of this project is that the students gained a deeper understanding of the generational differences that exist in our church. Even though most of the couples pursuing marriage presently are in their twenties, 13 out of the 17 couples in the class were over fifty years old. In fact, 8 of these couples had children who had recently been married. As a result, many of the older couples gained a better appreciation for the challenges facing younger engaged couples. Instead of being perplexed, the older couples sought to understand the perspective of the younger generation. Chapter one highlighted that the two largest age groups in the English congregation of FCBC Walnut are individuals in their twenties and fifties. Though not an explicit goal for this project, this class also helped connect people from different age groups to each other. For example, during the class about in-law relationships, some of the younger couples spoke openly about their own in-law struggles, which prompted older couples to consider their own relationship with their children-in-law. In the weeks following the class about in-law

relationships, many of the older couples from the class had candid discussions with their own married children.

Weaknesses of the Project

While the class as a whole was helpful, there were a few weaknesses of the project. First, the class materials could have been arranged better. Each student couple received a binder with sections for class notes, the premarital curriculum, and three appendices to the premarital curriculum. During most class sessions, I had to refer back to the class notes and also to sections from the premarital curriculum. To limit the number of times students would have to flip back and forth in the binder, I would sometimes include a section from the premarital curriculum in the class notes. Unfortunately, I did not always sufficiently differentiate between the class notes and the premarital curriculum.

The second weakness of the project was the lack of observation of premarital counseling. While 6 of the 17 couples had observed premarital counseling in my home, not all of them were afforded that opportunity due to the number of engaged couples going through premarital counseling at the time. The class would have been stronger if there was a video example of premarital counseling in action, which is a consideration for future training.

What I would do Differently

Though the entire doctoral program has been full of opportunities for learning, there are six lessons I learned from the doctoral project itself. First, I would have planned further in advance and prepared more thoroughly. Due to some of my own misunderstanding and the changes in the professional doctoral program, I implemented the project a little too early. There were less than forty-eight hours between my return from my fourth seminar and the project implementation. As a result, my project did not benefit from the final seminar, which was entitled “Marriage and Family Counseling.”

Had I planned to implement the project in May 2015, I would have had four additional months to incorporate material from that seminar.

A second lesson I learned for the future is to elicit feedback from a larger expert panel. I had initially included the entire pastoral staff and one of the deacons as part of the expert panel. But on further review, I realized that many of them had not been in ministry for very long and that not all of them had performed premarital counseling. Some of our pastors are single or newly married, while others had less than three years of full-time ministry experience. On top of the relative inexperience, our church has historically lacked a group of people in their twenties, who are now in their thirties (see appendix 1). So while I still asked for their feedback, I did not include their responses as part of the expert panel. The curriculum could have been even better had I sought out more feedback from a larger group of individuals.

Another way that I would change the project is to insist on longer class sessions. In total, each session lasted about seventy-five minutes. But by the time we finished with prayer requests, we had about sixty minutes of class time. It would have been better to have ninety minutes per session with about seventy-five minutes of class time. That would have been possible if our class actually started on time at 9:00 AM. Some of the couples came late to class because they had to drop off their children at Sunday school and some of them had to nurse their infants.

A fourth change I would make to the project is to set up the classroom differently. Due to the size of the classroom and the number of students, the room was arranged like a lecture with all the students facing the whiteboard. Even though the whiteboard was a necessary teaching tool, it would have been better to seat the students around tables or angle the chairs towards each other to encourage participation among the students. Along these lines, if this class was to be taught again in the future, it would be helpful to reduce the number of students. Including guests, the class size ranged from thirty-two to forty individuals each week.

Another change I would implement is to have stricter accountability for assigned homework. Mainly, I assigned the homework that an engaged couple would complete prior to coming to a premarital session. Since the students would one day ask engaged couples to do the homework, it made sense to require the future counselors to complete the homework first. One idea for a future time would be to require students to turn in their homework to enforce stricter accountability and to ensure a high quality equipping.

A sixth and final change I would make is to make sure to discuss every supplemental handout. Even though reading these articles are not assigned to engaged couples for premarital, the students were encouraged to read and interact with these handouts. Often times these handouts would shed light on the trends for engaged couples, covering topics like ways to express love for one's spouse, a biblical counseling article about headship and submission, the average wedding cost in 2014, and recent article about financial decision-making in marriage.³

Theological Reflections

As I take some time to think about how God used the doctoral project, I am reminded of a few theological truths. First, God works through Scripture. While it may be an obvious statement, this project actually reaffirmed this truth for the students and for me. With the advent of widespread internet access, marital advice has become increasingly proliferated and publicized. But God's truth stands firm. He is the only person who can speak about marriage from the designer's point of view.

The second theological reflection is a reminder of the call of pastors to equip others. By design, God uses various people to "equip the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of faith, and of the

³See appendix 4.

knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:11b-13). As I reflect on FCBC Walnut, it at once becomes apparent that our church responds to needs by hiring additional staff members. While there is a time and a place for additional staff, pastors still need to be equipping church members to help in the church. One of the greatest benefits of this project it multiplies ministers for the sake of the church. As the students were trained, they also received benefits from reviewing biblical teaching about marriage.

Lastly, I have been reminded of the beauty of the body of Christ. In addition to saving people, God also adopted believers into a new family. Even if an engaged couple did not come from Christian homes, they can still access other Christian homes through the church. Through the vehicle of premarital counseling, different generations of believers can connect with each other and cultivate the most important human relationship they have. Another aspect of the body of Christ is the diversity, offering opportunities to couples to learn from a variety of life experiences and see the different ways to show love for one another.

Personal Reflections

This project has truly been an eye-opening experience for me. Prior to teaching the class, I had little general exposure to the English adult congregation outside of preaching in the service. The smaller setting of the Sunday school class provided me an opportunity to connect in a more significant way with some key English adult leaders. The dynamic setting of a Sunday school class is much more conducive to interaction than a Sunday morning sermon. By the end of the project, the students felt comfortable enough to discuss marital issues that they had encountered personally or seen in other marriages. Open and frank discussion of marital conflict has helped these couples become more honest about their own marriage difficulties.

A second personal reflection is how useful data analysis can be for church

ministry. While not depending on data gathering to minister to people, statistics can help pastors understand their people better. After collecting and logging the scores from the pre-class and post-class survey, I was able to identify the areas of greatest growth. The statistical analysis indicated that the in-law relationship section resulted in the greatest improvement between pre-class and post-class surveys, demonstrated through an average increase of four points. The pre-class survey also indicated that couples were least familiar with the topic of sex. When asked whether they believed that God commands believers to teach and train other believers and whether they have been equipped to provide premarital counseling to engaged couples, on average, the students responded by marking “agree.” In the hands of a pastor, this statistical information can be helpful. For example, knowing that the group is least comfortable with the topic of sex or that the group showed the most improvement in the area of in-law relationships may lead to more focused teaching about those areas.

Another reflection is that I have immediate access to a group of willing and able helpers. In the rationale for this project, the church demography indicated that there is a disproportionately large concentration of singles in their twenties who will probably be getting married within the next seven years. Over the past four years, I have performed fifteen weddings and met for premarital counseling with eleven couples in the English congregation. There was a six-month span around November 2014 during which I had at least one premarital counseling session every weekend. Over the four-month class, there were five weddings from our English congregation, four of which I officiated. To be sure, I need more couples to assist with the premarital counseling ministry. As a result of this class, there is a greater excitement among the class members regarding the possibility of helping future generations of couples in marriage. Furthermore, this excitement has already yielded tangible results. During the four-month class, six of the seventeen couples were able to observe premarital counseling, one couple began meeting with a dating couple, and four individuals began meeting with younger believers for particular

discipleship. As these younger believers pursue dating relationships and move towards engagement, they will probably ask their disciplers to come alongside them during the premarital counseling.

A fourth personal reflection is that I should have trained couples to help with premarital counseling sooner. But in all honesty, I felt too busy to train others. But through this project, I realize how beneficial training people can be—for those who need help and for those who are trained to help. Even though training and equipping is difficult, it is nevertheless helpful in the long term. A pastor who trains and equips others is carrying out Ephesians 4:11-13. Through equipping others, the pastor teaches that the church is made up of many servants, and that ministry is ultimately a team endeavor for the glory of God (Eph 4:14-16).

Finally, this project has blessed me personally as a believer who happens to be a pastor. Through the doctoral project, I have learned more about the English adults. Knowing their struggles has helped me to have more compassion for them. Hearing about what they face has helped me preach in a way that would be more applicable to their stage of life. In all, this project has afforded me a better picture of their lives and helped me to identify our shared need of Jesus Christ. If anything, this project has reinforced that we are all needy and needed.⁴ In addition to learning more about the English adults, I have been challenged in my own faith to rely upon God in a very tangible way. In all my planning and preparation, I did not know who would respond to the call to be trained. Even though I had to prepare the project from beginning to end, only God is able to move hearts to respond positively. Since I serve as the young adult and college associate pastor, I have relatively little direct interaction with the adults in the English congregation. Outside of preaching in the service eight times a year, I did not have a regular forum to

⁴Ed Welch, *Side by Side: Walking with Others in Wisdom and Love* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 13.

interact with them besides exchanging greetings on a busy Sunday morning. So when I invited them to participate, I was not sure how they would respond. Their positive response and feedback from this project was a very significant encouragement to my heart. As the famous hymn reminds us, we must trust and obey.

Conclusion

In creating the institution of marriage, God has provided human beings with companionship intended to be a picture of the relationship between Christ and the church. Just as God does not intend for an individual believer to be bereft of fellowship with the body of Christ, a married couple should not be without relationship to other couples. Through the vehicle of premarital counseling, couples can be linked to one another as both examine Scripture for wisdom and insight. In addition to providing a biblical understanding about marriage, other married couples can also establish relationships with an engaged couple. Through premarital counseling, the body of Christ can provide a healthy beginning for marriages, which has the potential to benefit the future generation. Armed with Scripture, we must look to God to accomplish what he intends in the lives of couples in marriage for his purposes.

APPENDIX 1

ENGLISH CONGREGATION DEMOGRAPHY

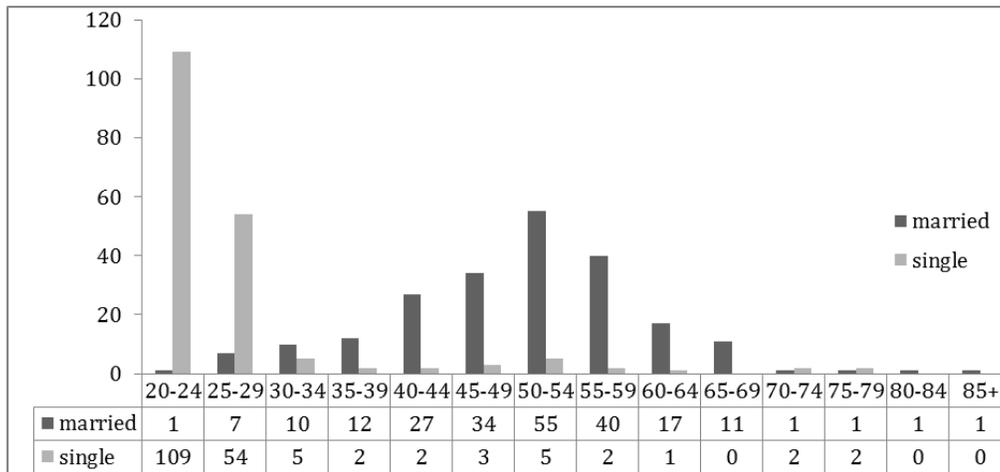


Figure A1. Age Distribution of the English Congregation

APPENDIX 2

EXCURSUS ON THE MEANING OF “KEPHALE”

A significant controversy surrounds the meaning of κεφαλή, as it is foundational to the egalitarian/complementarian debate. While it is most often used to describe the physical head of something, here it clearly takes on the figurative sense. Within this sense, this word can indicate precedence, or emphasize origin.¹ Outside the New Testament, it can mean something that is first or supreme, indicate prominence, or even suggest the entire person.² Within the New Testament, it can refer to the head as the source as, “the church is grounded in Christ,”³ which some argue is indicated by 1 Corinthians 11:3. The word can also refer to someone who holds a position of leadership and authority.⁴ However, Grudem makes the argument that κεφαλή can only mean source when used in plural and even then, referring to mouth of a river.⁵ When examining the evidence, it is important to realize that whatever the meaning of κεφαλή is, that definition must be applied to the role of the husband and to the role of Jesus Christ. The comparative conjunction dictates that the husband is the head of the wife in the same manner that Christ is the head of the church. The “source” definition would indicate that a wife finds her source in her husband just as the church finds her source Jesus Christ.

¹K. Munzer, “Kephale” in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 2 ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986).

²Heinrich Schlier, “Head” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey William Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1964).

³Ibid.

⁴H. L. E. Luering, “Head” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 2 ed. James Orr (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995).

⁵Wayne Grudem, “Does Kephale (‘Head’) Mean ‘Source’ Or ‘Authority Over’ in Greek Literature? A Survey of 2,336 Examples,” *Trinity Journal*, ns 6, no. 1 (Spring 1985): 38-59.

This “source” relationship may then refer to original creation, when God fashioned the woman from Adam’s rib, which is a possible interpretation. The “position of authority” definition is also plausible for the husband, especially in light of the context, where Paul is addressing obedience between various persons (children and their parents, slaves and their masters).

Since both of these proposed definitions seem to be plausible, it is also important to examine the way that κεφαλή is used in Greek literature. Grudem’s article⁶ on κεφαλή examines over 2,336 examples in Greek literature and asserts that the “source” definition does not exist. Furthermore, neither instance of κεφαλή in the other parts of Ephesians indicates source (Eph 1:22; 4:15). Paul makes the argument that Christ is the authority of the church in 1:22, while providing the direction of Christian growth and sanctification in 4:15. In light of the surrounding context (Eph 1:22; 4:15; 5:21-6:4), κεφαλή is best understood as conveying a sense of authority.

⁶Wayne Grudem, “Does Kephale (‘Head’) Mean ‘Source’ Or ‘Authority Over’ in Greek Literature? A Survey of 2,336 Examples,” *Trinity Journal*, ns 6, no. 1 (Spring 1985): 38-59.

APPENDIX 3

PREMARITAL COUNSELING CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC AND RESULTS

The following evaluation forms were distributed to members of an expert panel along with the teacher edition of class notes (appendix 4). Since there were fourteen sessions for the project, each evaluator filled out fourteen of these evaluation forms, one for each session. The following evaluation form was reproduced for all fourteen sessions. The only variation was lesson title at the top of each page, which are listed below.

Intro to class 1/18/15

Overview of marriage according to God 1/25/15

TOPIC 1 – Getting to know you 2/1/15

TOPIC 2 – The importance of personal godliness 2/8/15

TOPIC 3 – Roles in Marriage (Wives) 2/15/15

TOPIC 3 – Roles in Marriage (Husbands) 2/22/15

TOPIC 4 – Communication (1 of 3) 3/1/15

TOPIC 4 – Communication (2 of 3) 3/15/15

TOPIC 4 – Communication (3 of 3) 3/22/15

TOPIC 5 – Money 3/29/15

TOPIC 6 – In-Laws 4/5/15

TOPIC 7 – Family Life, Parenting 4/12/15

TOPIC 8 – Sex 4/19/15

Conclusion of class 4/26/15

In order to meet the requirements of my doctoral project, I am asking the pastoral staff to review over this teaching material. There are 14 class lessons in the FIRST tab. The teaching materials are also taught alongside my premarital counseling curriculum on the SECOND tab. The appendices are found in the remaining tabs.

LESSON TITLE:					
Equipping Premarital Counselors Class					
Lesson Evaluation Tool					
1=insufficient; 2=requires attention; 3=sufficient; 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
<i>Content of Material</i>					
The lesson topic is clearly stated.					
The lesson topic is relevant to the overall goal of equipping premarital counselors.					
The lesson is relevant to the practice of premarital counseling.					
The content of the lesson is biblically-based.					
The content of the lesson is theologically consistent.					
Overall, the lesson is clear					
The lesson contains points of application.					
<i>Organization of Material</i>					
The lesson fits into the overall objective of the course to equip couples to do premarital counseling					
The lesson follows a logical progression.					

The expert panel was comprised of three pastors. Each pastor had been in full-time ministry for at least ten years and had performed premarital counseling at least three times.

The following table summarizes the results of the evaluation. I have removed personal information and converted the marks to number values. Out of a maximum score of four, a sufficient mark would be valued three.

<i>Name</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>Total</i>
Pastor 1	36	36	36	36	36	36	36	36	36	36	36	36	36	36	504
Pastor 2	35	36	36	36	36	36	36	36	36	36	36	36	36	36	503
Pastor 3	36	36	34	36	36	36	36	36	35	36	36	36	36	34	499
Pastor 4	36	36	36	36	27	27	27	27	27	27	27	27	36	27	423
perfect score	36	36	36	36	36	36	36	36	36	36	36	36	36	36	504

APPENDIX 4
TEACHING NOTES

The following pages are a condensed version of the teaching notes used to equip married couples to assist with premarital counseling. Actual class handouts had fill-in-the-blank words, which are identified by underlined words in the teacher edition. Additionally, all class handouts provided additional space for taking notes.

SESSION 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE CLASS

I distributed the class handouts and asked them to fill out the pre-class survey

CLASS STRUCTURE, SCHEDULE, ETC.

I have entitled this class “Marriage Matters” because

- 1) Marriage is important (matters) in the plan of God.
 - 2) We will be examining specific marriage topics (matters).
- a. **Our class objective:** to be **equipped** to assist with premarital counseling at FCBC Walnut.
 - b. **Our class time:** **9:00–10:25 AM**. Please do not be late.
 - c. **Our class style:** Counseling by nature is **interactive** and **dynamic**. Therefore, I am asking for your **participation**. Ask questions and seek clarification. Present **hypothetical** situations. Your involvement is **critical** to the learning process.
 - d. **Our class homework:** (GASP!) Yes, I will be asking you to do homework almost every week in preparation for our class time together (see back of binder for assignments). We will be asking engaged couples to do the homework before meeting with us. Therefore, we should not ask others to do what we are unwilling to do ourselves.
 - e. **Our potential class topics/schedule:** listed on the back of your binders.
 - f. **Our Class Materials**

Marriage Matters Binder – Jonathan Szeto

Please bring this binder to class every week. I will be referring to the premarital curriculum that in your binder. Also, I will be giving you a new set of class notes each time.

Tab 1 – class notes

Tab 2 – premarital curriculum (teacher edition)

Tab 3 – Appendix 1

Tab 4 – Appendix 2

Tab 5 – Appendix 3

Taking the Next Step: Foundations for a God-honoring Marriage – Jonathan Szeto

Strengthening Your Marriage – Wayne Mack

Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands – Paul David Tripp; not required reading.

INTRODUCTION TO PREMARITAL COUNSELING

A. Why do we do premarital counseling?

We do premarital counseling because it is an important season of **preparation** for engaged couples. Nobody wants a terrible marriage. Everyone wants a terrific marriage. But how do we move from terrible (the marriages we hear about) to terrific (the marriages we dream about)?

This is a **window** of opportunity to inform, instruct, and illustrate marriage. What's more, engaged couples **want** this kind of counseling.

Purpose: To discern together if God is calling you to move forward in pursuing marriage by getting engaged (if not engaged) or by getting married (if engaged).

To discern - This is a call for **wisdom**

Together - This is a call for **cooperation**

If – This examination will have a conclusion or **recommendation**

B. What are the goals of premarital counseling?

- **EDUCATION** – In order to pursue a God-honoring marriage, we must learn what God thinks of marriage. We must study Scripture to learn. The bulk of this work is done through their reading of *Strengthening Your Marriage*, by Mack.
- **EQUIPPING** – We want to help train you on practical ways to cultivate a healthy marriage. This involves biblical communication and conflict resolution. We want to model it.
- **ESTABLISH** – We want to form a relationship with you for the purpose of caring for you. We realize that it's not always easy sharing about what is happening in your marriage. But by God's grace, we hope to connect with you to offer future encouragement and guidance.

C. What are some benefits of premarital counseling?

- i. Promotes **clarity** about marriage (Eph 5:22-33; 1 Pet 3:1-7)
- ii. Promotes important **discussions** about marriage (Eph 4:15)
- iii. Promotes a deeper **understanding** of each other (1 Pet 3:1-7)
- iv. Promotes **healthy** relationship practices for future marriage
- v. Promotes **unity** in the relationship and body of Christ (Gal 6:1-4)
- vi. Promotes **fellowship** in the church (Heb 10:24-25)

D. How *should* we do premarital counseling?

TIME – relationships must be **cultivated** over time (hours, not minutes)

MUTUAL OPENNESS – investment through **vulnerable** communication

HOSPITALITY – an expression of Christian love; an **open** door for the future.

WIDE EXPOSURE – inviting people into our homes provides a **window** into family life. Unfortunately, we cannot assume that individuals have grown up in a Christian home, or even in a Christian way.

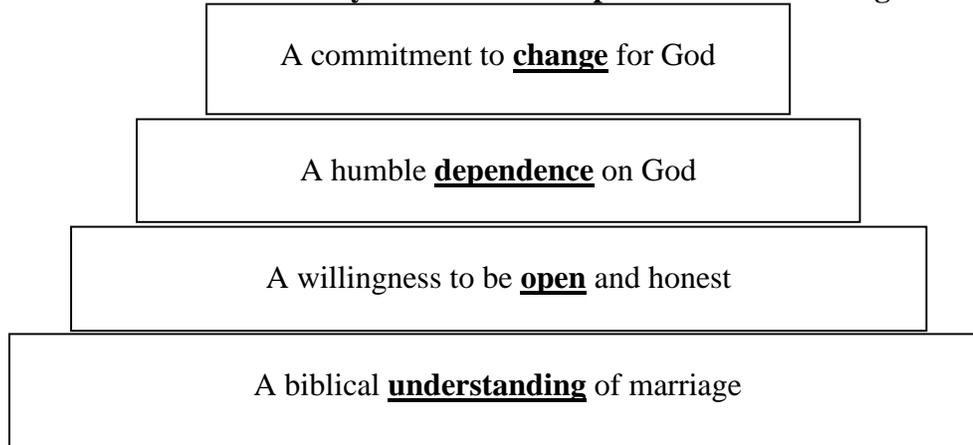
Sample 1st session – get to know you:

4:30 – 5:15	couple arrives; play with children, finish up preparing dinner, set table
5:15 – 6:30	eat dinner; ask get to know you questions
6:30 – 7:00	clear table; dessert
7:00 – 8:30	talk about testimonies

E. What are some obstacles in premarital counseling?

- i. Lack of **availability** – relationships take time to mature and deepen
- ii. Lack of **openness** – fear of what other people might think
- iii. Lack of **knowledge** – misunderstanding of Scripture
- iv. Lack of **confidence** in marriage – “our marriage isn’t the best”

F. What are some necessary foundations for premarital counseling?



G. What are the important topics for premarital counseling? (see class outline)

Personal spiritual health
Roles in marriage
Communication / Conflict resolution
Sex
Money
Family
In-laws

Ongoing Prayer Requests (4 P's)
Purity
Perseverance in planning
Prepare for marriage, not just wedding
Premarital counseling

**SESSION 2:
OVERVIEW OF GOD’S DESIGN FOR MARRIAGE
AND PREMARITAL COUNSELING**

GOD’S FOUNDATION FOR MARRIAGE (GENESIS 1-2)

In Genesis 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25, there is a repeated phrase. God declares that what He made was good. God Himself evaluates his work. Yet the strangest thing happens in Genesis 2:18-25. This is the **FIRST** recorded time that God evaluated anything created as **NOT GOOD**. And it is not that what He created is bad. Rather, God is saying that Adam’s **loneliness** is not good. From Genesis 2:19-20, we also see that Adam noticed that he did not have a **counterpart** in all of God’s creation. God responds to this problem by creating **Eve**.

And how does Adam respond? In Genesis 2:23, Adam **recognizes** that Eve is HIS counterpart. Eve is the suitable helper he had been missing.

This marks the beginning of marriage as we know it. This is God laying forth the foundation for the institution of marriage.

- **Marriage is between a man and a woman (Gen 2:18)**
This is one man + one woman. In light of God’s infinite power and wisdom, He could have created anything or anyone for Adam. In wisdom, God chooses to solve Adam’s problem by creating Eve. God created one woman. He did not create a dog (“man’s best friend), multiple women, a man, multiple men, or some other pet. This is God’s custom-made solution to Adam’s loneliness.
- **Marriage provides permanent companionship (Gen 2:24)**

APPLICATION
Since God matched one man with one woman, then marriage should be protected. This is why fornication, adultery, bestiality, homosexuality, etc. are prohibited.

The “one flesh” description is **unique** to the marriage relationship, which is why Jesus explains that God hates divorce (Mal 2:16) and never intended for divorce from the beginning (Matt 19:5-9). Furthermore, Jesus reveals God’s personal involvement in bringing together a man and woman in marriage (Matt 19:6).

APPLICATION
It is important to ask engaged couples what they seek from marriage. Do they have unrealistic expectations? (the spouse will solve personal problems and fulfill desires)

Far from being some thoughtless robot, God created Eve as a helper who was “suitable,” indicating that she was Adam’s direct counterpart (his companion).

- **Marriage is the basis for a family unit (Gen 2:24)**

The man **leaves** his father and mother to be **joined** to his wife. The leaving means that the man's primary relationship must be his marriage to his wife. While all people are still called to honor their parents (Ex 20:12), spouses are called to place a higher priority on their marriage.

The leaving and cleaving involves, "a declaration of intention and a redefining of obligations and relationships in a familial and social setting." While often times difficult, individuals must move from a relationship of obedience to one of independence from their parents in order to establish a new family unit.

Your marriage must be the PRIORITY relationship.

APPLICATION

Often times, this relationship change can be initially felt during wedding planning, where the engaged couple must make decisions for themselves after hearing the advice from their parents. Subsequent to marriage, the couples' relationship to their parents will again be tested upon having children.

GOD'S PILLARS FOR MARRIAGE (EPHESIANS 5:21-33)

- God calls wives to gracious **submission** to their husbands (Eph 5:22-24)

Attitude – not just about external behavior.

Action – not just about theoretical acceptance.

- God calls husbands to loving **leadership** of their wives (Eph 5:25-32).

Sacrificial – as Christ loved the church

Sanctifying – in order to present the church holy and blameless

Sensitive (cf 1 Pet 3:7) – caring for her as yourself; live with your wives in an understanding way

Application

There is usually a lot of fear related to roles in marriage.

Women are afraid that their husbands will become tyrants (or that he will not lead well).

Men are intimidated by the high call to Christlike leadership, especially since they don't have much leadership experience.

GOD'S SUPPORTS FOR MARRIAGE (TITUS 2:1-8)

There is a relationship between older and younger believers. The older believers should help teach and train the younger believers. This is "life on life" ministry in the church.

To be helpful to the engaged couple, premarital counselors should give advice that is characterized by six qualities, which can be summarized by the mnemonic, SPREAD.

S – Scriptural. Spiritually mature believers should derive their advice and instruction from Scripture. First Corinthians 10:31 exhorts every believer, "Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." The proper exaltation of God in everyday life requires a thorough knowledge of Scripture.

P – Practical. While it may be easier to offer generalized principles that could apply to anybody's life, Paul actually calls on older women to encourage the young women to love their husbands and their children (Titus 2:4). Since love results in action, these younger women must focus on loving their husbands and children in light of their unique interests and values (Eph 4:15).

R – Relational. People are much like different cities; in order to establish connections between cities, one must build roads. After developing the required infrastructure, there can be an exchange of ideas, services, and goods. True counseling happens with the context of a relationship. It is difficult for any couple to divulge their secret relationship struggles to complete strangers.

E – Empathetic. Older believers should be empathetic, having an attitude of understanding and compassionate care for fellow believers. First Thessalonians 5:14 reminds believers to be sensitive to the attitudes of others, prescribing admonition for the unruly, encouragement for the fainthearted, help for the weak, and patience with everyone. We are fellow saints who struggle with sin.

A – Affectionate. Christian love is implied throughout Scripture. Love is mentioned in the list of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23). Ephesians 4:15 combines truth and love in speaking. Jesus Himself emphasizes that Christians should be recognized by their love for one another, modelled after Christ's love for believers (John 13:34-35). When an older believer offers counsel or encouragement to a younger believer, it should be from a heart of love and compassion (Prov 17:17; Gal 6:1; 1 John 4:7).

D – Demonstrative. The older couple should be a demonstration of sanctification in the marriage relationship. Sometimes, it is too difficult to explain a biblical concept without offering an illustration. Within the context of a relationship, an older couple has the privilege of demonstrating a sanctified marriage for a younger couple. As I heard John MacArthur once say, "it's about direction, not perfection." If your marriage is heading in the right direction, then it can be used.

SESSION 3:
TOPIC 1 – GETTING TO KNOW YOU

The goal of the first session together is just “getting to know each other.” We are usually surrounded by “acquaintances,” instead of by true “friends.” Let’s get past the superficial talk about the weather, sports, movies, and trending topics. Let’s talk about family life, upbringing, desires, goals and fears. Let’s talk about life-shaping events that God has used to mold us into the people we are today.

Consider this quote from Paul David Tripp:

I am deeply persuaded that the foundation for people-transforming ministry is not sound theology; it is love. Without love, our theology is a boat without oars. Love is what drove God to send and sacrifice his Son. Love led Christ to subject himself to a sinful world and the horrors of the cross. Love is what causes him to seek and save the lost, and to persevere until each of his children is transformed into his image. His love will not rest until all of his children are at his side in glory. The hope of every sinner does not rest in theological answers but in the love of Christ for his own. Without it we have no hope personally, relationally, or eternally.¹⁵⁶

GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER ON A DEEPER LEVEL¹⁵⁷

[Two-way communication: You should learn this about each other]

- a. Your Salvation Testimony** *[without salvation and the help of the Holy Spirit, all of this marriage teaching is impossible]*
- i. How did you get saved?
 - ii. When did this happen?
 - iii. What has your life been like since salvation?
 - iv. What is the most difficult trial you’ve experienced since being saved?
- b. Your Family Background** *[past is influential, not determinative; but past is also default]*
- i. Christian or non-Christian family? Upbringing? What was it like for you? Memories?
 - ii. Your parents’ marriage
 1. Past divorces? Remarriages?
 2. What is your dad like? How would you describe him?
 3. What is your mom like? How would you describe her?
 4. Who are you more like? Dad, mom, or mix?
 5. Strengths of parents’ marriage
 6. Weaknesses of parents’ marriage
 7. Has the marriage improved? How do you know?

¹⁵⁶Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands*, 117.

¹⁵⁷Jonathan Szeto, *Taking the Next Step*, 7.

8. What are some things you see in your parents' marriage that you want to emulate in your marriage?
 9. What are some things you want to avoid?
- iii. Family practices
1. Family prayer? Devotional time?
 2. Joyful memories?
 3. Painful memories?
 4. How does your Dad serve in the house? Mom?
 5. How do you serve in your house? Chores, etc.
- c. Your prior relationships** *[bring out the skeletons hidden in the closet]*
- i. Have you ever dated in the past?
 - ii. Have you ever been engaged?
 - iii. Why did you break up with your ex? Has that changed?
 - iv. How does your fiancé feel about your ex-bf/gf?
- d. Your own relationship** *[it's important to hear what they think of their own relationship strengths, weaknesses, etc]*
- i. How/when did you get together?
 - ii. What attracted you to him/her?
 - iii. What is a typical date for you?
 - iv. What is your most memorable date? What do you like to do for fun?
 - v. What are some differences between you two?
 - vi. When you argue, how do you resolve it? What was the worst argument?
 - vii. What are some difficult subjects for you to talk about?
 - viii. What do you hope to gain from our time together? Out of the topics, which one(s) do you want to focus on?
- e. What are some other questions you like asking when you want to get to know someone else?**

**SESSION 4:
PERSONAL HOLINESS IN MARRIAGE**

AN ACCURATE VIEW OF SANCTIFICATION

How does the sanctification process take place? How does God sanctify us?

While the ultimate source of our spiritual growth is God Himself, we also participate in this process (1 Thess 5:23, Heb 2:11-12, Philippians 1:6-7, 2:12-13). Donald S. Whitney identifies 3 main catalysts for our spiritual growth (*Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 17-18).

- i. **Other people** – God providentially uses people to bring us closer to Himself (Prov 13:20, 25:11-12, 27:6, 27:9, 27:17, 28:23) → *this is where Biblical Counseling is helpful.*

Rebuke (Gal 6:1, Matt 18:15-20)

Admonition (Acts 20:31, 1 Thess 5:14)

Discipleship relationships (2 Tim 2:1-2, Titus 2:1-8)

- ii. **Circumstances** – God providentially orchestrates circumstances for your sanctification and growth. (Rom 8:28)

Trials (James 1:2-4)

Affliction / difficulty (Ps 119:71-72)

Suffering (1 Peter 1:6-8)

Discipline from God (Heb 12:5-11, 2 Cor 12:7-10)

- iii. **Spiritual disciplines** – this is your intentional and sustained effort to be taught and sanctified by God (1 Tim 4:7, Phil 2:12-13).

You will often hear the following statement: **I have trouble reading my Bible daily.** It is imperative that we stress the importance of regular time with God. But it is also important that we avoid reducing “time with God” to just “reading your Bible.”

Devotional life > Bible study
Devotional life > Meditation
Devotional life > Dependent Prayer
Devotional life > Application

Bible study + Meditation + Dependent Prayer + Application → devotional life
Spiritual maturity is more than the **accumulation** of Bible knowledge (theology, Scripture, etc). Spiritual maturity is the **application** of that knowledge.

APPLICATION:

This is where we can ask about how these individuals are growing in their faith.

Do they have accountability in their life as individuals?

Do they have accountability in their life as a couple?

Who has an “all-access” pass to their spiritual health?

What practical steps do they take to regularly draw near to God?

REVIEW THE HOMEWORK WITH THE COUPLE

- 1) Read through the first 4 articles in the appendix
 - a. FCBC Walnut Marriage policy
 - b. Guys, It matters Whom you Marry
 - c. Ladies, It matters Whom you Marry
 - d. Should We Get Married?
- 2) Be prepared to discuss 5 or more lessons you learned from all the reading.

Ask about their answers to the questions posed in “Should we Get Married?”

GOAL FOR THIS SESSION

Your goal for this session is to stress the importance of their **individual** spiritual lives. The godlier they become, the better their marriage will be. Godliness strips us of our selfishness, our pride, and our unwillingness to repent and serve each other. When we are humble like Christ, we refuse to argue, insist on our own way, or yell at each other.

Your vertical relationship with God impacts your horizontal relationship with your fiancé.

In fact, when you think about it, every disagreement between a couple can be traced back to **sin**.

- vague communication; inexact language
- imperfect listening
- not giving others the benefit of the doubt
- difficulties throughout the day that makes us impatient towards each other
- harsh language; anger

PROBING QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT SPIRITUAL LIFE

(see premarital curriculum)

**SESSION 5:
TOPIC 4 – ROLES IN MARRIAGE (WIVES)**

UNDERSTANDING SUBMISSION IN GENERAL

While Ephesians 5:21-33 specifically applies to women in marriage, it is important to recognize that submission is a concept for all Christians. All believers are commanded to:

- submit to **God** (Jas 4:7)
- submit to their church **leaders** (Heb 13:17; 1 Pet 5:5)
- submit to the **governing** authorities (Rom 13:1-8)
- submit to **supervisors** (Eph 6:5-9),
- submit to **one another** in the fear of Christ (Eph 5:21).

UNDERSTANDING SUBMISSION FOR WIVES IN MARRIAGE

What submission is NOT:

- **Solely** for women (see above)
- **Slavery** – She is freed from certain things for specific things
- **Silence** – It does not mean that the wife never opens her mouth, never has an opinion, never gives advice. Wise husbands eagerly seek input from their wives.
- **Suppression** – wives should not discard the use of her God-given gifts for her family or the church
- **Statement of inferiority** – Christ submits to God the Father. But Christ is not inferior to the Father. Submission teaches us the necessity of order and structure in the home. Galatians 3:28 says that we are all equal before God in Christ.

What submission IS (Mack, *Strengthening Your Marriage*, 18-20)

8. The **responsibility** of the wife to make herself submissive. The husband is never commanded to force his wife into submission.
9. **Continuous** and ongoing, not just a one-time act.
10. **Mandatory**, not optional. The Greek verb is stated in the imperative (command) form.
11. Fundamentally **spiritual** in nature. It is to be done “as to the Lord” (Eph 5:22). Depending on the power of the Holy Spirit, a wife manifests her trust in God through her submission to her husband.
12. A **positive**, not a negative concept. It emphasizes what the wife should do rather than what she should not do. She is free to use all of her talents, abilities, resources, and energy for the good of her husband and family under her husband’s management.
13. An **attitude** backed by action. Proverbs 31:13 says that she works with her hands

in delight. Ephesians 5:33 says that she must respect her husband.

14. **Extensive**, not selective, not total, not unlimited. Of course, the wife is never allowed to submit to her husband when he asks her to sin against God.

APPLICATION

There is a LOT of fear regarding submission in the home. All too often, we hear of men who are overbearing, ungrateful, and uncaring jerks. As a result, engaged ladies often feel a great deal of hesitation (read: fear and anxiety) when it comes to submission. There is the fear of letting someone else lead.

What if he messes up?

What if he's wrong?

What if he makes me change everything I do?

What if he won't listen to me?

Therefore, offer comfort by way of clarity. The husband needs to understand his role as well. In fact, there's a reason I put the wife's submission first—to make men realize how much they are depended upon to lead.

Practical Suggestions from Mack's book (*we reviewed Mack's chapter*)

QUESTIONS TO ASK ENGAGED COUPLE:

How do you feel about submission?

What are you uncomfortable with concerning submission?

Has this example been modeled in your parents' marriage?

What does the man think of submission?

**SESSION 6:
TOPIC 4 – ROLES IN MARRIAGE (HUSBANDS)**

UNDERSTANDING LOVING LEADERSHIP ACCORDING TO GOD

Ephesians 5:21-33 compares the husband to Jesus in the following way.

HUSBANDS : WIVES :: JESUS : THE CHURCH

EPH 5	HUSBANDS	JESUS
23	The husband is head of his wife LEADERSHIP	Jesus is head of the church LEADERSHIP
25-27	Husbands must love their wives SACRIFICIAL SANCTIFYING	Jesus loved the church Gave Himself up for the church For the purpose of church sanctification
28	The husband must love his wife as himself	n/a
29-30	The husband must nourish and cherish his wife SENSITIVE / understanding	Christ nourishes and cherishes the church because we are members of His body.

How did Jesus lead?

- Being continuously associated with those He led
- Carefully and relevantly instructing His disciples
- Being a good example
- Making decisions and delegating responsibility to the disciples

What was Jesus' love like?

- Unconditional (Rom 5:8) – Jesus' love was not earned, but given
- Volitional (Deut 7:7; Eph 1:6-7) – Jesus' love was a choice
- Unending (John 13:1; Rom 8:39) – Jesus' love is long-lasting
- Unselfish (Phil 2:6-7) – Jesus' love elevates our interests above His own
- Purposeful (Eph 5:26-27) – Jesus' love results in sanctification
- Sacrificial (Eph 5:1, 15; Gal 2:20) – Jesus' love is sacrificial
- Manifested (John 10:1-14) – Jesus' love was communicated

When you compare Jesus' love and leadership to a husband, you realize:

- No husband has ever fully loved his wife in that way or to that degree or extent.
- But it is the goal toward which every husband is to press; the model which he is to follow.
- Every husband ought to spend much time thinking about what this means in terms of his marital relationship. This is a call to self-examination.
- Does the husband really love his wife as he loves himself? Is he really pressing toward the goal of loving his wife as Christ loved the church?

Premarital Counseling

When you read the chapter about male headship, it's downright impossible without God's help. And even WITH God's help, we will never be perfect husbands. But we still need to make that our goal.

Comfort your brother with these words.

What are some ways that a husband can sensitively communicate his love toward his wife?

- By saying it
- Providing for her needs (1 Tim 5:8)
- Protecting her (Eph 5:28)
- Assisting her to fulfill her chores and responsibilities (help around the house!)
- Sacrificing for her (Eph 5:25; Phil 2:5-6) – what does she want to do?
- Allowing her to really share your life (1 Pet 3:7 – heirs together in the grace of life)
- Refusing to compare her unfavorably with other people, especially other women
- Demonstrating that apart from Jesus, she has first place in your life (before business, golf, TV, whatever game is on)
- Giving her a lot of tenderness, respect, chivalry and courtesy.
- Expressing appreciation and praise generously and in large doses.

Premarital Counseling

This is a great place for you to help illustrate what this looks like in your marriage.

How does the wife know that her husband loves and cares for her?

Provide some everyday examples of how husbands can serve their wives. While the engaged couple doesn't have to copy what you do, it will give them some ideas.

We also briefly examined how to make decisions in a biblical way, using Dr. Stuart Scott's material from lecture notes, July 2014.

I also handed out the following document.

100 Ways a Husband May Express Love to His Wife

(How to convince your wife you love her)

John Street, *Pastor's Home Syllabus*, Spring 2008

Ephesians 5:25

Evaluate the way you express love to your wife. Circle the ways you are neglecting. Ask your wife to go over the list and put a check mark in front of the ways she would like you to express love. Ask her to add other things to the list.

You may express love to your wife by:

1. Telling her you love her frequently.
2. Giving her a regular amount of money to spend in any way she chooses.
3. Leading family devotions regularly.
4. Smiling and being cheerful when you come home from work.
5. Helping her wash and dry the dishes at least three times a week.
6. Taking care of the children for at least three hours every week so that she has free time to do whatever she wants.
7. Taking her out for dinner or to do some fun thing at least once a week.
8. Doing the "fix-it" jobs she wants done around the house.
9. Greeting her when you come home with a smile, a hug, a kiss and "I am I glad to see you. I really missed you today."
10. Give her a lingering kiss.
11. Patting her on the shoulder or holding her hand or caressing her frequently.
12. Being willing to talk to her about her concerns and not belittle her for having those concerns.
13. Looking at her with an adoring expression, sitting close to her, and rubbing her back or...
14. Shaving or taking a shower or brushing your teeth before you have sex.
15. Writing love notes or letters to her.
16. Letting her know you appreciate her and what you appreciate about her. Do this often and for things that are sometimes taken for granted. Talk to her as if you are trying to convince her you think she is great and very important to you.
17. Doing the dishes while she relaxes or takes a bubble bath.
18. Fulfilling her implied or unspoken desires and wishes as well as the specific requests she makes of you. Anticipate what she might desire and surprise her by doing it before she asks.
19. Playing with her; sharing her hobbies and recreational preferences enthusiastically; including her in yours.
20. Seeking to set a good example before the children.
21. Talking about her favorably to the children when she can hear you or not.

22. Bragging about her good points as a wife and in every other area to others; letting her know you are proud to have her as your wife.
23. Maintaining your own spiritual life through Bible study, prayer, regular church attendance and fellowship with God's people.
24. Handling your affairs decently and in order' structuring your time and using it wisely.
25. Making plans prayerfully and carefully.
26. Asking her advice when you have problems or decisions to make.
27. Following her advice when you have problems or decisions to make.
28. Fulfilling your responsibilities.
29. Being sober, but not somber about life; having a realistic, biblical, positive attitude toward life.
30. Discussing plans with your wife before you make decisions and when the plans are made share them fully with your wife, giving reasons for making the decisions you did.
31. Thanking her in creative ways for her attempts to please you.
32. Asking forgiveness often and saying, "I was wrong and will try to change."
33. Actually changing where and when you should.
34. Sharing your insights, reading, good experiences with her.
35. Planning for a mini-honeymoon where the two of you can do whatever you want to do.
36. Giving a low whistle or some other expression of admiration when she wears a new dress or your favorite negligee or...
37. Gently brushing her leg under the table.
38. Being genuinely happy to go shopping with her.
39. Relating what happened at work or whatever you did apart from her.
40. Reminiscing about the early days of your marriage.
41. Expressing appreciation for her parents.
42. Taking her out to breakfast.
43. Agreeing with her about getting a new dress or some other item.
44. Thank her when she supports your decisions and cooperates enthusiastically.
45. Asking her to have sexual relations with you and seeking to be especially solicitous of her desires. Express gratitude when she tries to please you.
46. Buying gifts for her.
47. Remembering anniversaries and other events that are special to her.
48. Watching the TV program or going where she wants to go instead of doing what you want to do. Do it cheerfully and enthusiastically.

49. Being cooperative and appreciative when she holds you, caresses or kisses you.
50. Being cooperative when she tries to arouse you and desires to have sexual relations. Never make fun of her for expressing her desires.
51. Running errands gladly.
52. Pampering her and making a fuss over her.
53. Being willing to see things from her point of view.
54. Being lovingly honest with her. (No backdoor messages) (No withholding of the truth that may hinder your present or future relationship)
55. Indicating you want to be alone with her and talk or just lie in each other's arms.
56. Refusing to "cop out" or "blow up" or attack or blame shift or withdraw or exaggerate when she seeks to make constructive suggestions or discuss problems.
57. Giving her your undivided attention when she wants to talk.
58. Cheerfully staying up until 9 o'clock to solve a problem or share her burdens.
59. Getting up in the middle of the night to take care of the children so that she may continue to sleep.
60. By holding her close while expressing tangible and vocal love when she is hurt, discouraged, weary or burdened.
61. Planning vacations and trips with her.
62. Sometimes helping her yourself instead of telling the children to "help mommy."
63. Being eager to share a good joke or some other interesting information you have learned.
64. Joining with her in a team ministry in the church.
65. Doing a Bible study or research project together.
66. Establishing a family budget.
67. Keeping yourself attractive and clean.
68. Being cooperative, helpful, as a co-host when you have people in for dinner or fellowship.
69. Asking her to pray with you about something.
70. Spending time with the children in play, study communication.
71. Acknowledging that there are some specific areas or ways in which you need to improve.
72. Refusing to disagree with her in the presence of others.
73. Cooperating with her in establishing family goals and then in fulfilling them.
74. Being available and eager to fulfill her desires whenever and wherever possible and proper.
75. Beginning each day with cheerfulness and tangible expressions of affection.
76. Planning to spend some time alone with her for sharing and communicating every day.

77. Remembering to tell her when you must work late.
78. Refusing to work late on a regular basis.
79. Taking care of the yard work properly.
80. Helping the children with their homework.
81. Refusing to compare her unfavorably with other people.
82. Handling money wisely.
83. Not allowing work, church, or recreational activities to keep you from fulfilling marriage or family responsibilities.
84. Trying to find things to do with her.
85. Being willing to go out or stay home with her.
86. Being polite, courteous and mannerly with her.
87. Refusing to be overly dependent on your friends or parents.
88. Developing mutual friends.
89. Providing adequate hospitalization insurance.
90. Trying to the level of your ability to provide housing and some support for your family in case you should die or become handicapped.
91. Being especially helpful and solicitous when she is not feeling well.
92. Being on time.
93. Going to P.T.A. with her.
94. Letting her sleep in once in a while by getting the children breakfast and, if possible, off to school.
95. Frequently giving in to her and allowing her to have her own way unless to do so would be sinful.
96. Putting children to bed at night.
97. Being gentle and tender and holding her before and after sexual relations.
98. Not nit-picking and finding fault, and giving the impression that you expect her to be perfect.
99. Ask questions about her day.
100. Pray with/for her regularly.

SESSION 7:
TOPIC 4 – COMMUNICATION
(ENCOURAGEMENT, CARE, AND CLARITY)

Good communication is important to God

It reveals what is in your heart (Matt 12:34).

Good communication will help us avoid unnecessary conflict (Prov 21:23).

Good communication is also difficult

The difficulty of taming the tongue (James 3:2-6)

As a result of the Fall, mankind is plagued:

- Flawed interpreters of the world (Prov 18:17) [he said; she said]
- Imperfect reasoning (Rom 1:20-23)
- Constantly exposed to worldly value system (Col 2:8-9)
- Unskilled communicators (Jas 3:1-2)

Six Prerequisites to Good Communication

- 1) **You must want to please God more than anything else.** More than getting your own way. More than wanting to be right. More than wanting to be vindicated (2 Cor 5:9).
- 2) **You must be humble.** It is far too easy to react in pride. Patient and loving communication requires humility (Eph 4:1-3).
- 3) **You must be aware that you are accountable to God for everything you communicate (Matt 12:36).**
- 4) **You must know how to listen.** Communication requires good listening skills. Many of us have engaged in hurtful conflict due to misunderstanding. It is wise to listen well (Prov 18:13).

Good practices

- Concentrating on and carefully considering what the other person is saying.
 - Not interrupting (exceptions for out of control communication and incessant talking)
 - Not formulating what you are going to say while the other person is talking.
 - Not talking too much, but allowing breaks in the conversation so that another person can have time to process information, formulate what they want to say and then say it to you.
 - When you are in an important conversation, always ask for clarification with comments like, “could you please say that again?” or “could you explain a little more?” or “Is this what you are saying...?”
 - Not talking when someone else is speaking. This is just bad manners.
- 5) **You must know that communication involves more than just words.** It involves words, tone of voice, body language, and deeds. (Ex: Could you please come here?)

Watch for your:

- Volume of voice
- Tone of voice
- Facial expressions
- Hand gestures
- Sighing, or snorting
- Rolling the eyes
- Looks of amazement or disgust
- Body posture

- 6) **You must be willing to put forth the effort and spend the time it takes to communicate.** This is about serving others, not just about doing whatever is convenient for you. This is ultimately about preferring others by speaking the truth in love (Eph 4:25).

Four Specific principles

HOLY (truthful and righteous) – Eph 4:25

Things to avoid:

- lying
- exaggerating
- Partial or half-truth (giving only part of the truth to mislead)
- Evasion of truth (changing the subject, redirecting question, etc)

Eph 4:29-32 also commands us to avoid:

- Bitterness – attitude of harshness
- Wrath – outburst of anger
- Anger
- Clamor (yelling)
- Slander – speaking evil of another person
- Malice – talking to injure or cause suffering

PURPOSEFUL

For the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31)

For the benefit of others (Eph 4:29)

Having these goals for communication can minimize hurtful speech.

CLEAR (straightforward and appropriate) – Matt 5:37; Prov 10:19; Prov 15:28

Things to practice:

- Pray about what you will say
- Think carefully about what you will say
- Speak concisely
- Refrain from frustrating people (you should know better...)
- Define vague terms
- Avoid manipulation (stop hinting and just say it)

TIMELY (straightforward and appropriate)

Things to practice:

- Communicate something that needs to be communicated as soon as it is prudent. Don't wait needlessly (this can be unkind)
- Allocate adequate time to communicate and provide time for response.
- Pick a good time for all involved

We also reviewed 12 Practical Suggestions for Developing and Maintaining Good Marital Communication (Wayne Mack, *Strengthening Your Marriage*, 73).

**SESSION 8:
TOPIC 4 – COMMUNICATION
(CONFLICT RESOLUTION)**

Recognize where conflict comes from:

SOURCE 1: Differences

- ➔ Difference of interpretation (past, family upbringing, lens of perspective)
- ➔ Difference of opinion (we just think differently)
- ➔ Difference of values (we want / emphasize different things)

Differences are not always sinful. But the differences that are mishandled can result in conflict. By God’s grace, differences can lead to greater growth in godliness. If you have a different perspective on childrearing and parenting, then it is an opportunity to search Scripture for God’s wisdom.

SOURCE 2: Offense

This is usually related to differences. An offense can occur when we wrongfully respond to differences. We may scoff at someone else’s opinion (ex: sleeping with your hair wet).

**A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city,
And contentions are like the bars of a citadel. (Prov 18:19)**

SOURCE 3: Pride and the Flesh (Jas 4:1-3; gal 5:19-21)

Our desires need to be informed and then transformed by God’s Word. We must seek to bring all of our desires before God. In 1 Corinthians 10:24, God commands, “**Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor.**”

Just think for a moment, what would it be like for a man to genuinely and continually seek his wife’s highest good? Or what would it be like for a woman to genuinely and continually seek her husband’s highest good? How in the world do you argue with someone who loves you more than himself/herself?

Avoiding Conflicts:¹⁵⁸

Unbiblical ways to avoid conflict (i.e. what NOT to do):

- Just keep quiet (ignore the problem).
- Stay away from each other i.e. cold shoulder (John 15:12; 1 Pet 4:8).
- Change the subject, which is deceptive (Prov 12:22; 24:28).
- Hide information, sins or bitterness (Gen 20:2).

Biblical ways to avoid conflict (i.e. what you SHOULD do):

- Seek to know your spouse well, appreciate and understand his/her perspective (1 Pet 3:7).
- Gather plenty of data before speaking (Prov 18:13, 17).
- Pray, study, and think about the issue before speaking if possible (Prov 15:28).
- Demonstrate and/or communicate your love and care at the time of a disagreement (Rom 12:9-10).
- Listen more than you speak (Prov 10:19; 25:11).

¹⁵⁸Stuart Scott, *Communication and Conflict Resolution* (Bemidji, MN: Focus Publishing, 2005), 22-27.

- In matters of sin, approach your spouse in love (Eph 4:15; Col 3:19).
- In matters of preference, prefer one another (Rom 12:10).
- In matters of wisdom and conscience, suggest searching in Scripture and getting godly counsel (Prov 11:14; 2 Tim 2:15) with a teachable attitude.
- Refuse to sin in your communication (Prov 8:6-8).
- Be more interested in God's glory and the other's good, rather than having your own way, or being right (Josh 22:5; Rom 15:2).

Resolving Conflicts:

- Confess any sin that you are aware of before God.
- Ask forgiveness from your spouse for each thing that you did specifically (Eph 4:32).
- Express a desire to resolve the conflict fully and decide together when the best time to do that would be (Prov 15:28).
- Meet at that appointed time.
- Pray together for God's wisdom, self-control, and speech (Prov 16:32; Jas 1:5).
- Take turns confessing any unconfessed sins (to God and spouse). Ask for forgiveness.
- Begin discussing the issues that precipitated the conflict.
 - What do you agree about?
 - What do you NOT agree about?
 - What kind of issue are you dealing with?
 - Preference?
 - Sin?
 - Wisdom issue?
 - Conscience issue?
 - Take specific steps to resolve the issue.
 - Begin carrying out those steps.
 - Decide if and when you need to discuss the issue again.
 - End your time together with prayer and an expression of love.

Due to our total depravity, we are flawed listeners and communicators. Even when we want to say the right thing, we can often times say it in the wrong way. In other words, we can be completely right in what we say and completely wrong in HOW we say it. We need the humility of Jesus Christ in order to persevere in our relationships. We need to see other's needs as more important than our own just as Jesus did (Phil 2:5-11).

**SESSION 9:
TOPIC 4 – COMMUNICATION
(FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION)**

NOTE: This document is a summary of Chris Brauns, *Unpacking Forgiveness: Biblical answers for complex questions and deep wounds* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

INTRODUCTION:

Even before we discuss this topic, we need to remember first of all that **we are all sinners**. There is not a single human being (besides Jesus) who has never sinned. So when someone sins against us, we must remember that we have sinned against others in the past as well. We are sinners saved from the penalty of sin. But we still wrestle with the presence of sin. Therefore, sin is part of life in this world.

As Christians, we must faithfully address sin by pursuing FORGIVENESS biblically.

DEFINITION OF FORGIVENESS (Brauns, 55)

A commitment by the offended to pardon graciously the repentant from moral liability and to be reconciled to that person, although not all consequences are necessarily eliminated.

So let's say that someone has offended you. You can pursue forgiveness in two ways—you can either drop the matter or you can discuss the matter. Here are some helpful tips for each option.

OPTION #1: SHOULD I BRING THIS MATTER UP?

Do you need to talk to the person who has offended you? Several Bible passages indicate that you do not have to pursue Matthew 18 reconciliation for every single offense (1 Pet 4:8; Prov 19:11).

But, how do you know if this is a matter that you should bring up?

Here are 6 Diagnostic Questions for consideration:

- 1) *Have I examined myself yet?*
- 2) *How sure am I that I am right?*
- 3) *How important is this?*
- 4) *Does this person show a pattern of this kind of behavior?*
- 5) *What do wise people counsel me to do?*
- 6) *What else is going on in the other person's world?*

But if, after working through these questions, you determined that you cannot drop the matter, then you must pursue forgiveness and reconciliation through option #2.

OPTION #2: PURSUE FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION AS DETAILED IN MATTHEW 18

For matters that cannot be dropped, you must consider the teachings of Jesus from Matthew 18. The passage is ultimately about restoration and reconciliation, not pointing out other peoples' faults without regard for their wellbeing. Rightly understood, rebuke is actually an expression of our love. The process of reconciliation (Matt 18) falls into four steps, described below.

STEP 1: ONE ON ONE CONFRONTATION (Matt 18:15)

8 Helpful Guidelines for practice:

- 1) **Keep the circle small (Prov 16:28; 25:9-10; 26:20)** – do not involve others unnecessarily. If it is important enough for you to bring it up, then you need to bring it up with that person.
- 2) **Be gracious (Eph 4:32)** – Do not expect someone to earn your forgiveness. You must be willing to grant forgiveness as a gift, just as God forgives us.
- 3) **No revenge, not even a little (Rom 12:17-21)** – Do not seek revenge in thought or deed.
- 4) **Listen first, and be prepared to ask forgiveness yourself (Matt 7:1-5)** – A good way to begin is to ask, “I have been troubled by our interactions recently. It has been on my heart. Have I done something to hurt you?” Take the time to listen to your brother/sister. You may find that you need to ask forgiveness for things you have done.
- 5) **Take the other person at his word (1 Cor 13:7)** – Love believes all things. You need to believe what your brother/sister tells you (unless you have a documented pattern of lying and deceit).
- 6) **Choose the time and place carefully (Prov 27:14)** – Even if someone was calling just to encourage us, we would not prefer to hear that encouragement at 3 AM.
- 7) **Choose your words carefully (Eph 4:15; Prov 25:11)**
 - Express your thankfulness for the other person
 - Explain how you have been hurt (be specific)
 - Avoid using inflammatory words like “always” or “never”
 - Avoid conveying harshness or melodrama

If you are asking someone to forgive you:

- Carefully describe how you have hurt the other person. Be specific rather than vague. Avoid saying, “sorry for whatever it was that I did.”
 - Assure the person that you are truly repentant—that you regret what you have done and that you are determined to do better in the future.
- 8) **Be patient and have modest expectations (1 Cor 13)** – You have probably been thinking about this matter for a while. In contrast, the other person probably hasn't.

STEP 2: BRING ONE OR TWO OTHERS (Matt 18:16)

Identify wise people (1 or 2) who can think clearly about the offense. If the conflict is between two parties within a local church, then a third party should probably include someone from the church leadership. Explain to them what happened as objectively as possible. Submit to the more objective counsel of the third party.

The third party will need to determine whether the matter should be pursued further.

Principles to remember:

1. **Go humbly** – Prepare with prayer and put on an attitude of love and humility. This is about reconciliation and mending a relationship.
2. **Go urgently** – Race to reconciliation because it glorifies God.
3. **Listen first** (Prov 18:17) – Gather data carefully. Do not assume that you know all the facts in the situation.
4. **Remember all the guidelines listed in STEP 1.**

STEP 3: CHURCH DISCIPLINE (Matt 18:17a)

Involve the church by asking people to pray regularly for this person to repent. This prayer request should be seen in a similar way as praying for someone's physical illness. Having tried to keep the matter private, this situation is now a church family matter. You do not have to disclose every little detail. But you do have to identify the sin of the situation. Pray that God would soften this person's heart.

STEP 4: EXCOMMUNICATION (Matt 18:17b-20)

By saying that the person should be treated as a "Gentile and a tax collector," it means that his/her church membership should be revoked. The church should no longer treat him/her as a believer because he/she has refused to repent and reconcile. This does not mean that you cease all contact. But you should not pretend as if nothing is wrong. The church family should pray for his/her repentance and be prepared to welcome him/her back.

Common Reservations about Matthew 18 church discipline

- 1) **This sounds so harsh and unloving.** Reconciliation and repentance is modeled after our interaction with God. Reconciliation is inextricably linked to forgiveness. God is love. Yet, God still calls sinners to repent and be reconciled. The unrepentant will not receive God's grace. To allow a fellow brother/sister to go astray and walk away from God is unloving.
- 2) **This will not work.** God does not ask us to "make things work." He tells us to obey. By the same logic, we should all stop evangelizing because it doesn't seem like it's working that effectively.
- 3) **This seems graceless.** On the contrary, there is a lot of grace built into this process. Step 4 cannot happen unless steps 1-3 happen first. After each step, there is time offered for repentance and much prayer involved for the individual.

**SESSION 10:
TOPIC 5 – MONEY**

APPLICATION:

Not keeping a budget is a sure-fire way to underestimate your expenditures.

Review the homework with couple

What are some lessons you learned from the reading?
(UNIT 5 from Strengthening Your Marriage)

Why money matters

1. Money matters to God

“The parable of hidden treasure is one of many references Jesus made to money and possessions. In fact, 15 percent of everything Christ said relates to this topic—more than His teachings on heaven and hell combined.”¹⁵⁹

Matt 6:19-21 – Do NOT store up earthly treasures. Instead, store up heavenly ones.

Prov 23:5 – the fleeting nature of riches

2. Money is closely related to what we value

The husband purchases a 49er jacket because he is a fan (ie values and cares about them).

The wife purchases a new handbag because she likes it (ie values and cares about it).

3. Money is a tangible form of security

Luke 12:13-21 – the rich fool who trusted in himself only

Luke 16:19-31 – the rich man and Lazarus

Matt 6:25-34 – the cure for anxiety is to place your trust in God

While God typically uses **employment** to provide for us, we must recognize that God can provide in other ways.

GUIDED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

A. Where are you coming from? What is your concept of money?

Describe your family financial situation.

What do your parents do for a living?

Do they both work?

Do you both plan to work after marriage?

What are some of the lessons they have taught you about money?

What was your financial situation when you were young?

What do you think your financial situation will be when you are married?

Have you ever argued over finances before? What happened?

Out of the two of you, which one would you say “has a tendency to spend more?”
In what way(s)?

APPLICATION:

There is the VERY real issue of being spoiled (always getting what you want). Watch out for “daddy will get it for me” kind of talk. Watch out for couples who live beyond their means intentionally (getting parents to pay for stuff) or unintentionally (living a subsidized life).

¹⁵⁹Randy Alcorn, *The Treasure Principle* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2001), 8.

B. What are your current practices regarding money?

Have you two discussed how you would like to spend money when you are married?

Have you worked through a budget? Did you learn anything from that exercise?

Do you currently use a budget for your own spending?

Do your parents still support/pay for anything on your behalf? (insurance, medical, etc)

Do you both plan to work after getting married?

What are some of the financial ramifications of such a decision?

Do you both plan to work after having children? (this is related to the “family life” topic)

What are some of the financial ramifications of such a decision?

Are you currently making plans for future expectation?

Do you tithe or give to the church? How much (% , \$ amount)? How did you reach that conclusion?

C. Review Biblical Teaching about Money (Unit 5 from *Strengthening Your Marriage*)

D. Addressing differences about money

Different opinions about how money should be spent are opportunities for heart-to-heart discussions for engaged couples.

Some couples have allowed each spouse to have his/her own “spending allowance” account. *What do you think about that?*

Closing exhortation:

This is an opportunity for you as a married couple to help the engaged couple understand that finances will not always be easy for them. You can share about your own struggles and/or experiences.

**SESSION 11:
TOPIC 6 – IN-LAW RELATIONSHIPS**

For your entire life, you have been raised by your own parents. For as long as you can remember, it has been “dad” and “mom.” And now, you will be getting another “mom” and “dad.” Your parents-in-law are different from your birth-parents. You and your spouse have grown up in different families. Now your two families and backgrounds will be mixed to form a new family. Although you may not think this now, your in-law relationships can become “tense” as you learn how to interact with each other.

Review the homework

Read the handout on “*In-Laws: Keeping Parents from becoming Out-laws!*” Read and discuss the questions in the back. Be prepared to discuss 4 of the lessons you learned from the article next time.

A. Why this matters

1. The married couple must establish independence as a couple (Gen 2:22-24)

Leave - New couple creates new home (with new leadership and separate house rules) in all aspects, including physically, financially and emotionally

Cleave - New couple “fastens themselves tightly together” and abides in complete commitment and oneness in trust, loyalty, sex, will, finances, etc.

APPLICATION:

It is helpful here to remember where this couple is at the moment. Consider the difference between a man who moved down to Southern California for college and never returned home. Now consider the man who commuted to a local college.

This is an issue of relationship **PRIORITY**. Your marriage should become the most **important** human relationship you have.

2. Some Practical Principles for pursuing PEACE with your in-laws (we reviewed some principles from my handout).

Identify Potential Hindrances to Independence

- **Any ongoing financial ties** – this could be in the form of shared bank accounts, credit cards, health plans, cell phone plans, and insurance. Consider if the engaged couple intends to pay.
- **Physical location** – It’s hard (but still possible) to be independent from your parents when you live in their house.
- **Emotional ties revealed in conflict**– Your parents cannot and should not be solving your conflicts for you. You need to do that on your own.
- **Decision-making** – While it is wise to consult your parents when it comes to making decisions, you are always responsible to make that decision. Generally, parents should not be making decisions on behalf of a married couple.
- **Any other examples you can think of?**

GUIDED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

How would you describe your current relationship with your parents? Close? Distant?

How independent are you from your parents right now?

Financially? Do your parents pay for any of your bills right now? (car insurance, etc)

Emotionally? How often do you talk with your parents? How deep are your conversations? Do you talk to them about your problems? Do you tell them about your relationship problems?

For big decisions? Do your parents make suggestions on big decisions? How do they respond if you disagree with them? How do you handle it?

What do you think about your future in-laws? How are they different from you? How are your future in-laws' relationship with other son/daughter-in-laws?

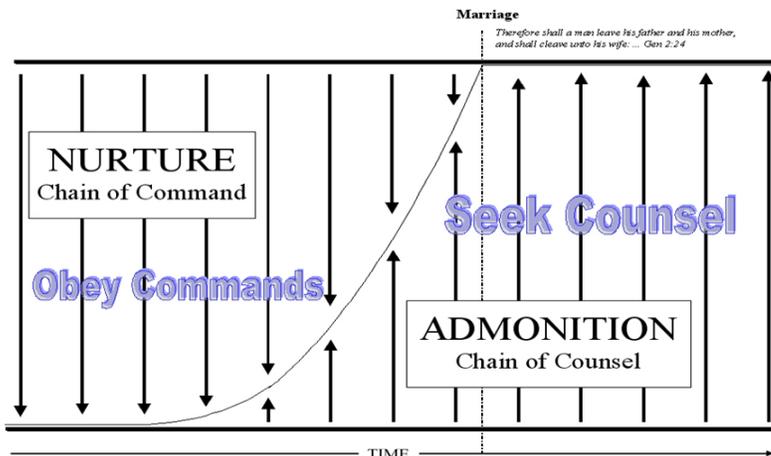
Have you encountered any difficulty with your future in-laws at this point? Is there anything that your future in-laws do that bother you? What is the biggest difference between your future father-in-law and your own father? What is the biggest difference between your future mother-in-law and your own mother?

APPLICATION:

The son/daughter-in-law will never be closer than the son / daughter.

If the son / daughter does not have a good relationship his/her parents, then the son/daughter-in-law should not expect to be super close.

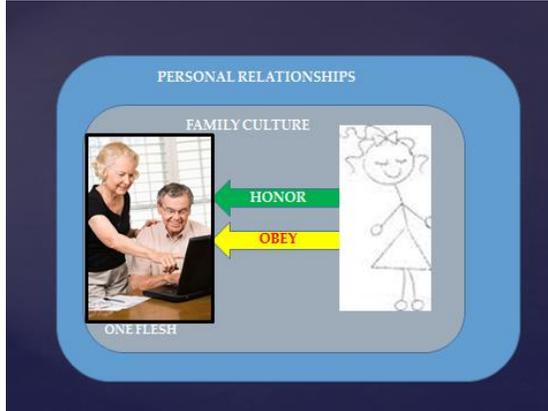
The Parent – Child Relationship Over Time



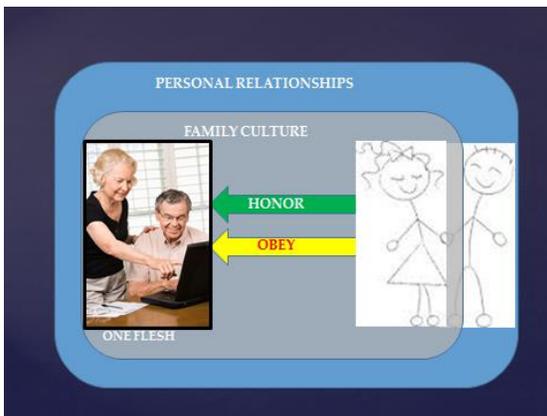
From Ted Tripp's *Shepherding a Child's Heart*, 2011.

SESSION 10: ADDITIONAL HANDOUT

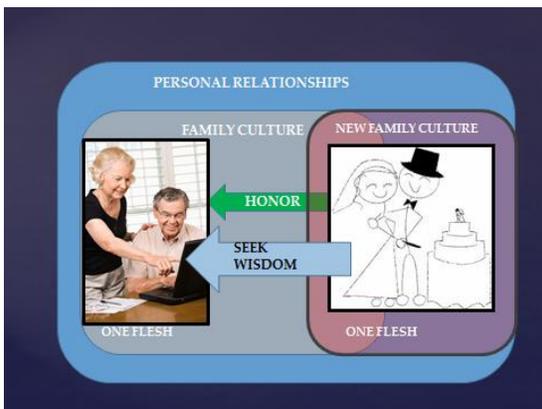
AN ILLUSTRATION OF THE PROCESS



In this diagram, there is a young woman under the care of her family. As a child, she must submit to the biblical commands about personal relationships. Since she is their child, she must also honor and obey her parents. The specific ways in which she shows that honor will be influenced by culture.



So there's this guy...
Dating
Engagement



Upon marriage, the new couple becomes one flesh. As a result, they must both honor the bride's parents, and seek out their wisdom (blue arrow instead of yellow arrow) Even though they are "one flesh," the bride will still be influenced by her own family culture and upbringing (the pink section). By the way, the groom experiences the same thing. Biblically speaking, the in-law relationship is difficult because it involves three of the closest human relationships available.

1. Immediate family (adult child-to-parent)
2. Extended family (adult child-to-others)

1. **Marriage / immediate family** (adult child-to-adult child)
2. Extended family (adult child-to-others)

1. **Marriage / immediate family** (adult child-to-adult child)
2. Parenting (adult child-to-his child)
3. Extended family (adult child-to-others)

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES FOR COUNSELING (PEACE)

- I. Prioritize the Marriage Relationship**
 - a. For the younger couple (instead of clinging to parents)
 - b. For the older couple (instead of clinging to adult children)

- II. Explore family background and history (OIC)**
 - a. Open up about your upbringing (learn to talk about your upbringing objectively)
 - b. Identify the values underneath tradition (ritualism vs tradition)
 - c. Choose new family practices fairly (neither blanket rejection nor blanket acceptance)

- III. Affirm Respect and Honor for Parents (SIDE)**
 - a. Seek their insight when making significant decisions (seek input, not verdict)
 - b. Involve them in your lives (don't just vanish)
 - c. Disagree respectfully (respect viewpoint; disagree with conclusion)
 - d. Express gratitude for parents (increasing gratitude as they grow in experience)

- IV. Cultivate Marital Unity (US)**
 - a. Be united when making decisions (decide as one unit)
 - b. Be sensitive to your spouse's inclusion in family activities (don't leave him/her stranded)

- V. Establish Adult Relationships with Parents (CARLS)**
 - a. Consider advice from parents thoughtfully (this is honor)
 - b. Advise adult children cautiously (Prov 26:17)
 - c. Resolve conflict biblically (biblical > cultural)
 - d. Love each other well
 - e. Share appropriately with parents

Questions for discussion:

- 1) My parents (or in-laws) want to move in with us. How do I biblically think through this?
- 2) I have an unmarried young adult child. How should I treat him/her?
- 3) My parents (or in-laws) have offered to take care of our children while we are away at work. How do I biblically think through this?
- 4) Is it okay for us to live with my parents (or in-laws)? How can we "leave and cleave?"
- 5) But what if my parents (or in-laws) are helping us financially?

**SESSION 12:
TOPIC 7 – FAMILY LIFE**

For most married couples, they spend a large part of their years as parents. Psalm 127 says that children are a blessing from the Lord. Yet, the reality is that raising children is very hard work.

A. Review the homework with the couple (units 7-8 in Strengthening Your Marriage)

What are some lessons you learned from the reading?

B. Go for the heart (Prov 4:34; Mk 7:21)

C. Recognize the EXTERNAL influences in a child's life¹⁶⁰

As parents, we hope to influence our children to love Jesus Christ. But we also see that there are many other influences in a child's life.

Structure of the family life – *what is the family life like?*

Who lives at home? What is the atmosphere?

Family values – *What is important to the family? Where is God in the life of the family?*

Family roles – *Who's the boss? Is there authority?*

Family conflict resolution – *Does the family know how to talk about their problems?*

Family response to failure – *Shame? Mockery? Comfort?*

Family history – *remarriage, divorce, etc. Health of the marriage?*

The problem of misunderstanding influence—neither denial nor determinism

D. Recognize the INTERNAL inclination of your child's heart (Ps 58:3; 51:5; Prov 22:15)

Rom 1:18-32 indicates that your child will turn towards GOD or IDOLS.

E. Recognize your God-given role as parents

1. We have a mission to reach the heart of our children on God's behalf
2. Our authority is delegated, meaning that it is inherently limited
3. Discipline is an expression of love and care; therefore, we must be self-controlled (Prov 3:12; Rev 3:19; Pro 13:24; Heb 12)

¹⁶⁰Ted Tripp, *Shepherding a Child's Heart* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd's Press, 2005), 9-14.

F. Addressing common goals from Scripture

GOAL	WORLDLY	BIBLICAL
Special <u>skills</u>	<i>Academics and athletics; college</i>	<i>Don't confuse worth with skill</i>
Psychological <u>adjustment</u>	<i>Just want to fit in and not be bullied</i>	<i>Do we love our enemies and care for those who offend us?</i>
<u>Salvation</u>	<i>Get 'em saved and in God's family.</i>	<i>What about discipleship? This is an ongoing process.</i>
Family <u>worship</u>	<i>Be the "godly family"</i>	<i>Are we reaching the heart? Is worship an appointment or a lifestyle?</i>
Well- <u>behaved</u> children	<i>Good manners; good reputation with other families</i>	<i>Is that genuine? Is this habit or is this looking out for the interests of others?</i>
<u>Education</u>	<i>For monetary success?</i>	<i>Is this about stewardship?</i>

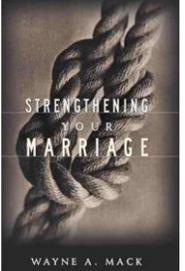
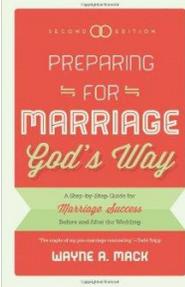
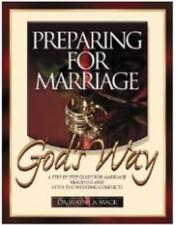
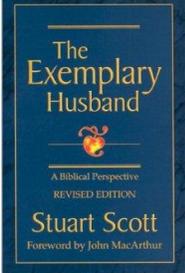
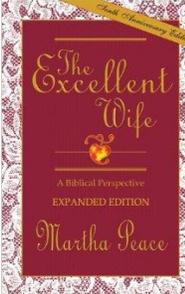
G. Embracing Biblical Methods

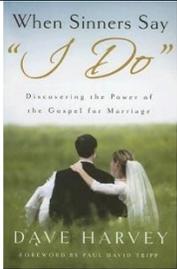
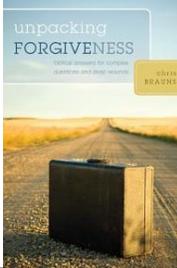
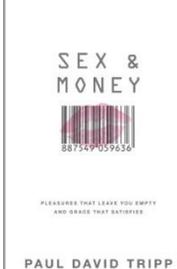
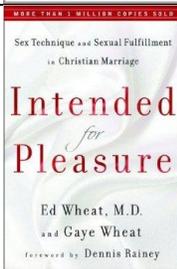
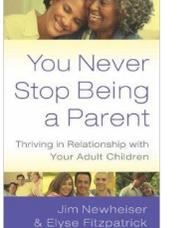
1. **Communication** – At some point, parents need to develop the ability to communicate with their children (this means two-way communication). Teach children how to think and diagnose their own desires and thoughts. Confront sin at the level of desire.
2. **Discipline** – Heb 12:11; This is ultimately correction.
 - a. Controlled, not in anger, frustration, or vengeance
 - b. Accompanied by a talk and immediate restoration
 - c. Child must understand why it is happening

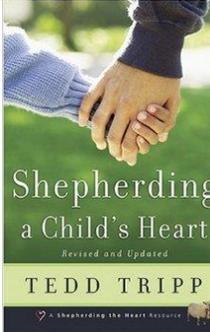
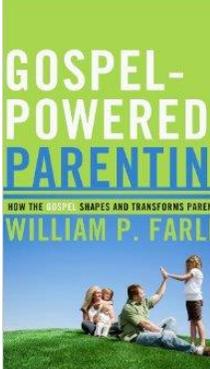
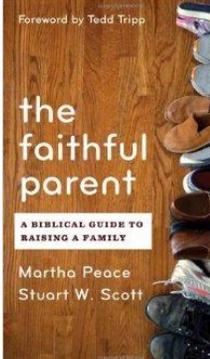
H. Practical Questions to ask / Areas to explore

- Have you ever talked about having children or starting your own family? How much did you talk about it? What was said?
- How do you feel about adoption?
- When would you like to have children? (obviously, this is ultimately up to God).
- How many children would you like to have?
- How were you raised as a child growing up?
- What did you do that made your parents happy?
- What did you do that made them sad?
- How were you disciplined as a child?
- Are there any ways that you would have changed/modified your upbringing?
- How would you like to raise them?
 - Babysitting? Live-in nanny? Stay-at-home mom?
 - How can you plan for that?

SUPPLEMENTAL HANDOUT: MARRIAGE RESOURCES

CATEGORY	COVER	COMMENTS
<p>OVERVIEW OF PREMARITAL COUNSELING</p>		<p>Strengthening Your Marriage – Wayne Mack</p> <p>I believe this is one of the best single books on marriage. If you can only read one, I'd read this.</p> <p>Downside: written in an outline form. The study guide questions will take longer than the reading.</p>
<p>SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL:</p> <p>For those who like quizzes and surveys</p>	 	<p>Preparing for Marriage God's Way – Wayne Mack</p> <p>Practical handbook with many questions, surveys to prepare for marriage. It's a <u>workbook</u>, not necessarily a regular reading type of book. This workbook is especially helpful in identifying differences in background and expectations in marriage. If you like those surveys and questionnaires, this is your book.</p> <p>← Note: This is the first edition. It is a large workbook (larger than an 8.5 x 11)</p>
<p>TOPIC 2: PERSONAL SPIRITUAL HEALTH</p> <p>TOPIC 3: MARRIAGE ROLES</p>	 	<p>Exemplary Husband – Stuart Scott</p> <p>This is an in-depth book dealing with various problems in marriage. Many examples help to make it practical. Read it before marriage and then while you're married. It helps. A lot. This is the book that convinced me to get a doctorate under Dr. Scott.</p> <p>Excellent Wife – Martha Peace</p> <p>This is an in-depth book dealing with various problems in marriage. Many examples help to make it practical. She has an especially helpful section on how to rebuke your husband respectfully. Many of those insights can be applied to general rebuke. Font can be annoying.</p>

CATEGORY	COVER	COMMENTS
TOPIC 4: COMMUNICATION	 <p>When Sinners Say "I Do" Discovering the Power of the Gospel for Marriage DAVE HARVEY FOREWORD BY PAUL DAVID TRIPP</p>	<p>When Sinners Say I Do – Dave Harvey</p> <p>Harvey is a very down-to-earth writer who humbly and comically talks about the common everyday struggles of two sinners living together in marriage. This is particularly helpful for couples who have romanticized, Disney-fied expectations for marriage.</p>
	 <p>unpacking FORGIVENESS HOW TO MOVE ON FROM OFFENSES AND SINNERS CHRIS BRAUNS</p>	<p>Unpacking Forgiveness – Chris Brauns</p> <p>Brauns examines forgiveness patterned after God's forgiveness of us (Matt 18). He helpfully asks and answers questions we would typically think about.</p>
TOPIC 5 & 8: SEX AND MONEY	 <p>SEX & MONEY FORGOTTEN THAT LEAVE YOU EMPTY AND BRIDE THAT ENTICED PAUL DAVID TRIPP</p>	<p>Sex and Money – Paul David Tripp</p> <p>Tripp addresses two of the most seductive temptations in our generation. He does an exceptional job of explaining how we become enslaved to these kinds of sins. The section about the human heart (ch 3) is outstanding.</p>
	 <p>MORE THAN 4 MILLION COPIES SOLD Sex Technique and Sexual Fulfillment in Christian Marriage Intended for Pleasure Ed Wheat, M.D. and Gaye Wheat Foreword by Dennis Rainey</p>	<p>Intended for Pleasure – Ed and Gaye Wheat</p> <p>The only Christian book of its kind I've come across. Deals with sexual intercourse from a scientific/medical and biblical perspective. This is helpful for people who really want to understand the anatomical mechanisms of intercourse.</p>
TOPIC 6: IN-LAWS	 <p>You Never Stop Being a Parent Thriving in Relationship with Your Adult Children Jim Newheiser & Elyse Fitzpatrick</p>	<p>You Never Stop Being a Parent – Jim Newheiser and Elyse Fitzpatrick</p> <p>Presented as a book for parents of adult-children. Specifically addresses how to handle an adult child who moves home, appropriate financial support, etc.</p>

CATEGORY	COVER	COMMENTS
<p>TOPIC 7: PARENTING AND FAMILY LIFE</p>		<p>Shepherding a Child's Heart – Tedd Tripp</p> <p>Excellent book. Deals with parenting on a heart level and asks important questions for couples to think/work through. BEST first book to read on parenting (along with Gospel powered parenting). Helps establish a framework. It also provides excellent advice about parenting challenges in each stage of development.</p>
		<p>Gospel-Powered Parenting – William P. Farley</p> <p>Best first book to read on this subject. It's not as practical as it is "paradigm-shifting." It helps frame parenting in the grander scheme of discipleship and evangelism</p>
		<p>The Faithful Parent – Martha Peace and Stuart Scott</p> <p>Excellent read that is balanced and fair. This gives an overview of spiritual parenting goals for your child for each developmental stage. Relatively short for the years that it covers. Excellent primer/overview book.</p>

SESSION 13: TOPIC 8 – SEX

This topic is purposely put towards the end of the premarital counseling. Aim to schedule this talk about 2-3 weeks before the wedding date. You don't want to cause them to stumble by talking about the topic too soon. It would probably be a good idea to meet with them SEPARATELY (men and women meet separately).

There's a lot of blushing when it comes to the topic of sex. But ultimately, God has created sex for our enjoyment in marriage. When we engage in sex outside of the marriage relationship, it will come back to bite us (divorce, STD's, children out of wedlock, etc).

A SHORT THEOLOGY OF SEX

1) **The role of sex in God's plan (Heb 13:4)**

God created Adam and Eve to be in unity in marriage together. He matched the two of them to each other. And part of that one-flesh relationship included sexual relations. Sexual relations properly occur WITHIN marriage.

Think about the problems that develop as a result of sex outside of marriage—STDs, children out of wedlock, baggage from prior relationships, damage to marriage, damage to future marriage, divorce, broken families, hurt children, etc.

All of these can be avoided if we keep sex within the context of marriage.

Heb 13:4 Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

Discussion: What are some practical implications of this verse?

2) **The purpose of sex in God's plan (1 Cor 7:1-6)**

According to God, the goal of sex is NOT personal satisfaction. It is personal MINISTRY. Sex is a means of serving your spouse in marriage.

Notice that in 1 Cor 7:5 says that sex is also helpful to prevent sexual immorality. 1 Cor 7:33 also adds that the one who is married must be concerned about how he may **please his wife.**

Discussion: What are some practical implications of this verse?

Also, Genesis 1:28 says, **God blessed them; and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'**

Discussion: What are some practical implications of this verse?

Review the homework

- 1) Read **Unit 6** in Wayne Mack's Strengthening Your Marriage and answer the study questions in the back. Read Jonathan and Miranda's **letter to friends**.
- 2) Ask your questions.

Open it up for questions. Remember to endure present awkwardness to avoid some future awkwardness.

1. Comfort them by reminding them that no question is silly or stupid
2. Go see a doctor and get yourself checked out.
3. Ask them about their past (are they virgins?)
 - i. What if they're currently sexually active?
 1. Ask them to stop until the wedding. Show them God's prohibitions in Scripture (1 Thess 4:3-8; 1 Cor 7:1-6).
 2. Tell them to confess their sins to God and ask for His forgiveness.
 - ii. What if they're not virgins?
 1. Ask about their past sexual experience (# times, circumstances of experience, have they told their fiancé?, contracted STD(s)?)
 2. Have they repented of premarital intercourse?
 3. If so, point them to the forgiveness offered in Christ. In times of guilt, they must remember that forgiveness
4. What is their choice for birth control?
5. Feel free to share how **you** felt on your wedding night.
6. GUYs – It probably won't be like you see in the movies (or in pornography for that matter). GIRLs – Check what they know/don't know (even going into the mechanics if necessary). Sometimes girls have avoided this topic completely.
7. Encourage them that it will get better with practice. (Even filling up your car with gas was awkward the first time).
8. Point them to resources (but only at the end because you don't want them to avoid asking you). Ed Wheat, *Intended for Pleasure*.

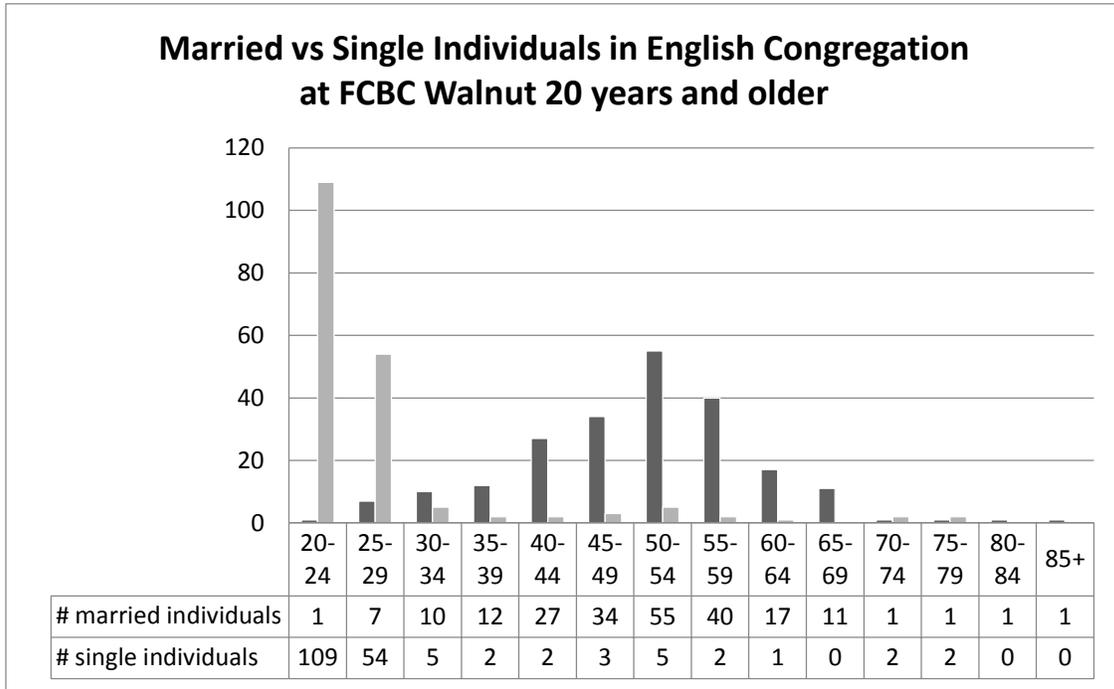
Our culture and society has deluded us into thinking that sex is NOT special. But it IS special. In God's eyes, there is something beautiful and sacred about the union between a man and a woman in marriage. And a part of that union is sexual relations.

Let's think for a minute about the significance of nakedness in marriage. We go around life trying our best to draw attention to our good features while downplaying our faults. We dress to present ourselves in the best possible way.

But nakedness strips us of our masks, exposing everything about us physically while leaving us emotional vulnerable. When we are exposed to our spouses, we allow ourselves to be seen for who we really are—for good and for bad. And the greatest thing about sex within the marriage relationship is that your spouse has already vowed to love you—all of you, your strengths, your weaknesses, in sickness and in health, til death do you part. Sex, therefore, is an expression of LOVE at a very deep level.

**SESSION 14:
CONCLUSION**

A PATH FORWARD



Review: My Doctor of Ministry project is to EQUIP married couples to assist with premarital counseling at FCBC Walnut.

STEP 1) EQUIPPING THROUGH EDUCATION IN THE CLASSROOM (2 Trimesters)

Topics:

- **Fall 2014 (Sept – Dec 2014)** – Intro to Biblical Counseling
- **Winter 2015 (Jan – Apr 2015)** - Marriage Matters (i.e. premarital counselor training)

STEP 2) OBSERVATION IN PREMARITAL COUNSELING

Invite potential premarital counselors to observe premarital sessions with permission from the engaged couple. This has already begun.

- One couple has already met with an engaged couple from start to finish.
- Five additional couples have observed a premarital counseling session:
- During our class time (Jan – Apr 2015), many of you have stepped up to help:
 - A couple has started meeting with a dating couple
 - Three sisters are meeting one-on-one with two young adult women
 - Two other sisters continue meeting with three younger women.
 - A brother started meeting with a young married man for discipleship.
 - Another brother is meeting with a young married man

STEP 3) ASSISTING WITH PREMARITAL COUNSELING

So what would this look like going forward?

- The engaged couple would approach the pastor for premarital counseling.
- The engaged couple be matched to a “mentor couple” for the process (one of you).
- The pastor and the mentor couple do “team premarital counseling.”
- Over time, the mentor couple will do more sessions on their own.

CLOSING REMARKS:

We have an opportunity to do premarital counseling—to help couples start well in marriage. We all know couples who have not started well. As a result, they are experiencing some very difficult times right now. Most of you know me. I think you would probably say that I’m a “straight-shooter.” I’m a “truth-talker.” I’m direct and to the point. I give straightforward answers. But even more than that, most of you know that I’m not prone to exaggeration or telling tall tales.

I truly believe that what has transpired in our class this trimester can have a HUGE and UNPRECEDENTED impact on the church. I firmly believe that this class is quite possibly the single most important class to ever be taught in our English congregation

Because ministry should never be limited to pastors.

Because this class has tried to equip other leaders to lead.

Because this is about ministry multiplication.

Because the people in our church are too important for us to neglect.

Because even though I’ve trained you to prepare engaged couples to start well in marriage...looking at these topics, you realize that every single marriage problem can be traced back to the topics we’ve covered as a class.

TOPIC 2 – The importance of personal spiritual health in Marriage

TOPIC 3 – Roles in Marriage – Husbands and Wives (2)

TOPIC 4 – Communication (3)

TOPIC 5 - Money

TOPIC 6 – Leaving and Cleaving: In-Laws

TOPIC 7 – Family Life, Parenting

TOPIC 8 – Sex

So while I don’t expect that you will go out as couples to meet with married couples...at least you have a start. I’ve pointed you to additional resources for future study in case you wanted to pursue couple-to-couple counseling in the future.

Thanks for being a part of this class and more importantly, being willing to be used by God.

May God allow this class to bear fruit for His glory and His people.

FILL OUT POST-CLASS SURVEY

APPENDIX 5

PREMARITAL CURRICULUM

Along with notes for each class, every student received a copy of the premarital curriculum they would use in premarital counseling. Students received the teacher edition, which contain a list of questions that they could ask the engaged couple. These questions are shaded grey and are not given to the engaged couple. Since this is just a copy of what I give to premarital counselors, it does not conform to Turabian formatting.

COUPLE: _____

Taking the Next Step:

Foundations for a God-honoring Marriage



Prepared by
Jonathan Mark Szeto
jmszeto@gmail.com

Revised as of 1/21/15

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Preparing a Heart for Marriage	
Principles for Dating Wisely (abbreviated notes)	
Selected questions to discuss before getting engaged	
Lies Women Believe While Wedding Planning, Counsel for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood	

Establishing Preliminary Guidelines

Purpose: To discern together if God is calling you to move forward in pursuing marriage by getting engaged (if not engaged) or by getting married (if engaged).

To discern - This is a call for wisdom

Together - This is a call for cooperation

If – This examination will have a conclusion or recommendation

Goals for Pre-marital counseling (E³)

- **EDUCATION** – In order to pursue a God-honoring marriage, we must learn what God thinks of marriage.
- **EQUIPPING** – We want to help train you on practical ways to cultivate a healthy marriage. This involves biblical communication and conflict resolution.
- **ESTABLISH** – We want to establish a relationship with you for the purpose of caring for you. We realize that it's not always easy sharing about what is happening in your marriage. But by God's grace, we hope to connect with you to offer future encouragement and guidance.

How we do pre-marital counseling: We will try to schedule about 8 sessions. In all likelihood, we may not use all of these sessions. But it's good practice to schedule the time just in case (especially during the wedding planning season). Each session will probably last 2-4 hours. This allows us to get to know each other better in a more natural and comfortable way (over dinner). We will address the topics listed in the Table of Contents.

Commitments:

In order for us to gain a clear understanding of your relationship, we need to make the following commitments.

- 1) We commit to ***regularly praying*** for each other.
- 2) We commit to being ***honest*** and ***transparent*** with each other.
- 3) We commit to ***completing*** any assigned homework (reading, conversations, etc).

I agree to abide by the above terms and will do my best.

Phone number:

E-mail:

Phone number:

E-mail:

ASSIGNMENT LIST

DATE	TOPIC	TO PREPARE, PLEASE...
	TOPIC 1 Getting to know each other	Come ready to get to know each other
	TOPIC 2 Godly Individuals = Godly Marriages: The importance of personal godliness in marriage	Read through the first 4 articles in the appendix [FCBC Walnut Marriage policy, Guys, It matters..., Ladies, It matters..., and Should We Get Married?] Be prepared to discuss 5 or more lessons you learned from all the reading.
	TOPIC 3 Defining Marriage: understanding and embracing marital roles	Read through Units 1-3 in <u>Strengthening Your Marriage</u> and complete the study questions. Come prepared to discuss 2 lessons you learned from each unit.
	TOPIC 4 Practicing for a Good Marriage: The importance of communication	Read through Unit 4 in <u>Strengthening Your Marriage</u> and complete the study questions. Come prepared to discuss 5 lessons you learned from the reading.
	TOPIC 5 Show me the Money: Unity in Financial Stewardship	Read through Unit 5 in <u>Strengthening Your Marriage</u> and complete the study questions. Come prepared to discuss 5 lessons you learned from the reading.
	TOPIC 6 Leaving and Cleaving: In-laws	Read handout entitled, “ <i>Couples Conference Table</i> .” Then go and do it. Take notes during your conference time and bring them in to discuss. Read the handout entitled, “ <i>In-Laws: Keeping Parents from becoming Out-Laws!</i> ” Come prepared to discuss.
	TOPIC 7 Family Life	Read through Units 7-8 in <u>Strengthening Your Marriage</u> . Answer the study questions in the back. Come prepared to discuss.
	TOPIC 8 Sex	Read through Unit 6 in <u>Strengthening Your Marriage</u> and complete the study questions (if possible). Read “ <i>Jonathan and Miranda’s letter to friends</i> .” Come with questions.
	TOPIC 9 Post-wedding follow-up	None. Enjoy your wedding and honeymoon. ☺

TOPIC 1 – GETTING TO KNOW YOU

Salvation Testimony

How did you get saved?

When did this happen?

What has your life been like since being saved?

What is the most difficult trial you've experienced since being saved?

Family Background

Family- Christian?

Past divorces or remarriages?

Your family history—

Favorite family memory; most painful family memory;

how would you rate your parents' marriage?

How do your parents handle conflict?

Would you like to have your parents' marriage? Why or why not?

Prior relationships

Have you had any past relationships? How did they go?

What were the reasons for breaking up?

Have the two of you talked about your past relationships?

Do you have any hesitations or fears about those ex-boyfriends/girlfriends/spouse(s)?

Relationship story

How did you get together? How long have you been together?

What is the most joyful memory in your relationship? Special date?

Have you ever broken up?

What are some differences between you two?

Do you ever fight/argue/disagree? How do you resolve these situations?

What is the most difficult argument you ever experienced?

What are some difficult subjects for you? What do you find difficult to talk about?

What do you hope to gain from our time together?

PRAYER REQUESTS:

HOMEWORK:

- 1) Read through the first 4 articles in the appendix [FCBC Walnut Marriage policy, Guys, It matters..., Ladies, It matters..., and Should We Get Married?]
- 2) Be prepared to discuss 5 or more lessons you learned from all the reading.

TOPIC 2 –GODLY INDIVIDUALS → GODLY MARRIAGES

Review of the homework last week:

- 1) Read through the first 4 articles in the appendix [FCBC Walnut Marriage policy, Guys, It matters..., Ladies, It matters..., and Should We Get Married?]
- 2) Be prepared to discuss 5 or more lessons you learned from all the reading.

EVERY disagreement between a couple can be traced back to **SIN**. Therefore, one of the keys to having a healthy relationship with each other is to have a healthy **PERSONAL** relationship with God.

In other words, your **PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP** with **GOD** AFFECTS your **RELATIONSHIP** with your **SIGNIFICANT OTHER**.

Godly marriages are the result of godly individuals.

What is your spiritual life like?

How would you describe/characterize your relationship with God?

QUALITATIVE

What is your spiritual life like?

How would you describe/characterize your relationship with God?

PRESENCE OF GOD IN EVERYDAY LIFE

How are your quiet/devotional times with God?

- Regular? Consistent?
- Is it rich? Or dry?
- What has God been teaching you lately?

How often do you think about God during your day?

- Often? Never? Infrequently?
- Is God part of your thought life?

SPIRITUAL INPUTS

How are you being spiritually fed?

- Regularity of feeding?
- Attendance and participation in the church?

What are some specific areas where you need to be growing in your walk with God?

- How did you learn about those areas where you need to grow?
- What are you presently doing to grow in those areas?

Have you ever experienced spiritual “dryness?” How did you respond to that?

SPIRITUAL CONVERSATION

Have you visited each other’s church? (if applicable)

- What differences did you see?
- What do you agree about doctrinally?
- What do you disagree about doctrinally?

How would you describe/characterize your relationship with others in the church?

ACCOUNTABILITY; RELATIONSHIP TO THE CHURCH

How would you describe/characterize your relationship with others in the church?

- Do you have accountability with others?
- How?

How would you describe what you share in your small groups?

- Is it deep? superficial?
- Do they know about your relationship?
- What do they think about your relationship?

SERVICE IN THE LOCAL CHURCH (SPIRITUAL OUTPUT)

Do you serve in the church?

- How?
- Do you enjoy it?

In what ways have you been blessed by serving in the church?

What are your spiritual gifts? How do you know?

PRAYER REQUESTS:

HOMEWORK:

- 1) Read Units 1-3 in Wayne Mack’s Strengthening Your Marriage and answer the study questions in the back.
- 2) Write down 2 lessons that you learned from each unit and bring them for discussion

TOPIC 3 –DEFINING MARRIAGE

Review of the homework last week:

- 1) Read Units 1-3 in Wayne Mack's Strengthening Your Marriage and answer the study questions in the back.
- 2) Write down 2 lessons that you learned from each unit and bring them for discussion.

Discuss the lessons that were learned.

What is the purpose of marriage? How does knowing the purpose of marriage change a person's expectations of marriage?

What are some of your fears about marriage?

Do you have any reservations about marriage?

What does a good marriage require?

Where do you think good marriages come from?

(They come from Spirit-enabled effort to cultivate a healthy marriage.)

Are you willing to put forth the effort into building a good marriage?

Do you have any reservations about marriage?

What role does each person play in a marriage?

WOMEN?

SUBMISSION to her husband

How do you feel about submission?

What are you uncomfortable with concerning submission?

Has this example been modeled in your parents' marriage?

PRIMARY MINISTRY is her husband

What are some practical implications of this idea?

(priority is to care for the home and the people in it)

MEN?

His wife's **LEADER**

In what areas?

One of the ways a husband leads and loves is by providing financially. Are you in a position to do that? What does it look like to provide?

How has this provision been modeled in your parents' lives?

Are there some adjustments to expectations that need to be made?

His wife's **LOVER**

According to what example?

How has it been going in your efforts to show sacrificial love towards her?

How has your father shown love to your mother?

In which areas do you need to grow in your leadership and care for your fiancé?

PRAYER REQUESTS:

HOMEWORK:

- 1) Read **Unit 4** in Wayne Mack's Strengthening Your Marriage and answer the study questions in the back.
- 2) Write down **5 lessons** that you learned from unit 4 and bring them for discussion.

TOPIC 4 –PRACTICING FOR A GOOD MARRIAGE

Review of the homework last time:

- 1) Read **Unit 4** in Wayne Mack's Strengthening Your Marriage and answer the study questions in the back.
- 2) Write down **5 lessons** that you learned from unit 4 and bring them for discussion.

Discuss the lessons that were learned.

What are some ingredients for good communication?

OPENNESS and **HONESTY**

Hindrances?

One of the most common hindrances is FEAR and LACK OF TRUST. On a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being completely open), how would you rate how honest you are with each other? Where would you like it to be?

SELF-CONTROL

Practical examples? **PURITY** – emotional and physical

FORGIVING SPIRIT

A relationship equivalent of “CTRL+ALT+DEL”

Do you have a history and pattern of biblical conflict resolution?

How do you make-up and resolve conflict? What does that look like?

GOOD LISTENING

This must be learned since it can be specific to your spouse.

How would you rate your present level of communication? (1 to 10, 10 good).

What are some ways to improve?

12 Practical Suggestions for Developing and Maintaining Good Marital Communication

(Wayne Mack, *Strengthening Your Marriage*, 73)

- 1) You must be willing to admit that you are part of the problem
- 2) You must be willing to change
- 3) Do NOT use emotionally charged words (e.g. you don't really love me, you *always* do..., you *never* do...)
- 4) Take responsibility for your own emotions, words, actions, and reactions. Do not blame others.
- 5) Do NOT go back to old arguments. No old argument reruns allowed.
- 6) Deal with ONE problem at a time
- 7) Focus on the present, not on the past...unless the past will help you solve present problems.
- 8) Focus on the positive instead of on the negative
- 9) Learn to communicate in non-verbal ways too
- 10) Express your thoughts and concerns to each other. Listen, understand, and respond to the meaning behind what a person is saying.
- 11) Practice the golden rule
- 12) Do good without expecting good in return.

Out of these 12 suggestions, which ones do you need to work on the most?

Examples of Poor Communication

- Compartmentalized, detached communication
 - If it's awkward, no thanks!
 - I said it once. Do I *really* have to say it again?

Ways to improve communication

- Ask for feedback when speaking
 "Ask," does that make sense?"
- Checking for understanding (when speaking, and when listening)
 If you really understand, you should be able to repeat what was said in your own words.

- "Reading in between the lines"
 - Interpreting body language
 - What you mean vs. what you said

Ways to improve communication

- Avoid relying on interpretation; ask for clarification
- Checking for understanding (when listening)

PRAYER REQUESTS:

HOMEWORK:

- 1) Read **Unit 5** in Wayne Mack's Strengthening Your Marriage and answer the study questions in the back.
- 2) Write down **5 lessons** that you learned from unit 5 and bring them for discussion.

TOPIC 5 –SHOW ME THE MONEY

HOMEWORK:

- 1) Read **Unit 5** in Wayne Mack's Strengthening Your Marriage and answer the study questions in the back.
- 2) Write down **5 lessons** that you learned from unit 4 and bring them for discussion.

Discuss the lessons that were learned.

Describe your family financial situation.

What do your parents do for a living?

Do they both work?

Do you both plan to work after marriage?

What are some of the lessons they have taught to you about money?

What was your financial situation when you were young?

What do you think your financial situation will be when you are married?

Have you ever argued over finances before?

Out of the two of you, which one would you say "has a tendency to spend more?"

Unit 5 contains this philosophy of money:

- 1) God is the one who gives a man the ability to make money.
- 2) Everything we have belongs to God.
- 3) There are many things which are more valuable than gold.
- 4) Covetousness, discontentment, and worry about material things are sins.
- 5) God expects us to use fully the strength and abilities He has given us in hard, honest work.
- 6) Using our strength and abilities in honest, hard work, is the NORMAL way of supplying our needs. He usually rewards hard, honest work with some measure of prosperity.
- 7) Giving to the Lord and to needy people is a privilege and an investment as well as a responsibility.
- 8) We ought to plan HOW we will make and spend our money.
- 9) We ought to live within our income and not make debts which may be almost impossible to pay.

Have you two discussed how you would like to spend money when you are married?

Have you worked through a budget? Did you learn anything from that exercise?

Do you currently use a budget for your own spending?

Do your parents still support/pay for anything on your behalf? (insurance, medical, etc)

Do you both plan to work after getting married?

What are some of the financial ramifications of such a decision?

Do you both plan to work after having children?

What are some of the financial ramifications of such a decision?

Are you currently making plans for future expectation?

Do you tithe or give to the church? How much (% , \$ amount)? How did you reach that conclusion?

PRAYER REQUESTS:

HOMEWORK:

- 1) Read the handout on “Couples Conference Table Assignment.” Go and do it.
- 2) Take notes during your conference time and bring them in to discuss.
- 3) Read the handout on “In-Laws: Keeping Parents from becoming Out-laws!” Read and discuss the questions in the back. Be prepared to discuss 4 of the lessons you learned from the article next time.

Couples Conference Table Assignment

from Dr. John Street, *Pastor's Home Syllabus*, Summer 2008

Procedure

1. Read Ephesians 4:25-32 and review the *Four Rules of Communication*.
2. Pray and ask that God will grant both of you a humble and teachable spirit.
3. Agree upon a signal (e.g. silently raised hand or stand quietly) that can be used if one of you observes the other violating one of the *Four Rules of Communication*.
4. Deal with today's concerns by confessing your sins and failures. The husband should begin and your wife should follow after he has been as thorough as possible.
5. Deal with most recent concerns the same way.
6. Each takes a turn. This can eventually extend to the whole family once the husband and his wife has learned to do it well.
7. Discuss problems only at the conference table.
8. Try to find a solution to the problem that is a biblical solution.
9. If you cannot reach a solution to a problem, put that problem off until next time.
10. If one of you becomes emotional or angry it is best to end the Conference Table and take an exercise walk to pray for God to help you bring your emotions/anger under control.
11. If you still cannot reach a solution after several tries, seek godly counsel. It is infinitely more preferable to set aside your personal pride and seek competent biblical counsel for your unresolved problems than for your marriage to continue to deteriorate to the point that it is actually a negative example.

Topics

1. Personal log list (Matthew 7:1-4)
2. Speck list
3. Each person's personal concerns
4. Disagreement or conflict list

Guidelines

The “Conference Table” is:

(1) an assignment designed to help Christians develop effective, biblical communication patterns;

(2) a strategy for helping spouses put off the old sinful ways of communicating and putting on the new, biblical way of communicating; and

(3) a forum for discussing and resolving conflicts and problems in a constructive way.

Arrangements

TIME:

(agreeable to everyone; least likelihood of interruption; not at worst physically i.e. tired)

PLACE:

(preferably not some place with bad associations)

LENGTH: 15 – 45 minutes

Rules

1. Be Honest (Eph. 4:25).

Speak—Clamming up is not an option for the Christian.

Speak truth—Honesty is more than not lying. Other examples of dishonesty include: deceit, exaggeration, evasion, innuendo—disguising the real message, half-truth

Speak truth lovingly (Eph. 4:15)—What you say, how you say it, how much you say, when you say it

Become a skilled listener.

2. Keep Current (Eph. 4:26,27).

Failure in attempting to solve each day’s problems quickly is sin. Don’t carry them over into tomorrow (cf. Matt. 6:34).

3. Attack the problem, not the person (Eph. 4:29,30).

Do not use any “unwholesome word”—words that tear down, words that by-pass the conflict, words that grieve the Holy Spirit

Use edifying words—words that edify or build up, words that deal with what the person says or does, words that help reach a solution

4. Act, don’t react (Eph. 4:31,32).

Attitudes and actions that must be put off: bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander, malice

Attitudes and actions that must be put on: kindness, tender-heartedness, forgiving

It is only through God’s Spirit that we can learn to be this way.

[NOTE: This material is taken from John Street, Syllabus for Pastor's Home, Summer 2008]

IN-LAWS:

Keeping Parents from becoming Out-laws!

*Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife:
and they shall be one flesh.*

Gen 2:24

- 2 Key Instructions for Overcoming Marriage Struggles
 - Leave - New couple creates new home (with new leadership and separate house rules) in all aspects, including physically, financially and emotionally
 - Cleave - New couple “fastens themselves tightly together” and abides in complete commitment and oneness in trust, loyalty, sex, will, finances, etc.

*Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the
LORD thy God giveth thee.*

Ex 20:12

- Children are commanded to HONOR and RESPECT their parents,
 - To hold in esteem, revere, value, to make successful, etc
 - Regardless of parent's behavior, incapacity, deserving

*Honour thy father and thy mother, as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee; that thy
days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with thee, in the land which the LORD
thy God giveth thee. Deut 5:16*

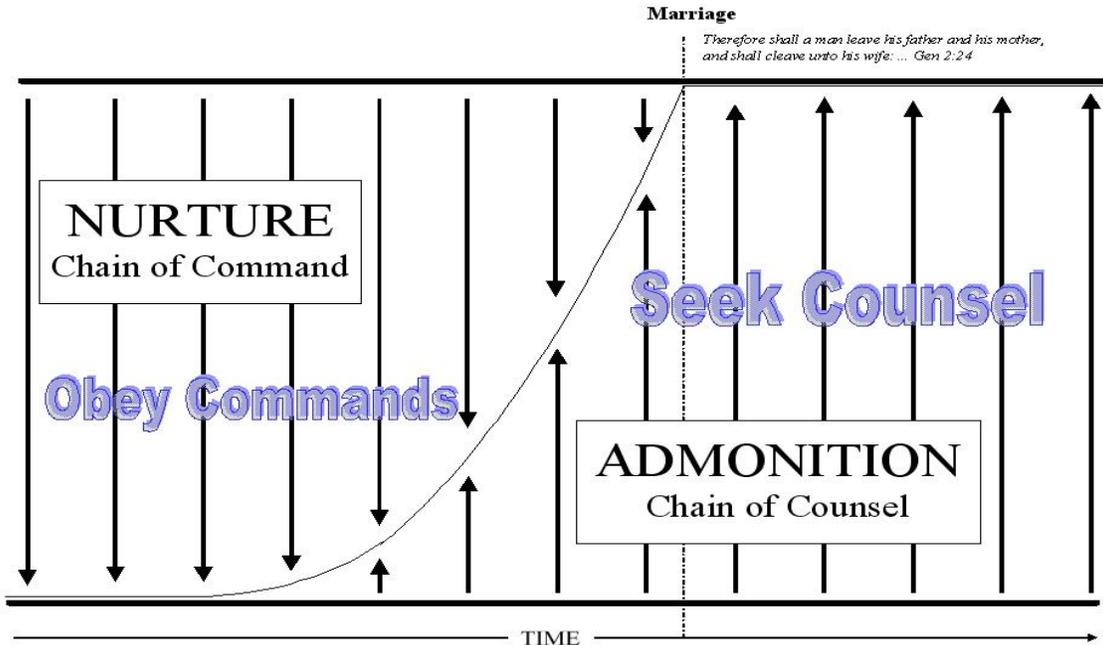
*Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man, and fear
thy God: I am the LORD. Lev 19:32*

*For every one that curseth his father or his mother shall be surely put to death: he hath
cursed his father or his mother; his blood shall be upon him. Lev 20:9*

*Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother;
(which is the first commandment with promise;) That it may be well with thee, and thou
mayest live long on the earth. Eph 6:1-3*

Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old.
 Prov 23:22

The Parent – Child Relationship Over Time



▪ Different Seasons of Parental Honor Within Marriage:

- Stage One: Before Marriage **OBEDIENCE**
- Stage Two: Early Marriage (No children) **INDEPENDENCE**
- Stage Three: Middle Marriage (Children) **INTERDEPENDENCE**
- Stage Four: Older Marriage **REVERSE DEPENDANCE**

OBEDIENCE: *Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord. Col 3:20*

Honor is expressed by primary obedience.

INDEPENDENCE: Control Struggle. Establishing new separate household. Working out the details of truly “Leaving”. Parents forced (with firm honor and dignity of the younger couple) to leave the chain of command and pick up the chain of counsel.

Honor is expressed by encouraging chain of counsel.

INTERDEPENDENCE: Gen 29, 31, example of Jacob, Leah/Rachel and Laban

Couple sets themselves apart as a separate family now. Parents become grandparents, and focus excessively on grandchild over children. Holidays become time for power-struggles between in-laws and new family. Interaction between parents and new family becomes “together as separate.”

Honor is expressed by communication, planning ahead, and appropriately sharing your new family (new house rules, customs, etc.) with parents.

REVERSE DEPENDENCE: *If any man or woman that believeth have widows, let them relieve them, and let not the church be charged; that it may relieve them that are widows indeed. 1 Tim 5:16*

Roles reverse as parents start caring for now older grandparents and the couple’s own children require less care. Couple’s parents now become dependent upon them.

Honor is expressed by respectful care, provision, and counsel.

Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. Eph 4:31-32

▪ Five Primary Issues Preventing In-laws from becoming Out-laws:

- Reality
- Loyalty
- Authority
- Priority
- Dignity

Reality *Problems occur in this area when upcoming couples are not willing to admit that their parents aren't perfect, or that they made mistakes in their child-raising, etc. A proper balance occurs when the younger couple views their parents as real people with strengths and weaknesses – people to learn from and honor, but not necessarily uphold on an unrealistic pedestal of pride or heroism.*

Requires the recognition, reconciliation, and healing of childhood wounds or other sources of bitterness and unforgiveness in the parent-child relationship.

Loyalty *Loyalty must change from personal family to spouse. Not necessarily less loyal to family now...just more loyal to spouse. Choose to side with spouse vs. parents on controversial subjects. If a mate runs to their parents whenever conflict arises, he/she hasn't properly transferred loyalty to their own spouse. The marriage is your team – whether you're in a winning or losing season – you must stay and work within this team.*

Authority

This is an issue of control. Who is the boss when the families are together? Do parents still improperly exercise a chain of command after marriage? Is the authority properly balanced thru a chain of counsel? Ultimately, the boss of family gatherings should be determined by whose home the gathering is in. Abide by the house rules in which you reside. Resolving conflict in this area often includes firm yet kind communication to overbearing parents on how the young family is going to choose to honor them, and still occupy the leadership role that the scriptures have given the younger husband for his own family.

Priority

What's more important—the couple, the children, the parents, etc? A healthy priority will wean the parents of their needs early in the marriage—before having children—so that they can properly prioritize their own relationship as a couple with children as they come. Problems with priorities often are resolved by planning ahead and communicating before a problem arises to full strength with other family members/parents.

Dignity

Problems occur in this area when the young couple chooses not to value the older in their ways and traditions. Dignity implies that certain traits, recipes, mannerisms, etc are left to the honor and glory of the parents. The upcoming family does not try to outdo their parents' in any way; rather gives honor and commendation to the ways of their parents in the presence of their own children, etc.

EVALUATION:	False		Sometimes			True	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
We show honor and respect to our parents, even when we may not feel they deserve it.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
We have learned to ask for wise counsel from our parents, but are free to exercise our own judgment in the actual decisions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Neither of us deliberately tears down our parents or in-laws to our spouse.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
We are independent of our parents' control and authority. We don't feel obligated to obey their every wish.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
We respectfully yet firmly choose which activities will be done with (or without) the in-laws.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
We both accept the humanity of our parents and have chosen to forgive them for any wrongs done against us.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
We are united, not taking sides with our parents against each other.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
We enjoy a healthy, mature relationship with both sets of parents.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <p>The Couple "In-Laws" Score 48-56 I love my in-laws! 38-47 Ask me about my in-laws. 28-37 My in-laws? Short visits are OK. 18-27 You don't know <i>my</i> in-laws! 8-17 Take my in-laws, PLEASE!</p> </div>	Column Subtotals:						
	GRAND TOTAL: 						

Questions Related to Leaving & Cleaving

From 5 Questions to ask Before You Get Engaged, Powlison and Yenchko

Discussion Assignment for Engaged Couples: Talk through the following questions.

Leaving Questions:

Are you willing to make a break emotionally with your parents?

Failure to do this leads to such problems as: the man who visits his mother every day before returning home to his wife; the man who won't defend his wife against criticism by his parents; the woman who insists that all vacations be taken with her parents; the woman who goes home to mother"—by phone or physical visit—at the first signs of difficulty. Leaving your parents means you build a new family unit.

Are you willing to make a break financially?

Are you taking responsibility to care for yourselves and pay your own way?

Are you willing to break with your friends and your single life?

The man can't go out three nights a week with the guys. The woman cannot make her best friends the source of all her emotional and spiritual satisfaction.

Are you willing to break with your job? In our career-oriented world, do you understand that your spouse comes before your job, and you cannot neglect your spouse for the sake of work or study?

Are you willing to break with the right that single people have to make independent decisions, keep their own counsel, go as they please, and maintain the degrees of privacy they choose?

To choose to "leave" is to choose to become "one flesh" with another person. You open your life. You make joint decisions. First Corinthians 7 teaches that there is a cost—loss of individual freedom—in gaining the intimacy and partnership of marriage. Obviously each of these hard questions needs to be properly balanced. In each of these questions we do not mean "break" in an absolute sense. Rather you need fundamentally to rearrange your priorities, values, and commitments with your spouse at the center. Certainly you will love your parents; there are appropriate ways parents might help you out; you will not ignore your friends; you will go to work; you will remain an individual. But in each case there is a redefinition of the place these things have in your life.

Cleaving Questions:

- Where are you going in your life?
- What are your gifts and ministry interests?
- What are you doing with your life to serve the Lord?
- Can you walk alongside each other gladly?
- What kind of job do you have or anticipate?
- What is your basic lifestyle?
- What are your work hours and habits?
- How do you like to spend leisure and recreational time?
- How do you spend Saturdays?
- When do you go to bed and wake up?
- How much TV do you watch—one hour per week or four hours per night?
- What kind of food do you like—are you a health nut or junk food junkie?
- How will you use the Lord's Day? (It will be one-seventh of your life together.)
- Do you have things you enjoy doing together?
- What level of financial and material expectations do you have?
- How is money handled?
- What percentage of your money are you now giving to the Lord?
- What kind of neighborhood do you anticipate living in—inner-city row home or suburban mansion?
- What geographical location—Uganda or Vermont or New York City?
- What level and kinds of church involvement do you desire?
- Will you go to church once a week, or will you spend four nights a week in church activities?
- How much time do you spend devotionally?
- Are you basically agreed in your theology?
- How do you view the authority of Scripture, Calvinism, the charismatic movement, baptism, eschatology, etc.?
- What are your views and attitudes towards the roles of men and women, husband and wife?
- Will both husband and wife work?
- How should decisions be made?
- How many children do you want? None? Two? The more the merrier?
- How should children be loved and cared for?
- How should they be disciplined?

What are the “disciplinable offenses”?

Who does what with the children?

How often will you visit your parents?

Where do you like to spend vacations and holidays? How much will you do with other friends besides each other?

This is a sampling of the kinds of questions we believe couples contemplating marriage should ask themselves. Perhaps you can think of others! We’ll say it again: Are you heading in the same direction in your lives? Sometimes this is a hard question for a young couple to take seriously. It is easy to say, “Yeah, yeah, we’re going in the same direction; we’ll work it out.” But the present direction is the best predictor of the future. Stand back and take a good, realistic look at yourselves. Are there any “red flags” that indicate that some of these important issues have not been resolved in you or the other person?

Resist the temptation to whitewash these questions! On the other hand, are there “green flags” indicating that your lives *are* moving more and more in the same direction? If your answer is “yes”, be encouraged! Vows of marriage can be made with great joy when you are confident that you both are “leaving” and are ready to “cleave” together for the rest of your lives.

Further Study!

Biblical Accounts of In-laws and Out-laws that have been written for our learning:

Ruth and Naomi (Ruth 1:6-14; 4:15)

Esau & his wives with Isaac & Rebekah (Genesis 26:34-35)

Moses & Jethro (Exodus 4:18, 18:7, 8-12, 13-24, 27)

Moses & Hobab (Numbers 10:29-32)

Jacob & Laban (Genesis 29, 31)

Judah & Tamar (Genesis 38:11-26)

Peter & his mother-in-law (Matthew 8:14ff)

David & Saul (1 Samuel 18:20-28; 22:14; 26:9-11)

Lot & his son-in-laws (Genesis 19:14)

Struggles with In-laws are Prophesied to Exist before the End of all Time:

For the son dishonoureth the father, the daughter riseth up against her mother, the daughter in law against her mother in law; a man's enemies are the men of his own house. Mic 7:6

Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division: For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother in law against her daughter in law, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. Luke 12:51-53

Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven. Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it. Matt 10:32-39

TOPIC 6 –LEAVING AND CLEAVING

Reviewing Homework from last time:

- 1) Read the handout on “Couples Conference Table Assignment.” Go and do it.
- 2) Take notes during your conference time and bring them in to discuss.
- 3) Read the handout on “In-Laws: Keeping Parents from becoming Out-laws!” Read and discuss the questions in the back. Be prepared to discuss 4 of the lessons you learned from the article next time.

Discuss the lessons that were learned during the couple's conference table.

What lessons did you learn from the “In-Laws” article?

How would you describe your current relationship with your parents? Close? Distant?

How independent are you from your parents right now?

Financially? Do your parents pay for any of your bills right now? (car insurance, etc)

Emotionally? How often do you talk with your parents? How deep are your conversations? Do you talk to them about your problems? Do you tell them about your relationship problems?

For big decisions? Do your parents make suggestions on big decisions? How do they respond if you disagree with them? How do you handle it?

How do your parents treat you right now? Do they allow you to have your own independence?

Financially?

Emotionally?

For big decisions?

Do you have freedom of choice?

What do you think about your future in-laws? How do they differ from you?

How are your future in-laws' relationship with other son/daughter-in-laws?

Have you encountered any difficulty with your future in-laws at this point?

Is there anything that your future in-laws do that bother you?

What is the biggest difference between your future father-in-law and your own father?

What is the biggest difference between your future mother-in-law and your own mother?

Have you ever gotten into an argument regarding someone's parents?

PRAYER REQUESTS

HOMEWORK:

- 1) Read **Unit 7-8** in Wayne Mack's **Strengthening Your Marriage** and answer the study questions in the back.
- 2) Write down **3 lessons** that you learned from each unit and bring them for discussion.

TOPIC 7 – FAMILY LIFE [for engaged couples only]

Review of the homework from last time:

- 1) Read **Units 7-8** in Wayne Mack's Strengthening Your Marriage and answer the study questions in the back.
- 2) Write down **3 lessons** that you learned from each unit and bring them for discussion.

Discuss the lessons learned from Units 7-8.

The importance of children in your marriage.

- How long do you think it takes to get pregnant? Here are some interesting statistics.
http://www.babycenter.com/0_how-long-it-takes-to-get-pregnant_1813.bc

Of all couples trying to conceive, here's about how long it takes:

- 30 percent get pregnant the first cycle (about one month)
 - 59 percent get pregnant within three cycles (about three months)
 - 80 percent get pregnant within six cycles (about six months)
 - 85 percent get pregnant within 12 cycles (about one year)
 - 91 percent get pregnant within 36 cycles (about three years)
 - 93 to 95 percent get pregnant within 48 cycles (about four years)
- How many children would you like to have?
 - How were you raised as a child growing up? Are there any ways that you would have changed/modified your upbringing?
 - How would you like to raise them? Babysitting? Live-in nanny? Stay-at-home mom?
 - When would you like to have children? (obviously, this is ultimately up to God).

While nothing can truly, completely prepare you for children in marriage, it is important to be on the **same page** as a couple. Take the time to read books on how to raise children on your own.

PRAYER REQUESTS:

HOMEWORK:

- 1) Read **Unit 6** in Wayne Mack's Strengthening Your Marriage and answer the study questions in the back. Read Jonathan and Miranda's letter to friends.
- 2) Highlight **5 things** you learned from all of the reading and be prepared to discuss them.

Dear Friends,

You've planned the wedding—it's been an arduous, stressful, and exciting time for making all of these small decisions that eventually culminate in one big day. This is likely to be the most-photographed day of your life.

You're excited, right? OF COURSE! (even though there's a lot to be anxious about).

For a man, maybe you've been waiting for the moment when you see your beloved walk down the aisle. You've dreamed of putting that ring on her finger and letting everyone know that you have married a wonderful, godly woman.

For a woman, maybe you've been waiting for those doors to open and for you to step out onto that white runner, rose petals at your feet, and hundreds of your closest friends there to cheer you on as you take the next step.

For as much planning that has happened over the months, the ceremony may end up being a blur (a blissful one, though). It might prove difficult for you to remember exactly what the minister said after a few weeks. But then again, that won't matter. You'll be married and off into a wonderful new stage of life.

Somewhere in between that blissful ceremony and unwrapping all of those wedding gifts will be your **wedding night**. Even the mention of this phrase can evoke many different responses. When you think about this upcoming special first night together, you might feel a mixture of emotions—excitement, curiosity, anticipation...and somewhere in there...a little bit of anxiety.

After all, you've never made love to your fiancé before. And if by God's grace you've kept pure your whole life, you've **never** made love to **anyone** ever before.

*What will it be like?
Will it be scary?
Will it be difficult?
Will it be like what I've seen in movies?
What if he/she doesn't like my body?
What if I don't perform?*

If you will allow us to offer a few words of advice about the wedding night, we hope that our words will be an encouragement to you as you consider this night. We offer 3 pieces of advice.

1) **EXAMINE YOUR ATTITUDE TOWARDS SEX**

For your entire life, the church, your pastors, and your family members (especially your parents) have told you to **avoid** sex. Perhaps these prohibitions have been repeated to the point that you may think sex is inherently bad or dirty.

But Scripture says different. In fact, Scripture teaches that sex is a **gift**. More specifically, sex is God's wedding present to you and your spouse. You have waited for this moment for your whole life...and now all of a sudden, sex is permissible. In fact, biblically speaking, sex more than permissible—sex is **encouraged** and **commanded**.

In 1 Corinthians 7:3-5, Paul talks about sexual relations in marriage.

“The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.” (NASB)

As you can see, sex in marriage is not only permissible—it is explicitly **encouraged** as a normal part of the marriage relationship.

Admittedly, this can be a difficult transition for many couples to make. It is likely that you two have struggled in the area of physical purity. You’ve drawn lines, set forth boundaries, and modified your time together to avoid sexual temptation. You have constructed a dam to hold back the raging torrent of sexual desire. But all of that will change on your wedding night—because God has told you to let your guard down. God has given you permission to open his wedding gift.

And all of these barriers you two have constructed will be dashed to pieces in a single moment. Due to the drastic change in how you regard sex, you must examine your perspective of sex. Remember that sex is not innately sinful. It is sex without God’s permission that is sinful. Outside of marriage, sex can be a besetting sin; within marriage, it is God’s blessing to you. If you have engaged in premarital sex, you may feel extra guilt on your wedding night. It is important to deal with this guilt by confessing it honestly before God and believing by faith in His forgiveness. Difficulties in the confession/forgiveness area will make it harder for you to have a biblical attitude towards sex.

So I exhort you to examine your attitude towards sex. An unbiblical attitude will hinder your ability to enjoy sex as God has intended it. Remember that sex is God’s wedding gift to you. It is to be enjoyed at His timing. Enjoy the gift of sex!

2) EMBRACE REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

Learn to embrace realistic expectations of what may happen on your wedding night. Much of whatever you’ve seen in the movies or on TV is **not** realistic. Remember, those “passionate” couples have rehearsed everything...and afterwards, a director will touch up the scenes to make it look even better. Movie sex is NOT real-life sex. It’s acting.

What you’ve seen in movies is rehearsed and practiced—your wedding night, on the other hand, will **NOT** be rehearsed.

I realize that you might be blushing at this point in the letter. Please understand that I write this for *your* benefit. Having met with many couples, I have found that some of them have been unprepared for the wedding night. Perhaps it was because others assumed they knew. Or maybe it was because this topic can be really awkward. Regardless of the reason, I believe that having this conversation is worth the awkwardness.

My brother and sister, may I be real candid with you? **The wedding night can be difficult.** Your wedding night may include one or more of the following:

- not having an orgasm (man and/or woman)
- premature ejaculation
- a very short lovemaking session
- struggles with using contraceptives (like putting on a condom for the first time)
- non-insertion or partial insertion (as opposed to full insertion of the penis into the vagina)
- vaginal pain/discomfort as the penis is inserted

Keep in mind that you have not made love to each other before. In fact, you've probably not ever had sex with anyone before. Even a simple task like filling up your car with gasoline is awkward when you do it for the first time.

Ladies, this experience may be scary to you if you are a virgin. Don't be afraid to tell your husband that you're scared—it will help him to be more sensitive. If you're not comfortable with something that he wants to do, tell him.

Men, please remember that your figure (no matter how chiseled) is NOT as appealing as the female form. Also, many of the acts depicted in pornographic videos may NOT be something your wife would enjoy doing. You need to be sensitive to her feelings and to her preferences.

More than anything, remember that this is just the ***beginning***—love-making will get better with time and practice. It won't always be this awkward. The wedding night is a wonderful, joyous night...but it is also just the beginning. Your wedding night won't look what you've seen in movies.

Embrace realistic expectations.

3) COMMUNICATE CANDIDLY

You've likely been trying to work on communicating better with each other. There is no more important place to practice that communication than in the bedroom on your wedding night.

If you are scared, say so.

If you don't want to do a specific position, say so.

If it hurts, speak up.

If you want to take a break, let your spouse know.

If you are sore, let your spouse know.

Ladies, if you have kept yourselves pure, your first time will probably hurt. You've never had anything that large inside of you before. God designed women to be capable of engaging in sex. But it will take time for your vagina to adjust to it. You may feel sore for the next day or two. But please keep in mind that this adjustment period is normal. It will not always be this awkward or this painful.

Men, you must be patient with your wife. Though *you* may feel pleasure, try to focus more on giving your wife pleasure. Men are quickly aroused. Women usually take much longer to be aroused. And part of their arousal involves foreplay—gentle caressing, talking, cuddling, etc. Make sure you tell your wife how beautiful she is—many of the most beautiful women in the world are insecure about how they look even *with* their clothes on. So imagine how insecure a woman might feel when she’s completely naked.

Conclusion

The marriage bed is to be undefiled (i.e. pure) and to be held in honor above all. Unfortunately, we have been saturated by what the world has put before us—images and videos that can give us unbiblical perspectives on sex, leaving us with an unrealistic picture of lovemaking in the bedroom.

Please take this time to pray and to think about how you can be serving your spouse in making love before your wedding night. Please don’t be ashamed or afraid to ask a mentor couple about their experiences or to talk to a close same-gender married person. No question is stupid. No question is off-limits. In fact, wise people ask questions.

We’ve met with many couples who say, “I wish someone had talked to me about the wedding night. I was totally unprepared.” Others have said, “I should have taken my friend up on his/her offer to talk about this.”

And it is precisely because we care, because we want to minister to you, we’re here to talk about anything that’s on your mind.

Your friends,

Jonathan and Miranda Szeto

TOPIC 8 –TALKING ABOUT SEX [for engaged couples only]

Review of the homework from last time:

- 1) Read **Unit 6** in Wayne Mack's Strengthening Your Marriage and answer the study questions in the back. Read Jonathan and Miranda's letter to friends.
- 2) Highlight 5 things you learned from all of the reading and be prepared to discuss them.

Discuss the lessons learned from unit 6 and/or the letter

(men only, women only, ALL together)

Birth control – what are your plans for birth control? Do you have any questions about methods?

According to Unit 6, the key to sexual unity is an **HEALTHY MARRIAGE**.

Fundamentally, sex is **NOT ABOUT YOU!** Your goal in sex should be to **PLEASE YOUR SPOUSE**, not to please yourself. In other words sex is about what you **GIVE**, not what you **GET**.

Once you are married, remember that you will have your lifetime to improve your sexual encounters. The wedding night is only a starting point for BOTH of you.

PRAYER REQUESTS:

HOMEWORK:

- 1) Talk to Jon and/or Miranda if you have any more specific questions. Do NOT hesitate to ask.
- 2) Enjoy your wedding! Enjoy your wedding night too!

TOPIC 9 – POST-WEDDING FOLLOW-UP

Review of the “homework” from last time ☺:

- 1) Talk to Jon and/or Miranda if you have any more specific questions. Do NOT hesitate to ask.
- 2) Enjoy your wedding!

So now that you’ve been married for a while, how have things been?

Is there something in this pre-marital area that you would have liked to know more about before getting married?

If an engaged couple came to you for some advice, what would you say?

What are some new things that you’ve learned about your spouse?

What was your favorite part of the honeymoon?

APPENDIX 6
WEDDING DOCUMENTS

The following contains the first appendix of the premarital curriculum, which includes some basic information and examples of vows and wedding ceremonies.

Typical order of service

[your wedding doesn't need to have all of these elements]

Prelude

Honorable Seating of the Mothers / Grandparents if applicable

Lighting of the Unity Candle by Mothers

Processional

Presentation of Bride & Declaration of Consent (Father gives bride away)

Doxology

Welcome & Prayer (Scripture reading)

Congregational Song(s)

Sharing of the Word

Prayer for the Couple

Exchanging of Vows & Rings

Lighting of the Unity Candle by Couple (thanking of parents); Sand ceremony

The Kiss

Presentation of Mr. & Mrs. _____

Recessional

Traditional Vows and Rings

GROOM

_____ please repeat after me:

I _____ take you _____
to be my wedded wife
To have and to hold
from this day forward,
For better, for worse,
For richer, for poorer,
In sickness and in health,
To love and to cherish,
Till death do us part
or until the Lord returns.

Now take the ring and repeat after me:

May this band
that has no beginning nor end
be an enduring symbol
of my devotion
to Christ and to you, my bride.

You may place the ring on _____'s
hand

BRIDE

Now _____ please repeat after me:

I _____ take you _____
to be my wedded husband,
To have and to hold
from this day forward,
For better, for worse,
For richer, for poorer,
In sickness and in health,
To love and to cherish,
Till death do us part
or until the Lord returns.

Now take the ring and repeat after me:

May this band
that has no beginning nor end
be an enduring symbol
of my devotion
to Christ and to you, my husband.

You may place the ring on _____'s
hand

Sample Christian Vows – From Pastor Kurt Gebhards

Groom

I covenant
before the Lord of heaven and earth
understanding His infinite power
and righteousness
to love you as Christ loved the church.
With the gospel as my guide
I choose gladly to die to self
denying myself
for your benefit and growth
so that I may present you
blameless in Christ in that final day.
Having an eye on heaven
In all my leadership
I want to faithfully guide you
To our Lord Jesus Christ.
I vow to love you sacrificially
Such that circumstances
Will have no bearing on my promise to you.
I will cherish, honor and protect you
until our Lord calls us to be in His presence

Now take the ring and repeat after me:

May this band
that has no beginning nor end
be an enduring symbol
of my devotion
to Christ and to you, my wife.

You may place the ring on _____'s
hand

Bride

I covenant
before the Lord of heaven and earth
understanding His infinite power
and righteousness
to submit to you as the church submits to
Christ.
With the gospel as my guide
I choose gladly to die to self,
denying myself
for your benefit and growth
so that we may be blameless in Christ
in that final day.
Embracing the privilege of submission
I look to my Jesus Christ as my example
I gladly honor your servant leadership
I vow to love you sacrificially
such that circumstances
will have no bearing on my promise to you.
I will cherish, honor and love you
until our Lord calls us to be in His presence

Now take the ring and repeat after me:

May this band
that has no beginning nor end
be an enduring symbol
of my devotion
to Christ and to you, my husband.

You may place the ring on _____'s
hand

Sample Christian Vows – From Pastor Jonathan Szeto

Groom

Before everyone gathered here today,
And before the Lord of heaven and earth,
I make this vow to you.

I promise to love you
as Christ loved the church
I promise to sacrificially serve you
I promise to point you to Christ
So that we may be blameless

In all seasons of life
For better, for worse,
For richer, for poorer,
In sickness and in health,

I vow to love you faithfully,
Until the Lord takes us home.

Now take the ring and repeat after me:

May this band
that has no beginning nor end
be an enduring symbol
of my devotion
to Christ and to you, my wife.

You may place the ring on _____'s
hand

Bride

Before everyone gathered here today,
And before the Lord of heaven and earth,
I make this vow to you.

I promise to submit to you
as the church submits to Christ
I promise to sacrificially serve you
I promise to point you to Christ
So that we may be blameless

In all seasons of life
For better, for worse,
For richer, for poorer,
In sickness and in health,

I vow to love you faithfully,
Until the Lord takes us home.

Now take the ring and repeat after me:

May this band
that has no beginning nor end
be an enduring symbol
of my devotion
to Christ and to you, my husband.

You may place the ring on _____'s
hand

APPENDIX 7
ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF
VARIOUS RESOURCES

This bibliography contains a list of resources along with my personal notes in case the engaged couple wishes to study the topic further.

DATING AND ENGAGEMENT

Chediak, Alex, and Marni Chediak. *With One Voice: Singleness, Dating, and Marriage--to the Glory of God.*

Practical, down-to-earth, and easily digested, this is my TOP recommendation for a book about dating.

Hiestand, Gerald, and Jay S. Thomas. *Sex, Dating, and Relationships: A Fresh Approach.*

I have some reservations about this book. Proposes “dating friendships,” which is confusing at best, and dangerous at worst. The relationship categories are sound. **But I would not recommend it as a first book.**

Mack, Wayne. *Preparing for Marriage God's Way.*

Excellent. Practical handbook with many questions, surveys to prepare for marriage. It's a workbook, not necessarily a regular book. This workbook is especially helpful in identifying differences in background and expectations in marriage. If you like those surveys and questionnaires, this is your book.

Phillips, Sharon L., and Richard D. Phillips. *Holding Hands, Holding Hearts: Recovering a Biblical View of Christian Dating.*

Excellent first book to read on topic of dating. It offers foundational principles and good reminders.

Powlison, David, and John Yenchko. *Pre-Engagement: Five Questions to Ask Yourself.*

Excellent handbook on basic questions to ask. It is useful as a starting point. Super short. This is a standard list of questions with helpful explanations. When people ask me about readiness for engagement, I give them this.

Winner, Lauren F., Jerusha Clark, Rick Holland, Douglas Wilson, Jeramy Clark, and Jonathan Lindvall. *5 Paths to the Love of Your Life: Defining Your Dating Style.*

Presents 5 views on dating. Interesting read. I agree with Rick Holland's view.

BOOKS FOR MEN

Harris, Joshua. *Sex Is Not the Problem (Lust Is): Sexual Purity in a Lust-Saturated World*.

Previously entitled “Not even a hint.” This is a book that addresses the problem of lust.

Hughes, R. Kent. *Disciplines of a Godly Man*.

Excellent when looking for a first book to read on the topic of biblical manhood. Wide in scope and coverage of areas in a man’s life.

Lambert, Heath. *Finally Free. Fighting for Purity with the Power of Grace*.

It’s REALLY good. Unlike most books on purity and fighting pornography, Lambert gets at the heart and links the gospel message of grace to life transformation. TOP recommendation for a book about lust and purity.

Mason, Eric. *Manhood Restored: How the Gospel Makes Men Whole*.

Mason writes very well. He clearly communicates at a very down-to-earth level how the salvation message of the gospel will comprehensively change a man.

Sanders, J. Oswald. *Spiritual Leadership: A Commitment to Excellence for Every Believer*.

This book is a standard book on leadership. Though not directly focused on leadership in marriage, it can be helpful as a starting point for leadership in general.

Scott, Stuart. *The Exemplary Husband: A Biblical Perspective*.

Excellent book. Good to read after *Disciplines of a Godly man*. This is an in-depth book dealing with various problems in marriage. Many examples help to make it practical. Read it before marriage and then while you’re married. It helps. A lot.

Stinson, Randy and Dumas, Dan. *A Guide to Biblical Manhood*.

I love this book. It’s short and to the point. But it’s also helpful. This would be a great little book to cover with an older man.

Street John, Ed. *Men Counseling Men: A Biblical Guide to the Major Issues Men Face*.

If there is ONE book that I would consult when counseling issues men face, it would be this one. At the end of each chapter, there are helpful books listed for further information.

White, David. *Sexual Sanity for Men Leader's Guide: Re-Creating Your Mind in a Crazy Culture*.

Though I have not personally read it, I hear good things about it and it is highly recommended by solid Christian leaders.

HOMOSEXUALITY AND THE CHRISTIAN

Allberry, Sam. *Is God anti-gay? And other questions about homosexuality, the Bible and same-sex attraction*.

A helpful, short book about homosexuality and the Bible.

Barr, Adam and Ron Citau. *Compassion without Compromise: How the Gospel Frees us to Love our Gay Friends without Losing the Truth*.

My top recommendation. It focuses more on how to minister and care for others instead of getting mired in the theological debate.

Hill, Wesley. *Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality*.

An autobiographical book about a man who continues to struggle with same-sex attraction. Not all of it is biblically accurate. But it's helpful to read to understand what Christians who struggle similarly experience.

Hubbard, Peter. *Love into Light: The Gospel, the Homosexual and the Church*.

My second top recommended book on how to love Christians who struggle with same-sex attraction. It does not really deal with the theological debate. It is more of a handbook for ministry.

Longacre, David. Ed. *First Steps in Compassion: Helping Someone who Struggles with Same-Sex Attraction*.

This is a handbook on how to counsel someone who has same-sex attraction.

Welch, Edward T. *Blame it on the Brain? Distinguishing Chemical Imbalances, Brain Disorders, and Disobedience*.

This provides a helpful diagnostic method for dealing with certain sins that appear brain-related.

_____ *Homosexuality: Speaking the Truth in Love.*

Short pamphlet from CCEF. It's helpful for understanding the biblical case for classifying homosexuality as immoral.

Yuan, Christopher and Angela Yuan. *Out of a Far Country.*

An autobiographical sketch of a gay man's journey to God and repentance in faith. It also features his mom's point of view. So this is also helpful for parents.

BOOKS FOR WOMEN

(I have not personally read all of these)

Fitzpatrick, Elyse. *Idols of the Heart: Learning to Long for God Alone.*

Helpful when identifying the "functional idols" in your life—the motivations and desires that drive our life choices.

George, Elizabeth. *Loving God with All Your Mind.*

Helpful in making your thought life more biblical. Deals with emotional responses and recommends how to think through the situation.

Hughes, Barbara. *Disciplines of a Godly Woman.*

Excellent when looking for a first book to read on the topic of biblical womanhood. Wide in scope and coverage of areas in a woman's life.

Mahaney, Carolyn. *Feminine Appeal: Seven Virtues of a Godly Wife and Mother.*

Covers the main responsibilities of a woman as wife and mother.

Somerville, Mary. *One with a Shepherd: The Tears and Triumphs of a Ministry Marriage.*

The only book I know of its kind. Written by a pastor's wife for other pastors' wives. Capitol Hill Baptist Church adds to it (but I haven't read it).

Peace, Martha. *The Excellent Wife: A Biblical Perspective.*

Excellent book. Good to read after *Disciplines of a Godly Woman*. This is an in-depth book dealing with various problems in marriage. Many examples help to make it practical. She has an especially helpful section on how to rebuke your husband respectfully. Many of those insights can be applied to general rebuke.

MARRIAGE

Adams, Jay E. *Solving Marriage Problems*.

Excellent book on solving marriage problems. Helpful in revealing that marriage problems ultimately stem from wrong expectations and wrong thinking. Also, short and concise.

Colón, Jeff. *From Ashes to Beauty: Restoring Marriages from the Devastation of Sexual Sin*.

A guide to restoring a marriage after adultery, sprinkled with stories of restoration.

Harvey, Dave. *When Sinners Say "I Do": Discovering the Power of the Gospel for Marriage*.

A helpful illustration of the pervasive effect of sin on marriage. This helps us become more sensitive to each other, knowing that we are broken people.

Mack, Wayne A., and Carol Mack. *Sweethearts for a Lifetime: Making the Most of Your Marriage*.

Read parts of it. It's good. Primarily written as a "marriage refresher." Has interesting projects or suggestions to continue improving your marriage.

_____. *Strengthening Your Marriage*.

I believe this is one of the best single books on marriage. If you can only read one, I'd read this. Downside: written in an outline form.

Piper, John. *This Momentary Marriage (Paperback Edition): A Parable of Permanence*.

Good book on the foundation of marriage. Theologically driven, it could use more practical helps on improving the marriage.

Ricucci, Gary and Betsy. *Love That Lasts: When Marriage Meets Grace*.

Pretty good. Covers a bunch of topics in marriage.

Sproul, R. C. *The Intimate Marriage: A Practical Guide to Building a Great Marriage*.

Good book. More directed towards married couples. It focuses on common marriage problems and is fairly practical.

SPECIFIC TOPICS ON MARRIAGE

Grudem, Wayne, ed. *Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood*.

More theological than practical. It's okay. But this would be a book to read if you were interested in a specific topic or passage.

Kostenberger, Andreas J., and David W. Jones. *God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation*. 2nd ed.

Dense and theological, with marginal application. Good as a second or third book on subject. Deals with deeper and more specific issues (IVF, birth control, etc). See also [Ethics for a Brave New World](#) by John S. Feinberg for more on IVF, abortion, birth control.

Schreiner, Thomas R., John Piper, and Wayne Grudem, eds. *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*.

Theological but a bit impractical. This is really a collection of academic essays aimed at answering difficult questions from a theological and biblical perspective. Good to consult if you have specific questions about topics. There is also a shorter condensed version entitled, "What's the Difference?"

Wheat, Ed M. D., and Gaye Wheat. *Intended for Pleasure: Sex Technique and Sexual Fulfillment in Christian Marriage*. 4th ed.

The only book of its kind I've come across. Deals with sexual intercourse from a scientific and biblical perspective.

PARENTING AND FAMILY LIFE

Adams, Jay Edward. *Christian Living in the Home*.

Excellent primer on family life. Even though it is brief, it is a good read. Does not deal with specific marital issues.

Barnett, Dr John Samuel. *The Joy of a Word-Filled Family*.

Good book on family life. Very long. If you're only reading 1 book on family life, this would be good.

Farley, William P. *Gospel-Powered Parenting: How the Gospel Shapes and Transforms Parenting*.

Best first book to read on this subject. It's not as practical as it is "paradigm-shifting." It helps frame parenting in the grander scheme of discipleship and evangelism.

Hughes, R. Kent, and Barbara Hughes. *Disciplines of a Godly Family*.

Okay when looking for a first book to read on the topic of family. This is helpful as a discussion starter.

Kostenberger, Andreas J., and David W. Jones. *God, Marriage, and Family (Second Edition): Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation*. 2nd ed.

Dense and theological, with marginal application. Good as a second or third book on subject. Deals with deeper and more specific issues (IVF, birth control, etc). See also [Ethics for a Brave New World](#) by John S. Feinberg for more on IVF, abortion, birth control.

MacArthur, John. *What The Bible Says About Parenting Biblical Principle For Raising Godly Children*.

Very good. Strongly biblical. Shorter than Barnett's work.

Mack, Wayne A. *Your Family, God's Way: Developing and Sustaining Relationships in the Home*.

Good book. Addresses biblical expectations and patterns for relationships in the home (marriage, parenting, etc)

Plowman, Ginger. *Don't Make Me Count to Three*.

Quite good. Focuses on discipline and the importance of not giving in to anger.

Priolo, Lou. *The Heart of Anger: Practical Help for Prevention and Cure of Anger in Children*.

Deals with the problems arising from exasperating children to anger. Very good. Probably should be read upon becoming a parent.

Pritchard, David, and Kelli Pritchard. *Going Public: Your Child Can Thrive in Public School*.

Specifically deals with the question of public school. Ultimately, the book says that you can still raise your child in public school, but you will have to be hands-on. Helpful in providing real-life remedies for the Christian home vs secular education tension.

Scott, Scott, and Martha Peace. *The Faithful Parent: A Biblical Guide to Raising a Family*.

Excellent read that is balanced and fair. This gives an overview of spiritual parenting goals for your child for each developmental stage. Relatively short for the years that it covers. Excellent primer/overview book.

Tripp, Tedd. *Shepherding a Child's Heart*.

Excellent book. Deals with parenting on a heart level and asks important questions for couples to think/work through. BEST first book to read on parenting (along with Gospel powered parenting). Helps establish a framework. It also provides excellent advice about parenting challenges in each stage of development.

Tripp, Tedd, and Margy Tripp. *Instructing a Child's Heart*.

BEST second or third book to read on parenting. Deals broadly with issues.

Zollos, Steve. *Time for the Talk: Leading Your Son into True Manhood*.

The only book I know of its kind. This sets the "sex talk" in the larger framework of having deeper conversations with your son about a host of issues.

APPENDIX 8

VARIOUS ARTICLES INCLUDED IN THE PREMARITAL CURRICULUM

For homework, the engaged couple must read four out of the eight articles in preparation for a discussion about marriage. They are:

The first article contains the “FCBC Walnut Marriage policy.” The policy states that in order for a couple to be married by an FCBC Walnut pastor or at the church, they must pursue premarital counseling with a pastor.

The second article comes from *The Christian Pundit* entitled, “It Matters Whom you Marry.” It was directed primarily to women. See bibliography for the web address.

The third article also comes from *The Christian Pundit*. Directed to men, it is entitled, “Guys, It Matters Whom you Marry, too.” See bibliography for the web address.

The fourth article is entitled “Should we Get Married.” I have distributed this article by David Powlison and David Yenchko too many times to remember. See bibliography for citation.

The fifth article is written by Ernie Baker and entitled, “Preparing a Heart for Marriage. See bibliography for citation.

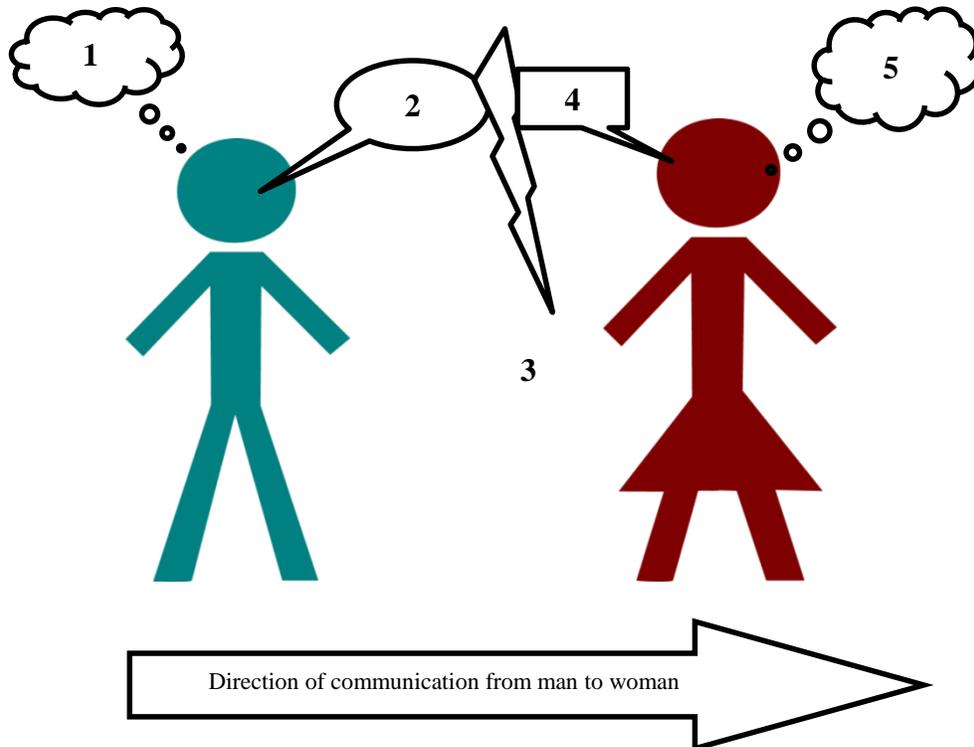
The sixth handout is entitled, “Six Principles for Dating Wisely,” which describes biblical principles I developed during a series on biblical manhood and womanhood.

The seventh handout is entitled, “Selected Questions to Discuss before Marriage,” and is derived from H. Norman Wright’s book, *101 Questions to Ask Before You get Engaged*. See bibliography for full citation.

The eighth and final article is entitled, “Lies Women Believe while Wedding planning.” It comes from *The Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* website. See bibliography for citation.

APPENDIX 9

A DIAGRAM OF COMMUNICATION OBSTACLES



I drew this diagram to illustrate the obstacles present in communication.

- 1 – The man's clarity in thought
- 2 – The man's difficulty in accurately putting his thoughts into words
- 3 – Existing differences in communication styles
- 4 – The woman's ability to understand what the man is saying
- 5 – The woman's difficulty in interpreting what the man said

For example, the man thinks that the home is becoming too cluttered. But he is

not sure if his wife feels the same way (1). After stepping on several toys over the course of a week, the man says to his wife, “don’t you think our home is too cluttered? (2)” The man wanted to ask a question because he genuinely wanted to know what his wife thought. He knows that he’s gone most of the day and that he’s a little irritable now that he’s stepped on some toys. Unfortunately, he encounters difficulty when talking to his wife (3). Upon hearing the man’s words, the wife is concerned that he is displeased with the state of the home (4). She now thinks that she is failing as wife (5).

Even though this diagram (illustrated through this example) helps identify normal obstacles in communication, it does not include obstacles arising from personal history, the complexity of a given situation, or even topics that are difficult to talk about.

APPENDIX 10

PRE-SERIES AND POST-SERIES SURVEY

The following surveys were distributed before and after the class in order to assess the knowledge of the class members and to evaluate the efficacy of the project.

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify the current understanding and practices of premarital counseling of the participant. This research is being conducted by Jonathan Szeto for purposes of ministry project. In this research, you will answer questions before the project and you will answer the same questions at the conclusion of the project. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

By your completion of this survey, and checking the appropriate box below, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

- I agree to participate
- I do not agree to participate

Directions: Please answer the following questions by circling your response or by filling in the blanks provided.

NAME: _____

SIGNATURE: _____ **DATE:** _____

Demographic Data

1. Do you consider yourself a Christian? Yes No
2. Are you married? Yes No
3. How long have you been married? _____ years
4. Were you born outside of the United States? Yes No
5. Were your parents born outside of the United States? Yes No
6. How many years have you lived in the United States? _____ years
7. How many children do you have living in your home? _____
8. How old are your children?

Name _____	Age _____
9. Did you and your spouse receive premarital counseling? Yes No
10. Have you ever conducted premarital counseling for another couple? Yes No

Directions:

Please read the statement and circle your level of agreement using the following scale:

**SD=strongly disagree; D=disagree; DS=disagree somewhat
AS=agree somewhat; A=agree; SA=strongly agree**

<u>General Statements</u>						
1. Scripture is the ultimate authority in the believer's life.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
2. Scripture is the ultimate authority for counseling.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
3. Scripture is the ultimate authority for marriage.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
4. I understand what it means to be a born-again Christian.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
5. I understand that a spouse's relationship with God affects his/her marriage.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
<u>The Husband's role in the home</u>						
6. In God's plan for marriage, the husband is called to be the spiritual leader.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
7. I understand what it means for men to be the spiritual leaders in the home.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
8. I am equipped to teach others what it means for men to be spiritual leaders in the home.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
9. I would know where to look for biblical guidance on how men can be spiritual leaders in the home.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
10. I regularly offer advice to men about how to be spiritual leaders in the home.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
<u>The Wife's role in the home</u>						
11. In God's plan for marriage, the wife is called to submit to her husband as to the Lord.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
12. I understand what it means for women to submit to their husbands in the home.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
13. I am equipped to teach others what it means for women to submit to their husbands in the home.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
14. I would know where to look for biblical guidance on how women are to submit to their husbands in the home.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
15. I regularly offer advice to women about how to be submissive to their husbands in the home.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

**SD=strongly disagree; D=disagree; DS=disagree somewhat
AS=agree somewhat; A=agree; SA=strongly agree**

<u>Communication</u>						
16. God calls for loving and clear communication between husbands and wives in marriage.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
17. I understand what it means for husbands and wives to communicate with each other in a God-honoring way.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
18. I am equipped to teach others what it means for husbands and wives communicate with each other in a God-honoring way.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
19. I would know where to look for biblical guidance on how husbands and wives should communicate with each other in a God-honoring way.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
20. I regularly offer advice to husbands and wives about how to communicate with each other in a God-honoring way.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
<u>Money</u>						
21. God calls for wise financial stewardship for married couples.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
22. I understand what it means for married couples to exercise wise financial stewardship in marriage.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
23. I am equipped to teach others what it means for married couples to exercise wise financial stewardship in marriage.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
24. I would know where to look for biblical guidance on how married couples would exercise wise financial stewardship in marriage.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
25. I regularly offer advice to married couples about how to exercise wise financial stewardship in marriage.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
<u>Leaving and Cleaving</u>						
26. God calls all married couples to become spiritually, financially, and emotionally independent from their parents.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
27. I understand what it means for married couples to become spiritually, financially, and emotionally independent from their parents.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
28. I am equipped to teach others what it means for married couples to become spiritually, financially, and emotionally independent from their parents.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
29. I would know where to look for biblical guidance on how married couples become spiritually, financially, and emotionally independent from their parents.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
30. I regularly offer advice to married couples about how to become spiritually, financially, and emotionally independent from their parents.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

**SD=strongly disagree; D=disagree; DS=disagree somewhat
AS=agree somewhat; A=agree; SA=strongly agree**

<u>Sex</u>						
31. God's plan for all married couples is to have healthy sexual relations in marriage.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
32. I understand what it means for married couples to have healthy sexual relations in marriage.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
33. I am equipped to teach others what it means for married couples to have healthy sexual relations in marriage.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
34. I would know where to look for biblical guidance on how married couples can have healthy sexual relations in marriage.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
35. I regularly offer advice to married couples about how to have healthy sexual relations in marriage.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
<u>Family Life</u>						
36. God commands all parents to be the primary spiritual leaders of their children.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
37. I understand what it means for parents to be the primary spiritual leaders of their children.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
38. I am equipped to teach others what it means for parents to be the primary spiritual leaders of their children.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
39. I would know where to look for biblical guidance on how parents can be the primary spiritual leaders of their children.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
40. I regularly offer advice to parents about how to be the primary spiritual leaders of their children.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
<u>Premarital Counseling</u>						
41. God commands believers to teach and train other believers.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
42. I have been equipped to provide premarital counseling to engaged couples.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

APPENDIX 11
STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Name	Classes Attended	Percentage Attended	Name	Classes Attended	Percentage Attended
student 1	12	86%	student 21	12	86%
student 2	14	100%	student 22	9	64%
student 3	12	86%	student 23	13	93%
student 4	14	100%	student 24	12	86%
student 5	13	93%	student 25	13	93%
student 6	12	86%	student 26	14	100%
student 7	11	79%	student 27	14	100%
student 8	14	100%	student 28	7	50%
student 9	14	100%	student 29	13	93%
student 10	7	50%	student 30	12	86%
student 11	13	93%	student 31	14	100%
student 12	13	93%	student 32	14	100%
student 13	13	93%	student 33	12	86%
student 14	13	93%	student 34	12	86%
student 15	14	100%			
student 16	12	86%			
student 17	14	100%			
student 18	13	93%	MAXIMUM	14	100%
student 19	14	100%	MINIMUM	7	50%
student 20	11	79%	AVERAGE	12	89%

Table A1. Attendance Statistics

NAME	PRE- SCORE	POST- SCORE
student 1	176	214
student 2	199	233
student 3	217	222
student 4	220	220
student 5	186	221
student 6	201	237
student 7	153	203
student 8	238	237
student 9	207	229
student 10	189	221
student 11	173	194
student 12	190	204
student 13	201	232
student 14	148	214
student 15	216	229
student 16	188	205
student 17	208	212
student 18	210	233
student 19	201	240
student 20	218	235
student 21	193	211
student 22	183	233
student 23	206	219
student 24	168	208
student 25	205	248
student 26	204	221
student 27	164	210
student 28	199	226
student 29	226	227
student 30	176	192
student 31	193	219
student 32	220	224
student 33	162	190
student 34	197	223
MAXIMUM	195	220
MINIMUM	238	248
AVERAGE	148	190

Table A2. Pre-Survey and Post-Survey Score Statistics

TOPIC	PRE-SURVEY	POST-SURVEY	VARIANCE
LEAVING AND CLEAVING	21.6	25.6	4.0
COMMUNICATION	22.2	25.9	3.7
SEX	20.8	24.6	3.7
FAMILY LIFE	23.2	26.7	3.5
WIFE'S ROLE	21.2	24.5	3.3
MONEY	22.2	25.2	2.9
HUSBAND'S ROLE	23.3	25.4	2.1
PREMARITAL COUNSELING	8.6	10.7	2.1
GENERAL STMTS	29.9	29.9	--

Table A3. Score Statistics by Topic (sorted by variance)

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ABSTRACT

EQUIPPING MARRIED COUPLES TO ASSIST WITH PREMARITAL COUNSELING AT FIRST CHINESE BAPTIST CHURCH IN WALNUT, CALIFORNIA

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015
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This ministry project was designed to equip married couples to assist with premarital counseling at First Chinese Baptist Church in Walnut, California.

Chapter 1 outlines the purpose, goals, and plan for the project. It also provides a brief analysis of the congregation of First Chinese Baptist Church.

Chapter 2 examines God's design for marriage from Genesis 1-2, Ephesians 5:21-33, and Titus 2:1-8. These three texts provide the foundation, structure, and support system for marriage.

Chapter 3 presents an overview of the benefits of mentoring from a secular and Christian perspective.

Chapter 4 documents the ministry project implementation, which involved teaching a fourteen session Sunday school class.

Chapter 5 evaluates the ministry projects from a personal, theological, and practical perspective. It includes suggestions for implementation and concludes with personal reflection.

VITA

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EDUCATION

B.A., University of California, Los Angeles, 2004

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MINISTERIAL EMPLOYMENT

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