

Biblical Pillars for a Family Foundation

Pillar Four: Marriage - Unity at the Top

I. Introduction – Why is unity so important?

As marriage goes, so goes the family. As family goes, so goes society. Lack of unity is the cause for the sad state of marriages and broken families today. Kids look for unity and grieve over its absence.

A. Opposites of Unity

1. **Distance** – *the couple has learned to live without interdependence they sought when they married due to disappointment and lack of trust... they live separate lives in the same house.*
2. **Unresolved Conflict** – *Each partner feels misunderstood, unfairly judged, undervalued and defensive. Any discussion outside of the weather can be reason to fear another conflict.*
3. **Selfishness** – *As one wag put it, divorce is caused by only three things: selfishness, selfishness and selfishness. It means that each partner uses their available time, energy and resources to fulfill their own desires more than to look after their spouse and family and building the marriage.*

B. Stories of Unity

- O’Henry’s story, *The Gift of the Magi*
- Robertson McQuilkin’s wife Muriel with Alzheimers’
- Chris Spielman’s wife with cancer (Shaved head, sat out from NFL, etc.)

II. Biblical basis for unity

A. Genesis 1:26-28

1. Pinnacle of creation
The last act of his last day of creation. Changes His adjective from “good” to “very good.” Suggests completion. Naturalism of the last 150 years suggests that we’re just the result of random mutations. Post-modernism suggests that, even with the mounting evidence of “information theory” which suggests that biosystems are so complexly programmed that there must be a programmer, that there is no absolute meaning to our being here. Highest pinnacle of creation suggests that God’s purpose for man is more distinct, more significant than for any of creation.
2. Let “us” make man in “our” image
Not saying proof-positive of the Trinity. But with the later evidence we have of the Trinity, especially in the New Testament, helps us see that even at the beginning, God was already communicating to us His nature as a God who has always been in perfect relationship within Himself. One God yet three persons. Just as that depicts unity, so does His design for mankind. “Our image” implies that we reflect Someone who is both plural and singular – a great picture of unity.

3. Reflect His image with two genders
*Verse 27 says “In His image, God created him; male and female created He them.” This means that the first part – created him – and the second part – created them (male and female) – are in God’s mind equal. When God brought us to be, it was as a pair, as a unit. It is **together** that we reflect His image. Though the man is created from dust and the woman from man, and though 1 Cor 11 shows us that in some specific way, the man reflects God uniquely and the woman is said to reflect the man, it is clear from this first account that in God’s mind, the male and female combination together reflect to the world something of what He is like.
This, by the way, is one of the great travesties of divorce. Divorce suggests that we live for ourselves. Marriage suggests that we live in covenant relationship (Malachi 2:14) so that through the ages, in good times and bad, we will reflect to boys and girls and young men and young women what God is like and how we are like Him.*
4. Fill the earth
Verse 28 tells us that God wants lots of kids – “be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth.” This is a picture of unity, a picture of man and woman being created to start and be part of a never-ending family. Try to think of a wedding or Thanksgiving and imagine no drug or alcohol abuse, no harshness or cruelty, no bitter feelings from years of unforgiveness, no divorce creating division of family, shared responsibilities, shared time of stories and eating and play. That is a much closer picture of what God is creating. Sadly, for many of us, when we think of family getting together for a holiday or wedding, we only think of the results of sin. Family gatherings can become equivalent to discord, disunity and disgust. That’s not what God was trying to create when He said to multiply and fill the earth. That’s why when we read this passage, we need to remove ourselves from thinking about how it is now and see what He had in mind. The unity of a family was His picture. We’ll see more of that applied to the marriage in particular in just a minute.
5. Subdue the earth
*Here we have the other half of the created purpose of mankind. Manage and oversee creation. That’s all. Build homes and highways, create schools, study nature, harness energy, find ways to exchange goods and services, take care of the family, use the gifts that come naturally to you, teach each other, discover together, creatively care for all I have given you in such a way that whenever I stop by for a visit, I’ll be able to say – That’s great! Way to go! The combined effort of Joey using his talents and Becky using hers would together – goodness knows we can’t subdue the earth alone – create a unity of purpose and achievement which would be useful, God-honoring and enjoyable. Some cultures believe that work was a result of the Fall into sin. Obviously not – work was part of what we were **built** for. As we’ll see in a minute, the frustrating, never-ending, toil of work was a result of the Fall. But this purposefulness was to be a great place of unity as we admired the colorful contribution of each musician or weaver, teacher or engineer, rancher or farmer, mom or dad.*

God's plan of managing creation had in it remarkable joy and one reason was that it had built into the idea of unity. Like a work project that many jump in on tougher, together we will subdue the earth, manage it as overseers.

A. Genesis 2:18-25

While the previous (Gen. 1:26-28) passage is described as a telescopic view of the creation of mankind, this passage is often described as a microscopic view. What the other passage told us quickly in overview, this passage tells us in artistic, sublime detail.

1. Alone

God lets us get a quick glimpse into Adam's world before creating his other half. It was the only thing in creation that God called 'not good.' God doesn't focus on the man's inability to fulfill his assigned purposes of filling the earth or of subduing the earth. Instead, He says the man is alone and that is not how God wanted man. God's original thought of the man is in relationship with a life-partner. Part was so he won't lie down alone on a cold night. It is so apparent that since He creates the woman so the man will have a companion and be able to fill and subdue, the man will be her companion just as well. As we'll see in a few weeks, he is to be much more than that. Unity is implied in their need for each other.

2. Searches for someone who fits

Not only is the man alone and needing a companion. God brings along horses and dogs, elephants and tigers. The man likes them all fine and names them as he greets them. But, as Adam might have said if he was from the Valley, none of them suits. None of them fits the man... golden retriever and German shepherd included. No, the man needed someone who is more like him than those creatures but also preferably a little different, too. Strategically different. He needs someone who will fit just so, someone with whom he really can be like one person.

3. From his side, bone and flesh

The monks of five hundred years ago observed that God did not take the woman from his foot, that he should trample on her, nor from his head, that she should dominate him, but from his side near his heart, that they could together see her as an equal and that his call to care for her would be evident. She was, in Adam's own words, bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. As the New Testament says later of the Body of Christ, when one part hurt, the other parts hurt. So it was to be in the marriage relationship. Unity is reflected in being made from the same stuff.

4. He leaves and cleaves

Here we get the idea that, although Adam had no earthly father and mother, he was to be the prototype of all after him who would. And they were to leave their first loyalty to their parents and establish a new first loyalty. They were to leave the home of their parents and establish a new home. They were to leave the unique ways of their parents and with their wife, create new ways.

This was a two-part recipe for unity: (a) leave everyone else in second place so your wife knows she has no rivals for your affection or attention; (b) draw so closely to her in body and heart that it could be said you had cleaved to her – become one with her. It’s hardly possible to imagine a better picture of unity – unless it’s the next.

5. They become one flesh and are naked and unashamed

Here the Holy Spirit who inspired this passage paints for us the last picture we are to see of mankind before the Fall into sin. Two people, physically and emotionally naked with each other – nothing to hide. They have no shame. And they make love. Two bodies become joined into one – inseparable. It doesn’t get more unified than that.

Summary

That’s His design. That’s God’s best. That’s God’s intent for the human family. We are all related to one common father and mother and so are part of each other... we are more alike than different, regardless of nationality or race.

We were designed to manage this world in a unified effort. And the foundation of all of it was to be that each man and woman who paired off in marriage was to be covenanted together without shame in physical, emotional union. Unity of purpose, unity of relationship – in that, we would reflect the image of God.

People would look at marriages and say, *“My how she loves him. Or my, how deeply he cares for her.”* They would look at families and say, *“Look at how each one contributes and how they function in order and submission with joy. Those boys are fast becoming young men, and those girls, what fine women they are becoming.”*

The unity of marriage and unity of the family was to be a window into what God is like.

III. Destruction of Unity

A. Genesis 3 – The Fall from unity with God and with each other

We see many things occur in the fall. They are all aspects of the “death” that God said would occur if the man ate the fruit and which Satan said would not occur. One writer has said that the fall was a fall from “shalom.” It was a disruption of the ‘peace’ that God designed into our relationship with Him, with each other, with nature and within ourselves. Another phrase for that fracture of shalom and the need for reconciliation is “loss of unity.” The Fall was as much as anything a disruption of the unity for which we have been designed, and in our country in this day, no place feels it more than our marriages. It is why the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 5 tells us “God has reconciled us to Himself through Christ and given to each one of us a ministry of reconciliation.” Reconciliation is what is needed when “shalom” or “peace” or “unity” is broken.

- B. Genesis 3:7-10 – Their eyes were opened... and they covered themselves
When spiritual death fell on the man, his eyes and the eyes of his wife were opened to the fact that their nakedness now instantaneously brought shame. Though the nakedness was not the problem – it was rather what was in the man – it was the nakedness that he felt he could do something about. They couldn’t cover the real problem but maybe if they appeared on the outside, well, “covered up,” then maybe, just maybe, this terrible feeling tearing them from the inside would go away.
- C. Genesis 3:10-12 – The man shifts blame to the woman (and God)
- D. Genesis 3:16-19 – The curses
 - 1. The woman (3:16)
 - a. Children – pain with your children
 - b. Husband – you’ll want to rule him but he’ll end up ruling
 - 2. The man (3:17-19)
His work will be cursed, yet through it will provide the needs of the family
- E. Net results: Driven from God’s presence and real life (3:24)

IV. Methods for Pursuing Unity in Marriage

- A. Principle from John Piper’s poem to his son at his wedding: *Love Her More and Love Her Less*
 - One – the way to know how to have a good marriage does not really begin with marriage passages. It really begins with passages about your spiritual life. The relationship you enjoy or do not enjoy in marriage will more than anything be a reflection of that relationship.
 - Two – in our effort to get married or to make a good marriage, let’s not make marriage an idol. Let’s keep the Lord in His proper place (FIRST) in our lives, and keep the idea of a marriage that can satisfy and bless in its proper place (SECOND).
- B. Know, Follow Christ –
 - 1. **John 15:1-17** – Abide in Him (*spend intentional time with Him and His Word, pray without ceasing, get to know Him as a friend and as Lord*) and thereby produce fruit. This will be show itself by how you love one another and how you obey Him.
 - 2. **Matthew 11:28-30** – Realize that He has a supernatural ability to care for you when you are weary and heavy-laden; don’t forget that
 - 3. **Mark 9:35** – The first in His kingdom will be the servant of all
 - 4. **Galatians 5:16-23** – Walk in the Spirit and you’ll not fulfill the desires of the flesh (See also **Romans 8:6-8**).
- C. All relationships for Christians are to be marked by several key principles; Marriages are the **primary Christian relationship** and so these are even more important there.
 - 1. Romans 12:10 – Prefer each other
 - 2. Philippians 2:3– Consider the other as more important
 - 3. Ephesians 4:23-27– Let your mind be renewed, put on your new self, lay aside falsehood, speak truth, do not sin in your anger.

D. Understand **your role**

This is one of the most significant things we can do to help unity take place. It will comprise two of our next pillars.

Please complete the homework you will find on the following pages.

Homework One: Marriage Questionnaire
In This Together: Unity at the Top

If you are married, please rate yourselves on each of the following questions so you will have a better understanding of where your marriage is. If we were built for individuality and unity (see Gen 1:26-28, 2:18, 1 Corinthians 12), then marriage is the place where that individuality and unity can best be experienced. Our grasp of God's design and means for marriage are essential to success in this most personal of all human relationships.

Depending upon the way the question is worded, the rating scale is as follows:

1=No	2= Seldom	3= Sometimes	4=Often	5= Regularly
1=No	2=Don't Understand	3=1 Yes, 1 No	4=Mostly	5=Completely

1. We are both confident that God's desire for us in our marriage is to experience a kind of interdependence where neither is controlled, neither is ignored and both are known and appreciated by the other. We believe this is still possible.

2. We have a strong sense that God reflects Himself in our marriage.

3. I know that my spouse and I "left" our father and mother and that neither one's extended family exercises an influence that pulls us apart from each other.

4. My spouse cleaves to me – connects more closely to me than to anything else than God

5. My spouse agrees that I cleave to them more than to any other relationship or purpose.

6. We regularly enjoy being together in the most intimate setting possible (sex).

7. We have dealt with any unfinished business from our past that can affect that close connection through trusting God, forgiving and giving ourselves away.

8. Our marriage is in Christ. We share a relationship with Him and with each other and are therefore equally yoked (2 Corinthians 6:15).

9. The husband in this marriage understands and has visibly committed himself to biblical priorities of providing, protecting, leading, understanding, honoring.

10. The wife in this marriage understands and has visibly committed herself to biblical priorities of honoring, submitting, loving her husband.

11. Honesty is practiced in our relationship.

12. We each understand that the stresses of life and of raising a family can easily wear on us and make it easier to live in our flesh, resulting in the deeds of the flesh mentioned in Galatians 5:19-21 (anger, immorality, jealousy, division, etc.).

13. We are each consistently approach the Lord in petition for our need for His Spirit to empower us to live the kind of life together He intends. This shows in our openness to Him, to His Word and to the input/feedback of our spouse.

14. Our finances are something we intentionally work on together to have God honored in the way we live and give, spend and save.

15. Communication and conflict resolution are things we are both open to working on as the Lord gives us opportunity.

16. I am grateful for my spouse.

17. I commit to attempt to bless my spouse and not live for myself, as the Lord works in me.

TOTAL _____

66-80 = Way to go – Please help FBC as we minister to families (Contact *Family Life Ministry* Dept.)
51-65 = You have made some key commitments. Be on the lookout for one marital area to work on.
40-50 = Need some real focus on a couple of areas. It would be good to isolate those and begin work.
39 and below = You are hurting. Feel free to contact the Family Life Department and see about courses or counseling with which we might be able to help.

Homework 2: *Love Her More and Love Her Less*

© John Piper (1998?) (For his son on the eve of his wedding)

The God whom we have loved
And in whom we have lived
And who has been our rock these twenty-two good years with you
Now bids us with sweet tears to let you go.

A man shall leave his father and his mother,
Cleave henceforth unto his wife and be one unashamed flesh and free.
This is the Word of God today
And we are happy to obey.
For God has given you a bride
Who answers every prayer we've cried,
For over twenty years --
Our claim for you before we knew her name.

If you now aim your wife to bless,
Then love her more, and love her less.

If in the coming years by some strange providence of God -
You come to have the riches of this age and painless stride
Across the stage beside your wife, **be sure** in health,
To love her, love her, more than **wealth**.

And if your life is woven in a hundred friendships
And you spin a festal fabric out of all your sweet affections, great and small,
Be sure no matter how it rends,
To love her, love her, **more than friends**.

And if there comes a point, when you are tired and pity whispers,
"Come be free, embrace comfort here with me!"
Know this: your wife surpasses these -
So love her, **love her, more than ease**.

And when your marriage bed is pure and there is not the slightest lure
Of lust for any but your wife, and all is ecstasy and life,
A secret all of this protects:
Go love **her, love her, more than sex**.

And if your own should someday be the craft that critics all agree
Is worthy of great esteem and sales exceed your wildest dream,
Beware the dangers of a name
And love her; **love her, more than fame**.

And if to your surprise, not mine, God calls you by some strange design
To risk your life to some great cause
Let neither fear nor love give pause - and when you face the gate of death
Then love her, **love her, more than breath.**

Yes love her, love her more than life.
Oh love the woman called your wife.
Go love her as your earthly best.
But, beyond this, venture not.
Lest your love becomes a fool's façade,
Be sure to love **her less than God.**
It is not wise nor kind to call an idol by sweet names
And fall as in humility before a likeness of your God.
Adore above your best beloved on earth -
The God alone who gives her worth.

And she will know in second place
That your great love is also grace-
And that your high affections now are flowing freely from a vow
Beneath these promises.

First made to you by God nor will they fade
For being rooted by the stream of heaven's joy
Which you esteem & cherish more than breath and life
That you may give it to your wife.

The greatest gift you give your wife
Is loving God above your wife.
And thus I bid you now to bless,
Go love her more and love her less.