

**Life on Life: The Art of Personal Ministry (301)**  
**Class One May 2, 2021**  
**Marriage Issues**

**I. Methods for Pursuing Unity in Marriage**

- A. Principle from John Piper's poem at his son's wedding: *Love Her More and Love Her Less*
  - 1. 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 spiritual relationship.
  - 2. 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 in our lives, and keep the idea of a marriage that can satisfy and bless in its proper place.
- B. 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.

**II. Christ in You – The Hope of Glory (Col. 1:27)**

- A. The more a Christian understands and counts on the reality of what happened to them at the beginning of their relationship with Christ when they first were saved, the more they will be able to follow the Lord's commands. The changes that occurred in our lives when we were saved are far more radical and life-transforming than most Christians realize. God didn't just forgive us and give us heaven when we die, and then command us to get our lives in order. He changed us internally such that seeing Him and ourselves accurately makes it easier to yield to His Lordship.

This involves many things, including:

- 1. Biblically understanding their pre-Christ "lostness";
  - 2. Deeply appreciating the gospel of grace by which they were saved;
  - 3. Personally grasping their new identity in Christ.
- B. The changes that occurred in our lives when we were saved have to be known, believed and trusted to result in the attitudinal and behavior changes that they are meant to produce. The more these **foundational realities** are owned, the more successful each of us can be in living out the life the Lord designed for us to live out. For example, listen to J. Hudson Taylor, great 19<sup>th</sup> century missionary to China, regarding grasping his identity in Christ:

*The sweetest part, if one may speak of one part being sweeter than another, is the "rest" which **full identification with Christ** brings. I am no longer anxious about anything... for He, I know, is able to carry out His will and His will is mine. It makes no matter where He places me or how; that is rather for Him to consider than for me. For the easiest positions, He must give me grace, and in the most difficult, His grace is sufficient. So if God places me in great perplexity, does not He give me much guidance? Or if in positions of great difficulty, will He not supply much grace? In circumstances of great pressure and trial, He gives much strength. As to*

*work, mine was never so plentiful, responsible, or difficult; but the weight and strain are gone. His resources are mine, for He is mine. All this springs from **the believer's oneness with Christ.***

- C. Failing to appropriate these principles will generally block a person from being able to obey significant parts of biblical revelation because they will see themselves as “saved sinners” – basically the same person they always were, except now they are going to heaven. That tendency to see ourselves as we were and not as we actually are, contributes substantially to our acting more like we used to than we wish was the case. The reason is that we act in ways consistent with how we see ourselves.
- D. “Indicative” statements of truth (e.g., Rom. 1-11; Eph. 1-3; Col. 1-2) lay a foundation for the “imperatives” God commands believers (Rom. 12-16; Eph. 4-6; Col. 3-4). Another way to say this is that we must “know” and “be” before we put too much emphasis on “do.” We miss both a biblical message and biblical methods if we move people too quickly to “commands” without helping train them on spiritual realities of their life in Christ.
- E. Part of complete discipleship is communicating the “indicative” first and then “imperative” because the Bible teaches both. I am not saying, “Do not call the husband or wife to any of any commands until after they have mastered their identity truths.” I am saying that as you plan to give them things to “do” which are quite appropriate (Example: Ephesians 4:25 or 4:27 or 4:29), make sure you are also helping them grasp the reality out of which doing these commands is possible and not burdensome.
- F. The more you help couples walk with and know Him, marriage issues will be supplanted by their experiential knowledge of Christ (*epignosis*), characterized by grace, peace, life, and godliness (2 Peter 1:2-3). Instead of their goal being a repaired, happy marriage (which is usually translated as, “change him” for wives, and “get her off my back” for husbands), their goal becomes to know and enjoy Christ more, and their marriage improves as a necessary by-product of the life of the Spirit in two people.

### III. Defining Marriage

- A. Genesis 1:26-28 and 2:18-25 – Picture of Marriage
  - 1. Male and female are the expressed *Image of God* (Imago Dei) (Genesis 1:26-28; 5:1; 9:6; James 3:9). In a way untrue of all other parts of creation, male and female reflect His image. Psalm 8:5-8 – *You have made him a little lower than God. As the ISBE says, “The image of God reflects... a nature capable of distinguishing right and wrong, choosing right and rejecting the wrong, and... communion with God. This involves a separation of man from the beast, and his supremacy as the culmination of the creative process.”* (The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, “Image.”)
  - 2. Fill the Earth
  - 3. Subdue the Earth
  - 4. Woman “helps” the man
  - 5. Man leaves Father and Mother
  - 6. Man cleaves to his wife
  - 7. Couple weaves (become one flesh)(Genesis 2:22-25; 1 Cor. 11:1-3; Ephesians 5:25-27)

Married couples are designed to be “one flesh” who in a unique way unavailable otherwise would together reflect the Trinity and the church’s relationship with Christ.

8. Naked, unashamed – couples are meant to experience relational intimacy
- B. God’s goals for marriage
1. Glorify Him (John 15:8) 1 Chronicles 16:8-36 tells of the transfer of the ark to Jerusalem. David ascribes the glory due to the Lord. The idea was that God’s glory would rest at the center of the nation and that God would bless Israel to draw the nations. That is what marriage is meant to be. (See attached essay by John Piper, *Marriage Lived for the Glory of God.*)
  2. Fill the earth with a godly offspring (Gen. 1:28; Malachi 2:15) One purpose of marriage is that we would “beget” children who would beget children. Having kids is not something we “get to do if we want to”; it is part of *His purpose*. This does not mean everyone will. But part of being made “in the image of God” is the idea of reproduction. In general, we reproduce and add to those who are being saved and whose lives and words point to Him. (Reproducing picked up again in Matt. 28:18-20.)
  3. Manage the earth (Gen. 1:26-28) We are to subdue the earth and everything in it to the reign of Christ over all. *(However, as the rest of scripture makes clear, the earth lies in the power of the evil one now, and Christ’s visible reign will only be ushered in on His return at a time determined by the will and foreknowledge of the Father. Therefore, we now exercise aspects of subduing that He enables us to, but only in those manners which follow His expressed will. Example would be that the Crusades were all about subduing but were not following His clearly expressed will. Example would be that someone in a vulnerable position like a Christian undergoing persecution does not look like they are subduing anything, but in the economy of God, their faithfulness under great duress a) bears confident witness of the eventual victory of Christ that was sealed at the cross, and b) draws people to Christ. Those two actions are therefore, part of subduing the earth.)*  
**When a married couple functions as they are designed, they generally produce order and grace. Order, because they trust God and follow His plan. Grace, because in a fallen world in which believers still can be subject to their flesh, it is so necessary. Order and grace will bring into subjection all things, though again, in God’s time.**
  4. Reflect the Triune God (1 Cor. 11:3) “Representing God’s image” means to reflect His nature or character. Jesus is said to reflect God’s image (see 2 Cor. 4:4, Col. 1:15), and in Hebrews 1:3, the author uses the word, *karakter*. In Jesus’s case, we know He is the “very substance” of God and says, “*When you see Me, you have seen the Father.*” In our case, we cannot say that. But we can say that we are able to reflect His likeness (Genesis 1:26; Rom. 8:29; Col. 3:10).
  5. Model Christ and the church (Eph. 5:21-32)
  6. Bless and give joy to both husband and wife (Gen. 2:18; Song of Solomon)

#### IV. Three Primary Marriage Counseling Goals

##### A. Discern where unity is broken

1. Common area #1 – Roles – see below
2. Common area #2 – Communication
  - a. Destructive Patterns

- (1) Escalation
    - (2) Invalidation
    - (3) Negative Interpretations
    - (4) Withdrawal and Avoidance
  - b. Biblical Principle
    - (1) Ephesians 4:25-32, especially 4:29
    - (2) Matthew 7:1-6
- 3. Common area #3 – Expectations
  - a. A huge portion of marriage problems come down to expectations, even though we are to have a covenant relationship in marriage (Mal. 2:14) based on grace
  - b. Expectations boil down to “laws” – as in, I have good reason to expect “X” or “Y” but such “laws” are not grace and presuppose that we have the right to judge
  - c. Like God has with us in His covenant with us, we have been called to make a 100-0 commitment to our spouse, not a 50-50.
  - d. Our expectations become demands which replace love (See *Marriage Builder*)
- 4. Common area #4 – any area where decisions and participation are joined, such as parenting, money, sex, vacations and holidays, in-law relationships, etc.

## **B. Spiritual assessment and plan**

- 1. Clear testimonies of relationship with the Lord? Is the gospel clear? Do they understand that they can be confident, assured of a relationship with the Lord? (1 John 5:13) Do they understand that it is by grace through faith? (Eph. 2:8-9) Are they clear on what Christ has done for them and not vice versa? (Romans 4:5) (“indicatives”)
- 2. What is their maturity level? Need to decide how fast to move, and how much ground to cover. They may have a strong commitment to the Lord but are blind to what each of them contributes to the problem. Or their commitment to the Lord may be immature, lacking Bible knowledge. You may need to start more slowly.
- 3. What is their growth commitment?
  - a. Do they understand and are they committed to progressive sanctification? (Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 5:9; Col. 1:28) You may have to teach this basic principle.
  - b. Biblical dependency? (Matt. 7:24-28; Rom. 10:17; 2 Tim. 3:16-17)
  - c. Biblical confidence? (Psalm 19:7-12; 2 Peter 1:2-3; 1:19-21)
  - d. Renunciation of their own wisdom? (Proverbs 16:25)
  - e. Readiness to repent? (2 Cor. 12:21; 2 Tim. 2:25; Rev. 2:5, 16. 21-22; 3:3, 19)
  - f. Do they understand blindness/deceit of their own heart? (Jer. 17:9)
- 4. What is their grasp of their need for community and commitment to local church?
  - a. Eph. 4:1-16
  - b. Romans 12

### C. Role assessment and plan

1. **You** need a clear understanding of God's call on the man and woman. *Biblical Pillars* course is a good place to get it. So is *Rocking the Roles* by Robert Lewis or many, many articles at [cbmw.org](http://cbmw.org) (counsel on biblical manhood and womanhood).
2. First examine the three parts of functional family life:
  - a. Husband is in charge
  - b. Husband and wife are on the same page
  - c. Children know they are not in charge
3. Second, help the husband examine himself for eleven things:
  - a. Does he accept his role as head of (leader for) his wife? (Eph. 5:23)
  - b. Does he live with her "according to understanding"? (1 Peter 3:7)
  - c. Does he treat her as a "weaker vessel" since she is a woman? (1 Pet. 3:7)
  - d. Does he treat her as an equal recipient of the grace of God? (1 Pet. 3:7)
  - e. Does he willingly lay his life down for her (or does he lay down her life for his, i.e., throw her under the bus)? (Eph. 5:25)
  - f. Does he recognize his sacrificial relationship with her as a parallel of Christ's relationship to the church? (Eph. 5:25)
  - g. Does he grasp that he has a sanctifying effect on her? (Eph. 5:26-27)
  - h. Does he permit the curse of "thorn and thistle" to preoccupy him over his responsibility to care for her and for the kids? (Gen. 3:17-19)
  - i. Does he "masal" her (rule harshly) as Gen. 3:16 warned may happen?
  - j. Does he love her as commanded in Eph. 5:32 (see 1 Cor. 13)?
  - k. Does he work to provide for her and for rest of family (1 Tim. 5:8)?
4. Third, help the wife examine herself for six things.
  - a. Does she see herself as his helper in aloneness and in filling the earth and in subduing it? (Genesis 2:18, ff)
  - b. Does she willingly submit herself under his headship by refusing to take over, and refusing to try to verbally control or pressure him? (Eph. 5:22-24)
  - c. Does she respect him (Eph. 5:32) and love him (Titus 2:5)?
  - d. Does she speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:25), unfrightened by fear (1 Peter 3:6)?
  - e. Does she take care of the house and love her children sacrificially (Titus 2:4-5)?
  - f. Does she work hard to be a great value to her husband (Prov. 31:10-31)?

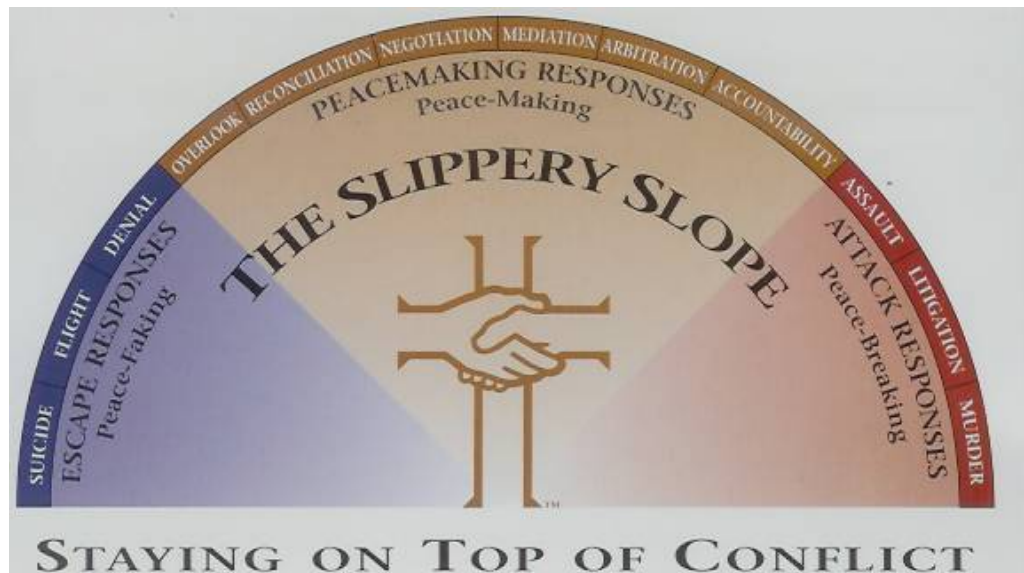
### V. Conflict Resolution **(Peacemaker, Ken Sande)**

#### A. Conflict — Central Points

**(1 Cor. 10:31)**

1. Definition = "Difference in opinion or purpose that frustrates someone's goals or desires." (p. 24, *The Peacemaker*, Ken Sande)
2. All conflict, good (e.g., preferences or perspectives) or bad (driven by our lusts, a la James 4:1-2) — is designed by God to be used for good in every circumstance, whether a situation to confront/address or one to overlook.
3. Conflict is an unavoidable opportunity to glorify God by obeying Him, by reflecting the image of Christ and by serving others.

## B. The Slippery Slope — Quick Overview



1. Three Basic Responses to Conflict
  - a. Avoid — Far Left
  - b. Attack — Far Right
  - c. Conciliate — Middle
2. Observations and Patterns Within the Slope
  - a. Left-Right goes from private → public
  - b. Left-Right goes from self-reliant → other control
  - c. Extremes end in greatest losses, even death (Proverbs 16:25, Romans 6:23a). Further from the middle that you get, worse it gets.
3. Left side (escape) focuses on “Me” and Right side (attack) focuses on “You” but the middle (conciliation) focus is on “Us”. Left side people are usually content to live with peace-faking and right side people are more content to live with peace-breaking, while those in the middle path are committed to “peace-making.”

## C. Working through Conflict

### 1. PAUSE

Ken Sande’s book *Peacemaker* explains in more detail, but this has to do with spiritual preparation, factual preparation, and relational preparation. It is the place you remind yourself of your purposes in conflict and the steps to accomplish that.

Prepare

Affirm the relationship

Understand their interests

Search for creative solutions

Evaluate options objectively and reasonably

### 2. Peacemakers Pledge (See the Peacemaker book or card for these)

Glorify God (1 Cor. 10:31)

Get the log out of your eye – deal with your blindness first

Gently restore – here is where you seek to present to a brother the area that you think needs to be addressed for the purpose of restoration.

Go and be reconciled – pursuing active steps of real reconciliation

### 3. Seven Steps of Confession

- a. Address everyone involved
- b. Avoid if, but and maybe
- c. Admit specifically (attitudes and actions)
- d. Acknowledge the hurt you have caused (with sorrow for hurting)
- e. Accept consequences
- f. Alter behavior
- g. Ask for forgiveness

### 4. Four Promises of Forgiveness

- a. I will not dwell on this
- b. I will not bring this up and use it against you
- c. I will not talk to others about this
- d. I will not allow this to hinder our relationship

## VI. Passivity and Avoidance

- A. One pattern you'll often see when counseling couples is the tendency on one person's part towards passivity or avoidance... where they resist expectation to function responsibly.
- B. Like dominance, such a trait normally follows a person's personality. The tendency to be a little more to oneself, quieter and less likely to "take over" is not itself sin, any more than the tendency to be a natural take-charge person is itself sin. Both personalities can "walk by the Spirit" or "walk by the flesh." Galatians 5-6 tell us that if we walk by the Spirit, we will "not fulfill the lusts of the flesh" (5:16) and we will "reap eternal life" (6:8). Romans 8:6 promises that "the mind set on the flesh is death and the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace."
- C. The problem is that "sinfulness" – the flesh in a believer or the sin nature in an unbeliever – is so deeply woven into a person's core that sin shows itself even when people are not trying to sin. In fact, people can be trying to do right and still end up sinning (See Romans 7:15-20, Jeremiah 17:9). Some people use that as a reason to stop trying to do right, but that is really just pride. When we realize "I keep doing wrong," it is an opportunity to realize our only chance to live lives pleasing to Him is in dependent trust (John 15:5). Conviction leads to humility; mixed with faith that *God is faithful*, we have victory (1 Cor. 10:13; 2 Cor. 2:14).
- D. When examining the issue of marital passivity or avoidance, evaluate three things:
  1. Does their behavior reflect a **specific sin** that is directly addressed in the Bible?  
Example: *Man or woman who gets drunk* (Prov. 20:1, 23:31; Eph. 5:18) or *Christian man fails to work to provide for his own* (1 Tim. 5:8) or *Christian man who does not train, admonish and manage his own children* (1 Sam. 2:29-33; 2 Sam 13:21; Eph. 6:4; 1 Tim. 3:4) or *Christian woman who is irresponsible caring for her home* (Pro. 31:10-31; Ti. 2:5).
  2. Does their behavior reflect a **disregard for others** or a lack of other-centeredness (love)?  
Example: *Christian spouse who avoids loving physical contact with their spouse* (1 Cor. 7:3-5) or *Christian spouse who occupies themselves with their own interests* (TV, Reading, Hobbies, Facebook, etc.) *to the neglect of household responsibilities, conversation and shared concerns with spouse* (Gen. 2:15; Phil. 2:3; 1 Timothy 3:4-5).
  3. Does their behavior reflect **self-protection**?  
Example: *Someone who refuses to forgive because they were badly hurt, they hold onto anger, and they are protecting themselves from more hurt* (Matt. 6:14-15, 18:23-35; Luke 17:3-4; 1 Cor. 5:15 and Galatians 2:20; Eph. 4:27) or *Someone who does not speak to their spouse about a difficult area because they are afraid the spouse will get angry*

(Ephesians 4:25; 1 Jn. 4:18). *Addictions are passive in that they self-medicate* (Prov. 18:1).

**VII. Core Sin Issues in Passivity** (i.e., *Again, I am not talking about “quiet personalities,” per se*)

A. Men

1. Retreat from ‘fill and subdue’ (Gen. 1:26-28) because of the challenges that presents.
2. Failure to protect - inherent part of sin in a man, because it is the opposite of what he was made for (Ruth 2:20 *go-el*; Psalm 127:1; Ezekiel 33:7, 34:1-10) - Genesis 2:15, 3:6-7.
3. Shifting blame onto his wife to avoid taking responsibility for sin – Genesis 3:10-12
4. Avoiding the risk of leadership to protect himself from experiencing failure. Look at Genesis 3:17-19 where the ground is cursed and he is guaranteed to have problems emerge that he has not directly caused, and they will make him feel failure.
5. Avoiding the hard work that life requires because it wears him out (Genesis 3:17).
6. Controlled by his wife (Genesis 3:16) or fearing criticism, he lets her take over.
7. Failing to instruct, discipline and admonish his kids (1 Sam. 2:29-33; 2 Sam 13:21; Eph. 6:4; 1 Tim. 3:4), because he neglects truth, because he fears the results or because of despair.
8. Pornography involvement is completely a work of passivity – a person uses images and other people where they have no interpersonal risk to feel alive and vibrant and sexual.

B. Women

1. Passivity in a woman comes up as a counseling issue less frequently than in a man.
2. It can reflect a woman protecting herself from someone’s anger or displeasure (often with the idol of being admired and cherished). In such a case, a woman will sometimes not apply herself diligently because she thinks that no matter what she does, she will still reap criticism. She holds back because she is not working as unto the Lord, but for approval.
3. Many times it shows up in someone who is indulging sins of the flesh (being comfortable, lazy and well-fed, and in avoiding the effort (Proverbs 31:13-27) that skillful life requires).
4. It is sometimes concomitant with a woman who struggles with depression. Depression robs us of energy, enjoyment and hope, and passivity can be a natural result. We discuss depression elsewhere, but suffice it to say that “appearing to do nothing” (passivity) when we are depressed is actually an active decision to not do things that probably need to be done. Since the depressed person usually sees little connection between their efforts and the results they want, they will often “disconnect” from the efforts that could benefit others but from which they feel no personal benefit.
5. It can be present in a woman who is seductive. By not working hard or on her character, she uses her sexuality or neediness to manipulate. It is passive in one way (a failure to develop character, skills and usefulness) and manipulatively controlling in another way.
6. It will show up in a woman who knows an area of growth (e.g., forgiveness or other-centered service) and then puts it off while she waits to feel ready for it.

C. Biblical interventions to passivity

1. Pointing out the willfulness and ineffectiveness of passivity (Proverbs 18:1)
2. Remembering whose we are (Jeremiah 18:1-6) and for whom we live (2 Cor. 15:5)
3. Calling people back from living for the favor of others (Col. 3:23-24)
4. Calling them to specific behavior steps of responsibility (Matthew 3:8; 28:20)



D. Additional Comments:

1. A man can help himself with his passivity if he were to go through Robert Lewis' course, **Authentic Masculinity** (part of the Men's Fraternity curriculum) with a friend and work to put on these traits of masculinity: *Resists Passivity, Accepts Responsibility, Leads Courageously and Waits for the Greater Reward.*
2. A man can also help himself with his passivity if he were to go through Proverbs for 90 days with a friend and see how many comments are made about these traits.  
A man could also help himself if he got a friend to hold him accountable to the opposite of each of these specific things. (Active responsibility; limiting complaining to one day, written and discussed; respectful disagreement and discussion – not sullen; coaching to speak about authority in respectful ways, even if you disagree; every encounter of envy, learning to go to God with confession and giving of thanks; something with his hardships and disappointments, but I don't know what; limiting electronic connection.)

VIII. Homework

- A. Read John Piper's article on "Marriage Lived For the Glory of God"
- B. If you are married, meet with your spouse this week and honestly but graciously discuss how you are doing with the roles under III C. (*For your purpose only – not shared here.*)

## Marriage Lived For the Glory of God

John Piper © Family Life Today 11/10/03

*From the "Building Strong Families in Your Church" conference in Dallas in 2003. Pastor John Piper had some opening remarks as keynote speaker. John Piper is the pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis.*

So my topic is "Marriage Lived For the Glory of God," and the key word, the operative, definitive word in that phrase is "for." Marriage Lived **For** the Glory of God, because that means that there is a certain order of priority here between marriage and the glory of God. The order is this – God is the most important reality, and marriage is less important – far less important – infinitely less important than God. Marriage exists to magnify God – the truth of God, the worth of God, the value of God, the beauty of God, the greatness of God. God does not exist to magnify marriage. Until that order is vivid in your mind and valued in your heart, marriage will not magnify the worth and the beauty and the truth and the greatness of God. It won't do it.

I take my topic to be the answer to the question – why marriage? And so let's answer that with "*for the glory of God.*" Which means that why marriage or the topic I have is a subset of a larger issue; namely, why anything? Why does anything exist?

The answer is the same for all of those from the Bible – they all exist for the glory of God.

*"Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised, and His greatness is unsearchable," Psalm 45:3. Isaiah 43:6 – "Bring my sons from afar, my daughters from the ends of the earth; everyone who is called by my name whom I created for my glory." It's really clear. Romans is a great book. Paul comes to the end of his greatest of all books – toward the end – and he climaxes, as you know, with "O the depth of the riches and the wisdom and the knowledge of God. His ways are unsearchable who has known the mind of the Lord, who has been His counselor, who has ever given a gift to Him, then he should be repaid, for from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be glory, amen."*

So everything is from God, everything is sustained by God, and everything is designed for God, or you can read it about Jesus in Colossians 1:16 – "By Him all things were created both in heaven and on earth. All things have been created through Him and for Him." It couldn't be any clearer – everything exists for Christ and woe unto you if you interpret the phrase "for Christ" to mean "for His improvement or benefit." It doesn't mean for His improvement or for His benefit when it says it is "for Christ." It means for His display – for the display and the magnification and the bringing toward reality in people's minds of how true and how great and how valuable He is.

When it says everything exists for Christ, it means everything exists to magnify the glory of Christ in the lives of people so that they can see Him for who He is to display His glory. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made through Him. And now all things are made for Him. This is the starting place for understanding marriage.

If we get this wrong, everything goes wrong. If we get this right, really right, in our heads and in our hearts, marriage will become what it was created to be – namely a display in the world of the truth and beauty and value and greatness of God. But if you get this wrong, it won't.

Most young people who come to marriage don't bring to their courtship a great vision of God. In the world there is almost no vision of God. He's not on the list to be invited to the wedding. He is simply and breathtakingly omitted – absent. In the church, the view of God for our young people is so small instead of huge and so marginal instead of central and so vague instead of clear and so impotent instead of all-determining and so uninspiring instead of ravishing that when they marry, the thought of living this marriage to the glory of this God is a thought without content.

So if their marriages are going to be lived to the glory of God, we must say something not primarily about marriage but about God. Our pulpits are not as filled with God and the particularities of His glory but far too many generalities so that the heads don't get filled with the glory of His eternity that makes the mind want to explode with the thought that He never had a beginning; or the glory of His knowledge that makes the Library of Congress look like a little matchbox and makes quantum physics seem like first-grade reader; or the glory of His wisdom that has never been or ever can be counseled by any man or any group of men; or the glory of His authority over heaven and earth and hell without which no man and no demon moves one inch; or the glory of His providence without which not one bird falls to the ground in any forest in the world or without which any hair on any head turns gray; or the glory of His Word, which upholds the universe and all the atoms and all the galaxies in it; or the glory of His power to walk on water and cleanse lepers and heal the lame and open the eyes of the blind and cause the deaf to hear and storms to be stilled and the dead to rise; or the glory of His purity never to sin or never to have one, two-second bad attitude or one evil thought; or the glory of His trustworthiness never to break His Word or to let one, single promise fall to the ground; or the glory of His justice to render all moral accounts in the universe settled either on the cross or in hell, there would be no outstanding injustices when all is said and done. People clearly to be redeemed or they will burn forever in hell, and there will be no injustice in the universe that has not been settled because of the glorious justice of God; or the glory of His patience to endure decade after decade after decade of John Piper's slow sanctification or the glory of His sovereign, servant-like, I say, slave-like obedience to embrace the most excruciating pain that has ever been designed by humankind; or the glory of His grace, which justifies the ungodly like me or the glory of His love that does for us while we are yet sinners.

Until we preach the particularities of His glory and put contours on our God instead of using broad, sweeping generalizations about His attributes but make Him look irresistibly, magnificently more attractive than anything in the world, nobody's marriage is going to be lived for the glory of God in our church because they won't know Him, they won't know Him. They'll use all the language, and they won't see Him, they won't be able to talk about Him to their children, they won't be able to talk about Him to their neighbors, they won't be able to talk about Him to spouses, because there will be no content to all those big words, and we haven't glorified Him in our preaching.

If we want marriage to glorify the truth and the greatness and the value and the beauty of God, we must teach less about marriage and more about God. God is not magnificently central in the lives of our people. He is not the sun – I wrote a letter to my oldest son one time. I wasn't quite sure where God was in the whole graduate studies pursuit that he had and the young wife that he had.

So I wrote him a long letter – a risk-taking pastor-like letter to a son in which I used the image – I said, "*Carston, I want to know that the glory of God is the sun in the solar system of your life so that all the planets are held in orbit by the glory of God, and no planet is starting to move into the center.*" And I unpacked that a little bit, sent it off, praying, "*O God, help him not to say, 'I've heard you preach for 22 years, I don't need anymore, thank you.'*" He called me four days later, and he said, "*I got your letter, and Shelly and I read it. Thank you. We needed it.*"

So I'm saying to you now – the marriages in your church have got to have a sun that holds things in orbit, and they can't let anything take the place of God. But for most of our people, I fear God is marginal. A hundred good things usurp His place, and marriages aren't going to be lived for the glory of God if that's the case. If that's peripheral. So knowing God and cherishing God and valuing the glory of God above all things including our spouse is the key to a marriage lived for the glory of God.

I like to say God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him. I think that's a key that unlocks a thousand doors in life. Now, I think being satisfied with all that God is for us in His glory and all that He is for us in Jesus, is the key or the source of the longsuffering without which husbands cannot love like Christ and wives cannot follow that love like the bride of Christ, the church. Ephesians 5:22-25 makes claim that husbands take their cues from Christ and lead and love and sacrifice like Christ did. And wives, you take your cues from the bride of Christ, the church, and support that leadership and honor that leadership and follow that leadership the way the church did. Those are costly, costly ways of loving for a wife and husband. And the only way to pay that price from a heart that is a desire factory is for those desires to be satisfied with a superior satisfaction in God, which is why His glory must be known by us, and why He is so glorified when we are satisfied in Him.

Now, those roles will not be sustained if the second level of glorifying God isn't happening; namely, God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him. If you try to do the roles for a motive other than satisfaction in God; if you are not being sustained by a superior satisfaction in God above satisfaction in sex, above satisfaction in spouse, above satisfaction in children, you might make it happen, and it won't be to God's glory. It will be to your moral prowess glory. But if you lean on God, if you get your strength from His beauty, His value, His greatness, it will be manifest that He is the one that you are satisfied in and where the strength is coming from to love like Jesus and love like the bride.

Well, what that means is that we need to take our cue from Paul in Philippians 3:8 – "I count all things as loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. I count marriage to be refuse, I count children to be refuse, I count my wife to be refuse, my husband to be refuse, sex to be refuse, because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. From that standpoint of a superior satisfaction in Jesus, you will have the wherewithal to return to the daily, weekly, monthly dying required by Christ-like and church-like love.

## Recommended Marriage Counseling Resources

Fellowship Bible Church

**Sacred Marriage** – Gary Thomas – Wonderful focus on God’s goal for our marriages to make us holy more than to make us happy. Readable, biblical, practical.

**This Momentary Marriage** – John Piper — Short but impactful treatise on God’s plan for marriage.

**What Did You Expect?** – Paul David Tripp – Encourages our growth in Christ as a response to the challenges every marriage presents. Enjoyable, one of the best.

**Marriage Builder** – Dr. Larry Crabb – 35 year old classic book focusing on how we get our needs met in the Lord rather than in our spouse so that we can minister to them. Contains exceptionally good material on resolving anger. Three essential building blocks for marriage (Grace, Commitment and Acceptance) are outlined with practical application exercises.

**“When Marriage and Mercy Collide”** – Brad Bigney – Great 8-part sermon series on marriage. Good for reminding and strengthening good marriages, and insightful for troubled marriages. [www.graceky.org](http://www.graceky.org)

**Marital Intimacy: Rejoicing in What God Created** – Rob Green, Faith Resources, [www.frlafayette.org](http://www.frlafayette.org), 2009 – A solid biblical resource for counselees to understand God’s plan for marital intimacy, obstacles that couples often face and how to begin addressing them. The booklet includes optional homework assignments.

**Forgiveness Series** – Four messages – A four part sermon series focusing on enjoying the forgiveness we have received in Christ and understanding more fully how to pass it on to others. Addresses hard-to-forgive situations, and the impact in our spiritual lives when we forgive and when we don’t. John Morrison / CD Set – FBC December 2013