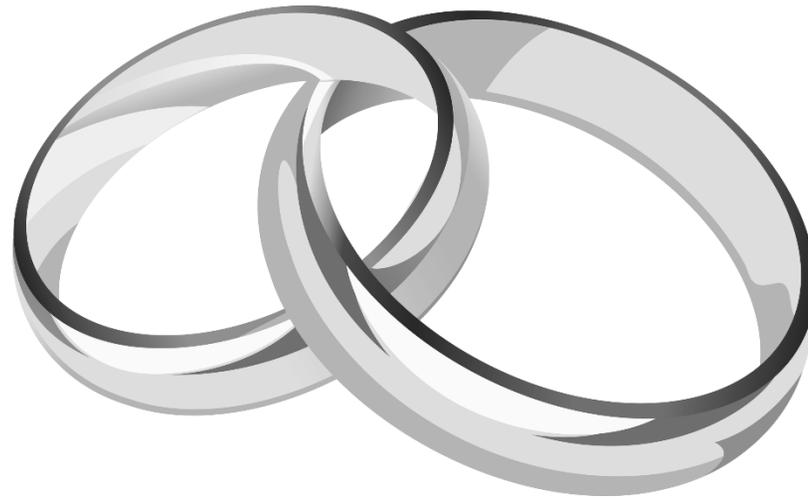


Name: _____



Take a Vow



CALVARY BAPTIST CHURCH
2022

Introduction to the series: *Take A Vow*

Wedding vows are more than a declaration of love; they are a part of a covenant that holds the keys to a strong, lasting marriage. Whether you hope to get married someday or you've already tied the knot, discover what *Take A Vow* can mean for the future of your relationship.

This four-week series walks us through four meaningful vows that will help us build stronger marriages and godly relationships: the vows of priority, pursuit, partnership, and purity. It's also a great opportunity to gather weekly with two to three other couples (and those singles seeking a future spouse) in a small group using the Group Time studies to further explore these vows.

Introduction To The 4G Guide

GATHER – GOD – GROUP – GIVE

It's important that we *GATHER* each week as a church family. Still, God wants us to take what He's teaching and apply it to our daily lives. This is the heart of the 4G Guides. These guides are written to encourage you in your personal *GOD TIME* and in your small *GROUPS*. They are designed to help you understand what God is teaching and apply it to your life. This understanding through application enables you to take what you are learning and *GIVE* it to others.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture references are from the *Christian Standard Bible* (CSB Text Edition: 2020).



USING THE 4G GUIDE

Each week is divided into four sections:



Gear Up

Each week starts with the Gear Up section. This section introduces the weekly topic and expounds on Scripture. Also provided are some practical steps to putting the subject matter into practice.



God Time

Personal time with God is vital to the Christian walk. Five daily devotionals are provided for each week's topic. This is your one-on-one time in a guided devotional format. At the conclusion, we encourage you to pray, seeking direction for the day and the rest of the week.



Group Time

We learn from one another! In small groups we meet to dig deeper into the weekly material. This booklet contains lesson outlines for discipleship discussion. For more information on available groups and forming a group, go to our Groups webpage:

cbcfamily.net/groups.



Family Group Time

Family worship glorifies God. Each week we have simple devotionals just for Families. Plan ahead though, as many of these lessons include fun experiments or video shorts to discuss.



Gear Up: Priority

Fifty percent of marriages don't make it. Even Christian marriages aren't exempt from ending in divorce. That is sobering news. But the more prepared people are for marriage, the better. Time spent safeguarding and strengthening our marriages is well spent. Establishing a solid framework for marriage health is critical for lasting "until death do us part."

In this series, we will look at four vows that will help do just that.

1. The Vow of Priority
2. The Vow of Pursuit
3. The Vow of Partnership
4. The Vow of Purity

Vow #1: God Will Be My First Priority

A common idea today is that people just can't be happy until they meet "the one." But Christians have already found the One in whom they can be content and fulfilled: God. Yes, God should be our first priority. Sure, others deserve time and attention, but they should always come in second to God.

Read Matthew 22:37

[Jesus] said to him, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind."

Whether we are married or not, we should all vow to put God first. To do otherwise is to make an idol of whatever we put above Him. When we put God first, He prepares us for loving others well.

Look at Genesis 2:24.

This is why a man leaves his father and mother and bonds with his wife, and they become one flesh.

When two people marry, they bond together. However, if we look to our spouse to fulfill us, we put stress and expectations on that person, making them into our idol. And if they disappoint us? We demonize them, beginning to zero in on every little flaw. We should *never* look to our spouse to fulfill us in a way that only God can. That is unfair! When God is in first place, we seek fulfillment from Him.

Protect the Priorities

Once we get our first and second priorities right, then we must protect those priorities. In order to do this, we must get practical. We've got to answer questions like: How are we putting God first? How are we serving God together? Are we loving our kids by investing in our marriage? and so on.

Look at Ephesians 5:23 and 25 (ESV)

²³For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. [...] ²⁵Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her...

Read Proverbs 31:11-12

¹¹The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will not lack anything good. ¹²She rewards him with good, not evil, all the days of her life.

We must protect the priorities and model a God honoring marriage to our children (and others). Yes, it takes effort, and both marriage partners have work to do. Husbands, you are called by God to protect, lead, and love your wife. Wives, you are called to nurture and do good to your husband, all the days of your life. Spend time praying, talking, serving, laughing, and worshiping together. Take a Vow today: get your priorities right and then work hard to protect them!

God Time Day 1: Make God Your "One"



Marriage is part of God’s plan. Yet, even among Christians, marriages often struggle, fail to thrive, or end in divorce. Why? Many times, it’s because even the most well-meaning Believers are spiritually ill-equipped for living as husband and wife. But there is hope!

It begins, of course, with God. Putting God *first* is the first step toward creating a great marriage.



Read Matthew 22:37.
[Jesus] said to him, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind."



Circle each occurrence of the word "all."

How does this indicate priority?

Have you made God your number one—your *first* priority?



Think of one thing you could stop or start doing to make God your number one.

God Time Day 2: Others Are Your "Two"



Read Matthew 22:39b.
Love your neighbor as yourself.

Jesus is speaking in the verse above. Elsewhere in the Bible, He explains that our "neighbor" is *anyone* we can show God’s love to. If you are married, this includes your spouse. This seems like a no-brainer, but sometimes we give our best "out there" and have nothing left to give once we cross our own threshold.



If you are married, what do you need to stop or start doing to make your spouse your second-after-God priority?

If you are not married, what do you need to stop or start doing to make others your second-after-God priority?

God Time Day 3: Leave Behind the Temptation to Idolize or Demonize



When God initiated the first marriage (creating Eve to be Adam’s wife and companion), He showed us the intentionality of their union.



Read Genesis 2:24.
This is why a man leaves his father and mother and bonds with his wife, and they become one flesh.



Circle the word "leaves" and underline the word "bonds."

In this verse, we see the tension of opposites. The man "leaves" his parents, and he "bonds" with his wife. One relationship loosens while the other strengthens. This is a beautiful and natural transition.

If we bond with our spouse in such a way that we look to them to be our "number one" (see Day 1), we create a problem. We "idolize" them, expecting them to fill a role they will never be able to fill.

Exodus 20:3, *You must not have any other god but me.* (NLT)

When we idolize others and they fail, which they will, there is the temptation then to "demonize" them. We begin noticing every flaw, painting them as worse than they really are.



Give an honest evaluation of the way you view your spouse or even a close friend. Are you idolizing them, expecting them to fill roles that only God can, or demonizing them because they fell short of a godly standard? Be specific.

(Undo that mindset with prayer and attention.)

Now, what flaws do you see in yourself?

Remember to extend the grace towards others (especially a spouse) that you want them to extend to you.

God Time Day 4: Leave Behind the Things That Interfere



Read Jesus' words in Matthew 7:12.
Therefore, whatever you want others to do for you, do also the same for them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.



When it comes to relationships, we often want to be treated better than we are willing to treat others. In the verse above, how does Jesus tell us to treat others?

Sometimes, we don't invest fully into our marriage or other close relationships because we let things, habits, feelings, thoughts, or behaviors get in the way. Sadly, it's easy to do. Obvious things like sin can hurt and destroy relationships, but sometimes the things that we allow to hurt our marriages aren't so obvious. They are actually "good things." Yes, even good things can interfere in our relationships if we let those things take priority over our spouse.



List *good* things you have let get in the way of having 100% healthy relationships. (E.g., internet, phone usage, hobbies, work/success, money, other relationships, etc.)

If you are married, what good things have you let get in the way of your relationship with your spouse?

If you are unmarried, what good things do *you* let get in the way of the relationships that mean the most to you?



What can you do to change this for the better? List three realistic and achievable steps you can take. (Remember, sometimes the good thing just needs to be put in its proper place, other times, it needs to be limited or eliminated.)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

God Time Day 5: Protect and Nurture Your Priorities



Any good marriage (or godly relationship) takes work. After taking the vow of commitment, a married couple must work hard to protect and nurture what God has joined together.

Underline anything that stands out to you in these verses:



- John 15:13 *No one has greater love than this: to lay down his life for his friends.*
- Ephesians 5:23 *For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.* (ESV)
- Proverbs 31:11-12 ¹¹*The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will not lack anything good.* ¹²*She rewards him with good, not evil, all the days of her life.*

Christians love one another by living sacrificially. God has set husbands as the head. As such, he lives to protect, lead, and love his wife. A wife is to nurture and do good to her husband. A couple must actively work to invest in their relationship—both protecting and nurturing their marriage.



If you are married, work with your spouse, to determine how you can protect and nurture your marriage in these areas:

1. Physically: _____
2. Spiritually: _____
3. Emotionally: _____



If you are unmarried, how can you stand in support of both God's definition of marriage and the Christian marriages that you know? (E.g., pray for them, lend wisdom, help in times of need, etc.)

Take a vow of priority on page 23.



Group Time

◀◀◀ **LOOK BACK:**

1. Each participant shares one praise and one prayer request. (Commit these to prayer for the week.)

2. ENCOURAGEMENT 1-on-1 (See last page for directions)

Y / N	Y / N	_____
_____	_____	

3. Starting a new series.

What do you hope to gain from this series?

Question: What are some “different” marriage traditions you’ve seen and/or experienced? Was it neat, interesting, weird?

Recap: You might have heard it said that 50% of all marriages end in divorce, even the Christian ones. (Let’s face it, 100% of marriages end in divorce or death, right?) It begs the question: Is a great marriage possible? The answer is, “Of course.” But it takes work; even the bad ones can last “until death do us part.”

Our first vow in this series is a vow of priority. When we make God our first priority, our spouses our second priority, and put everything else – even the really good and important stuff – comes after, only then have we set the framework for a great marriage. When we get the order of priorities mixed up, we are asking people to be something they were never intended to be nor capable of being.

LOOK IN: Discussion

- Prioritizing God first is an easy concept we all can hopefully agree on. How hard is it to keep in practice?
- Read Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:4-6, and Ephesians 5:25. How can we infer that the wife should be the husband’s highest priority after God – before family, job, status, etc.?

▶▶▶ **LOOK FORWARD: Application**

Point: *Get your priorities straight: God is first, your spouse* is second. Everything else is after these two.*

* If you are single, “future spouse” or other close relationships.

Take A Vow Of Priority

Write this vow down on a card and keep it where you will see it – in your Bible, on your bathroom mirror, taped to the coffee maker, whatever will work for you.

I promise God will be my FIRST priority and my spouse will be my SECOND, above all else.

On a scale of 1-10, how well are you making God your 1st priority?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

What can you practically do to improve? What can you stop or start?

What can you do to protect this FIRST priority?

On a scale of 1-10, how well are you making your spouse the next priority above all else?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

What can you practically do to improve? What can you stop or start?

What can you do to protect this SECOND priority?



Family Time

**Main Idea:
Priorities**



Key Verse: Deuteronomy 6:4-9

⁴Listen, Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. ⁶These words that I am giving you today are to be in your heart. ⁷Repeat them to your children. Talk about them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them be a symbol on your forehead. ⁹Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your city gates.



Set it Up:

Wherever you live, whatever the makeup of your family, you can make your spiritual life a part of your everyday life. It is important to make sure that our spiritual life is a priority in our family.



Ask:

What are some ways we can make our spiritual life more a part of our everyday life?

Here are additional ideas you might add to your list:

1. Read the Bible together.
2. Say a blessing over someone at the table before dinner. Take turns on who prays and who it is for each night.
3. Play uplifting music first thing in the morning.
4. Say the Lord’s Prayer together.
5. Involve children in useful service. They can help deliver a meal to a family with a new baby, clean the church building, or do kind things for an elderly neighbor. Even a toddler can take great joy in carrying a newspaper to a neighbor’s doorstep!
6. Attend church as a family.
7. In the evening, talk with your children about the choices they made to obey the Lord that day.
8. Encourage your children to talk to the Lord. Remind them that the Lord always knows what is going on with us.
9. Weekly, choose a verse from the Bible for the family to learn.



As a family, let’s choose two of these ideas today to create a new rhythm for prioritizing our spiritual life.



After choosing your two ideas, spend some time in prayer for each other.



Gear Up: Pursuit

We Pursue What We Don't Have

The grass is always greener on the other side. It's an old saying and, of course, it's not always true, but we often feel like it is. Usually we feel that way when we are dissatisfied. We like to pursue what we don't have. When it comes to marriage, if we are dissatisfied, it means we need to get to work, pursuing our spouse and a great relationship with them.

Vow #2: I Promise to Always Pursue My Two

Last week, we talked about how God must be our number one priority. Our spouse comes second. Christians know we should pursue a relationship with God. Likewise, we must pursue a healthy relationship with our spouse.

Look at Genesis 2:24.

This is why a man leaves his father and mother and bonds with his wife, and they become one flesh.

The Hebrew word for “*bonds*” in that verse means to follow close, join fast, and pursue hard after. We tend to appreciate what we've pursued so intentionally, don't we?

We can look to the story of Jacob and Rachel to see an example of this. Jacob loved Rachel and worked seven years to gain her hand in marriage but was tricked into marrying her older sister Leah. After the marriage, he was promised to Rachel if he worked *another* seven years.

Genesis 29:27 says,

Complete the week of [Leah], and we will give you the other [sister, Rachel] in return for serving me another seven years.

What's the point? That's a lot of pursuing! Rachel was worth the effort, and so he invested. We should do the same. But how?

When You Think Something Good, Say It

Hebrews 3:13 tells us to “encourage one another daily...” This is great advice for anyone, but especially within the context of marriage! If you think of something good, say it. Words matter. Words of affection are often very important for women, and words of affirmation are for men.

When You Think of Something Special, Do It

Read James 4:17

If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them.

We often do things for others, but sometimes we don't do things for our spouse. Spouses, do special things—come home early, grab takeout for the park, go on a date. Remember the little things, too—bathe the kids or wash the dishes. Just do something that shows love.

When You Want Something Different, Be It

It's so easy to look at our spouse and complain about what they aren't, especially if we are wanting something different, something better, in our marriage. Sometimes, we start thinking in terms of “if only.” As in, “if only my spouse would *do* this or *be* that.” This is unhealthy! Instead, we should look at ourselves and become what God wants us to become. Then we will be the change we hope to see.

Marriage isn't about what we are getting, it is about what we are giving. What are you giving your spouse today? Pursue your two!

God Time Day 1: Pursue My Two



We begin this week in our series by looking at the second vow: The Vow of Pursuit.



Read Genesis 2:24.
This is why a man leaves his father and mother and bonds with his wife, and they become one flesh.

Underline the word “*bonds*.”

In the original Hebrew, the word for “bond” is *dabaq*, which means to cling or to catch by pursuit. We pursue those things that we desire, and it is the pursuit that helps us appreciate those desires once we have achieved them. The effort we invest demonstrates how much we value what we are pursuing.

What is one good thing you have pursued in your life that took significant effort?



Pray and give thanks to God for this pursuit.

God Time Day 2: An Example of Pursuit



As we continue to explore what it means to take a Vow of Pursuit, let’s take a moment to look at a biblical example. In the story of Jacob and Rachel, Jacob arranged to marry Rachel by serving her father for seven years. After those seven years, Rachel’s father tricked Jacob into marrying Rachel’s older sister, Leah, instead.



Read Genesis 29:27.
Complete this week of wedding celebration, and we will also give you this younger one in return for working yet another seven years for me.

Jacob ended up working an additional seven years to earn Rachel’s hand in marriage. Jacob continued to pursue Rachel through it all because of his love for her.



When pursuing anything in life, adversity is bound to come. Pray for God to give you endurance and courage to pursue through the adversity.

God Time Day 3: Be The Difference



Pursuit requires moving beyond simple intentions and taking practical action. You can intend to pursue a goal but if you take no action towards it, you are actually only wanting or wishing for something rather than pursuing.

The first step in pursuing a change in a situation or person, especially in pursuing your spouse, is to be the difference you want to see. In other words, focus on change in your own life, not on trying to change your spouse.



Read Matthew 7:3-4.
³*Why do you look at the splinter in your brother’s eye but don’t notice the beam of wood in your own eye?* ⁴*Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the splinter out of your eye,’ and look, there’s a beam of wood in your own eye?*

Underline the word “*splinter*” in each of these verses.



Now, circle the word “*beam*” in each of these verses.

It is easy for people to see the shortcomings and faults in others, and even easier to be critical and hurtful out of a sense of self-righteousness. After all, you are trying to help, right?

Criticism and negativity do not repair relationships. They both come from a place of control. Relationships cannot thrive in an environment of control and manipulation. When we try to force change on someone it puts us in the place of God, with an authority we were not intended to carry (see Week 1, Day 1).

But we do have the ability to institute change in our own lives. And a strange thing about change is that it has a way of inspiring change in others, not in a manipulative way, but as a matter of relationship and choice.



Write down two personal changes God is calling you to make in your life and pray for God to help you take steps toward those changes today.



1. _____
2. _____

God Time Day 4: Think and Say

 As discussed on Day 3, if we want to live in passionate pursuit of our “two” (our spouse), it begins by making changes in our own lives. One of the easiest and potentially most powerful changes we can make is in how we speak.

 Read Proverbs 11:9 & 12.
⁹*With his mouth the ungodly destroys his neighbor, but through knowledge the righteous are rescued.*
¹²*Whoever shows contempt for his neighbor lacks sense, but a person with understanding keeps silent.*

Throughout Scripture, there are plenty of passages that address the destructive power of our words. Yet, despite that truth, we tend to be careless with our words, especially with our family.

Underline the words “*knowledge*” and “*understanding*” in the verses above.

Showing contempt, being negative, and harshly criticizing people is all too easy. Unfortunately, the painful, negative experiences tend to be the ones people remember and dwell on. But if we make positive words our normal language, hearts can be softened, and healing can occur.

 Read Hebrews 3:13.
But encourage each other daily, while it is still called today, so that none of you is hardened by sin’s deception.

Think about the last time you could have said something encouraging but didn’t. What’s your biggest excuse that prevents you from encouraging those closest to you?

 Identify two areas you know that your spouse or a close friend could use some encouraging, supportive words.

1. _____
2. _____

 Pray for God’s encouragement in your life to help you speak encouragement into those two areas of their life.

God Time Day 5: Think and Do

 We have explored how pursuing our spouse begins with first changing ourselves. Then we looked at how we must speak uplifting and encouraging words into their life. Finally, we look at yet another practical step, which is to act. In other words, if you think of something kind or special, do it.

 Read Proverbs 11:17.
A kind man benefits himself, but a cruel person brings ruin on himself.

 Now read Acts 20:35.
In every way I’ve shown you that it is necessary to help the weak by laboring like this and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, because he said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’

Doing something kind to bless others is not something to be done in a manipulative way to get something in return. But just as speaking kind words can lead to an improved relationship, acts of kindness have the potential to make a huge impact on any relationship, especially a marriage.

It’s easy to get caught up with life, busy with all the obligations we carry, and often the marriage relationship ends up suffering the most. Pursuing our spouse means making our relationship a priority and taking the time and effort in that pursuit doesn’t have to be elaborate or expensive – little things can make a big difference.

 Write down three simple acts of kindness you could bless your spouse with. (Guys, flowers should be on the list.)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Choose one of them to do this week... and do it! Next week, do two.

 Make it a weekly habit to come up with something nice to do for your spouse... and do it!

Take a vow of pursuit on page 23.

Group Time

◀◀◀ **LOOK BACK:**



1. Each participant shares one praise and one prayer request. (Commit these to prayer for the coming week.)

2. ENCOURAGEMENT 1-on-1 (See last page for directions)

Y / N	Y / N	_____
_____	_____	

3. **Point:** Get your priorities straight: God is first, your spouse* is second. Everything else is after these two. (* If you are single, "future spouse" or other close relationships.)

What are you going to stop or start doing?

▶▶▶ **Look Up:**

Question: What does the following statement mean? "Men are from Mars and women are from Venus."

Recap: Last week we talked about protecting our two priorities. This week we are looking at the pursuit of priority "two," our spouse. To gain something we don't have requires pursuit. Be it a trophy, a contract, or a lifestyle, it takes intentionality to attain these. But unlike a trophy, a great marriage is more like the pursuit of a dynasty – it takes continual work, but it's worth it! Intentions are good, but actions speak volumes. To close the gap between the two here are three practical practices:

1. When you think of something good to say, say it.
2. When you think of something special to do, do it.
3. When you want something different, be it yourself.

LOOK IN: Discussion

- Share a personal experience of receiving a seemingly small word of encouragement that made a big impact on your life.
- What has it meant for you to be on the receiving end of an unprovoked, yet intentional, act of kindness? (Are the responses different for men verses women?)

WEEK 2: PURSUIT

▶▶▶ **LOOK FORWARD: Application**

Point: Pursuit requires intentionality.

Take A Vow Of Pursuit

Write this vow down on another card and keep it with the first card where you will see it – in your Bible, on your bathroom mirror, taped to the coffee maker, whatever will work for you.

I promise I will always PURSUE my TWO.

- List five things you appreciate about your spouse:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Tell your spouse these things, one for each weekday this next week (#1 on Monday, #2 on Tuesday, etc.).

- List three things you can do to show you appreciate your spouse:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Spread them out over this next week and DO them.

At the end of the week, have you noticed anything different?

How have these two exercises changed you?



Family Time

Main Idea: Pursuit



Key Verse: Hebrews 3:12-14

¹²Watch out, brothers and sisters, so that there won't be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. ¹³But encourage each other daily, while it is still called today, so that none of you is hardened by sin's deception. ¹⁴For we have become participants in Christ if we hold firmly until the end the reality that we had at the start.



Ask:

If you were to take brown sugar and place it in a container with no lid, what would happen to the brown sugar after a couple days? *(It would turn hard.)*

Now if you took that same hard brown sugar and placed a piece of bread in the container and put a lid on it, what would happen to the brown sugar after a couple of days? *(It would become soft again.)*

What would happen to the bread? *(It would become crusty.)*



Read

Read Hebrews 3:7-14.



Discuss:

What does it mean to have a hard heart? *(When we say that someone has a hard heart, it means they don't display loving feelings.)*

What does it mean to have a hard heart against God? *(When we sin against God, disobeying His Word, our hearts get hard. We no longer show God our love, and we don't believe in His love. We shut ourselves off from Him by not believing and turning away from Him.)*

How did the bread help the hard brown sugar in the container? *(It helped the sugar stay soft.)*

How can we keep our hearts from getting hard? *(Verse 14 says we should hold firm to God with confidence.)*

How can we help others not have a hard heart? *(We can be loving towards them and encourage them to rely on God.)*

The bread helped the sugar stay soft. Verse 7 tells us who will help us keep our hearts from getting hard. Who is it? *(The Holy Spirit)*



Pray:

Pray as a family that God will help our family pursue God and not to have a hard heart towards God.



Gear Up: Partnership

God created us all to be very different. In marriage, sometimes we feel like we have married our exact opposite. This is good because where we are weak, our spouse may be strong. It also shows us that the balance we each bring is necessary to the relationship. God uses our differences to make us strong.

Vow #3: Our Marriage Will Be About “We” Not “Me”

Look at Genesis 2:24.

This is why a man leaves his father and mother and bonds with his wife, and they become one flesh.

Together, man and woman become one flesh. The Hebrew word for this is *echad*, meaning united, completely joined as one.

Jesus tells us more in Matthew 19:5-6

⁵ *‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’* ⁶*So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.*

God brought two together as one. No one should separate that. While yes, divorce can and does happen, it is God’s will that marriage be lasting and built on His Word. (If you have experienced divorce, remember, God can heal your past and change your future!)

Marriage is a Covenant, Not a Contract

A contract is based on mutual distrust. It looks like this: I don’t know you, not trust you to live up to your word. So, sign here so I can make sure you live up to this deal.

A covenant is based on commitment. It looks more like this: We are both 100% involved in this commitment with every part of our being. We intend to be faithful.

The word covenant means *“cutting, a binding agreement.”* These agreements were sealed with the shedding of blood. (Since Jesus shed His blood for us, we are part of the New Covenant.) Marriage is considered a covenant— that’s how special and important the marriage agreement is! It means that both people are *all in*— not as 50/50, but as 100/100.

Godly Leadership and Mutual Submission

Look what God’s Word says in Ephesians 5:1-2 and 21

1Therefore, be imitators of God, as dearly loved children, 2and walk in love, as Christ also loved us and gave himself for us, a sacrificial and fragrant offering to God. [...] 21submitting to one another in the fear of Christ.

The word submit makes many people uncomfortable. People get the wrong idea of submission and sometimes abuse the verses that talk about it (like Ephesians 5:22, where it says that wives should submit to their husbands). Yet God tells all Christians to submit to one another. Yes, wives submit to their husband’s leadership—this is an orderly system to prevent chaos in the home—but all Christians need to listen to and yield to one another, serving, giving, and putting the other first. When this is practiced in a marriage, it creates health.

When both spouses submit and imitate God, walking in love like Christ, we make marriage about “we” and not “me.” We show that marriage is an important partnership of equally valuable partners.

Remember: Marriage is about “we.” It is measured by commitment, not feelings. Take a Vow today to invest in your commitment!

Group Time

◀◀◀ **LOOK BACK:**



3. Each participant shares one praise and one prayer request. (Commit these to prayer for the coming week.)

4. ENCOURAGEMENT 1-on-1 (See last page for directions)

Y / N	Y / N	_____
_____	_____	

4. **Point:** Pursuit requires intentionality.

What changed

Look Up:

Question: What is the difference between the world’s definition of love and God’s definition of love?

Recap: Marriage has been a God-thing since the beginning of time. In fact, Chapter 2 of the Book (Genesis 2:24) tells us it’s designed to be a team effort. Jesus would later quote this verse (Matthew 19:4-6) and remind us that God has a purpose for this team.

The point is, a marriage is a covenant, not a contract. A contract is based on mutual distrust – I’ll do this IF you’ll do that. A covenant is based on mutual commitment – I’m all-in no matter what.

But keeping that commitment isn’t always easy. Like any team, if everyone on the team isn’t committed to the purpose and to their teammates, it’s easy to develop distrust and the team falls apart.

The Bible gives us the answers for both purpose and process. The purpose is doing God’s will, the process is love and respect, and these are each characterized by one difficult word: submission – submission to God and submission to one another.

LOOK IN: Discussion

- Define “love.” Is it a feeling? An Action?
- Read Ephesians 5:22-33. (Notice Genesis 2:24 is referenced again.) Put these verses in your own words.

▶▶▶ **LOOK FORWARD: Application**

Point: Marriage is a covenant based on mutual commitment.

Take A Vow Of Partnership

Sit down with your spouse and take this vow with each other.

I promise our marriage will be about WE and not about me.

Wives, share with your husband three things he can do to express love for you in a godly way.

(Husbands, write them down)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Husbands, share with your wife one thing she can do to help you be a godly leader in your family.

(Wives, write it down)

Pray for one another to have the strength and endurance to make these requests a reality.

Each evening this week, take 10 minutes together and pray for each other and your family. Review the items written down above. Make a positive progress note for each day.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

God Time Day 1: Partnership Strengthens and Sanctifies



Read Genesis 2:18a.
It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper corresponding to him.

From the beginning, God’s design for marriage has always been to create a partnership – though that word is not strong enough.

Read Genesis 2:24b.
...they become one flesh.

The original language for the word “one” here is the same word used for “one” in Deuteronomy 6:4:

Listen, Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.

Yes! Marriage reflects God. Both our “one” and our “two” (see Week 1) are about “WE, not me.” It’s a partnership that requires sacrifice.



How would it feel to be in a relationship where you had absolute confidence that the other person always had your best interest at heart? What will you do to be that person?

God Time Day 2: We, Not Me



In case it wasn’t clear from Genesis, let’s see what Jesus had to say about God’s purpose in marriage.



Read Matthew 19:4-6.
“Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that he who created them in the beginning made them male and female, ⁵and he also said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? ⁶So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate.”



Circle all words which talk about marriage as a joining.

Underline who joins a man and woman in marriage.



Describe what you think it means to be “joined together.”

God Time Day 3: Marriage: Covenant, Not Contract



In a world which puts a price tag on everything, it would be easy to treat marriage like a mere business partnership with a contract. The biblical view of marriage is much more – it is a sacred covenant.



Consider the differences between a contract and a covenant:

Contract	Covenant
An Agreement	A Pledge
Based on lack of trust	Based on trust
Must define valid period	Assumes permanence
Defines each party’s responsibilities	Full commitment for both
Limits liability of breach	Affirms consequences if broken



A covenant is not based upon what one does because of what the other has done, but simply on what one pledges to do, no matter what. How is a relationship more secure when it is not dependent on what the other partner does?

How does this understanding of covenant affect your idea of what marriage means?



List three things that you commit to do in your relationship that have no bearing on what the other does:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

God Time Day 4: Godly Leadership and Mutual Submission



So far this week, we've looked at marriage as a union or partnership which combines a man and a woman into "one flesh." This union can only succeed when each partner is fully committed to the other (unselfishly) and pursues what is good for the union rather than themselves. The nature of this is a covenant rather than a contract. Based on this view of marriage, it should come as no surprise that mutual submission (an orderliness of roles, not individual value) is an essential part of the relationship.



Read Ephesians 5:1-2, 15, 21-25.
¹Therefore, be imitators of God, as dearly loved children, ²and walk in love, as Christ also loved us and gave himself for us, a sacrificial and fragrant offering to God.

¹⁵Pay careful attention, then, to how you walk—not as unwise people but as wise.

²¹submitting to one another in the fear of Christ. ²²Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord, ²³because the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church. He is the Savior of the body. ²⁴Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives are to submit to their husbands in everything. ²⁵Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her.

In Verse 2, who is to walk in love? (Hint: look in the mirror)

In Verse 21, who is to submit to another? (Hint: ditto)



Summarize what submission looks like for wives. (vv.22-24)

Summarize what submission looks like for husbands. (v.25)



Remember, the key to this is in Verses 1-2. If we fail to imitate God and His sacrifice for us, we distort what "submitting to one another in the fear of Christ" really means.

God Time Day 5: Choosing to Love



This week's vow is, "Marriage is about we, not me." But this idea is exactly opposite of what our world says about relationships. Consider some common sayings:

- I'm just not in love with them anymore.
- Being with them doesn't do anything for me anymore.
- We're just not growing together.
- I don't need that kind of negativity in my life.
- It is just time for me to move on with my life.

All these phrases reveal a false understanding of love. Godly love is not based on temporary feelings, but on selfless commitment. Why else would God have sent Jesus to die on a cross? (John 3:16)

Godly love is a way of acting toward someone rather than how we feel about them.



Read 1 John 4:7-11.
⁷Dear friends, let us love one another, because love is from God, and everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸The one who does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his one and only Son into the world so that we might live through him. ¹⁰Love consists in this: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹Dear friends, if God loved us in this way, we also must love one another.



Write out a plan for acting in love towards your spouse or those close to you even when you don't feel like it.

Take a vow of partnership on page 23.



Family Time

Main Idea:
Partnership

Why is it more important for us to work together as a family than to work against each other?



Key Verse: Ephesians 5:21

Submitting to one another in the fear of Christ.

When we partner together as a family, we get to show others that in our family each one of us thinks that the others are important. Let's end with a simple prayer together.



Set it Up:

Describe yourself as a toy.

(I am like a _____ because I _____.)

Do you think we work well as a family? Do we look at the needs of others in our family before our own?



Prayer:

God, you gave us ears as well as a mouth. Help us to listen. You gave us eyes as well as a brain. Help us to see and to think. Help us learn not to shut others out because we disagree with them. Amen



Talk it Out:

Why is it hard to see things from someone else's point of view? Why do we tend to make judgements about each other instead of taking the time to understand each other?

What would it take for us to partner with each other and not always get our side heard on an issue?



Gear Up: Purity

Almost no one plans to ruin their marriage with sin. But sadly, it happens all the time. It is difficult to build a life of righteousness on a foundation of sin. (We gain righteousness through Christ alone.)

Look at Genesis 2:25

Both the man and his wife were naked, yet felt no shame.

In the beginning, Adam and Eve felt no shame at their nakedness. But that didn't last. Once the enemy came, tempted them to eat the fruit, and they disobeyed, sin entered the world. The Bible then describes their fear and shame. (See Genesis 3:7-10)

Secrecy is the Enemy of Intimacy

Fear and shame still exist in many marriages. Sometimes, a spouse has struggles, thoughts, painful memories, and are afraid of their spouse's reaction. They believe their spouse won't like them, trust them, love them, and so on, so they keep their secrets. Secrecy is not healthy; it is the enemy of true intimacy.

Vow #4: I Promise to Confide in You & Not Hide From You

Read Ephesians 5:8-10

⁸For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light ⁹for the fruit of the light consists of all goodness, righteousness, and truth — ¹⁰testing what is pleasing to the Lord.

Look what Ephesians 5:3 says about immorality:

But sexual immorality and any impurity or greed should not even be heard of among you, as is proper for saints.

Impurity is poison. Just as we would stay clear from poison, we must run from impurity. It destroys those who consume it. There shouldn't even be a hint of it in our lives. Proverbs 5:8 says to *"keep to a path far from [the adulteress], do not go near the door of her house."* In other words, run away from impurity!

How Can We Stay Pure in an Impure World?

Is it even possible to stay pure in an impure world? God says yes.

Read Psalm 119:9-11

⁹How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping your word. ¹⁰I have sought you with all my heart; don't let me wander from your commands. ¹¹I have treasured your word in my heart so that I may not sin against you.

If we live according to God's Word, we can stay pure. God's Word is powerful and helps us fight temptation. It transforms our hearts and minds and helps us become Christlike. When we fill our minds with God and His Word, there is less room for impurity.

Reveal Instead of Conceal

Proverbs 28:13 says,

The one who conceals his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them will find mercy.

When we confess and renounce (abandon) our sins we find mercy. The Lord forgives and heals, and we can move forward. It is important that we have open and honest hearts with Him. We can't hide anything from God anyway. But for our own good, He wants us to confess and reveal our sin— moving from darkness into light. This is good for our relationship with Him and in our marriages. Confide in your spouse; don't hide! Commit to purity; take a Vow and watch God work.

God Time Day 1: The First Marriage



In the beginning, God made everything good. Adam and Eve lived without fear and without shame, with no need to hide or be embarrassed about anything. Nothing marred their union or came between them. But once sin entered the picture, everything changed.



Grab your Bible and read Genesis 3:1-12.

Adam and Eve’s immediate response was to cover up and hide. They knew they had done wrong. Besides that, Adam immediately tried to pass the blame from himself on to God (“the woman you gave me” v 12).

For those of us who follow God, our marriages should look more like Adam and Eve’s BEFORE sin and shame, when there was no need to hide and blame.



Pray that you take such a hold of God’s forgiveness that sin and shame lose their hold over your relationships.

God Time Day 2: Confide, Don’t Hide



Read Ephesians 5:3
But sexual immorality and any impurity or greed should not even be heard of among you, as is proper for saints.

Underline the words, “should not even be heard of.”

This doesn’t mean we don’t talk about it to hide it, but that there’s nothing to talk about in the first place.

But what about when there is something to talk about?



Read Proverbs 28:13
The one who conceals his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them will find mercy.

Do you need to do some confiding rather than hiding? Confess your sins now to God! Do you need to confide in someone? What is your plan to change?

God Time Day 3: Jesus Moves the Line



Our world tries to define the boundaries of morality and purity, but the scale tends to move – just look at movie ratings. Yet, even back in Bible times, human-drawn boundaries rarely had anything to do with what was in a person’s heart. But that was never God’s intent as Jesus points out...



Read Matthew 5:27-28.
²⁷You have heard that it was said, Do not commit adultery. ²⁸But I tell you, everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.



Where does Jesus draw the line on purity?

How should that affect our definition of purity?

The defining difference between focusing on action and focusing on the heart is how we approach questionable thoughts and behaviors. The action approach attempts to see just how close we can get to the line without “technically” crossing it. The heart approach focuses on rooting out anything which even “hints” at impurity (remember yesterday’s verse?).



Read Proverbs 5:8.
Keep your way far from her. Don’t go near the door of her house.

Solomon’s wise instructions to his son about avoiding immorality was to keep far away, don’t even get close. The closer you get to the fire, the more likely you’ll get burned.

In a world where even “news” sites have “articles” about celebrities in bikinis, on a scale of 1-5 how well do you guard yourself against impurity?

(Wondering Eyes) 1 2 3 4 5 (Locked Down)



Plan for how you can practically improve your commitment to purity, especially in marriage:

God Time Day 4: Stay Pure in an Impure World

 One of the best ways to stay pure in an impure world is to fill our heart, mind, and time with God’s Word – leaving no room for impurity.

 Read Psalm 119:9-11
⁹*How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping your word.*
¹⁰*I have sought you with all my heart; don’t let me wander from your commands.* ¹¹*I have treasured your word in my heart so that I may not sin against you.*

We sometimes hear this principle expressed in sports terms: “the best defense is a good offense.” The more time my team has the ball, the less opportunity there is for the opponents to score. Similarly, the more time and energy we give to God’s Word, the less room there is for worldly thoughts and values to take hold.

 We see this expressed in these two passages of the New Testament.

- Matthew 6:24
No one can serve two masters, since either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.
- 2 Timothy 3:16-17
¹⁶*All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*

 Honestly, how much daily time and energy do you devote to God’s Word on your own and with your spouse (if applicable)?

On my own: _____ With my spouse: _____

What does this say about my/our commitment to purity?

 Pray for purity of heart, mind, and time.

God Time Day 5: Pure Intimacy

 Throughout this series, we have focused on vows that help develop healthy Christian marriages. We’ve looked at ways to prioritize, pursue, and partner with our spouses, and how to wrap it all in an atmosphere of purity.

 What this all boils down to is *intimacy*. While people often mistake the word “intimacy” to have only sexual connotations, the word means much more than that. At its core, intimacy is about a close personal and private association, a relationship built on mutual trust and confidence. True intimacy would look like what Adam and Eve had, not only with each other, but also with God, before their sin and subsequent shame.

Developing this type of pure intimacy takes intentionality. It’s a bit like entering the ocean. Before you swim in the depths, you get your toes wet, then wade out further and further until you begin to float. In other words, intimacy starts with small things. (For example, having simple conversations of trust before dumping heavy baggage.)

Once this solid relationship and foundation has been established, a couple is better prepared to handle the stormy seas of life. It’s not always smooth sailing but when a couple feels mutual trust and confidence, the waves aren’t so overwhelming.

Whether you’re married or not, building an atmosphere of pure intimacy is a crucial skill to have. Start with these things (in no particular order):

1. Prayer (James 5:16)
2. Grace (Colossians 4:6)
3. Mercy (Luke 6:36)
4. Forgiveness (Ephesians 4:32)
5. Accepting responsibility (Galatians 6:7-8)

 Choose one or two to “get your toes wet.” Commit to working on them together and add as you are able.

Take a vow of purity on page 23.

Group Time

LOOK BACK:



1. Each participant shares one praise and one prayer request. (Commit these to prayer for the coming week.)

2. ENCOURAGEMENT 1-on-1 (See last page for directions)

Y / N	Y / N	_____
_____	_____	

3. **Point:** *Marriage is a covenant based on mutual commitment.*

How did your homework go last week?

LOOK UP:

Question: In all homage to the *Assassin's Creed* oath, can one really "work in the dark to serve the light?"

Recap: Almost no one plans to wreck a marriage, but it happens. It is impossible to build a life of righteousness on a foundation of sin. The way we live affects every area of life, especially marriage. We are made in God's image to carry out His purposes in the world and when we do something wrong, we feel shame. When Adam and Eve first sinned, they tried to hide and blame others, and so it is for us today. When we do wrong, we often conceal and shift responsibility, but this only deepens the problem. In addition, we face an even greater threat when we convince ourselves that our identity is no longer based upon God's image but upon our sin. We swiftly move from relationships based upon intimacy and truth to ones of secrecy and shame. We can only make our way out of darkness and into the light through confession, revelation, and mercy. We can only maintain the light through truth, dedication, and planning.

LOOK IN: Discussion

- The answer to today's earlier question may reveal your taste in video games or movies, but also, the answer is "No."
- Share with your group how you "serve the light" and maintain purity in your marriage (or in purity towards a future marriage).

WEEK 4: PURITY

LOOK FORWARD: Application

Point: *Children of light don't live in darkness.*

Take A Vow Of Purity

Sit down with your spouse and take this vow with each other.

I promise to CONFIDE in you and not HIDE from you.

Below, each spouse should answer questions A - D on their own. (If you are single, answer B & D only in relation to a future spouse.)

A. How often and for how long do you and your spouse set aside time to just talk each week? Is it planned or just as needed?

B. How often and for how long do you think you and your spouse should be setting aside time to just talk each week? Should it be planned time or just as needed?

C. How often and for how long do you and your spouse pray with each other each week? Is it planned or just as needed?

D. How often and for how long do you think you and your spouse should be praying each week? Should it be planned time or just as needed?

E. Read Proverbs 28:13. Is there anything you need to confess?

Get together and discuss your responses. Come to an agreed plan regarding your findings.



Keep a "Together Journal" of your future times together.



Family Time

Main Idea:

Purity



Key Verse: 2 Corinthians 7:1

So then, dear friends, since we have these promises, let us cleanse ourselves from every impurity of the flesh and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.



Read:

1 Kings 18:1-39



Discuss:

This is a pivotal moment for Israel. Elijah said that he felt like he was the only one left in the whole country who had not deserted God and worshiped false idols.

The king and queen, Ahab and Jezebel, were completely corrupt and evil. It certainly seems like if something hadn't been done to stop them, God's people could have been lost forever. So, Elijah made his stand on Mt. Carmel. He defeated the prophets of Baal, and in so doing proved that the Lord was the one true God.

The same thing can happen to us when we put other things above God. Soon, we will find we can no longer be pure because we have sin in our life.



Ask:

What did the people do when Elijah called them to decide to either choose to follow God or follow Baal?

In what ways can it be harmful to be indecisive?

Is there an area of your life where you need to take a stand and follow God?



Prayer:

Pray for courage to live in purity as a family.



The 3-Step “1-on-1 Encouragement” Process

Let us hold on to the confession of our hope without wavering, since he who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to provoke love and good works, not neglecting to gather together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day approaching.

Hebrews 10:23-25

1. Partner-up: Partners should be of the same gender. If there is an odd number three is okay but work swiftly.
2. Partners ask each other these five questions:

	1) Did you spend specific personal time in the BIBLE <u>each day</u> this past week?	These are “Yes” or “No” questions.
	2) Did you spend specific time in PRAYER <u>each day</u> this past week – not just for meals?	Any hesitations or “Well...” responses are circled “No.”
	3) Did you do something specific to show Godly LOVE to someone this past week?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If so, the partner briefly shares the encounter(s) with their partner and, on the provided line, writes the name(s) of the person(s) they showed love to, shared the gospel with, or disciplined. • If not, leave the line blank.
	4) Did you intentionally share the GOSPEL with anyone this past week?	
	5) Did you DISCIPLE anyone this past week? (Ex: Sharing with others from any of the Gathering, God, Group, or Family Times)	

3. Each partner prays for the other: No matter how or what the partner has done over the past week, this is an intentional prayer of **encouragement** for the coming week!