

THE CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

A **MANNAHOUSE** RESOURCE



INTRODUCTION

Marriage is the basic unit of society. When marriages break down, the devastating effects are far-reaching. Both husbands and wives suffer deep emotional and psychological repercussions. Very often their spiritual lives will go into a tailspin. The children, though seeming to cope well enough on the surface, usually harbor deep-seated confusion, fears, and insecurities that may manifest themselves later in life. There are other detrimental consequences which affect family, friends, and even the health of the church.

Satan has come to “*steal, and to kill, and to destroy*” (Jn. 10: 10), aiming some of his most poisonous darts at the marriage relationship. Christ has come to give us an abundant life. Building our marriage according to His plan and purpose will ensure us victory.

This booklet is designed to give, you an understanding of that plan, and to provide the key principles for building a strong Christian marriage.

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WHAT IS MARRIAGE?

This is a good question! The answer is not as simple as it may seem. You may say, “Well, it’s two people in love, taking vows to live together as husband and wife.” Yes, this is part of it – but marriage involves much more than this!

The failure to truly understand marriage and the principles for its success is the primary cause of ruin in so many of today’s relationships.

The vast majority of married people are “marriage ignorant”. They know more about the T. V. Guide than what makes for a successful husband-wife relationship. They approach marriage with high expectations but inadequate knowledge, insight, and preparation. Too many rely on the Hollywood formula: fall in love and live happily ever after. Many who trust in this model are gravely disappointed.

Too often they find their relationship following this pattern: love - marriage - trials - disillusionment - unhappy endurance or divorce.

But it doesn't have to be this way! God intended marriage to be a successful and fulfilling experience, one that would grow in both depth and commitment through time, and be able to stand strong in the midst of the trials and the adjustments of life. Marriage is a glorious institution created by God to perpetuate the human race, to provide for a proper and fulfilling relationship between a man and a woman, and to be the basis of a society.

God has given us the pattern and principles for building a successful marriage relationship in His Word. **Every marriage can realize God's intended plan and purpose.**

On the following pages we will examine the foundational facts and practical principles that are necessary for building a godly marriage relationship.

THE PURPOSE OF MARRIAGE

This is the single most important issue of our marriage. **Before we continue to examine the other aspects of the married relationship, we must settle this question: What is the purpose of your marriage?** Some of the most common responses are:

- To have a happy and fulfilling relationship
- To enjoy life together
- To have a Christian home and family
- To provide for the happiness and needs of my partner

Each of these responses indicate good and proper goals, but they miss the mark of the real purpose for your marriage. These goals are a necessary part of a good relationship, but **the main purpose of your marriage must be to bring glory to God and to bring Him pleasure.** Establishing any other goal as the prime purpose of your relationship will cause you to center on either yourself or the marriage relationship instead of God.

Revelation 4: 11 teaches us that all things were created for God's pleasure (K.J.V.). Likewise, in Ephesians 1:12 Paul states *"that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory."* We are also told in Colossians 1: 17 that *"He is before all things, and in Him all things consist."*

Our marriage, like every aspect of our life, must exist to bring glory to God and to give Him pleasure. **Firmly establishing our relationship on this purpose will free us from humanistic and self-centered goals that cloud our perspective and judgment.**

Putting God's pleasure and will at the center of our concern will allow every facet of our relationship to be shaped by His Spirit so that we *"may grow up in all things into Him who is the head - Christ"* (Eph. 4: 15)

THE MODEL FOR MARRIAGE

“For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church” (Eph. 5 :31, 32).

God has given us the perfect model for the relationship between husband and wife in the relationship between Christ and the church.

In the above scriptures, Paul reveals that the institution of marriage is a foreshadowing and an earthly type of that beautiful union that Christ will consummate with His church. All those that will respond to His proposal of love initiated at Calvary will become a part of the bride of Christ.

As Ephesians 5:32 declares, this is a great mystery now revealed to every believer and it contains the principles and insights for a successful marriage relationship.

Most of the points of this booklet are directly based upon the understanding gained from using this model. In the rest of this section, we will examine two qualities of marriage revealed in Ephesians 5:31.

- 1. Marriage Is “Leaving”** – Marriage is a special and primary relationship that requires putting your mate before everyone except God. We are to subordinate even our closest family and friendship ties to the relationship with our marriage partner. Our marriage to Christ is both heavenly and eternal, and supersedes all earthly relationships when it comes to priority and responsibility.
- 2. Marriage Is “Joining To”** – Marriage is two people joined in a covenant union, working together to realize God’s ideal for their relationship. Both husband and wife must subordinate their own rights and demands to the requirements of building a marriage that truly reflects their oneness.

THE FOUNDATION OF MARRIAGE

“Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife” (Gen. 2:24, K.J.V.)

When God produced the original blueprint for marriage, He designed it to work. He established its foundation upon the highest expression of genuine love-**COMMITMENT!** A vivid picture of this level of intense commitment is seen in the word “cleave”. A man is to “cleave” to his wife. The word cleave comes from the Hebrew word “dabaq” and means “to cling to, to adhere, or to stick together.” It conveys the idea of taking a hold of something with a refusal to let go. **Both husband and wife are to take hold of their marriage with a dedicated commitment to its development and success.** Jesus Christ displays this degree of commitment by pledging to His earthly bride, *“I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Heb. 13:5)*

This same type of vital foundational commitment is defined in the vows taken between a man and a woman at the time of their marriage.

The following is a sample vow containing the conditions of commitment to which a man and woman pledge themselves when they are married:

“I _____ , take thee, _____ , to be my wedded husband/wife, to have and to hold from this day forth, for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in health and sickness, to love and to cherish, until death do us part, according to the commandment of God, and to this I do promise you my faithfulness.”

The wedding day is characterized by love, romance, and high future expectations. The pledge is made before the real tests of life together begin. The years ahead will bring both joy and sorrow, good times and tough times, unforeseen circumstances, adjustments, and adaptations. All of these situations can be victoriously met if the marriage partners remain steadfast in their commitment to one another.

Marriage is love realized through commitment. The demands and trials of life will work to perfect and strengthen the love of those whose marriage is based on commitment.

THE POWER OF MARRIAGE

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it” (Eph. 5:25)

Love is the source of power behind a successful and fulfilling relationship. It is like the water pouring over a hydroelectric dam providing the energy and dynamic to propel the relationship forward to its appointed ideal.

But what exactly is love? It is such a commonly used and frequently misunderstood term. We most often describe it by feelings of deep or warm emotions that we have for another person. But is this really love? Maybe, and maybe not! Feelings are a part of love, but feelings alone do not necessarily indicate real love. **Genuine love is based upon a desire to please God and a commitment to your mate to behave in a way that demonstrates your regard for his or her best.**

Love is more a condition of the will than the emotions. Love is based more upon intentions and actions, than the whims of feelings. Emotions will always follow our acts of love. Love based upon commitment will bring consistency. On the other hand, if our love is only feeling-oriented, our marriage will be a real roller coaster ride - up today, down tomorrow!

God's pattern of love is revealed through a close look at Calvary. We are to love as Christ "*loved the church and gave Himself for it*" (Eph. 5 :25). The important elements of this kind of love are seen in I Corinthians 13:4-8: "*Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.*"

Realizing this kind of love in your marriage requires the inner workings of the cross. There must be a denial of self, along with an embracing of self-giving love where the needs of your partner become the priority. This allows for a release of God's love within us and through it, a new power in our relationship.

THE NEED OF MARRIAGE

“And the Lord God said, it is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him” (Gen. 2:18)

There are a number of reasons people give for marrying. There is the desire for love, the goal of raising a family, the fulfillment of sexual needs, and even the pressure of being “socially normal”. But the prevailing need for marriage was seen by God immediately after creating Adam: *“It is not good man should be alone.”* **The very nature of our humanity demands a need for COMPANIONSHIP. God designed the marriage relationship to meet this need of companionship in the most complete way possible.**

Companionship is more than just being together. It is to involve an intimate interaction with our mate on the total level of our humanity: spiritually, emotionally, socially, and physically. Only a Christian marriage can offer this.

Those that are joined to the Lord are said to be “*one spirit with Him*” (I Cor. 6: 17) The Christian marriage offers a spiritual companionship through mutual fellowship with Christ. We choose our mates through mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical attraction. During marriage, this personality affinity provides the joy of personal companionship. The Bible describes the sexual relationship as “knowing your mate” (Gen. 4: 1). Sexual union in marriage produces a deep intimacy of companionship.

Marriage partners must work toward the goal of fulfilling this companionship ideal on every level of their life. An ever present danger is to slip into “role ruts” where each concentrates on being a good wife or husband, while ignoring the goal of genuine companionship.

Companionship is helped through developing good habits of communication. A husband and wife must oppose the drift of “marriage erosion” where he has his life and she has hers, and there is little mutual sharing. Cultivate an interest in the interests of your mate. Set apart days and times to be alone. Work to build your lives together in the midst of diverse responsibilities and activities.

THE ORDER OF MARRIAGE

“But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God” (I Cor. 11:3)

Everything in existence is designed to fit into a God-ordained order. The relationships within the family are no exception. God sustains His order in the universe by a hierarchy of authority and headship. In Romans 13: 1 Paul reminds us that all authority is of God and therefore demands our respect and submission. **The family has been given the headship structure of Christ over the man, the wife in submission to her husband, and the children in obedience to both parents.**

Because of misconceptions and abuses, there must be a clarity on this issue of male headship. **First of all, headship implies responsibility and covering and not superiority.** Neither does male leadership signify greater intelligence, gift, or status in God. Male and female are created

equal before the Lord, and are to relate as “*being heirs together of the grace of life*” (1 Pet. 3:7)

God established this order based upon the unique nature of the male and female. The woman was created with a more sensitive and vulnerable emotional and psychological nature than the man. Because of this, she is more subject to emotional pressures and the tendency to be deceived (1 Tim. 2:1). **Biblical submission requires the wife to yield to and be supportive of her husband’s leadership as he in turn yields to and obeys the headship of Christ.** Under his covering, she is free to be a creative counterpart, expressing her unique individuality and cooperating with him in establishing the direction of the home and family.

The husband must endeavor to secure his wife’s respect by being a good example of spiritual headship. Good headship requires a good example. Paul was able to say to others, “*Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ*” (1 Cor. 11: 1, K.J.V.). The man should measure the effectiveness and quality of his leadership by his obedience and submission to Jesus Christ. He should use his headship to both establish his home in a godly order, and to cultivate his wife’s potential as his helpmate.

EIGHT KEYS OF A SUCCESSFUL MARRIAGE

1. CHRIST AS THE CENTER

“All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist” (Col. 1:16, 17).

Setting Jesus on the center stage of your marriage is the first and greatest key for a fruitful relationship. He is the great architect of marriage and holds the blueprint for its success. In Colossians 1:17 we are given the insight that *“in Him all things consist”*. This word consist means “to be constituted of.” Christ alone can give the essential consistency to our marriage.

How do we put Him in the center? First, by making Him the center of our individual lives. This is only accomplished by regular and consistent prayer and study of the Bible. **Secondly**, we must build a spiritual communication with our mate. We should pray together, share spiritual insights and experiences, and become comfortable together with Jesus. **Thirdly**, we should establish the goals and direction of our marriage upon the Word of God.

2. MUTUAL EDIFICATION

“Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted” (Eph. 4:31, 32).

The marriage relationship offers tremendous opportunity to create or destroy human potential, and with it, a person’s happiness, sense of growth, and self worth. Proverbs 18:21 tells us that *“Death and life are in the power of the tongue.”* Our words and actions toward our mate day after day have an accumulated effect of either building them up or tearing them down.

God has entrusted us with a stewardship over our marriage partner. His goal is to help conform that person into the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29). How well are you cooperating with His efforts in accomplishing this? Once the initial euphoria and newness is over, we often allow destructive patterns of criticism, anger, and frustration to dominate our communication. Prince Charming now becomes the frog!

Our goal should be mutual support and encouragement, relating to the other out of kindness and a tender heart, and acknowledging his or her positive qualities and virtues (Phil. 4:8).

3. ACCEPTING YOUR COMPLEMENT

“And Adam said: This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh”
(Gen. 2:23).

In the unfallen state, Adam had an immediate revelation of his oneness with Eve. In the pattern of this first divine union, God has ordained marriage to produce that same consciousness of oneness. **Husband and wife are to relate to life together as one, in self-giving love, fully embracing the other as part of themselves.** Oneness does not imply likeness. In fact, the usual rule is for opposites to attract. The secret of marital oneness is realizing that your mate is a complementary opposite to yourself.

By God’s divine design, your partner is different in personality, temperament, and tendencies than yourself. It is usually these opposite qualities that inspire our initial attraction for each other. The Lord uses the opposite characteristics in our mates to complement, shape, and enlarge the other person. **A key to building oneness is to fully accept your marriage partner as your complement, created as a unique expression of the image of God.**

4. WILLINGNESS TO CHANGE

“Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another” (Rom. 14:19).

The balance in accepting your compliment is the willingness to change.

Both partners should maintain a loving acceptance of each other’s basic personality and temperament, but each must also be willing to make adjustments in those attitudes and habits that offend or hurt the other. Just because your mother picked up your dirty socks does not mean that your wife should have to. Just because your father washed the car every Saturday doesn’t mean your husband will.

A relationship growing in its expression of oneness requires change in both outward habits and in the ways we relate to each other. There is no “change list” that will fit for every couple. The simple rule is that each partner should maintain a willingness to change and be flexible wherever it is reasonable and will help build the relationship. The key principle is found in Romans 14:19 where we are taught to *“pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.”*

5. MAINTAINING GOOD COMMUNICATION

Young lovers never seem to have a communication problem, but somehow this area is often threatened after marriage. **Good communication is one of the most important elements of marriage since it is so necessary for close companionship.** Many people settle for second rate marriages because they fail to maintain good communication.

The following are some areas that create barriers in communication:

1. **Exploding** - Reactions of anger and frustration destroy communication.
2. **Tears** - The tendency, especially among women, to react quickly to hurt and withdraw can hinder communication.
3. **The Silent Act** - Resorting to silent warfare is a destructive pattern.
4. **Lack of Interest** - A failure to share and maintain common interests will reduce the number of topics for communication.

The best defense is a good offense. **Commit yourself to building interests and communication with each other.** Identify and discuss those areas that hurt communication. Work toward a life of enjoyable companionship.

6. CREATING ROMANCE

“Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband” (1 Cor. 7:3)

Like communication, romance seems to come automatically during the time of courtship. Unimaginative men become veritable Don Juans, bringing flowers, whispering sweet nothings, and suggesting romantic things to do together. Too often, after the vows, this kind of behavior quickly evaporates!

Romance must be kept alive! Women especially need this element in the relationship. Their view of marriage is colored with visions of romance. **If the man will inject romance into the relationship, the woman will quickly respond.** She needs the times of warmth and affection, the tender touch, the sense of being desired. One writer put it like this: “Men, what it takes to get her, it takes to keep her.”

Both partners must work at cultivating romance. Speak sweetly to each other. Remember special occasions with flowers. Get away alone together often. Frequently reaffirm your love for each other. Romance in a marriage is like the icing on a cake, adding a dimension of sweetness and attraction to the relationship.

7. SEXUAL INTIMACY

“Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled” (Heb. 13:4).

God created sex for two basic purposes: procreation and intimacy. In Genesis 1 :28 the mandate was given to *“Be fruitful and multiply”*. Marriage is to provide for the care and nurturing of offspring. But sex in marriage is to accomplish much more than this. Through the sexual relationship, a husband and wife can enjoy an intimacy, a “knowing of each other”, impossible through any other kind of communication.

Both partners must work to make this vital element of their marriage enjoyable and mutually fulfilling. A long term satisfying sexual relationship is built upon love and emotional closeness. This is best cultivated by being sensitive to your partner’s physical and emotional needs and by an attitude of preferring the other.

It should be “How can I give”, not “What can I get?” If both partners have this concern, matters of technique, timing, and frequency can be resolved, and a mutually satisfying relationship will result.

8. GUIDELINES FOR “CONSTRUCTIVE DISAGREEMENTS”

Disagreements can be constructive or destructive depending on how they are conducted. The following are some helpful guidelines:

1. **Stop and Pray** - When a matter of disagreement arises, center your hearts in God, ask for patience, deference, and understanding (I Cor. 13:4)
2. **Don't Raise Your Voice** - “A soft answer turns away wrath” (Prov. 15: 1)
3. **Identify the Issue** - Stick to it and don't be sidetracked to other points of irritation (Matt. 18: 15)
4. **Don't “Dig Up Old Bones”** - Bringing up old wounds always creates a destructive pattern (II Cor. 5: 1 7)
5. **No Name Calling** - This is character assassination and creates deep wounds (Eph. 4:29).
6. **Avoid Generalizations** - “You always do this”, or “You never do that” are destructive exaggerations (Eph. 4: 15).
7. **Finish the Discussion** - Don't burst into tears, stomp out of the house, or tum over and go to sleep (Eph. 4:31, 32)
8. **Reaffirm Your Love to Each Other** - Finish your disagreement with tenderness and forgiveness (Eph. 4:31, 32).

TIPS FOR HUSBANDS

“Likewise you husbands, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel” (1 Pet. 3:7).

As the head of the relationship, the man is in a more critical position to determine the course and atmosphere of the home. It is essential that he relate wisely and with understanding to the mate God has given him. **The following are some areas he must understand about his wife:**

- 1. A More Emotional Nature** – A woman has been given a more emotional and sensitive nature than the man. She sees and feels things differently than her husband. This gives her the advantage of greater compassion and sensitivity, and the disadvantage of being more easily affected, influenced, and hurt. Don't treat her like one of the boys but rather respect this part of her God given nature.
- 2. A Need For Love** – If marital counsel to husbands could be summed up in four words it would be, “Husbands, love your wives” (Eph. 5:25) When a

woman feels truly loved by her husband, she enjoys a deep, inner security and peace. This love must be demonstrated daily in acts of kindness, preference, and expressions of affection.

3. **A Need For Self-Esteem** - Many women struggle with low self-esteem, feelings of inadequacy, feelings of inferiority, and a lack of self-worth. Many also feel ugly, unattractive, unintelligent, and lacking in real virtues. Husbands, compliment and encourage your wives! Build her sense of value and self-worth. As her head, she looks to you for much of her definition of herself.
4. **A Need For Security** - The man is to be the prime provider for his family. God has given him the charge of headship, and the main responsibility for financial support. By your ambition, work habits, and diligence, demonstrate to your wife that she can be secure with you as provider.
5. **A Biological Difference** - The reproductive cycle of a woman affects her moods and feelings. During menstruation and the pre-menstruation period, her estrogen and progesterone levels are at their lowest and this affects her emotional condition. Employ extra patience, understanding, and sensitivity during this time.

TIPS FOR WIVES

“Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies. The heart of her husband safely trusts her; so he will have no lack of gain. She does him good and not evil all the days of her life” (Prov. 31:10-12).

This scripture reveals something a husband greatly desires from his wife: a person he can fully trust. **He needs to know that his wife is loyal, faithful, supportive, and protective toward him - someone who will not talk critically of him to others.** He needs a true helpmate who will carry the yoke of life with him, doing him *“good and not evil”*. The following are some important areas a wife must understand concerning her husband:

1. Respect and Honor - *“And let the wife see that she respects her husband” (Eph. 5:33)* A man needs to know that his wife enjoys a reverence for him as a person and as her head. This should be communicated by actions and words. Compliment him on the positive qualities of his character and leadership.

2. **A Man's Productivity** - God made man's identity to be linked to productivity. Your husband needs to feel that you appreciate his work and other areas of productivity, i.e., around the home, hobbies, spiritual labor, etc. Much of his self-respect and sense of self-worth comes through his feelings of productivity.
3. **His Home - His Castle** - The desire to provide for his family is at the base of a man's willingness to punch the time clock day after day. His home is his castle and needs to be a place where he can relax and be refreshed. Wives, be good homemakers. Make your home comfortable and attractive. Cook good meals. Do extra things to communicate your love and appreciation for your husband.
4. **Male Sexuality** - The sexual responsiveness of a man's wife can do much to affect his male identity. Frequent tum-off and coldness at bedtime can be devastating to this area of male identity and need. A wife must understand this need in her husband and, through her response, communicate her love and desire for him.

DANGERS TO AVOID

There has been much advice already given on the building blocks for a successful marital relationship. Ignoring any of the points previously made will have a detrimental effect on your marriage. There are, though, several additional dangers that have not been mentioned that deserve watchful avoidance:

1. **Overextended Lives** – Overextended lives produce fatigue and depression and drain energy and time required to build a good relationship. Your marriage must be a priority if it is to grow. You must realize that other areas are less important
2. **Unrealistic Expectations** – This booklet has set forth the ideals of marriage. Work toward them, but do not expect instant perfection. Realistically, you will be working toward these goals, making gradual headway, the rest of your married life.
3. **Comparing With Others** – Don't compare your marriage or your mate with others. Each of you, as well as your marriage, is unique. God created you this way. Continue to apply the principles and rejoice in your progress.

CONCLUSION

This booklet is designed as a brief and simplified coverage of those principles and practical keys that make for a fulfilling Christian marriage. At best, it is a “Reader’s Digest” version of the subject. It provides for a quick overview and outline of the necessary elements of a good marriage.

There are many excellent marriage books written that give more extensive coverage to the topics contained in this booklet. The reader is encouraged to read these.

A list of some of the more popular ones are given below:

- **How To Be Happy Though Married**, by Dr. Tim LaHaye
- **What Wives Wish Their Husbands Knew About Women**, by Dr. James Dobson
- **The Christian Family**, by Larry Christenson
- **Intended for Pleasure**, by Ed and Gaye Wheat

Those readers with marriages experiencing serious conflict should contact their pastor for help. **For a brief overview of the main points of this booklet, please re-read the boldly printed words on each page.**



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SCAN FOR SUNDAY
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