

# MARRIAGE MATTERS

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A CONFERENCE WITH  
JONATHAN HOLMES





# Session 1- What's Marriage Really About?

There is a surprising scarcity of biblical instruction devoted specifically to marriage.<sup>1</sup>

*Tim Savage*  
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*Introduction:*

JC Ryle: Familiarity with \_\_\_\_\_ things has a dreadful tendency to make men \_\_\_\_\_ them.

CREATION

We are created as embodied beings—body and soul—our bodies were designed and created by God.

- You have a \_\_\_\_\_: Gen. 1:26
- You are a \_\_\_\_\_ being: Gen. 1:26
- You are an \_\_\_\_\_ being: Gen. 1:27<sup>2</sup>
- You are a \_\_\_\_\_ being: Gen. 1:28

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<sup>1</sup> Tim Savage, *No Ordinary Marriage: Together for God's Glory*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 59.

<sup>2</sup> Herman Bavinck: God is the creator of the human being, and simultaneously also the Inaugurator of sex and of sexual difference. This difference did not result from sin; it existed from the very beginning, it has its basis in creation, it is a revelation of God's will and sovereignty, and is therefore wise and holy and good. Therefore, no one may misconstrue or despise this sexual difference, either within one's own identity or in that of another person. It has been willed by God and grounded in nature.

- You are a \_\_\_\_\_ being: Gen. 2:18-25

*John Walton:* The word “helper” is common enough as a description of someone who comes to the aid of or provides a service for someone. It carries no implications regarding the relationship or relative status of the individuals involved. In fact, the noun form of the word found in this verse as used elsewhere refers almost exclusively to God as the One who helps his people. If we expand our investigation to verbal forms, we find a continuing predominance of God as the subject. Nothing suggests a subservient status of the one helping.<sup>3</sup>

#### *FALL*

Immediately the effects of the Fall come into sharp focus:

- Relationship with \_\_\_\_\_ is fractured
- Relationship with each \_\_\_\_\_ is destroyed
- Relationship with \_\_\_\_\_ is damaged
- Relationship with \_\_\_\_\_ is complicated

#### *REDEMPTION*

*Eli Finkel:* In contrast to our predecessors, who looked to their marriage to help them survive, we look to our marriage to meet our \_\_\_\_\_ for passion and intimacy and to facilitate our voyages of self-discovery and personal growth.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> John H. Walton, *Genesis*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 176.

<sup>4</sup> Eli J. Finkel, *The All-or-Nothing Marriage: How the Best Marriages Work*, (New York: Dutton, 2017), 13.

## CONSUMMATION

*Greg Lanier:* For married Christians, there is also comfort in taking seriously “till death do us part.” Marriage between one man and one woman is a beautiful gift of God, but it cannot bear the weight of serving as your \_\_\_\_\_ end. Attempting to make it do so will lead to frustration, bitterness, and dissolution—or the idolatry of spouse- or child-worship. Such is the misstep of our age.<sup>5</sup>

### *3 points of application*

1. Marriage bears God’s \_\_\_\_\_
2. Marriage \_\_\_\_\_ God’s love
3. Marriage \_\_\_\_\_ you into God’s image

### Marriage bears God’s mission

*Tim Savage:* A more weighty rationale, a more transcendent vision, is required to lift husbands and wives to the heights of marital fulfillment. Only one thing qualifies: the \_\_\_\_\_ of God. Here is something so powerful that it transcends the most difficult challenges of life. Here is a provision so dependable that it can lift marriages to awe-inspiring heights. Here is a beacon so intense that it can show the way out of the darkest crisis. Here is a vision so permanent that it can outlast every temporary obstacle. Here is something supernatural, something beyond what mere humans bring to a partnership. Here is the cement of marriage. Here is the rope that binds. When husbands and wives unite for the glory of God, they unite indeed.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Greg Lanier, “Marriage is Built to End,” April 5, 2018, *The Gospel Coalition*.  
<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/marriage-built-to-end/>. Accessed 7 January 2019.

<sup>6</sup> Savage, 24-25.

## Marriage incarnates God's love

*Ray Ortlund:* The eternal love story is why God created the universe and why God gave us marriage in Eden and why couples fall in love and getting married in the world today. Every time a bride and groom stand there and take their vows, they are \_\_\_\_\_ the biblical love story, whether they realize it or not. The son of God stepping down out of eternity, entering time, taking on flesh, pursuing and winning his bride as his very heart and body with his inmost, sincerest love so that he can fit her to be with him forever above – that dramatic super-reality is the breathtaking reason why human marriage exist.<sup>7</sup>

## Marriage transforms you into God's image

*Dietrich Bonhoeffer:* God does not will that I should fashion the other person according to the \_\_\_\_\_ that seems good to me, that is, in my own image.<sup>8</sup>

*Tim Keller:* The essence of marriage is a \_\_\_\_\_ commitment to the good of the other.<sup>9</sup>

## *Stirring up conversation:*

- What did you learn about marriage in this session?
- Why are you here? What are your goals?

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<sup>7</sup> Ray Ortlund, *Marriage and the Mystery of the Gospel*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 100.

<sup>8</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, (New York: Harper One, 2009), 93.

<sup>9</sup> Timothy Keller and Kathy Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage*, (New York: Dutton, 2011), 80.

## Session 2- Addressing Conflict in Marriage

Harmony in the marriage state is the very first object to be aimed at.

*Thomas Jefferson*

I can't get no satisfaction  
I can't get no satisfaction  
'Cause I try and I try and I try and I try  
*Rolling Stones*  
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*Understand the pathology of inner conflict*

James 4:1-3:

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

*There is a war outside because there is a war going on inside*

- You desire and do not have→ so you murder
- You covet and cannot obtain→ so you fight and quarrel
- You do not have→ because you do not ask
- You ask→ do not receive
- You ask wrongly→ to spend it on your passions

*Excursus on expectations in marriage:*

- Unsaid expectations become unmet expectations.

○ *Family of origin*

Small, nuclear family	Large, extended family
A family who was punctual	A family who ran late
Conflict heavy	Suppressed conflict
Dinner on the go	Dinner with the family
Clean, neat and organized	Messy, chaotic and disorganized
Father was a spiritual leader	Father was absent
Mother ran the home	Mother was submissive

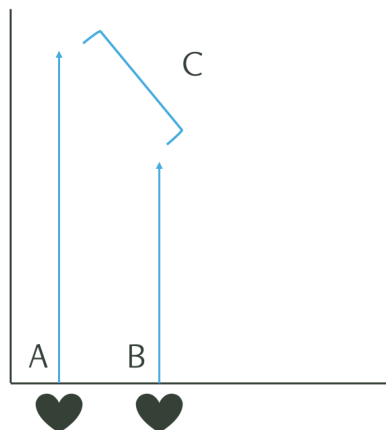
○ *Personality and disposition*

Introvert	Extrovert
Timely and punctual	Runs late
Adventurous and spontaneous	Safe and routine
Free spirited	Cautious
Spender	Saver
Optimistic	Pessimistic

○ *Likes/Dislikes (Preferences)*

Vegetarian	Meat Lover
Action movies	Rom-Coms
Beaches	Cities
Fiction	Non-Fiction
Pets	No pets

*Diagram*



- A. Stated desire or expectation
- B. Actual situation or realized expectation
- C. How do you respond when you don't get what you want?



*Spouses could re-evaluate their expectations (A):*

- Is this expectation \_\_\_\_\_? If so, it needs to be \_\_\_\_\_.
- Is this expectation a product of my own family of origin, personality/disposition, or likes/dislikes (preferences)? If so, how can I hold \_\_\_\_\_ to them, and hold tightly to God's plan- my spouse's \_\_\_\_\_?

*Spouse can re-evaluate their responses (C):*

- Is my response informed by our shared \_\_\_\_\_ and environment?
- Is my response informed by what my spouse has gone through today?
- Is this an opportunity for me to give \_\_\_\_\_ or overlook in \_\_\_\_\_?
- Is my response Spirit-filled or is it my flesh demanding what I want?
- Is my response going to help us \_\_\_\_\_ peace or \_\_\_\_\_ peace?
- At the end of the day am I trying to conform my spouse into my image or into the image of Christ?

*Addressing conflict in marriage*

- Have a \_\_\_\_\_ for addressing conflict in marriage
- Identity your \_\_\_\_\_ in conflict
- \_\_\_\_\_ the real problem

- Pay \_\_\_\_\_ to your posture and timing

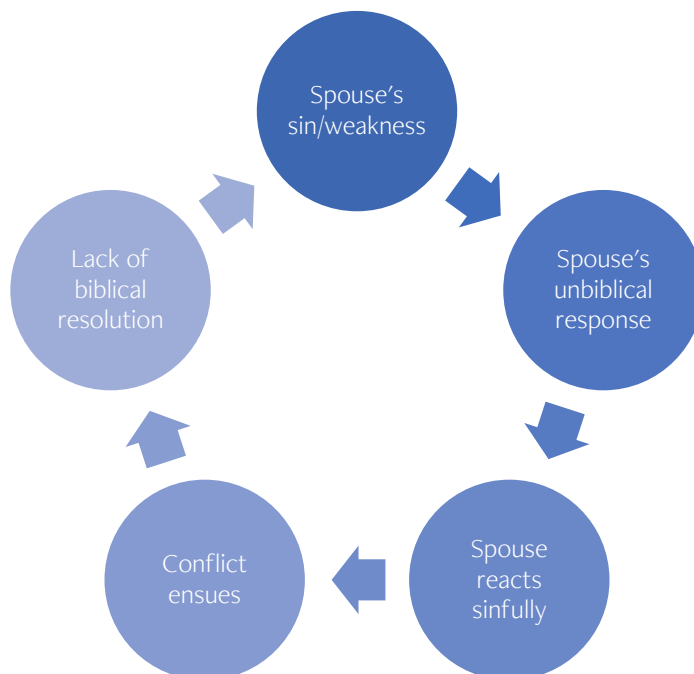
- Utilize a word bank of feelings

Angry	Sad	Upset	Misunderstood	Unloved	Unheard	Defensive
Blamed	Cornered	Bullied	Taken advantage of	Controlled	Manipulated	Disliked
Unappreciated	Unaffirmed	Stupid	Ignored	Indifferent	Unsafe	Tense
Powerless	Stubborn	Exhausted	Hounded	Foolish	Overwhelmed	Tired
Shocked	Dismayed	Guilty	Embarrassed	Ashamed	Lonely	Alienated
Remorseful	Sorrowful	Abandoned	Rage	Discounted	Frustrated	Indignant

- Introduce three \_\_\_\_\_

- Take a look at your conflict, and see if you can notice any \_\_\_\_\_

*Diagram*



- Know that there's always \_\_\_\_\_ in conflict
- Distinguish between \_\_\_\_\_ vs. consensus

Fig. 1

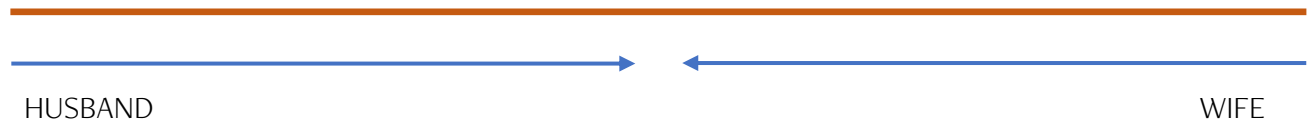
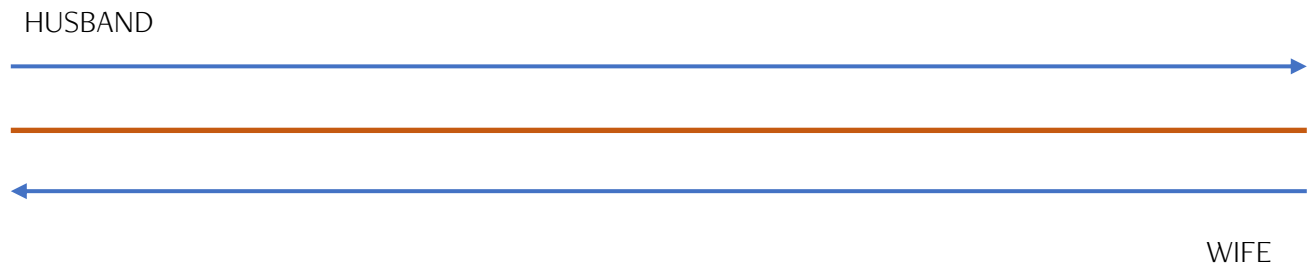


Fig. 2



### *Stirring up conversation:*

- What did you learn about conflict in this session?
- What leads to most of the conflicts you see in marriage counseling. Why is that so?
- What biblical principle, story, truth can help a couple resolve and reconcile conflict?

## Session 3- The Key to a Good Marriage

To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you.

*Lewis B. Smedes*

Everyone thinks forgiveness is a lovely idea until he has something to forgive.

*C.S. Lewis<sup>10</sup>*

Forgiveness is incredibly powerful. If it could be bottled, a daily dose would probably save a lot of marriages.

*Winston T. Smith<sup>11</sup>*  
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*Paul Tripp*: I cannot think of a more essential \_\_\_\_\_ in marriage than forgiveness.<sup>12</sup>

*Tim Keller*: Forgiveness is at the very \_\_\_\_\_ of what it means to be a Christian.<sup>13</sup>

*Walter Wangerin Jr.*: When Christ is the single most solid reality upon which you stand; when in faith you find the source of your own life in him; when you yourself do dwell within his loving mercy and his forgiveness, then you are empowered to forgive your spouse, infinitely. Christ is the well from which to draw the water for your thirsty wife or husband. But this must be remembered: only as you know Jesus' \_\_\_\_\_ forgiveness for you are you able limitlessly to \_\_\_\_\_ forgiveness with your spouse.

*Matthew 18:21-35*

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<sup>10</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 2001), 115.

<sup>11</sup> Winston T. Smith, *Marriage Matters*, (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2010), 164.

<sup>12</sup> Paul David Tripp, *What Did You Expect?*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Publishers, 2010), 86.

<sup>13</sup> Keller, 1.

### *9 Common Myths About Forgiveness*

1. I don't need to \_\_\_\_\_ to have a good marriage.
2. Forgiveness is something that only happens \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_ is the same thing as asking for forgiveness.
4. Forgiving means \_\_\_\_\_.
5. I need to learn to forgive \_\_\_\_\_.<sup>14</sup>

*HB Charles:* To claim that I have been forgiven by God but I cannot forgive myself \_\_\_\_\_ that I do not understand, believe, or appreciate the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is a sinister attempt of the Enemy to get us to depend upon our own righteousness, rather than the grace of God.<sup>15</sup>

6. I do not need to forgive if they are not \_\_\_\_\_.

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<sup>14</sup> For more on this topic, I'd recommend Robert Jones booklet, "I Just Can't Forgive Myself" (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2000).

<sup>15</sup> H.B. Charles, "How Can I Forgive Myself?", <https://www.hbcharlesjr.com/2017/07/17/how-can-i-forgive-myself/>. Accessed August 25, 2017.

*Paul Tripp:* Forgiveness is a vertical commitment that is followed by a horizontal transaction.<sup>16</sup>

7. Forgiveness is the same thing as \_\_\_\_\_

*Tim Keller:* Forgiveness means a willingness to try to reestablish trust, but that reestablishment is always a \_\_\_\_\_.<sup>17</sup>

8. Forgiveness erases \_\_\_\_\_.

9. Forgiveness is a \_\_\_\_\_ or should be easy.<sup>18</sup>

*Tim Keller:* Forgiveness, then, is granted before it is felt.<sup>19</sup>

*Brad Hambrick:* If we demand the benefits of forgiveness before we take the risk of forgiveness, we become trapped at the crucial point.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Paul David Tripp, *What Did You Expect? Redeeming the Realities of Marriage*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 92.

<sup>17</sup> Timothy Keller, "Serving Each Other Through Forgiveness and Reconciliation", *Redeemer City to City*, 4. In fact, the reestablishment of trust to quickly can often enable the other person to continue to sin against the spouse.

<sup>18</sup> Adams notes in general that, "All day long, in order to be responsible to God and others, I must do many things against my feelings." (Adams, 23)

<sup>19</sup> Keller, 2.

<sup>20</sup> Brad Hambrick, "Emotions and Forgiveness", February 22, 2013. <http://bradhambrick.com/emotions-and-forgiveness/>. Accessed August 25, 2017.

## Cultivating a Culture of Forgiveness

*God's forgiveness is both our motive and our model*

*Know that forgiveness is costly*

*Brad Hambrick: Similarly, forgiveness is a God-sized action that when written into our life pushes at the edges of our humanity to such a degree that it is sometimes deathly painful.<sup>21</sup>*

*Make a plan*

- Read and pray Psalm 139:23-24
- Additional Scripture reading
  - Psalm 51
  - Matthew 5:21-26
  - Matthew 18:15-35
  - Ephesians 4:17-32
  - Hebrews 10:1-18
  - James 4:7-10
- Read Tim Keller article, “[Serving Each Other Through Forgiveness and Reconciliation](#)”
- Set a time for the conversation
- Make two lists
- Structure for the actual conversation

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<sup>21</sup> <http://bradhambrick.com/lewisongforgiveness-2/>.

- Commit to the 4 Promises of Forgiveness<sup>22</sup>

1. “I will not dwell on this incident.”
2. “I will not bring up this incident again and use it against you.”
3. “I will not talk to others about this incident.”
4. “I will not let this incident stand between us or hinder our personal relationship.”<sup>23</sup>

*Paul Tripp:* You simply can’t continually \_\_\_\_\_ in your heart all someone’s perceived wrongs against you and grow in \_\_\_\_\_ toward him or her. You can’t argue with yourself daily that the person you live with is the chief cause of the wrongs that you do and want to move close to them.<sup>24</sup>

*J.C. Ryle:* Do we know what it is to be of a forgiving spirit? Can we look over the injuries that we receive from time to time in this evil world? Can we pass over a transgression and pardon an offence? If not, where is our \_\_\_\_\_? If not, why should we wonder that our souls do not prosper? Let us resolve to amend our ways in this matter. Let us determine by God’s grace to forgive, even as we hope to be forgiven. This is the nearest approach we can make to the mind of Christ Jesus. This is the character which is most suitable to a poor sinful child of Adam. God’s free forgiveness of sins is our highest privilege in this world. God’s free forgiveness will be our only title to eternal life in the world to come. Then let us be forgiving during the few years that we are here upon earth.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Peacemaker Ministries has excellent resources and tools on their website for issues related to conflict resolution and forgiveness. Four Promises of Forgiveness, <http://peacemaker.net/project/four-promises-of-forgiveness/>. Accessed August 27, 2017.

<sup>23</sup> Tripp, 71.

<sup>24</sup> Tripp, 71.

<sup>25</sup> J.C. Ryle, *Mark: Expository Thoughts on the Gospel*, (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2012), 189.



# Appendix A

## My favorite resources on marriage:

Alistair Begg, *Lasting Love*  
Timothy and Kathy Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage*  
Dave Harvey, *When Sinners Say, "I Do!"*  
Bryan and Kathy Chapell, *Each for the Other*  
John Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*  
Winston T. Smith, *Marriage Matters*  
Gary Thomas, *Sacred Marriage*  
Paul David Tripp, *What Did You Expect?*  
Jim Newheiser, *Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage: Critical Questions and Answers*  
Walter Wangerin, *As For Me and My House*  
Dwight and Margaret Peterson, *Are You Waiting for "The One?"*  
Andreas Kostenberger, *God, Marriage and the Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation (2<sup>nd</sup> ed)*  
Ray Ortlund, *Marriage and the Mystery of the Gospel*  
Christopher Ash, *Married for God: Making Your Marriage the Best it Can Be*  
Wayne Mack, *Strengthening Your Marriage*  
Tim Savage, *No Ordinary Marriage*  
Jonathan Holmes, *Counsel for Couples*

## My favorite resources on forgiveness:

Jay E. Adams, *From Forgiven to Forgiving*  
Ruth Ann Batstone, *Beyond Forgive and Forget*  
Steve Cornell, "How to Move From Forgiveness to Reconciliation"  
<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/how-to-move-from-forgiveness-to-reconciliation>  
Nancy Leigh DeMoss, *Choosing Forgiveness*  
Dave Harvey, *When Sinners Say "I Do"*, chapter 6  
Robert D. Jones, *Pursuing Peace*, chapters 8-9  
Timothy Keller, *Serving Each Other Through Forgiveness and Reconciliation*  
Winston T. Smith, *Marriage Matters*, chapters 12-13  
Aaron Sironi, "From Your Heart...Forgive", *Journal of Biblical Counseling*  
Ryan Troglin, "Must We Forgive Those Who Sin Against Us If They Don't Repent?"  
<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/must-we-forgive-those-who-sin-against-us-if-they-dont-repent>  
Walter Wangerin Jr., *As for Me & My House*, chapters 4-8

## My favorite resources on conflict resolution:

Ernie Baker, *Help! I'm in a Conflict*  
Brad Hambrick, Conflict-Resolution Online Evaluation: [http://www.bradhambrick.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/GCMevaluation\\_Conflict-Resolution.pdf](http://www.bradhambrick.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/GCMevaluation_Conflict-Resolution.pdf)  
Robert D. Jones, *Pursuing Peace: A Christian Guide to Handling Our Conflicts*  
Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*  
Paul David Tripp, *War of Words: Getting to the Heart of Your Communication Struggles*  
Brenda Pauken, <https://www.biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/2017/07/12/hope-for-troubled-marriages/>