

Leadership 113
MARRIAGE AND FAMILY
Teacher's Manual

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OBJECTIVES

At the end of this course, the participants should:

- grasp the purpose of marriage, family, and parenting
- be encouraged to value and guard marriage and family
- be inspired to have a Christ-centered life, marriage, and family

OVERVIEW

Session 1: Foundations

Session 2: A God-Honoring Marriage

Session 3: A Loving Family

SESSION 1 – FOUNDATIONS

Note to the teacher:

This module is designed to give a basic biblical perspective on marriages and families. Teachers should be aware that this module is designed for both married and single people, including students. Extra sensitivity should be given for the following:

- Couples who have been married for a good number of years but still have no children
- Single parents and widows
- Orphans and adopted children or those under the care of guardians
- Participants who come from dysfunctional families (like broken marriages, absentee parents, rebellious children)

INTRODUCTION

In spite of all the information and resources available to families, we have never been in a more desperate time to talk about issues within the family.

Illustration #1

Following are Philippine statistics:

- The number of marriage annulment and nullity cases filed in the country has been steadily rising for the past years, with an average of 28 couples seeking to have their marriages declared null and void per day in 2012 as the records from the Office of the Solicitor General (OSG) showed.¹
- A total of 10,528 annulment cases were brought before the OSG in 2012, or over 1,000 cases more than the 9,133 filed in 2011. In 2002, a decade prior, a total of 5,250 couples sought to have their marriages annulled or nullified.²
- Based on the 2000 Census of Population and Housing, of the 57.1 million Filipinos aged ten years and over, one percent or 558,023 were either divorced or separated.³
- 2.4 million or 4.3 percent were in live-in arrangements.⁴
- Based on the 2002 Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality Study, 40 percent of the youth would support a bill to legalize divorce in the country.⁵
- An estimated 470,000 abortions were performed in the Philippines in 2000. In 2010, an estimated 560,000 babies were aborted.⁶
- One in ten young Filipino women aged 15 to 19 has begun childbearing.⁷

¹ <http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/story/302435/news/nation/more-pinoy-couples-seeking-annulment-despite-high-cost>

² *ibid*

³ <http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/story/87220/news/specialreports/number-of-filipinos-filing-for-annulment-legal-separation-cases-up>

⁴ *ibid*

⁵ *ibid*

⁶ Guttmacher Institute and University of the Philippines Population Institute.

⁷ <http://census.gov.ph/content/one-ten-young-filipino-women-age-15-19-already-mother-or-pregnant-first-child-final-results>

Illustration #2 (Optional)

Following are North American statistics

- The rate of divorce is between 40% and 50%. This is an increase of 500% from thirty years ago.
- Of those married, 20% are unhappily married and 10% are separated.
- The divorce rates of Christians and non-Christians do not significantly differ.
- Suicide is the third leading cause of death among teenagers.
- One in ten children has a serious, impairing mental illness, such as major depression or anxiety disorders.⁸
- In 2002, 11 million anti-depressant prescriptions were written for children.⁹
- Forty percent of children will spend a portion of their childhood in a single parent-home.¹⁰
- In the 1940's, the seven major problems in school were talking out of turn, chewing gum, making noise, running in the halls, cutting in line, violating the dress code, and littering. Forty years later, they were drug abuse, alcohol abuse, pregnancy, suicide, rape, robbery, and assault.¹¹

Why is the situation in families getting worse? The root issues have not been addressed.

The Purpose of Marriage and Family

1. Examining root issues is first about discovering God's purpose⁽¹⁾ for the family.

EXPLANATION

We need to find God's purpose for families. If we do not know where we are going, how will we succeed? If we aim for nothing, we are bound to hit it every time. Fortunately, the Bible gives parents a very clear mandate.

DEUTERONOMY 6:6,7

⁶"*And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. ⁷You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.*"

MATTHEW 28:19,20

¹⁹"*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*"

2. God's purpose for the family is the same purpose He has for individuals—to make

⁸ USA Today, June 2, 2004. 1-D

⁹ The Tennessean, March 14, 2004. 21-A

¹⁰ Gary Chapman, Five Signs of a Loving Family, p. 181

¹¹ Robert Lewis, Raising a Modern-Day Knight, p. 65

disciples⁽²⁾.

GENESIS 18:18,19

¹⁸“... *seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?* ¹⁹For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice, so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has *promised him.*”

EXPLANATION

With Abraham's position as a chosen covenant servant of the Lord come certain responsibilities. He is to instruct his children and family to observe the way of the Lord by practicing righteousness and justice.¹² Abraham's job is to teach, to command, to charge, and to order his sons and their families to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just. The major events in Abraham's life—waiting for a child, the birth of Ishmael, the tension between Sarah and Hagar, the birth of Isaac and the binding—are all about his duty and role as a father.

God designed the family for our holiness as much as for our happiness. The moment we shift our purpose off discipleship, we have missed the mark. Even if we seek to raise morally upright, smart, or successful children, or if we seek to build a happy life together, we have missed God's purpose for the family.

When we make disciples, our homes are filled with righteousness, peace, and joy. The bottom line is that disciples of the Lord Jesus will have better marriages and families.

To support this, researchers traced the genealogies of two men from the eighteenth century:¹³

Max Jukes, was a man who lacked biblical principles. His 1,200 descendants included:	Jonathan Edwards, was a widely renowned Christian leader. His 1,400 descendants included:
310 full time vagrants	300+ ministers, missionaries, and theological professors
440 physically wrecked from debauchery	78 college presidents and university professors
130 convicted criminals	100 lawyers
7 murderers	30 judges
100 chronic alcoholics	56 physicians
60 habitual thieves	70 holders of public office

¹² Victor Hamilton. The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18-50: NICOT

¹³ <http://unlockingthebible.org/jonathan-edwards-leaving-a-godly-legacy/>

190 publicly known prostitutes	3 U.S. senators and 3 governors
20 learned a trade (10 while in state prison)	3 mayors of large American cities
0 made any significant contribution to society	1 vice president of the United States
At the time of the study, this family cost New York State \$1,200,000 in social services.	Members of the family had written 1,035 books and edited eighteen journals and periodicals.

EXPLANATION

Jonathan Edwards believed in rising before sunrise for prayer. He would then read a chapter of the Bible to his eleven children before the day began. Though he was perhaps the greatest intellect produced in colonial America, each day he took time out from his writing, pastoring, and mission work among the Indians to give one hour of undivided attention to his children.

Another study was conducted on how parents shape their children's view of God:¹⁴

EXPLANATION

Members of a test group were asked about their views of God and then a few weeks later were asked about their relationship with their parents. This is a summary of those two interviews.

BELIEFS ABOUT PARENTS	BELIEFS ABOUT GOD
"My father always insisted I make the best use of my abilities."	"If there is a God, then I have dissatisfied Him, because I have not made the best use of my abilities."
"I was never close to my father."	"I have never experienced closeness to God."
"I do not ask anything from my father."	"If I am in distress I do not resort to God, because I have no belief in God."
"The provider in my family was my father because he worked."	"I think that God provides for my needs because He watches over me."
"If I could change my past, I would like to change my parents and my religion, because they make me feel guilty."	"If I receive an absolute proof that God does not exist, I will be happy, because I won't feel guilty."

¹⁴ Anna-Marie Rizzuto, The Birth of the Living God.

The point is clear: we must actively⁽³⁾ disciple our children.

EXPLANATION

A sobering example of the cost of this choice is the teaching of “values-neutral” sex education. The start of sexual intercourse and increased sexual activity goes up in proportion to the class time teenagers spend in such sex education programs. Even Planned Parenthood’s own follow-up survey showed a 50% higher rate of sexual activity after the classes. And the final irony: there was no significant change in the level of contraceptive usage. The point is clear: we cannot passively abdicate our responsibility to disciple our children.¹⁵

[Note to the teacher: You can explain again what is a disciple—someone who follows Jesus, fishes for people, and fellowships with other believers and relate it to discipling children.]

The Foundation of Family: Christ

1 CORINTHIANS 3:11

For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

JOSHUA 24:15

“... But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

EXPLANATION

Couples express problems in three primary areas: money, communication, or sex. But what underlies these problems?

1. The root problem in families is always sinful desires⁽⁴⁾, for sin always breaks relationships.

JAMES 4:1

What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?

EXPLANATION

The problem with families is that sinful people populate them! For example, our problem with communication is less about technique and more about how out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks (Luke 6:45).

¹⁵ Dr. George Grant, PhD, *Grand Illusions: The Legacy of Planned Parenthood*, Franklin, Tennessee: Adruit Press, 32; and Diana Richard, PhD, *Has Sex Education Failed Our Teenagers? A Research Report*, Pomona, California: Focus On The Family Publishing, 1990, 21-22; and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, “The Failure of Sex Education,” *Atlantic Monthly*, October 1994, 68-70.

2. Idolatry⁽⁵⁾ drives a sinful heart.

EXPLANATION

An idol is anything or anyone that takes God's rightful place as Lord of our lives. The first of the Ten Commandments highlights this truth:

EXODUS 20:3-6

³"*You* shall have no other gods before me. ⁴You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. ⁵You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my *commandments*."

1 SAMUEL 15:23

"For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as *iniquity and idolatry*. . . ."

Notice how idolatry directly curses the family in particular.

How does idolatry manifest itself in the home?

- Self-centered⁽⁶⁾ homes

EXPLANATION

In Genesis 3:5, we read that the first sin (which gave rise to every other sin) was to be our own gods, deciding right and wrong for ourselves.

2 Timothy 3:1,2 confirms that Genesis 3:1,2 is still true today: But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self . . .

EXPLANATION

Selfishness in parents and children alike is the biggest problem in our homes.

- Spouse-centered⁽⁷⁾ homes

GENESIS 3:6

. . . she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

EXPLANATION

The first willful sin was Adam's decision to follow Eve instead of God. 1 Timothy 2:14 says that Eve's sin was birthed in deception versus willful rebellion. Adam chose Eve over God and, in doing so, made spouse-worship humanity's second act of idolatry.

Listening to love songs confirms that the idolatry of the opposite sex is rampant. Britney Spears sings, "You're the one I need in my life . . . You're the answer, You're my answer." Relationships quickly crumble under the weight of such unreasonable expectations. Misplaced affection removes the possibility of Jesus Christ defining our homes.

• Child-centered⁽⁸⁾ homes

EXPLANATION

Many parents view good parenting as everything revolving around their children.

"Most of us parents love our children, [but] our commitment to their happiness harms them. Indulged children are unprepared for adulthood."

—Reb Bradley

EXPLANATION

This form of idolatry is so dangerous because it looks so noble. But when parents are more concerned with pleasing their children than they are with pleasing God, and more afraid of their children than they are of God, they have made gods of their children. This idolatry brings a "curse" upon the very children we are trying to love.

EPHESIANS 6:1-3

¹Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ²*"Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise),* ³*"that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land."*

EXPLANATION

When parents tolerate disrespect, they are withholding God's blessing upon their children. Establishing practical expressions of respect toward parental authority lays a healthy foundation for a child's relationship with God.

• Rule-centered⁽⁹⁾ homes

EXPLANATION

In this kind of home, there is not a particular person that is at the center of the home, but rather rules and responsibilities. But this is just as deadly.

2 CORINTHIANS 3:6

... the letter [of the law] kills, but the Spirit gives life.

EXPLANATION

The reality is that legalism never delivers our children from lawlessness. God's law is meant to define loving relationships, not replace them.

3. God redeemed us so we can choose Him to be the center⁽¹⁰⁾ of our families.

The Lord Jesus is the only person worthy to be in the center of our homes. This means that every member of the family submits his or her will to God.

EXPLANATION

Homes ruled by Jesus are filled with righteousness, peace, and joy. This makes Lordship or Christ-centeredness the key to healthy families. The more all the members of a family submit to God, the closer they come to each other.

"Man, by nature, does not like authority. Our fallen natures are self-legislative, and authority challenges that state."

—Gary Ezzo

- When the issue of God's authority⁽¹¹⁾ is settled, a solid foundation is established in the home.

MATTHEW 7:20

"Thus you will recognize them by their fruits."

So how can parents tell if God is leading their homes?

- Children are the clearest reflection⁽¹²⁾ of the parents' relationship with God and authority.

EXPLANATION

Although children ultimately make their own choices, we must have the courage to evaluate our devotion to Christ by our children.

JOHN 15:8

"By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples."

ACTIVITY

1. How did your relationship with your parents affect your view of God?
2. In what ways do your family members see your example of being a disciple of Christ? In what other ways can you model Christ in your home?
3. Among the different manifestations of idolatry in the home, which one do you usually see in families around you? How has it affected them? How can you avoid it in your home?

SESSION 2 – A GOD-HONORING MARRIAGE

Introduction

To honor God is to glorify Him. And to honor God in the marriage is to give reverence and recognition to God's being and God's place. God deserves all honor in everything, especially in marriage.

Marriage was used by God to showcase His authority and love for the church. In the next section, we will discuss more about how God models headship and submission in order build strong marriages for His glory to be seen.

Headship and Submission

1 CORINTHIANS 11:3

But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.

EXPLANATION

Critical to our understanding of headship and submission is the example of Christ. By looking at what it means for Christ to be the head of the church and the submission of the church to Christ, we will have a better handle on how to apply this in marriage.

1. Christ is the head⁽¹⁾ of the church.

Headship is about leadership. This means that Jesus is the leader of the church. His authority is supreme. He not only has this power to rule but also, the right. Ephesians 5:23 says, He is the Savior of the church. Jesus' work on the cross brought about this relationship with Him. He initiated it, worked it, and finished it. He did this out of love and mercy for people in sin bound for eternal punishment.

EPHESIANS 5:23-25

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. ²⁴Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. ²⁵Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her . . .

The primary scriptural model for headship is the relationship between God the Father⁽²⁾ and God the Son⁽³⁾.

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-9

⁵. . . Christ Jesus, ⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸. . . he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name . . .

EXPLANATION

First, the Father and Jesus are equal. This is a basic truth in the doctrine of the Trinity. The Godhead is co-equal, co-eternal, and co-substantial.

Headship and submission do not imply superiority⁽⁴⁾, inferiority of worth, or ability.

EXPLANATION

In the same way, men and women are made in God's image, and are equal in value (Genesis 1:27)⁶.

Secondly, in the relationship between the Father and Jesus, they do not grasp for equality. Relationships founded upon love and respect have no need to demand for equality. But when there is mistrust or pride, people fight for equality as a form of self-protection.

2. The church submits⁽⁵⁾ to Christ.

Submission to Christ is a response to the gospel. It is an honoring worthy of the Son of God's sacrifice. The church voluntarily submits out of reverence for Christ. As disciples, we submit to Christ because we have been won over by His love.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:14,15

¹⁴For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; ¹⁵and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

Headship and submission relationships are built⁽⁶⁾ on love and trust, not duty and enforcement.

EXPLANATION

Submission cannot be demanded, only received as a gift. Both leadership and submission are roles for serving. The only difference is in how service is expressed.

MATTHEW 20:25-28

²⁵But *Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. ²⁶It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ²⁷and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, ²⁸even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

EXPLANATION

Christ served by giving His life as a ransom for us. This is the display of His submission to the will of His Father. It is because of this sacrificial obedience that we as a church submit to Christ. An unhealthy view of submission is where the wife serves and the husband is served. Jesus defines leadership as service. Paul echoes this view concerning his authority:

2 Corinthians 13:10

... the authority the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing you down.

Walking out godly submission is not easy. Many wives withdraw their gift of submission the moment a husband does something wrong; others cower in fear of their husbands. The challenge to wives is to remain responsive to their husband's authority, while not condoning ungodly behavior.

1 PETER 3:1,2

¹Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, ²when they see your respectful and pure conduct.

EXPLANATION

We also reap what we sow. Just as untrustworthy husbands build mistrust in their wives, so do trusting wives build trustworthiness in their husbands.

Following are some of the qualities⁽⁷⁾ of families based on leadership and submission.

- These relationships create the opportunity for trust⁽⁸⁾ and trustworthiness.

EXPLANATION

Hierarchy develops a need for both trust and trustworthiness. I need to trust someone who has authority over me, and I need to be trustworthy when I am responsible for the wellbeing of others.

- These relationships create an opportunity to accomplish greater purposes⁽⁹⁾.

EXPLANATION

Just as teams need a captain, businesses a CEO, and countries a president, so families accomplish more when they are led as God intended.

Leadership and submission are functional roles, willfully embraced by both parties to help achieve an agreed upon purpose.

3. Headship and Submission in the Home

EPHESIANS 5:21

... submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

EXPLANATION

The husband's headship and the wife's submission are actually mutual submission out of reverence for Christ.

- Husbands are to surrender selfishness to lead⁽¹⁰⁾ their families toward God's purposes and values.

The Bible commands husbands to love their wives by laying down their lives—it is a dying to self.

EXPLANATION

Male leadership is limited in its sphere of authority: to promote God's heart and purposes for the members of his particular home. Leadership, then, is not about having unquestioned rule. Just as a police officer only has authority as he represents the laws of his government, a husband only has authority when he is promoting God's will. Submission means to operate within those purposes.

- Wives are to surrender self-rule and to submit⁽¹¹⁾ to their husbands' direction.

The Bible commands the wives to submit to their husbands as their head, but in recognition of Christ's headship.

COLOSSIANS 3:18,19 (AMP)

¹⁸ Wives, be subject to your husbands [out of respect for their position as protector, and their accountability to God], as is proper and fitting in the Lord. ¹⁹ Husbands, love your wives [with an affectionate, sympathetic, selfless love that always seeks the best for them] and do not be embittered or resentful toward them [because of the responsibilities of marriage].

COLOSSIANS 3:18,19 (ESV)

¹⁸ Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. ¹⁹ Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.

EXPLANATION

The husbands are not Christ, neither perfect nor sinless or divine. But the wives' submission to their husbands is acknowledging that Jesus is Savior and Lord.

Men and women are equal in worth yet unique in design and function. They stand equally before God. Yet, equality alone paralyzes trust and purpose. So God has given to men governing authority, typically demonstrated in the roles of husband, father, elder, and apostle.

Leadership is founded upon a voluntary trust relationship, where a husband defines, provides for, and leads his family towards God's purposes. His wife submits to his leadership by enhancing and executing the vision and values her husband provides.

“Masculinity and femininity are whatever comes out of a man or woman when they repent from self-centeredness.”

Men and women must realize that masculinity and femininity are not so much roles to play, as they are God's natural design. As they each set about to lead their homes without pride or competitiveness, who God has made them to be will emerge.

HUSBANDS OR FATHERS	WIVES OR MOTHERS
Leadership	Submission
Initiator	Responder
Provider	Helpmate
Cultivator	Incubator
Purpose-driven	Nurture-driven
Solution-oriented	Impact-oriented
Macro-thinker	Micro-thinker
Need respect	Need love

Marriage Model

EXPLANATION

Counseling a couple that is struggling in their marriage can be an intimidating task. Where do you start? What are the issues? How will change occur? In this section, you will learn a simple but effective model for counseling that will help you evaluate a troubled marriage and provide a process for change that is grounded in the saving work of Jesus Christ.

The following are five biblical presuppositions that inform our understanding of marriage.

1. God designed marriage to mature⁽¹²⁾ us relationally (Malachi 2:15).
2. Relationally mature people have the ability to give⁽¹³⁾ and receive God's love (1 John 4:7,16).
3. Healthy relationships are reciprocal⁽¹⁴⁾ in nature.

EXPLANATION

An unhealthy relationship is not reciprocal; one person is more of the giver and the other is more the taker. When one spouse has their identity in being needed and the other spouse in being needy, the relationship is dysfunctional.

4. Healthy marriages are comprised of individuals who know their security⁽¹⁵⁾ and significance⁽¹⁶⁾ in Christ.

EXPLANATION

A secure person does not try to earn other people's love, or minimize their need for love. They walk in transparency and humility, gratefully receiving what others offer. A significant person has discovered the joy of sacrificially loving others. They are self-giving and courageous in their love.

[Note to teacher: This is a good time to review how we find security and significance in Christ. Take time to explain how the gospel meets our need for security and significance.]

5. Everyone struggles⁽¹⁷⁾ with both giving and receiving love to some degree.

EXPLANATION

These are general characteristics. Each person does not have all the symptoms listed under their issue, and they may have symptoms listed under the other column, but these descriptions paint a picture of someone's primary issue.

SIGNS OF NOT RECEIVING LOVE WELL	SIGNS OF NOT GIVING LOVE WELL
Critical: of how others are performing	Resentful: of others' demands
Independent: present as capable, "godly"	Needy: seeks to be loved and helped
Legalistic: resists having problems	Lazy: passive, disengaged
Perfectionistic, driven: more "religious"	Selfish: looks more "rebellious"
Distant: struggles with intimacy	Withdrawn: from giving love
Unforgiving: judgmental	Relaxed: avoids stressful situations
Functional: "should" or duty-oriented	Unaware: can't see what needs to be done
Blaming: articulate about issues	Resistant: to practical obedience
Ungrateful: focus on what is lacking	Undisciplined: can't seem to execute

Generally confident: clear	Lacking confidence: uncertain
Discouraged about others: feels unable to change others/spouse	Discouraged about self: can't see how to change self

[Note to the teacher: This could be a ministry moment for some in the class. Take a moment to pray as the Holy Spirit leads you to.]

ACTIVITY

1. Why is headship and submission an issue for marriage? How does Christ's example of headship and submission help resolve this tension?
2. How did the gospel address your issue of security or significance? How has this translated to your relationships?

Session 3 – A LOVING FAMILY

INTRODUCTION

EPHESIANS 6:1-4

¹Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ²*“Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise),* ³*“that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.”* ⁴Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

The apostle Paul in his letter to the church at Ephesus laid out the requisites that will lead to a loving and nourishing family – children who obey and honor their parents, as well as parents, especially the fathers who will lovingly bring up their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

MATTHEW 28:19,20

¹⁹*“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations . . .* ²⁰*teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. . . .”*

1. Parenting is a discipleship⁽¹⁾ activity.

PROVERBS 22:6

Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.

EXPLANATION

Discipleship cannot fit into a Bible lesson or good night prayer. It happens in the context of life as our children play together, work through disappointments, study for a test, or obey instructions.

Parental education should likewise begin early and be according to his way (Proverbs 22:6, lit.), with sensitivity to the child's potential and long-range welfare (not in the way he should go, as NIV and many other translations of this verse). "The task of education [alluded to in this saying] is to enable the youth to raise his capabilities to the highest pitch of effectiveness and to set him undeviatingly on the right road by disciplining his habits and enlightening his attitudes" (McKane: 364). Once trained in this manner, this text states confidently, when he is old he will not turn from it. For this educational process to be effective, the son must not resist his father's admonitions (Proverbs 15:5).¹⁶

DEUTERONOMY 6:6,7

⁶"And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. ⁷You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise."

EXPLANATION

The purpose of discipleship in parenting is to raise children who love God and others.

2. Discipleship is the process of leading⁽²⁾ our children to love God and others in an ever-increasing measure. This is their life purpose.

MATTHEW 22:37-39

³⁷And *he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.* ³⁸This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

EXPLANATION

This purpose gives parents godly criteria for success: "Are my children growing in their love for God, their parents, siblings, friends, church, and society?" "Are they using their abilities and developing their character toward this direction?"

3. This purpose defines a parent's role as a minister of reconciliation⁽³⁾—bringing each child into right relationship with God, one another, and the world.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:18

All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation . . .

¹⁶ John W. Miller. Proverbs: Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2004)

EXPLANATION

As ministers of reconciliation, our goal is not simply to make our children stop fighting with one another, but to help them live in right relationship with their siblings as well as the people around them.

Loving God, One Another, and the World

The first people God calls children to love are their families. Without the practical experience of obeying their parents and loving their brothers or sisters, a personal relationship with God is an abstract concept. In fact, loving their families is how they tangibly express their love for God.

1 JOHN 4:20,21

²⁰If *anyone* says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. ²¹And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

1. Parents promote⁽⁴⁾ loving relationships at two levels: by enforcing respect and encouraging love.

EXPLANATION

We will first look at the level of enforcing respect.

Respect is the most basic form of love. It is foundational for the existence of a healthy society or home. Therefore, do not tolerate disobedience or rage as “the terrible twos” for they become the terrible threes, fours, and fourteens unless we insist on a basic standard of righteousness in our homes.

- Parents enforce respect by insisting that the baseline of godly behavior to which every member of the house must submit is the Ten Commandments.

EXPLANATION

We must build a family that honors God, does not condone idols, speaks respectfully of God, and honors a day of worship. It should be a home that will not tolerate disobedience towards parents, nor does it put up with rage, perversity, stealing, lying, or jealousy. These are reasonable expectations that every parent is responsible to uphold and defend.

Even babies must be taught that it is not appropriate to resist diaper changing, set their bedtime schedule, or throw their lunch on the floor. We must adapt and apply the Ten Commandments to every stage in our children's development.

- Parents enforce respect by administering godly justice.

PROVERBS 29:4

By justice a king builds up the land . . .

PROVERBS 2:1,8-9

¹My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you . . . ⁸guarding the paths of justice and watching over the way of his saints. ⁹Then you will understand righteousness and justice and equity, every good path . . .

EXPLANATION

Justice: The word connotes conformity to an ethical or moral standard. "Justice" is the act of calling our children to the standard of righteousness through a "cause-and-effect" form of parenting.

When there is injustice, compromise, or inconsistency in the home, a child becomes discouraged in their commitment to be righteous. Children need to know that specific sinful behavior will always be punished. Consistency is the key.

We will now look at the level of encouraging love.

MICAH 6:8

He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

EXPLANATION

Micah 6:8 outlines a three-stage maturation process for our children: to act justly, then to love mercy, then to walk in their own relationship with God.

- Parents encourage love by adding love and kindness to a foundation of right and wrong.

EXPLANATION

In society, police can only enforce respect; they cannot demand love. Likewise, parents can make their children respect God and others, but cannot make them love God and others. Although love cannot be enforced like the law, we can learn how to build love and compassion into our children. It begins by understanding what love is.

- Parents encourage love by reforming their children's motives, not just their behavior.

EXPLANATION

While love is a feeling, action, and decision, the Bible teaches that love is first a motive. And what motivates all behavior is either love or selfishness. As we teach our children to reject self-centeredness and choose other-centeredness, we are helping foster love in their hearts.

We help our children develop a heart of love by “staging” opportunities to love others: make a surprise present for mommy, cook a special meal for daddy, let their younger sibling win at a game, and then celebrate their acts of kindness. As we create opportunities for our children to express forgiveness, generosity, or self-sacrifice, we lead them to embrace a personal faith in God.

Calling them to a life beyond simple respect is leading them towards a life of faith, for Jesus calls us to a depth of love that requires faith (Galatians 5:6). This is especially critical in Christian homes where children can easily learn how to love but not really do it because of God. We must teach them the reason why we love—because it is God's will and it should be done by faith.

2. More than anything, our children's faith is affected by how we live out⁽⁵⁾ ours.

EXPLANATION

Children learn out of the corner of their eyes. This means that children do not just learn from a focused teaching time, they learn from what they observe us doing. Do not keep your faith private.

2 TIMOTHY 3:10,11

¹⁰You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, ¹¹my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me.

EXPLANATION

A child's favorite bedtime stories are the ones we tell about our own life.

Structured opportunities to learn about God are valuable when they are an expression of our personal faith, not a replacement.

[Note to the teacher: Describe what you or your parents did to teach about God.]

3. Church and family will bless each other and avoid competition⁽⁶⁾ when they work toward the same goal—discipling the next generation.

EXPLANATION

Sadly, parents tend to avoid the challenges at home by escaping into ministry, and the church can steal away time and energy parents should be giving to their children.

LUKE 2:49,51

⁴⁹And *he said to them, “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?”* . . . ⁵¹And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart.

EXPLANATION

The best thing that we can do for our children is to build great churches, for that is where their future lies. The best thing the church can do for families is to provide more than childcare; it must exist for the sake of building up the next generation. As an African proverb says, “It takes a village to raise a child.”

4. Families with a heart for the lost and vision for the world is crucial to city and world transformation (Psalm 2:8; 90:12; Proverbs 13:22).

EXPLANATION

Many parents overprotect their children from the world.

JOHN 17:15,18

¹⁵*“I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. . . .* ¹⁸*As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.”*

EXPLANATION

From Adam to Noah to Abraham and his offspring, God’s plan to expand His kingdom was always through families. Families were expected to provide food for strangers and give them justice, even an inheritance (Deuteronomy 24:21; 26:12; Ezekiel 22:29; 47:23).

Because the gospel usually spreads relationally, homes are at the center of God's evangelistic strategy.

ACTS 10:24

... Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends.

Child Discipline

PROVERBS 22:15

Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him.

PROVERBS 29:15

The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.

EXPLANATION

Children are born with a sin nature, and unless we respond to that fact properly, they will not "grow out of it." Therefore, the question we want to answer in this section is, "How do we turn our children from a sinful and selfish life?" Our outline will follow the Process of Change: Truth, Repentance, and Faith.

- Truth is expressed in the home by giving our children instruction⁽⁷⁾.
EPHESIANS 4:15
Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ...
- Repentance is expressed in the home in disciplining⁽⁸⁾ our children.
HEBREWS 12:11
For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.
- Faith is expressed in the home through leading our children to obedience⁽⁹⁾.
JAMES 2:18
... I will show you my faith by my works.

Truth: Instruction

3 JOHN 4

I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

1. God's truth is the ultimate authority⁽¹⁰⁾ in the home.

2 TIMOTHY 3:16,17

¹⁶All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for

correction, and for training in righteousness,¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

EXPLANATION

Our beliefs form who we are. So as we teach our children God's truth, we give them a framework of beliefs that rightly shapes them into who God intends them to be.

2. We teach⁽¹¹⁾ both the "what" and "why" of God's truth.

EXPLANATION

From the beginning of parenting, we must teach our children what is right and wrong. This means that in young children (toddler years), correcting their behavior is the primary means of teaching them the truth.

GARY EZZO

"With adults, beliefs precede actions; with children the opposite is true—actions precede beliefs. Parents should insist on correct behavior long before the child is capable of understanding the associated moral concepts . . . Actions come first, understanding comes second."

Initially, our teaching aims at reforming our children's behavior, but eventually (especially after the toddler years) it must provide answers that explain why they should behave in a certain manner.

EPHESIANS 6:4

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

EXPLANATION

We will eventually frustrate our children if we do not explain why they should act a certain way.

GARY EZZO

"It is not enough to teach your children how to act morally; they must learn to think morally . . . children who do all the right things without knowing why they are right are moral robots. They often respond to situations and circumstances correctly, but not from any guiding principles of the heart. In contrast, children who govern their behavior by moral principle . . . are morally free, governing their behavior by intrinsic principle, not extrinsic circumstances."

Explaining the why translates external behaviors into internal principles that a child can use to govern their choices, even when the parents are not around.

When we teach our children the what and the why of God's truth, even when they are old they will not depart from it (Proverbs 22:6).

We should also teach our children how to learn. There is a saying, "If we give someone a fish, we feed them for a day. If we teach them how to fish, we feed them for a lifetime." The same is true for parenting. When we teach them how to learn, we can give them a lifetime of knowledge. Children learn through humility, respectful enquiry, listening, obeying, and consequences.

3. We should use a variety⁽¹²⁾ of teaching forms.

DEUTERONOMY 6:5-7

⁵"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. ⁶And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.

⁷You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you *rise*."

EXPLANATION

There are many ways to teach our children such as doing devotions, discussing their questions, giving them warnings, providing guidance, storytelling, etc.

[Note to the teacher: Highlight in this list what you consider important for the students to understand.]

The most powerful kind of instruction happens through capitalizing on "teachable moments".

Repentance: Discipline

EXPLANATION

"A child's nature is intrinsically self-oriented, self-legislative, self-serving, and void of moral qualities." Our children are born with a disposition towards sin and evil.

1. Once we instruct⁽¹³⁾ our children in the truth, we then turn their lives to line up with that truth.

- We help bring our children to a place of repentance through correcting their behavior.

BETTY N. CHASE

“Correction means to alter or adjust a child’s behavior by taking actions to cause him to follow previous instruction.”

- Correction is the act of turning our children away from sin towards God’s will for their lives.

EXPLANATION

Biblical authority is not cold, calloused, and arbitrary. Our correction or discipline is not random acts of punishment. It is a deliberate act of redirecting our children toward the truth, and toward right relationship with God and others.

Therefore, it is unloving to ignore discipline, even occasionally; it confuses the child.

- When children experience negative consequence of their sinful behavior, they are motivated to turn from those actions and obey God.

EXPLANATION

By inflicting “artificial” pain now (physical discipline), we seek to spare them from greater pain in the future—relational dysfunction, job loss, divorce, etc.

2. The Bible teaches that there are several different forms⁽¹⁴⁾ of discipline: verbal correction, behavioral consequences, and physical punishment.

EXPLANATION

Because of the controversy around physical discipline and the potential for abuse, we will spend some time going into detail on this subject.

PSALM 89:30,32,33

³⁰“If his children forsake my law and do not walk according to my rules . . . ³²then I will punish their transgression with the rod and their iniquity with stripes,³³ but I will not remove from him my steadfast love or be false to my faithfulness.”

PROVERBS 23:13,14

¹³Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you strike him with a rod, he will not die. ¹⁴If you strike him with the rod, you will save his soul from Sheol.

PROVERBS 23:13,14 (NKJV)

Do not withhold correction from a child, for if you beat him with a rod, he will not die. You shall beat him with a rod, and deliver his soul from hell.

EXPLANATION

Typically, parents default to either copying or reacting to their parents' style of discipline. This often looks like permissive or authoritarian styles of parenting. It is imperative, then, that we understand how the Bible defines healthy discipline.

- A parent should choose⁽¹⁵⁾ which form of discipline to employ based on the child's age, the severity of the offense, and what would best motivate the child to repentance.

[Note to teacher: You can share your practices and the reasoning behind it or share about what you have learned from other mature Christians about this.]

- Clear instruction⁽¹⁶⁾ is always our first form of discipline.

EXPLANATION

When you ask your child to do something, make a clear request, make sure that they heard you, and let them know the consequences if they do not obey.

When you ask a child to do something, make sure that they heard and understood you by verbally responding to you, "Yes Daddy/Mommy." It is very important to get verbal agreement. It helps them engage their will and they cannot plead ignorance later if they do not obey.

A second level of discipline is to ask, "What are you doing?" "What are you supposed to do?" These two questions appeal to their conscience and give them an opportunity to repent before more severe forms of discipline are employed.

3. Following are guidelines for physical discipline.

- Physical discipline is reserved for acts of willful rebellion, defiance, disrespect, disobedience, and violence.
- Physical discipline is always motivated by love for the child, not the frustration of the parent (Hebrews 12:5,6).

EXPLANATION

We discipline for their benefit, not according to what we can and cannot tolerate.

- Physical discipline is used primarily before age five and should be discontinued around age eight to twelve.
- Physical discipline is applied in private (to retain the child's dignity).
- Physical discipline must produce pain, but not lasting harm.

PROVERBS 13:24 (NASB)

He who withholds his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him diligently.

PROVERBS 13:24 (ESV)

Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.

EXPLANATION

If it does not hurt, we have not given them a good enough reason to change.

- Physical discipline is only one part of healthy love and discipline.

EXPLANATION

Spanking is not the solution for all negative behavior.

- Physical discipline should be limited to a child's bottom and between one to five swats depending upon the age of the child and the severity of the offense.

4. The following is an outline for physical discipline.

EXPLANATION

Physical discipline is the only form of child discipline that is clearly described in the Bible. Here is an outline for how to spank a child:

- Listen⁽¹⁷⁾ before you judge their offense. Then, speak the truth about their sin and explain why it is wrong (Truth).
- Have them confess⁽¹⁸⁾ their sin and receive discipline. Afterwards, give them time to process what they have done (Repentance).
- Verbally restore⁽¹⁹⁾ them to right relationship (express your love), outline proper behavior, and give them faith for obedience (Faith).

EXPLANATION

After discipline, demonstrate forgiveness by not using that offense against them in the future. Consider the matter closed. Remember that the goal of discipline is to give them the motivation, wisdom, support, and resources they need to choose righteousness in the future.

Faith: Obedience

JAMES 1:25

But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

JAMES 1:25 (CSB)

But the one who looks intently into the perfect law of freedom and perseveres in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer who works—this person will be blessed in what he does.

EXPLANATION

The goal of speaking the truth and disciplining our children is for them to walk in their God-given destiny of loving God, their natural and spiritual family, and the world. That destiny will be realized through a lifestyle of trust and obedience to God.

The first question here is: How much do you believe your children can obey? Children will rise to the level of expectation of their parents. Many parents expect little and receive exactly that.

The following are four principles of obedience.

1. Never give a command unless you intend for it to be obeyed.

EXPLANATION

Expectations must be definable, reasonable, and enforceable. Give them the best opportunity to obey successfully.

Parents often have a harder time being clear and consistent in their requests than children do in their response. When you are clear in what you are asking them to do, it is remarkable how willing a child is to obey. Therefore, when you give a command, you must expect obedience.

2. Your child's response to your requests should be without challenge, excuse, or delay.

EXPLANATION

If you give second and third warnings, they will never hear you the first time! “First-time obedience” brings peace to the parent and security to the child.

3. Have them acknowledge your request verbally and with eye contact: “Yes, Daddy/Mommy.”
4. The goal of instruction and discipline is for our children to internalize obedience.

EXPLANATION

GARY EZZO

“By obedience, we do not mean the yielding that results from repeated threats, bribes, or manipulation of a child through the fear of losing parental love.”

We want our children to initiate obedience out of a heart of love. We foster obedience through giving our children clear opportunities, instructions, and encouragement. Parents should spend more time encouraging what is right than correcting what is wrong. There are numerous forms of encouragement, including frequent verbal affirmation, physical affection, rewards, goal setting, prophecy, exhortation, and modeling.

ACTIVITY

1. How do you show your love to your children? How did your parents show their love to you when you were growing up?
2. How do you instill discipline to your children? When you were a child, how did your parents discipline you?
3. How do you encourage your children to obey God and their parents? How did your parents encourage you to obey them?

APPENDIX: FRIENDSHIP, COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE

Introduction

PROVERBS 18:22

He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord.

There is a strong desire in most of us to get married, to find a person with whom we can share our lives. So strong is this desire that we feel great joy when we find that someone, and a great disappointment when we do not.

However, in the pursuit of this desire, we also find great temptation. The Bible is full of warnings concerning sexual temptation:

1 THESSALONIANS 4:3-5

³For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; ⁴that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, ⁵not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God . . .

How do we relate to the opposite sex in a godly manner and seek to find our spouse? While there is diversity in cultures concerning courtship, there are also clear biblical principles to guide us.

When is Dating Unhealthy?

1. Dating is unhealthy when it is with non-Christians.

2 CORINTHIANS 6:14,17

¹⁴Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? . . . ¹⁷Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you . . .

DEUTERONOMY 7:3,4

³*"You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, ⁴for they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of the Lord would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly."*

2. Dating is unhealthy when it is based solely on external appearance.

PROVERBS 31:30

Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. External attraction must not be the primary motivation for our relationship with the opposite sex. While physical attraction is not bad, it can distract us from more godly criteria for choosing a mate.

1 PETER 3:3,4

³Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear—⁴but let your adorning be the hidden person of the *heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight* is very precious.

3. Dating is unhealthy when physical intimacy is expressed outside of the marriage covenant.

1 CORINTHIANS 6:18-20

¹⁸Flee from sexual immorality . . . ¹⁹Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, ²⁰for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

- Sex outside of marriage dishonors God, stunts maturity, and fosters insecurity and mistrust towards the opposite sex.

Not only does immorality disregard God's standard of love, it prevents us from building a relationship upon selflessness and respect. The result is a relationship wrought with mistrust and insecurity.

PROVERBS 9:17,18

¹⁷*"Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant."* ¹⁸But he does not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol.

Forbidden fruit is attractive, but the cost is extremely high. Unplanned pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, broken hearts, shame, loneliness, affected children, and violating another man's wife, are some of the key ways sex outside of marriage hurts you and others.

PROVERBS 6:27-29

²⁷Can a man carry fire next to his chest and his clothes not be burned? ²⁸Or can one walk on hot coals and his feet not be scorched? ²⁹*So is he who goes in to his neighbor's wife; none who touches her will go unpunished.*

- Sex outside of marriage confuses lust for love, and sex for intimacy.

Sex outside the commitment of marriage does not express love, for there is not the proper security in the relationship to be truly vulnerable. When physical intimacy is inside commitment, it is an expression of selflessness, transparency, and trust, instead of a replacement for it. The tragedy is, when we do try to engage in a healthy physical relationship after marriage, it is hard to undo the selfish and hurtful patterns that were established during pre-marital sex. So even if you justify promiscuity by saying this is the person you are going to marry, understand that this sin will affect your marriage.

GALATIANS 6:7

Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.

- Sex outside of marriage uncovers and violates our brother or sister in Christ.

1 TIMOTHY 5:1,2

¹Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, ²older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity.

4. Dating is unhealthy when it undermines our devotion to Christ.

A dating relationship is idolatrous when we try to find in another person what only Jesus can give us.

“If I am attached to another person because I cannot stand on my own two feet, he or she may be a life saver, but the relationship is not one of love.”

—Erich Fromm

There is a general rule: when two people look to find in another what they should have in God, their relationship will break under the strain. We must find our security and significance in God first, and trust Him with our desires (Matthew 6:33).

5. Dating is unhealthy when it creates temptation.

We are called to flee from, not flirt with, temptation.

2 TIMOTHY 2:22

So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

PROVERBS 4:25-27

²⁵Let your eyes look directly forward, and your gaze be straight before you. ²⁶Ponder the path of your feet; then all your ways will be sure. ²⁷Do not swerve to the right or to the left; turn your foot away from evil.

MATTHEW 5:28

“But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

JOB 31:1

“I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I gaze at a virgin?”

How do we Grow Healthy Relationships?

Although many of us have already engaged in patterns and behavior that are not godly, God promises a new beginning for those in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:16,17).

While the expressions may change from culture to culture, the following are stages of a healthy relationship.

1. Friendship

- The goal of friendship is to develop a relationship with others, outside the expectations and temptations of courtship.

Learn how to relate with the opposite sex in healthy and honorable ways. When building healthy friendships, do not fixate on every conversation as an opportunity to look for a prospective mate. Just enjoy their company. As you become more interested in each other, perhaps, casually go out together in public places.

- Enjoy your single years as a gift to mature and serve Christ.

1 CORINTHIANS 7:32-34

³²I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. ³³But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, ³⁴and his interests are divided . . .

- Do not let the thought of being alone or of needing a mate steal away your faith in God to give you what you need.

PSALM 37:4

Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Unmarried people often have an illusion of what marriage will give them. It does not cure lust or loneliness, nor guarantee peace or happiness. In fact, immature people who marry enter into an entirely new level of pain. Use your single years as a time to mature in Christ. A good way to maximize your single years is to make a list of the qualities that you want in a spouse. And using that list, assess yourself and figure out what you still have to develop to prepare yourself for marrying that kind of person.

2. Courtship

“Just because a couple is at a place in their lives where they can consider marriage doesn’t mean that they should proceed recklessly . . . Instead of savoring an unfolding love story—acquaintance, friendship, courtship, engagement, marriage—impatient couples mash the sequence together. Before they have built a friendship, they start playing at love. Before they’ve even thought about commitment, they’re acting as though they own each other.”

—Joshua Harris

There should be a natural flow from friendship to courtship. (Hint to men: If she is surprised by your intentions to court, it did not flow. Hint to women: If you are planning the wedding day on the first date, you are probably rushing things!)

- Biblical courtship is a clearly definable, accountable dating relationship that creates a morally safe avenue for two people to seek God regarding marriage. Courting should begin when you are ready and able to commit to marriage.

LUKE 14:28-30

²⁸*“For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? ²⁹Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, ³⁰saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’”*

For men, to discern if you are ready for marriage, ask questions like: “Would others say that I am ready to be the spiritual head of a home? Do I have the kind of faith that my wife and children would respect? Do I have a vibrant relationship with God, or am I looking for a woman to enhance it?”

Women can ask questions like: “Would others say that my faith and maturity are worth imitating? Do I have a need for men that should be reserved for Christ? Am I the type of helpmate a husband would desire? Can I give to my children what they need to grow in faith and godliness?”

The following are guidelines for courting:

- Spend time getting to know each other more personally and in a variety of circumstances.

Treat the other person with respect, in the fear of the Lord, not assuming that you will marry them. This is the time to discern the future, not to assume or act like marriage is inevitable. Therefore, while courting, you are to do two contradictory things: grow in intimacy and guard your hearts in the process.

- Commit to discern God’s will for this relationship.

“A successful courtship is one in which two people treat each other with holiness and sincerity and make a wise choice about marriage—whether the choice is yes or no.”

—Joshua Harris

PHILIPPIANS 1:9,10

⁹And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless . . .

- Verbally agree on clear physical boundaries.

Be aware that physical involvement heightens temptation, lessens your ability to know the person, and stifles God’s will for your relationship.

- Seek godly counsel.

PROVERBS 15:22

Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed.

Families and church communities provide objectivity, protection, and accountability.

3. Engagement

Do not just plan for your wedding day, plan for your marriage. Pre-marital counseling should be a key part of that preparation. If mentoring is not part of your church's pre-marital counseling program, find a godly couple you both respect to mentor you for the first few years of marriage.

Have a godly testimony for your offspring (Psalm 78:5-7).

"God does not excuse our sin because we are in love and 'no one is getting hurt.' You have heard the argument; maybe you have even used it yourself. 'We're two consenting adults. We love each other! We both want this!' But do you see who is being forgotten in the equation of 'two consenting adults'? The Almighty Creator of their two bodies. Each time you feel as though you are denying yourselves, you are actually blessing yourselves. Each time you walk away from temptation and refuse to stoke the fires of passion prematurely, you are sending yourselves the best gifts you will receive on the day of your wedding—gifts of trust and respect and increased passion."

—Joshua Harris

4. Marriage

"The success of a marriage comes not in finding the right person, but in the ability of both partners to adjust to the real person they inevitably realize they married."

—John Fisher

Marriage is a mutual agreement between two people to leave past allegiances and be devoted to a life of intimacy and fruitfulness according to God's will.