



MARRIAGE COUNSELING QUICK RESOURCE GUIDE



A ministry of
Salem Heights Church



The Purpose and Foundation of Marriage

Introduction:

Your counselees want more for their marriage. Neither one thinks their own needs are being met. They keep trying to get along, but nothing seems to work. More and more, the little things create conflict. She wants him to engage more around the house and not disconnect when she talks about her feelings. He desires to be close to her but thinks most conversations lead to a list of ways he doesn't measure up. Neither one of them expected marriage to be like this.

Before we can really work on specific issues in marriage, it is important to understand God's design and purpose for it.

In-session counseling:

Pray: Open our hearts to hear what Your Word says and give us the motivation to put it into practice.

Read Colossians 1:15-18 aloud and discuss the following question.

What does this passage say about Christ and marriage?

- Christ created all things to bring Him glory, including marriage.
- Christ desires to be central in all areas of our lives.

Read Genesis 2:18-25 together and use the following questions to guide your discussion.

What do you learn about marriage from this passage?

- Adam was given a helper to reflect God's character.
- Adam was given a partner, not a possession.
- God's union joins one man and one woman.
- God's one-flesh design indicates that other earthly relationships should be secondary.

How does your understanding of God's design for marriage compare to your experience?

What do you think it means to reflect God's character within marriage?

What circumstances or situations in your marriage hinder you from living out God's design?

After-session homework:

1. Read Proverbs 3:5-6 and answer the following questions:
 - a. In what ways have you been following your own understanding of marriage?
 - b. What would it look like for you to trust the Lord "with all your heart" concerning your marriage?
2. Pray that God would give you a desire to trust Him and follow Him in your marriage.

Our Personal Walk with God

Introduction:

Currently everything seems to be a source of conflict for Joe and Amy. They both wonder why they are even still married. When we ask about where God fits into their personal lives and marriage, both hang their head. When they met and first started out in marriage, God seemed to be at the center of all they did. Today with 2 busy careers, 3 active children and hobbies, life has become hectic. They acknowledge that they have not been to church in 3 years and that their devotional life has become K-Love on the way to work. Each of them thinks God feels distant—who moved?

Our personal walk with the Lord impacts our spouse and marriage. An intimate walk with Him can transform a marriage. However, intimacy with Him apart from His Word and His Spirit working in us is impossible and makes a thriving marriage unlikely.

In-session counseling:

Pray: We are so prone to wander, especially when there are so many distractions in our lives. Rekindle in us the desire to pursue our friendship with You so Your love will spill over into our relationships with one another.

Read Psalm 1 aloud and use the following questions to guide your discussion.

What two paths are described?

-the path of ungodly counsel (worldly wisdom)

-the path of following the Lord's instructions

How is happiness or blessedness described (both positively and negatively)?

What hinders blessing in this passage? How does that look in everyday life?

-Notice the negative progression of the verbs in verse 1 (walk, stand, sit). Worldly counsel always stops spiritual growth.

What is the source of happiness or blessedness? What do you think it means to delight in the Lord's instruction? To meditate on His instructions?

According to this passage, what is the result of an intimate walk with the Lord?

-happiness or blessing

-security and stability (A healthy tree has a root system as deep and wide as the tree is tall and wide. It taps into the living water.)

-prosperity according to God's standards

How would a growing walk with the Lord impact your spouse and marriage?

-A close walk with the Lord gives peace, clarity and direction that will impact all areas of life, including marriage.

-When we are intimately acquainted with God and His Word, we will view marriage from His perspective and understand how He wants us to live.

-A growing understanding of God and His Word will give us confidence to follow His instructions in life, including marriage.

After-session homework:

1. Evaluate your personal relationship with God. What counsel, habits, or patterns hinder a close walk with the Lord?
2. Think of two or three things you would be willing to set aside in order to learn to love God's Word and follow it.
3. Think of two or three things you could incorporate into your life in order to make pursuing God a priority.
4. Read Psalm 19:7-11. List the benefits and blessings found in God's Word.
5. Pray that God would give you a desire for His Word and for wisdom to live it out.

Communication

Introduction:

The couple shares on their intake form that they struggle with communication. She longs for meaningful communication with her husband even though their life is busy. She expects to engage in deep meaningful conversations when her husband arrives home from work. He arrives home exhausted from a physically demanding, stressful job and wants a hot shower and a few moments of quiet. It's clear that they are communicating—each one knows what the other expects, but neither one hears what they want to hear.

Godly communication in marriage is possible with God's help. The first step in good communication is a heart that is yielded to the Lord.

In-session counseling:

Pray: Help us listen to You and to love each other enough to hear each other's hearts the way You do.

Read Luke 6:43-45 together and ask the following questions to begin your discussion.

How are the heart and words connected? What do you notice about the terms used to describe the heart of a person? Have you ever thought about your own heart in those terms?

Read Galatians 5:16-26 aloud, pausing to define words as needed. Discuss the following questions.

What do you notice about the two different lists?

(vs 19-21)

-The flesh desires independence from God.

-The flesh always deviates from God's plan.

-The flesh impacts our sexuality, interpersonal relationships, and desires.

(vs 22-23)

-The Spirit produces fruit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control).

-The list is opposite of what the flesh produces.

-The Spirit leads towards God's plan.

In terms of communication, which list more resembles your home in general right now?

How would yielding to the Spirit change the way you talk to each other?

What are some practical ways that you can be led by the Spirit?

What specifically is God asking you to do?

After-session homework:

1. Read Proverbs 4:20-27. What would it look like to "guard your heart above all else?" What steps are you willing to take to do this?
2. How does your heart attitude affect the way you speak to your spouse? Think of some specific examples (positive and negative).
3. Ask the Lord to change your heart so that your communication in marriage honors Him and benefits your spouse.

Conflict and Conflict Resolution

Introduction:

Billy and Suzy share their most recent conflict in hopes of learning how to avoid this in the future. Their much-anticipated weekend away to celebrate her birthday had arrived. They were busy packing things for a trip out of town. Suzy was very clear about what she expected Billy to pack. When they arrived at their rental home and unloaded the car, it appeared that the birthday cake had been left on the counter back home. He apologized repeatedly for his oversight but she remained angry over his “forgetfulness”. She accused him of not caring for her and purposely leaving the cake behind. Even as she recalled the incident, she remained angry. He wasn’t sure how to convince her that he did not forget it on purpose. She wants perfection; he wants grace—what does God want and what does His Word say about this dynamic?

The goal of marriage is not to be conflict-free but to view and resolve conflict in a biblical way.

In-session counseling:

Pray: You have said that all of us have sinned and fallen short of Your glory. Please help us recognize our own sin and give us the desire to remove the log from our own eye before trying to tweeze the speck out of our spouse’s eye.

Read James 4:1-5 aloud and discuss the following questions.

According to this passage, why is there conflict in your relationship? What else do you notice about conflict?

- Quarrels and fights start in my heart.
- My strong independent selfish desires are the problem.
- My selfish desires “put to death” my opposition.
- My greed pursues personal pleasure.
- My quest for pleasure destroys relationships.

How do you see your personal desires contributing to the conflict?

In what ways have you put your own personal desires above loving and caring for your spouse?

Read James 4:6-10 aloud and continue your discussion with these questions.

In what different ways does the Lord offer help when you are headed towards (or in) conflict?

-Remember God's grace. (*"I need your Spirit."*)

-Submit to the Lord. (*"I need your help."*)

-Resist the devil. (*"I need your victory."*)

-Draw close to God. (*"I need you close."*)

-Repent. (*"I need your forgiveness."*)

-Be humble. (*"I need to trust you."*)

What do you find difficult about receiving God's help for conflict? What is easy?

What might the Lord want you to change in order to move toward peace in your marriage relationship?

After-session homework:

1. Review James 4:1-5. Evaluate your own heart concerning selfish desires that have impacted your marriage. Share with your spouse areas of conviction and seek forgiveness from God and your spouse.
2. Review James 4:6-10. How can you practically begin to submit to God? What is God calling you to do in order to draw near to Him? Share these insights with your spouse and pray together about these things.
3. Read James 1:19-25. What encouragement do you find in this passage to help you regarding conflict and resolution?
4. Pray that God would grow the fruit of His Spirit, particularly patience and peace, in you and your marriage.

Forgiveness

Introduction:

The couple comes to us feeling more and more distant from each other. It is clear that both feel hurt and wounded by their spouse in different areas. When we ask for specifics, both can name detailed incidents of hurt in the past. When we ask how they have tried to repair their relationship, they acknowledge that they haven't really talked about them. Both admit to harboring bitterness and anger towards the other. They both know that certain subjects are just off-limits. Both are waiting for the other to bring up the conflict but each assumes it will just end in a fight. So they "brush it under the rug" and hope for the best. Like crushed glass swept under a rug, bitterness and resentment will find a way to resurface and cause still more pain.

The forgiveness God offers is generous, complete, and ongoing. Believers are to extend this same kind of forgiveness to others. The Gospel should motivate us to forgive as God forgives.

In-session counseling:

Pray: You gave Your life to pave the way for the forgiveness of our many sins. Give us the desire to forgive each other as freely as you have forgiven us.

Read Matthew 18:21-35. Ask this series of questions to guide your discussion of the passage.

What was Peter concerned with? Can you identify with his question? Why or why not?

-how many times to forgive

What do you observe about the servant in the parable?

- He owed a very large debt to his master (10,000 talents would have been an unpayable debt).
- He asked for time to pay back the loan and the master forgave it instead.
- Someone else owed him a smaller amount.
- He was unwilling to forgive the debt owed to him.
- He endured consequences for his lack of mercy and forgiveness.

What do you observe about the master?

- He did not require his servant to pay back the very large sum (forgave him the entire debt).
- He expected the servant to follow his example of mercy and forgiveness.

What does this parable teach you about God and forgiveness?

- The Lord is gratuitously generous in His forgiveness.
- Forgiveness is at the heart of the Gospel.
- The willingness to forgive others flows out of a heart that knows and appreciates God's forgiveness.
- The Lord does not take lightly an unforgiving heart.

How does this passage challenge your view of forgiveness?

Have you experienced the King's forgiveness of your debt?

How does God's display of forgiveness to you impact how you think about extending forgiveness to others?

How does God want you to display forgiveness in your relationship?

What are some things you would be willing to do to move toward repentance and forgiveness?

After-session homework:

1. Read Ephesians 1:3-14 and Colossians 1:13-14. How is the gift of God's forgiveness to you described? Is this how you think about forgiveness? If not, what gets in the way?
2. What questions do you have about forgiveness?
3. Take time to praise God for the forgiveness that He offers in salvation. Ask Him for a willingness to offer forgiveness in your relationship.

Roles in Marriage

Introduction:

Greg and Yvonne appear to be well-versed in the Scriptures and are both intent on following God's plan for their marriage. They are disappointed in each other because neither thinks their spouse is living out the biblical roles of marriage. She says he doesn't pray with her, lead family devotions or encourage her with the Word. His leadership in their home, in her opinion, is weak. He shares that he is trying to lead but that she has so many opinions about how he is leading that he just gives up and lets her lead. He knows that she is supposed to be submissive but he is not really sure what that should look like. Both express that if their spouse would just figure out how to follow Ephesians 5:22-33 things would get better in their marriage.

Ephesians 5 helps us understand how to obey God's design for husbands and wives in the marriage relationship. We often want to start with the biblical roles and figure out who should do what. But first, we need to step back and talk about the motivation we need for the desire to obey.

In-session counseling:

Pray: You've promised to give us the desires of our hearts when we delight in you. Help us delight in You more than in our own plans and expectations.

Read Ephesians 5:22-33 together. Ask the following questions to start your discussion.

What stands out to you about the husband/wife roles? What do you find easy about living these roles? What about these roles do you find difficult?

Read Ephesians 5:1-2 together and discuss the following questions.

How do verses 1 and 2 relate to the instructions about husband/wife roles in marriage?

What does it look like to imitate God?

How has Christ loved you and sacrificed for you?

How might remembering the love and sacrifice of Christ impact your ability to submit? To love your wife?

-In order to imitate God, we must know Him in relationship.

-We are to imitate Christ's sacrificial love as demonstrated on the cross.

-Successfully fulfilling our roles in marriage is a response to Christ's love to us.

-The Gospel (1 Corinthians 15:1-4) must impact all areas of our lives. It must be our motivation to live according to God's agenda in marriage.

-Serving and sacrificing in marriage is first about loving God, not following a set of rules.

After-session homework:

1. Review Ephesians 5:1-2. List some specific ways that you could imitate God in your relationship with your spouse. What steps could you take to make these a reality in your marriage?
2. Read Colossians 3:1-17.
 - a. Make 2 lists: things God is calling you to put aside, and things God is calling you to do.
 - b. Think about your own salvation and all the blessings that come with being a child of God. How might reflecting often on the Gospel motivate you to obey the instructions in this passage?
 - c. How might your marriage be impacted if you walk in obedience according to the passage? List some specific differences.
3. Pray that God would change your heart so that obedience becomes a joyful act of love and not a duty.

Sexual Intimacy

Introduction:

Tom and Jenny have been married for 10 years. They are struggling because they seem to have different ideas about sex. She desires closeness and emotional connection instead of just five minutes of passion. The subject is tough for him to discuss because she always seems tired and unavailable. They know sexual intimacy is an important part of marriage but they don't see how to find common ground.

Sexual intimacy is part of God's good plan in marriage. However, for many couples the idea of sex and intimacy is a source of confusion and conflict in their relationship. God's Word gives us instruction and encouragement in this area. A biblical view of sex and intimacy will help couples begin to think clearly about this important area in their marriage.

There are a number of issues and concerns that may contribute to difficulty in the area of sexual intimacy in marriage. This lesson highlights God's design and purpose and does not address specific issues. Your discussion may open up an opportunity to explore those particular concerns and offer counsel to address them at a future meeting.

In-session counseling:

Pray: You created us male and female and joined us with our spouses in a way that somehow reflects your Tri-Unity. Give us a clear vision of how our relationship with each other has repercussions throughout eternity.

Read Genesis 2:22-25 together and discuss the following questions.

What observations can you make about marriage and sexual intimacy?

- Sexual intimacy is God's idea, not a product of the fall.
- It creates a unique, powerful, emotional, physical, and spiritual bond between husband and wife.
- It is to be enjoyed only within marriage.
- Sex is part of God's good creation and brings Him glory.

How does your view of sex and intimacy in marriage compare with God's? What has impacted how you view the sexual relationship in marriage?

Read 1 Corinthians 7:1-5 How does this passage help you understand God's design for sex?

-Sexual intimacy is created by God to be enjoyed within the boundary of marriage.

-It should be a regular part of the marriage relationship to avoid temptation.

-Sexual intimacy is an expression of belonging to your spouse in a covenant relationship.

-It is a gift to share with your spouse, not a right to be demanded.

What gets in the way of viewing and enjoying sex as God intended?

How does a growing understanding of His purpose and plan for sex encourage you?

After-session homework:

1. Read the Song of Solomon. Observe how the author describes the expressions of sexual love. Are these surprising to you? Why or why not?
2. What beliefs, attitudes, and experiences have impacted your view of sex and intimacy? How might changing your views to align more closely with God's view affect your relationship?
3. Pray for God to help you trust Him in this area of your marriage.