

# BIBLICAL MARRIAGE COUNSELING PRINCIPLES

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## I. **Marriage in the Bible: Overview**

- a. Ministering often to couples who are Biblically illiterate when it comes to marriage. Churched or unchurched, people often build their foundations and understanding of marriage from places other than Scripture
- b. The world has nothing to offer
- c. As counselors, we don't want to flip only to the "marriage passages" in the Bible. Marriage is throughout the Bible, because the Gospel is throughout the Bible
- A. Man and Woman
  - a. God creates them in His image: different, with roles and responsibility, etc.
- B. Made in God's Image
  - a. made for relationship
  - b. perfectly complementary
  - c. made to glorify God, work, etc.
- C. Given a Mission
  - a. Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it and fill it with the glory of God.
- D. Promised Struggle
  - a. Sin enters the world, and everything flipped upside down: work without pleasure, childbearing with pain, relationship with conflict and sin, etc... things that God created for His glory and our joy become struggles.
- E. Obvious Opponent
  - a. The enemy hates that God gets all glory, and man is made in the image of God. As a result Satan is the enemy of God and man, and goes after man. Man falls.
  - b. We fail to live by God's good design
- F. Gospel Hope Gen 3:15-16
  - a. "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."
  - b. We must start in Genesis 1-3 in marriage counseling: the design, and what went wrong.
- G. Old Testament Examples
  - a. Good Marriage: Ruth and Boaz... few others.
  - b. Bad examples: Many! We see often in the Old Testament what goes wrong when we do marriage our way, choosing pleasure over joy
- H. Jesus's Work - Romans 6:4 - Died, Buried, Newness of Life
  - a. "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."

- b. Our old nature and sin has died and been buried with Christ, and we are free to walk in the Spirit, in righteousness, and in newness of life.
          - i. Discipleship
        - c. Must start here: a man and wife must lay down their lives to the Lord before they lay down their lives for each other. Only in submission to Christ is there power to live out a godly marriage
  - I. The Gospel and Marriage - Ephesians 5:15-33
    - a. How we should walk
    - b. Proof we can't
    - c. The Gospel
  - J. The End of All Things - Revelation 19:6-9
    - a. Goal in marriage counseling is not that a couple would fight less, but that they would be on mission to show the world this picture of Christ and His bride
- II. **So how do we do marriage counseling in light of the Gospel?**
  - A. Prologue - The Importance of Premarital Counseling
    - a. Save a marriage before it starts
    - b. The world has not set up these couples for healthy Biblical marriages. Good premarital counseling helps put them on the path to true, good understanding of marriage
  - B. Show God's design
    - a. What marriage is supposed to be. People come in to marriage counseling with the wrong goals: they want to fix a symptom (fight less, have better communication, etc...)
  - C. Bring out the dysfunction
    - a. Data gathering and context: what does their specific dysfunction look like? Conflict? Unbelief in the Gospel? Control?
  - D. The Gospel difference/The Gospel deficiency in their marriage
    - a. Apply the Gospel to the specific couple's situation
    - b. Give Gospel hope
    - c. Goal is to get to a place where the couple who came in for counseling is helping others in their marriages
    - d. How they are not believing/practicing the Gospel in their own lives
    - e. Three outcomes for marriage (and only these three!): divorce, dysfunction, or God's design
  - E. Practical
    - a. Avoiding "practical stupidity": ex: spending no time together, not reading the Word, watching TV every night instead of with each other, etc. These are practical hindrances to a godly marriage, and can be addressed immediately with action.
  - F. Example
    - a. 1 John 4:7-21
      - i. Gospel: people tend to reflect their true understanding of God's love

for them in their actions towards them. (eg, a wife loving her husband based on his actions or performance, because that's how she understands the way God loves her.)

### III. Obstacles in Marriage Counseling

- A. You, the Counselor
  - a. Own pride, ego, picking sides ...
- B. Agendas by Counselee
  - a. Many enter the counseling room wanting a judge to tell their spouse they are wrong, instead of a counselor to show them how to be more godly in their marriage.
- C. Rabbit Trails
  - a. This can be a manifestation of counselee's agendas: each counseling session is spent getting into the nuances of all of the ins-and-outs of their relationship and specific situations
  - b. Remember what our goal is: restoration, life in community, life on mission. Our goal is not to solve all of their problems, but to point them to Christ, and give them the tools they need to solve their own problems as they pursue Him.
- D. Tyranny of the Urgent
  - a. Dealing with the most recent flare up instead of underlying heart issues
  - b. This makes counselors miss major complicating factors:
    - i. One or both is on medication
    - ii. Abuse as a child
    - iii. Hidden addiction
    - iv. Issues with extended family, adult children
    - v. One of them is not a believer

#### Resources:

1. "What Did You Expect? Redeeming the Realities of Marriage" - Paul Tripp
2. "Marriage Matters: Extraordinary Change Through Ordinary Moments" -Winston Smith
- 3."The Mingling of Souls: God's Design for Love, Marriage, Sex, and Redemption." - Matt and Lauren Chandler (Best chapter on sex on the market.)
4. Jim Sabin recommends "Pre-Engagement: Five Questions to Ask Yourselfes" by David Powlison & John Yenchko.

## Group Discussion

1. How do you determine at what point a couple will not benefit from counsel?
  - a. Determine if someone "is a counselee:" are they humble, teachable, ready to change, or are they moving towards this? If not, there are options:
    - i. Give long term assignment: read a book, get into community, etc and come back to counseling when they have completed the assignment and are ready to come back to counseling
    - ii. If one individual refuses to come to counseling, or is not a counselee, continue on in individual counseling with the spouse who wants to change.
    - iii. We must be careful to not try to woo someone into being a counselee. God changes hearts, and we as counselors can't fight more for someone's marriage than the couple.
    - iv. If everyone is stuck, counselor, and couple, but they're still teachable, move from role of counselor to advocate, and see another biblical counselor with them.
2. If a friend comes to you for marriage counseling, is it a conflict of interest?
  - a. Not inherently, but if you have a good relationship with them and are in regular contact with them, you may be able to help more as an advocate than a counselor
  - b. This is nuanced.
3. How do you set expectations for counseling?
  - a. Ask what their expectations are, what they've experienced in the past
  - b. "You are the problem in your marriage, and as you grow in Christ likeness, you will see resulting change in your marriage"
  - c. Ask what they're looking for, and give them what you have: the Gospel
  - d. If you're thinking the Gospel is implied, it won't be applied
4. How do you lovingly tell someone who has been sinned against (eg: cheated on), that they are still sinful (that they are "the problem in their marriage")?
  - a. there are reasons why we do sinful things, but there is no excuse. There may be reasons that led to infidelity, but there is no excuse.
  - b. They are both sufferers and sinners.
5. How do we implement Premarital counseling in a big church, where it seems overwhelming to counsel each couple individually?
  - a. One idea is to consider offering a premarital counseling class for foundations, and connecting these couples with a seasoned couple who will walk with the young couple through the first year of marriage.