

What is being said about
Marriage by Design
by Eric A. Disney

When I read Mr. Disney's book, *Marriage by Design*, I was overjoyed with his material! Being a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist who does lots of integration with Christian theology, I found it to be insightful and "user friendly." The integration of scriptural truths with solid counseling concepts adds to its effectiveness.

Ron Hall

Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist

Board Certified Professional Christian Counselor

Certified Trauma Specialist

CCV Pastor of Encouragement

"If, like many of us, you got married with the idea that love will make all things clear, do your relationship a favor and read *Marriage by Design*! Eric Disney does an amazing job of laying a biblical foundation for marriage and attacks "head on" the issues that have plagued couples for years."

Dale Harewood, Associate Pastor

Covenant Blessing Fellowship, Wilmington, Ca.

"Why wasn't this written two decades ago?" I believe that Eric Disney truly has the gift of imparting wisdom that is both sound and easy to implement. Its interactive nature allows couples to move beyond superficial texts that are quite common in this genre. I plan to utilize this book for couples that I work with in the future as well as recommend it to all of my colleagues as an excellent supplement to their marriage counseling."

Jay Fitter

Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist

Author, Respect Your Children

Marriage by Design will take any couple to a higher level in their relationship roles as husband and wife and bless them in the process."

Mike Rodriguez, Senior Pastor

Calvary Chapel Corona

ERIC A. DISNEY

MARRIAGE
by Design

*The Keys to Create,
Cultivate and Claim the
Marriage You've Always Wanted*

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Marriage by Design

The Keys to Create, Cultivate and Claim the Marriage You've Always Wanted

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*This book is dedicated to
my beautiful wife, Jennifer,
whom God uses to show me much about marriage and myself.
To Denzel and Gerda, my father and mother,
who demonstrated a wonderful example of marital commitment,
and to Denny and Derek, Daddy's boys
and God's little reminders to me
that a healthy marriage is well worth the effort.*

*To Suzi Jones, whose heart for healing marriages was
an inspiration to others.*

*To Tony Malama, a gentle giant who through his example
taught me much about the importance of forgiveness.*

*Dad, Tony, and Suzi, your passings leave a hole in my heart
that will never be replaced. I take comfort in the knowledge
that I will see you all again.*

*I finally give thanks to those who showed great courage and
transparency
in sharing their personal stories within these pages
so that others might glean from the hope
that was given them.*

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Introduction

In the Beginning...

He stands in the local bookstore, perusing the most recent edition of a muscle magazine. He knows in the back of his mind that the only reason these guys were lucky enough to grace the pages was because the editors just hadn't seen him yet. Suddenly he senses someone staring him down. He cautiously glances to both sides. To the left, a short balding middle-aged man looking over a fine dining magazine; he seems oblivious. To the right, an older woman with her hair tied up in a conservative bun. She looks up and smiles, then goes back to reading her cross-stitching quarterly; it was surely not her.

He flips a couple of pages and again feels the stare. Looking up, he notices a pair of beautiful hazel eyes staring at him through the slot between the magazines on the rack. She quickly looks back to her magazine, but it is unmistakable: she was checking him out. Those exquisite hazel eyes are enough to call for further investigation. He subtly walks to the end of the aisle, making sure that she is not watching him. He walks around the end cap and there she stands. She is gorgeous, everything he has ever wanted in a woman. *She's the one!*

She glances up, hoping to catch another glimpse of him through the magazine rack. A look of sadness crosses her face as she lowers her head. He has gone.

“Hello,” he says, nearly scaring her to death. She has been caught and looks quite embarrassed. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to startle you,” he adds, helping her save face. “I’m Mark.”

“Hello, I was so engrossed in this article...my name is Sheila.”

Their eyes lock, their hearts pound, their blood courses through their veins like a rushing river, the music swells...

Fifteen years later, in a dimly lit kitchen, Mark and Sheila sit at a table. I mention their names because if you could see them now you would never recognize them as the couple just described. They sit across from each other, no eye contact whatsoever. The tension is so thick you could cut it with a knife. You can hear the sound of a pesky fly whizzing about the room; the sound is bellowing in contrast to the dead silence in the room.

Not a word is spoken, but their body language speaks volumes. Mark is reading a newspaper on his laptop computer. Sheila stares into her coffee as she stirs it continuously, trancelike. The lines around her mouth suggest that the smile left her lips years ago. His eyebrows lower, as if the top of his nose were the only thing preventing them from sliding right off his face. He finishes his coffee, puts his laptop into its case, and heads toward the door. She glances up long enough to watch him leave the house. The sunny backlight from outside completely darkens his fading image as he shuts the door behind him. Once again the kitchen is dark, symbolic of the current status of their relationship. Not a word, not a smile, not a kiss, not even a “bye”—nothing. A scowl crosses her face. She looks back down at her coffee, giving it another pointless stir. What happened? What is going on?

Unfortunately, this is the picture of too many marriages. It doesn’t take fifteen years for a marriage to collapse into a state of

total disrepair. We have a pretty good idea what the next step will be for this marriage if something isn't done. Sadly, the statistics for divorce in this country are on the rise, and it's sobering to say that many who are reading this book right now may well be awaiting or have already served divorce papers.

So at this point, *what is the point*, you may be asking yourself. Ah, let's begin with a glimmer of hope regardless of your reason for picking up this book. The bad news is, you picked up this book. So what's the good news? You picked up this book. That shows there is a possibility of restoring and saving your marital commitment to one another. The most important thing to remember is that it takes two people to make a marriage work and two people to destroy a marriage. In very few instances a marriage dissolves solely because of the behaviors of just one spouse. Yet everyone who has ever come into my office has stated emphatically "it's *all their fault!*"

For others, perhaps you picked up this book because you've experienced some bumps in the road. Bumps are inevitable because every marriage consists of two different people, sometimes two *very* different people. The differences between us are what make a marriage exciting; we just have to figure out how to maneuver the waters of matrimony. Too many times couples didn't go through any type of premarital counseling so the actual marriage becomes the practice ground. I always tell couples to embrace their differences because if you had married someone exactly like yourself, one of you would have to die because the two of you could not exist in the same plane—you couldn't stand it over time!

And for yet others, perhaps you are contemplating marriage and want to learn a bit about building a solid marital foundation. If that is the case, God bless you. It is my sincere hope that there is something for everyone in what God allows me to unfold throughout this book. As with anything in life, having the tools and not actually using them can often constitute the problem in a nutshell. My prayer for all of you is that you would die to yourself and put

forth the efforts necessary to create, cultivate, and claim the marriage that God has designed for you.

As a couple, it is greatly beneficial that you each have your own copy of this book. At various times you will be asked to do an individual assignment, while at other times you will be asked to work as a team on a given assignment. Obviously, if you are an individual reading this resource you will not be able to participate fully in the experience of this book, but you will receive great insight for that time when you have a partner with which to work through problems that will undoubtedly occur.

No marriage book will be able to address every situation in every marriage, but we will lay out a foundation for marriage based on my experience in working with couples for many years, as well as the foundation prescribed by the author of marriage himself, God. It is important that we go back to the source in assessing how effective we are in our marriage, and in making sure that the foundation is solid.

Imagine how frustrating it was when I tried to put together a little plastic tricycle for my son's second Christmas. The silly thing cost less than twenty dollars, so it must be easy to assemble, right? When I opened up the box the pieces just fell out. Breaking down the cost of this tricycle by the hundreds of pieces that fell on the floor, my first thought was that I got a great deal. Trouble however was looming on the horizon. First off, I'm no mechanical whiz. In fact, whatever the opposite of mechanical whiz happens to be, that's me. It wasn't long before heavy breathing, beads of sweat, and grunts of frustration all emanated from my very being as I tried to put this thing together.

I constantly referred to the picture on the box—you know, the perfectly assembled tricycle with a beaming little boy sitting on the seat, obviously proud of his competent father. Sad to say that this would not be the situation for my son Denny. Finally, defeated, angry, and exhausted, I pulled out the magic papers—the papers no man on earth should ever need: the dreaded instructions.

Yes, I reluctantly admitted that the instructions did make assembly much easier. As we walk through this journey together we will spend a lot of time referring to God's instruction manual for life and marriage, the Bible.

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

In this book you will find a variety of exercises concluding each chapter called "Taking Action" that I recommend you take seriously and actually write out. You must remember we are trying to establish a new pattern of behavior in your marital relationship. Spending the time writing will move some of what you may have been experiencing emotionally from a "feeling" state to a "thinking" state, getting you to a place where you can begin to assess and make changes. It's difficult to sort things out when they are tied up in an emotional bundle. There will be times when you will be requested to go on scripture runs and look up and write down some scriptural references. It's important to begin to use your Bible and discover what the intent of marriage truly is.

You will see a smattering of personal testimonies throughout the book, sections titled "In Their Own Words" designed to show practical application of the various topics discussed. These testimonies will offer hope to couples regardless of the extent to which their marriage may be in crisis. They will also serve as warning signs to those who have been slipshod in their marriages up to this point. We have also not heard the last of Mark and Sheila as excerpts from their lives will introduce some of the chapters in this book to serve as impetus for growth in our personal relationships.

Every chapter ends with a section for personal notes, a place for you to jot down the concepts, thoughts, and/or scriptures that

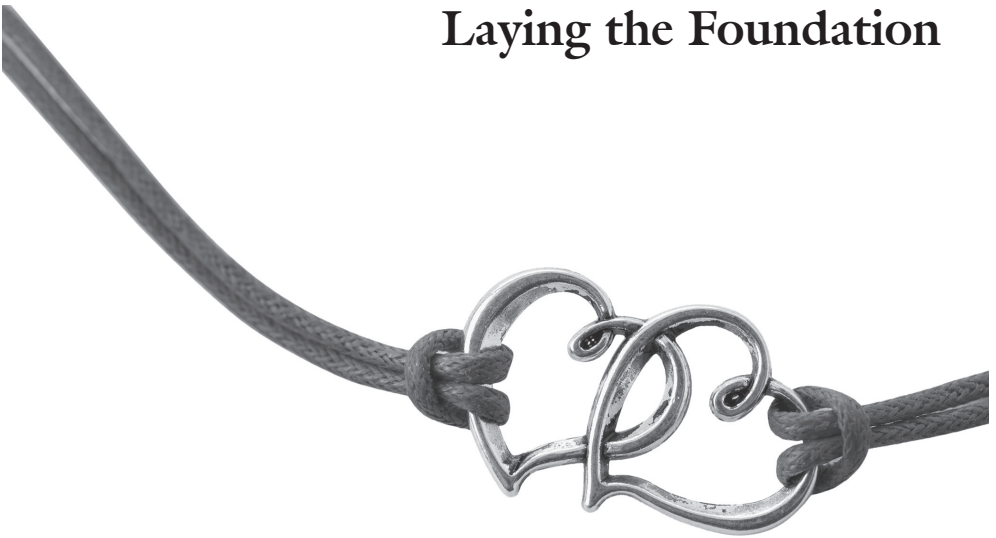
really spoke to you in that chapter. By doing so, you will end each chapter with your own personal footnotes for use as a quick reference when necessary.

The first objective is to establish a foundation for hope, faith, and trust. For some of you, restoration of your marital commitment will be a longer process than it is for others. The decision to change can be immediate, but healthier behaviors and healing will occur over time. How dedicated you are to your relationship will be in direct proportion to the amount of time and speed with which you heal and grow.

We will begin our journey examining the basic question: “What is my marriage supposed to look like?” Without a clear understanding of the institution of marriage it is very difficult to benchmark the direction in which we are headed. Let’s examine the model of marriage.

Part I:

Laying the Foundation



Chapter One

What Is My Marriage Supposed to Look Like?

Fourteen years earlier, Sheila sits at a quaint little table just outside a local sandwich shop.

“Sheila!” She looks up from her menu and rises as Mark approaches. Mark gives her a big kiss and they sit. “You know, I love this place but they need to do something about the parking. This is crazy! I was driving around for twenty minutes just to get a spot two blocks away,” Mark sputters between deep breaths.

Sheila smiles. “Obviously someone needs to work harder at the gym.”

Mark checks out the menu. “Good day?”

“Yeah, it’s been okay.”

He looks up from his menu with suspicion. “What happened?”

“It was nothing bad, really. I’ve just been spending a lot of time thinking about something that Claire from work mentioned.”

Mark has a quirky smile on his face, hoping to move the conversation forward. “And?”

After a momentary pause, Sheila continues. “She was just talking. They’ve been getting premarital counseling. I guess the counselor is laying out a complete foundation for them. She says it has been helping them to talk to each other better and really understand what their marriage commitment is going to be about.”

“Honey, we’re not talking rocket science here. We’ve been married for almost a year, and I think we’re doing well.” Mark smiles at her. “I don’t understand what’s got you all bound up.”

“Listen, I’m not saying that we’re having these major problems. That’s not it. You know how we can butt heads from time to time. It might not be a bad idea to talk to someone or at least, I don’t know, maybe do a marriage study together.” Sheila shrugs, uncertain how she will be received.

Mark looks puzzled. He shakes his head. “Come on, you’re taking this way too seriously.”

A bit offended by his nonchalance, Sheila says in a quiet voice, “My marriage is serious.”

Mark realizes that he has hurt her. “Sheila, I take our marriage very seriously. I love you. I married you in the sight of God and promised to take care of you. I meant that.”

“I just want our marriage to be great. I don’t want us to end up like my mom and dad.”

Mark smiles. “I think we have a solid foundation. I think we’re doing what we are supposed to be doing.”

“I don’t want to think, I want to know.”

Our society has done such an effective job of distorting the concept and institution of marriage. No wonder couples are confused going into marriage. We will begin laying the foundation for marriage by examining the opening question, “What is my marriage supposed to look like?” We will identify what the design of marriage is and how it should be executed based on what Scripture says—essentially discovering the direction we should be headed and assessing

the detours that may have occurred along the way. The ultimate goal is to get back on track and move in the right direction.

When taking back ground, doubt and frustration often arise, making this an ideal time to offer some meditation verses to move you forward and serve as a reminder that you are not alone in this endeavor. Refer to this list as often as necessary, and commit these verses to heart and mind.

FOR MEDITATION AND ENCOURAGEMENT

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.

Proverbs 3:5-6

Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me.

Psalm 50:15

Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God, the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them—the Lord who remains faithful forever.

Psalm 146:5-6

Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you; when you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.

Isaiah 43:1-3

The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him.

Nahum 1:7

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 15:13

No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

1 Corinthians 10:13

[God]...is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.

Ephesians 3:20

We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.

Hebrews 6:19-20

Now, equipped with some ammunition, let's enter the battlefield together.

Many couples do not seek premarital counsel prior to making their lifelong commitment before God, and that includes self-proclaimed Christians. As a professional counselor, I can tell you

that premarital counseling is far more fun and exciting than sitting down with a couple who has been married for ten years (or more) with divorce the daily topic of conversation or, worse yet, the divorce papers have already been filed! The latter scenario is much more difficult to work through, not to say that it's impossible. Reconciliation is very possible when couples decide to rededicate themselves to their marriages and one another. Be encouraged, do not lose hope! We serve a big God who wants nothing more than to heal the pain and hurt, to heal your marriage and redeem your commitment.

MARRIAGE IS...

So what is marriage? Let's define it, shall we?

Marriage is a gift given by God to his creation. In Genesis 2:18-25, the story of creation talks about the need for man (Adam) to have a suitable helper. God did not want man to be alone so he created a partner suitable in Eve. You'll note that God created man out of Adam's rib; woman is a part of man, a very important part that was designed to fulfill a healthy need.

Marriage was designed to be a permanent commitment to one another before God.

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.

Matthew 19:5-6

It's the idea of taking two pieces of plywood and gluing them together. Once the glue has set, try to separate the two sheets. It's impossible to do so without causing irreparable damage to both

pieces of wood. You will also note in this passage that Jesus speaks of leaving father and mother. Couples are to be bound to one another, with God as the glue. This is why there are often problems when one spouse wants their family to be the other partner in the relationship rather than the spouse they married. This causes nothing but dissension and can undermine the marriage commitment. There is nothing wrong with input from the in-laws, but do not give them sole authority in the relationship with your mate. Let them attend to their own marriages; you attend to yours.

To solidify God's intention that marriage be permanent, read Romans 7:2-3. God's intent was that, ideally, death should be the only circumstance that dissolves a marriage. He means for marriage to be a lifelong commitment.

Marriage is an opportunity to learn how to love another. For many, this is no small task. Depending on our background and upbringing, we may not have had love demonstrated to us. This can make it very difficult when we try to show someone the love that we never received. It becomes important to understand and accept that God loves us unconditionally. There is nothing we can do to earn it. God's love is a free gift, no strings attached.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

John 3:16

Can you possibly imagine sacrificing your child for the good of another? This wonderfully summarizes how much God has done for us and how much he truly loves his creation.

Marriage is not exempt from suffering. Some of you may be saying to yourself, "Marital suffering, that I understand. I've done plenty of it!"

The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Romans 8:16-17

In your marriage, remember that when one of you suffers, you both suffer. Our responsibility is to be of support and encouragement to our mates. Plenty of people are willing to tear you down, but you should never be your partner's enemy, for you are called to be a team. This is not to say that marriage does not hold times of great joy and gladness (Jeremiah 33:11). Marriage has the potential to be one of the most gratifying decisions you will ever make.

Marriage sets the best example to children, and it is in this context that they should be raised ideally. Modeling a healthy marriage is the greatest gift you can give your children, who in all likelihood will take the same journey as their parents.

Has not the Lord made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth.

Malachi 2:15

What example are you setting in your marriage? Sons look to their fathers to learn how a man is to behave. Daughters watch their mothers very closely to determine the best ways to interact with the opposite sex. If petty bickering, infidelity, verbal abuse, and constant talk of divorce is your model, you will see the same patterns on display in their own relationships. Children learn well and will follow your example if they don't choose to do something about it. Consider: how often do you respond based on the

example that you were shown growing up? As parents, we are always being observed. Remember that!

Marriage is a public demonstration of Christ and the church to people who may never set foot in church. Your marriage sets an example to others. Ephesians 5:23 states, “For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.”

Ladies, don’t get your feathers ruffled just yet. We’ll shed greater light on this passage further into this chapter. We will lay out the entire marital roles and explore how and why Ephesians 5:23 works. Back to topic, are you setting an example for others to follow?

Marriage is designed to be an honorable endeavor.

Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you; nor forsake you.”

Hebrews 13:4-5

Do you set an honorable example? Do you display integrity in your relationship? Are you a man or woman of your word? We demonstrate great hypocrisy if we teach and proclaim a certain set of moral or ethical values, yet behind closed doors we do not live up to those beliefs. How much more troubling when we represent God to the world around us yet lead a double life of selfish desire. The person who acknowledges the damage pornography can have on a marriage but continues to gratify themselves on the Internet does not display godly integrity. Again we come back to the example we are setting in our marriage: an example to our children, our families, and the world.

Marriage is the perfect environment to cultivate romance. The entire concept of love has been so twisted and warped by our society that many don't know the difference between love and lust. Merriam-Webster defines lust as "intense or unbridled sexual desire: lasciviousness." Further defining lasciviousness we read "lewd, lustful." The synonyms include bawdy, coarse, crude, filthy, indecent, and obscene to list a few. The antonyms include clean, decent, and wholesome. The same source definition of love states, "strong affection for another arising out of kinship or personal ties, attraction based on sexual desire: affection and tenderness." Synonyms include "attachment, devotion, admiration, fondness and passion." Antonyms listed are "hate, hatred, and loathing."

Love has become a "no strings attached proposition," all about the momentary physical pleasure with little or no regard for the other(s) involved in the sex act. There is a distinct difference between "making love" and "having sex." The difference involves what motivates those involved. The act of making love in a committed relationship involves respect, selflessness, and communication. For those who are unaware, I would encourage you and your spouse to sit down together and read through Song of Songs. You will discover one of the most beautiful stories of love and affirmation in all of Scripture. This book unfolds the story of a bride and her bridegroom exploring their love for one another and their love for God.

Of course these are not the only scriptures that offer guidance as to the design for marriage, but they will certainly give a solid foundation to start.

DEALING WITH THE "S" WORD (SUBMISSION)

As we continue our journey let's entertain a topic that is bound to raise the hackles of some wives. The issue of submission has been so distorted that it has lost all of its original meaning, certainly as laid out scripturally and how it applies to the relationship

between a husband and wife. Let's give it some clarification; we will not dilute the meaning to make it more palatable but simply brush away all the assumptions and misconceptions to expose what God truly means by submission.

It is fascinating how even men who spend very little time reading the Bible have the following scripture committed to heart.

Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting to the Lord.

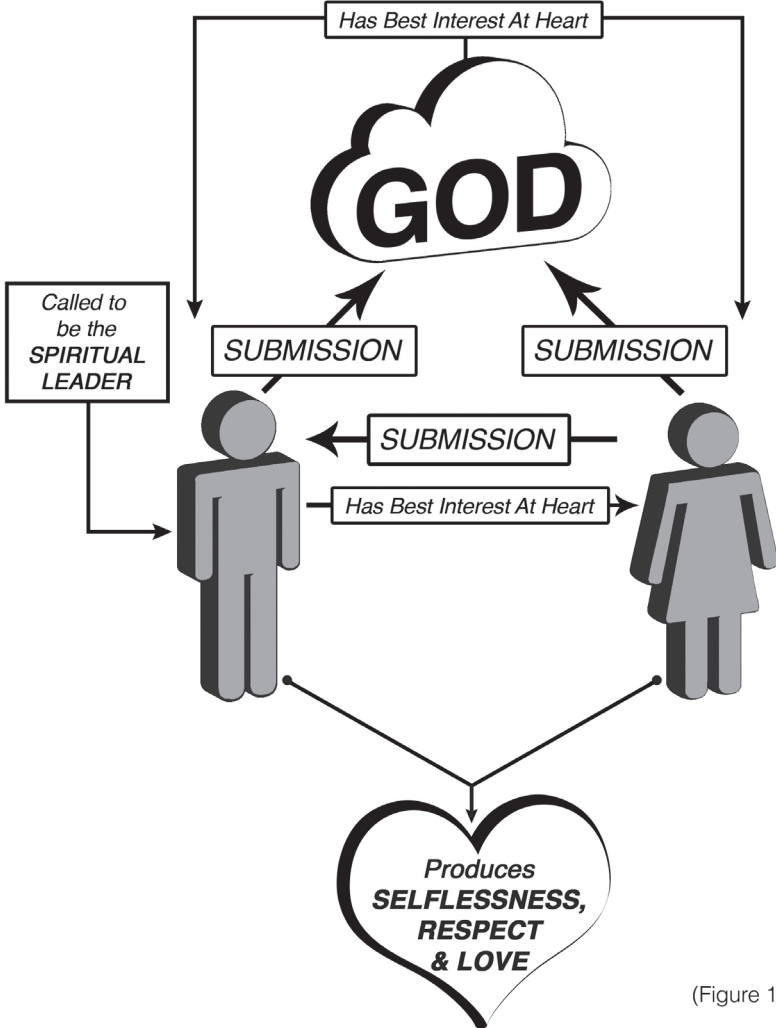
Colossians 3:18

Ladies, some of you didn't like reading it a few pages back in the reference to Ephesians 5:22-23, and you may not be thrilled to hear it again, but follow me for a few moments before slamming the book shut. Husbands, you listen as well! First of all, if Scripture mentions something more than once, pay attention to it. When we look at submission it is imperative that we examine the flow of the marital roles, how they work together, and how they are unique. (Figure 1.1) The model starts with God at the top, for he is the designer of marriage and all creation. The next two elements (husband and wife) are not ordered in importance but rather differentiated by responsibility of role. Galatians 3:28-29 makes it clear that in God's eyes we are all equal.

What we know about God is that he loves both the husband and the wife equally with no qualifications. He has at heart the best interest of both people in the marriage. Ephesians 5:23 declares that the husband is the head of the wife. "Are you saying that he is my boss?" the wives may be asking. No, not at all, ladies. What it means is that God has given men a role that is unique to them. Within the context of marriage, the husband is called to be the spiritual leader of the household.

Ah, here is often where the issue of submission becomes derailed. Husbands, take a moment and assess your effectiveness

MARITAL ROLE FLOW



(Figure 1.1)

as the spiritual leader. Are you leading your family in the ways of God? Do you as the spiritual leader demonstrate God to your household? Does your family know that you have their best interest at heart? Do you attend church with the family, demonstrating that it has priority? Don't expect it to have priority with your children if it has none with you. Are you praying with and for your wife and family? Are you in fellowship with others?

There are many ways to demonstrate the spiritual aspect of our being to our family. If you are weak in this area it will affect your credibility as the leader and the willingness of your family to follow you. Men, stated simply, you are called to treat your wife and family in the same manner that God treats you. It is a tall order, and if you are not tapped into Scripture and cultivating a relationship with Him, you will not know how to lead.

UNDERSTANDING THE ROLES

When talking to men who struggle to lead their families, often I will ask them how their fathers modeled manhood to them. Many times they concede that they have had to figure it out for themselves because Dad was either always working, too busy, emotionally unavailable, distant from their wives, or even had affairs scattered on the horizon. None of which sets a great example. Bottom line, they had no earthly model. Guys, our God wants to be that model for you. We need to develop a close relationship with God so that we can have a healthy relationship with our wives and children.

Men, if someone is talking to you in a normal tone of voice from an office six doors down, are you likely to hear them? If you walk down to their office and continue the conversation, naturally you are going to hear what they have to say. The same goes with our relationship to God. Draw close to God and let him show you how to lead your family spiritually. In this way you can fulfill God's

calling on your life. You have a greater accountability to God by the design of your role in marriage. Your goal is to live up to it to the best of your ability.

As to women, wives are called to be submissive, by virtue of their role, to their husbands, and the husbands are called to treat their wives and family as God treats him. Submission for the wife involves being a support to her husband. God knew it was necessary that Adam have a suitable helper so he fashioned one out of a part of Adam, his rib. The passage from Genesis 2:20-24 is the well-known foundation for the woman's role. It is evident that the woman was needed to complete the man; they complement one another. She is called to be an encouraging, loving, and trusting support to her mate. She is called to show loyalty and confidence in her husband.

The biblical design for marriage is entirely countercultural as the media portrays the head of most households to be incompetent buffoons not receiving and apparently totally undeserving of the respect of either their spouse or children. Scripturally, the wife is called to do nothing to jeopardize her support of her man. Proverbs 31:10-31 addresses the character qualities necessary to fulfill this very important role, and the value of a "virtuous woman" is described in this passage as: "She is worth far more than rubies." Men, keep that in mind, and treat them as such!

I guess the real question is, "Wives, why wouldn't you be willing to be submissive if your spouse was fulfilling his role and modeling God's love to you?" Submission probably wouldn't even be an issue if everyone were fulfilling their roles.

Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.

Colossians 3:19-21

Did you notice? Men are equally bound by submission. In fact, submission begins with the husband by virtue of his role. Paul states in Ephesians 5:1-2, “Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” He continues his thought in verse 21, “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” The evidence displayed by our Savior through his selfless sacrifice exemplifies his love for us.

The husband is called to honor God out of respect for who he is and by merit of his title, creator of all things and designer of life. This is a foundation for reverence as denoted in the above scripture. His is the example to follow as demonstrated in the life of Jesus Christ. Our call to submission is an observance of role and title, but it is not the only reason.

LEADING FROM CHARACTER

Interestingly, God does not lead from his position of authority, he leads from his character. Many of these qualities we are called to emulate as his creation. However, some of God’s character qualities are not passed down to his creation, including omnipresence (is everywhere), omniscience (all-knowing), and eternal (always existed and not bound by time).

Some other attributes, including wrath and jealousy, do not show that God loves us any less. The fact that he detests sin only serves to prove that he wants what is best for us. He knows what sin produces in his creation. As with any good father, just discipline is the consequence of a child’s bad behavior. Character attributes that we can experience include wisdom (Job 12:13), faithfulness, truth (Titus 1:2), mercy (Exodus 34:6), grace (Romans 3:23-24), patience (Psalm 103:8), peace (1 Corinthians 14:33), and righteousness (Deuteronomy 32:4) to name a few.

God offers us free will, the choice to follow his lead and live

out these character qualities. As most of us do not respond well to dictates, God leads from the characteristics that show his love, grace, and mercy. As Christians we are called to share God and his Word in love, the way Jesus did. As husband and wife we are called to personify those same characteristics that God shows in his love for us.

When a married couple adheres to their responsibility, the outcome is rewarding. Showing the appropriate regard for our God-given roles produces in our relationship the same attitude as exhibited toward God. What is produced is selflessness, respect, and love for one another in marriage. Is there a better example to set for your children?

First Peter 3:7 calls you husbands to treat your wives in a respectful manner so that nothing will hinder your relationship with God. God has given your wives a unique temperament, the ability to think and reason, and the same grace and mercy that he extends to you. Do not treat them as second-class citizens. Their role of support and contribution is equally important, albeit different from yours.

Men, respect and listen to your wives. They are allowed to present suggestions and opinions in a loving way. God didn't say that man is the smarter one. Your differences complement each other. Where one is strong often the other shows weakness and vice versa. The marital relationship should not be deemed a competition but rather a cooperative.

In the example of the two sheets of plywood, the strength of the two sheets now glued together is considerably greater than either one was individually, and so it is with marriage. Marriage is one of the few times in life that one plus one can equal three. There is far greater benefit in working together than would be evident in each of you working individually.

When I'm counseling a couple and the wife appears to be the more aggressive partner, it usually means the husband is taking the

passive role and not leading the home spiritually. In too many cases, the wife is the one who takes the kids to church and grows the family spiritually. This is not the role of the wife, but praise God someone is willing to step up. If this is the case in your relationship, I encourage the man to stand up and take his rightful role. It won't be easy, because your wife has to develop the trust necessary to relinquish that role. This will only become a comfortable situation for the wife over time as the husband shows his consistency. As you both step into your appropriate roles, your marriage will take on a new light. What was once a burden will become easier because you are now working as you were designed to.

TAKING ACTION

Exercise 1.1 Being a Godly Example

In what area(s) do you need to focus on improving and aligning your personal life and relationship with what God prescribes for the sake of your marriage? for the sake of your children?

Exercise 1.2 Letting Scripture Speak to You

Read Song of Songs. What does it speak to you?

Exercise 1.3 My Spiritual Leadership

For the men, write a brief paragraph defining what your spiritual leadership looks like.

How did it go? Did you have difficulty writing down the spiritual elements you bring to the table in leading your wife and family?

