

Enriching
YOUR
MARRIAGE

DRS. CLAUDIO AND PAMELA CONSUEGRA



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Chapter One

Two Becoming One

*For this reason a man will leave his father and mother
and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.*

This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.

—Ephesians 5:31, 32, NIV

What would you say is the purpose of marriage? Why was marriage established? Having been immersed in family ministries for more than twenty years, we can tell you with certainty that most people see marriage as a means or a gateway to happiness. But one day, when they find themselves at the end of their marital rope, they come to us as if to justify their desire to leave their relationship and ask, “Don’t I have the right to be happy?”

Happiness. Is that the purpose for which God designed marriage? Is that why God created a man and a woman and brought them together to become one flesh? What is the purpose of marriage anyway? As you may recall in the story of Creation (Genesis 1; 2), God first created Adam and gave him the task of naming all of the animals. But as the beasts came to him, Adam noticed a pattern: for each kind, there was a male and its female counterpart. Quickly he realized there was no such mate for him. This didn’t catch God by surprise. It had been a part of His plan for Adam. It was important for Adam to notice that being alone was not good or healthy as he felt the void of something—or rather someone—missing from his life. Consider these words: “Adam’s study of the animal creation supplied him with considerable knowledge, but did not satisfy his longing for companionship with another being, his equal. This fact indicates the equal partnership that the woman should enjoy with the man. No real companion could be found for Adam among creatures inferior to him.”¹

“The LORD God said, ‘It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him’ ” (Genesis 2:18). While God made the animals to be the man’s companions, they were still not the perfect companion. Only the creation of someone like him would provide true completeness and satisfaction. God didn’t make for Adam some other lower creature like the animals. God made from Adam an equal to himself.

Several Bible translations and versions have used different terms to try to illustrate the equal relationship between Adam and Eve. We find words like “corresponding” (ISV, CSB); “suitable” (NASB, NIV); “a[n] help meet” (KJV, ASV); “a helper fit” (ESV); and “just right” (NLT). The emphasis in all these examples is of a companionship, an equality, and a mutuality in the spousal relationship. We also find that theme in other places in the Bible. For instance, in Song of Solomon, the bride, the Shulamite, shouts with joy, “My beloved is mine, and I am his,” and, “I am my beloved’s, and my beloved is mine” (Song of Solomon 2:16; 6:3). We also read about this relationship of mutuality in the first letter Paul wrote to the Corinthians, in which he tells them, “The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does” (1 Corinthians 7:4). Another place where the Bible illustrates the principle of mutuality in marriage is found in one of the most significant passages in the New Testament dealing with the marital relationship. In Ephesians, the apostle Paul tells husbands and wives to “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Ephesians 5:21, NLT).

In God’s plan, equality means complementarity. The Jewish Study Bible explains, “The creation of the woman after the man and from a part of his body need not imply the subordination of women to men.”² God could have made woman the same way He made man. He could have made a second clay model, breathed into her nostrils, and given her life. But the method God employed to create Eve, from the side of Adam, shows the intimate relationship He intended for married couples to have. As Matthew Henry stated, “The woman was made of a rib out of the side of Adam; not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved.”³

We can only imagine what happened when God brought Eve to Adam as he awakened from divine surgery. Perhaps he rubbed his eyes to make sure he was not still sleeping, that he was not seeing a mirage of sorts. But the moment he realized this beauty was the companion he had longed for, Adam burst into the first poem of human history:

Here is someone like me!
 She is part of my body,
 my own flesh and bones.
 She came from me, a man.
 So I will name her Woman! (Genesis 2:23, CEV).

Again, reflect on this moment when Adam met Eve: “Instinctively, or as the

result of divine instruction, he recognized in her part of his own being. He was henceforth to love her as his own body, for in loving her he loves himself.”⁴

UNEXPECTED MATH: 1 + 1 = 1

American journalist Mignon McLaughlin is often attributed with stating, “In the arithmetic of love, one plus one equals everything, and two minus one equals nothing.”⁵ Even before entering school, a child is able to discern that one plus one equals two. The events described in Genesis 2 are not only about some divine surgery God performed to remove part of Adam’s side and turn it into another human being. They also illustrate an interesting mathematical calculation. The union of a husband to his wife results in two becoming one. Marriage, as God intended, is the process of a man and a woman becoming one—and by doing so, reflecting the relationship between Christ and His bride, the church (Ephesians 5).

God says that when it comes to marriage, one plus one really does equal one. The areas of weakness in one become intertwined with the areas of strength in the other. But how do we get to the point of two becoming as one? How do we, in our marriages, make God’s math a reality?

At first glance, many assume that this text refers only to sexual intimacy. Indeed, that is one part of what it means for a husband and wife to become one. However, it is so much more than that. When married, a husband and wife become one physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Two lives become united in purpose. To quote Erik Jones:

Marriage is an exclusive union between *one male* and *one female*. . . .

Marriage forms a unique family unit. The building block of society, in God’s view, is the family unit. The nucleus of this family unit is the husband-wife relationship.

The marriage relationship is to be the closest possible relationship on the human plane. The word translated “joined” in the New King James Version is the Hebrew word *dabaq*, which means “to cling, stick, stay close, cleave, keep close, stick to, stick with” (*Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew Lexicon*). This describes the close emotional bond that is to develop between a husband and wife. Later, Christ expounded on this verse by saying, “What God has joined together, let not man separate” (Mark 10:9).⁶

Please do not misunderstand this concept of two becoming one. For many, this has negative implications: *Don’t you each have separate lives? What about your own individuality? Why give that up?* It is perfectly acceptable to have things that

you personally want to accomplish if your spouse supports you in them. God gave each of you gifts and talents, and you should develop them to their full potential. Becoming one does not mean that you lose the uniqueness of you! Instead, it is possible that you can help in developing the talents and gifts in each other. You can play a crucial supportive role for your spouse and discover that your individual talents and dreams may coincide and lead to the same ultimate goal.

At the time we got married (and even today), one of the customs during the wedding ceremony was to light a unity candle. Usually, the mother of the bride and the mother of the groom would ascend the platform, and each would light a candle. After the vows were pronounced, the bride and groom would take those candles and together light a central, larger candle, the unity candle. Before replacing the two other candles, they would blow them out, signifying that the two were now one. When we got married, however, we decided that, contrary to common practice, we would leave our mothers' candles lit as a symbol that, while we were joining our lives and becoming one, we would also maintain our individuality as we complemented each other.

Some couples discover that each person has separate goals leading in separate directions. It is as if you have a car with two steering wheels, and you are both driving. If you both drive in the same direction, you will be fine; but if you try to drive one way and your spouse is trying to drive the other way, either you will not go anywhere or you will crash. Think about your faith values, your hopes for the future, your dreams, and your goals. Do they align with your spouse, or do you find yourselves pulling in opposite directions?

This does not mean that you must agree on everything or that you must have the same tastes, personal goals, wishes, or desires. Pamela's gifts are in the educational field, one in which she has excelled over the years. Claudio's gifts lean more toward the theological and psychological fields. Pamela would prefer not to have to travel much, whereas Claudio enjoys traveling very much. Claudio would much rather never have to go shopping, while Pamela finds it therapeutic and relaxing. We are different in many ways, but we share more in common than we differ, particularly in the most important areas of life. It is helpful when you can share a vision and ultimate goals together, so you both can work in one accord toward reaching them. It will be extra hard to fulfill that vision if your spouse is not with you or is fighting against you. It is very important to make sure you are on the same page and working together to achieve your hopes, dreams, and goals.

Perhaps the number one way to align your goals and move together is to spend undivided, quality time together. It doesn't happen automatically. You must be intentional about spending quantity and quality time together and communicating about the things that matter most. However, the sad

fact remains that most couples today spend more time with technology than they do in face-to-face communication. In an article on ChristianPost.com, authors Mike and Trisha Fox cite some startling statistics, saying that “23% of all couples [spend] less than [one] hour per day with each other,” and “of that one hour per day, only three minutes is meaningful conversation!”⁷⁷ In addition, Zig Ziglar mentions a survey showing that “more than 90% of the couples who considered their marriages ‘strong and close’ also said they spent a great deal of time together”; on the other hand, “divorced couples usually had spent little time together before the split.”⁷⁸

If there is one word that defines couples of today, it would be *busyness*. We are just too busy. We are consumed with distractions that take us away from each other. Even when we are not at work, it seems that we are not spending time together. It is far too easy to drift apart if we are not intentional about carving out blocks of quality time. Indeed, becoming one is not something that happens overnight. Rather, it happens over time as you discover the intersections of your lives. How could you possibly become one if you spend only three minutes a day in meaningful conversation? As a married couple, you are no longer just looking out for yourselves but should be setting goals for yourselves as a couple. Two can accomplish what is impossible for one. Work together on becoming one in your relationship!

For many years we have shared with couples a simple time formula to help them become more intentional in the quantity and quality of time they spend together. We recommend that this time have no outside technological distractions, such as the cell phone, television, radio, computer, or tablet. We also encourage couples to spend time alone together: no family, children, friends, colleagues, or church members. Spend time getting reacquainted, talking about feelings, and enjoying each other’s company, and do not use the time for solving problems, shopping, or completing chores. So, with that in mind, here is a simple suggested time formula to follow. Spend a minimum time together of

- one half hour each night;
- one night each week;
- one day each month; and
- one weekend each quarter.

Sometimes couples look at us, eyes wide open, and ask, “And what are we supposed to do all that time?” We tell them to remember how much time they used to spend when they were dating, when it seemed as if they didn’t have enough time to be together, and to follow the same practice. Use the time to come close together as one.

God’s math gets even more interesting than just $1 + 1 = 1$. Actually, we like to explain to couples that two can become one only if there is a third strand. Yes, that means $1 + 1 + 1 = 1$. In his poem, “Marriage Takes Three,” Perry Tanksley expresses it beautifully:

I once thought marriage took
 Just two to make a go
 But now I am convinced
 It takes the Lord also.
 And not one marriage fails
 Where Christ is asked to enter
 As lovers come together
 With Jesus at the center.
 But marriage seldom thrives
 And homes are incomplete
 Till He is welcomed there
 To help avoid defeat.
 In homes where God is first
 It’s obvious to see
 Those unions really work,
 For marriage still takes three.⁹

King Solomon understood this principle as well when he wrote:

It’s better to have a partner than go it alone.
 Share the work, share the wealth.
 And if one falls down, the other helps,
 But if there’s no one to help, tough!

Two in a bed warm each other.
 Alone, you shiver all night.

By yourself you’re unprotected.
 With a friend you can face the worst.
 Can you round up a third?
 A three-stranded rope isn’t easily snapped (Ecclesiastes 4:9–12, *The Message*).

A rope of three strands is stronger and harder to break than one with only two strands. That “rope” of three strands consists of you, your spouse, and Jesus. It is

only as you add this third strand that you can become a strong cord of one that is difficult to break. In essence, two become one as you add Jesus to the mix, involve Him in all your decisions and goals, and spend time in communion with each other and with Him.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. How much quality time do you spend together each day? Be honest and remember that time spent on technology (including watching TV) does not count as quality time.
2. What steps can you take to increase your quality time together?

THE PURPOSE OF MARRIAGE

Why did God establish marriage? It is not simply a sociological, economic, or legal agreement between two parties. There are businesses, clubs, and other organizations that could meet that criterion. God also intended marriage to be more than just for procreation. In fact, many are now having children without even having sexual intercourse.

Timothy Keller proposes that the purpose of marriage, according to God's design, was for companionship.¹⁰ When God declared, "It is not good for the man to be alone," He didn't just create a whole lot of people to keep Adam company. Instead, God said, "I will make a helper who is just right for him" (Genesis 2:18, NLT). Marriage is not simply a convenient legal agreement between two parties. At the very center of this institution is the fact that marriage, as God intended, is the deepest of friendships and the source of intimate companionship. God planned for this special relationship to provide both parties with close, constant, mutual support, to bear each other's burdens, to build each other up. God fashioned this special arrangement between a wife and her husband, one in which they could be completely vulnerable and transparent with each other, affirm and encourage each other through the battles of life, and enjoy complete emotional intimacy.

But perhaps God created marriage between a man and a woman for a much deeper spiritual reason. In theology, we use three terms to describe what God does for us. When we accept the sacrifice of Jesus on our behalf, at that very instant, we are justified before God. Paul writes to the Romans: "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). We refer to that miraculous experience as *justification*. It is instantaneous as our sins are forgiven and we stand before Jesus justified because of the blood He shed for us on Calvary.

From the moment we accept Jesus as our Savior, we are justified, and there

begins a process of preparation to meet Him at His return. Here's what Paul tells the church members in Corinth: "And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:18, NRSV). Step by step, day by day, the Holy Spirit is changing us to be more like Jesus Himself until His return. It is a work that doesn't stop as long as we're alive. We refer to this process of growth and change as *sanctification*. Again, it is the work of the Holy Spirit in us, preparing us, setting us aside, sanctifying us in order for us to be ready for the return of Jesus.

Finally, one day soon, Jesus will return to take us to the place He has been preparing for us (John 14:1–3). At that very moment, "in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet . . . the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality" (1 Corinthians 15:52, 53). We use the term *glorification* to indicate the amazing transformation we will experience when Jesus returns for us.

The work of salvation, from beginning to end, is God's. It is not in our power to save ourselves because

we're all sin-infected, sin-contaminated.

Our best efforts are grease-stained rags.

We dry up like autumn leaves—

sin-dried, we're blown off by the wind (Isaiah 64:6, *The Message*).

Only God can do that saving work for us. However, we need to go back for a moment to the process of sanctification. We stated that sanctification is the work of the Holy Spirit helping us to become ready for the return of Jesus. Please keep this idea in mind for a moment as we turn briefly to one of the most important passages in the New Testament dealing with the marital relationship. Paul wrote a letter to the members of the church in Ephesus in which he told husbands: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish" (Ephesians 5:25–27). Sometimes we read those words so fast that we don't realize the treasure floating just under the surface. Please notice three very important elements in Paul's message.

First, he tells husbands how to love their wives: "Husbands, love your wives, *just as* Christ also loved the church" (verse 25; emphasis added). We could replace "just as" with other phrases, such as *in the same way that*, *exactly like*, *the same as*, or *in an identical way to the way that*. They all convey the same idea—husbands,

your love for your wife should be no different than the love Christ has for His wife (the church).

I (Claudio) have preached on this passage many times and have asked the questions: When did Christ abandon His wife, the church? When did Christ neglect His wife, the church? When was Christ abusive toward His wife, the church? It is preposterous even to think that Christ would ever mistreat His wife, the church, in any way. And that is precisely what Paul wants us to remember. In the same way, it is preposterous and a denial of his faith for a husband to mistreat, abandon, neglect, or abuse his wife in any way.

Second, Paul states, “Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her” (verse 25). To what extent did Christ give Himself for His wife, the church? To the point of death! Jesus Himself stated, “The greatest way to show love for friends is to die for them” (John 15:13, CEV). Isn’t your wife your best friend? Isn’t she closer to you than any and all of your other friends? If your greatest declaration of love to your friends is to be willing to die for them, shouldn’t that also be your greatest declaration of love for your wife?

Of course, many men might immediately tell us, “I would be willing to die for my wife.” As we write this chapter, there was recently a shooting in a church in Texas. A video camera in the church captured the entire incident. Repeatedly, the news reporters made it a point to mention how one of the parishioners had covered his wife with his body to shield her from danger. A real man, a godly man, will do all in his power to protect his wife, even if that means dying for her. But perhaps better questions would be: Are you willing to live for her? Are you willing to tend to her needs? Are you willing to strengthen, encourage, and build her up? Are you ready to respect her, honor her, and be faithful to her?

Third—and this is the main point—Paul tells husbands to love their wives, “just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might *sanctify* and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish” (verses 25–27; emphasis added). Christ loved and even died for the church in order to *sanctify* her. Paul is giving husbands a very strong directive: “Do the same for your wives.”

Now, let’s make sure we understand what we’re trying to say here. Earlier, we stated that sanctification is the work of the Holy Spirit. To paraphrase Paul, “Husbands, love your wives in order to sanctify them, just as Christ did for His wife, the church.” We suggest Paul is saying that the ministry or the mission of marriage is the sanctification of your spouse. God has commissioned you, as a husband, to be the Holy Spirit’s agent or helper as He prepares your wife for the soon return of Jesus. God is extending a call to husbands to work alongside the

Holy Spirit in the process of sanctification of their wives.

Often, when we make these statements, there are husbands who will ask, “If my role is to help my wife be ready for the second coming of Jesus, who is there to help me?” That’s a valid and important question. Paul answers it in his letter to the Corinthians when he writes, “If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy” (1 Corinthians 7:12–14). While Paul makes specific application to those married to unbelievers, the same is true for those married to believers. The point is that husbands and wives are God’s instruments in the hands of the Holy Spirit to help each other be ready for the second coming of Jesus. That’s why Gary Thomas asks, “What if God designed marriage to make us holy more than to make us happy?”¹¹ We don’t want to insinuate that marriage should not be a happy union—God forbid! But we are suggesting that happiness should not be the primary reason for us to enter marriage; instead, holiness, sanctification, and preparation for eternity should be.

This concept is not only important for those of us who are married so we can understand and accept God’s call to the ministry and mission of marriage. It also is even more critical for those who are not yet married and who are trying to decide whether to take the next step. Perhaps they should ask themselves, *Is the person I’m dating the one I can help be ready for the second coming of Jesus?* Or conversely, *Is the person I’m dating the one who will help me be ready for the second coming of Jesus?* That’s why Paul warns, “Don’t become partners with those who reject God. How can you make a partnership out of right and wrong? That’s not partnership; that’s war. Is light best friends with dark? Does Christ go strolling with the Devil?” (2 Corinthians 6:14, 15, *The Message*). In other words, choose someone who will be your marriage ministry partner.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Husbands, write down your understanding of the Bible verse that says, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church” (Ephesians 5:25).
2. Wives, write down your understanding of what it means for a wife to submit to her husband (Ephesians 5:22).
3. After you have each written your answers, share them with each other.
4. What does modern culture tell us about these two statements?

5. Does your understanding (and practice) align with the Bible?

CONTRACT VERSUS COVENANT

In today's world, we are all very familiar with contracts. We enter into a contract when we buy a house or a car. We may enter into an employment contract. We usually sign on the dotted line, and the two parties must agree to certain terms before any contract becomes official. Contracts also contain an "out" clause. There are conditions that must be met and, if the terms are broken, the contract may become null and void. In other words, the contractual relationship is no longer binding.

Many view the marital relationship in this manner. It is simply a contract on paper that can easily be considered null and void. If this is the mindset, it becomes far too easy to consider the marriage relationship disposable and one that can be tossed aside for another.

Forgive us for using our sanctified imagination, but in our minds we picture God the Father walking Eve, the most beautiful, perfect bride, down a tree-lined aisle to meet Adam, her groom, and then performing the first-ever wedding ceremony. We imagine listening as the birds provide the special music, the garden provides the most beautiful backdrop, the flowers adorn the scene, and the wedding party of angels is filled with joy. F. D. Nichol further helps our imagination by describing the scene: "God Himself solemnized the first marriage. After making the woman He led her to Adam, who by that time must have awakened from his deep sleep. As Adam was the 'son of God' (Luke 3:38), so Eve could properly be called the daughter of God; and as her Father, God led her to Adam and presented her to him. The marriage covenant, therefore, is appropriately called the covenant of God (Prov. 2:17), a name implying His authorship of that sacred institution."¹²

While contracts require both parties to keep the terms of an agreement for it to remain valid, a covenant is a promise that will be kept without regard of the other party's integrity. An article from LifeWay explains the differences between a contract and a covenant this way:

1. *"Contracts are often made for a limited period of time."* If two parties come to a situation in which the conditions of the contract are not being met, the contract is considered null and void. Although they may repeat the words "till death do us part," often couples interpret those words to mean "as long as the relationship is mutually beneficial."
2. *"Contracts often deal with specific actions."* In other words, our wedding vows express our *intent* to perform certain actions. We state things such as, "I will love and cherish you," "I will stay by your side through

thick and thin,” “I will be with you in sickness and in health,” “We will eat plenty or starve together,” “I will be exclusively yours,” and “We’re in this till the end.”

3. *“Contracts are based on an ‘If . . . , then . . . ,’ mentality.”* Couples that rely on the other spouse for happiness may find that this expectation is not met at times, particularly early in marriage.
4. *“Contracts are motivated by the desire to get something.”* For instance, when we need a car, we sign a lease because we want to be able to drive out of the dealership’s lot with it. At the same time, the salesperson signed on the dotted line because he or she wants the commission. Often in their interactions, spouses are motivated to get something.¹³

On the other hand, a covenant has different characteristics from those of a contract:

1. *“Covenants are initiated for the benefit of the other person.”* Wedding vows are not a declaration of present love but a mutually binding promise of future love. In a covenant relationship, we promise to be loving, faithful, and true to the other person in the future, regardless of how we may feel at the moment or what may be going on around us at the time.
2. *“In covenant relationships people make unconditional promises.”* In our wedding vows, we never state that we will do all of those things only if the other person will do likewise. We simply commit to doing our part—unconditionally.
3. *“Covenant relationships are based on steadfast love.”* Steadfast love does not rely on feelings; rather, steadfast love is a decision, a choice we make.
4. *“Covenant relationships view commitments as permanent.”* When we get married, we vow to stay together, not until love do us part or until the courts do us part or until we just don’t want to be together any longer. Instead, we vow to stay together until death alone separates us.
5. *“Covenant relationships require confrontation and forgiveness.”* As the article in LifeWay states, “These two responses are essential in a covenant marriage. Confrontation means holding the other person responsible for his or her actions. Forgiving means a willingness to lift the penalty and continue a loving, growing relationship. Ignoring the failures of your spouse isn’t the road to marital growth.”¹⁴

God’s plan is for us to view marriage as a covenant relationship. There may be

some characteristics of a contract within the covenant of marriage, but ultimately it is a covenant. On our wedding day, we made a holy vow that involved not only us as a couple but also Jesus Christ. It is not a vow that is easily tossed aside or discarded. “Till death do us part” was a binding promise made in the presence of our spouse, our family, our friends, and the holy angels—along with Jesus. A contract may easily be considered null and void as there may be numerous loopholes; but a covenant is forever! God’s grace and mercy, when given as a gift to each other, smooth over those loopholes.

SO DIFFERENT AND YET SO ALIKE

It shouldn’t come as a surprise that men and women are different. We see that every single day. During our marriage retreats, we show several cartoons and pictures to demonstrate, in a humorous way, how different men and women really are. In one of those cartoons, an older, overweight, balding man stands in front of a mirror, but the image he sees is of a much younger, fit man with a head full of hair. On the other side stands a woman, slim and shapely, who looks at her image in the mirror, and the reflection she sees staring back at her is of a woman who is much heavier. Men tend to see themselves better than they are, while women tend to see themselves worse than they are.

In general terms, men and women are different in many areas. Understanding those differences can be a big step forward in having a strong, healthy relationship (we’ll talk more about this in chapters 4 and 5). Nowhere is this more important than in the area of roles and responsibilities. If you were brought up in a traditional home, you might have been taught by word and example that the role of the husband is to be the provider for the needs of the home, while the role of the wife is to take care of the day-to-day operations in the home. He is supposed to go to work (outside the home) and bring home the paycheck, while she is supposed to stay home, clean the house, cook, and take care of her husband and children. Again, this is the traditional view of marriage, one still prevalent in some cultures and families today.

On the other hand, many have been raised in a more egalitarian home environment, in which both husband and wife have education and training, both work outside the home, and both contribute to the health and well-being of the family. Today we see many other less traditional arrangements that may work well for individual couples. For instance, it is not uncommon to find a family in which the wife is the one who works outside the home and the husband is the one that stays home to take care of the family. We have also seen homes in which one or both spouses travel extensively or work away from home and are together only for a few days each week or perhaps even each month. Since this is a book on marriage, we won’t take the time to talk

about such other family arrangements as single parenting, grandparents raising their grandchildren, and so on. (Please see our parenting series, *Help! I'm a Parent*, and our book, *Grandparenting: Giving Our Grandchildren a GRAND View of God*. All are available on AdventistBookCenter.com, Amazon.com, or AdventSource.org in both print and electronic versions.)

So, according to the Bible, what roles do the husband and wife play in their relationship? How can they have a clear understanding of those roles? Understanding each person's role is extremely important. We need to understand two biblical principles all couples would do well to consider:

1. *Practice mutual submission.* Paul wrote to the Ephesians, "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Ephesians 5:21, NLT).
2. *Don't be selfish.* In his letter to the Philippians, Paul told them, "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves" (Philippians 2:3, ESV).

With these two biblical principles in mind, let's look more carefully at the roles the husband and wife play in a healthy relationship.

THE HUSBAND'S ROLE

We can only truly become one if we understand our individual roles in marriage as defined by Scripture. What is the role given to husbands? Paul delineates and defines that role in his letter to the church in Ephesus, where he states, above all, "Husbands, love your wives" (Ephesians 5:25). The love that Christ had for us took Him to the cross; the love of a husband for his wife will involve a similar giving of himself. Such is the nature of true love that it is willing to sacrifice for the loved one. A husband's responsibility is to love his wife without selfishness, without reservation, and without conditions. Love her as Christ loved the church unto death (John 13:1). Love her; seek her best good; sacrifice for her benefit; give yourself to her wholeheartedly; and, when that's all done, love her some more.

But Paul also places the responsibility on the husband to be a spiritual leader of the home. Paul writes to young Pastor Timothy that one chosen to be an overseer, bishop, or deacon should, among other things, "manage his own household well" (1 Timothy 3:4, ESV). B. Reicke expounds on the word "manage" used in the New Testament Greek by explaining that it means to lead in the sense of assisting, protecting, representing, helping, or caring for those under his charge—in this case, the husband's family.¹⁵

Much like the husband's love for his wife should be like Christ's love for His church, the husband's leadership should also be like Christ's. What kind of leader was Jesus? We find the best example on the night before His death. Jesus and His

disciples were gathered to celebrate the Passover service. The custom of the time was that as the guests arrived, and in preparation for the meal, a servant would wash the feet of all those coming into the house. Apparently, arrangements had not been made for a servant to do this, and none of Jesus' disciples took the initiative to even offer to wash His feet, much less any of the others'. But Jesus, leading by example, "put some water into a large bowl. Then he began washing his disciples' feet and drying them with the towel he was wearing" (John 13:5, CEV). The Master became the Servant. Jesus taught and exemplified servant leadership, and a husband should also lead by being willing to serve his wife and family.

To be the leader does not mean to be the ruler, the boss, or a dictator. Instead, husbands are called to influence their wives and families as they are led and influenced by Christ Himself. Ellen White explains this clearly when she writes,

The Lord Jesus has not been correctly represented in His relation to the church by many husbands in their relation to their wives, for they do not keep the way of the Lord. They declare that their wives must be subject to them in everything. But it was not the design of God that the husband should have control, as head of the house, when he himself does not submit to Christ. He must be under the rule of Christ that he may represent the relation of Christ to the church. If he is a coarse, rough, boisterous, egotistical, harsh, and overbearing man, let him never utter the word that the husband is the head of the wife, and that she must submit to him in everything; for he is not the Lord, he is not the husband in the true significance of the term.¹⁶

Being the spiritual leader of the home does not mean that the husband should be the leader in every aspect of life. Each spouse has their own gifts, talents, and abilities, which benefit the couple and the family. If the wife is better at handling the finances, perhaps it would be more beneficial to the family if she did so. If the husband is better at cooking and providing healthy, nutritious meals, he should be encouraged to do so. The key is to find out what each person's strengths are and encourage them to exercise those strengths for the betterment of the family.

The role of the husband begins with loving his wife as Christ loves His church and being the spiritual leader of the home, following Jesus' example of servant leadership. But the role of the husband also encompasses being protector and provider. A husband can demand that his wife follow him, and she may feel like she must, but he will never truly have her heart unless he provides for her needs, cares for her well-being, and protects her both physically and spiritually. Paul writes, "If anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those

of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Timothy 5:8). He also tells husbands “Love your wives, and do not be harsh with them” (Colossians 3:19, ESV). The Contemporary English Version takes it even further: “[Do] not abuse her.” Even the apostle Peter chimes in when he writes, “In the same way, you husbands must give honor to your wives. Treat your wife with understanding as you live together. She may be weaker than you are, but she is your equal partner in God’s gift of new life. Treat her as you should so your prayers will not be hindered” (1 Peter 3:7, NLT). We don’t want to miss Peter’s final statement, as he seems to indicate that when a husband neglects, mistreats, or abuses his wife, his own prayer life is hindered or completely cut off.

Paul ends his words to husbands the same way he started—by reminding husbands again to “love their wives.” Twice in Ephesians 5, Paul tells husbands to love their wives “as their own bodies” and as they love themselves (verses 28, 33). Loving others begins with loving and taking care of ourselves, accepting God’s love for us, and becoming the conduits of His love to others. As Ellen White so beautifully states, “The husband is to be as a Saviour in his family. Will he stand in his noble, God-given manhood, ever seeking to uplift his wife and children? Will he breathe about him a pure, sweet atmosphere? Will he not as assiduously cultivate the love of Jesus, making it an abiding principle in his home, as he will assert his claims to authority?”¹⁷

THE WIFE’S ROLE

Wives also play a very important role. When asked about the wife’s role, many immediately quote the verse, “Wives, submit to your own husbands” (Ephesians 5:22). We’re often asked, “Why should a woman have to submit to her husband? Why should men have authority? Doesn’t this lead to abuse?” It is true that this one Bible verse and other similar ones (Colossians 3:18; 1 Peter 3:1) have been misused repeatedly to support oppression and even abuse of women. Submitting to someone who does not fully understand their role as a husband (as stated in the previous section) is contrary to biblical teaching, and it can be dangerous and perhaps even deadly. Fulfilling our roles in the context of marriage happens only as a wife submits to someone who is leading and loving in the same manner as Christ loved the church.

If we’re going to think properly about submission within marriage, we need to think about it within the context of the sacrificial love of Jesus. After all, most would have no problem submitting to someone who loved, led, and served like Jesus. We encourage you to read all of chapter 17 of Ellen G White’s *The Adventist Home*, as it is a very clear, descriptive, and balanced presentation on Ephesians 5. Here’s a sample of her instructions:

The question is often asked, “Shall a wife have no will of her own?” The Bible plainly states that the husband is the head of the family. “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands.” If this injunction ended here, we might say that the position of the wife is not an enviable one; it is a very hard and trying position in very many cases, and it would be better were there fewer marriages. Many husbands stop at the words, “Wives, submit yourselves,” but we will read the conclusion of the same injunction, which is. “As it is fit in the Lord.”

God requires that the wife shall keep the fear and glory of God ever before her. Entire submission is to be made only to the Lord Jesus Christ, who has purchased her as His own child by the infinite price of His life. God has given her a conscience, which she cannot violate with impunity. Her individuality cannot be merged into that of her husband, for she is the purchase of Christ. It is a mistake to imagine that with blind devotion she is to do exactly as her husband says in all things, when she knows that in so doing, injury would be worked for her body and her spirit, which have been ransomed from the slavery of Satan. There is One who stands higher than the husband to the wife; it is her Redeemer, and her submission to her husband is to be rendered as God has directed—“as it is fit in the Lord.”¹⁸

What if the husband demands submission from his wife? What if he goes on to quote the passages we mentioned? Should she simply quietly obey as if she had no will of her own? White states, “When husbands require the complete subjection of their wives, declaring that women have no voice or will in the family, but must render entire submission, they place their wives in a position contrary to the Scripture. In interpreting the Scripture in this way, they do violence to the design of the marriage institution. This interpretation is made simply that they may exercise arbitrary rule, which is not their prerogative.”¹⁹

The challenge in marriage isn’t headship or submission; rather, it’s loving God and allowing God’s love to transform our homes. Like Christ loved the church, the husband must love and sacrifice for his bride. Like Christ submits to the Father, the wife must submit to her husband. If we are to fulfill the biblical mandate, then both husband and wife will reflect Jesus in their marriage. This kind of mutual, Christlike love provides dignity, honor, and respect for both the husband and the wife.

DEVELOPING YOUR MARRIAGE MISSION STATEMENT

Imagine the impact if everyone who visited your home were to see a marriage mission statement in the entryway. Using all the information in this chapter, we

invite you, as husband and wife, to write your own marriage mission statement, frame it, and hang it in your home to serve as a constant reminder. Perhaps you have been part of a group that has developed mission statements for an organization, or maybe this is your first opportunity to engage in the process. Regardless, here are a few ideas—a few borrowed from Dr. Kim Blackham—to help you in the process of developing your own marriage mission statement as a couple:

1. *Set aside a dedicated time.* On the topic of creating marriage mission statements, Dr. Kim Blackham recommends, “Make it a special occasion. You may want to do this over a vacation week or a special getaway. . . . Make it deliberate and intentional.” Don’t try to squeeze it into an already packed day. Set aside time when this is the only item on your agenda.
2. *Bathe the process in prayer.* Even before the time you have set aside arrives, pray for the process. Pray for wisdom, a listening ear, and an open heart and mind as you write this together.
3. *Identify your marriage legacy.* “What marriage legacy do you want to leave?” asks Blackham. This question will help you zoom in on what’s important to you both.
4. *Identify your shared core values.* Blackham offers a series of good questions to consider as you list your core values as a couple: “What matters most to you? What kind of spouse do you want to be? How do you want to resolve conflict? How do you want to treat each other? How do you want your partner to feel because of you? What traditions do you want as part of your family? What do you want your children to learn about relationships by watching you?”
5. *Use short phrases.* Blackham recommends utilizing short phrases such as “To . . . (do something),” “In such a way that (how and in which manner),” and “So that . . . (we gain these results or benefits).”
6. *Write the mission statement.* Be concise. Blackham says the statement should be no more than ten sentences. Continue to rework it until you both are happy. This may take some time, so keep at it and, above all, listen to each other.
7. *Hang the mission statement where you can see it easily.* “So many people write out their mission statement and then tuck it in a drawer and forget about it,” says Blackham. “Put yours in a prominent place in your home where you will see it often.”
8. *Refer to the mission statement daily.* Blackham notes that “your marriage mission statement should impact your actions on a daily basis. These aren’t just good ideas to hang on the wall. These are the core values and

principles that you want to guide your life. Use it!”

9. *Revise the mission statement when necessary.* “Life circumstances change. You get older and wiser. You will learn from your mistakes,” Blackham states. She says that it’s OK for your marriage mission statement to change too. Marriage is a relationship that needs daily nurturing, so consider it a work in progress—for a lifetime.
10. *Memorize the mission statement.* “This is the reason you want it concise,” advises Blackham. “Memorizing your mission statement makes a huge difference! Those words will come back to your mind in moments when you need them most.” Commit it to memory and repeat your marriage mission statement together on a daily basis.²⁰

COUPLE’S ACTIVITY

1. Dedicate a significant block of time to developing your personal marriage mission statement together.
2. Use the preceding ten steps and all the material you have read in this chapter to assist you.
3. Frame the mission statement and place it in an area of your home where you can view and read it daily.
4. Memorize it, review it frequently, and feel free to change it as needed.

CONCLUSION

God intends that we come together with our wonderful diversity and form a powerful oneness in marriage. Four times we find these words in the Bible: “A man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24; see also Matthew 19:5; Mark 10:8; Ephesians 5:31). It is as if God does not want us to miss the point.

In 1 Corinthians 12 and 14, Paul describes the body of Christ as being one but being made up of many individual parts; each is unique in its own function. It is one body with wonderful diversity. A marriage is a team of allies working toward a common goal. Their unity does not generate uniformity; it powerfully creates oneness in the midst of diversity.

Two can become one only as we make Jesus the center of our lives and homes, we become more concerned about the welfare and happiness of each other, and we make it our goal to help each other to be ready for heaven.

Anything that is of value takes dedication to maintain. Be intentional about making your marriage all that God intended, set aside time each day to spend together, don’t get discouraged about the rough spots that you encounter, and pray together about your failings and disappointments, as these are opportunities

to experience some of the greatest growth.

Marriage is a holy covenant that is not easily broken or discarded, and it looks beyond life here on this earth. May each day bring you closer and closer together as you realize that two have become one, with Jesus binding you together.

Should I remain married to my spouse even though he or she has been unfaithful and therefore rendered the marriage covenant null and void?

The Bible does not dictate that the spouse of someone who has committed the sin of adultery against God and against their own spouse must remain married to them or seek a divorce from them. What Jesus stated are the conditions upon which adultery may be accepted as a reason for a person to choose to divorce their spouse: “And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery” (Matthew 19:9, ESV). We want you to notice several things in this text and the greater context.

- *“For any cause?”* Jesus was responding to a question posed to Him by the Pharisees as a test: “Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause?” (Matthew 19:3, ESV). The Pharisees were specifically referring to Moses’ teaching in Deuteronomy 24:1. Two rabbinic schools interpreted that passage to allow for divorce. One of them, the school of Hillel, taught that divorce should be allowed for any reason. Similar to this reasoning, today, some places allow a couple to divorce without placing blame on either party and, therefore, refer to it as a “no-fault divorce.” On the other hand, the school of Shammai allowed for divorce only in cases where adultery had taken place. In His response, Jesus seemed to have sided with the school of Shammai. However, while Jesus confirmed that adultery would allow the innocent party to seek a divorce, He did not prescribe or dictate that divorce had to take place. We have known many couples who have suffered through this experience, many repeatedly, and yet have chosen to remain married, have rebuilt the broken trust and promises in their relationship, and have recommitted to their relationship. Adultery does not have to be the end of a marriage. What these couples have found is the gift of healing that comes from forgiveness (more on this on chapter 11).
- *The result to both parties.* Now, Jesus takes it one step further by stating that if the person who committed adultery divorces their spouse and marries someone else, they are still living in sin. Furthermore, the person they marry is also guilty of adultery. Not only that but earlier, in Matthew 5:32, we find that Jesus also states that the person at fault

is also guilty of causing their former partner, and the person they may choose to marry, to commit adultery. For Jesus, divorce is so serious that even the disciples exclaimed, “If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry” (Matthew 19:10, ESV). In other words, getting a divorce is way too difficult. It would be better to not get married at all! The Israelites, like many today, wanted to have an out in case things didn’t work out in marriage; but that was never God’s plan.

The bottom line is that while the Bible provides a reason for which divorce may be an acceptable course to take, it does not dictate that such a decision must be made. For the sake of the couple, the children, and the family, forgiveness and a recommitment to the marriage vows is a better choice.

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