



**COMMUNITY GROUP
LEADER GUIDE**

by Leigh Robinson & Michael Philip



*"God can sanctify you in a hundred different ways.
Being married is the fast lane!"*

MATT CHANDLER

PREFACE

Marriage is marvellous! It was designed by God and given as his gift of grace to the human race for the purposes of procreation, partnership, and pleasure. A solid and satisfying marriage is, next to a believer's relationship with Christ, one of life's richest joys and, without a doubt, the greatest gift any couple can give their children. But marriage is also messy because ever since Adam and Eve fell into sin, every marriage is "a tale of two sinners." Nothing exposes our sin and highlights our need of a Saviour more than living with another sinner in the close confines of marriage. One of God's main purposes in a Christian marriage is the sanctification of the spouses. He is more concerned about our holiness than our happiness.

May God use this sermon series to help those in the "fast lane" to do better.

Leigh Robinson

SERIES OUTLINE

BIBLICAL FOUNDATION

Understanding the meaning of marriage

SCRIPTURES:

Genesis 1:1-2, 24-31; 2:15-25

Proverbs 2:17

Malachi 2:13-16

Matthew 19:1-12

Mark 10:1-12

Romans 7:1-3

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

Ephesians 5:22-33

BEAUTIFUL PATTERN

Fulfilling the roles in marriage

SCRIPTURES:

Genesis 1:1-2, 24-31; 2:15-25

Ephesians 5:22-33

Colossians 3:18-19

1 Peter 3:1-7

1 Corinthians 11:3; 15:24-28

MESSINESS AND GRACE

A tale of two sinners

SCRIPTURES:

Genesis 3:1-24

Romans 8:19-23

HARD WORK

Making your marriage the best it can be

SCRIPTURES:

Ephesians 4:17-5:21

Colossians 3:1-16



THE BIBLICAL FOUNDATION

Understanding the meaning of Marriage

READ: GENESIS 1 & 2 right through.

QUESTION: What are the three traditional Christian answers to the question '*What is the point of marriage?*'

The 1662 Book of Common Prayer says,

"First, It was ordained for the procreation of children, to be brought up in the fear and nurture of the Lord...

Secondly, It was ordained for a remedy against sin, and to avoid fornication...

Thirdly, It was ordained for the mutual society, help, and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other..."

So, the traditional view of marriage is that it is for raising children, sexual purity, and mutual help.

Do you think this view of marriage is true today?

QUESTION: What four truths does GENESIS 1:26-31 teach about human beings?

- We (male and female) were created in the image of God
- We have been given the task of ruling over all creation as God's regents
- It is God's will that we be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth
- What God made was *very good*

QUESTION: What societal evils could be avoided if we correctly understand that all men and women have been created in the image of God (1:26-27)?

QUESTION: How has GENESIS 2:18 been misunderstood? How do we know this is wrong?

QUESTION: Why is this misunderstanding of GENESIS 2:18 disastrous?

QUESTION: What does GENESIS 2:18 really mean and how does this help us understand God's purpose for marriage?

A 'helper' is one who supplies strength in the areas that are lacking in the one helped. The term does not imply that the helper is either stronger or weaker than the one helped. The word 'suitable' means the woman is 'fit for' or complementary to the man.

- QUESTION: Share examples of how you have been either helped or hindered in formulating a Biblical view of marriage?
- QUESTION: Why is it significant that both Jesus and Paul quoted GENESIS 2:24 in their teaching on marriage (MATTHEW 19:4-6; 1 CORINTHIANS 6:16; EPHESIANS 5:31)
Leaving one's parents implies putting their wife's welfare above that of their parents. The term 'hold fast' is used elsewhere in the bible in reference to faithfulness to a covenant.
Jesus and Paul use of the verse is highlighting that the union of a man and his wife is a God-made covenant which should not be broken.
- QUESTION: What are the consequences of a husband or wife failing to properly "leave" his or her father and mother?
- QUESTION: How can a flourishing Christian marriage have impact for the gospel in society?
- QUESTION: From these foundational principles of marriage, what are the implications for same-sex marriage?
- QUESTION: How should the church behave toward people struggling with same-sex attraction or involved in homosexual relationships?
- QUESTION: Read MALACHI 2:13-15 and discuss what it means to "*guard yourself in your spirit*" (VV15-16).



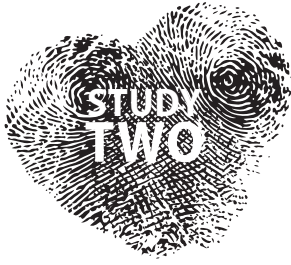
THE *messy* PART

"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says."

JAMES 1:22

The goal of any learning must be obedience. So consider some of these simple self-examination and application questions:

- Is there a truth to believe?
- Is there a sin to confess?
- Is there an error to avoid?
- Is there any promise to claim?
- Is there an attitude to change?
- Is there an example to follow?
- Is there any command to obey?



THE BEAUTIFUL PATTERN

Fulfilling the roles in marriage

READ: Ephesians 5:21-33
Colossians 3:18-19
1 Peter 3:1-7

In the context of our day and age where any notion of submission arouses angry protest and resentment, the verses in Ephesians concerning the roles of wives and husbands may seem very out of touch and offensive. And yet in this letter Paul is outlining the new, counter-cultural standard which God expects of his people (the church).

QUESTION: How should Christians respond to the mood of our day?
John Stott argues that we should welcome movements which seek to liberate women from exploitation and injustice (since such attitudes are all too common in many cultures in the world). These verses are not in any way to be viewed as a mandate for humiliation, exploitation or oppression of woman. We should not interpret Paul's words regarding wives submitting to their husbands in any way which would contradict the attitude of Jesus who treated woman with dignity, equality, courtesy and honour in an age when they were despised. Nor should we allow our interpretation of Paul's words here to contradict his own arguments regarding the equality of male and female as being one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:28).

QUESTION: So how should we interpret the submission called for in this passage?
Firstly we need to distinguish between the person and the role. Husbands and wives, children and parents, masters and servants all have equal dignity in being people created in the image of God and co-heirs of the gracious gift of life (1 Peter 3:7). But, some roles have been invested by God with an authority to which others must submit (husbands, parents and masters). In each context, submission is called for "*as unto the Lord*". The general rule that the Bible insists on is humble submission to all God-given authority.

QUESTION: What are the limits of this authority?
The authority invested by God is not unlimited but it is subject to the ultimate authority of Christ. Submission is required up to the point where obedience would involve disobedience to Christ.

QUESTION: What is the role of the husband in these verses?
Notice how the husband is never instructed to exercise authority over his wife, rather he is instructed to love her as Christ loved the church.

QUESTION: How does the husband's role give context to the submission required of the wife?
The husband's role calls for a very high standard of sacrificial love and tender care and does not allow for harsh authoritarian rule. This kind of love would create a context where a wife could submit with trust, knowing that her husband has her best interests in mind.

QUESTION: Considering the different, complementary, God-given roles of husbands and wives, how would you argue that this is a *"Beautiful Pattern"*?
Both roles are given responsibilities but neither roles are told to claim their rights. Instead, the rights and privileges of each role are invested in the fulfilment of the other person's responsibilities. So when the wife fulfils her role, the husband receives respect. And when the husband fulfils his role, the wife receives love and nurture. This is a mutually beneficial covenant relationship that serves as an analogy to Christ's relationship with his bride, the church. In the context of a believing husband and wife, this is a beautiful pattern.

QUESTION: What about situations where one partner is not a believer?
Read 1 Peter 3:1-2. While this is difficult truth to follow, what is the context of this command? (See especially 1 Peter 2:21-25).

QUESTION: How does the example of Christ take the sting out of the call to submission? How does his example show ultimate submission to God the Father and an eternal perspective?



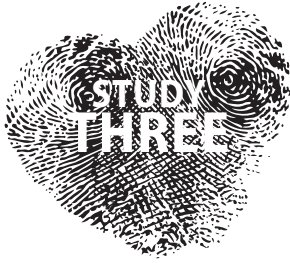
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MESSINESS & GRACE

The tale of two sinners

READ: Genesis 3:1-24

In week one, we read the creation account, of how God created man and woman in his image. Eve was made to be a suitable helper for Adam - someone whose strengths and needs would be a perfect complement to his own. They were an exceptionally compatible couple. Genesis 2 ends on a euphoric note of their joyful covenant union in the first marriage. Had there been guests at their wedding, I'm sure they would have all been confident that here was a couple who would go the distance. And yet, this very first story we have of their married life is one of relational breakdown.

QUESTION: What were some of the immediate changes in their relationship when they both sinned against God?

They firstly went from being naked and unashamed, to being suddenly aware and ashamed of their nakedness.

They wanted to cover themselves from each other

They began to hide from God in fear.

They looked for someone to blame instead of accepting responsibility

QUESTION: How is some of their behaviour echoed in the ways a married couple can behave once the *honeymoon period* is over?

People often enter marriage when they are deeply in love. They can be convinced that their partner is perfect in every way. We hide our nakedness from each other (at least metaphorically speaking) hoping to obscure our faults and flaws. Often only after some time do the flaws in our character start to become apparent to our partner when the realities of married life start to draw them out. Then, like Adam, we may start questioning whether this really is "the one".

QUESTION: What can people who are not yet married learn from this?

For those not yet married, it is important to not be naive about the fact that even the most compatible couples will have struggles!

QUESTION: When the reality of the imperfections of one's spouse become apparent, what is it that will keep a marriage together?

Read Matthew 19:5-6

The covenant of being united together by God in marriage needs to

be the bedrock of your relationship. John Piper once quipped that if you're already married, then, congratulations! You have married "the one". What keeps marriages together is covenant love.

QUESTION: What about those who may not yet be married, how can they enter marriage wisely in this regard?
For those not yet married, it is critical to enter marriage with a commitment that says divorce is not an option. You need to have a very high view of your covenant to each other before God. Implicitly, it is also critical that your relationship be grounded in your common faith in God.

QUESTION: So, in the context of two sinful people bound in a life-long covenant relationship, what is God's will for them once their sinfulness is exposed? What is the spiritual purpose of marriage?
Read Ephesians 5:25-28; Ephesians 4:15
The value of marriage is in helping each other to grow out of our sins and flaws in a safe context of truth and love and grace. The Ephesians passages highlight the tenderness, love and tenacity with which a husband and wife should pursue each other. In imitation of Jesus' covenant love for us, we should love each other in a way that strives to bring about growth and holiness in each other. As our sinfulness and character flaws are exposed they should be lovingly dealt with in an effort to progressively grow in Christ-likeness.

QUESTION: On what basis should we extend grace to one another?
Read 1 Peter 3: 7. Peter says that husbands should respect their wives, "*as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life*". As Christ has shown us grace and mercy, so too should we act with grace towards one another.



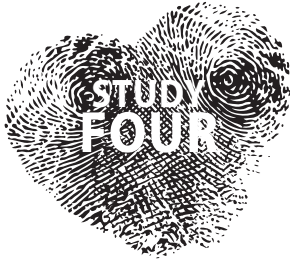
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HARD WORK

Making your marriage the best it can be

READ: 1 Corinthians 7:25-389

Some of the previous passages we have looked at present marriage with a very high view. But Christianity also present singleness as an honourable way of life for it's followers (whether unmarried, divorced or widowed).

QUESTION: What advantages for singleness does Paul give?

QUESTION: By contrast, what advantages does he give for getting married?

QUESTION: Implicitly, what are the advantages of being married for both a husband and wife (v 33-34)?

They will both be on the receiving end of relationship with a partner who wants to please the other.

QUESTION: How does this passage remove any animosity or superiority between those who may be married versus those who may be single?

Being married and not being married are both good conditions to be in. We should not idolize either marriage or singleness.

The previous two studies definitely have a significant bearing on the question of the Hard Work of marriage. So today we'll look at the hard work of protecting your marriage.

READ Colossians 3:1-10

As you read through this passage, underline all the direct commands.

QUESTION: What do you notice about the commands of this passage? What is the underlying assumption?

Assumes that those reading it are part of the church - that they have repented, put their faith in Christ and are living by faith.

QUESTION: How does being rooted in our new identity in Christ bring about the behaviour and character which will ultimately serve to protect and build your relationships (especially in the context of marriage)?

Pay attention to the specific sins that are combated through living in our new identity in Christ. Maybe even list the sin and consider how these things destroy relationships.

QUESTION: So, in this context, what is the chief responsibility a believing couple must shoulder if they are to build and protect their marriage?

They need to individually cultivate their own relationship with Christ and obedience to him.

READ Matthew 5:27-32 ; Malachi 2:13-16

QUESTION How does Jesus raise the bar when it comes to our understanding of unfaithfulness to the marriage covenant?

QUESTION In our cultural context what are some things which make unfaithfulness (for both men and woman) all the more common and easy?

Consider things like dating or hookup apps and websites, social media, instant messaging, sexting, lack of cultural constraints, pornography, micro-cheating, secrecy etc.

QUESTION Physical sexual unfaithfulness is obviously condemned (it's the 6th Commandment), but Jesus says that even looking at a woman lustfully is unfaithfulness. In what ways can both husbands and wives be similarly unfaithful?

QUESTION Jesus calls for ruthless action against things that may cause us to stumble (specifically in the context of his teaching on adultery). What are some drastic steps you and your partner could take to guard your marriage against unfaithfulness?

QUESTION From these two passages, why is faithfulness so important? Unfaithfulness to our marriage covenant (in which God makes the two one) is taken very seriously by God and will result in breaking our relationship with him.

QUESTION How is this teaching equally applicable to those who are not married?



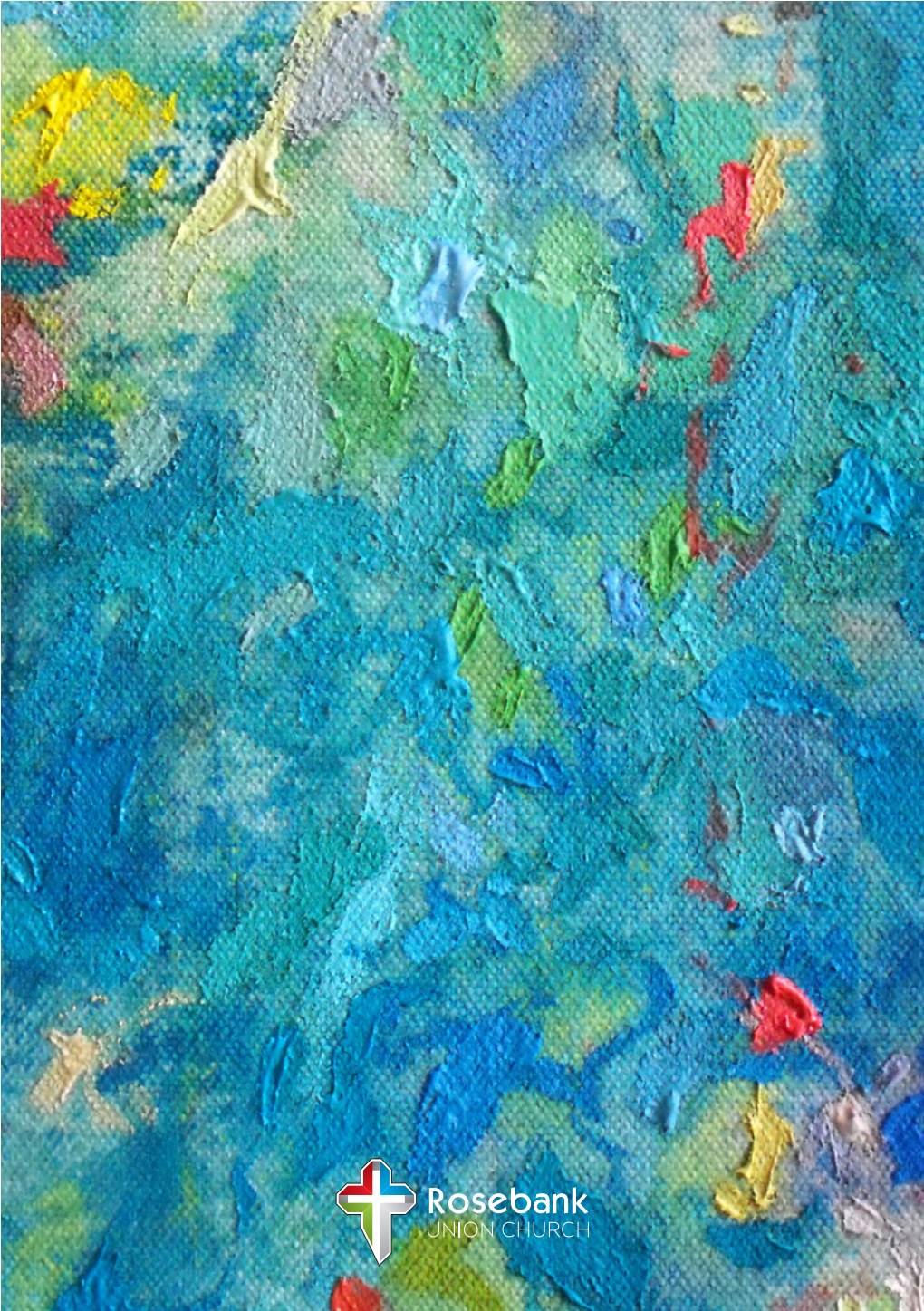
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