



How to Make Your Marriage Better

Pursuing God's Design

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Let's face it. Marriage isn't easy.

I had not been married long before it all began to fall apart. My wife and I were on the verge of divorce. Our son was still a toddler, and our screaming matches had become a nightmare for him. What was strange was that I knew, and so did she, that we loved each other. We truly did. Yet, we could not seem to get along. This is true for many marriages. And if help is not found quickly, even the present love will fade into hatred and bitterness.

I wish someone had been there to help us navigate this, but we continued in isolation. We were active in the church. She was a college student, and I was a high school football coach. We were quite adept at creating a facade. In public, the love between us was evident. Most never would have guessed the dark place we inhabited together. If we had opened up to someone, we might have arrived sooner to where we finally landed. But our own insecurity, fear, and pride kept us from talking to others. We were poor, and without insurance, so professional counseling was not an option. In our desperation, we turned to God.

The truth is that there are a million marriage helps out there. I have been to them. I have sent others there. Ultimately, when we go to these seminars or read books, for the most part, we are taught techniques to do what we already know we should do. We know we should communicate better. We know we should be more patient. We know we should put their needs first. We know what to do. Experts will write 30,000 words teaching us techniques to help us do these things. However, there is only one problem with these types of marriage help. They never help us understand why we don't do what we already know we should do. They never reveal why we continue in behavior we know is destroying the relationship. All the most creatively constructed interventions will only go so far without understanding why we don't do what we already know we should.

When we finally begin to understand why, it fosters an emotional, psychological, and spiritual willingness to change. It is not enough to change our behavior. We must be changed on a fundamental level so that we see ourselves differently, our spouses, and our world. This transition opens our eyes to another path to consider when working to improve our marriage. Until we experience this change deep within, we are blind to any other path that may be better. If we are honest with ourselves, we will clearly see a negative pattern in the marriage that never



stops though perpetuated by many different issues from money to sex to parenting. The pattern may be one variance or another of insult, raised voices, more insults, walking out, screaming, throwing things, waiting, fuming, breaking, crying, remorse, return, moving back in, make-up sex, the honeymoon period, then repeat. Your pattern may be different, using passive aggressiveness instead of overt attacks. Nevertheless, these patterns are triggered by many different issues. These patterns have more than likely been present for a very long time.

To stop the patterns, we must find a different path. Discovering and trusting a different path requires a personal transformation on a metaphysical and ontological level.

God has already given you Everything You Need for a great marriage.

Many reading this would also say they have prayed and asked God to save their marriage, but I have found in my study of Scripture that it is easy to cry out to God. But crying out to God is not turning to God. Turning to God is more than a prayer for help. It is to accept God's help. We pray and weep as if we are waiting for God to give us what we need, but in truth, He has already given us everything we need for a great marriage. How cruel would it be if God withheld the essentials for a lovely marriage until we were about to file papers? No, God is not waiting for our life to fall apart so He can jump in as the glorious savior of our marriage. This is not how God works. Instead, because of His perfect love, He gave us all that we need in the Scripture, the life, death, and resurrection of Christ and the Holy Spirit.

The Bible says that God's ways are higher than ours. His understanding no one can fathom, it says. Yet, the Bible emphasizes the need for transformation and the power to make it happen. But what constitutes the transformation necessary for a great marriage?

When asked to choose the greatest commandment, Christ said all the law and the Biblical corpus hung on loving God and loving our neighbor as ourselves. Love is the fulfillment of the law. This is what the Apostle Paul taught. In other words, obedience to do what we already know we should do can only be accomplished as we learn to love better continually. The Bible is not a list of what to do and what not to do, but an instruction manual on loving better. Imagine how your marriage would be transformed if you and your spouse continually loved better. The marriage would never sour. The longer the marriage, the sweeter it would be. Because this is not the norm, we see people who were once madly in love now ready to throw in the towel, convinced it is the best thing despite all the damage it will do to the family unit. If we learned to love better, people would not divorce ten and twenty years into the marriage. Marriage would not be an institution to be avoided but something to look forward to.



The Bible

In Scripture, we are taught the contents of the Bible have already given us all we need for life and godliness. The word 'life' here means abundant life. When understood in the context of continually loving better, the principles found in Scripture redefine what love looks like. Rather, the Bible does not redefine but reclaims the original meaning of love.

We have learned the concept of love inductively through concentric circles of cultural participation. First, in our immediate family, then extended, followed by friends and neighbors, social media, and finally, the social imaginary of societal culture. In Western civilization, love has been redefined from its original meaning by each level of influence when those who belong to each concentric circle of influence describe a certain behavior as loving or hateful. For example, it is now considered to be hateful to suggest certain behaviors to be self-destructive. To suggest that promiscuity is maladaptive is hatred. This is analogous to letting a child stick a paper clip into an electrical socket because pointing out the danger somehow hurts the child. This is absurd. Culturally, love is not doing anything that will make another uncomfortable but instead supporting any desired behavior regardless of its reckless nature.

For example, the Bible defines love as patience. A calm demeanor can only be defined as patience when others' actions challenge our calm and stir frustration. The world defines love as retaliating against anyone who disturbs our peace. The Bible says when someone's behavior stirs animus, our behavior must remain calm. This is contrary to the world, which defines love in a way that another's irritating behavior must be ended with emotional force. Yelling, screaming, guilt trips, and crying all work to stop the behavior. But they work to stop the irritation from a selfish perspective, not love.

Consider your marriage. When your spouse does something that triggers you, the world teaches that you must retaliate and defend yourself. The Bible indicates working to stop their hurtful behavior, but this is done by helping them see their behavior is not good for them. When this is our approach, we are more likely to stay calm. But when we are sick and tired of what they are doing, love defined by our culture is retaliation or separation. Love defined this way may accomplish the desired result, but wrong motives will prevent the desired result from becoming a new way of being together. Instead, a roller-coaster pattern of frustration will develop.

Like a highway sign indicating which direction to go to reach our desired destination, the Bible points the way to a great marriage with an arrow pointed at love as defined in Scripture. One way to drastically improve your marriage is to consider a different path that opposes the negative patterns already in place. A great way to do this is to memorize the Bible's definition of love in Paul's letter to the church in Corinth. Don't simply memorize it, but take one aspect each week over the next ten weeks and put forth a great deal of effort to exhibit this definition of love remembering these behaviors are to be done when your spouse is not doing them.



The word 'love' in this passage comes from a Greek word that means 'charity.' In other words, God reveals that the true nature of love can only be found when they are done without expecting our spouse to do the same for us. When we give to Red Cross, we don't expect the Red Cross to pay our medical bills. It is a charity. We give without expectation. The most genuine and highest form of love can only be lived out when our spouse isn't.

FOR A BETTER MARRIAGE

MEMORIZE AND EXEMPLIFY THIS PASSAGE

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶

Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. (NIV)

The Life of Christ

It may not seem like the life of Christ is an important gift from God specifically for your marriage. However, Scripture teaches that Christ is the groom, and those who believe constitute His bride. His life, death, and resurrection become a human illustration of what it looks like to love well in a marriage.

The Jewish culture of Jesus' Day had wedding rituals. The man would give a dowry to the woman's father. If this dowry was accepted, the two were betrothed. This is legal marriage with stipulations. The two could not be in the company of one another at all until after the man had built them a place to live. Because the man would be in a hurry to be with his wife, he might rush, so their custom was to designate the husband's father as the general contractor. He inspected daily, and until he approved, the husband could not get his wife. Once the father approved the house, he and his friends would rush into the streets shouting the groom is coming. The wife who never knows when her wedding ceremony will actually happen is always ready. When they hear the parade coming, she and her friends also rush out into the street. The two parties meet and return to the newly built house, usually attached to the husband's house, and the wedding lasts for seven days.



Jesus, the husband, made his life the dowry given for his bride. The cross was a husband taking a wife. He told his disciples that he had to go and prepare a place for them in his father's house. One asked him when the end would come, and he said only His Father could make that call. When the Father declares our Heavenly dwelling prepared for us, Christ will rush toward the earth, and the Bible says those who believe will meet Him in the air. We will go back to Heaven, and the book of Revelation describes the wedding supper of the Lamb, which lasts seven years.

My point is that the entire Scripture and the life of Christ reveal the nature of a marriage that will last forever. It is a marriage where love between husband and bride continually grows.

It was not all roses for Christ in this process. His bride first rejected the gift. Instead, they crucified Him. His response was patience and kindness. He taught, healed, and forgave.

Think about how long it sometimes takes someone to forgive, and this is only after the one who hurt them has groveled before them. But Christ forgave His bride before she asked for forgiveness. As He hung on the cross, He prayed for His wife, saying, "Father, forgive her, for she knows now what she is doing." Those are not the exact words, but when the church is seen as the bride of Christ, we see that many who rejected Him that day become followers.

The bride who did not want Christ was moved in her heart to choose Him after seeing His patience and kindness in response to her nasty behavior. Christ sent the message, "I love you even at your worst." When we choose to live by the Bible's definition, the life of Christ shows us what it looks like. By studying His life, we learn the Biblical definition lived out in human circumstances to help us know how to do it. We also find hope that Christ did this by the power of the same Holy Spirit we now have access to.

We might think it is impossible to love like this, but Christ again is our example. He was God. However, He limited His earthly existence to only what was available to all men. By relying on the Holy Spirit, which we will discuss later, He could love perfectly, and the church that walked out on Him finally came home.

FOR A BETTER MARRIAGE

READ THE BOOK OF JOHN ONCE A WEEK FOR SIX WEEKS, THEN
MODEL CHRIST'S BEHAVIOR IN YOUR MARRIAGE



The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is God manifest in us. As we journey through the Scripture, we first meet God above us, and then Christ is born as God with us until we receive the Holy Spirit, who is God in us. The Spirit allows a visceral experience with God beyond our intellectual understanding. As we read Scripture and follow Christ's example, the Holy Spirit takes what is in our mind and writes it upon the tablets of our hearts. This work of the Spirit completes the transformation necessary to love better. We must experience the love of God to be able to live it out. As we experience the love of God being clearly defined by Scripture and portrayed in the life of Christ, we will begin to change so that we love better.

Anyone who has ever embarked upon a date with someone they met online knows the difference between knowing about someone and truly knowing them. If we do not engage with the Holy Spirit beyond Scripture and Christ's example, the love of God will never be more than a stale academic definition of something we have never experienced.

The Scripture reminds us how God uses the marriage analogy to teach us about our relationship with Him. If we don't understand Him, our marriage will never be all it could be. At the same time, as our marriage improves, the lessons learned will deepen our relationship with the Lord.

A major difference between marriage and other relationships is the sexual nature of it. Sexual activity releases neurohormones called vasopressin and oxytocin. These work to create an intense emotional bond between partners. Contrary to modern philosophy, our sexual bodies are not isolated from our psyche. Sex has a dramatic effect on our brains. These hormones stir up positive emotions with our sexual partners. In monogamous relationships, the continual overload of these during sex also works to build trust, lower anxiety, and stabilize emotions. These also work intranasally so that these hormones are released during arguments to help a couple work through the issues. This is why sex is so important in marriage. But what does this have to do with the Holy Spirit?

Scripture refers to Christ as the groom. We, the body of believers, are the bride. Psalm 22:3 teaches us that God enthrones or inhabits the praises of His people. The people's worship in the Old Testament involved roasting sacrificial animals. The phrase saying a sacrifice was 'an aroma pleasing to the Lord' is repeated often. Our praise goes to Him. He inhabits our praises. There is an intercourse or communion that takes place when we praise Him. If expressed wholeheartedly, prayer, praise, and worship move us beyond our physical frame into a spiritual place where we ascend, and God descends for spiritual communion.



Engaging spiritually with God through worship bonds us tighter with God. We have a visceral experience where His presence is no longer limited to ideas but felt experience. This communion takes us into deeper communion, where God's influence on who we are increases to the point of transformation. As we experience His love as described in Scripture and lived out in Christ, we are changed with a greater capacity to love as He loved.

Consider the woman caught in adultery. We know God forgives, but imagine this woman's experience of forgiveness. The law demanded she be stoned to death. As we watch Christ live out the concept of forgiveness, He does not declare her innocent. Neither she nor He supposes that she is innocent of this religious crime. Instead, He refuses to condemn her and reminds the crowd of their own sin to disarm their willingness to take her life. She had stood there next to Jesus, surrounded by a crowd. They were ready with rocks in hand to take her life. But Christ's words cause them one by one to drop their rock and walk away. After they have all departed, He asks the woman, "Where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She responds, "No one, sir." Jesus replies, "Then neither do I. Go and sin no more."

I can only imagine how overwhelmed she felt as she walked away. Her gratefulness to Christ, who loved her through her sin without condemnation, would have created a strong desire to honor the man who saved her life by sinning no more. Her life was changed. Not through condemnation but the forgiveness she experienced. Not only would she repent of her sin, but she would never condemn any other because of something they had done. The Holy Spirit helps us internalize God's love so deeply that we begin to love as He loved.

FOR A BETTER MARRIAGE

ENGAGE WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT THROUGH WHOLEHEARTED WORSHIP OF GOD

Time and Help

We may think we are already Christians and don't need transformation. But the Bible says we are born again when we believe in Christ. The analogy is a baby. Babies do not know how to love well because when they are not getting what they want, they are designed at that age to not care about what anyone else is going through. If they are hungry, it doesn't matter that Mom is late for work. It doesn't matter if Dad is exhausted when their diaper is full. When we become



Christians, we are credited by God as transformed, but then He calls us to be transformed by renewing our minds. Without this transformation, we cannot enjoy the gift of marriage in its highest form.

The Bible compares transformation to a baby with a great inheritance. The child has no understanding of what it means. Even as they grow, their understanding will be skewed so that if they were in charge of the inheritance, it would be squandered away. Only when the child matures can they understand how to manage the inheritance to its maximum enjoyment.

God's gifts, including marriage, are not given to us alone. God intends to use your marriage to bless others. A good marriage will be a blessing to the children. It will be a blessing to others struggling in their relationships. It will be a blessing to others in the couple's lives because a good marriage stabilizes emotions helping them to interact better with all people. Because all gifts from God are also for others, they must be managed. In the same way, Adam and Eve were called upon by God to oversee and care for Eden. We must do the same for marriage. But to manage this gift well, we have to grow up. Too many people, including Christians, are attempting to enjoy their marriage without growing up spiritually. It's as if a couple of two-year-olds were able to get married. The selfishness of each would destroy everything. We must be transformed to live a loving behavior reflecting our feelings towards our spouses. Without transformation, the love we feel will never manifest in our behavior when times are tough. Instead, we will act like two-year-olds fighting over a toy.

The Bible says we are the clay, and God is the potter. This illustrates the process of transformation. The Spirit works like water to keep the clay pliable. But the potter is forming us as His masterpiece, where each gentle touch works to reform the entirety of the clay existing on the pottery wheel of life. It is small, gentle touches within the movement that transform. The transformation needed for a beautiful marriage does not come quickly, but through small touches of God through our movements in life. This is why we may go to a conference or read a book and make good changes only to see those changes disappear with time, allowing the same negative cycles to return. Transformation cannot happen overnight or from a weekend of marriage enrichment. It is learning to move in the marriage while being pliable to the touch of God as we spin. It takes time, and we need help.

As God's touch begins to form us, we become better lovers. Not only is our marriage transformed, but our relationship with our children, parents, co-workers, and even those who have attacked us improve significantly. The Bible says we can learn to love so well that even our enemies will live at peace with us. We will learn to love like Christ so that through us, He can change hearts and minds, restore hope and joy, and give peace and power to others. We learn to love ourselves better. We love God better. We parent better. Even our sex life gets better. Everything changes as our marriage changes.



This small ebook barely touches the surface. To be fundamentally transformed by the Holy Spirit to love better and make your marriage as great as God intended, you need help from a teacher or coach. Your faith must be increased, but faith comes from hearing. This means you need someone to listen to. You need personal contact and direct conversations where there is teaching and questions specific to your relationship. If your marriage is struggling, get counseling. Get a relationship coach who can lead you through the transformational process, guiding you through Scripture, Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

FOR A BETTER MARRIAGE

GET HELP FROM SOMEONE WHO CAN BE USED BY GOD TO GUIDE
YOU THROUGH THE TRANSFORMATIONAL PROCESS SO THAT YOU
BEGIN TO LOVE BETTER