

Premarital Mentorship

A 6-WEEK MENTOR GUIDE

PROVIDENCE CHURCH RESOURCES



Dear Premarital Mentors,

Thank you for being a Providence Church Premarital Counseling Mentor! We are thankful for you and your service to the body of Providence through counseling couples towards marriage.

Here is a quick overview of the Premarital Counseling process:

- By the time you are matched with an engaged couple, they will have been given an overview of the process, a premarital questionnaire, a link to complete a Prepare-Enrich assessment, and instruction to purchase the two books used for content.
- As soon as the engaged couple completes the items above, Providence Staff will send you their responses to the Prepare-Enrich assessment and questionnaire.
- At this point, you can schedule your first session with the engaged couple.
- The Providence Premarital Program content is designed to be completed in six sessions over approximately 12 weeks (meeting every other week to give the engaged couple time to complete their reading and assignments). This binder contains all of the content for all six sessions separated by tabs for your convenience. Once you have completed the binder, you are done with the process!

Please know that you have flexibility on timing and content. We encourage you to follow the Spirit's leading and do what works best for you and your mentees.

As you meet with them, feel free to reach out to one of the pastors should any issues arise in which you are concerned or need help addressing with the mentees. And if you have any questions about the process or logistics, please contact Lucy Walker (lucy@providenceaustin.com). She will also check on you throughout the process to make sure things are going well and to answer any questions that come up.

Thank you again for blessing our community with your time, efforts, and prayer. We are praying for you!

In Christ,

Kendal Haug

SESSION ONE

Getting to Know You

Big Idea

Marriage is a picture of Christ and the Church, and it projects the glory of God in a unique and powerful way. The couple before you is about to enter into a personal, public, and permanent commitment to one another and will make a promise to God to honor their commitment. There is no way for them to fully understand what they are getting themselves into, but your goal as a premarital mentor couple is to give them as full a picture as you can by looking at what God's Word has to say about marriage, asking them hard questions about, and ultimately pointing them to Jesus as the only hope for their coming marriage.

Your goal for this first meeting is to give them an overview of the premarital process, lay out expectations, and get to know them as best you can (as individuals and as a couple). You should already have read over their premarital questionnaires and Prepare/Enrich assessments before this initial meeting. You can follow up on anything that stood out to you from those in addition to the following content.

Introduction | 10 Minutes

Setup You are engaged—we want to celebrate this significant milestone with you! You are about to enter into a whole new chapter of life, which is fun and exciting, but it is also going to stretch you in significant ways. Though your excitement and energy right now are probably focused on *your wedding day*, we want to help you prepare for *your marriage*. We want your life together to be as fulfilling to you and as glorifying to God as possible. That's what this whole premarital process is all about. We are committed to helping send you into marriage with biblical insights, practical tools, theological development, and coaching so that you are better equipped to be the husband and wife that God desires. Let me give you a little overview of the process ...

Overview of Process

Communicate Like most things in life, they will only get out of premarital counseling what they put into it. Clearly communicate the following details and expectations ...

- This is a six-session premarital counseling process. You should plan on 2 hours for each session. We try and meet roughly every other week, so this will take a minimum of 12 weeks.
- It will involve reading assignments and other homework that you have to do on your own time and you need to complete it separate from each other (unless otherwise noted).
- Let's respect each other's time, so you need to come to meetings prepared. You must do all the homework to finish this process and you have to do the work before coming to our session.
- We believe that the Bible is the Word of God (it has authority and the final say) and we will be using it to guide our time and discover what God says about marriage.
- Be honest and open. Our meetings are confidential. *(Mention that you will be vulnerable and transparent and that you expect the same.)*
- Give each other permission to call off the engagement or postpone the wedding if that is where God guides this process.
- Regardless of each of your past history (both apart and together), from here on, commit to remaining sexually pure until your wedding day. At minimum this means not living together, not sleeping over, and not having sex.

Ask Are you both up for that? *(You want to hear from both of them that they are committed to the process)*

Homework Follow-up: Chapter 1 from *Catching Foxes*

Ask Did you get the book and read the first chapter? *(In future sessions you will ask them to share about their reading and what takeaways they had, but this week you just want to make sure they got the book and did their first assignment.)*

Transition For this first session, we really just want to spend some time getting to know you both and allow you to get to know us a little as well ...

Get to Know You | 60 Minutes

Ask Here is a list of suggested questions, some of which are taken from their reading assignment this week *(You don't have to ask all of these, use your own discretion)*

- How did you two meet? How did you know this was the person you wanted to marry? How did you get engaged, tell us the story?
- What do you enjoy about your fiancé? What have been some of the greatest delights of your relationship?
- Have there been any hardships, difficulties, or conflicts you have had to face together?
- When/where are you getting married? Who is marrying you?
- How is your wedding planning going?
- What will life be like once your married? Where will you live? Work? Etc.
- What fears do you have about engagement, the wedding, marriage?
- What do you like to do for fun?
- Where are you from? Tell us about your families. Have you spent a lot of time with each other's family?
- Share about life growing up in your home. What were some defining events, good or bad?
- What family experiences do you believe were most profound in shaping who you are today? How do you think they have shaped your expectations for marriage?
- Tell us about your models for marriage (parents, grandparents, friends) ... How has marriage been viewed, talked about, and treated in your family?
- Tell us about your journey of faith (growing up until now)? How would you describe your faith in God? *(Allow for the possibility that one of them might be unsure about their faith or that one of them is not a Christian. You should already know this basic info based on their questionnaire so you can figure out how you need to word this question.)*
- How have you seen the Holy Spirit growing you in Christ over time?
- Share areas of life where you continue to need more focused transformation?

Transition Tell them a little about yourselves, your marriage, your kids, etc. Tell them what you enjoy about the premarital process and why you are involved in this ministry. And let them ask you questions ...

Ask Alright, now it is your turn to grill us ... What questions do you have? Ask away ...

Ask Do you have any questions or concerns about the premarital process?

Transition Every time we get together we will look over a few sections from the Prepare/Enrich assessments that you filled out. The results from these types of assessments can vary depending on what mood you were in at the time, what you were working through as a couple, how stressed you were in the moment, etc. So this assessment isn't a status or label on your relationship, but rather it is a tool that will help us to surface and talk about both potential strengths and areas of growth that you might face as a married couple. Our hope is that it gives you insight into the big picture and reality of your relationship. Today we will just look at the intro sections of the assessment ...

Prepare/Enrich | 15 Minutes

Review Open up to and go over the “Background Info” and “Couple Typology” sections of the assessment ...

- **Background Info:** You should already be aware of most everything in the background section at this point, but make sure there is nothing that stands out to you and might be worth a question (e.g. really low incomes, unhealthy living arrangement that you weren't aware of, etc.).
- **Couple Typology:** Share their strength and growth areas with them and see if they think they are accurate. Ask them to elaborate on one or two of the strengths as well as one or two of the weaknesses: “How have you already experienced that in your relationship?” (You want to take note of things like: are they aware of themselves, are they able to clearly talk about their relationship, etc.)

Transition Alright, that is all for our first session. Any final thoughts or questions?

Wrap-up | 5 Minutes

Homework for next session Read ch. 2-5 from *Catching Foxes* and answer any questions in those chapters.

Schedule next meeting and pray together

SESSION TWO

God's Design for Marriage

Big Idea

God's design for marriage is for two people to "become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). When most people think about getting married, they are thinking about what it will mean for them—how much fun it will be, what kind of life they want to have together, and so on. It's easy to slip into a "contract" view of marriage, wherein two people commit to one another for the purpose of mutual benefit. Whether spoken or unspoken, the relationship is conditioned upon certain needs or expectations being met. But when God says, "they shall become one flesh," He is saying, marriage is a covenant, not a contract. It is not about closeness. It's about oneness: permanent, spiritual, intimate, mutual, and exclusive oneness.

This union of man and woman in covenant relationship is meant to put the gospel of Jesus on display for the world to see: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church" (Ephesians 5:31-32). Jesus took the church to be His bride, not because of what He would gain from her, but because of what He would give to her. And the church loves and serves Jesus, not for selfish gain, but in devotion to the One who loves her and gave Himself up for her. This is what God wants to say through your marriage!

Prepare/Enrich | 15 Minutes

Review Go over the "Idealistic Distortion", "Relationship Dynamics", "Commitment", "Personal Stress Profile", and "Spiritual Beliefs" sections of the assessment ...

- **Idealistic Distortion:** Share their overall scores with them and ask if they think that is accurate. If one of them is way more idealistic than the other, ask how they have seen that come out in their relationship. Look at the “Idealistic Distortion Items”, pick 2 or 3 that they differ on, share those with them, and ask for them to talk about them a bit. You are looking to see if they are aware of themselves and can talk through differences in a healthy way. Also look out for if one of them is overly idealistic and make sure they are aware of the potential for unhealthiness there.
- **Relationship Dynamics and Commitment:** Look for any red flag issues and make sure they are aware and acknowledge them.
- **Personal Stress Profile:** Share their overall scores with them as well as some of their top stressors. Ask each of them to talk about those scores in general a bit and ask how they have seen that come out in their relationship.
- **Spiritual Beliefs:** Look for any red flag issues and make sure they are aware and acknowledge them.

Introduction | 15 Minutes

Setup Tonight we want to lay the foundation for the commitment that you both are heading towards together— we want to talk about God’s design for marriage. When you’re engaged, it’s fun to think about what married life will be like: where you will live, what you will do, etc. It’s easy to think about what we want our marriage to look like without stopping to consider God’s design for marriage. It’s like having an idea for a house in your mind, and then just jumping into the building phase without laying a foundation. We want to build our marriages on the foundation of understanding God’s design for marriage. So that’s what we are going to talk about.

To start, let’s follow-up on your reading. You read chapters 2-5 from the book ...

Homework Follow-up: Chapters 2-5 from *Catching Foxes*

Ask What stood out to you from the reading? Was there anything that was new for you? Anything that you were unsure about or disagreed with? What are your main takeaways?

Transition One of the key terms from your reading is the biblical concept of “covenant.” Let’s talk about that term for just a minute before we get into Scripture to make sure we are all on the same page ...

Intro Questions

Ask The predominant view of marriage in our culture is a “contract” view of marriage ...

- What do you think that means? What would a contract marriage be like?
- What are the possible downsides of this view?
- What kinds of things do you hear people say about marriage that portray this view?

Ask The Biblical view of marriage is not a contract, but a covenant. We don't use that word much ... what do you think are some differences between a covenant view of marriage in contrast to a contract?

Transition Let's look at Genesis 1 and 2 together ... this will help solidify our understanding of God's design for marriage. We are just going to read through the text and talk about it as we go.

Bible Discussion | 35 Minutes

Read Genesis 1:26-28 aloud together.

Ask It says that God created man and woman in His own image. What all does it mean that we have been created in the image of God? What implications does that have for us? *(Some answers: We have inherent value as image bearers of God; we are created in and for community and relationship; we are not our own—we are God's workmanship)*

Transition So God creates Adam in His own likeness, and then He is going to give Adam a God-sized mission. Let's move ahead to chapter 2 ...

Read Genesis 2:4-17 aloud together.

Ask Okay, so God made Adam and put him in this paradise called Eden ... Now, what is he supposed to be doing? *(Answer: “work it and keep it”).*

Transition So Adam has a purpose, a mission; he has God-given work to do. This is an important context for what happens next ...

Read Genesis 2:18-23 aloud together.

Ask Adam lives in paradise. He has a job that he loves and was literally made to do. He has unhindered fellowship with God. Yet, in spite of all this, something is “not good.”

- What is “not good”? (*Answer: that he is alone*) Why isn't that good? I mean, it's paradise, right?
- Why do you think God took Adam through the whole animal-naming thing? (*Answer: The Lord parades the animals before Adam, but none of them were a fit for him. He is at his wits end ... he longs for something, but he can't name it, can't conceive of it, and certainly can't create it. Perhaps God brings him to this point so that he will know that what he needs comes from God.*)

Transition One of the things we see so far in the story is that marriage is God's idea. Every aspect of this relationship is God's doing. He brings Eve to Adam like a Father walks his daughter down the aisle. He is giving his daughter away ... it's the most precious gift a Father can give. But there's more ... God also performs the ceremony. Let's keep reading in ch. 2—this is his pronouncement over the couple ...

Read Genesis 2:24-25 aloud together.

Ask Let's think about Adam and Eve in the garden together for a minute ...

- How would you describe their marriage? (*Some possible answers: It was not characterized by duty, but delight. They delighted in God, each other, and in creation. They worshipped and enjoyed God together. They had a shared mission. They enjoyed each other's companionship. They were not ashamed, but totally open with one another. Their marriage was a context for joy, worship, blessing, and pleasure. This is a picture of oneness ... being of the same mind and heart.*)
- What is God's design for marriage? (*God designed marriage to be permanent, exclusive, intimate, and fruitful for His purposes.*)
- What does “oneness” look like outside of Eden? I mean, what are some tangible ways that we can express God's design for marriage?
- How do you think oneness is a picture of the gospel?

Ask Let's wrap-up with a very practical question ... Adam and Eve's oneness was built on the foundation of intimacy with God. So, as you prepare for marriage:

- How is your relationship with God?
- What are you doing to cultivate friendship with God?
- Is this relationship taking priority over your relationship with God? (How would you know?)
- What are some things you can do to encourage and help each other grow closer to God?

Transition Oneness is huge in your marriage, and you are both responsible for cultivating healthy oneness with one another. Let's do an exercise together that is going to give you each some insight into what that responsibility will look like for two specifically.

Exercise | 15 Minutes

Hand out Give them each a copy of the *Responsibility for Oneness* exercise, have them fill it out on their own, and then have them share their answers with each other using the questions at the end.

Transition Alright, that is all for our second session. Any final thoughts or questions?

Wrap-up | 5 Minutes

Homework for next session Read ch. 6-7 (men do ch. 6; women do ch. 7) from *Catching Foxes* and answer any questions in those chapters.

Schedule next meeting and pray together

SESSION TWO EXERCISE

Responsibility for Oneness

Fill out the appropriate section below (men fill out the husband section; women fill out the wife section), rating yourself 1 (this doesn't describe me at all) to 5 (I'm doing really well here) in each area.

Husband's Responsibility for Oneness

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ My leadership style will make biblical submission easy/reasonable for my fiancé

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ My attitude and leadership makes my fiancé feel cherished and understood

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ My leadership is characterized by a pattern of taking initiative

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ I verbalize acceptance and honor to my fiancé

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ I find ways to nourish my fiancé's gifts and help her be all that God made her to be

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ I am honest with my fiancé about my needs (physical, emotional, spiritual)

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ I know what makes my fiancé feel loved, and I work to show love in those ways

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ I am growing spiritually

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ My fiancé feels confident that she will be my top priority (above work, hobbies, sports, parents, etc.)

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ I look for ways to share life with my fiancé (activities, dreams, etc.)

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ I romance my fiancé (dates, non-sexual affection, gifts, compliments, etc.)

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ My fiancé feels secure in my ability to provide for her and our family

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ I am a one-woman man (not given to inappropriate interaction with other women or pornography)

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ I am learning how to be biblically accurate in my responsibilities as a husband

Wife's Responsibility for Oneness

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ My attitudes toward my fiancé reflect support and confidence in him

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ My attitudes and actions toward my fiancé show him respect

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ My attitudes toward my fiancé reflects contentment and trust in God

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ I am growing spiritually

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ I support my fiancé's responsibility to initiate spiritually

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ I am honest with my fiancé about my needs (physical, emotional, spiritual)

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ My fiancé knows I admire him

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ I know what communicates love to him, and I try to express love in those ways

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ I am willing to follow his direction for our future home

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ I accept him regardless of his performance

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ My fiancé feels confident that he will be my top priority (above friends, future kids, parents, etc.)

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ I back him and verbally support him around other people

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Biblical priorities are more important to me than status and lifestyle

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ I am learning how to be biblically accurate in my responsibilities as a wife

Discussion Questions

1. Share the 2 areas of strength and 2 areas of weakness that most stand out to you.
2. Ask your fiancé if that seems accurate to them; see if they have any feedback.
3. Share your main takeaways with each other along with anything you need to confess.

SESSION THREE

Needs and Roles in Marriage

Big Idea

“God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27). God’s design for marriage involves two very different people becoming one flesh. Just as it is within the Godhead, and in creation, marriage has a distinct order that promotes health and beauty. As the husband lives into his role as “head,” and as the wife lives into her role as “helper,” they meet each other’s needs in ways that enable them to pursue the mission of God together. In this way, marriage is a beautiful picture of the gospel.

Prepare/Enrich | 20 Minutes

Review Open up to and go over the “Partner Style and Habits”, “Leisure Activities”, “Relationship Roles”, “Relationship Expectations”, and “Parenting Expectations” sections of the assessment ...

- **Partner Style and Habits:** Look for any red flag issues and make sure they are aware and acknowledge them. Ask them to elaborate about any areas of disagreement.
- **Leisure Activities:** Look for any red flag issues and make sure they are aware and acknowledge them. Ask them to elaborate about any areas of disagreement. Have them describe what they like to do together.
- **Relationship Roles:** Look for any red flag issues and make sure they are aware and acknowledge them. Ask them to elaborate about any areas of disagreement.
- **Marriage Expectations:** Similar to the “Idealistic Distortion” section, pick 2 or 3 items that they differ on, share those with them, and ask for them to talk about them a bit. You are looking to see if they are aware of themselves and can talk through differences in a healthy

way. Also look out for if one of them is overly unrealistic and make sure they are aware of the potential for unhealthiness there. If one of them scores as extremely “realistic”, you might ask about that. Often times the person that is highly realistic comes across as negative and pessimistic to the other person. So maybe ask that other person how their partners “realistic” tendencies comes across to them? How does it make them feel? How does it affect their relationship?

- **Parenting Expectations:** Look for any red flag issues and make sure they are aware and acknowledge them. Ask them to elaborate about any areas of disagreement. Make sure this is a conversation that they have had together. It is also wise to make sure they have some openness about this topic. Meaning, they don’t know how their married lives are going to go, and they don’t know God’s plans for them regarding kids and parenting. It is important to communicate well and get on the same page, but also to have openness and dependence on God’s leading, not their own planning.

Introduction | 10 Minutes

Setup Last time we looked at God’s design for marriage in Genesis 1-2. The big picture is “oneness,” but this oneness does not mean sameness. They are created in the image of God, male and female (Genesis 1:27). Men and women reflect the image of God in unique ways. So this week we want to talk about the unique needs and roles that men and women have in a marriage.

To the man, God gives the role of headship. He is to lead and shepherd his wife. Men, by nature, are defenders/protectors/providers, and that images God, because God is a defender/protector/provider!

To the woman, God gives the role of helper. She is designed by God to help and support her husband. Women, by nature, are nurturers/helpers/encouragers. Psalm 54:4: “Behold, God is my helper”... [same Hebrew word as Gen 2:18].

To start, let’s follow-up on your reading. You read chapters 6 and 7 from the book ...

Homework Follow-up: Chapters 6 and 7 from *Catching Foxes*

Ask What stood out to you from the reading? Was there anything that was new for you? Anything that you were unsure about or disagreed with? What are your main takeaways?

Transition The topic of roles within marriage can be a tricky and divisive thing. It is helpful to define some terms and get on the same page about what exactly these different roles are ...

Intro Questions

Ask Words like “headship” and “helper” don’t go over that well in our culture ...

- What thoughts or questions come to mind when you hear those words, or when you think about the concept of men and women having different roles in a marriage?
- What was your parents’ marriage like in this area? How did roles play out in their relationship?

Transition It’s important and helpful to understand what the Bible means when it uses these words. Let’s read this article together, and then we can talk about it some more.

Article | 15 Minutes

Handout the *Marriage Roles: Headship and Helper* article and read it aloud together, taking turns at the paragraph breaks.

Discussion Questions

Ask What stands out to you in this explanation of marriage roles?

Ask How does this article differ from or affirm your understanding of the terms “authority” and “helper”?

Ask We all struggle with these roles (that’s Genesis 3, which we will look at next time) ... but what do you think your strengths are in these areas? What is challenging for you?

- **Men:** With regard to biblical authority and leadership?
- **Women:** With regard to biblical submission and support?

Mentor’s Note: They can help each other if needed or desired (i.e. share what they think each others’ strengths and weaknesses are).

Transition The article mentions Ephesians 5. This passage gives us more detail about how to love each other well in light of these roles, so let's look at it together.

Bible Discussion | 25 Minutes

Read Ephesians 5:22-33 aloud together.

Ask This passage says that we can learn about marriage by looking at the relationship between Jesus and the church. Verse 24 says, "As the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands." So: how does the church submit to Jesus? (Trust Him, follow His leadership, depend on Him, honor Him, willingly come under His authority and purposes, etc.)

Ask How does that translate to the wife's role in marriage? In other words, what do you think it will look like practically to submit to your husband and support him like this?

Mentor's Note: Be ready to share examples from your own marriage.

Application Questions

(these are worded for the woman, but both can respond):

- How does he receive love? What makes him feel respected and supported?
- Are you critical or gracious in your feedback?
- Can he be honest without worrying about how you will respond?
- Do you encourage him to pursue his interests and aspirations?
- Do you ask him to share about his relationship with God?

Ask Okay, let's look at the other side now. Verse 25 says, "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church." How does Jesus love and lead the church? (Loved her first, without condition, sacrificed for her, sanctifies her, intercedes for her, etc.)

Ask How does that translate to the husband's role in marriage? In other words, what do you think it will look like practically to love your wife and lead her like this?

Mentor's Note: Be ready to share examples from your own marriage.

Application Questions

(these are likewise worded for the man, but again, both can respond):

- How does she receive love? What makes her feel loved and cared for?
- What seems like it takes priority over her (hobbies, work, friends, etc.)?
- What threatens her sense of security in your relationship? (money, impurity, anger, etc.)?
- Do you ask her about her relationship with God? Do you pray for her?
- Does she feel free to talk to you about hard things (is there an environment of grace)?

Transition Learning to live into your God-given roles and love each other well is hard work, but it is a beautiful display of the gospel. Let's finish with an exercise that will help us make this even more practical for you as you work on this together.

Exercise | 15 Minutes

Hand out Give them each the appropriate section of the *Marriage Needs: Love and Respect* exercise, have them fill it out on their own, and then work through the discussion questions on the back page together.

Transition Alright, that is all for our third session. Any final thoughts or questions?

Wrap-up | 5 Minutes

Homework for next session Read ch. 8-9 from *Catching Foxes* and answer any questions in those chapters.

Schedule next meeting and pray together



Marriage Roles: Headship and Helper

God’s design for marriage is for two people to become one flesh—two very different people: a man and a woman. This diversity and oneness within a marriage reflects the nature of the diversity and oneness of our Triune God. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have unique roles as they work together to accomplish the work of redemption. Incidentally, the culmination of all things will be people from every tongue, tribe, and nation living and worshipping the one true God in perfect harmony. Clearly, God is glorified by the mystery of diversity and oneness.

In marriage, the man and the woman are created equal, but given different roles according to their nature and needs. First, Adam is given authority over creation, including Eve. Now, when we hear the word “authority,” we tend to think of things like superiority and hierarchical relationships in which one person is permitted to impose his will upon another. But this is not the biblical concept of authority. In the Bible, authority is a very positive thing. It is given as a means to bless and serve others. First, Adam is given authority over the land, to “work and keep it” (Genesis 2:15), and over the animals (2:19-20). God gave him this authority so that he could cultivate the beauty of the natural world. Adam is also given a role of authority in his relationship with Eve (2:22). Notice that he does not look down on her as inferior. He rejoices over her with poetry! His authority is a means of caring for, protecting, and blessing Eve.

The clearest picture of biblical authority is Jesus ... Jesus has authority over us, but He lays down His life for us (Romans 5:6-11). That is the nature of biblical authority. Headship in marriage, therefore, is the divine calling of a husband to take primary responsibility for Christ-like, servant leadership, protection and provision in the home (John Piper).

Eve is given the role of “helper” (2:18). This word also sounds condescending to our ears, but the meaning here is just the opposite; it speaks of strength. Most of the instances this word is used in Scripture, it is used of God. He is our Help. It is a word that is often used to refer to military reinforcements. God uses the term for Himself several

times in instances when Israel would have been destroyed if He had not come along to help. “Help” is a strong word, a divine word. Eve is someone with enormous power, but power which is very different than Adam. That is the role a wife plays in her husband’s life. She uses her insight and abilities to make up what is lacking in her husband so that together they can accomplish God’s purposes. When the Bible talks about being a helper or submitting to another, it is not portraying weakness, but strength. Not inferiority, but glory. I know it sounds upside down, but that just tells you how twisted things have become in the way our culture thinks.

Again, the clearest picture of biblical submission is Jesus, who voluntarily took a subordinate role, and became a servant to the point of death (Philippians 2: 5-8). This did not diminish His dignity or power at all. It led to His greater glory (Philippians 2:9-11). Submission in marriage, then, is the divine calling of a wife to honor and affirm her husband’s leadership and help carry it through according to her gifts.

In Ephesians 5:22-33, Paul says that these roles in a marriage depict the beauty of the gospel. It is a mystery, to be sure, but make no mistake about it: “God means (by marriage) to say something about His Son and His church by the way husbands and wives relate to each other.” (John Piper).

SESSION THREE EXERCISE

A Wife's Need: Love

One of the wife's biggest needs is to feel loved and cherished by her husband. But every wife is a little different in what truly makes her feel loved by her husband. Communicating these needs to your future husband will go a long way in helping him love you better. Read through the list below, checking the 2-3 items under each heading that make you feel most loved by your future spouse. Once you are both done, work through the discussion questions on the back page together.

I feel close to my fiancé when ...

- He is affectionate: holds my hand, hugs me, or gives me a kiss.

- He is alone with me so we can focus on each other and laugh together.

- He flirts with me, especially in front of others.

- He sets up a fun night out or plans something romantic.

- He goes out of his way to do something for me, like run an errand.

- He makes it a priority to spend time with me.

- He is aware of me as a person with a mind and opinions, and he lets me know that he enjoys discussing things with me and getting my insights.

- He suggests the unexpected or plans something spontaneous.

- He shares feelings and intimate ideas.

I feel my fiancé is open to me when ...

- He shares his feelings, telling me about his day and difficulties

- He says, "Let's talk." He asks me what I'm feeling and asks for my opinions.

- His face shows he wants to talk—relaxed body language, good eye contact, etc.

- He clears out uninterrupted time in his schedule to make himself available to me.

- He prays with me.

- He gives me his full attention without any distractions.

- He discusses ideas about our future.

I feel my fiancé is trying to understand me when ...

- He listens and can repeat back what I said.

- He doesn't try to "fix my problems" unless I specifically ask for a solution.

- He tries to identify my feelings.

- He doesn't dismiss my feelings, no matter how illogical that may seem.

- He says, "I appreciate you sharing that with me."

- He doesn't interrupt me when I am trying to tell him how I feel.

- He is patient with me and cuts me some slack.

- He sees something that needs to be done and does it without a lot of hassle.

- He expresses appreciation for all that I do.

I feel at peace with my fiancé when ...

- He lets me vent my frustrations and hurts and doesn't get angry or closed off.

- He apologizes and admits when he is wrong.

- He is willing to compromise and meet me halfway.

- He seeks to resolve things that are unresolved and never saying, "Forget it."

- He forgives me for any wrongs I confess.

- He doesn't nurse bitterness and reassures me of his love.

- He prays with me after or even during a hurtful time.

I am assured of my fiancé's loyalty when ...

- He speaks highly of me in front of others.

- He is involved in things that are important to me.

- He helps me make decisions, such as ones regarding our future.

- He doesn't look lustfully at other women or give them inappropriate attention.

- He includes me in social gatherings even when he doesn't need to.

- He makes me a priority over and above others.

- He chooses time together over other things.

- He calls and lets me know the plans.

- He keeps his commitments.

I feel esteemed by my fiancé when ...

- He praises me when I do a good job or handle things well.

- He speaks highly of me in front of others.

- He is a gentleman and opens the door for me.

- He tries something new with me.

- He notices something different about my hair or clothes.

- He is physically affectionate with me in public.

- He respects and values my opinion.

- He finds ways to encourage and draw out my gifts and talents.

Discussion Questions

1. Hand your sheet to your fiancé and let him look over your answers. Ask him if anything stands out to him and see if he has any questions or feedback.
2. Share your main takeaways with each other along with one or two areas where you need to grow.

SESSION THREE EXERCISE

A Husband's Need: Respect

One of the husband's biggest needs is to feel respected and honored by his wife. But every husband is a little different in what truly makes him feel respected by his wife. Communicating these needs to your future wife will go a long way in helping her to respect and honor you. Read through the list below, checking the 2-3 items under each heading that make you feel most respected by your future spouse. Once you are both done, work through the discussion questions on the back page together.

I feel my fiancé appreciates my desire to work and achieve when ...

- She tells me verbally or in writing that she values my work efforts.

- She expresses her faith in me related to my chosen field.

- She shows interest and listens to what is going on at work.

- She allows me to dream about the future.

- She talks with me about what I need and asks how she can help.

- She doesn't dishonor or subtly criticize my work to get me to show more love to her.

I feel my fiancé appreciates my desire to protect and provide when ...

- She praises my commitment to provide for and protect her and our future family. She doesn't take this for granted.

- She empathizes when I talk about difficulties or frustrations at work.

- She doesn't put down my job or how much I make.

- She follows my lead and is willing and ready to make financial sacrifices when needed.

- She allows me to care for her by coming to me for a shoulder to cry on or just to be held.

- She follows through on something I ask her to do regarding her safety or our future family's well-being.

I feel my fiancé appreciates my authority and leadership when ...

- She tells me she is thankful for my strength and enjoys being able to lean on me.

- She praises my good decisions.

- She is gracious if I make a bad decision.

- She doesn't try to manipulate the decisions we are making together.

- She expresses her disagreements or frustrations with me respectfully.

- She doesn't go behind my back to bring other people into our struggles or decisions.

- She focuses on and emphasizes with others the good in our relationship instead of the bad.

- She encourages me when I try to lead spiritually.

I feel my fiancée appreciates my insight and counsel when ...

- She comes to me first for support and a listening ear.

- She is often willing to defer to me and trust in what I am telling her, even if she is unsure.

- She tells me upfront that she just needs me to listen, instead of complaining later that I “always try to fix her.”

- She thanks me for my advice without acting insulted or as if I don't care about her feelings. She applauds my solutions.

I feel my fiancée values our friendship when ...

- She tells me she likes me and shows it.

- She responds to my invitation to engage in recreational activities together or even to come along and watch from time to time.

- She enables me to open up and talk as we are doing things together.

- She encourages me to spend time alone (or with my guy friends), which energizes me to reconnect with her later.

Discussion Questions

1. Hand your sheet to your fiancée and let her look over your answers. Ask her if anything stands out to her and see if she has any questions or feedback.
2. Share your main takeaways along with one or two areas where you need to grow.

Communication and Conflict

Big Idea

Conflict is something we all experience, but often handle very badly. While marriage magnifies the good things in our relationship, it also intensifies the hard things. Every couple has to figure out healthy ways to work through arguments, annoyances, sin, and the like. The gospel gives us a pattern and a means to healthy conflict resolution.

Prepare/Enrich | 20 Minutes

Review Open up to and go over the “Communication”, “Conflict Resolution”, and “Family & Friends” sections of the assessment ...

- **Communication:** Look for any red flags and make sure they are aware and acknowledge them. Ask them to elaborate about any areas of disagreement. Have them talk about what they feel like their strengths and weaknesses are within their communication with one another.
- **Conflict Resolution:** Look for any red flags and make sure they are aware and acknowledge them. Ask them to elaborate about any areas of disagreement that seem relevant. Ask them what the last fight was that they had together and have them describe for you how that went.
- **Family & Friends:** Look for any red flags and make sure they are aware and acknowledge them. Ask them to elaborate about any areas of disagreement. Family and in-laws is one of those areas where it seems that it is either a big issue for a couple or it is largely a non-issue. You probably already know by now where your couple stands here. If this is an issue for your couple, make sure you spend some time talking about family dynamics. Family issues can be complicated and messy, and you certainly will not be able to solve anything with them. But you want to make sure they are talking about it and being honest with one another, are moving towards being on the same page, have a proper commitment to “leave and cleave”, etc.

Introduction | 15 Minutes

Setup Okay, we are talking about conflict this week. To start, let's follow-up on your reading. You read chapters 8 and 9 from the book ...

Homework Follow-up: Chapters 8 and 9 from *Catching Foxes*

Ask What stood out to you from the reading? Was there anything that was new for you? Anything that you were unsure about or disagreed with? What are your main takeaways?

Intro Questions

Ask There are big things that come up in marriage, of course, but the thing that you really have to pay attention to is the small, everyday things that can become bigger than they should be if they aren't dealt with. So let's start with some of the easy stuff ... which one of you is:

clean *or* messy

optimist *or* pessimist ("realist")

spender *or* saver

on time *or* whenever

morning person *or* night owl

outgoing *or* stay at home

Ask Are there any other differences like these that you guys have?

Mentor's Note: These are obviously more light-hearted differences that you are getting them to share about, so it shouldn't be too serious and you aren't working through these differences ... just get them talking about them, acknowledging the ways that they are different.

Transition Our differences are good. God made someone different from Adam so that they could work together on God's mission. So we are called to embrace and appreciate and learn from our differences, but because of sin, these things also become our most common sources of conflict. Let's read about Adam & Eve's first fight, and see what we can learn about conflict.

Bible Discussion | 15 Minutes

Read Genesis 3:1-13 aloud together.

Setup This is the first marriage fight. They sinned, and then sin started wrecking their relationship. It's helpful for us to think about this passage because it's not only where all conflict begins, it actually contains most of the elements of every conflict we will have. So, three basic questions:

Ask What was the conflict?

Ask What caused the conflict (as many factors as you can list)?

Ask How did they respond (list as many behaviors or attitudes that you can see)?

Mentor's Note: This is more of an introduction to the lesson. Your aim is to root conflict biblically – as a result of sin – and to surface some of the common elements of conflict. So interact with the text and with each other about what you read.

Transition This fight – the fall of humanity into sin – is a big deal. It's the fount from which all other conflicts flow. So the big question when you are reading Genesis 3 is: What does God do about this? In the rest of the chapter, we see real consequences for sin, but we also see real restoration for sinners. God acts redemptively to help us deal with our conflict. We are going to read a short article that helps us see how the gospel helps us in this way.

Article | 15 Minutes

Handout the *The Gospel Helps Us Fight Fairly* article and read it aloud together, taking turns at the paragraph breaks.

Ask How do you usually deal with conflict in your relationship; do you tend toward attacking or withdrawing? Is that different than how you deal with conflict with others?

Ask Which descriptions from the article do you particularly identify with?

Transition Let's go through an exercise together that will help us work out this 'attacking and withdrawing' thing a little further.

Exercise | 15 Minutes

Hand out Give them each a copy of the Natural vs. Redemptive Response in Conflict exercise and then work through the chart and discussion questions together.

Mentor's Note: Lead the way on this exercise by sharing your answers to the discussion questions first and allowing your couple to see your own tendencies within your marriage.

Transition Healthy conflict resolution is one of those things that you just need lots of grace and practice. So we want to give you an assignment that will help you start to get some good practice with one another when it comes to communication and conflict.

Assignment | 5 Minutes

Mentor's Note: This assignment is for them to do outside of your time together, before your next session. So you don't really need to do anything here except for making sure they understand the assignment. You will follow-up on this assignment next session.

Hand out Give them each a copy of the Gospel-Centered Approach to Conflict assignment and make sure they understand the basics of the assignment, which are detailed in the third paragraph of the description.

Transition Alright, that is all for our fourth session. Any final thoughts or questions?

Wrap-up | 5 Minutes

Homework for next session 1) Complete the Gospel-Centered Approach to Conflict assignment. 2) Read ch. 10 from *Catching Foxes* and answer any questions listed.

Schedule next meeting and pray together

Mentor's Note: Remember that your next session is discussing the area of sex and you will be meeting separately (men and women) with your couple. You can do this however you want: have them both meet you together like normal and then break off or you can make separate arrangements to meet up.



The Gospel Helps Us Fight Fairly

How do you handle conflict? Do you attack problems and people? Or would you rather avoid the tension altogether? Most people have default ways of dealing with conflict. In fact, our ways of dealing with others are so instinctive that often we don't even think about how the gospel changes us and helps us "fight fairly." As we have seen, marriage is a covenant of oneness, in which we seek to love one another as we love ourselves (Eph. 5:28). Resolving conflict is a critical part of cultivating oneness. So, how does the gospel help us fight fairly?

Think of the most recent argument or fight you've had. Maybe it's that little thing that just keeps coming up. Now set aside the circumstances of the argument (what the issue was, how it made you feel, who was right or wrong, etc.) and take a moment to consider your actions during the conflict. Your behavior probably falls into one of two categories.

Some people are **attackers**. They like to be on the offensive. They place a high value on justice, so it matters greatly to them who is right and who is wrong. The following are signs that you might be an attacker:

- You deal with anger or frustration by "venting" it.
- You argue your case passionately.
- You ask questions like "How do you know?" and "Can you prove that?"
- You cross-examine like a lawyer in order to get to the bottom of things.
- Winning the argument is often more important than loving the person.

On the other end of the spectrum are **withdrawers**. People with this tendency often find themselves on the defensive. They tend to avoid or ignore conflict and, when pressed into an argument, they are usually silent or passive. If you're a withdrawer, here are some patterns you might recognize:

- You deal with anger or frustration by suppressing it.
- You have opinions but keep them to yourself in order to "keep the peace."

- You ask questions like, “Do we have to talk about this now?” And, “Does it really matter?”
- You’d rather avoid a fight than win one.
- You sometimes physically leave an argument in order to “get some space”

These are typical ways we respond to disagreement, frustration, offense, or hurt. The fact that these responses are considered “normal” (i.e., natural) is a clue that they may not be biblical (i.e., supernatural). How, then, do we move toward resolving conflict in a biblical manner?

Gospel-centered confrontation mirrors God’s movement toward us in the gospel. God did not pour out his wrath on us (attack) or remove his presence from us (withdraw). Instead, he sacrificially moved toward us in the person of Jesus, full of grace and truth. Jesus confronted sin, invited relationship, and provided a way of reconciliation. Thus, the gospel provides the pattern of biblical conflict resolution. We have a proper motivation (love), confidence (faith), and means (grace and truth) for resolving conflict.

Motivation

To be motivated by love means we move toward the other person for their good. In other words, we don’t seek resolution just because we want to feel better about things. So let’s say your spouse disappoints you or annoys you or sins against you. You could bring it up because you want them to feel really bad (attacking), or you could not bring it up at all because that’s just how they are (withdrawing). But love won’t let you do either of these things. Love compels you to bring it up because you want them to experience the gospel by having a chance to repent of their sin and receive forgiveness (or, if it’s not sin in question, they at least need the chance to become more self-aware of how they are affecting the relationship). Love seeks the good of others, even when they sin against us.

Confidence

Resolving conflict is scary because there is always a chance that bringing it up will make things even messier: they could reject us again; they could say more hurtful things; we may never see things the same way and end up even more frustrated than before. Moving toward people, especially those who have hurt us, is risky and makes us vulnerable. That is why our confidence is not in ourselves or in them, but in Christ. We can pray and ask for God’s help because we know that he desires people to be reconciled (Matt. 5:23-24). Further, we can risk rejection and hurt because we have acceptance

and comfort in Christ. Of course those things will be hard, but they do not define us (2 Cor. 3:4). Finally, even when things do not resolve, we can rest in the fact that God will make all things right (Rom. 12:17-21). This is why covenantal commitment is so important. When we both know that we are committed to the marriage, we do not have to attack or avoid out of fear. Commitment and assurance breeds the confidence we need to love each other well.

Means

Sometimes the difficulty with resolving conflict is simply that we don't know what to do. It's like we want to fix our car, but we don't have the right tools. The gospel gives us the right tools to deal with conflict: grace and truth. After all, this is how Jesus reconciled us to God. He was full of grace and truth (John 1:14). God's grace means that we can come before him without fear of being condemned (Rom. 8:1). Even though we have sinned against God, when we are in his presence we receive grace upon grace (John 1:16).

Many times, people attack and withdraw because they feel like they are being condemned. We can put them at ease by extending grace, which can take many forms: serving them, telling them up front we love them and want what is good for them, not talking badly about them to others, asking questions instead of making accusations, admitting the ways we have contributed to the conflict before talking about what they did, and so on. Grace means we try to see one another as God sees us: in need of mercy, in a process of change.

But we need the truth as well. Conflict is not about being right or wrong, or winning or losing. It's an opportunity for us to look to God and his Word and pursue life with God together. This means that both parties will have to be honest about what God wants (what they should have done in the specific situation at hand), how they have fallen short of that, and what it will take to restore the relationship. Many arguments, of course, are about preferences rather than pure truth, but even in those situations, there is something true about each person—how they feel and how they are acting. If we want to cultivate oneness, then we have to tell the truth about ourselves instead of pretending. And we have to tell the truth to each other instead of stuffing it.

When you put it all together, grace and truth, you get things like confession of sin, gentle correction, wise counsel, and the joy of deepening love. The gospel calls us to this, and gives us the power to repent of our sinful patterns of attacking and withdrawing, and to move toward each other with a humble, confident, God-glorifying intentionality. We can forsake the "normal" way of doing things for the gospel way.

SESSION FOUR EXERCISE

Natural vs. Redemptive Response in Conflict

The chart below lists common scenarios in a marriage relationship, and then contrasts two kinds of responses to those situations (natural and redemptive). Our natural tendency is to attack or withdraw, but the gospel enables us to act redemptively in conflict. Read through the chart below, then work through the discussion questions together.

SCENARIO	NATURAL RESPONSE Attack or withdraw (isolation)	REDEPTIVE RESPONSE Humility and Forgiveness (intimacy)
HURTFUL WORDS	Hurtful words back, silent treatment	Confrontation, invitation into your hurt, forgiveness
UNMET EXPECTATIONS	Value affirmed based on performance – belittle verbally or by “doing it for them”	Value always affirmed, honest communication about disappointment, help offered
DISAGREEMENT	Try to get your way, prove you are right -- “submit” un-submissively	Give up your rights
ANNOYING HABITS	Judge, impose your standards – ignore the preferences of the other	Believe the best, Defer to one another, extend generosity and patience
IDENTITY	Work and kids, whatever the fruit is that you long for now	Pursue each other with greater passion than the “fruit”

Discussion Questions

1. Pick one thing from each column that you see in yourself (something to confess and something to celebrate).
2. Pick one thing from each column you see in your fiancé (something to confront and something to celebrate).
3. Share your thoughts, talk about examples, seek understanding, and pray together.



A Gospel-Centered Approach to Conflict

There are no magic formulas for working through conflict together; it is hard work, and there are no easy ways out. Healthy conflict resolution comes with lots of practice and commitment—that is the human means that God uses to transform and refine us in this area. God’s grace working through your commitment to one another over a long period of time is what will produce a marriage that is defined by good communication and healthy conflict resolution. With that said, it does help to have a very simple process that you can both commit yourselves to so that you have some tools when conflicts do arise.

Outlined below is just that: a simple process of dealing with conflict in a gospel-centered manner, with practical questions that will help you work through an argument, a hurt, or recurring issues in your relationship. This is meant to give you practice in dealing with conflict.

So, here is your assignment: 1) Think of a specific issue or fight or hurt, the more recent the better. 2) Walk through these three questions below, asking the Holy Spirit to bring clarity and insight. Do it individually at first, reflecting on things from your point of view. Journaling can be really helpful during this step to better capture your thoughts. 3) Lastly, come together in order to share with each other what the Spirit has been showing you, clarify things with one another by asking good questions, seek understanding, and pursue restoration. Remember, the goal is to recognize unhealthy patterns in your life and to practice applying the gospel more effectively. Your mentor couple will be following up with you about how your time went together.

Reflection Questions

1. **What did I do?** In any conflict, everyone has something to “own.” Identify your words and actions in the conflict. Were you defensive? Did you blame others? Were you argumentative? Did you say mean things? Did you gossip to others about the issue? Did you lie? Did

you not say what you should have because you were afraid of how they would respond? Did you avoid the person, hop-ing the problem would just disappear? Confess these things as sin.

2. **Why did I do it?** What was the motive behind your words and actions: saving face, being right, revenge, insecurity, control, fear, pride, approval, comfort, self-protection, etc.? By faith, affirm your trust in the power of the Holy Spirit to free you from these sins of pride and fear.
3. **What do I do now?** Tell the other person that you want to talk about things and try to resolve the conflict. Talk honestly and respectfully about your thoughts and feelings, and invite the other person to do the same. Do you understand each other? What usually gets in the way of your understanding, or being understood (anger, argumentativeness, dishonesty, timidity, assumptions you make about others, etc.)? Specify what steps need to be taken toward resolution. Pray for God's will to be done (his glory and each other's good). Thank Him for paying the ultimate price of death to resolve the ultimate conflict of our sinful rebellion against him.

SESSION FIVE

The Gift of Sex in Marriage

Big Idea

If marriage joins a man and woman together in a one-flesh union, then sex within marriage is the most tangible expression of that union. Physical intimacy/oneness is a reflection of relational intimacy/oneness. One pastor says that “sex is to marriage as communion is to worship: It’s a regular, sensual re-enactment of the covenant.” Sex is a beautiful expression of self-giving love within marriage, a helpful barometer of how the relationship is going, and a wonderful picture of unconditional acceptance and vulnerability (“naked and unashamed”). But we are also broken in our sexuality (whether from our own sin, the sin of others, or the influence of our culture). So we need to be honest about how we bring that sexual brokenness and insecurity into marriage. And we need to look to Jesus to redeem us in our sexuality and grow us in what it means to fully love our spouse with our whole person (body and soul). Because marriage is a lifelong covenant, you have a lifetime to enjoy and grow in God’s glorious gift of sex in marriage.

Introduction | 15 Minutes

Mentor’s Note: Remember, this session is meant to be a one on one conversation (man to man, woman to woman).

Setup Let’s follow-up on your homework from last session. You had a conflict assignment you did together and you read chapter 10 from the book ...

Homework Follow-up: Gospel-Centered Approach to Conflict Assignment and Chapter 10 from *Catching Foxes*

Ask How did the conflict assignment go? What did you learn about yourself? What did you learn about your spouse? What are your main takeaways?

Ask What stood out to you from the reading? Was there anything that was new for you? Anything that you were unsure about or disagreed with? What are your main takeaways?

Prepare/Enrich | 10 Minutes

Review Open up to and go over the “Sexual Expectations” section of the assessment ...

- **Sexual Expectations:** Look for any red flag issues (such as areas of disagreement, indecision, or special focus). Discuss anything that raises your interest. Be aware of any instances of past or current sexual abuse. Also be aware of any past or current struggles with pornography. These things should show up on p. 7 of Prepare/Enrich. These are things that should be dealt with sensitively, but honestly. In case of abuse, make sure the person has sought counseling and restoration. In the case of pornography, talk about their plan for transparency, accountability, and change. Both of these things should be “on the table” in the relationship (i.e. known by both partners).

Transition A vibrant sex life is absolutely central to a healthy marriage, but sex is also an area of great pain and brokenness. Let’s read an article that will help us think through this area more thoroughly.

Article | 45 Minutes

Handout the *The Gospel and Sexual Intimacy* article and read it aloud together, taking turns at the paragraph breaks.

Ask What ideas or concepts stood out to you as you read this article?

Ask How would you describe how you feel about sex going into marriage?

Ask What misconceptions about sex do you think you or your spouse might struggle with?

Ask Let’s talk about the area of sexual fears ... What fears, hesitations, and reservations do you have about sex in marriage?

Ask Let's talk about the area of sexual expectations ... What do you expect your married sex life to look like? How often do you envision having sex? In light of your fiancé's expectations, how do your own expectations need to be adjusted?

Ask Let's talk about the area of sexual history ... Tell me about your past sexual history. Have you fully disclosed your past sexual history to your future spouse? What have you done to repent of past sexual sin and experience God's forgiveness? Do you FEEL forgiven, or do you still carry the guilt and shame of your past? (This is a chance to talk about the gospel if necessary.)

Ask How's it going in your physical relationship with your fiancé? Have you set physical boundaries?

Ask If these other practical things haven't come up in your discussion already, make sure you talk about them together: birth control, first night and honeymoon expectations, possible complications and frustrations, etc.

Actions Steps

- **Sex Resource:** Suggest a book for the couple to begin reading together (and to have as an ongoing resource): *A Celebration of Sex* by Douglas Rosenau is one we recommend, but maybe you (or the engaged couple) have another you like. Have them pick something and begin reading it as further preparation for their marriage.
- **Full Disclosure Night:** Honesty and trust are the building blocks of a healthy, gospel-centered marriage. In light of that, give your couple the assignment of getting together one night soon in order to fully disclose with one another anything they need to share with them. This conversation isn't solely about their sexual past, but it certainly should include that if they have things they haven't yet told them. The goal with this assignment is that they would stand before one another on their wedding day knowing that they are not hiding anything from each other. They don't necessarily have to tell each other every little thing, but they cannot hide things from each other. Hiding will destroy a marriage. Let them know that you will follow up with them about their full disclosure night during your last session, asking them to tell each other, "I am not hiding anything from you."
- **Anything else:** Any other action steps for the couple? Conversations they need to have?

Transition Alright, that is all for our fifth session. Any final thoughts or questions?

Wrap-up | 5 Minutes

Homework for next session 1) Full Disclosure Night assignment. 2) Read ch. 11-12 from *Catching Foxes* and answer any questions in those chapters. 3) Complete the zero-balanced budget worksheet together (email it to them).

Schedule next meeting and pray together



The Gospel and Sexual Intimacy

A vibrant sex life is absolutely central to a healthy marriage. But sex is also an area of great pain and brokenness, especially in our sex-obsessed culture. Because of the sinful ways sex is used, abused, and misunderstood, we need to spend some time addressing sex from God's perspective.

Let's start by stating clearly: sex is good. Sex was created by God for our joy and His glory. It is one of God's greatest gifts to us: a beautiful, wonderful, powerful celebration of love between a husband and wife. Some Christians, in their attempt to fight against the perversion of sex, seem to implicitly say: "Sex is dirty, disgusting, and vile: so save it for the one you love!" This sentiment does violence to the beauty and holiness of sex as God created it.

However, sin has caused us to replace "sex is good" with "sex is god." This is the essence of idolatry: we take the good things God has created and make them into idols. Our culture worships sex. People pursue it, promote it, define themselves by it. All constraints are removed: any sex is good sex. Sex is unhinged from God's design and pursued as an end in itself.

The worship of sex makes sex about self. This is why our culture legitimizes pornography, prostitution, and adultery. I have a right to have my sexual needs fulfilled. Sex is about me getting my needs met. And if that's the case, other people are merely a means to my sexual happiness. I'm using them to worship the false god of sexual pleasure.

Perhaps this is how you've approached sex in the past. Perhaps you've used other people for your sexual fulfillment. Perhaps you've indulged lust, fantasy, or pornography to gratify your sexual cravings. Perhaps you've given yourself sexually to someone you're not married to. If so, you need to confess your sexual sin to God and to your future spouse. Then you need to repent by turning away from the idol of sex and worshipping the true God of the Bible. Not momentarily or temporarily, but with your whole life. "Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do [including sex!], do it all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31). From now on, for the rest of your life, you are to have sex to the glory of God. Every act of sex is to be an act of worship to the living God.

Thinking of sex as worship provides a great filter for evaluating your sexual desires. Can you worship God while viewing pornography? No. Can you worship God while indulging lust, cultivating fantasy, or harboring bitterness? No. But can you worship God while pursuing vibrant, joyful, faithful sexual intimacy with your husband or wife? Absolutely. So, what does worshipful sex look like?

- **Worshipful sex is obedient.** It honors God’s commands regarding sexuality. It expresses itself only within the bonds of covenant marriage between a husband and wife, and it jealously guards the chastity and holiness of that relationship.
- **Worshipful sex is other-centered.** Rather than thinking about how to gratify my needs, I seek to honor God by serving, loving, and pleasing my spouse (Imagine how great your married sex life will be if each of you are always seeking to please the other!).
- **Worshipful sex is holistic.** It recognizes that sex is one aspect of a much larger relationship. It seeks to cultivate an environment of mutual love, trust, honor, and worship, so that the marriage is marked by oneness in every area: emotional, spiritual, psychological, and physical.
- **Worshipful sex is redemptive.** Often one or both partners will have experienced sexual brokenness in their past. Worshipful sex seeks to gently redeem sexuality, showing care and tenderness toward past sin and failures and their lingering consequences.
- **Worshipful sex is joyful!** It rejoices in God’s good provision of married sex, and it delights in and enjoys the other person’s body. “Rejoice in the wife of your youth ... Let her breasts satisfy you at all times; be exhilarated always with her love” (Proverbs 5:18-19).

Contrary to the selfishness of sinful sex, godly sex is self-giving. It’s about serving the other person. Good sex is all about dying to yourself and considering your spouse’s needs as more important than your own. “With humility of mind, regard one another as more important than yourselves” (Phil 2:3).

The path to a wonderful sex life starts now, by preparing your heart and talking honestly with your spouse-to-be. Here are some of the conversations you should be having:

- **Sexual fears:** What fears, hesitations, and reservations do you have about sex in marriage? Talk through these honestly and forthrightly, so your future spouse can be sensitive to your apprehensions in this area.
- **Sexual expectations:** what do you expect your married sex life to be like? How often do you envision having sex? What does sex in marriage “look like” in your mind? In light of your fian-

ce's expectations, how do your own expectations need to be adjusted?

- **Sexual history:** Are you a virgin? If not, how many times have you had sex, and with whom? When was the last time you saw pornography? Honesty here is crucial. It will be hard to talk about past sin in this area. But your fiancé deserves to know the truth now, not later. Keep nothing in the dark. Have you repented for your sin in these areas (including asking forgiveness from those you've sinned against)? If not, one of your 'action steps' from this meeting will be to do so.

This whole subject illustrates why you need Jesus, the Redeemer. Pop-culture sex therapists offer tactics to put a band-aid on your sexual brokenness. Supermarket magazines promise new sexual techniques to "spice up" your sex life. But only Jesus offers to forgive your sin and redeem your brokenness so that you can experience sex the way he intended it. And since he's the Creator, maybe... just maybe... he knows what he's talking about.

**This article is taken with permission from Coram Deo Church in Omaha, NE.*

SESSION SIX

Financial Stewardship

Big Idea

In marriage, two different people come from two different families. Each person has developed particular views and habits when it comes to money and possessions. They each have their own ways of saving, spending, and investing. As we have already talked about and established, marriage requires you to become “one flesh” in every area of your life, including your finances. The good news is that the gospel makes this simple, because the gospel reminds you that it’s all about worship. The worship of Jesus as Lord sets you free from the worship of money and allows you to steward your resources for the glory of God and the good of others.

Introduction | 20 Minutes

Setup Let’s follow-up on your homework from last session. You had two different assignments you needed to work through together as well as some reading. We will work through the budget you made together towards the end of our time, but as for the other two things ...

Homework Follow-up: Full Disclosure Night and Chapters 11-12 from *Catching Foxes*

Ask How did the Full Disclosure Night go? We don’t need to know specific details, but is there anything you want to share or have questions about?

Ask Honesty and trust are the building blocks of a healthy, gospel-centered marriage. Hiding from one another will force a wedge in your relationship that ultimately will destroy your marriage. Your marriage must be built on honesty if it is to produce gospel fruit over the course of a lifetime. Full Disclosure Night was about driving home the importance of those truths and helping you to start your marriage off on the right foot.

So just to confirm with one another, I want you to face each other and say: “I am not hiding anything from you.”

Mentor’s Note: Don’t skip this part. It might seem slightly awkward or unnecessary, but it is good practice for your couple and it adds some weight to this conversation that hopefully will stick with them.

Ask Alright, let’s talk about the chapters from *Catching Foxes* now ... What stood out to you from the reading? Was there anything that was new for you? Anything that you were unsure about or disagreed with? What are your main takeaways?

Intro Questions

Setup In this last session, we are looking at the area of financial management within your marriage. The goal for this session is two-fold: 1) To help you examine your use of money and what it points to as what you treasure in life. 2) To consider how you can live generously and thankfully in your marriage as an overflow of the riches of your life in Christ. To get us started thinking about finances ...

Ask As you were growing up, how did your family handle finances? What was good? What was bad?

Ask As you think about your own marriage in this area, what are some things that you want to be true of your finances and the way you handle your money as a couple? Are there specific values or practices that come to mind?

Ask What do you anticipate will be your strengths in the area of finances? What do you think will be some areas of growth or what are some things that might cause struggles for you?

Transition Let’s look at your Prepare/Enrich Assessment one last time together as we focus in on the area of financial management.

Prepare/Enrich | 5 Minutes

Review Go over the “Financial Management” section of the assessment ...

- **Financial Management:** Look for any red flag issues and make sure they are aware and acknowledge them. Ask them to elaborate about any areas of disagreement.

Transition As we stated from the start of this process, we believe that the Bible is the Word of God (it has authority and the final say) and that we would be using it to guide our time and discover what God says about marriage. Our finances are no different—we want to see what God has to say about how we handle our money. So let’s look at Matthew 19 together.

Bible Discussion | 30 Minutes

Read Matthew 19:16-30 aloud together.

Ask Let’s start with some observation of the text:

- What stands out to you from these verses? What observations and/or questions do you have about this passage?
- Why do you think Jesus makes the call to follow Him look so difficult to the rich young man?
- What does this guy’s response reveal about his vision of the good life?
- What is at the heart of what Jesus is getting after here in this passage? What are your main takeaways?

Ask In Matthew 6, Jesus says, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also,” and “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.”

- How can we tell if we are serving God, or serving money?
- Why do you think money presents such a challenge to our faith? Why do you think that marriage will only add to that challenge?
- How does the idol of possessions/wealth surface in your lives? How does it show up and what are its effects? In what ways do you suspect you might be blind to it? Or rationalize it?
- How will you work against those idols in your marriage? How will you worship and serve God together with your finances?

Ask There are two values worth cultivating in your marriage as a way of keeping you from worshipping and serving money and walking in the freedom that Jesus gives us as his disciples: generosity and thankfulness. Let’s take them one at a time ...

- **Generosity:** Tim Keller says, “The only way we can be free from the power of money, and to be sure we are free (and not self-deluded) is to give money away so much that we lower our living standards.” What do you think about this statement? What other things could you do to cultivate generosity in your marriage? What will it look like for you to give generously and sacrificially?
- **Thankfulness:** An attitude of thankfulness does not look at what we don’t have, but rather at what we do have. Thankfulness says, “Lord we are content with what you have given us and we’re not looking for the next thing, the next possession.” Thankfulness takes the focus off of ourselves and our stuff and points to God and his goodness. Thankfulness re-aligns our lives to make sure we’re worshipping the Giver of gifts, not the gifts themselves. In what areas of your life do you find it difficult to be thankful? Why do you think that is? What will it look like for you to cultivate thankfulness in your marriage?

Ask The good news of the gospel is that God has made a way through Jesus for money to be dethroned in our lives. The gospel tells us that if we are united with Christ, there are some things that are true about us. Let’s look at three of them from the first 2 chapters of Ephesians ...

- **Read Ephesians 1:3-6:** What does this passage say is true of us? (We are blessed sons and daughters of God).
- **Read Ephesians 1:11-14:** What does this passage say is true of us? (We are heirs with Christ, having obtained an inheritance).
- **Read Ephesians 2:1-7:** What does this passage say is true of us? (We are rich through the poverty of Jesus).

Ask How have you each specifically experienced the riches in Christ in your life? How has God made you a wealthy person?

Ask In what ways have you each seen the gospel bring transformation in this area of your life?

Transition One really helpful and important practice in your marriage related to the area of finances is living off a budget. Budgeting helps you live within your means, plan for your future, and stay on the same page with your finances. Starting your marriage off by creating and living off a budget is something we are asking you to commit to together. So let’s talk about your budget.

Exercise | 30 Minutes

Setup There are lots of different budget forms and strategies out there. The one we had you fill out is a zero-based budget, which means that you are accounting for every dollar coming in and out. This has its advantages, but you might have something else that you use and prefer. The value here is to commit to something together, something that you will actually follow. It will take time (up to 6 months or more) to figure out a good working budget for your marriage and how best to execute it. The goal with this exercise was to have you get something on paper together as you head into your marriage.

Review Have the couple lay out their filled-out budget form and begin looking it over with them. Go through each area and have them talk through things as you have questions. If a certain category looks out of whack (too low or too high), ask them to explain their thinking and provide feedback. Make sure they are not forgetting any major expenses. If they don't come up naturally, make sure you address these practical things:

- **Management:** Who is going to be in charge of what with their finances? What is their plan for communicating and staying together on their budget? What types of expenses need to be approved by one another?
- **Debt:** What debt do they have? How will they pay it off? “The borrower becomes the lender’s slave” (Proverbs 22:7). Their goal should be to live debt-free, paying off any current obligations, and living below your means.
- **Giving:** How are they going to give consistently and generously to God’s work? Do they need to be challenged to prioritize the church in their giving? Giving is a gospel issue: it flows out of an awareness of the fact that God gave his only son for us when we didn’t deserve it (Rom. 5:8). In short, everything we have is from God. It ought then to be used for God and his kingdom. We give so that we might bless others and thereby increase thanksgiving to God (2 Cor. 9:11). Their goal should be to give in a disciplined, consistent, generous way to support your local church and God’s mission around the world.
- **Saving:** How are they going to balance saving and spending? People tend to be either savers or spenders. They will need to understand their spouse’s disposition on this matter and have a unified plan for both saving and spending.

Action Steps

Possible action steps might include ...

- **Financial Peace:** FPU is a great practical tool for any married couple to go through, but especially a newly married couple. If your couple is significant financial challenges facing them or if they don't seem to be on the same page or if they are just interested in growing in this area, then you should counsel them to go through FPU together during their first year of marriage.
- **Financial Counseling:** Counseling is another great resource if they need some specific help working through their finances in a more detailed way with someone. Ask one of the pastors for a recommendation if you need it.
- **Anything else:** Any other action steps to take? Conversations they need to have?

Transition Alright, that is all for our sixth and final premarital session. Any final thoughts or questions before we wrap up?

Prepare/Enrich | 15 Minutes

Wedding Ceremony If one of the Providence pastors is officiating their wedding, make sure they have communicated with that pastor about their ceremony and any needs/questions they might have.

Homework 1) Read the sex book that was assigned last session in the next few months. 2) Read ch. 13-15 from *Catching Foxes* within the first 3 months of marriage. They are written to be read after you get married as a way to continue having healthy dialogue with your spouse.

Follow-up Make sure that your couple knows that you are available for continued guidance, prayer, and support throughout their marriage. Let them know that you will follow-up with them after about 6 months into their marriage to schedule a time to get back together and hear how things are going. Let them know that they can also meet with one of the pastors if they need specific help with something.

Pray Together

Monthly Cash Flow Plan

Cash flows in and out each month. Make sure you tell it where to go!

Yes, this budget form has a lot of lines and blanks.

But that's okay. We do that so we can list practically every expense imaginable on this form to prevent you from forgetting something. Don't expect to put something on every line. Just use the ones that are relevant to your specific situation.

Step 1

Enter your monthly take-home pay in the box at the top right (A). This is the amount you have for the month to budget. So far so good, huh?

A → Monthly Take-Home Pay

Step 2

Within each main category, such as Food, there are subcategories, like Groceries. Start at the top and work your way down, filling out the Budgeted column (B) first. Add up each subcategory and put that number in the Total box (C).

Also, pay attention to Dave's recommended percentages (D). This will help you keep from budgeting too much for a category.

FOOD		Spent	Budgeted
Groceries			
Restaurants			
		*5-15%	TOTAL

B → Budgeted column
C → Total box
D → *5-15%

Step 3

Finally, enter your take-home pay in the top box at the end of the page (E), then add up all categories and place that total in the Category Totals box (F). Then subtract your Category Totals amount from your Take-Home Pay. You should have a zero balance (G). Doesn't that feel great?

E → TAKE-HOME PAY

F → CATEGORY TOTALS

G → ZERO BALANCE

Step 4

When the month ends, put what you actually spent in the Spent column (H). That will help you make any necessary adjustments to the next month's budget.

FOOD		Spent	Budgeted
Groceries			
Restaurants			
		*5-15%	TOTAL

H → Spent column

Monthly Cash Flow Plan

Cash flows in and out each month. Make sure you tell it where to go!

Monthly Take-Home Pay

Add up budgeted column
⌵ enter here

These icons represent good options for cash envelopes

♥ CHARITY

Spent Budgeted

Tithes _____

Charity & Offerings _____

*10-15% TOTAL

🐷 SAVING

Spent Budgeted

Emergency Fund _____

Retirement Fund _____

College Fund _____

*10-15% TOTAL

🏠 HOUSING

Spent Budgeted

First Mortgage/Rent _____

Second Mortgage _____

Real Estate Taxes _____

Repairs/Maint. _____

Association Dues _____

*25-35% TOTAL

⚙️ UTILITIES

Spent Budgeted

Electricity _____

Gas _____

Water _____

Trash _____

Phone/Mobile _____

Internet _____

Cable _____

*5-10% TOTAL

🍏 FOOD

Spent Budgeted

✉ Groceries _____

✉ Restaurants _____

*5-15% TOTAL

👕 CLOTHING

Spent Budgeted

✉ Adults _____

✉ Children _____

✉ Cleaning/Laundry _____

*2-7% TOTAL

🚗 TRANSPORTATION

Spent Budgeted

Gas & Oil _____

✉ Repairs & Tires _____

License & Taxes _____

Car Replacement _____

Other _____

*10-15% TOTAL

🩺 MEDICAL/HEALTH

Spent Budgeted

Medications _____

Doctor Bills _____

Dentist _____

Optometrist _____

Vitamins _____

Other _____

Other _____

*5-10% TOTAL

*Dave's Recommended Percentages

INSURANCE

Spent Budgeted

Life Insurance _____

Health Insurance _____

Homeowner/Renter _____

Auto Insurance _____

Disability Insurance _____

Identity Theft _____

Long-Term Care _____

*10-25% TOTAL

PERSONAL

Spent Budgeted

Child Care/Sitter _____

Toiletries _____

Cosmetics/Hair Care _____

Education/Tuition _____

Books/Supplies _____

Child Support _____

Alimony _____

Subscriptions _____

Organization Dues _____

Gifts (inc. Christmas) _____

Replace Furniture _____

Pocket Money (His) _____

Pocket Money (Hers) _____

Baby Supplies _____

Pet Supplies _____

Music/Technology _____

Miscellaneous _____

Other _____

Other _____

*5-10% TOTAL

RECREATION

Spent Budgeted

Entertainment _____

Vacation _____

*5-10% TOTAL

DEBTS

Spent Budgeted

Car Payment 1 _____

Car Payment 2 _____

Credit Card 1 _____

Credit Card 2 _____

Credit Card 3 _____

Credit Card 4 _____

Credit Card 5 _____

Student Loan 1 _____

Student Loan 2 _____

Student Loan 3 _____

Student Loan 4 _____

Other _____

Other _____

Other _____

Other _____

Other _____

Your goal is 0% *5-10% TOTAL

Once you have completed filling out each category, subtract all category totals from your take-home pay.

