**Key to Reviving a Broken or Stagnant Marriage**

1. **Marriage Was Designed to Be a Picture of the Relationship Between Christ and His Bride – the Church.** (Eph. 5:22-33)

Show your counselees how Christ is the reference point for all our actions in marriage. If you miss or marginalize Christ, then marriage makes no sense, and you’ll have no reason to approach marriage the way God calls us to.

**6x in 8** verses he uses the word “as” or “just as”

**v. 22** - Wives should submit to their husbands "as to the Lord"

**v. 23** – For the husband is head of the wife, “as also Christ is head of the church”

**v. 24** –Therefore “just as” the church is subject to Christ, so let wives be to their own husbands

**v. 25** - Husbands love your wives "just as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it”

**v. 29** - Husbands should nourish and cherish wives, "just as Christ does the church"

God never designed for marriage to work well without Jesus Christ at the center of it.

1. **Marriage was Ultimately Designed for God’s Glory**

(I Cor. 10:31; Colossians 3:17-23)

“Forget your sense of awe…and the universe becomes a marketplace for you. The loss of awe is THE great block to insight.” God in Search of Man:A Philosophy of Judaism, **Abraham Joshua Heschel, p 78**

Your counselees are not likely to see much traction in their marriage until they get ahold of the bigger purpose of God’s glory, and you’ll need to be the one to bring that into view.

Marriage was designed to be a reflection of God’s glory!  When start trying to make it all about you, it becomes toxic and falls apart.

That’s why Paul didn’t just stick the landing when he finished talking about the husband’s role and the wife’s role in Eph. 5. Instead he ramped it up in v. 32.

**Ephesians 5:32** “This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.”

Paul says there’s something at the very heart of marriage that preaches a sermon about Christ and the glory of God! A strong Christian marriage was designed to be a billboard for the glory of God in His Son, Jesus Christ and His Church!

It also means that an ugly Christian marriage is like graffiti, because it defaces and devalues something precious. It misrepresents the glory of God and our Savior because it represents selfishness, chaos, and twisting, while a strong marriage can adorn the gospel.

**Titus 2:10** “… that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things.”

1. **Marriage was Designed to Expose Us and Help Us Grow Spiritually to Become More Like Christ** (Eph. 5:1; Prov. 27:17; Rom. 8; 1 Pet. 3)

Marriage is not a stopping point. It’s a startingpoint. The wedding ceremony is not the closing chapter; it’s the beginning of the real work of becoming more like Christ.

1. Marriage is designed to help each person grow in **holiness**.

“To spiritually benefit from marriage, we have to be honest. We have to look at our disappointments, own up to our ugly attitudes, and confront our selfishness. We also have to rid ourselves of the notion that the difficulties of marriage can be overcome if we simply pray harder or learn a few simple principles… Why is this?  Because there's a deeper question that needs to be addressed beyond, ‘How we can ‘improve’ our marriage?’ What if God didn’t design marriage to be ‘easier’?  What if God had an end in mind that went beyond our happiness, our comfort… What if God designed marriage to make us holy more than to make us happy?” *Sacred Marriage: What If God Designed Marriage to Make Us Holy More than to Make Us Happy?* Gary Thomas, p. 13

1. Although marriage is designed to be the **norm** for life on earth, it is not required to glorify God, grow spiritually, or impact others. (1 Cor. 7:7-8, 1 Cor. 7:32-34)

**1 Cor. 7:32-34** 32I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. 33But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, 34and his interests are divided.

“Christianity was the first religion that held up single adulthood as a viable way of life. He writes, ‘Christianity’s founder, Jesus Christ, and it’s leading theologian, St. Paul, were both single their entire lives. Single adults cannot be seen as somehow less fully formed or realized human beings… Paul’s assessment in I Corinthians 7 is that singleness is a good condition blessed by God, and in many circumstances, it is actually better than marriage. As a result of this revolutionary attitude, the early church did not pressure people to marry (as we see in Paul’s letter)” ***The Meaning of Marriage***, Tim Keller, p. 194

I don’t think Paul intended to communicate that the life of a single person cannot be a billboard that puts on display the glory of Christ and His love for the Church; He simply wanted married couples to *not* get so caught up in their own marriage, and each other, that they forget that marriage was always designed to be about something bigger than the two of them.

**2 Cor. 11:2-3**…is a passage that speaks to every believer – whether single or married.

**2 Corinthians 11:2-3** “… I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. But I am afraid that… your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.”

1. **God Never Designed Marriage to Fully Satisfy Us or to Replace Him**
	1. Help them to see how they might be taking a **good thing** (like marriage) and making it a ‘god’ thing or ultimate thing

Romans 1 shows us the ‘Great Exchange’ that our human hearts are so often guilty of, where we take even good things, like marriage, and try to make them into ultimate things or ‘god’ things.

**ESV) Romans 1:21-26** “21For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. 24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, 25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. 26 For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; 27 and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women...”

Paul draws our attention to this cosmic distortion by using the word ‘exchanged’ 3x in this text:

* **v. 23** – He says we “exchanged the glory of the immortal God for something finite and created in this world… because we prefer the creature over the Creator
* **v. 25 –** He says we “exchanged the truth about God for a lie”
* Then in **v. 26** and **27** he uses the sin of homosexuality as an example of how this exchange distorts our human relationships

Beneath every marriage problem is to some degree a glory of God problem, so you’ll need to bring them back to their first love – God, in His Son, Jesus Christ!

You will love your spouse best when you love God most. You don’t want your spouse to make you the #1 thing in their life. Love for God always has to be ultimate, and your marriage secondary.

* 1. Help them to accept that there’s a measure of **futility** that’s still present even in the best Christian marriage

**Romans 8:20** “For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope.”

* 1. **Encourage them to groan and long for something better that will fully satisfy**

**Romans 8:23, 26** “And not only they, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body… Likewise, the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses.  For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.”

**C.S. Lewis** “If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable

explanation is that I was made for another world.” C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

Every husband and wife has to be tapping into a superior satisfaction in something outside of that marriage, because without a superior satisfaction in God, husbands can’t love and lead sacrificially like Christ did – laying down their lives. And wives can’t submit like the Bride of Christ.

**Recommended Resources**

Harvey, Dave. *When Sinners Say ‘I Do.’* Shepherd Press, 2007.

Piper, John. *This Momentary Marriage.* Wheaton: Crossway, 2009.

Keller, Timothy. *The Meaning of Marriage.* Penguin Books. 2013.

Thomas, Gary. *Sacred Marriage.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000.

Tripp, Paul. *What Did You Expect?* Wheaton: Crossway, 2010.