

**Biblical Marriage In A Broken World:
A Biblical and Practical Theology of a Redeemed Relationship**

**By
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I believe one of God’s greatest gifts this side of heaven is marriage and family. I believe they are good gifts from a great God. My wife Charlotte and I have been married for more than 33 years and we have loved each and every minute. As is true in any marriage we have had our good days and our bad days, but our life together has truly been a blessing from the Lord. We have also been graced by God with four sons, each now serving King Jesus in ministry. We have three beautiful daughters-in-law and six grandchildren and two more on the way. We agree with the psalmists, “Behold, children are a gift of the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one’s youth. How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them.” (Psalm 127:3-5).

Tragically many in our fallen world are not experiencing what God designed for marriage and family. Sin and confusion rob them of the delights and joys God planned in this sacred covenant relationship. Divorce, marital disharmony, confusion and broken lives are all about us, and the heartache and disappointment we see day after day causes us to weep and cry out to our Lord for help.

Placing marriage within the great redemptive storyline of the Bible is instructive and helpful in seeing what God planned, what went wrong, and how we can regain something of “Paradise Lost” in our marriages and families. The three great movements (excluding “consummation” in the eternal state) and the appropriate text can be outlined as follows:

<u>Creation</u>	→	<u>Fall</u>	→	<u>Redemption</u>
Genesis 1-2		Genesis 3		Ephesians 5
-Equal image bearers		“Battle of the Sexes begins”		“Redeemed and restored marriage”

-Distinctive and complementary role assignments

Fallen humanity trying to live life together

Husbands loving/ knowing.
Wives submitting/ respecting.

This storyline is found in narrative text, law material, poetry, songs, wisdom literature, gospels and epistles. This rich tapestry in terms of genre amplifies our Creator's perspective on the value and beauty of marriage and family lived out in harmony with His plan and purposes. In his excellent work, *Creation Regained*, Albert Wolters notes the four foundational worldview questions set forth by Richard Middleton and Brian Walsh: "Who are we? Where are we? What is wrong? What is the remedy?" He then notes that N.T. Wright, who "adopts the four foundational questions" adds a 5th, "What time is it?" In other words, "Where are we in the biblical story of the world?" (p. 127). These questions are extremely valuable in the numerous contexts of Christian theology, including that of marriage and family. We will adopt this redemptive story framework as we conduct an inductive biblical survey of crucial texts that should inform our understanding of a biblical theology of marriage and a redeemed relationship.

I. Who Are We? (Creation)

- 1) Genesis 1:26-28: "Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Observations

- Both male and female are equal image bearers of God. There is an ontological and essential equality. 1:26-27
- God is the author of gender distinctiveness as a component of His good creational order. 1:27
- As imagers of God we came into being by trinitarian deliberation, with unique design and special dominion. (The “cultural mandate.”)
- The content of the image entails rulership, relationship and resemblance.

2) Genesis 2:18-25: “Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.” Now out of the ground the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.” Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.”

Observations

- A necessary complementarity exist between a man and a woman as a part of God’s good creational ordering. 2:18

- Complementing essential equality are functional distinctives as a part of God's good creational ordering.
 - Man is tasked as a loving and gracious leader for his wife.
 - Wife is tasked as an equal and unique helper for her husband.
- Sex is seen as a good gift and as an essential procreative dimension of God's good creational ordering. 2:24-25; cf. 1:28.
- Polygamy, whether simultaneous or serial is contrary to God's good, creational ordering.
- Sexual union other than heterosexual within covenant marriage is clearly contrary to God's good creational ordering (1:28; 2:23-25).

II. Where Are We? What Went Wrong? (Fall)

Genesis 3:1-21

- Genesis 3:15-19: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." To the woman he said, "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

Observations

- Sin incites the "battle of the sexes" and engenders conflict and chaos in the marital, familial world. 3:16

- Gender confusion and role disruption are the result of the Fall. 3:16
 - Women's desires are damaged but not destroyed.
 - Man's rulership is damaged but not destroyed.
- Genesis 3:15 provides hope for the restoration of our broken relationships (remedy/redemption). The proto-evangelium.

III. What Is The Remedy? (Redemption)

A. Part 1: Following the progressive redemptive story

- 1) Exodus 20:14, 17: "You shall not commit adultery." "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's."

Observation

- Marital monogamy and fidelity is a part of the divine design for marriage.
- 2) Psalms 127: "Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep. Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth. Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them! He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate."

Observations

- The presence of the Lord is crucial to building a healthy home. 127:1
 - The presence of children is a sign of God's pleasure and blessing. 127:3-5
- 3) Psalms 128: "Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in his ways! You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands; you shall be blessed, and it shall be well with you. Your wife

will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table. Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the Lord. The Lord bless you from Zion! May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life! May you see your children's children! Peace by upon Israel!

Observations

- A husband must fear the Lord to receive God's blessing. 128:1-2
- A flourishing wife is the fruit of a husband who fears the Lord. 128:3
- A household of faith will provide a context for children to prosper in the Lord. 128:3-4 (cf. Deut 6:1-9)
- The health of a nation is tied to the health of the home. 128:5-6
- Grand-parenting is a double blessing of the Lord! 128:6

4) Proverbs and the Proverbs 31 Lady

Observations

- Proverbs thru wisdom sayings reinforces the sanctity of hetero-sexual marriage, covenant marital fidelity, the blessing of children, and the importance of parental discipline and instruction. Wisdom for how to pursue a redeemed relationship in a fallen world fills its 31 chapters.
- The excellent or virtuous wife of Proverbs 31:10-31 is:
 - 1) Trusted by her husband. 31:10-12
 - 2) A gifted business woman and hard worker. 31:13-19
 - 3) Compassionate. 31:20
 - 4) Prepared for difficult times. 31:21-22
 - 5) A blessing to her husband. 31:23

6) Endowed with godly wisdom. 31:24-27

7) Admired by her family. 31:28-29

8) Honored by her Lord. 31:30-31

❖ Take note of Proverbs 31 and the connection to Ruth the Moabite!

5) Song of Solomon

Observations

- Sex is a good gift by a great God to be enjoyed fully and freely within the context of heterosexual marriage.
- The book provides a portrait of a redeemed marital relationship that looks back to Genesis 1-2 and anticipates Ephesians 5:21-33.

6) Malachi 2:16: “For I hate divorce,” says the Lord, the God of Israel, “and him who covers his garment with wrong,” says the Lord of hosts. “So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously.”

Observations

- Divorce is a tragic consequence of the Fall and the ravaging effects of sin (cf. Deut 24:1-4)
- God hates divorce and it is never a part of His perfect plan for a man and woman who have united their lives in covenant marriage.

7) Matthew 19:4-9: “He [Jesus] answered, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” They said to him, “Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?” He said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce

your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.”

Observations

- Jesus affirms our unique gender distinctiveness. 19:4
- Jesus affirms the heterosexual nature of marriage. 19:5
- Jesus affirms permanence as the divine intention for marriage. 19:6
- Jesus said hardness of heart (fall/sin) is why we have divorce. 19:7-8

8) 1 Corinthians 7:1-40

Observations

- Paul, like Moses, Solomon, and Jesus affirms the heterosexual nature of marriage. 7:1-2
- Mutuality should govern conjugal relationships within marriage. 7:3-5 (cf. Phil 2:3-5)
- Singleness is viewed as a good and acceptable state and has practical advantages over a married state. 7:6-8, 25-40
- God’s desire for troubled marriages is always reconciliation. 7:10-11

B. Part 2: Redemptive Realized in Redeemed Relationships (Ephesians 5:18-6:4/The prototypical paradigm)

9) Ephesians 5:18-6:4: “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. “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. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Observations

- I will purposefully spend more time here.
- Spirit-filling is crucial to our fulfilling our God-given assignment in marriage and family life (5:18).
- Interestingly, the New Testament grounds both the assignments of the redeemed husband and the redeemed wife in the atoning work of the Lord Jesus. In Ephesians 5:25-33 Paul draws on the themes of sacrifice and substitution (v. 25 in particular) in addressing the responsibility of a saved husband. Here is the foundation of a redeemed relationship, “paradise regained” in the home! I will shortly return to address more fully the role assignment of the husband.

- In Ephesians 5:21-24, 33 Paul instructs the godly, redeemed wife. His words both to her and her husband should be read in the greater context of the entire chapter, especially verses 1-2, 8-9, 15-20. Two guidelines for marriage are put before her. First, she should honor her husband with her submission (vs. 21-24) and secondly she should honor her husband with her respect (v. 33). Let me address these.

Submission and respect are attitudes that lead to action. Submission has the idea of yielding ones rights and “followship” to another. It is a theme repeatedly addressed in the Bible and in a positive context (e.g. Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 2:13, 18). The word implies no inferiority whatsoever. Men and women are ontologically and essentially equal before God as His image-bearers (Gen 1:26-27). A wife’s submission is functional in terms of her divinely ordained responsibility in marriage. I believe this is reflective of what we discover in the Trinity. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are ontologically, essentially and equally God. They are, to use classic Trinitarian language, co-equal, co-eternal and consubstantial in relationship to each other. Yet in His assignment to redeem us from sin, God the Son is willingly submissive to His Father. Thus the Son can affirm essential equality with His Father when He says, “before Abraham was, I AM” (John 8:58), “the Father are one” (John 10:30), and “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:9), while also using “sending language” [e.g. the Father sending the Son], as well as saying, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish His work” (John 4:34), “I always do what pleases Him (John 8:30), “I honor My Father” (John 8:49), and “the Father is greater than I” (John 14:28). The Bible is clear there is no inferiority in yielding to the leadership and direction of another. Just ask Jesus.

Now a practical theology question naturally arises: are there occasions when a wife's submission to her husband would actually be inappropriate and the wrong thing to do? I believe the answer is yes, if he were to ask or require her to do something unbiblical, unethical, immoral or illegal. In these particular contexts, her allegiance to Jesus would supersede her submission to her husband. Further, submitting to one's husband does not entail enduring spousal abuse. Submitting to physical beatings and putting one's life and the lives of the children in danger is not biblical. It is actually foolish and unwise. A time of separation may be in order. It may even be necessary to have an abusive husband arrested for his criminal activity against his wife and family.

Ephesians 5:25-33, in a corresponding fashion, teaches that a godly, Spirit-filled husband will love his wife. In 1 Peter 3:1-7 the Bible teaches he will "know" or "understand his wife." Let's take a look at both admonitions.

Paul calls on a husband to love his wife. It is the Greek word *agape*. The word occurs six times in Ephesians 5:25-33. Its first appearance in verse 25 is a "present imperative." A man is commanded by God to continually and consistently love his wife. Not leaving this to our imagination, Paul develops five facets of the Christ-like love every husband is to demonstrate toward his wife.

First, his love should be sacrificial (v. 25). A husband is to love his wife just as Christ "loved the church and gave Himself for her." The emphasis of the love described here is volitional more than emotional. This love is a choice, a decision, an act of the will. This is not an "I love you if..." or an "I love you because..." No, this is an "I love you anyway. I love you even when you may not be lovely." This is how Jesus loved us when we were dead in sin (Ephesians 2:1-10) and alienated from God (Ephesians 2:11-22).

Emotional love/feelings have their proper place in marriage. (e.g. The Song of Solomon)

It is usually that which gets us started in a relationship, at least in our western cultural context. However, it cannot sustain us for a lifetime. We need something wider and deeper. We need a sacrificial love that seeks the best for another even at great cost to oneself.

Second, his love should be sanctifying (vs. 26-27). Christ gave Himself for His church “that He might sanctify and cleanse her...that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.” The truth of this text as it relates to Christ and the church is readily apparent. But, how does it apply to the husband/wife relationship? It looks something like this. Because your wife is married to you, she is encouraged and enabled to grow in Christlikeness. The husband is her helper in the process of sanctification and her being conformed to the image and likeness of her Savior. This means a husband will mentor and disciple his wife. He will lead and guide her as she matures into a radiant woman of God. He will help her and not hinder her in her pursuit and passion for the things of God. He will work and work hard for her success in the eyes of God.

Third, his love should be sensitive (5:28). “Husbands ought (there is a moral imperative here) to love their own wives (it is exclusive) as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself.” A husband is sensitive to himself. He knows when he is having a good day or a bad day. He knows when he is up or down, happy or sad. In the same way he should be sensitive and aware of what is going on in the life of his wife. He needs to develop what I call a “marital radar system” that picks up signals that come from his wife. I should be quick to add this radar system should improve with practice and age. The

way she walks into the room, her eyes, body language, facial expression, and tone of voice are just a few of the areas a wise and godly husband will study and learn to read. Fourth, his love should be satisfying (5:29-30). Paul says a wife should be “nourished” and “cherished” by her husband’s love. Both of these words are present participles affirming continuous action. A husband continually nourishes or feeds his wife with his love, and he continually cherishes or honors her with that same love. His love strengthens and sustains her. His love informs her that there is a place in his heart reserved just for her.

Fifth, his love should be specific (5:31-33). Paul (and Peter) not only grounds his theology of marriage in the atonement, he also locates it in the doctrine of Creation. Verse 31 is a direct quote of Genesis 2:24 (note Jesus’ citation of this as well in Matthew 19:5). It is also pre-fall (Genesis 3). Having left father and mother to join or cleave to his wife, Paul concludes by charging the husband in verse 31, “let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself.” (*NKJV*) God calls a husband to be a “one woman kind of man.” He calls him to love his wife in such a way that she knows, the children know, friends know, and even enemies know this man is in love with and devoted to only one woman, and that woman is his wife. This man is neither a flirt or a fool. He commits to being alone with only one woman, and that woman is his wife. He constantly reminds himself that it does not matter how much he loves Jesus or his wife: “the wrong person + the wrong place + the wrong time = the wrong thing happening. The tragic example of King David is never far from his mind’s eye.

- 10) Colossians 3:18-21: “Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. Children, obey your parents in everything,

for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.

Observations

- Here we have the “Readers Digest” version of Eph. 5:22-6:4.
- Note 5 imperatives are delivered to 4 members of the family. Men actually receive 3 of the 5!

11) 1 Peter 3:1-7: “Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct. Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear – but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is God’s sight is very precious. For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening. Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.”

Observations

- Peter calls upon saved wives in 3:1-6 to submit to unsaved husbands that they “may be won [to Jesus] without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior (v. 1-2). The grounding or basis for this charge is found in 2:21-25 where Peter highlights the redemptive emphasis of Christ’s example (esp. vs. 21-23). This is an amazing insight, the significance of which must not be understated or papered over.

- Husbands are commanded to 1) know/understand their wives, 2) honor them, 3) recognize them as co-heirs of the grace of life, and 4) avoid having a hindered prayer life (3:7).

Practical Theological Implications For A Redeemed Relationship

This is a good time to transition from the disciplines of biblical and systematic theology to that of practical theology. Scanning scripture for reoccurring themes and then attempting to package them in a manageable form, what are some specific ways in which a wife can bless her husband as she seeks to honor him with her submission and respect?

I believe a wife can be a blessing to her husband and honor him as the Church honors Christ in at least 5 specific ways.

1) **Show him admiration.**

Work to understand and appreciate your husband's value and achievements as his wife.

Remind him of his capabilities and gifts and help him maintain his walk with God. Be proud of your husband, not out of duty, but as an expression of sincere admiration for the man you love and with whom you have chosen to share your life. Let him know you see him as God's gift to you and that you admire and respect the good and just things he does. (*Ephesians 5:22-23, 33*)

2) **Provide sexual fulfillment.**

Become an excellent sexual partner to him. Study your own response to recognize and understand what brings out the best in you; then communicate this information to your husband, and together learn to have a sexual relationship that you both find repeatedly satisfying and enjoyable.

Dennis Rainey notes that men often connect their own sense of self-worth with their ability to be a satisfying sexual partner for their mate. Everything fits physiologically, but the visual, mental and emotional components need to come together as well. In particular a woman should remember that her husband is a visual creature moved by what he sees. A woman, in

contrast, is more a person of the ear and heart. Good communication and understanding are essential if you are to enjoy this powerful and tender area of marital life. (*Proverbs 5:15-19; Song of Solomon 4:1-5:1; 1 Corinthians 7:1-5; Hebrews 13:4*)

3) Cultivate home support.

Create a home that offers him an atmosphere of peace and quiet and refuge. Manage the home and care of the children. The home should be a place of rest and rejuvenation. Remember, the wife/mother is the emotional hub of the family. Proverbs teaches that men cannot stand to be around gripping, nagging, whiney women. Fight or flight will often be their response. A godly wife will work hard to make the home a place where her husband wants to “hang out and hang out with her!” (*Proverbs 9:13, 19:13, 21:9, 19, 25:24*).

4) Strive to be an attractive wife.

Pursue inner and outer beauty in that order. Cultivate a Christlike spirit in your inner self. Keep yourself physically fit with diet and exercise, wear your hair, makeup, and clothes in a way that your husband finds attractive and tasteful. Let your husband be pleased and proud of you in public, but also in private. I could add a word at this point about the evil nature of flannel gowns and cotton socks (!) but I will move on. (*Song of Solomon 1:8-19, 2:2, 6:13-7:9; 1 Peter 3:1-5*)!

5) Become his best friend.

Develop mutual interests with your husband. Discover those activities your husband enjoys the most and seek to become proficient in them. If you learn to enjoy them, join him in them. If you do not enjoy them, encourage him to consider others that you can enjoy together. Become your husband’s best friend so that he repeatedly associates you with the activities he enjoys most.

When I do premarital counseling I take the first session and talk about their relationship with Jesus, the need to attend together a Bible-believing church and common problem areas in

marriage (e.g. communication, finances, sex, children, in-laws, aging parents, etc.). I then conclude by asking the question, “Do you like your potential mate and are you becoming, if not already, best friends? I then tell them if they will grow to be best friends I believe 1) their marriage will go the distance because best friends do not give up on best friends; 2) their marriage will be a joy because best friends like being with their best friend; 3) being best friends will insure that your husband finds you attractive, feels supported at home, will be your lover and that he knows he is admired. (*Song of Solomon 8:1-2, 6*).

Remember, “The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable (corresponding) to him” (*Genesis 2:18*). I believe God knew what He was talking about. (*Song of Solomon 8:1-2, 6*).

Now, what practical counsel and wisdom is there for men? Male bashing has been a favorite American sport for some time now. It is epitomized by a cover story in *Time* magazine dated February 14, 1994. On the cover you will see the body of a man with the head of a pig. The lead story for that Valentine’s edition was entitled, “Are Men Really That Bad?” The gist of the article was “yes they are.” Give them your heart and they will break it. Put your trust in them and they will let you down.

I think it must be admitted that men have too often invited such ridicule and scorn. Too many males have failed to act like men. They have come up short as husbands and fathers. However, this is where Jesus Christ makes all the difference. A redeemed man cannot be satisfied with a half-hearted devotion to his wife and children. Christ in him compels more. Christ in him demands more.

Having called a man to love his wife in Ephesians 5, God also instructs a man to “know” or “understand” his wife in 1 Peter 3:7. Again, moving into the area of practical

theology, I want to raise and attempt to answer the question, “what does a marriage look like when a man has come to know his wife as God made her?” How can he love and bless her as he comes to more fully know and understand her? I believe a husband can be a blessing to his wife by loving her as Christ loved the Church and giving her specific gifts of love that speak to her heart as a woman. What do these gifts look like? I suggest seven.

1. Be a spiritual leader.

Be a godly man of courage, conviction, commitment, compassion, and character. Take the initiative in cultivating a spiritual environment for the family. Become a capable and competent student of God’s Word and live out before all a life founded on the Word of God. Lead your wife in becoming a woman of God, and take the lead in training the children in the things of the Lord (Deut 6:1-9; Psalm 1; Ephesians 5:23-27; 6:1-4).

2. Give her personal affirmation/appreciation.

Praise her for personal attributes and qualities. Praise her virtues as a wife, mother, and homemaker. Openly commend her, in the presence of others, as a marvelous mate, friend, lover, and companion. Help her feel that, to you, no one is more important in this world other than King Jesus. (Proverbs 31:28-29; Song of Solomon 4:1-7, 6:4-9, 7:1-9).

3. Show personal affection (romance).

Shower her with timely and generous displays of affection. Romance her in a language she understands! Tell her and show her how much you care for her with a steady flow of words, cards, flowers, gifts and common courtesies. Remember, affection is the environment in which sexual union is enjoyed and a wonderful marriage developed (Song of Solomon 6:10, 13; Ephesians 5:28-29, 33).

4. Initiate intimate conversation.

Talk with her at the feeling level (heart to heart). Listen to her thoughts (i.e., her heart) about the events of her day with sensitivity, interest, and concern. Such conversations with

her convey a desire to understand her not change her (Song of Solomon 2:8-14, 8:13-14; 1 Peter 3:7).

5. Always be honest and open.

Look into her eyes and, in love, always be truthful (Ephesians 4:15). Explain your plans and actions clearly and completely because you are responsible for her and the children. Lead her to trust you and feel secure with you (Proverbs 15:22-23).

6. Provide home support and stability.

Take hold of the responsibility to house, feed, and clothe the family. Provide and protect, and do not feel sorry for yourself when things get tough. Look for concrete ways to improve home life. Raise the marriage and family to a safe and more fulfilling level. Remember, the husband/father is the security hub of the family (2 Timothy 5:8).

7. Demonstrate family commitment.

After the Lord Jesus, put your wife and family first. Commit time and energy to spiritual, moral and intellectual development of the children. For example, pray with them (especially at night by the bedside), read to them, engage in sports with them and take them on other outings. Do not play the fools' game of working long hours, writing many books and articles, trying to get ahead, while your children and spouse languish in neglect (Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:19-20).

Marriage and family are good gifts from a great God. They must be treated with tender care. Our Lord has provided a blueprint for us to follow. When we do, we will find the joys and blessings he intended from the beginning when he put a man and woman together in this holy covenant.