

"Building A House and Home"
"Introduction and Orientation"
Session One

I. The Process Of Premarital Counseling

¹⁸And the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a companion who will help him." **Genesis 2:18 (NLT)**

²⁴So a man will leave his father and mother and be united with his wife, and the two will become one body. **Genesis 2:24 (NCV)**

Drawing – Before & After

II. The Purpose Of Premarital Counseling

- Investment
- Preventative Medicine
- Building A House & Home

III. The Persons Of Premarital Counseling

1. What brings you to this place?
2. What are your expectations of these sessions and of me as a Minister?
3. How did you meet?
4. How long have you known each other?
5. How long have you been dating?
6. How long have you been engaged?
7. What do you enjoy doing together?

8. What do you enjoy doing separately?
9. What do you see as your future spouse's greatest strengths?
10. What do you see as your future spouse's greatest weaknesses?
11. How would you describe your relationship with God?
12. What part will God play in your marriage?

IV. The Philosophy Of Premarital Counseling

- Christian Wedding - before God, under His standards
 - Covenant vs. Contract – **Homework from this session!**
- Secular Wedding - before each other, relative standards
- Commitment – three months prior to the wedding

A contract is an agreement between two people. A covenant is when two become one.

Covenant – an unconditional surrendering of your rights while increasing your responsibilities.

Contract – a conditional agreement protecting your rights and limiting your responsibilities.

V. The Policies Of Premarital Counseling

- Church Involvement
- Cohabitation
- Sexual Standards
- A Guide To Weddings – forms, procedures, & finances

Activity: Premarriage Awareness Inventory

Resources: "Before You Say I Do" (Wes Roberts & H. Norman Wright)
 "His Needs, Her Needs" (Willard F. Harley, Jr.)
 "Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts" (Dr. Les Parrott)

Next Appointment: _____

We all approach marriage with a picture of how it is going to be: She will submit. He will submit. We'll save money. We'll spend money. We will spend our discretionary time together. I need my space and friends. Christmas is at my mom's with all my aunts, uncles, and cousins ...

At the center of all this is "I." I imagine. I desire. I have always thought. I expect. We have drawn a picture of marriage designed for me and by me. Bottom line, we have agendas for the people we are marrying. And wouldn't you know it, your spouse also has an agenda and a set of expectations as well. They have an "I."

Expectations over time will transform your marriage from a covenant relationship to a debt/debtor relationship. This is because of what expectations communicate: You owe me. Expectations reflect what you feel like you deserve. These may be very realistic expectations, but they ultimately lead to disappointment. I didn't get what I deserved. You didn't deliver what you owed me. Eventually you begin to move into a bargaining approach in order to manage expectations, but this impedes our ability to love. You see, an expectation is a request for something, while love is the gift of something. We end up in a tug-of-war that destroys intimacy and romance.

But the thing is, behind you and your spouse's expectations is a legitimate God-given desire. Everyone was born with desires. We desire to be cherished, companionship, acceptance. But when you take a legitimate desire and place it on the shoulders of your spouse it feels like an expectation.

So how do you keep good God-given desires from becoming harmful de-motivating expectations? How do you take an expectation and put it back into the category of a desire? How do I get "I" out of the middle of the relationship? You have to answer one foundational question. **What does your future spouse owe you?** The answer to that question will pinpoint your expectations.

The key to a successful marriage is having enough love to carry you both through the times of conflicting interests. Scripture reveals a secret source of unending love for any marriage. **It's really not a matter of putting your spouse first – or your spouse putting you first – but learning to put yet a third person first instead.**

The only way to get everything out of the expectation box and back into the desire box is to conclude that **your spouse doesn't owe you anything and that you owe him or her everything**. This is the essence of a Christian marriage – mutual submission for Christ's sake.

“Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.”

Ephesians 5:21 (NIV)

What does it mean to submit? Submission is placing the needs, desires and dreams of someone else ahead of "I." Our motivation for submitting is out of reverence for Christ – not one another. We are to express our gratitude to God through our treatment of the person we married.

“Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord.”

Ephesians 5:22 (NIV)

What the scripture is saying is that wives should put their husbands first as you put the Lord first. Place your husband’s needs, wishes and dreams ahead of yours. And ladies, you may push back because he doesn’t deserve it. But that’s just the point! He doesn’t deserve it. Like you didn’t.

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.”

Ephesians 5:25 (NIV)

Men, lay down your life for your wife just like Christ laid down His life for you. Our wives should feel as if we would lay down our lives in order to protect them emotionally, physically and financially. But she doesn’t deserve it. That’s the point!

You have been chosen as God’s number one method of expressing His love for your future spouse. So how do you do this? You can’t unconditionally love your spouse until you get your expectations back in the proper box. And the only way to do that is to decide that your spouse doesn’t owe you anything. Only then are you free to love. And only then can you experience the unconditional love of your spouse.

Now you may have hesitations. You fear what would happen if you put everything back in this box and just gave and gave and gave. You’re afraid of being taken advantage of. And if that is the way you think then you probably also believe that the only reason your spouse is behaving now is because of your expectations, your reminders, your notes or your late-night conversations. Unfortunately, that’s not called marriage. That’s called parenting. If you take the pressure off, there’s no telling what will happen!

What you need more than anything else in the world is what your spouse cannot give you as long as you insist on prodding and nagging and reminding and tugging. You need to experience unconditional love. That requires space and the opportunity to give before being reminded. If you came out of a difficult family situation, you will always have a tendency to place on your spouse the expectations that were not met in your family of origin. And once you do that, he or she will live with the burden of pleasing someone that can’t be pleased. And you will never feel loved because you have removed the margin necessary to love. And what you fear will become a reality – you will become disappointed in your marriage.

Once you have dumped everything from the expectation box back into the desire box, what’s next? You’ve still got all these desires, hopes and dreams. What are you supposed to do with them?

All of you should be very humble with each other. "God is against the proud, but he gives grace to the humble." ⁶ Be humble under God's powerful hand so he will lift you up when the right time comes (*in due season*).

1 Peter 5:5-6 (NCV)

Casting the whole of your care [all your anxieties, all your worries, all your concerns, once and for all] on Him, for He cares for you affectionately and cares about you watchfully.

1 Peter 5:7 (AMP)

In this context we can think of **grace** in this way: **He gives you what you need in the moment for the moment.** He doesn't make unreasonable demands of us. He gives us the ability to do what we need to do.

Declare your dependency on God. Tell God you need Him! God invites us – He gives us permission – to unload on Him! We can talk to Him and be specific. No need to be polite ... you can vent and dump. Why? Because He cares for you.

Your desires and dreams matter to Him even if they don't seem to matter to your partner right now. And in response, you will find the grace to carry on. We've already talked about what happens when you dump your expectations on your spouse. He or she simply wasn't designed to handle them. But we have a heavenly Father who can handle them.

After you have cast your cares on God and you are ready to talk with your spouse about what's in the box, here are some practical tips on how to have that conversation ...

1. Confess

Take responsibility for turning your desires into expectations. And make sure you are specific, whether it is the expectation to make more money, keep the house cleaner, be more organized, be in better shape, or spend more time with the kids. Confess your expectations.

2. Ask

- a. Where do you feel pressure to live up to my expectations?
- b. What can I do to make our marriage richer?

Then don't say anything. Just listen. This is just another way of asking, "What's in your box?" But don't ask that. Now, when you are asked this, there may be some things in your desire box that don't need to come out. There are some things that need to stay between you and God. There may be some dreams you are going to have to die to.

3. Reward

Reward your spouse like you did when you were dating. You see, the problem with expectations is that we don't reward people who meet them. "That's their job." "She's supposed to cart the kids around." "He is supposed to mow the grass." So when your spouse gets it right, reward that. Because what's rewarded gets repeated. One specific way to reward is to write thank-you notes and be specific in your gratitude. Sometimes we don't know what is a big deal until someone tells us.