



Week Two: Marriage Checkup – Study Guide

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“The state of being united to a person of the opposite sex as husband or wife in a consensual and contractual relationship recognized by law.” I would say that it’s not the most attractive definition by *Merriam Webster* of a lifelong unity between husband and wife. However, it’s quite possibly the most politically and socially correct! Have our marriages become victim to a world-perspective? Are we in desperate need of a greater understanding of marriage? Are my spouse and I possibly missing out on the most amazing years of our lives, and what God has in store for us?

If you had a married couple on your left and one on your right, statistics tell us that one of those two couples will experience divorce. I think it’s time we seek out answers, and time we seek out the truth, even if it means challenging all those preconceived ideals of husband and wife. Are you ready? This week in part two of our series Family Dynamics, we’ll turn this logical and boring definition of marriage on its head as we look into the depth, beauty, and blessing of a God-inspired union.

Where Am I Today?

- 1) In your own words, how would you describe marriage? How much, if at all, does it differ from the *Merriam Webster* definition above? Do you feel the idea of a “contractual relationship” is God’s view of the agreement that binds a husband and wife in unity?

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- 2) When you were contemplating marriage, did your image of how it would be differ any from the reality of what you have experienced? On a scale of 1 – 10, 1 being clueless, and 10 a full understanding, rate how you understand God’s plan for your marriage.

Into the Bible

- 3) I thought men were the best at not reading instructions prior to putting together complicated pieces of “assembly required” furniture, until I met my wife. Over the years I have witnessed many of her works of art, and I have to say she is amazing! She doesn’t require near the “suggested assembly time” nor does she need all the parts. And, she has become quite excellent at final modifications and tweaks to complete her masterpieces, although I often wonder if those are planned. In contrast, I do think there can be great value in understanding what the engineers originally had in mind when they took the time to write those detailed step-by-step instructions for their creation.

Read Genesis 2:19-24. Have you ever wondered how marriage was created, or who thought it up? Could there possibly be notes for us out there from the Engineer? What advantage is there in having insight from the designer of something?

- 4) So, how serious is God about our marriages? Let us look a bit further at the idea of “contract” relationships. The Bible uses a slightly different word to describe the commitment of this union: not a contract, but a covenant.

Read Genesis 15:18-21, Genesis 17:1-7 and Malachi 2:13-16. What was the covenant between Abram and God? Do you have any inclination that God would not have fulfilled this covenant with Abram? Is this different from a common contractual agreement where one party can nullify it by not upholding their end of the deal? Why or why not? Does God appear concerned about a marriage covenant from the verses in Malachi?

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- 5) Jesus also made a covenant with us during the Last Supper, as found in Luke 22:20. His covenant required death and was for our ultimate rescue. And I am so glad He took it seriously! **Read Genesis 15:9-10 and 17:9-11.** Do you notice that the shedding of blood and a covenant often go hand in hand?

Now, read Romans 7:3 and Matthew 19:3-8. Is the phrase "till death do us part" starting to take on a different meaning? Explain.

- 6) "So, why all the work in understanding covenant sacrifice? Can we just get to some helpful tips on the role of a husband and wife?" Absolutely, but a word of caution when reading these next verses, as objects in the mirror may be closer to covenant sacrifice than they once appeared! **Read Ephesians 5:1-2 and 22-33.** From the following verses, list how the roles of a husband and wife relate to what you know of the life of Jesus.

How Does This Apply?

- 7) What does a daily dose of covenant marriage look like? Well, for starters, it's not easy, and involves one of the hardest things imaginable, selflessness. Actually, we find that our lives as husbands and wives look very much like what Christ teaches for all people, and that's love. **Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-8.**

List all the attributes of love. Can you think of any marriage tip not summed up in those passages? Can you recall a time you brought up a past "record of wrongs" to your spouse? What would life be like for your spouse if you didn't bring them up anymore, but forgave them? Does this seem opposite of what worldly marriages do?

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- 8) It's obvious that somewhere along the way, marriage in America got confused. One thing we can do, that I believe is very productive, is call it for what it is and then move forward on to what it should be. Years ago I was listening to Pastor Chip Ingram teach on his book *Love, Sex, and Lasting Relationships*. A concept that he taught caught my attention, and it still impacts how I view relationships today. Chip explained that there is the world's view of marriage, and it differs greatly from God's. The world's view states simply that if you find the right person, all will be well in the universe. You know, the proverbial needle in the haystack, your soul mate. How does a person pull this off? Well, you wear the right clothes, you diet, you say the cool phrases, you have a successful career, and this list goes on and on, as you are probably familiar with. After two "right" people find each other, they get married.

Problem is, years go by and things aren't so warm and fuzzy anymore. The resolution is that "I must have missed something; maybe they were not the one for me. But I know that person has to be out there somewhere! So, I will get a divorce and continue this search." So once again, we put on the right clothes, drive the right car, start working out and hanging out in the right places, etc. So, here's the point that so impacted me. Chip states, "God's view is very different than that of the world's ... we never really find the **right** spouse, but through the years of marriage we can **become** the right spouse."

Does this perspective impact how you view marriage? **Read 1 Peter 3:1-7**. Do these verses support the idea of finding the right person, or becoming the right person?

- 9) Your marriage should be full of awe, not full of awful. I remember several years ago, when God spoke to my heart very clearly as I was driving home on I-40 East one Sunday night. I was by myself and was asking God why Christy and I were going through all these tough marital challenges. In my prayer I remember wanting to bring her in on at least 50% of the blame! Very unexpectedly I felt these words, "Brent, you have got to be an inspiration to your wife and your kids." Wow, not really what I was hoping for God, but for some reason I kept seeking what was next. "You have a profession in which you are constantly ministering to folks and telling them about me. But if the one joined together with you, your wife, is not being

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inspired by you, if she is not being strengthened by you, if she doesn't see more of ME through you, then what is it exactly that you are giving everyone else?" Ouch. I remember crying for several miles and couldn't wait to get home so I could apologize. Would you be willing to take the initiative in your marriage and say, "God, I am willing to assume my part in making this marriage full of awe and not full of awful"? Are there some things coming to mind now that are contrary to what most people do in marriage, but is what God may be asking you to do?

Increase Your Learning on Your Own

- 10) Would you ever have guessed that becoming more like Christ is the answer to our questions on marriage? One of the best visuals I can remember is correlating the closeness of marriage to a pyramid. You see, Christ is always at the top of the pyramid, with you and your spouse at each of the bottom corners. As you both rise up and start moving closer to Christ, you essentially move closer to each other.

Read Revelation 19:7-9, Ephesians 5:31-33 and John 3:26-30.

Do you think Christ can relate to marriage? How?