



What is a Gospel-Centered Marriage?

Second in a 3-part mini-series titled: *Reno*
Part of the larger 10-week *Family Bundle* series

Pastor Matt Friend – September 16 & 19, 2021
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– OUTLINE –

Today's Big Idea:

The key to a God-centered marriage is a gospel-centered marriage.

Why is family discipleship so important this year?

#1 – God Creates

“God designed marriage between a man and a woman and has created my spouse just as He wanted him/her to be.”

#2 – Sin Breaks

“Sin has wreaked havoc on the institution of marriage, and my sin continually challenges my own marriage.”

#3 – Jesus Saves

“I can extend unconditional love to my spouse because Jesus has given that kind of love to me.”

#4 – Jesus Transforms

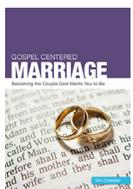
“Just as Jesus is still slowly changing me into His image, He is also still changing my spouse into His image. Where there's life there's hope!”

#5 – God Restores

“God will one day make all things new in the new Heaven and on the new Earth. Though marriage is temporal, how I cultivate my marriage will echo in eternity.”

Today's Take-Away:

Center your marriage around the gospel!



Resource Recommendation

[*Gospel Centered Marriage: Becoming the Couple God Wants You to Be*](#)

Tim Chester



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– NOTES –

Introduction:

Today we continue our 10-week “Family Bundle” series. We’re bundling family discipleship in a way we all can use. We’re studying what God says: priorities, marriage, parenting, singleness, sexual identity, navigating this digital world, mental health, narcissism, expectations, and more. See the [schedule, details, and resources here](#).

On July 21, 1861, the first land battle of the Civil War started before dawn. The roar of artillery seemed to awaken everyone in Virginia as the Union and Confederate armies clashed among the farms by a stream called Bull Run.

But a strange thing happened as the battle intensified. Hundreds of Washingtonians—Senators, Representatives, government workers and their families, all dressed in their Sunday best and carrying picnic baskets—raced to the hill near Manassas to watch the battle unfold. With opera glasses in hand to survey the fighting, they chatted like friends at a coffee shop while men were being slaughtered on the fields below. One northern sympathizer commented, “That is splendid. Oh my! Is not that first-rate? I guess we will be in Richmond this time tomorrow.” Spirits were high, toasts were raised. All in all, they thought it was a superb way to spend a summer afternoon.

Suddenly a Rebel counterattack led by a hard-charging cavalry swept over the Union flank, causing the Union army to retreat. Quickly they realized that their picnic ground was about to become a battle zone. Mass confusion erupted as the spectators fled. Within moments, a Confederate wave washed over the hill.

They arrived on the hill that day looking for a picnic, but they soon realized they were at war. For the sake of our illustration today, unfortunately, most couples come to the marriage altar looking for a picnic; however, they soon find themselves at war.

Today’s Big Idea:

The key to a God-centered marriage is a gospel-centered marriage.



The gospel is what the entire Bible is all about. It's God's unfolding story from Genesis to Revelation.

Here at Bible Center Church, we summarize the gospel in ten words: God creates, sin breaks, Jesus saves, Jesus transforms, and God restores.

"The gospel is the heart of the Bible. Everything in Scripture is either preparation for the gospel, presentation of the gospel, or participation in the gospel." –Dave Harvey

"The gospel is the good news of God's redemptive plan to create, save, transform, and restore His people and world through the work of Christ to the glory of God." –Mike Graham

The gospel is more than just something we believe to go to heaven. It's the starting line for Christian maturity and spiritual growth. It's our centering point with God, and it's our centering point with others... especially our spouse!

So, what is a gospel-centered marriage? A gospel centered-marriage believes...

#1 – God Creates: "God designed marriage between a man and a woman and has created my spouse just as He wanted him/her to be."

In perfect unity and eternal fellowship, the triune God created out of the abundance of his love. By the power of his word, he spoke matter, space, and time into being. Creation climaxes as God creates man and woman in his own holy image and relational nature. All of creation brings glory to God, but especially man and woman, as they reflect God's holiness, beauty, and nature.

Look with me at the time God himself officiated the first wedding...

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So, the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh. Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame. –Genesis 2:22-25



Marriage is not just a “piece of paper.” It did not evolve in the late Bronze Age as a way to determine property rights. At the climax of the Genesis account of creation, we see God bringing a woman and a man together to unite them in marriage. The Bible begins with a wedding (of Adam and Eve) and ends in the book of Revelation with a wedding (of Christ and the church). Marriage is God’s idea. It is certainly also a human institution, and it reflects the character of the particular human culture in which it is embedded. But the concept and roots of human marriage are in God’s own action, and therefore what the Bible says about God’s design for marriage is crucial.

Husband: God made your wife just as he wanted her to be. There’s no stray DNA in her. Her appearance, her laugh, her smile, her personality, her boldness, her shyness, her sense of humor, her body. All of this is God’s gift to you. Don’t forget that: not now, not one year from now (when you see another attractive woman), not years from now when she is beautifully gray.

Wife: God made your husband just as he wanted him to be. There’s no stray DNA in him. His height, strength, laugh, smile, personality, organization (or disorganization), humor, seriousness... All of this is God’s gift to you. Don’t forget that: not now, not one year from now (when you see another attractive man), not years from now when he has completely changed shape.

#2 – Sin Breaks: “Sin has wreaked havoc on the institution of marriage, and my sin continually challenges my own marriage.”

Though created in holiness, mankind chooses to sin and rebel against God. Through the sin of Adam, all of creation is broken, cursed, and fallen. Death now reigns. Humanity’s relationship with God and with one another is broken beyond human repair. Sin and suffering taint all of creation.

Unfortunately, this is often forgotten at the marriage alter with friends and family around them:

- Maid of honor: “They’re in love–They can conquer anything.”
- Mutual friend: “Compatibility is the key. This marriage will last because they are...”
- Youth Pastor: “It all comes down to parenting. These kids will go the distance because...”
- Uncle Bob, CPA: “Do you have any idea what their stock portfolio is like? Planning...”
- Best man: “They’ve read every marriage book–they’ll be a perfect couple!”



However, the Bible teaches us that there's one reality at that marriage altar that must not be forgotten: that husband and wife both have a very selfish sinful nature that will try to take more than it gives every single day.

I tell couples all the time, the main question isn't, "How can I fix my partner?" but, instead, "How can I be aware of my own sin and learn to apply the gospel to it?"

Jesus properly diagnosed our problem in Matthew 15:18-20a... "But the things that come out of a person's mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what defile a person."

James, Jesus' half-brother, gives the same diagnosis in James 4:1-3... "What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures."

The "fog of war" is a common phrase to describe the chaotic mindsets that develop in battle. In the heat of the moment, good people can do things completely out of character. The Apostle Paul talks about a *fog of war* in our hearts in Romans 7:21-24... "So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?"

It's almost as if we have two operating systems, one that's coded to follow Jesus and one that's coded to follow God. That's why we sometimes say with surprise:

- "I can't believe I did that!"
- "Where did that come from?"
- "That's just not like me!"

No, it is like you, and it is like me. We are sinners.

If you are married, I will guarantee you that your sin is affecting your marriage in some way. You may be a fearful person with a tendency toward unhealthy disbelief and unchecked anxiety. You may be a proud person with a tendency



to be overly opinionated and selfish. You may be an inflexible person, with a tendency to be demanding and sulky if you don't get your way.

You may be an abrasive or harsh person who people tend to respect more than they love. You may be an undisciplined person with a tendency to be unreliable and disorganized. You may be an oblivious person who tends to be distracted, insensitive, and unaware of how you come across to others. You may be a perfectionist with a tendency to be judgmental and critical of others and also to get down on yourself. You may be an impatient, irritable person, with a tendency to hold grudges or to lose your temper too often.

You may be a highly independent person who does not like to be responsible for the needs of others, who dislikes having to make joint decisions, who most definitely hates to ask for any help yourself. You may be a person who wants far too much to be liked, and so you tend to shade the truth, you can't keep secrets, and you work too hard to please everyone. You may be thrifty but at the same time miserly with money, too unwilling to spend it on your own needs appropriately, and ungenerous to others. You may be an unforgiving person, holding a grudge against something your spouse did and sought forgiveness for years ago, determined to make them pay every. single. day.

Illustration: Marriage reveals our flaws like heavy weight reveals the flaws of a bridge. Think of an old bridge over a stream. Imagine that there are structural defects in the bridge that are hard to see. There may be hairline fractures that a very close inspection would reveal, but to the naked eye, there is nothing wrong. But now see a 10-ton Mac truck drive onto the bridge. What will happen? The pressure from the weight of the truck will open those hairline fractures so they can be seen. The structural defects will be exposed for all to see because of the strain the truck puts on the bridge. Suddenly, you can see where all the flaws are. The truck didn't create the weaknesses; it revealed them. Similarly, marriage doesn't create weaknesses; it reveals them. When you get married, your spouse is a big truck driving right through your heart.

Puritan pastor Thomas Watson, "Till sin be bitter, Christ will not be sweet." Likewise, till sin be bitter, marriage will not be sweet.

Can you think of any examples of selfishness in marriage, including your own marriage?

Remember, you have married a sinner. Your husband/wife is a sinner, just like his/her great, great grandparents, Adam and Eve. Your spouse has the same selfish desires that you have. He/she may say things that hurt you. Without



even knowing it, your spouse may choose something over you (time with a friend, your children, a TV show, a hobby, a career, a sport). He/she may forget to meet your needs without even knowing it. Don't be bitter against him/her. Talk with your spouse. Communicate with your spouse. But don't grow bitter against your spouse. He/she struggles with the same sin you do.

#3 – Jesus Saves: “I can extend unconditional love to my spouse because Jesus has given that kind of love to me.”

God, knowing humanity would fall, provided Himself as a Savior to save us from our sin. All of the Old Testament points to a coming Savior and all of the New Testament points back to the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who died on the cross in our place, bearing the full weight of God's wrath against our sin, and who rose from the dead conquering sin and death. The love, grace, and mercy of God in Christ form the basis of our unconditional love in marriage.

In 1 John 4:19, one of Jesus' close disciples writes, “We love because He first loved us.” In other words, the love we express in marriage finds its roots in Jesus' saving love for us.

In his book, *The Meaning of Marriage*, Tim Keller writes, “Marriage is a major vehicle for the gospel's remaking of your heart from the inside out and your life from the ground up. The reason that marriage is so painful and yet wonderful is because it is a reflection of the gospel, which is painful and wonderful at once. The gospel is this: We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope. This is the only kind of relationship that will really transform us. Love without truth is sentimentality; it supports and affirms us but keeps us in denial about our flaws. Truth without love is harshness; it gives us information but in such a way that we cannot really hear it. God's saving love in Christ, however, is marked by both radical truthfulness about who we are and yet also radical, unconditional commitment to us.”

Let's think for a moment about just one of the benefits of salvation: the mercy of God. He forgave us, is patient with us, and is kind toward us even though we were his enemies prior to salvation (Rom. 5:10). We were destined for God's eternal wrath, like the devil himself (Eph. 2:1-3), yet God chose to respond to us in love. Even after we become Jesus-followers, he continues to extend his mercy when we sin.

Do you find it easy or hard to show your spouse mercy? Why or why not?



Illustration: Mercy is like a sweetener for marriage. What it touches, it sweetens. Just as Splenda or sugar sweetens coffee or tea, so mercy sweetens marriage. After a while, good sex can't solve the most challenging marriage struggles. Having excessive money can't solve the most challenging marriage struggles. Only mercy can sweeten a marriage of two sinners.

It's not the presence of differences that make us incompatible. It's the absence of mercy. Mercy takes people who are capable of open warfare over tooth-paste tubes and toilet seats, and enlarges their vision to include a Savior. Mercy confronts a sinner wrapped in self-pity and protected by pride and shows him the way out of the darkness into the light.

We have two choices when we are offended. Neither involves storing your spouse's sins as future fuel for your fire against them. Neither involves filing it away in "Things About My Spouse that Need to Change." Neither involves exorcism. ☺ However, both require mercy. You can...

1. Let it go, showing mercy. (Prov. 19:11; 1 Peter 4:8). Or...
2. Confront it lovingly at the right time. (Hint: Ask, "Is this a good time to talk about it?" If they say "no," then wait until they are ready.)

One final helpful hint: Remember, your spouse is not only sinful, but they are also weak in certain areas, just like you're weak in certain areas. When they repeatedly sin against you, try seeing this as a weakness as much as a sin. Mercy often flows easier that way.

It's hard for two people to have a bad marriage when they are both overwhelmingly grateful for the salvation of Jesus Christ.

#4 – Jesus Transforms: "Just as Jesus is still slowly changing me into His image, He is also still changing my spouse into His image. Where there's life there's hope!"

Christians are adopted into God's family to live life together in and through the church. Growth takes place in community centered around the Word. The Holy Spirit works in and through the church to provide direction, discipleship, and community for God's people. Maturity and growth take place as each member of the family lives a life of love and service—giving grace and truth—on mission, sharing this Gospel message with others.

In summary, the message of the gospel saves us AND transforms us. An ever-increasing understanding of God's holiness and our sin (through God's Word, God's people and God's Spirit), draws us to the cross in repentance and



faith. A deepening understanding of Jesus' work on our behalf increases our love, joy, gratitude, and fellowship with God becoming more like Christ. Jesus and the finished work of the cross become ever-more beautiful and amazing as we fall more in love with Him.

The gospel grows us by leading us to a Christ-centered life of increasing dependence, worship, love, and service, leading us away from moralism or performance to find acceptance before God. Only in the Gospel do we have hope in a world of sin and suffering. The gospel transforms our hearts, grows his church, and is at work in his world.

God has designed you to be a transforming influence on your spouse, and your spouse to be a transforming influence on you.

When helping your spouse grow, consider these three principles:

- Sledgehammer principle: Don't use a sledgehammer to drive in a thumbtack.
- Dump truck principle: Stick to one item. Don't unload the dump truck on your spouse.
- Hand grenade principle: Only bring something up if you're prepared to see it through. Don't pop the pin on the hand grenade, let it fly, and then run for cover.

Remember: Jesus rose from dead, ascended back to heaven, and gave His Spirit so you can grow. He is still working on your spouse, for sure, but He is still working on you, too. Don't make the mistake so many spouses make when they get married, thinking they will change their spouse into what they want them to be. Instead, focus on the kind of spouse God wants you to be. Read God's Word. Talk to Him in prayer. Get in a good church where you can make spiritual friends. You will grow old in the Lord, but never quit growing up in the Lord. Your spouse needs you. If God has given you children, they need you.

Remember: If God gave Jesus the power to raise from the dead, He can give you the power to take out the trash, bite your tongue, help with the dishes, or to do whatever you find impossible to do.

#5 – God Restores: “God will one day make all things new in the new Heaven and on the new Earth. Though marriage is temporal, how I cultivate my marriage will echo in eternity.”

In the final chapter of the Bible, as in the final chapter of human history, God will complete His redemptive plan. Through the work of Christ, all of creation



will be restored, renewed, and reconciled to Him. God is presently at work in our hearts and in His universe, pointing to the day when all things will be made new. God's redemptive plan will culminate in a redeemed people living with Him in a new heaven and a new earth—a holy and restored creation that will worship and enjoy its Creator forever!

If you're married, you accomplish God's mission together now, not apart. However, marriage is temporary, while God's Kingdom is eternal.

Encourage your spouse to take risks, to step out of their comfort zone, and to serve the Lord like only they can. Most importantly, build your home to be a living billboard of God's love, grace, and hope. Meet each other's needs so you both can serve your Savior to the fullest.

Today's Take-Away:

Center your marriage around the gospel!

How?

- Celebrate what's right in your marriage.
- Confess what's wrong in your marriage.
- Change what needs to be changed in your marriage.

Why must we center our marriages around the gospel? Because...

The key to a God-centered marriage is a gospel-centered marriage.