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FOREWORD

*Your Marriage by God's Design* is an invitation for the Christian eager to refresh his or her understanding of God's will for marital life. At a time when many in our culture are content to live without benefit of marriage, others engage in the practice of serial marriage, and some are unfaithful in marriage, there is cause to revisit the godly foundations of the most important human relationship. Christians are right to note that the defense of marriage has become a necessity as tidal waves of public opinion imply that we are to embrace same-sex marriage or explore the possibilities of polyamory. The culture now endorses and teaches our children about a radically different and dangerous view of marriage and child rearing. Rev. Scott and Julie Stiegemeyer have written a clear, countercultural resource that teaches simply and points faithfully to God's Word and His plan for sexuality and marriage.

The biblical foundations of human love, marriage, family, parenting, and vocation are offered alongside the stories of Christian men and women whose lives illustrate the clear blessings and certain challenges of family relationships. The discussion examines what a biblical “one flesh” relationship is all about, apart from media hype and cultural distortions. The authors point unapologetically to God's plan for family and the need to raise up our children in the knowledge of God, all the while protecting little ones from all manner of cultural mayhem. Thorough in their biblical survey of matters marital, the Stiegemeyers also discuss divorce, cohabitation, and chastity in an unblinking review of human temptation and excess, pointing always to God's abundant love for us in Christ Jesus and underscoring how we are sustained by grace to live a life of daily repentance and renewal.

In addition to supporting those who are married, *Your Marriage by God's Design* would also be a fine text for a teen or adult Bible study and may be useful as a resource for individuals receiving premarital spiritual care and counsel from their pastor. We could all profit from enhancing our ability to speak with clarity and confidence about the biblical foundations of Christian marriage.
at a time when many are endeavoring to redefine marriage to suit their own political agendas. The Stiegemeyers’ book is a helpful resource to review as we prepare to speak with others beyond our community of faith and is profitable, as well, when we encounter inquiring others whose understanding of marriage is imperiled by misbelief, unbelief, or despair. The book begins by asking this pivotal question: “What does the Bible teach about marriage?” and then weaves an account of God’s faithfulness.

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INTRODUCTION

What is marriage? What makes for a long-lasting and happy relationship? How can we find personal fulfillment in our marriage, our friendships, and in other relationships? How do we define husband and wife? What does the Bible teach about human persons in relation to others?

The answers to these questions and more form the bedrock of this first of four chapters in Your Marriage by God’s Design. We start by laying the foundation, by defining terms and searching the Scriptures to identify God’s plan for us, and by building on the teachings of God’s Word.

“WE MUST RETURN TO OUR ORIGINS, TO THE PARADISE OF THE GARDEN OF EDEN.”

First, however, we have to break down some basic assumptions shaped by our culture. We have to be radically countercultural as we consider God’s view of marriage and relationships. Being radically countercultural means that, at our root, we are very different from the world. Radical means “root,” from which we get the word radish—a root vegetable. These changes we so desperately need are not mere exterior improvements or minor revisions but come from the root as Christ transforms us from the inside out. For this complete, total change, we must return to our origins, to the paradise of the Garden of Eden.

We need this radical transformation because in today’s culture we find everything but paradise. Train-wreck reality shows, sitcoms
pressing for social change, and TV characters portraying today’s “hook-up” culture are nightly beamed into our family rooms. We, who are so well connected by our technology, feel more depressed, isolated, and lonely than ever before. The sexual revolution of the last fifty years has led to unhappiness, disease, and death. Divorce, suicide, addictions, and despair are rampant. Clearly, our culture does not have the answers to attaining personal happiness or long-lasting relationships.

So we turn to our Lord for wisdom. We need to fill our minds with God’s heart for humanity. We need to know how He can fix this mess we’re in. All of this can be found in His Word, where He tells us about human personhood, relationships, sexuality, and marriage. After all, God’s revealed Word for us—the Bible—begins and ends with a wedding. In Genesis, God creates the first people: a married couple, Adam and Eve. The Bible ends with Revelation, which shows the marriage between God and His Bride, the Church.

As we turn to God’s Word for wisdom, we may wonder what God wants for us. What are God's wishes for His children? Quite simply, He wants the very best for you. He wants you to find fulfillment in life and in your relationships—not in a selfish, I-deserve-better mentality. Rather, He wants you to love and be loved, to give and to receive. So we return to our origins, to His original plan for humanity.

BEGIN AT THE BEGINNING

A frigid day. Snowflakes swirl into tiny tornadoes in the icy winds of late February. Robins have yet to make their appearance, even though Punxsutawney Phil's shadow predicted an early spring. It's that point in the winter when we've completely forgotten how lush and green the trees will one day be, that the grass and bushes will need trimming, or that the gardens will one day flourish with vegetables and fruit.

It's an intellectual exercise, pushing beyond our immediate senses to the distant memory of what can be. Promise lies beneath the soil in the rebirth of spring. Daffodil bulbs are nearly ready to pop. Buds on the magnolia will soon sprout as the earth on its axis
ticks one day closer to spring and rebirth.

But before this rebirth, there was a very first birth, a genesis. In the first book of the Bible, Genesis, we begin to explore God’s plan for us in marriage. From Genesis chapters 1 and 2, we learn about God’s plan for us as unique persons in relationship to one another. This ancient story may seem an unlikely place to begin a marriage book. Forbidden fruit, a serpent, and clothes made from fig leaves seem less than relevant. It would be far easier to follow “5 Steps to a Happy Marriage,” “10 Dos and Don’ts for a Healthy Relationships,” or “8 Things You Can Do TODAY to Raise Great Kids.” It seems like the world’s first inclination is to look for relationship wisdom from supermarket tabloids rather than the Bible.

As we explore God’s heart for marriage, we will certainly find great practical things to take away from Scripture that will enrich our relationships. But God’s Word cannot be pared down to bullet points. The biblical underpinning of our faith is rich and deep, and we must mine its treasures in order to learn what God wants for us. We must start where God does and sit at His feet, students of the Word.

Marriage is, after all, God’s idea. He invented it. He created the first husband and wife, Adam and Eve. In Martin Luther’s commentary on Genesis, he discusses the importance God places on marriage, which exists by God’s good creative plan and order. Because of that, it is an estate both blessed and sanctified by God. So we go back to the source, beginning in the Garden of Eden with His perfect vision of human love and marriage.

This is also where Jesus Himself points. When the Pharisees asked Him about divorce and marriage, Jesus referred to Genesis (Matthew 19:3–12). A helpful tool of biblical interpretation is to let Scripture interpret itself. In Matthew 19, we see the Word Himself, Jesus, interpreting the Old Testament text and giving us insights into marriage and family. So, we turn back to Genesis, as Jesus Himself did. As we learn more about this primal story of creation, we begin to understand God’s will for us today as individuals in relationship to each other.
WHAT'S SO GREAT ABOUT ADAM AND EVE?

In Genesis 1–2, we see a truly perfect marriage, the perfect marriage: Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden in naked, unveiled communication with each other. None of the things that separate us kept them from each other, and nothing kept them apart from God. Since the fall into sin, we have never had the opportunity to experience this kind of openness with another person. However, Adam and Eve felt no shame with each other. They had no fear of rejection. They didn’t fear the sting of betrayal. They didn't keep score. They didn’t hold grudges from past insults. They didn’t replay old arguments in their minds. They simply loved, in perfect unity and communion. They served and submitted to each other in the way Paul describes in Ephesians 5. They stood before each other in open, honest, perfect communion. They were in harmony with each other, with the natural world, and with their Creator.

But let’s back up a bit. Genesis first begins with six days of creation. With His spoken word, God creates everything: light, dark, seas, land, birds, and fish. After each day, God calls His creation “good.”

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.” (1:26–28)

The first thing we note in verse 26 is that God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness.” What does it mean to be created in God’s image? Human beings were created to perfectly reflect, as mirror images, God's goodness. However, this perfection, or original righteousness, was lost by the fall into sin.
But being made in the image of God has other dimensions as well, facets that we as human beings still possess, though badly marred by sinfulness. This understanding can inform both our view of ourselves as God’s creatures and our relationships with others. In exploring these questions, we find God’s heart and will for us: He has made us as His unique and best creation. He loves us far more than we can imagine, and by His love we can learn to give and receive love in sincere self-sacrifice.

MADE FOR LOVE

First, note in Genesis 1:26 the plural pronoun: “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness.’” God says, “Let Us,” as in “Let Us create man like We are—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—in our perfect love and unity.” Like the perfect relationship between the persons of the Trinity, so we are made to be in relationship to others. As husbands and wives, we complement each other in a variety of ways. Our bodies fit together. And complementing each other in this way seems to reveal something about God: He made us for love. So we begin to see how holy and awesome marriage really is. It’s not merely a human contract or a casual arrangement to be defined and redefined by human society.

“WE ARE MADE TO BE IN RELATIONSHIP TO OTHERS.”

We are made for love: to both give and receive. Like the perfect love between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we give self-sacrificially to the other. When married persons love self-sacrificially, they both receive and give, showing an image of the perfect love between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As Luther states, it’s like a mirror into the being and nature of God and the love between the persons of the Trinity. Through it, we can see the tenderness and affection of God’s loving heart.²

This view challenges our culture’s idea of love and relationships. Women’s magazines such as Cosmopolitan give “relationship advice” like the popular “Sex Position of the Week”
column or “How to Handle Breakups like a Celebrity.” Men’s magazine *GQ* has the tagline “Look sharp. Live smart.” Sounds good, right? But a sampling of articles touts “Get Her in the Sack: A *GQ* Guide to Bedding” or “The 50 Best Breasts in Movie History.” Or you could follow the flow chart in *GQ*’s guide to online dating, beginning with your choice of three in answer to the question “What are you looking for?” It could be “You know, whatever,” “The one,” or “Sex (Also, sex!).” Or you could scan *Esquire*’s online magazine that gives oral sex advice and chimes in with “New Sex Positions!” These highlights only skim the surface. The rest makes us blush to our toes.

With this as our backdrop, simply getting married feels like we’re bucking societal trends. But the sexual freedom of our age is not leading to happier, healthier lives, no matter what the magazines tout. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that there are nearly twenty million new sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in the U.S. each year and that young people account for 50 percent of new STIs. The cost to treat these STIs is estimated at $16 billion a year in direct medical costs alone. HPV, the most common STI, has no treatment and can lead to further diseases of genital warts and cancers.

And are we happier? In a 2010 report, CDC states that the most commonly used drugs for 20–59-year-olds were antidepressants. A U.S. government agency, the National Institute on Drug Abuse, shows through numerous studies that there’s a direct link between drug abuse and mental illness and reports that illicit drug use among high school students is on the rise in America. Anecdotal evidence abounds: don’t we all know someone in our circles of friends or family who is addicted to drugs or alcohol, who is suffering from a major depressive episode, or who has committed suicide? Clearly, we need another answer.

This is why our calling is so radically different. God’s call to us is for loving, self-sacrificial marriages. And when we show God’s perfect love, we equally self-give to the other: *I* give myself fully, unabashedly, wholeheartedly, even recklessly to *you*, as *you* give yourself fully, unabashedly, wholeheartedly, and recklessly to *me*. 
Patti and Glenn talk about having the faith of a child, finding our joy in the promises of Christ, that Jesus has done it all for us. Patti encourages new believers to simply read the Book of John and start becoming familiar with God’s promises to us and His love for us, and then to continue through life as an individual and in a marriage rejoicing in God and His gifts.

GOOD . . . AND NOT SO GOOD

During the account of creation, we read a repeating refrain, beginning in Genesis 1:10: “God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together He called Seas. And God saw that it was good.” Then God made vegetation and plants—and He saw that it was good. He made the fish and the birds—and He saw that it was good. God’s powerful and creative words brought all things into being, and this was truly good. Over and over this refrain reminds us of God’s very good creation.

However, in this opening to Genesis, one thing is not good. As perfect as creation was, there was one thing missing.

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. (2:18–20)

Here we see that God brings all of the creatures and beasts of the earth to Adam for him to name them. But in the garden, Adam was alone. He was not God. He was not an animal. He was a distinct human person. But being a solitary human person was “not good.” Aloneness for Adam was not ideal. So what does God say—that a
dog would be Adam’s best friend? That a pet would make Adam complete? No. As fabulous as pets are, they cannot talk with us and cannot give us the communion God wants us to have. So, as God had planned from the beginning, He made a companion for Adam. He made Eve.

God causes Adam to go into a deep sleep and then takes one of his ribs to form the woman:

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. (2:21–22)

Finally, here was the equal Adam was hoping for. This was the companion Adam needed.

After the woman is brought from Adam’s side, we hear Adam’s very first words recorded in Scripture:

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. (2:23)

We can almost hear the exuberance in his voice. At last, here is someone, like Adam, who will befriend him and be a companion to him. At last, Adam finds someone who will allow him to love and be loved. He now has a partner to show the love of God to him, and Adam will be a partner to Eve to show God’s love to her.

And interestingly, when God made Eve, He didn’t start from scratch. He made her from Adam’s rib. She is flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone. She and he are of the same stuff. They are distinct persons but one in substance.

It is famously said of this passage that God fashioned Eve from Adam’s rib for a reason. God did not take Eve from Adam’s head so that he would lord over her. He did not take Eve from Adam’s feet so that he would trample her. Instead, God took Eve from Adam’s rib to be by his side. This description is commonly attributed to
Martin Luther and may have come about based on one of Luther’s terms of endearment for his wife, Katharina: “Kitty, my rib.”

God created men and women to be in relationship with one another; specifically, God made man and woman to love each other fully, selflessly, and as a gift in marriage. And when God looked out at His creation, He saw that “it was very good” (Genesis 1:31). We are not meant to be alone; to be human means that we are created to love and be loved.

UNIQUELY MADE

The soft pastel blues, greens, yellows, and pinks of the crocheted baby blanket was a gift for our son from a sweet woman at our church in the L.A. area, where Scott served as a vicar for a year in the early 1990s. We found out we were expecting our first child shortly after we’d returned from his vicarage year, and this was one of the generous gifts from the congregation.

When our son was still an infant, we discovered that he had a special attachment to that particular baby blanket—though we had several others we used interchangeably. One night when he was nearly a year old, he was crying in his crib after bedtime, and we couldn’t figure out why. Finally, out of desperation, we grabbed this particular blanket and covered him up. Soon, he was content and sleeping again. We were amazed that an infant so young could become attached to one particular blanket. But the story doesn’t end there.

From that moment on, Blankey became Jacob’s constant comfort, though we did have a spare, just in case. When Jacob was a preschooler, Scott took his first call to a church in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where he would be the sole pastor. As we were packing up the moving truck, the house was chaotic. We had a three-year-old son, two cats, and a houseful of furniture to get out the door. Finally, Scott stowed the cats in his car to drive out to our new home, and Jacob and I stayed behind to finish cleaning. We would stay with friends and then make an early start the next day. But at bedtime, we discovered the worst—Blankey was missing! Fortunately, the spare was located, but it took three months until
Jacob was finally reunited with his special blanket. It had been stuck in a hamper that got broken during the move and then was shoved in the basement. When we finally went to throw the hamper away, we discovered the prodigal blanket. The reunion between Jacob and his Blankey was thrilling!

As a parent, these stories—one upon another—are innumerable. They are intimate details of the completely unique experience of our son, interwoven with our own unique histories. This individuality in experience, in personality, in body, mind, and spirit is another aspect that Genesis can help us understand. And as our son grows older, we begin to look back and see how God weaves His children together in families and friendships.

As parents, we've experienced the uniqueness of one particular person by being the closest observers of our son. We remember the first time we looked into his infant face. We know that the scar on his forehead came from a fall on the bleachers as a six-year-old. We recall the name of his favorite stuffed animal and, yes, the story of Blankey getting stuck in a broken hamper when we moved. If we, as imperfect parents, know and treasure all of these intimate details of our child's life, think of God's loving heart, cherishing all of His children. God has shaped each person as a unique individual with a unique fingerprint and bone structure, a unique personality and temperament, and with unique wishes and hopes for the future. But even beyond the unique distinctions between persons, God has made people distinct from all other of His creatures, setting us apart as the pinnacle of His creation.

MADE IN GOD’S IMAGE

In 2011, we adopted a pair of cats, littermates, who definitely look related but couldn't be more distinct in personality. Kenji, mild-mannered and fun-loving, has never met a toy he didn't adore. Yuki, with a dominant personality, is faster, hungrier, and more demanding than his easygoing brother. Through their daily behaviors, these critters show their distinct personalities. Isn't God's creation truly remarkable? Even the common house cat exhibits features of personality and uniqueness!
But even though these animals are individual, Genesis tells us they are still quite distinct from people. This runs counter to some extreme attitudes that come closer to the mainstream of our culture today. PETA and other groups exist for the ethical treatment of animals. To a reasonable extent, this makes sense. When our son was young, we never let him kill ants just for fun. We insisted that these were God’s creatures too. As Christians who hold to the Scriptures, we acknowledge that we are stewards of the earth, entrusted by God to care for His creation, which of course includes animals.

But some of these animal-rights groups go to the extreme, insisting that “Animals are not ours to eat, wear, experiment on, use for entertainment, or abuse in any way” (PETA). While certainly abusing animals is cruel and immoral, God has given us the freedom to enjoy a good steak or own a pet. Animals’ rights do not and should not extend as far as human rights do. But for much of society, the line between human and animal is becoming blurred. In the news in recent years, a few men and women have even married animals—a man married a dog, while a woman married a dolphin. As Bible believers, however, we hold that God’s good creation has a created order. God placed Adam in the Garden of Eden as the steward, or manager, of the earth. The world is not ours to ransack and destroy, but it is ours to use as needed for the benefit of our neighbor.

This fundamental difference between people and animals comes from being created in God’s image and likeness. Certainly, this image of God is badly obscured by sin. It is like Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 13:12: “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face.” We only see dimly or darkly what God intended this world to be. However, human beings still express godlikeness unique in all of creation.

MADE MALE AND FEMALE

In Matthew 19, Jesus affirms what is clearly stated in Genesis: God made persons equal in person and dignity but different in gender. The Pharisees, or teachers of the law, approached Jesus with a
question about the legality or appropriateness of divorce.

And Pharisees came up to Him and tested Him by asking, “Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?” [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.” (Matthew 19:3–6)

Here we see that Jesus upholds the Genesis account, affirming that God made His creatures male and female. So what does it mean to be made male and female?

One implication of the biblical account is the distinction between genders. This brings up a variety of issues. The sexual revolution of the last fifty years has had far-reaching effects on our culture. Some of these changes are positive: women's pay for equal work has come closer to the male equivalent; women's rights in the workplace are better protected. But in other ways, could it be that the pendulum has perhaps swung too far? Yes, women have more opportunities in the workplace, but it could be argued that they are also more stressed and stretched thin as they work full-time and still bear the most responsibility when it comes to raising children and caring for the home. And has all of this freedom really helped us in the long run? It could be argued that in the quest for sexual revolution, we also are more diseased, depressed, and lonely.

Another challenge for Christian women today is to understand their own dignity and vocation in God's kingdom. In the midst of today's gender sensitivity, women tend to diminish their “femaleness” and adopt male qualities rather than embracing their own dignity and worth as women.

Throughout the New Testament, Jesus raises up the position of women in His care. God could have chosen any way for His Son to come into the world, but He chose a woman, Mary, to bear the
Son of God in her womb. And Mary gets it. She realizes the honor given her. She says, "He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name" (Luke 1:49).

The first witnesses of the resurrected Christ were women, not men. Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James looked into the empty tomb and wondered where the Lord could be. An angel in dazzling clothes appeared to them and said, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen" (Luke 24:5–6).

Many people falsely believe that the Church is misogynistic or that Jesus put women “in their place.” But in fact Jesus’ ministry to women was revolutionary for His time. The women who crossed Jesus’ path in His earthly ministry learned that Jesus makes “all things new” (Revelation 21:5). Even His disciples “marveled” at Jesus’ ministry to women (John 4:27). All sorts of women approached Jesus—they had physical illnesses, losses, and needs, and Jesus cared for them. There was a woman with the “flow of blood” who was healed by simply touching the Lord’s cloak. He praised her great faith (Mark 5:34). He had compassion on the Canaanite woman whose daughter needed healing (Matthew 15:28). He hung out with the “untouchables.” He associated with the “undesirables.” He even went so far as to say to the Pharisees: “Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you” (Matthew 21:31)—a comment that likely did not go over well.

The sexual revolution of the last fifty years has created problems for men too. Very few television shows or movies portray men positively in traditional or biblical roles. Consider the Homer Simpsons or many other idle, overweight, ineffective men—especially fathers—on television. Men are the cliché, lazy stereotypes who are always the butt of jokes. Are men now denigrated, disparaged, and disrespected? Are the opinions of men cherished and valued? It’s an important question to consider. Further, are men valued as men, or are they expected to adopt more feminine qualities?
“COULD WE LEARN TO SEE MALE AND FEMALE COMPLEMENTARITY AS A GIFT TO BE TREASURED INSTEAD OF AN OFFENSE TO OVERCOME?”

Throughout the Gospels, we see Jesus upholding the dignity of women as well as of men. He shows through His words and actions His love and value for each of God’s creations—men and women. This can inform our views today. Instead of taking our cues from society, could we view things from God’s perspective, upholding the basic dignity and equality of both male and female? Could we learn to see male and female complementarity as a gift to be treasured instead of an offense to overcome?

Ken and Amy describe how we are designed for love and marriage. And God gives us the opportunity to model His love through our marriages. God has plans for us, and part of His plan, Amy says, was for her to marry Ken. He designs people to give and receive love.

Luther wrote about God’s plan in the Large Catechism:

He created man and woman separately . . . so that they might live together in marriage, be fruitful, bear children, and nourish and train them to honor God [Genesis 1:28; Psalm 128; Proverbs 22:6; Ephesians 6:4]. (I 207)

As Luther affirms here, men and women were created with differences in order to be in relationship with each other and to expand their love through the human family.

God’s care for His children shows through the very nature of our bodies. He made us to fit with each other. We complement each other. This sexual complementarity of men and women reveals
that God has made us to be in relationship with each other. We are made for love. And even beyond our physicality, God has made men and women to complement each other in temperament, in psychology, and in personality.

Now that we've unpacked the origins of marriage, we can start to see God's vision for marriage come into focus. From Genesis 1–2 and Matthew 19, we see the care God has taken to create us male and female, to make our bodies to love and be loved. Marriage is the best and highest expression of this love—even so great that it mirrors the unity and communion of the persons of the Trinity. This reflection of the divine underscores the seriousness and importance of marriage and reminds us again why we have so high a regard for it. The world may jump willy-nilly from one marriage to the next, but we should not be haphazard or careless as we enter into marriage. Rather, we are circumspect and prayerful as we speak vows for life to husband or wife.

BUT SIN MESSED EVERYTHING UP

All of this is well and good. We can intellectually assent to the validity of Genesis and the perfection of the Garden of Eden. We can rejoice in God's good creation being made in His image and likeness. We can see the loving, open communion Adam and Eve had with each other and desire such closeness with our own spouses.

“WHERE WE LIVE IS FAR FROM EDEN.”

But where we live is far from Eden—in time, in space, in reality. We live in a world with warts and blemishes, broken dishes and spilled milk, lymphomas and heart disease, car wrecks and senseless school shootings. We see messed-up relationships all around us and even experience such brokenness ourselves. We suffer the sting of insults, the heartbreak of betrayal, and the pain of being gossiped about, lied about, or slandered. It hurts. A lot. And when we begin to understand how perfect God's creation was, how Adam and Eve had unity and communion, we mourn the loss all the more.
RELATIONSHIP PITFALL: SELFISHNESS

Selfishness is the opposite of love. Ask yourself if you are a giver or a taker. Do you think only of yourself? Selfishness is, in a sense, the most fundamental sin, the bedrock of all sinfulness. Selfishness motivated Eve to disregard the warnings of God and heed the serpent’s call. Selfishness is pride. It is placing yourself in the center. And nothing is more deadly to a marriage.

Philippians 2:3 makes clear that love always means that you put the other person before yourself: “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.” But be careful. The pendulum could swing too far in the opposite direction. Scripture does not say that you are supposed to ignore completely your own needs or wants. It is better to express your needs rather than suppress them. While it might seem obvious to you what you need in a relationship, and you may wish that your beloved understood intuitively how to express love to you, this is frequently not the case. Love does not require you to disregard completely your own emotional, mental, and physical needs. The trouble comes when an individual exalts his own needs above those of the people around him. This is not easy, and you will spend the rest of your life practicing at not being selfish. That is because it is native to our fallen condition to be radically self-centered.

There is no love greater than the love that God shows toward His rebellious children by granting the forgiveness of their sins. This is one reason why it is extremely important for your family to be present regularly in God’s house, where the Good News of free salvation is purely preached and the Sacraments are administered according to Christ’s institution. As you hear that you are the recipient of unselfish divine love, that God in Christ has made the ultimate sacrifice on your behalf, God’s Spirit melts the hardened me-centered heart.
KEY TO A SUCCESSFUL MARRIAGE:
COMPATIBILITY

Birds of a feather flock together, but opposites attract. Two people of widely different personalities and viewpoints might get along famously because they complement each other. The excitement of difference can fuel curiosity and discovery in a relationship. However, without areas of meaningful commonality, common interests, shared values and beliefs, realizing a lasting relationship will be fraught with difficulty.

You do not have to agree on everything, but you do have to respect and appreciate the differences. A lot of this has to do with personal temperament. How tolerant are you of difference? Are your differences irritations or endearments?

For example:

One of you is rabidly punctual and the other is constantly late.

One of you is almost obsessively tidy and the other is a slob.

One of you enjoys frequent outings with friends and the other is a homebody.

These differences do not have to be a negative. Instead, focus on identifying the things in your relationship that you both enjoy. What interests or goals do you share? How can you support each other when your interests and goals vary? Accept that you will not always want the exact same things. That is all right as long as you also explore those areas you share in common. Attend lectures or concerts, work on hobbies, volunteer at church, go skiing. Give each other room to be individuals, but look for places of overlap and make the most of them. Make sure you know each other well before getting married. This process of exploration and discovery takes time.