Your Marriage Masterpiece

Study Guide

The problem with writing a book like *Your Marriage Masterpiece* is that so much more could be explored. An author has to make difficult choices about what to include, or the text quickly becomes too long. In this book I decided to concentrate on one big idea, then allow readers to meditate on it and consider how it might apply to their own circumstances.

This study guide is intended to help you dig deeper into the rich depths of God’s model for marriage. You may want to work through the questions alone, perhaps reflecting on them in a journal. Or you and your spouse may choose to go through this study together. You may even prefer to use this as a framework for a small-group study. Whatever manner you choose, I encourage you to prayerfully ask God to reveal how His marvelous love relationship with you can be reflected in your marriage.

The structure for each of the 12 sessions is as follows:

1. **Points to Ponder:** This will refer to specific content in the book.
2. **Contrasting Pictures:** You are asked to lay the Masterpiece of God’s marriage next to what our culture portrays about marriage.
3. **Reflections on the Masterpiece:** You are invited to delve deeper into the Scriptures.
4. **Application of the Masterpiece:** God’s marriage should inspire us in our marriages. This section will suggest possible applications.

Do not feel you must answer every question. This is simply a guide, giving you some suggestions of where to go for further reflection and discussion.

**Session 1: Whatever Happened to Happily Ever After?**
Covering the prologue and chapters 1–3.

**Points to Ponder:**
1. What was your first reaction to Jim’s declaration that he wanted to divorce Bonnie because he was unhappy?

2. What is your reaction to the idea, expressed by Philip Harvey and Dr. David Fromm, that marriage is “an old-fashioned idea”?

**Contrasting Pictures:**
1. What reasons have you heard among friends or family for getting divorced?

2. If you have any acquaintances who have chosen not to marry (remaining single, cohabiting, or following some other alternative), try to answer these questions: “Why are they making this choice?” “Would you try to change their minds?” “Why or why not?”
Reflections on the Masterpiece:
Read slowly Genesis 1 and 2.
  1. If God is truly the Artist, what is your first impression when you look at His creation?

  2. Why did God create Adam and Eve in a manner so different from the rest of the creatures?

  3. Why did God make Adam wait before He created Eve? Why show Adam all the other creatures first?

  4. Mike Mason writes: “To ‘fall in love’ actually means . . . to have a revelation from God.” Why do you think he says that?

Application of the Masterpiece:
It has been suggested that in the first marriage Adam and Eve (a) had a three-way relationship among God, husband, and wife, (b) enjoyed a shared adventure, (c) grew together in knowledge, and (d) reflected the image of God as a couple. Do any of these four things characterize your marriage? Which one(s)?

Try to quantify your answer by rating your marriage in each of these areas (relationship with God, shared adventure, growing in knowledge, and reflecting God’s image) on a scale from 1 to 10, with 10 being ideal. What might move your marriage closer to 10?

Session 2: Every Marriage Needs a Hero
Covering chapters 4 and 5.
Points to Ponder:
  1. After reading the first five chapters, do you believe Adam and Eve were happy in the Garden of Eden? Why or why not?

  2. What do you think attracted the first couple to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil?
Contrasting Pictures:
“Happiness and self-fulfillment were a natural byproduct of marriage as God intended it, but not the primary purpose for marriage.” Do you agree with this assessment? Why or why not? How does that compare with the current cultural thinking about marriage?

Reflections on the Masterpiece:
Read Genesis 3.
1. How could Adam and Eve have helped each other resist the temptation?

2. What were the immediate consequences to the first couple when they disobeyed God’s command?

3. What were the long-term consequences to the institution of marriage because of Adam and Eve’s disobedience?

4. What evidence do you see today of the Fall as it affects marriages?

5. How much do you think self-centeredness contributed to the fall of Adam and Eve?

Application of the Masterpiece:
“The irony is that self-centeredness often produces the opposite of what we desire. . . . The more I concentrate on me—on my needs, my desires, my happiness—the less likely I am to find what I want.”

Prayerfully ask yourself if there is a recent situation in which you realized this fact (or a time when you should have and didn’t). You may want to write a prayer of confession, admitting where you are selfish in your marriage, and then ask God to change your attitude.

Session 3: A Role Model for Marriage
Based on chapter 5.
Points to Ponder:
Jim, the baseball player, was unhappy being married to Bonnie. What options did Jim have? What are the pros and cons of each option?
Contrasting Pictures:
Noting the prevalence of failed celebrity marriages, we might conclude that “these beautiful people can reveal little to us about true marital happiness.” Why do you think so many people look to celebrity marriages as their models?

Reflections on the Masterpiece:
Read Isaiah 54:5-7 and Ezekiel 16:8-14.
1. Why did God get married? What do you think He desires from His marriage?


3. Read 2 Corinthians 11:2, Ephesians 5:31-32, and Revelation 19:7-9. The church is described as the bride of Christ. Does that truth affect your own relationship with Christ? If so, how?

4. What does the picture of Christ and His bride, the church, say to you about how God might view your marriage?

Application of the Masterpiece:
1. What is your first reaction when you read, “God got married”?

2. If you could ask one question of God about His marriage, what would it be?

Session 4: God’s Marriage Is a Covenant Marriage
Covers chapters 6 and 7.
Points to Ponder:
1. Why do you think God used a familiar human ceremony when He made His promise to Abram?

2. What does this say about the way God views promises?
Contrasting Pictures:
Prenuptial agreements begin with the same goal as a covenant: They bind two people together. But is there anything else they have in common? How are they different?

Compare and contrast them for yourself:

**Prenuptial Agreement vs. Covenant**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Escape clause</th>
<th>Irrevocable</th>
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<td>Witnessed by the state</td>
<td>Witnessed by God</td>
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Reflections on the Masterpiece:
Read Isaiah 54:5-10 and Deuteronomy 23:21-23.

1. What do these passages have to say about the way God views a marriage covenant?

2. What do you think most people’s understanding of a covenant is today?

3. How does an understanding of the true nature of a covenant change a marriage?

Application of the Masterpiece:
What do you think of the phrase “What doesn’t cost much doesn’t mean much”? If it is true that price determines value, what price would you affix to your marriage? How many things (small or big) can you think of that boost your relationship’s value?

Session 5: God’s Marriage Is a Passionate Marriage
Covers chapters 8 and 9.

Points to Ponder:

1. What is your take on the steamy story of love found in the Song of Songs?

2. Why do you think this story is included in the Bible?
Contrasting Pictures:
1. Our society says two people should stay married as long as they still “love” each other. In other words, loving feelings are the basis for marriage. How is that different from the biblical view?

2. What thoughts or actions constitute adultery? Does it have to include sexual intercourse to be considered adultery?

How does God’s view differ from the world’s or even from what many Christians assume?

Reflections on the Masterpiece:
Read Song of Songs 4—5:1.
1. Why do you think Solomon dwells so long on the physical beauty of his lover?

2. What impact did his deliberate metaphors have on Solomon’s bride (v. 16)?

3. What does God seem to be saying to married couples through this passage?

Application of the Masterpiece:
Think back to the first few expressions of love you and your spouse shared with each other.
1. How has your passion, whether physical or emotional, changed since then?

2. How has your marital commitment affected your passion? Why do you think that is?

3. Do you see value in sustaining romance? What are some ways you want to achieve that?

Session 6: God’s Marriage Is a Fighting Marriage
Covers chapters 10 and 11.
Points to Ponder:
1. If you were one of the prophets, how do you think you would have felt knowing the extent of God’s jealousy over idolatry?
2. What does God’s jealousy tell you about how He views His relationship with His people? Do you think God might have felt trapped like Jim, the baseball player?

Contrasting Pictures:
Our culture teaches us to fight for our own rights or to find a compromise so that both our desires and those of our spouse get equal attention. How is that different from fighting for a marriage, as God did?

Reflections on the Masterpiece:
Read Ezekiel 16:15-63, especially vv. 53-63.
1. What was the source of Israel’s unfaithfulness? (see v. 15)

2. Do you think the Israelites understood the covenant they were bound to? Why or why not?

3. Based on the covenant, how did God respond to the threat to His marriage?

4. How does the way that God handled Israel’s infidelity demonstrate the right way to fight?

5. Did God adjust His expectations when Israel “cheated” on Him? Are there times when we should adjust our expectations in our relationships?

Application of the Masterpiece:
Your relationship can be conflict-free! All you have to do is always meet your partner’s expectations. Sound easy? Of course not! Yet if you can communicate your expectations to your partner openly and honestly, then when a conflict arises, your spouse may be prepared to give special attention to your expectation rather than challenge it. For this important exercise, try to list your expectations and suggest ways that will help your spouse honor them. Second—but more important—be as honest as you can about your own self-centered expectations and flag them as areas to work on.

Session 7: God’s Marriage Is a One-Sided Marriage
Covers chapters 12 and 13.
Points to Ponder:
1. What do you think is the goal of marriage?

2. Can a person in an unhappy marriage still find meaning in the relationship? Why or why not?

3. How did you feel when reading about Joseph’s reaction to Georgine’s unfaithfulness?

Contrasting Pictures:
What is the common “wisdom” offered today to a person trapped in a one-sided marriage? What justifications are often made for this recommended course of action?

Reflections on the Masterpiece:
Read Hosea 1–3.
1. How closely do you think the details of Hosea’s one-sided marriage match the one God endured with Israel?

2. Why do you think that, right after Hosea says God has disowned Israel, he quickly assures them that God will also restore the covenant (1:9-10)?

3. How would you describe God’s tone when He promises to win Israel back (2:14-23)?

Application of the Masterpiece:
If your spouse was severely disabled, how would you respond? Or if your spouse became indifferent and unromantic, what would God want you to do?

Session 8: God’s Marriage Is a Heroic Marriage
Covers chapters 14 and 15.
Points to Ponder:
Do you think Jesus enjoyed becoming a hero? If yes, why? If not, then why did He do it?

Contrasting Pictures:
Popular entertainment demonstrates that people are obsessed with stories. Touching, dramatic, suspenseful—we live many experiences vicariously in the course of a day.
1. Think of a film or story that portrays self-sacrifice, where the hero puts another person’s welfare above his or her own. What was your reaction to this heroic act?

2. If you can, think of another story where the protagonist acted selfishly instead of heroically, and compare the two “heroes.” Which story was more satisfying? Why?

**Reflections on the Masterpiece:**
Read Philippians 2:1-11.
1. Paul was writing to the church. But how might this also apply to your marriage? Be specific.

2. What are some ways Jesus “made himself nothing” and took on the form of a servant?

3. Following the example of Christ, how can you serve your spouse?

4. What is Jesus feeling here?

5. Why is Jesus the ultimate hero?

**Application of the Masterpiece:**
At the heart of every hero is self-sacrifice. What opportunities do you have to love your mate sacrificially?

**Session 9: The Heroic Husband**
Covers chapters 14 and 15.

**Points to Ponder:**
1. Did the pastor whose wife was unfaithful (chapter 15, pages 161–162) have the right to divorce? Why or why not?

2. What were the benefits and liabilities of his decision to fight for his marriage?
Contrasting Pictures:
How does society define a “real man”? Compare that macho image with this book’s concept of a hero.

Reflections on the Masterpiece:
Read Ephesians 5:22-33 (especially v. 25) again.
1. How many of these verses talk about marital happiness?

2. How does Paul say a husband should sacrifice for his wife?

3. What does Jesus’ sacrifice tell you about the nature of marital love?

4. What means does the Holy Spirit use to help people understand the “great mystery” concerning Christ and His church?

5. How does Christ’s sacrifice for the church put your sacrifice in perspective?

Application of the Masterpiece:
Jesus led by example. Not only did He heroically save us from death, but He also left us a model of perfect love in His deliberate sacrifice. Not many husbands will ever have the chance to die for their wives. Yet there are ways men can show that type of sacrificial love. Look for some specific opportunities in your daily life together.

Session 10: The Heroic Wife
Covers chapters 14 and 15.
Points to Ponder:
1. Shouldn’t Linda (chapter 15, pages 166–168) have returned Ron’s fire? Or demanded equal consideration for her career? What is your evaluation of her response?

2. “Be imitators of God, therefore . . .” (Ephesians 5:1). How do you feel knowing you can never attain such a high standard in marriage as the one Paul suggests?

Contrasting Pictures:
In our culture, submission and servanthood usually mean playing an inferior role and being less valued than someone in a leadership position. How does this match or differ from the Bible’s view?
Reflections on the Masterpiece:
Read Genesis 2:18-24 again. Also Ephesians 5:22-33.
1. What are the roles given for wives in these verses?

2. How does the idea of self-sacrifice for wives differ from that of husbands?

3. How do you see this ideal playing out in your sacrifices for your husband?

Application of the Masterpiece:
Think of a specific instance when you can sacrifice for your husband. Be creative.

Session 11: Return to Eden
Covers chapters 16 and 17.
Points to Ponder:
1. What is required to make marriage a three-way relationship?

2. Think of a couple you know who seem to be pursuing an adventure together. How does that help their marriage?

Contrasting Pictures:
Why do most people get married? What adventure or shared purpose (if any) seems to underlie the marriages you observe around you?

Reflections on the Masterpiece:
1. What do you think Abram and Sarai felt when God told Abram to “leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you”?

2. Describe in your own words the joint adventure that God was setting before Abram and his wife.

Read Galatians 5:16-26.
3. How does the Holy Spirit help marriages “return to Eden”?
Application of the Masterpiece:
1. Talk as a couple about the adventure you’ve been on with God and where you think it’s heading. Then discuss your goals and purposes. What does God want to accomplish through you together?

2. For the next week, spend a few minutes each day in prayer together about your goals.

Session 12: Is There Happiness in Our Future?
Covers chapters 18 and 19.
Points to Ponder:
1. Have you experienced a transcendent moment with your partner as Al and Jo did? If so, how did it affect you and your relationship?

2. What are some ways in which you could expand or capitalize on that moment?

Contrasting Pictures:
What value does the world place on happiness in marriage? How important is it to you? Is your happiness dependent on your spouse’s intellectual or physical attractiveness? What if that attraction fades over time?

Reflections on the Masterpiece:
1. What significance does this coming marriage have for your own relationship now?

2. What does John’s description promise to believers?

3. How does this hope of things to come help you deal with marital troubles here and now?

Application of the Masterpiece:
1. What are some ways you’ve noticed yourself thinking differently about marriage in general, or your marriage in particular, after viewing God’s Masterpiece?
2. Based on God’s picture of marriage, what are three things you can do in the next month to cause your marriage to reflect God’s image?