

# MARRIAGE, FAMILY, AND WITNESS



## *Partnered Together with Purpose*

### SCRIPTURE FOCUS

*“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”* Genesis 1:27

*“Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”* Genesis 2:24

*“Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends...”* 1 Corinthians 13: 4-8

*“...and you will be My witnesses...”* Acts 1:8

*“And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.”* Colossians 3:14

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### QUOTES

*“The key is not to find the right person, but to become the right person: a person who has learned to practice Christian love at the most intimate level.”* Gary DeLashmutt & Dennis McCallum<sup>1</sup>

*“Just as celibates use abstinence and religious hermits use isolation, so we can use marriage for the same purpose—to grow in our service, obedience, character, pursuit, and love of God.”* Gary Thomas<sup>2</sup>

*“The first thing God does is to knock pretense and the pious pose right out of me. The Holy Spirit reveals that God loves me not because I was lovable, but because it was His nature to*

do so. Now, he says to me, show the same love to others—“Love as I have loved you.” Oswald Chambers<sup>3</sup>

“So far then from abolishing marriage, [Jesus] sets it on a firmer basis and sanctifies it through faith. The disciple’s exclusive adherence to Christ is marked by discipline and self-denial. Christ is the Lord even of marriage. There is, of course, a difference between the Christian and the bourgeois conception of marriage, but Christianity does not, therefore, depreciate marriage, it sanctifies it.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer<sup>4</sup>

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## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

As a result of the readings, discussion and activities in this lesson, the candidate should be able to ...

- name and understand the foundations for marriage,
- identify the realities of marriage and family in a cross-cultural setting,
- recognize the challenges and joys of marriage and family in the overseas context,
- and explore strategies and resources for successful living and witness as couples and families.

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## INTRODUCTION

This lesson is not a Bible study on marriage and family or a course for marriage enrichment or child-rearing. Loads of materials exist in book form or via conferences for improving one’s marriage and living as a family. A general list of books and websites at the end of this lesson provides resources should you wish to explore these topics further. Rather, the aim of this lesson is to highlight the necessary foundations for marriage, the challenge and blessing of cross-cultural shock, and the ways in which marriage and family can become part of our witness to Jesus Christ.

No matter where we live and what job we do, the way we live as married people and function as families is central to who we are, how we relate to others, and the way in which we represent Christ. The issues within marriage and family are multifaceted and complex, and thus, require hard work. This is especially true when we live cross-culturally. Add to the normal challenges of any marriage and family the dynamics of navigating a foreign culture, cross-cultural friendships, and the stress of language and culture learning, and the possibilities for serious conflict and relational breakdowns increase dramatically. Add to these challenges the calling to give witness to Jesus Christ, and it is easy to see that true diligence and critical attention to marriage and family are not optional but essential.

Let’s begin at the beginning. What are the foundation blocks upon which marriage is to be built?

### **Marriage**

We meet someone, and we marry. We plan and prepare as if the ceremony and honeymoon are the end of the matter. And yet, this is only the beginning.

CASE STUDY: CURT AND ANNA

Curt and Anna met during their sophomore year at university, dated steadily throughout their studies, and married a month after graduation. They both had come to faith in Jesus as young people but had left university with only a mild commitment to God and the church. During their years at university, they had been somewhat active in a local church and had even gone on one of its mission trips during Spring break to do construction in Mexico.

Curt had majored in business and Anna in elementary education, so once they graduated and married, they began looking for jobs in their respective fields of study. Anna immediately found a teaching position in a local school. Curt, on the other hand, had a hard time finding a job of any kind. At first, he applied to what seemed to be ideal positions for his training and aspirations, but after six months of looking, he was at the point of taking whatever job might come along. One day, he ran into Sally, one of his classmates from university days. After talking over coffee for a couple of hours, they decided they would start a new company. So, as partners, Sally put up the majority of the money and Curt began managing accounts.

After only thirteen months, the business had grown considerably and had even begun to turn a profit. Curt worked night and day and even weekends to make the fledgling business a success. And yet, once the business was established and the profit margin grew, Curt did not cut back on his work hours but continued to push harder and harder toward more and more success. After just three years, the business was booming and expanding. He and Sally had proven to be quite a team. He felt at ease with her and she liked working with Curt. As business partners, they shared everything and struggled with every issue together. In time, what began for Curt as admiration for Sally's ability in the partnership, turned into secret thoughts about Sally. He imagined the two of them spending time outside the office together and being intimate with each other.

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*HE IMAGINED THE TWO OF THEM  
SPENDING TIME OUTSIDE THE OFFICE  
TOGETHER.*

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Curt and Anna's marriage had begun with loads of excitement and promise, but now the business seemed to tower over everything, including Curt and Anna's relationship. Curt spent more time on the business than he did at home and more time with Sally than he did with Anna. Anna loathed the business and what it was doing to Curt; she was jealous of Sally and the attention Curt paid to her. Anna longed for the days when she and Curt were struggling just to put food on the table because at least they struggled together. Now they barely saw each other, and when they were physically together, it was as if Curt was somewhere else. Anna began to withhold thoughts and feelings from Curt and began spending more and more time with a college girlfriend. Both were lonely, and therefore, confided in each other. In her anger, hurt, and jealousy, Anna criticized and complained about Curt to her friend, who, of course, told Anna she was right to feel the way she did. More and more evenings Curt would come home to find that Anna was out with her friend at a movie or having dinner, only returning after Curt had gone to bed.

Curt was aware of what the business had done to him and to his marriage but found it hard to

slow down or refocus his attention. The business had become like a drug that gave him a rush and yet left him wanting more.

One fall evening as Curt and Anna sat in silence at the dinner table, Anna asked aloud what she had been thinking and rehearsing in her mind for months. “Curt, who are you?” Curt’s fork stopped in mid-air. “What do you mean? You know who I am.” Anna replied, “No, I am no longer certain who you are. It is as though this business has gone from something you did for a living to something that now defines who you are. You are the business.” What Anna said was too true for Curt to brush aside or refute. He did not respond but continued eating in silence. Anna had said all she wished to say, so she too ate in silence.

The next morning, Curt had to drop some papers by the office of a realtor friend in order to make a counteroffer on a building that he and Sally wanted to buy. Curt entered the building and began searching for his friend’s office. Winding his way to the back of the building, he found Mike Smith’s office and a few people gathered at the doorway. As Curt approached the open door and the gathered people, he could hear someone talking about Mike and his forty years of service to the company. When Curt pulled even with the door, he could see his realtor friend standing at his desk with a small box in one hand and a nice wristwatch in the other. His friend, Mike, looked as though something had sucked the life out of him. He looked drawn and tired. Curt was aware that Mike’s wife had left the marriage as soon as the children were out of the house and he had since gone through a series of failed relationships. Curt stood staring into the office, thinking, “Is this all there is in the end – a lapel pin, a wristwatch, and loneliness?”

Curt did not wait to talk to Mike or even go to his company office. Instead, he went back home. It was summer, so Anna was not at school but at home doing laundry. Curt walked straight

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*“IS THIS ALL THERE IS IN THE END – A  
LAPEL PIN, A WRISTWATCH, AND  
LONELINESS?”*

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into the laundry room, took Anna’s hand, and spoke straight to her. “Anna, you are right. I don’t know who I am anymore. The business has come to define me and has pulled me away from you and everything else that is important. It has pulled me away from me.” The two of them stood

in the laundry room and talked for two or three hours. He did most of the talking. He talked about how the job had gone from being a business opportunity to being a source of pride and self-worth. He confessed that he had gone to places in his mind with Sally that he should not have gone.

He then admitted that left to himself and his tendencies, he would just keep on hurting Anna and not remain faithful. “I need God to change me,” he told Anna. By the time he had said all he could say, they both had tears streaming down their cheeks and they were no longer just holding hands but embracing each other.

Curt pulled away and said, “Anna, will you forgive me?” Anna quickly asked the same, “Curt, will you forgive me?” In unison, they said, “yes.” Right there in the laundry room, they knelt, held each other, and prayed. In desperation, they asked God for a new beginning and a purpose that would bind them together as a couple to serve God’s purpose. They placed their marriage, jobs, and future before God to use however He wished.

The reasons for their marital difficulty were clear. As they talked through the afternoon, they

identified ways in which they hoped to repair the damage to their relationship and the means by which they would protect themselves against future troubles. First, they pledged to tell each other everything, no matter how painful. They would talk about feelings, struggles, joys, and disappointments. Anna promised not to try to 'fix' Curt but to listen to him and ask questions.

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*WILL YOU FORGIVE ME?*

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Second, they renewed their vow to love each other, no matter what might transpire between them or what might happen to them. They acknowledged that loving each other included more than saying the words, "I love you," but caring for and helping each other. Third, they decided to do something they had never done before – pray together. They had, of course, mouthed prayers before meals, but this new decision to pray meant that they would ask God together for what they needed and to pray for each other. And last of all, they determined to find a church and make worship of God and service to others a priority. They also knew that they needed the influence of others in their marriage and lives.

The next day, Curt told Sally that he wanted to dissolve the partnership and divide up the assets. Curt had hoped that they might have an amicable separation and part as friends. Sally had no objections, said it had been fun and was willing to be cooperative in the separation.

Now that Curt once again did not have a job, he began praying that God would provide exactly what he and Anna needed. The next Sunday, they went to the church just down the street from them. The pastor's sermon seemed to be directed straight at Curt. "If your only purpose in life is to make money, spend money, and then retire, what will you have at the end of life? You were created for a purpose much larger than a paycheck or a dividend. You were created to glorify God through every aspect of your life – marriage, work, relationships, and worship. You are a man or woman created in God's image, for God's purpose. If you want to know this purpose, pray as Jesus prayed to His Father, 'not my will but your will be done.'"

Curt prayed that prayer right then and there and continued praying it every day. As he woke up, as he searched for work, as he and Anna made decisions, as they worked through misunderstandings, Curt prayed those words over and over. As he prayed with Anna at meals and bedtime, she heard her husband pray, "not my will but your will be done."

**REFLECT #1**

1. What was the cause of the separation and distancing that occurred between Curt and Anna?
2. Who was at fault? Curt? Anna? Sally?
3. What exactly happened that led to their conversation in the laundry room?
4. What does Curt's prayer – "not my will but your will be done" – actually mean?

## FOUNDATIONS

While all of us are flawed and broken people and will continually fall short of what is ideal, the high standards as set forth in Scripture should continually and constantly pull at us and cause us to move toward God's ideals. It seems that too many people settle too quickly for less than God's ideals or rationalize compromise too easily. Thus, it is only right that we begin this lesson by stating the values and beliefs that should define who we are and determine to what we should strive as followers of Christ. Our human nature is to gravitate toward attitudes and actions that harm ourselves and others. God's nature, on the other hand, is to forgive us of our

sin and selfishness and allow us to begin again. This is why it is important that we keep His ideals before us in order that we might know from where we have wandered. Scripture teaches and illustrates that fidelity, morality, and love are the foundation stones upon which we build marriage and family.

### FIDELITY

The covenant relationship of marriage between a man and a woman is a sacred pledge and bond that is meant to remain intact and to endure throughout time and eternity. When a couple exchanges vows with each other and before God, they are making a covenant with each other in the same way God binds himself to us. People do separate and divorce does happen, but the fact that this is the case does not minimize or negate the ideal for marriage—covenant marriage between two people for all of life.

The ideal of fidelity not only means staying together no matter what but also includes physical, emotional and spiritual fidelity through each phase of life. Infidelity does not happen all at once but comes bit-by-bit, step-by-step, as one spouse steps away from the other spiritually, emotionally, and physically. Fidelity as an ideal should call us to remain faithful to our marriages in the arenas of our emotions, mind, and body. Without a commitment to fidelity, we will find ourselves lacking the resolve to work through problems, seek forgiveness, and to stick with each other through the ups and downs of life.

### MORALITY

Scripture instructs us to “*flee immorality*” (1 Corinthians 6:18). Living a moral and ethical life is the ideal to which we are called. Moral living means that we refrain from lewdness, coveting, questionable acts, and that we mourn when we do find ourselves participating in immoral attitudes and acts. Some interpret their liberty in Christ to mean that they are free to do whatever they wish, to dabble in excessive behavior, or to entertain in their minds whatever they might imagine. Paul reminds the Corinthians and us that “*the body is not for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body*” (1 Corinthians 6:13). Because we have been bought by the sacrifice of Christ’s death, we now live unto Him and His purposes rather than those of the flesh or the world. Without a commitment to moral purity, we open the door to all kinds of influences and powers that can damage and destroy our marriages.

### LOVE

Above all, the ideal of self-giving and self-sacrificing love should reign in our marriages. While Scripture speaks of this ideal in many places (Matthew 5:44-46; Luke 6:35; John 13:34-35), Paul speaks clearly about the high ideals of love in 1 Corinthians 13. This self-giving, self-sacrificing love, among other things, is not arrogant, does not boast, does not seek its own, but bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. We are to pursue the ideal love in all our relationships but especially in marriage and family. Without a commitment to love, we will exert control, seek only what is good or pleasing for us, and not be willing to endure life together.

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### FORMATION

Marriage is a journey to ourselves, each other, and God. Life calling and family are stops along the way on this journey to a greater destination.

#### REFLECT #2

1. Do you often hear people talk about fidelity, morality, and love as foundations for marriage?
2. How might you help yourself and your spouse build upon the foundation of fidelity, morality, and love?
3. What foundation are you building your marriage on right now?

### SHOCKS: CURT AND ANNA, MATT AND KATE

Sixteen months after Curt and Anna's conversation in the laundry room, they found themselves exiting the international terminal in India's capital city. Crowded into a taxi with a host of suitcases, they made their way toward the center of Delhi and their new life. While Curt was investigating job opportunities, he came across a job in India that fit perfectly with his education, skill set, and experience. He interviewed over the phone and a week later was offered the job. Anna contacted a Montessori school in the area of Delhi near Curt's new office and was offered a job as well.

A group of new friends at the local church had prayed with Curt through his unemployment and the opportunity in India. Rather than rushing headlong into what looked like a great opportunity, Curt and Anna wanted to know, as best they could, that they were pursuing God's will and not their own. Both Curt and Anna had a strong sense of divine purpose as they moved toward the Indian company, Montessori school, and India. Yet, Curt moved slowly wanting to be sure Anna had a peace about the move. Likewise, Anna helped Curt in the decision by letting him process aloud and by asking good, probing questions.

As they looked back on all that had happened since the afternoon conversation in the laundry room, it seemed as though they were different people. Their priorities and the way they made decisions had drastically changed. "God had to shake us loose from the thought that life's purpose is about making money or having things," Curt had remarked. They were doing what had been unimaginable and for purposes that were highly unlikely only months before. They were venturing into a new country to take jobs, so they might be salt and light to people without a relationship with Jesus Christ. They were doing God's will in their marriage, family, and employment, including being witnesses of Jesus Christ.

From the beginning, their venture was full of shocks, and it seemed as though these shocks came all at once. Of course, there was the shock of a new culture that was immediate and harsh. India was a barrage of new smells, sounds, sights, and sensations. These were unrelenting and constant. In every direction, they were confronted with new situations in which their familiar ways of responding no longer worked. From the back seat of the taxi on the way into Delhi from the airport, Anna felt anxiety and fear building. These were not just matters in her mind but all over her body. Her skin was clammy and tingling, her stomach was churning, and her head was spinning. She wanted to tell the thin Indian man driving the vehicle to pull over so she could throw up but did not know what words to use or signal to make; so, she put her head between her legs and vomited on the floor of the taxi.

What Anna did not know was that besides the shock of smells and sounds was the sensation of a baby that was making her sick. Included in the change of location, jobs, culture, and language was the presence of a child within her. Every jolt of the taxi accentuated Anna's new and unfamiliar queasiness.

Their new Delhi life was a roller coaster of events and emotions for Curt and Anna. It was as if they were doing everything they did for the first time – as if they had no reference point or prior experience. Shopping, traffic, foods, work, and relationships were fraught with landmines that Curt and Anna had to navigate with great care. The stress level for both Curt

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*THEY WERE KEENLY AWARE OF THE  
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NOT TALK.*

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and Anna was off the chart. Everything was new – new city, new apartment, new jobs, new relationships, new language, and new patterns of relating to everyone around them, as well as to each other. They knew that if they were to survive, they had to stay anchored to their

'laundry room commitments,' as they now called them. They were constantly talking to each other about each day's happenings, their cultural mistakes, and their feelings. They were keenly aware of the temptation to shut down and not talk, so they made a point of scheduling time each day for a long conversation. Because they knew that culture shock destroys any sense of self-worth and confidence, they worked hard at taking care of each other. They spoke words of love and gave love to each other. Some evenings after dinner, they would sit on the couch in their living room just holding each other. They prayed together. They prayed with desperation. In their minds, their marriage and lives would come undone and be lost, if God did not act through them and their circumstances. And they prayed, "your will be done." As they prayed, they had a sense that they were being reshaped as a couple and being reoriented toward divine purposes.

Their fourth commitment, to be part of a congregation, was in some ways the hardest to keep. They attended several churches before finding one that they felt was right. It was not a matter of 'feeling at home' or just enjoying church; they wanted to find a place where they could invest their lives and make a difference. The place they found was a group of mostly Indian professionals who met in a rented room at a business complex. They felt they belonged to the same world as these people – young couples and singles, business and professionally oriented, seeking to follow Christ within modern India. As they moved into this new group of friends, they gradually found the support and love they had known in their family, friends, and church in the U.S.

For Curt, the temptation to fall back into old habits and patterns was a constant battle. He had to fight the tendency to exclude Anna from his life, to go it alone, and charge ahead. This was especially true in the Indian business context. It was a man's world, and business practice was rough and rowdy. And yet, it helped him to call to mind the image of hearing Anna's tough question at dinner or standing outside Mike's office.

For Anna, the temptation was to retreat from strange and difficult social situations. She would have been happy merely to sit in the apartment and not deal with the stress and inconvenience that was just outside the front door. "I have every reason," she thought, "to hide out in the apartment. Hey, I am pregnant!" And yet, she also knew her tendency to isolate and shut down



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was not helpful. So, she made herself go to the market, join other ladies for lunches, and go to dinner with Curt and other couples from their church group.

Curt and Anna were aware of their tendencies and worked hard not to dismiss or hide these from each other. Some evenings they would talk about what happened at work or the market, their cultural missteps, and their fears and tendencies. Often, they would find themselves laughing so hard that tears were streaming down their cheeks. Their new life was hard, but it was full and good.

Even though Curt's company would pay for Anna to travel back to the U.S. to deliver their baby, Curt and Anna decided to deliver the baby at a hospital in Delhi. They felt good about the facilities and really liked their Indian doctor, a woman educated in England. The day came and after only four hours of labor, their new son was born. Curt and Anna were elated. Curt announced his name as Matthew. Throughout the commotion of seeing their son for the first time and naming him, the doctor did not look up or stop her work. After a bit of time, she asked, "Anna, are you ready for a second child?" In a matter of minutes, Matthew's twin sister, Katherine arrived. Curt and Anna were no longer just a couple but a family of four.

Their new commitment to each other and to God had reshaped life for Curt and Anna in unexpected ways. Their vow to talk, pray, love, and worship had revived their marriage and had relocated them to India and a new way of life. Rather than relaxing in safe and set patterns, they were being transformed and remade into new people.

## CHALLENGES AND SHOCKS

We might think the challenges and shocks of cross-cultural living should be avoided at all costs, yet they are not only unavoidable but are necessary if we are to be reshaped and reoriented. Through the difficulties of culture shock and adjustments of cross-cultural living, marriage can be greatly strengthened or utterly destroyed. The difference is in being self-aware and having a commitment to act. Challenges allow us to grow and develop as individuals and as couples.

### REFLECT #3

1. What challenges did Curt and Anna's marriage experience in their transition to India?
2. What actions did Curt and Anna take in order to survive the challenges of culture shock?
3. Every couple is different and each situation has its unique challenges. For Curt and Anna, there was an awareness of their tendencies and points of temptation. For her, it would be withdrawal or retreat. For him, it would be to charge ahead and leave Anna behind. Self-awareness became a safeguard or trigger that reminded each of them where not to go mentally, emotionally, or physically. Thinking of how you react to stress and difficulty, what will be your tendency or temptation in a cross-cultural setting?
4. Prayer was central to Curt and Anna's recommitment to each other and their survival in India. Just as they were communicating freely and often with each other, they were communicating with God. This was not a happenstance commitment for Curt and Anna but one that was essential and vital. What role does prayer play in your marriage?
5. What keeps you from praying more frequently with your spouse?
6. From their wedding day to the birth of Matt and Kate, Curt and Anna's understanding of marriage had undergone a massive shift. Rather than just living together and pursuing separate aims, they were now desperately clinging to each other, praying, laughing, crying together, and pursuing the same ultimate goal. What words would you use to describe Curt and Anna's understanding of marriage?

TRANSFORMATION

The destination or goal of each of our lives is transformation into the goodness and likeness of God, which, in turn, leads to the transformation of others. While marriage and family are meant to complete and fulfill us, ultimately, they are for the purpose of our transformation and for the transformation of others.

WITNESS: CURT AND ANNA, MATT AND KATE, PRAKASH AND LAKSHMI

Life really became busy once Matt and Kate entered Curt and Anna's apartment, yet it seemed that the investments made in communication, loving care, and prayer had created a home and family for Matt and Kate. Curt and Anna were not two people sharing two babies; rather, they were a couple, a team caring for each other and their beautiful children. They were a family.

In fact, Curt and Anna had been on a journey of becoming since the laundry room. Their fragile and marred situation had set them on a journey of being transformed. It had been almost three years since Anna's pointed question on a fall evening and Curt's realization at Mike Smith's office door. And while Curt and Anna were far from being perfect and still had their struggles, they were not the same people and were on the way of becoming. When faced with a work dilemma, insurmountable problem, or stressful predicament, Curt would often breathe his prayer, "not my will but your will be done."

Prakash was one of Curt's Indian co-workers. Because he was assigned to Curt's project, they had offices right next to each other and spent a good bit of time together. They began to eat lunch together regularly and would talk about politics, cricket, and family. Curt understood little about Indian politics and less about cricket, so he talked a lot about Anna and the children. Prakash was just a year or two younger than Curt but was still unmarried. His family had selected a young lady for him, and the two of them were in conversations about marriage.

Curt's talk about Anna and the children really fascinated Prakash. While he had known other Americans, they did not talk the same way Curt did about their wives and children. While Prakash had assumed that all Christians were irreligious and somewhat indifferent to the idea of the gods, he found Curt to be quite different. It was not that Curt talked all the time about being a Christian or inserted God into every conversation, it was just that God's Son, Jesus, was important to him and his family.

Prakash's perception of Curt was naturally a bit one-sided, as he had only known Curt as a co-worker; however, Prakash's view of Curt widened one evening when he went to Curt's apartment for dinner. What Prakash experienced was far better than he could have expected. It was more than obvious that Curt loved Anna. Prakash saw this love in the way Curt helped with the children and cleared the table after dinner, but most of all in the way he spoke to and looked at Anna. There was tenderness and care in his words and actions. It was also clear that Anna loved Curt. Their home, while simple, was full of warmth and happiness. Curt did not require that Anna serve the food and then disappear, and he included the children in the meal.

As they sat down to eat, Curt took Anna and the children's hands and then asked Prakash if he would join them in prayer. Prakash said yes and took Curt and Matt's hands. Once the prayer was done, Curt and Anna smiled at each other and then together at Prakash.

After some small talk at lunch the next day, Prakash remarked, "I enjoyed dinner at your apartment last night. I found your American customs to be most interesting." Curt asked, "Which customs do you mean?" "Well, your custom of holding hands and praying before you eat." Curt replied, "For Anna and me, praying is more than a custom. It is our way of telling God that we are thankful to Him for all His gifts to us. It is our way of saying we are thankful as a couple and as a family." Prakash thought about this for a few minutes and then said, "When I marry Lakshmi, I want to do the same. I want to thank God." Curt smiled. "And," continued Prakash, "why do you end the prayer with 'not my will but thy will be done'?" Curt smiled again, and then slowly recounted the story that began with his marriage to Anna, through the business start-up, the laundry room conversation, and the decision to come to India. Prakash listened without interrupting, without making any comment. When Curt finished, Prakash smiled and then went on to another subject.

The dinner generated numerous other lunchtime conversations between Curt and Prakash on a number of topics ranging from wedding ceremonies, resolution of disputes, separate careers, child rearing, and sex. The conversations were usually two-way with Prakash asking a specific question, and Curt inquiring about ways and customs within India.

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*I FEAR NOT BEING A GOOD WIFE AND  
A GOOD MOTHER. I WANT TO BE LIKE  
YOU. YOU ARE THE BEST WIFE AND  
THE BEST MOTHER. HOW DO I  
BECOME LIKE YOU?*

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At the end of most conversations, Prakash would thoughtfully say, "I see," or sit thinking about what he had heard. It was becoming more and more clear to Prakash that Curt and Anna were not like Americans he had previously met or those portrayed in American films. Curt and Anna were definitely different.

An invitation finally came from Prakash for Curt and Anna to join him and Lakshmi for a meal at his family's house. Curt and Anna were eager to meet Lakshmi and Prakash's family. Lakshmi, of course, had heard about Curt and Anna from Prakash and was likewise eager to meet this couple of whom Prakash had said so much. Anna and Lakshmi became instant friends and spent most of the evening talking together as if no one else was there. Before parting, they agreed to meet for tea at Anna's house the coming week.

Curt was lunching with Prakash regularly, and Anna was often meeting Lakshmi for tea. The questions and conversations between the four were becoming more and more probing and intimate. In their responses, Curt and Anna did not hide their lives but shared openly about their struggles, as well as their joys. Nor did they conceal the fact that Christ was central to their lives as parents and as husband and wife. One afternoon at tea, Lakshmi said, "I fear not being a good wife and a good mother. I want to be like you. You are the best wife and the best mother. How do I become like you?" Anna held her teacup in both hands and thought for a moment. "Lakshmi, I am not the best. In fact, I am not even good – except as Jesus gives me the power to do good. I know that without Jesus I am a very selfish person who wants to take and keep for myself rather than to give to Curt and my children. I desperately need Jesus in order to do and be good." Anna then recounted to Lakshmi a similar story to the one told by Curt to Prakash several months earlier. Once she finished, Lakshmi without hesitation asked, "How does Jesus become my God? I want Jesus to take away my fears and make me good." After a bit of explanation, Anna and Lakshmi knelt at the couch and prayed together. Once they had finished, Anna looked to see Lakshmi's smile and her eyes full of tears. "I am so happy

that I can trust my marriage and my children to the true God, Jesus,” Lakshmi announced. “Lakshmi, I am so happy for you. This day is the day Jesus starts making you into a new person – His person.”

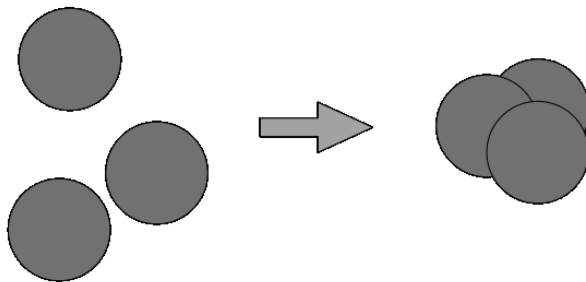
The next day at work, Prakash did not wait until the lunch break but walked straight into Curt’s office and shut the door. “Curt, I need to talk with you.”

## WITNESS

We tend to think of witness as something we go and do – an activity or task. It is something different from who we are as husband or wife, father or mother, son or daughter. In the modern understanding of witness, what we do as a religious activity is separate from who we are as a person. This modern understanding of being and acting is quite foreign to what is found in Scripture and different than a biblical understanding of witness.

Just before ascending into heaven, Jesus tells His disciples – “*You shall be My witnesses*” (Acts 1:8). In this pronouncement, Jesus does not necessarily instruct them to perform the act of witness or go someplace in order to become witnesses. Rather, Jesus simply says, you shall BE My witnesses. Witness is to be a matter of who they are – their being and identity. In other words, witness is tied to personality, role, and self.

If witness is linked to our being or identity, then our marriage and our family cannot be separated from our witness. In fact, these are fundamental to our witness. It is as we live our existence as husband or wife, father or mother, son or daughter that we are witnesses.



Rather than seeing marriage, family, and witness as three distinct spheres that either are at odds with each other or compete against each other, is it possible to view the three spheres overlapping to the point that marriage and family are witness? While distinction between the three still exists, the overlap or integration is more pronounced than their

distinctions. What the overlap or integrations indicate is that who we are as a couple is part of God’s work of reconciliation in the world. Marriage and family are not my domains to control or use for my sole purpose and pleasure. Rather, my marriage and my family belong to God and are for God’s purpose.

### REFLECT #4

1. What does the overlap between your marriage, family, and witness look like?
2. Where are you finding your identity?

## FAILURE

Why do we fail to integrate marriage and family into witness?

## PANORAMA

**Socialization.** Through media, education, and even church, we have been taught that life is about us – our enjoyment, happiness, pleasure, and fulfillment. Our marriages suffer loss of meaning when our expectations of living “happily ever after” do not materialize. It is no wonder that more than 50% of all marriages in America end in divorce. When marriage does not equal endless euphoria, happiness, ecstasy, or bliss, it loses its appeal, purpose, and meaning. For marriage to be an integral part of witness, we will have to undo the socialization process and re-envision marriage as serving God’s purposes.

**Silos.** Failure to integrate marriage and family into witness occurs when these are approached as separate entities or tasks. Often the activities and identity of marriage and family function within a well-defined, air-tight silo that does not allow the activities and identities of other silos (work, church, social relations, etc.) to contaminate or infringe upon it. When marriage and family do not mix and mingle with the broader spheres of life in an effort either to protect or to hide, integrative witness is impossible. We either fear the influences of these other spheres, or we fear being discovered as less than perfect or severely flawed. So, silos protect and minimize risk – but witness means exposure and risk.

**Secrecy.** To truly give witness to Christ through our lives, as well as words, means living open lives with others. We must be willing to let others look beyond the façade of what we present as marriage and family and allow them to see the beautiful and the ugly, the victories and the struggles. While risky, such vulnerability and exposure offers an authentic witness that the world craves to know, can understand, and is willing to accept.

### REFLECT #5

1. Which of these causes for the disconnection of witness from marriage and family do you most identify with?
2. Why are we unwilling to risk openness toward others in the areas of marriage and family?
3. Are you and your spouse committed to serving God’s purposes? Are you and your spouse witnesses in all areas of your lives? Are you and your spouse secretive or are you open toward others?

## PRINCIPLES

The following are some of the key principles from this lesson:

- Fidelity, morality, and love provide the foundation upon which to build strong marriages.
- New and different situations present great possibilities for couples and families to grow and develop in their faith but cause complications and difficulties as well.
- Self-awareness and humility are necessary tools to successful marriages.
- Witness is about who we are as families and married couples, as well as what we say and do.
- Marriage, family, and witness are meant to be an integrated whole – who we are forms a big part of our witness.

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## LEARNING ACTIVITIES ~BEFORE YOU GO

If we wish to live and give witness to Christ cross-culturally, we must be proactive in doing the

kinds of activities that make us self-aware and others-directed. The following activities will help you actively and intentionally build a strong basis for your marriage and family, as well as survive the shocks and adjustments of cross-cultural living. As you try these activities, record your difficulties, struggles, and successes.

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## SO WHAT?

### **Imagine**

What would life look like if the spheres of marriage, family, and witness were successfully integrated? If you are married and have children, imagine in what ways you might be a witness as a couple and as a family in a cross-cultural situation.

### **Lifestyle**

What lifestyle changes need to take place, in order for your marriage and family to be whole and for who you are to become your witness? Integration does not just happen in theory but must become a habitual choice, as we decide how we will respond, the initiatives we take, and how we live our lives.

### **Missional Formation**

Each of us as couples must continually be reshaped and reformed. Since all of us are self-centered and self-absorbed, the 'challenges and shocks' will either mold and transform us, or they will just make us angry. We can either self-justify and retreat or lean into the transformative process. What will you, as a couple, do in order to be shaped by the challenges and shocks? What disciplines do you need to practice as a couple or as a family?

### **Language and Customs**

How do you talk about your spouse, either in his or her hearing or in their absence? How do you speak to your children? What words will you speak to each other when life gets hard and stress rises?

### **Stretch Life on Life**

The aims of this lesson are not meant to be explored alone. Rather, they need to be discussed and put into practice as a couple or as a family. Make time to talk through the lesson with your spouse and family.

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## IN SUMMARY

When you meet someone and marry that person, this is the only the beginning. From that point onward, the two of you are on a journey to each other and to God. There will be many stops along the way in this journey. While each is important and contribute to the whole, they lead to a greater destination. The ultimate destination is the transformation of each of us into the goodness and likeness of God. This, in turn, leads to the transformation of others. Marriage and family are meant to complete and fulfill us, and yet, they are ultimately for the purpose of our transformation and for the transformation of others.

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## PANORAMA

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR *MARRIAGE, FAMILY, AND WITNESS*

For a marriage and one's family to survive and thrive as a cross-cultural witness, you will need to work constantly toward a better understanding of what this means and how to put this understanding into practice. The resources below provide a wide range of help across a number of perspectives. I encourage you to continue your quest to integrate the spheres of marriage, family, and witness. This integration is important but difficult, so you will need to do the hard work of resisting your natural tendencies and the skewed perspective your culture has given you. The following resources can be helpful in reframing marriage, family, and witness.

DeLashmutt, Gary, and Dennis McCallum. *Spiritual Relationships that Last: What the Bible Says About Dating and Marriage*. Columbus, OH: Xenos Publishing, 2001.

Rainey, Dennis. *Staying Close: Stopping the Natural Drift Toward Isolation in Marriage*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003.

Thomas, Gary. *Sacred Marriage: What if God Designed Marriage to Make Us Holy More than to Make Us Happy?* Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000.

Whitehead, Evelyn E., and James D. Whitehead. *Marrying Well: Stages on the Journey of Christian Marriage*. New York: Doubleday, 1983.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Gary DeLashmutt and Dennis McCallum, *Spiritual Relationships that Last: What the Bible Says about Dating and Marriage* (Columbus, OH: Xenos Publishing, 2001), 26.

<sup>2</sup>Gary Thomas, *Sacred Marriage: What if God Designed Marriage to Make Us Holy More than to Make us Happy?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 26.

<sup>3</sup>Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1935), 132.

<sup>4</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 133.

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## AUTHOR

**Dr. Michael W. Stroope** is Associate Professor of Christian Missions and M.C. Shook Chair of Missions at George W. Truett Theological Seminary in Waco, Texas. Mike doesn't just talk mission – he has lived it literally all over the globe. After years of service through the IMB, Mike set out on a journey to help the Church realize her potential in taking the gospel to all nations. Mike serves as a catalyst to movements such as Restore Hope around the world through his relationships with passionate missional thinkers.

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