

The Ministry of a Leader's Marriage

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As leaders integrating faith and work, we often talk about how we can implement ministry strategies to help the people we do business with experience the life and love of Jesus. The gospel must shape our culture and operations so that our business conduct is conducive to ministry. Another critical domain of our ministries not to be overlooked is how we and our leadership teams steward our marriages. Yet it is one of the godly practices that the world too commonly discounts.

Scripture puts us into a family as God's sons and daughters. His relational principles apply to each of us, no matter our marital status or history. Our world desperately needs to see the model of marriage that God created and intends as the very best for life as a couple. Just as our organizations may be the only place 70% of our teams have the opportunity to hear the gospel, our organizations may also be the only place our teams witness a Christ-centered marriage. An increasing majority of us and those we lead have not witnessed a healthy example of marriage.



In 1960, 89% of American kids lived with two parents. By 2016 that figure had declined to 69%, many of which lived in blended-family households.

If we apply the same continuous improvement, accountability, diligence, and stewardship disciplines of our businesses to our family enterprises, the legacy of our leadership could have multigenerational implications.

All-Too-Common Neglect

It is dangerously easy to drift into a disobedient pattern of idolizing business and “ministry” while neglecting marriages and families. If you are convicted by the biblical call of marriage as you reflect on your own relationships, you are not alone! Sadly, throughout time, great leaders—even great theologians like A.W. Tozer and John Wesley—have settled into the tragic hypocrisy of doing great things “for God” while masking anemic or disastrous marriages. Headlines are so often littered with stories of leaders succumbing to epic failures in their marriages to the point that a lousy marriage may seem like a given, and even acceptable, liability of success or leadership.

High rates of “spiritual maturity” and financial stewardship among faith-driven leaders can often mask significant deficits in communication, conflict resolution, responsibilities in roles, and other aspects of

marriage. Many leaders mistake a lack of volatility for relational wellness, while dysfunction overtakes their marriages. Merely avoiding divorce is no more similar to cultivating a healthy marriage than avoiding bankruptcy is to grow a healthy business. Complacent leaders who tolerate dysfunctional relationships are like frogs in a simmering pot.

The world may celebrate a hustle culture where “10X at any cost” is the badge of honor. But as sons and daughters of God, we’re invited to live in a different Kingdom, where the economy of success is anchored in the gospel. There are very few instances in which our Father suggests He won’t listen to our prayers, but one we can’t (yet many do) ignore is when we rebelliously neglect our spouse as a co-heir of the grace of life ([1 Pet. 3:7](#)).

The Powerful Mystery of Marriage

In [Ephesians 5:32](#), the Apostle Paul described marriage to a new group of Jesus-followers as a “profound mystery.” He didn’t mean mystery in the sense of a Netflix thriller. No, he meant it is a deep marvel to be studied and appreciated, containing remarkable merit, and meaning God intends for the marriage relationship to demonstrate the relationship we get to experience with Jesus.

As imperfect people in relationships with imperfect people, surrounded by imperfect examples, and coming out of imperfect families—this “mystery” can feel like a mandate for futility or a recipe for frustration. Dr. Emerson Eggerichs, author of [Love and Respect](#), expresses insights and opportunities in this mystery as four progressive cycles.



My Beloved and Friend

Marriage is sometimes treated like a business deal, two people living parallel lives and monitoring whether the other is upholding his or her terms of the agreement. By contrast, the bride in the Song of Solomon has the right idea when she says, “This is my beloved and this is my friend” ([Song of Solomon 5:16](#)). She has God’s view of marriage in mind, and it is not a contract—it is a covenant.

A covenant is not like a contract. A contract is built on distrust; a covenant is built on trust. This is important for us to understand, particularly as professionals who tend to think contractually. The concept of covenant appears hundreds of times throughout the Bible, sometimes between God and people and other times between two people, such as in marriage. The main kind of covenant is expressed in the Hebrew word *hesed*, translated variously as covenant love, loving-kindness, mercy, steadfast love, loyal love, devotion, commitment, or reliability.

We are not under contract with God. We are under His covenant. We are not under His penalty; we are under His love. We emulate God by engaging in relational covenants with our spouses, families, employees, vendors, and customers. This is why Paul's charge is about proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ to ourselves and those around us. Leaning into the "I can't" or "I don't know how" is exactly where God does His greatest work in and through us!

Strategic Stewardship of Marriage

It is important to note we are responsible to God for our behavior toward our spouses. We will all stand before the [Bema Seat of Christ](#) one day. As far as our marriage is concerned, the question will simply be, did we treat our spouse how Christ called us to? Did we rightly pursue him or her? Did our marriage emulate Christ's sacrificial love and sanctification of the church?

God's design of marriage is perfect. But no spouse is perfect, as many of us prove daily. The triumphs and failures of each marriage are unique. God made men and women different, our family situations are varied, and some right now are suffering the wounds of failed marriages. The good news of the Bible, however, is that God has forgiven us and defined our marriages through Jesus's perfect obedience on our behalf. The fruit of forgiveness is to practice faithful obedience, not to wallow in yesterday's failures.

God's plan is not for us to build successful businesses alongside failed marriages. Success in marriage may require books, consultants, coaches, assessments, skill development, financial investments, innovation cycles, and every other breakthrough tool you utilize to grow a thriving business. The road to success may even bring you to the end of yourself, where you find all known resources exhausted. For [God perfects His power in weakness](#). When a first-century small businessman was fatigued by fruitless efforts and long hours, Jesus met him and challenged him with a simple question: Will you try again? The business owner stared at Jesus incredulously. *Does he think I have not already been trying as hard as possible?* But then the business owner, with nothing to lose, relented and said, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." That business owner then experienced the greatest reward he'd ever seen ([Luke 5:1-7](#)).

Whether you are joyfully or bitterly married, contentedly or yearningly single, thriving or surviving, optimistic or exhausted from fruitless seasons, the invitation by the Living God is to enter a mystery play, to trust Him to do something new, and to allow your life to proclaim the good news of Jesus to the world around you ([Gal. 2:20](#)).