

In order to have a successful marriage we must first answer a few key questions. The answers to these questions are the foundation upon which a God glorifying marriage is built and must be fixed in our minds before we can seek out specific application on which to work. The first foundational issue revolves around who we are as humans. Once we understand who we are, and how God designed us, then we can better understand how to relate to our spouse. (Oh, and don't limit yourselves to the provided bible passages...go wild!)

- 1) **Who are we modeled after? How should we define this kind of 'image'?** *Genesis 1:26-27 says: "Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them."* We are modeled after God our Creator. The idea of being in God's "image" covers many areas, such as our mind, emotions and will. All of these different facets are pointers to our Creator. Although Adam's choice changed our role from true image bearers to sinners, we still retain, in our depths, the image of God. The best description of an unbeliever's image would be "soiled". As unbelievers we were incapable of accurately representing God, even though many of His attributes, such as love, mercy, justice and grace, could still be seen even in our rebellion. Some helpful synonyms for "image" include; likeness, reflection, pattern, picture and representation. Ultimately we are to represent or picture God to the world. When people see us, they should see the goodness of God. Marriage is a wonderful opportunity for two limited image bearers to combine efforts and, through their unity, use their strengths to more completely and accurately represent God to the world.
- 2) **If we are image bearers, what responsibility does this involve?** *Phil 2:15 says: "so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world".* We have been given responsibility from God to bring Him glory. We are expected to look like God and thus show off His goodness to others. Anything we do wrong brings shame to Him. We need look no further than Jesus for an example to follow. God has big plans for us to bring Him big glory. He has created a people for Himself and desires we be zealous for good deeds, which bring Him glory! (see also Romans 12:1-2 and John 17)
- 3) **Since we are all God's representatives (image bearers) what does this imply about how we should treat our spouse? When we sin against our spouse, what are we doing?** We should honor our spouse so that they can better honor God. If we sin against our spouse we're taking God's image and degrading it. We're making it less glorious. Our sins against our spouse directly affect God and His glory. A good example is seen in a statue. Statues are erected to be a representation of a leader and that leader is dishonored if his statue is defaced or torn down. Our spouse is created in God's image, just like we are, and if we truly desire God to be glorified in them we should be willing to put forth much effort to see that goal met!
- 4) **If we're not to sin against our spouse, what should we do instead?** *Phil. 2:3-4 says: "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others."* We need to treat our spouse as more important and build them up so they can better glorify God. This means granting them honor, washing them in the Word, sacrificing for them, giving them preference and genuinely caring about them. This is how we will most effectively increase their honor as well as God's glory.
- 5) **Simply put, our choices are:**
 - A) **Degrade our spouse (and God) – How might we degrade our spouse?**
 - Putting them down to make our self look good
 - Anger, neglect, betrayal
 - Failure to admit our wrongs/being slow to apologize
 - Violating, embarrassing or using them for our own selfish purpose
 - Emotional, physical or sexual harm
 - Idolizing them and thus making them into a god instead of an image of God
 - B) **Honor our spouse (and God) – How might we honor our spouse?**
 - Treating them as an equal

- Protect and support them
- Selfless love
- Honoring them publicly
- Showing respect and allowing them dignity
- Pursuing them passionately
- Viewing them as a mystery and a treasure that deserves much attention and exploration
- Encourage Christ-likeness in them and help them grow any way we can
- Further enhance their glory for His glory
- Enjoy the reflection of God's glory in them

The goal of our marriages should be to honor God *and* to honor our spouse so that *they* can honor God. We should strive to enhance our spouse's glory so they can live out the glory of God.