

Transforming Family Experience in the Family of God

By Judy TenElshof

Speaker 1:

You know, Paul talks about his companions in the gospel, in the New Testament. And if I were going to list my companions in the gospel, Judy TenElshof would be one of my companions in the gospel. Um, I have the privilege of co-teaching and co-directing various parts of our program with her. And so it's really an honor and a delight, and just frankly a joy to introduce uh, to be the one that gets to introduced her this evening. Judy graduated from Talbot School of Theology, lo these many years ago, and then went on to Fuller to get her PhD in marriage and family. She's going on teaching 20 years here at Talbot. She's one of the brave women Prof's that made the way for the rest of us women who are here at Talbot. Yes, right, thank you.

[Audience applauds and cheers]

Speaker 1:

Judy also is responsible for catching the vision for the intentional character development program here at Talbot and now the newly formed spiritual formation focus that will impact the lives and ministry of every Talbot student. She and her husband, Gene, have founded and are the directors of the Hilltop Renewal Center, which is a wonderful place where uh you can go for times of prayer, silence, solitude, and retreat up near Idyllwild. Judy, with Dr. Robert Soucy, authored the book "Women and Men in Ministry." I commend that one to you. And Judy and Gene are the parents of two children and the proud grandparents of seven grandchildren. Sometime when you have a longtime, ask them about their grandkids. And so tonight, without any more ado, I invite you to welcome Dr. Judy TenElshof.

[Audience applauds]

Judy TenElshof:

First of all, I just want to say it is such a privilege to be able to talk to you about the things that I love most. I love spiritual formation. I love marriage. My husband Gene, um we've been married for 44 years, and um I'm just thrilled to death that he's still at my side supporting me all the way. And uh, I get to talk about children tonight, and I have two of them that I absolutely love, one of them that teaches here at Biola, undergrad philosophy, and um one who's busy teaching her four children.

[Judy TenElshof laughs]

Judy TenElshof:

So um I also, with the subject, get to talk about the family of God. And the family of God, without it, I couldn't be here. I couldn't be doing what I'm doing. And so somehow I think that there has been a lot of misunderstanding about how God works through marriage, family, and the family of God. And I, tonight, want you to discover how God brings all these things together for His purpose and His glory. And so I'm going to begin by telling you a little bit about me. Um, when I was a little girl, I loved to read. It's probably why I'm here today.

[Judy TenElshof laughs]

Judy TenElshof:

But I loved to read so much that my parents took a picture of me in my dad's chair when he wasn't around and, um reading a book, because that's what I loved to do the most. I just always

loved to read. But the interesting thing is that the thing I loved to read the most was novels. I loved to get into that world of fantasy, a place where I could dream about being a grown up, having children of my own, having my own house, having um, you know how the fantasy goes. A husband that comes along and loves you, and um, and gives you what you want, and what you need. And, you know, you enter into this whole fantasy that um, that was even more than what I could imagine, probably. And I always dreamed we'd be happy, and I'd had friends, and um, and I would love my work. Which a lot of that is true.

But these kinds of dreams, um, are also today confirmed in the movies. A lot of you love movies today as much as I loved reading and entering into that world. And my desires to enter into this married life were met very young. At 19, Gene and I married. And I thought I would start living my dream. And it wasn't long before I realized I was entering the reality of life. And it was a very rocky road. It wasn't an easy road. It was instead one that would take me to places where, in my fantasy, I never dreamed I would go. Divorce was never an option between the two of us. Murder, maybe.

[Judy TenElshof and audience laugh]

Judy TenElshof:

But, but, you know, we both lived. We're living here to tell the story. And here I am after 44 years. And I think they call it marital bliss. I'm not sure I'd call it that. And I'm not going to tell you tonight that this book, the Bible, is a marriage manual, or a systematic statement of how to live in a family. But I'm going to tell you that the Bible is a love story. It's a love story revealing the intimate relationship between God and you. God's desire and will for His people is so

revealed in the Old Testament, through His relationship with the people of Israel. And in the New Testament, to the relationship between Christ and the church. So we get our cues from there. But possibly we need to think even further than that and say He wrote this so that we could intimately love and relate to Him, and become a family with others.

So what went wrong? What went wrong? To understand that, we need to know first, what does it mean to be a man? Or what does it mean to be a woman? I'm a woman. What does the Bible say? What does He tell us in here about what it means to be a woman? We were made second after man. That's the first thing we hear. Whoopee. Aren't you excited about that as women? And then it says, we were made for the purpose of helping him. That isn't the fantasy I have. It's going nowhere. Let's look at what He said about men. And the first thing we hear about men is that man was divinely created as the natural head. This just keeps getting worse for women. And then it says women were divinely created to complete and help man function as the head. Do we want this to be our guide? The love story somehow just doesn't seem very exciting.

But then it says, both were divinely created equal in the image of God. Oh, I kind of like that. In the garden, Adam and Eve lived in a state of glorious perfection. Now that fits my dream. Both man and woman were completely content. That's what I used to dream about. Can't you just feel the love that was in the Garden of Eden? Woman was man's helpmate. Man was incomplete on his own. This spoils it a little, but I like the equal better, didn't you? Where neither man or woman would live alone and they needed each other, and life was perfect? Men and women were fulfilled. Living out the complete potential that they were divinely created for. Why wouldn't we love that? Wow. That's my dream. And I read it in here. So what happened?

Do you sometimes read the Bible like that? Are you like me? You sort of pick and choose the parts of God's love story that protect your fantasy or make you feel good? Do you feel like you need to protect parts of your heart because no one truly cares about the deep desires, including God? Why do men feel threatened today by women? And why do women feel oppressed and put down? Ashamed of being created secondly. Why have we been taken--why have we taken on the belief that to truly make it in life, we have to be like a man? Why have we taken on the belief that to truly make it, we have to push through equal rights? Why do men and women have a tendency to cover their strengths with defensive competitiveness? And why can't men recognize how much they need us? The answer, the curse. The curse of mankind perverted God's plan for men and women.

God's plan for desired interdependence, healthy sharing, and mutual preference, just what we dream, and long for, and desire. But this was brutally smashed by sin. This was Satan's goal. He wants to oppress and destroy the sweet spirit that God marvelously created in the woman of His own image. He knows that if he can destroy the natural marriage relationship, he can steal God's best analogy, describing the pure intimacy between Christ and the church. He knows that a hard heart full of resentment cannot flow freely with a tender love of his heavenly Father. This is Satan's goal. If he can conquer the heart of women, he has shackled the heart of men. For man needs woman as a helpmate. Completely, fully and unreserved. And what do we have in the church today? Physical shells of men and women walking through life as a facade with broken hearts shut off to each other and ultimately to God. And this is truly Satan's goal.

Let's look a little closer at that first man and woman and see how this happened. I want to do this through the eyes of Helen DeMoss and her books, "Lies Women Believe." She writes, "Banished from Eden, wearing clothes of animal skins, Eve's husband sore at her. And because her sin would be passed down through the generations, she was on her way to being the mother of the first murdered child, and the mother of the killer." Imagine being in that place. Eve must have felt very low, alone, defeated, a failure. How hard it must have been to walk with Adam, East of Eden into a world in which it was a struggle just to stay alive. How hard it must have been to have known a paradise, and then to be told to leave it. What must Eve have wanted most at that moment? What would you have wanted?

I believe that with all her heart, Eve wished she could have taken back that instance just before she bit into that forbidden fruit, when her arm was still outreached toward the limbs of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and escape while it was still possible. She ached to do things over, to live firmly in the truth that God had given to her and Adam and to have done things right the first time. We are like Eve. We have all experienced defeats and failures. Trouble and turmoil. We've all experienced a selfish heart, a shrewish spirit, anger, envy, and bitterness. Some of our failures may not be as extreme as Eve. They're definitely not as catastrophic, public events. Maybe they're just small lapses, but they still reveal how far our hearts are from where they should be. And we ache to do things over. To have lives of harmony and peace.

Whenever I give a lecture like this, I know there are people in the audience whose marriages are hanging by a thread. Those with broken relationships. Couples who are coexisting with one another and who may feel bitterness, resentment, anger, hurt, or loneliness with the other. People

whose hearts ache for their children, or whose children no longer want anything to do with them. Others who are overwhelmed with past failures and wounds. Men and women with a longing desire to be married. Others with intense personal struggles. Many filled with doubts and confusion about their spiritual life. This audience is no different, because you are real people, with real needs, and real struggles, with real stories. These things that are shared tonight may not relate directly with your burden. For I don't-but I just don't want anybody to leave tonight without having the burden of your heart prayed for.

So I'm going to give you a few minutes right now, alone with God. I want you to take a few minutes to identify a particular hurt in your life, or a particular pain. And I want you to open to that gently, to ask God to be with you in this weakness. Let Him love you there. So just close your eyes and be with God for just a few minutes and open to one place in your life and bring it to Him.

[Moment of silence]

Judy TenElshof:

Now, I want you to take a couple of minutes to silently pray for the person on your right. You may not know them, but God does. And His Spirit will lead you in what to pray.

[Moment of silence]

Judy TenElshof:

Thank you, God, for the capacity that You gave us to be able to pray for another, and have Your Spirit interpret for us, so the needs of the other will be met. In Jesus' name, we pray, amen. Let's

go back to Eve. What do you think she would have written in her diary that day? Let me read it to you. "My head is spinning. I hardly know where to start. This day started out so perfectly, like every other day we've had. As we always do, Adam and I got up early to take a walk with God. These walks have always been the highlights of our day. This morning, no one said anything for a while. We just enjoyed being together. Then God started singing. It was a love song. And when He got to the chorus, we started to sing with Him. First, Adam's deep voice. And then I joined in. We sang, and sang, and sang, songs about love and joy and about God.

And finally we sat down under a big shade tree near the middle of the garden. We thanked God for being so good. We told Him all we wanted to do was to make Him happy, and to find our happiness in Him. It was such a sweet time. It always was when the three of us were together. I don't quite know how to explain what happened next. All of a sudden we heard a voice we'd never heard before. I turned, and there, looking right at me, was the most beautiful creature I'd ever seen. He talked directly to me. He made me feel important. And I found myself wanting to hear what he had to say. I'm not sure what happened to God at this point. It wasn't like He left us. I think I just kind of forgot He was there. In fact, for a while, I forgot Adam was there. I felt as if I were alone with this dale-dazzling, mysterious creature.

The conversation that followed is indelibly etched in my mind. He asked me questions. Questions I'd never thought about before. And then he offered me some things I had never had before. Things I'd never thought I needed. He offered me independence, independence from God. Independence from Adam." When have you been lured by independence? I think the one most vivid time in my life where I was lured by independence was when I wanted to leave home and

get married. I just wanted to escape, and I wanted someone to rescue me. You can hear some of my fantasy come out in this. But I thought that once I married, I would be independent and away from all the rigid legalism of my home. And so, I married young. And after being married, I realized the lure of independence led me to more dependence.

But this dazzling creature offered Eve more. Beyond independence, he also lured her into thinking about position. Eve had always looked up to God and to Adam. This creature said that they would look up to her. You ever longed for someone to give you position? You know, I looked for that for most of my life because at five years old, I was in bed for a year. I was sick. And you know what that did? That made every member of my family make me special. My sister, she went to school, she came home and taught me what she learned in school because my parents told her she had to spend some time with me and teach me. I was missing kindergarten. And I learned to read, because my sister taught me. My mom carried me to the bus stop to get to the doctor because we only had one car and my dad would take it to work and she would, twice a week, take me to the doctor downtown. I lived in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

And she would, in the snow or in the the good days, she would carry me because I wasn't able to walk. She would carry me in the cold, to the bus stop. And she would take me down and she-to-the-for-the doctor. And then we'd ride the bus back. She would carry me to the restroom over, and over, and over. I became the center of what she needed to care for. My dad, my dad was a pretty rigid, hard man. But when I was five and in bed, he connected with me because it brought out the tenderness of his heart because I was sick. And so we made a connection that no one else in our family did. And I was special. You know that after that year, I wanted that position back.

Guess who got the chicken pox harder than anyone else? Guess who got the measles harder than anyone else.

[Judy TenElshof laughs]

Judy TenElshof:

What do I do to get that position back? Do you long for status? This creature also at-gave, um lured Eve with knowledge. That she would know mysteries known only to God. Do you have a degree hunger? Was a B.A. not enough, and then you go for an M.A. and then you go for PhD? And I know people with more than one PhD, and-or maybe you just read and read and read. My dad had a hunger for books. He read the Calvin's institutes from cover to cover and the Calvin commentaries, from cover to cover. See, behind that, maybe, maybe I can have and know what God knows. There's a hunger to know. I think Eve also was lured, she wanted someone to give her permission. That tree was sitting there with that good fruit. Would someone join her in her sin? Can you recognize that one in yourself? Do you look for people who agree with you rather than people who challenge your thinking? Do you want people to walk with you into the places where your heart is pulling you to go?

And finally, I think Eve was lured by envy, envy of God, keeping something from her. Do you envy those that know what you don't know? She couldn't trust that God had His very best interest--her very best interest in mind. That He loved the desires of her heart. And He would do what was good, the ultimate good for her. She couldn't trust that. And there was envy. Let's go back to Eve's diary. She said, "First, I just listened and I looked at the creature. In my heart, I pondered and questioned. I debated. Can you hear the inner war going on? Adam had reminded

me many times that God said we were not to eat the fruit. The creature kept looking into my eyes and talking in that soothing voice. I found myself believing him. I surrendered. I reached out, cautiously at first, and then more boldly, I took, I ate, I handed it to Adam and he ate. We ate together. First me and then him.

Those next moments were a blur. Sensations deep inside that I'd never heard before. New awareness like I know a secret I'm not supposed to know. Elation, depression at the same time. Liberation. Prison. Rising. Falling. Confident. Afraid. Ashamed. Dirty. Hiding. I can't let him see me like this. Needing and wanting to hide. And then, alone. So very alone. Lost. Deceived. Betrayed." So what happened? The first family was lured away from God and His purposes, into hiding from God, rather than being open to Him. Covering their sin, instead of being honest about the truth of their behavior, and filling themselves with the forbidden fruit, and filling their hearts with feelings of independence, position, knowledge, permission, and envy.

I want you to take a couple of minutes. And I want you to reflect over your marriage, your family, or your community relationships, and ask God to show you specific ways you cover, hide, and fill your heart with independence, position, knowledge, permission, envy. Again, let God meet you there in your weakness with His love. Go ahead and be with God.

[Moment of silence]

Judy TenElshof:

Now, take a couple of minutes and pray silently for the person on your right. And let the Spirit of God lead you as you pray for them.

[Moment of silence]

Judy TenElshof:

Father. We thank You again that You love us right in the middle of our weakness. And I thank You that You have allowed us to be intercessors for others in their weakness. Thank You for Your love. In the middle of all of that. In Jesus' name, amen. The problem today in family relationships is not only that we're tempted by these same things that Eve was tempted by, but we've gone a step further. We aren't tempted. We live in independence. Where she was tempted, we now live. In independence from God, we want God to look at what we've accomplished, at what we've become. We want Him to bless our work, with our degrees behind us. We begin to believe that we know all God knows. And we no longer have to seek His face. We seek status with others. We envy and compete with them in our marriage relationships, in our families, and in the community of the body of Christ.

The values of our culture encourage people towards autonomy and individualism. Listen to Jean Vanier in his book, "Man and Woman, He Made Them." The quote is in your hand out actually, you can follow along. "To be strong is to have no need of another. To be free is to be dependent on no one. These are the ideals which oppose that of community based on the acknowledgement of our gifts, our weaknesses, and our need of others. There is no longer, or at least very much less, a sense of sharing. Villages have lost their soul and sense of celebration. In the big cities, no one knows anyone. Each is isolated, barricaded with their own fault-four walls. Large families with all the uncles, and aunts, and cousins, and grandparents have disappeared. Even the nuclear

family is in danger because there is no longer celebration together, no longer a sense of community. People find themselves isolated in an anguished, often lacking inner strength.

Therefore, they seek excitement in violent or erotic shows. Drugs or alcohol. They throw themselves into the pursuit of political and other causes, in a terrible hyperactivity without sufficient reflection. Or they seek strong emotions in transitory, egotistical sexual relations without a deep intimacy of the heart and without covenant. In all these situations, they risk losing themselves. The choice we make today will our fat--will affect our children, and grandchildren, and the generations to come." Each choice you make has a lasting effect. Listen to Sarah Grill's song "Generations" and just reflect over it for a few minutes. Father, as I uh, reflect over the things that lured Eve, I feel the struggles in my own heart. But we aren't left alone there, Lord. You love us and You will meet us right there. And so I pray tonight, even as we look at the truth of our heart and we see how it has affected the choices we've made in life, we know that Your Spirit dwells within us, calling us out of independence. Into a life of love with you. I pray that defeat will be turned to joy as we hear Your call. May we follow. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Jesus calls us out of independence. And He calls us back to Himself. At the top of your handout, I have a quote from Henry Nowen, and he says, "We are all handicapped, we all search for home. We all desire to live intimate and fruitful lives. God comes to us with open hands, calling out again and again, 'Come to Me all you who are overburdened, and I will give you rest.'" Can you hear Him calling? He calls you out of independence, back to Himself with His words in John fifteen, "I am the true vine and My Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in Me that bears no fruit." Well, every branch that does bear fruit, He prunes so that it will be even more

fruitful. "You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in Me and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit of itself. It must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in Me."

Jesus calls us out of independence back to His purposes, for which He prays for us in John 17. He says to God, His Father, "I have given them the glory that You gave Me," Incredible, "That they may be one as We are one. I in them and You in Me, may they be brought to complete unity to let the world know. To let the world know that You sent Me, and have loved them even as You have loved Me." Jesus is calling us out of independence, into unity with Himself and His body. This unity is best expressed and experienced in marriage, where two become one. But also in family, which is the spiritual awakening center. And also in community, the spiritual living center. The rest of this evening, we're gonna be spending talking about marriage, family, and community and how they work together to call us out of independence, to spiritually form us, to fulfill God's purpose for our life.

We're gonna begin with marriage. And I start with marriage, because marriage is where family begins. If you are married, and many of you are here, what were the reasons that you got married for? Or if you're single, why do you want to get married? What do you want? Why do you get married? You know, when I ask that question in classes that I have, these are the reasons I get. And if I could ask you and hear everybody that talked, I would. But I'll just kind of tell you what I think is in your head. I want to be happy. I don't want to be lonely. I don't want to go through life by myself. I want companionship. I hear that one a lot. I want romantic love. I want children. I want to be able to raise children. I don't like being single. Anybody want legitimate sex? You

know? Some of you get married for that. Sad to say. All of those reasons that we're getting married is out of our desire for independence. Just like Adam and Eve.

We want to be happy, to be rescued, to be loved, or to get our needs met. These are me centered reasons for being married. Rather than seeking the wellfor-fare of the other, I am tempted to seek the welfare of myself through the other. That's why I got married. I married Gene because I wanted to be rescued out of my family. I wanted the real love. You know, no one ever told me there was any other reason to get married. You get married because you want something better than you have right now. These me centered reasons for marriage, you know what they set us up for? Divorce. They set you up for divorce. Why? With these reasons, we will maintain our marriage as long as our earthly comforts, desires, and expectations are met. And we'll just keep trying until we have no energy left to try. And then we give up. Think about it. What are the me centered reasons inside of you? Why did you get married? Why do you desire to be married? Just reflect on this for a second. What do you come up with? Just sit with the Lord. Ask Him to show you.

[Moment of silence]

Judy TenElshof:

You know, there have to be better reasons for marriage than that. If family is going to be stable and healthy, there has to be better reasons. Where do-where did all this begin? Why did we start moving into independence in our reasons for marriage? I went back and looked at some of the early thinkers. And I looked at Augustine, one of the early church fathers, 300, 400 A.D. And, you know, he suggested that there's three benefits or blessings of marriage. The first one he listed

was offspring. So we got one. Maybe, maybe you want to get married because you want kids. But the second one, he said, was for faith or fidelity to God. That marriage would teach you faithfulness to God and to your spouse. Interesting. And then the third one, he said, is sacrament. You know, marriage is a sacrament. I think we've heard that. And of the three, sacrament, he said, was the greatest benefit of all, because as a-as long as a couple is married, they can continue to display, however imperfectly, the ongoing commitment between Christ and His church.

That's what marriage is supposed to reflect. And a sacrament of marriage, is that as you come together and be one, that you reflect to the world God's incredible love-loving relationship for you so that they too will be drawn to Him. This ongoing commitment between Christ and His church makes, he says, sticking it out, or working it out, vitally important. I am so glad Gene and I decided to stick it out. Everything in those first few years, should have pushed us into divorce. I came into that marriage with so much anger. It was unfair. But he stuck it out. He stayed with me and we kept working on it. And I think he fathered me before he husbanded me. I had to grow up. You know, centuries after Augustine, or Augustine, however you want to say it. The Anglican reformers responded to those same three blessings. Only they call them three causes. And then in the early 1549 prayer book, it suggests that marriage has three reasons.

One is for procreation. Again, having children. Everybody seems to agree on that one. But then they change the next two, listen to how it changed. It became a remedy against sexual sin. A remedy against sexual sin. And then the third one just sat in my heart. It was for mutual comfort, mutual comfort. Marriage was now beginning, can you hear the me-ness in that? Now, it was a

we-ness. At that point. It was mutual comfort. And this replaced, that mutual comfort, replaced the whole aspect of sacrament in marriage, that we were going to showcase Christ and His church to the world. And instead we were going to go for relational comfort. But we didn't stop here. Our culture moved us more and more to individualism or independence. This relational comfort now has become individual's comfort. This is huge. When you walk into a marriage to become one, and you do it because of what you want, and you think you need, rather than having the other in mind, there's going to be no oneness. And there won't be that reflection to the world that God created marriage for in the first place.

So knowing why we are married, and should stay married, is crucial. The key question is, are we going to approach marriage from a God centered view or a me centered view? Remember, with the me centered view, we will maintain marriage as long as our earthly comforts, desires, and expectations are met. So what is God's intention for marriage and family? I want you to think of a picture for me. Marriage, family, and community are the frame. It's a frame God uses to hold us in relationship to Himself. So He surrounds us with someone who's one with us with God. And then He put the family, He gives us children, and we begin to reflect to them, and then He puts the community around us to support us. We need every bit of that frame. Every bit of it. A healthy goal for marriage and family is to counter original sin. It's why I brought you through the story of Adam and Eve.

Marriage and family are to counteract that. Adam and Eve were created in God's presence. The fall left them spiritually dead with a fallen nature, and a relationship hole that no finite experience can fill. This means that no matter how much Gene loves me, how much he protects

me, how much he rescues me, how much he cares for me, how much he financially provides for me, that relational hole will not be filled. That was created by original sin. But being driven by my fantasy, the me centered reasons, I will be tempted to use him to fill that hole. Honey, I need this. You know the honey-do's? You know? I need this. I need that. Do this. Do that. Help me here. Help me there. We have to have a healthy goal for marriage so that there's a reversal of the selfish filling. And it's rather, we want to enter into an ever-changing and dynamic relationship that should be doing three things. And I'm going to give you those three things and then we're going to take a break, and then after the break, we're going to practically tell you how to do it.

Okay? We're going to tell you just what it should look like in marriage, family, and community. But let me tell you three things that a healthy goal for marriage should be doing. It should be breaking chains for intergenerational sin. Sara Grille's song. A healthy marriage and family breaks that--we should be working at breaking that intergenerational sin. And what I mean by intergenerational sin is when you go back, and you look over three generations, at least, you could go back all the way but that might be hard. Three generations you might be able to get a hold of. And I have students in my class do that. And begin to look for patterns that went from generation to generation. Divorces. Alcoholism. Overworking. Pastoring. Generations of doing something that came down to you and you did it for that. You did it because it was just passed down to you. And there was no reflection. It may even be a good thing that was passed down to you, but if it isn't God's calling on your life, then it won't be right for you.

But abuse, we see it over and over and over, abuse in one family goes to the next family, goes to the next family. Intergenerational sin needs to be broken through a healthy marriage and family. And you do that by, before marriage and during marriage, reflecting on what you're bringing to marriage. What are you bringing? I remember I was one that um always thought if something went wrong in our family, it must be my fault. I mean, I was the mom, I was with the kids the most. So I always reflected it on myself. And I remember when I did this exercise and looked through three-three generations of my family. And we were told by, when I did it, to do it to our husband's family, to. And, you know, that was such an eye opener for me and it gave me so much for-more freedom because I realized I wasn't passing everything down. You know, some of it came from him. He wasn't perfect. I wanted him to be. It was a lot easier taking it on myself than blaming him.

But I realized, wow. Some things came out of his generation's. It's so helpful to know what's being passed down to you because then you can make choices about it. Remember, she talked in her song about the choices you have. Am I going to be the next alcoholic in my family? If your family has a propensity to alcoholism, might probably be good not to drink. You know, if there was abuse, physical, sexual, doesn't verbal. Maybe you need to look at yourself and say what comes out of my mouth? What do I do with my anger? I'm taking that into marriage because it was passed down to me. I need to make some choices here. Am I going to get some help from the community? That's one thing a good, healthy goal for marriage and family. A second one is breaking the power of the relational hole left by original sin. You know that story of Adam and Eve and how wonderfully they were related? It's the way we all long, it's the way they related. But once they send it left a hole that only God can fill.

Marriage partners should stimulate in each other growth and love of God, and growth and love of neighbor. The two greatest commandments. Marriage should stimulate us to more love. Thereby, as they stimulate you to that, it creates a place where the Holy Spirit can work and do the transforming that needs to take place so the relational hole is less. It's not going to be completely filled until we're in heaven. But it should stimulate us to more love of God. And finally, breaking the power of cultural sin. Cultural sin, you said-you say? Yeah, cultural sin. Americans have incredible cultural sin of individualism. That reeks with independence. With prideful status. And comfort seeking. We hear it every day on the news with this election coming up. Are we going to go along with our culture? And be lured by independence and getting what's right for me? Or are we going to replace it with God's purpose for marriage, to reflect to the world His love relationship with His people?

See, this book is all about God's love relationship with His people. In the Old Testament, the examples are Israel. In the New Testament, it's Christ and the church. In today's world, it's you and the relationships around you. What are you reflecting? Are you reflecting God's love? So God's purposes for marriage need to be in the consciousness of the couple in a dynamic way in order to stimulate the motives, attitudes, and energies of each one. If you don't keep these purposes in mind in marriage, you'll go right back to the me-ism. It's hard not to be lured by me centered reasons for marriage. Really hard. But it can be done and it can be done very practically. If we lose sight of these purposes, we will lose hope and inspiration and begin to build barriers around ourselves. We'll become more and more me centered, losing more and

more of the reflection of God, God's love, that brings Him glory because it is design-that's how He designed us.

These barriers then lead to division, apathy, brokenness, separation, divorce possibly, and death of a marriage. Exactly what we're seeing in the church today. Some questions to reflect as you go take a break. What is this-what is your response to this idea that marriage is a spiritual discipline? Do you desire a spiritual connection in your marriage? Are you ready and willing to allow your spouse to see the truth of your hidden heart? That's the biggie. Think about those things. Take a 10-minute break, and come back, and the rest of our time will be talks about how we can do that.