

BUGEMA



UNIVERSITY

**SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES**

COURSE MODULE

RELP 2105: MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

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COURSE INFORMATION

Course Code:	REL 2105:
Course Title:	Marriage and Family
Credit Unit:	3 (45 Hrs)
Semester:	One
Course Duration:	8 weeks (One hour each day for five days, 2 hours for presentation of portfolio, and 3 hours for final examination= 45 Hrs)
Start:	September 1

REL 2105: MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to **REL 2105: Marriage and Family**.

This course introduces you to the biblical, theological, psychological, and practical foundations of marriage and family life. Throughout this course, you will discover God's original design for marriage, explore the responsibilities of husbands and wives, examine principles of Christian parenting, and learn practical approaches to building healthy Christian families. You will also study contemporary issues affecting marriage and family and evaluate them from a biblical and Seventh-day Adventist perspective.

This is a **Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC)** course delivered through the **Open, Distance and e-Learning (ODEL)** mode. Unlike traditional classroom learning, you will study independently using this course guide and the recommended learning resources. The activities in every unit are designed to help you develop practical ministry competencies rather than simply acquire knowledge.

Throughout this course you will participate in **Problem-Based Learning (PBL)** activities that require you to solve real-life family situations by applying biblical principles. You will also complete reflective exercises, ministry activities, case studies, and a Family Ministry Practicum that will enable you to apply what you have learned within your own church or community.

This course consists of **five modules containing thirteen study units and one practicum**. Each module builds upon the previous one, so you are encouraged to study the units in the order presented.

PROGRAM LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the time you complete your theology programme, you should be able to:

1. Demonstrate competence in gospel ministry within the Seventh-day Adventist Church.
2. Interpret Scripture using the historical-grammatical method.
3. Teach, preach, and disciple others using sound biblical principles.
4. Apply biblical knowledge to solve practical ministry challenges.
5. Demonstrate Christian leadership and ethical conduct.
6. Conduct theological research using appropriate academic methods.
7. Engage communities through holistic and contextualized mission.
8. Continue with advanced theological studies.

COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES

When you successfully complete this course, you should be able to:

1. Explain God's original plan for marriage and family.
2. Interpret biblical teachings on marriage and family relationships.
3. Apply biblical principles to strengthen Christian marriages.
4. Demonstrate effective communication and conflict-resolution skills within families.
5. Design family life programmes for church ministry.
6. Evaluate contemporary family issues from a biblical perspective.
7. Provide basic pastoral support for families.
8. Integrate biblical principles into your personal, family, and ministry life.

HOW YOU WILL LEARN

Since this is a **modular self-learning course**, you are responsible for managing your own learning. This course guide serves as your instructor throughout the semester. Carefully read every module, complete all learning activities, and honestly evaluate your progress before moving to the next unit.

Each study unit contains:

- An introduction to the topic.
- Learning outcomes that tell you what you should achieve.
- Recommended readings.
- Self-study notes.
- Competency activities.
- Problem-Based Learning activities.
- Reflection questions.
- Deliverable assignments.
- Summary.
- Self-assessment questions.
- References.

As you study, keep a notebook or electronic journal where you record important ideas, reflections, and ministry applications. This habit will help you prepare your portfolio and final examination.

YOUR LEARNING SCHEDULE

This course has been organized into **five modules**. You are expected to study **one or two units each week** according to the learning schedule provided by your lecturer.

For every study unit you should:

- Read the introduction carefully.
- Review the learning outcomes before beginning your study.
- Read all recommended materials.
- Complete every learning activity.
- Participate in the online discussion forum where applicable.
- Complete the Problem-Based Learning activity.
- Submit the Deliverable Assignment before the deadline.
- Reflect on what you have learned before proceeding to the next unit.

Avoid skipping units because each one prepares you for the next.

ASSESSMENT

Your progress in this course will be measured through continuous assessment and a final examination.

Throughout the semester you will complete assignments, practical ministry activities, and a Family Ministry Practicum. These assessments are designed to help you demonstrate both knowledge and ministry competence.

YOUR DELIVERABLE ASSIGNMENTS

This course contains **thirteen Deliverable Assignments (DA)**—one for each study unit—and **one Family Ministry Practicum Report**.

Complete every assignment immediately after studying its corresponding unit. Keep copies of all your completed assignments because they will form your learning portfolio.

Each assignment should demonstrate that you have:

- Read the study materials.
- Consulted additional scholarly sources.
- Applied biblical principles.
- Reflected critically on your learning.
- Developed practical ministry skills.

Your completed portfolio must be submitted before you are allowed to sit for the final examination.

ASSESSMENT PLAN

Assessment Activity	Weight
Deliverable Assignments	30%
Family Ministry Practicum	20%
Final Examination	50%
Total	100%

University Grading System

Score Range	Letter Grade	Performance Description	Quality Points
80-100%	A	Excellent	5.00
75% – 79.99%	B+	Very Good	4.50
70% – 74.99%	B	Good	4.00
65% – 69.99%	C+	Above Average	3.50
60% - 64.99%	C		3.00
55% – 59.99%	D+	Average	2.50
50% - 54.99%	D	Below Average	2.00
0% - 49.99%	F	Failure	1.00

HOW TO GET THE MOST FROM THIS COURSE

Your success depends largely upon your commitment to independent study. To benefit fully from this course, you should:

1. Read this Course Guide before beginning Module One.
2. Create a weekly study timetable and follow it consistently.
3. Study in a quiet environment free from distractions.
4. Complete every learning activity before moving to the next unit.
5. Participate actively in all online discussions and collaborative activities.
6. Submit your assignments before the deadlines.
7. Contact your lecturer whenever you need clarification.
8. Apply what you learn in your own family, church, and community.
9. Build your portfolio throughout the semester instead of waiting until the end.

10. Review each module before proceeding to the next one.

COURSE GUIDELINES

As you study this course, you are expected to:

- Study every module in the order presented.
- Complete all learning activities independently.
- Participate honestly in all assessments.
- Observe academic integrity by avoiding plagiarism.
- Cite all sources correctly.
- Keep your own study schedule and meet assignment deadlines.
- Respect confidentiality during family ministry practicum activities.
- Maintain regular communication with your lecturer whenever you need assistance.
- Prepare your portfolio carefully for submission.
- Review all modules thoroughly before taking the final examination

Study Units

There are **four (4) modules consisting of thirteen (13) units and one (1) Family Ministry Practicum**. The modules should be studied carefully and diligently to enable learners to understand the biblical, theological, psychological, and practical foundations of marriage and family life from a Seventh-day Adventist perspective.

MODULE ONE: BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS OF MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

UNIT 1: The Divine Origin and Purpose of Marriage

UNIT 2: Biblical Theology of the Family

UNIT 3: Marriage and Family in the Old and New Testaments

MODULE TWO: BUILDING STRONG CHRISTIAN MARRIAGES

UNIT 4: Choosing a Marriage Partner and Courtship

UNIT 5: Roles and Responsibilities of Husbands and Wives

UNIT 6: Communication, Love, and Conflict Resolution

UNIT 7: Sexual Intimacy, Fidelity, and Family Planning from a Biblical Perspective

MODULE THREE: CHRISTIAN FAMILY LIFE

UNIT 8: Parenting and Child Development

UNIT 9: Family Worship, Spiritual Nurture, and Faith Formation

UNIT 10: Family Challenges: Domestic Violence, Divorce, Remarriage, and Single Parenting

UNIT 11: Contemporary Issues Affecting Marriage and Family

MODULE FOUR: MARRIAGE AND FAMILY MINISTRY

UNIT 12: Family Life Education and Marriage Enrichment

UNIT 13: Family Counseling and Pastoral Care

MODULE FIVE: MARRIAGE AND FAMILY PRACTICUM

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Students will engage in practical family ministry by participating in marriage enrichment seminars, family visitation, premarital counseling observations, family worship facilitation, or community family-life education. A reflective practicum report will be compiled and submitted as part of the course portfolio.

Suggested Practicum Activities

- Observe or assist in premarital counseling sessions.
- Conduct interviews with at least two Christian families on principles of successful marriage.
- Organize a family worship program.
- Participate in a Family Life Ministries seminar in a local church.
- Prepare and present a biblical seminar on strengthening Christian families.
- Write a reflective report relating practical experiences to biblical and Seventh-day Adventist teachings on marriage and family.

This module structure is appropriate for a **3-credit-hour (45 contact hours)** undergraduate course in **Marriage and Family** and is consistent with Bugema University's Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) and Problem-Based Learning (PBL) approach.

MODULE 1: BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS OF MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

As you begin this course, you are embarking on a journey that will help you understand one of God's greatest gifts to humanity. Marriage and family are more than social institutions; they are divine institutions established by God before the entrance of sin into the world. Everything you will study in the remaining modules of this course rests upon the truths presented here. For this reason, it is important that you study this module carefully and prayerfully.

Many people today define marriage according to culture, personal experience, government legislation, or public opinion. These definitions often change from one society to another and from one generation to the next. As a result, there is considerable confusion regarding what marriage is, why it exists, and what purpose it is intended to serve. Throughout history, different cultures have developed different customs concerning marriage, family relationships, inheritance, gender roles, and parenting. While culture influences how marriage is celebrated and practiced, it does not determine what marriage is. The authority to define marriage belongs to the One who created it.

Throughout this module, you are invited to set aside popular opinions and return to the authority of Scripture. The Bible presents marriage as God's idea rather than humanity's invention. Consequently, if you desire to understand marriage correctly, you must begin where the Bible begins—in the Garden of Eden. There you will discover that marriage originated not from human need alone but from God's wisdom, love, and purpose. Every biblical teaching concerning husbands, wives, parents, children, family relationships, and even church leadership is rooted in God's original design for marriage.

As you study this module, remember that the Bible is not merely providing historical information. Rather, it is revealing timeless principles that continue to guide Christian families today. Although society has changed dramatically since the days of Adam and Eve, God's design for marriage remains constant because His character does not change. His wisdom is as relevant today as it was at creation.

This instructional guide serves as your teacher throughout your study. Since this course is offered through module, you will be responsible for directing much of your own learning. Read every section carefully, take notes as you progress, compare Scripture with Scripture, and spend time reflecting on how these biblical principles apply to your own life, family, church, and ministry. Do not rush through the material simply to complete the module. Instead, allow God's Word to shape your understanding and transform your thinking.

In this first module, you will journey through three closely related themes. First, you will discover the divine origin and purpose of marriage. Second, you will examine the biblical theology of the family. Finally, you will explore marriage and family as they are presented throughout both the Old and New Testaments. These three areas provide the theological foundation upon which the entire course is built.

UNIT 1: THE DIVINE ORIGIN AND PURPOSE OF MARRIAGE

1. The Divine Origin of Marriage

Before discussing communication between spouses, parenting, conflict resolution, family ministry, or contemporary family challenges, you must first understand where marriage came from. Every structure requires a solid foundation, and every biblical doctrine must begin with God's revelation. Therefore, to understand marriage correctly, you must begin with its divine origin.

One of the greatest mistakes people make today is assuming that marriage is a human invention. Many believe that marriage developed gradually as civilization evolved or that it is merely a legal arrangement created by governments to regulate relationships. Others regard marriage as a social contract that can be modified whenever society changes. While governments may regulate marriage and cultures may celebrate it differently, neither governments nor cultures created marriage. The Bible makes it abundantly clear that marriage originated in the mind of God before any human institution existed.

When you open the first pages of Scripture, you encounter the majestic account of creation. Genesis begins with the declaration, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). Everything that follows in the creation narrative points to God's sovereignty, wisdom, and intentional design. Nothing in creation occurred by accident. Every part of creation was planned carefully by the Creator, who declared His work to be "good."

As you continue reading Genesis chapter one, you observe the orderly progression of creation. God created light before the heavenly bodies, separated land from water, produced vegetation before creating animals, and finally created humanity as the climax of His creative work. Human beings alone were created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26–27). This unique distinction demonstrates the special value and dignity that God placed upon humanity.

After creating Adam, God entrusted him with meaningful work. Adam was given responsibility to cultivate and care for the Garden of Eden. Work itself was not a result of sin; rather, productive labour formed part of God's original plan for human flourishing. Adam also enjoyed perfect fellowship with God. There was no guilt, fear, alienation, or brokenness. The relationship between God and humanity was characterized by complete harmony.

2. "Not Good": The Relational Need (Genesis 2:18)

Yet within this perfect environment, Scripture records something remarkable. For the first time in the creation account, God declared that something was "not good." Genesis 2:18 states, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him." This statement deserves careful consideration. Everything else in creation had been pronounced good, but Adam's aloneness was not.

This declaration does not suggest that Adam was spiritually incomplete or emotionally deficient. Neither does it imply that fellowship with God was insufficient. Rather, it reveals an important truth about human nature. God created human beings as relational creatures.

Although your relationship with God is your highest relationship, God also designed you for meaningful relationships with other human beings. You were not created to live in complete isolation. Human flourishing requires community, companionship, mutual support, and loving relationships.

God's solution to Adam's loneliness was not to create another occupation, another garden, or another animal companion. Instead, God created woman. The creation of Eve demonstrates that marriage was God's answer to humanity's need for intimate companionship. The relationship between husband and wife therefore occupies a unique place among all human relationships.

Genesis describes how God caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep, took one of his ribs, and fashioned the woman from it. This narrative has profound theological significance. Eve was not created from Adam's head to rule over him, nor from his feet to be trampled beneath him. She was formed from his side, close to his heart, symbolizing equality, partnership, companionship, and mutual love. While men and women are biologically and functionally distinct, they possess equal dignity because both bear the image of God.

The Hebrew word translated as "helper" (*ezer*) has often been misunderstood. In many cultures, the word "helper" suggests someone of lower status or lesser importance. However, this is not the biblical meaning. The term *ezer* is frequently used in the Old Testament to describe God Himself as the helper of Israel. Obviously, God is not inferior to those He helps. The word therefore emphasizes strength, support, and indispensable partnership rather than subordination. Eve was created as Adam's corresponding partner, supplying what he lacked so that together they could fulfil God's purposes.

When Adam first saw Eve, his response was one of joyful recognition: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." His words express delight, acceptance, and unity. For the first time, Adam encountered another human being who fully corresponded to him. The first recorded human words concerning another person were words of celebration rather than criticism. This reminds you that God's design for marriage begins with appreciation, gratitude, and mutual respect.

3. The Divine Blueprint (Genesis 2:24)

Immediately following the creation of woman, Scripture records the foundational principle of marriage: "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). This verse has become the cornerstone of biblical teaching on marriage. Remarkably, Jesus quoted it when teaching about marriage (Matthew 19:5), and the Apostle Paul quoted it when explaining both marriage and Christ's relationship with the church (Ephesians 5:31–32). Throughout Scripture, this verse remains the divine blueprint for marriage.

Notice that three important actions are described:

- **Leaving:** Marriage establishes a new primary family relationship. Although honouring parents continues throughout life, marriage creates a new family unit with new responsibilities and priorities.

- **Cleaving:** This describes being united in a permanent covenant relationship characterized by faithfulness, commitment, and exclusive devotion.
- **Becoming One Flesh:** This expression includes physical intimacy, emotional unity, spiritual fellowship, intellectual partnership, and the sharing of life itself.

Marriage, therefore, is much more than living under the same roof or sharing financial responsibilities. It is a covenant of lifelong companionship established by God. Unlike a contract, which is based upon mutual benefit and can often be terminated when obligations are not fulfilled, a covenant is grounded in faithful commitment. Throughout Scripture, God relates to His people through covenant relationships. Marriage reflects this same covenantal faithfulness.

4. The Central Purposes of Marriage

Scripture reveals several foundational purposes for marriage:

- **Companionship:** God declared that it was not good for the man to be alone because human beings were designed to experience mutual love and support. Marriage provides emotional encouragement, spiritual accountability, practical partnership, and lifelong friendship. A healthy Christian marriage reflects God's desire for people to live in loving community rather than isolation.
- **Procreation and Nurturing:** God's command to "be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28) reveals that families play a central role in His plan for filling the earth with people who know and worship Him. Children are repeatedly described in Scripture as gifts from the Lord rather than burdens. Consequently, Christian parenting becomes a sacred stewardship entrusted by God.
- **Sanctification and Holiness:** Marriage exposes selfishness, teaches forgiveness, develops patience, and provides daily opportunities to practise sacrificial love. Through marriage, God shapes the character of husbands and wives so that they increasingly reflect the character of Christ. In this sense, marriage is not merely about personal happiness but about spiritual growth and sanctification.
- **Living Illustration of the Covenant:** The Old Testament frequently portrays Israel as God's bride, while the New Testament describes the church as the bride of Christ. This imagery demonstrates that faithful marriage reflects divine love, commitment, grace, forgiveness, and redemption. Every healthy Christian marriage therefore becomes a testimony to the gospel.

Sadly, sin distorted God's original design. Following the fall recorded in Genesis chapter three, selfishness, blame, domination, pain, conflict, and broken relationships entered human experience. Nevertheless, sin did not abolish God's institution of marriage. Instead, redemption in Christ makes it possible for husbands and wives to pursue God's original ideal through the transforming work of the Holy Spirit.

UNIT 2: BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF THE FAMILY

1. Introduction: The Expansive View of the Family

A biblical theology of the family helps us understand how God views human relationships, authority, and discipleship within the home. In this study, we examine the family not merely as a sociological phenomenon or an accident of human evolution, but as a deliberate, divinely engineered structure meant to fulfill specific cosmic and kingdom purposes.

When we look at the world around us, the family is often viewed through lenses that are functional, economic, or psychological. While the family certainly possesses those dimensions, a biblical theology forces us to look higher. It challenges us to see the home as an earthly embassy of the Kingdom of God. We must examine how Scripture redefines the home, elevates its purpose, and commissions it as the frontline of spiritual warfare and theological instruction. As we progress through this unit, consider your own family background, the families in your community, and the global crisis facing this institution. We will examine how scripture redefines the home, elevates its purpose, and commissions it as the frontline of spiritual warfare and theological instruction.

2. The Family as the Primary Social Unit

Throughout Scripture, the family is treated as the building block of human society and the primary arena for spiritual formation. Long before nations had kings, laws, or formal schools, God established the family as the place where values, faith, and identity are forged.

- Looking closely at the chronological ordering of God's creative work, God did not begin humanity by establishing an institutional church, a political empire, or an academic academy. The very first institutional reality established on planet earth was the home. This chronological priority dictates its theological priority. The family is the structural baseline from which all other human institutions flow and upon which they entirely depend. In the ancient Near East, communities were tribal, but at the nucleus of every tribe was the *bet ab* ("father's house"). This small, localized ecosystem was entirely self-contained, handling
 - **Economic survival:** Agricultural coordination and shared generational resources.
 - **Judicial governance:** Resolving disputes internally based on moral custom.
 - **Spiritual preservation:** Passing down the stories of Yahweh's covenant interactions.

When God seeks to preserve humanity or build a people for Himself, He consistently starts with a family. When the world became completely corrupted by sin in the days of Noah, God saved a single family inside an ark. When God chose to birth a nation that would bring the Messiah into the world, He called an old childless couple—Abraham and Sarah—and promised to build a family line.

In contrast to the prevailing secular worldview that treats the family as an arrangement of convenience—a legal or economic contract where individuals cohabit to split living costs or satisfy personal utility—the biblical framework presents the family as a living covenant community. The difference is profound: a contract promises presence only as long as personal needs are met, whereas a covenant binds members together by divine

appointment, responsible to God for one another's spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being. The biblical family operates as an organic body where the suffering or honouring of one member impacts the entire system. The health of a nation, a church, or a community is directly tied to the spiritual and relational health of its families.

3. Discipleship and the Transfer of Faith

One of the most vital theological mandates given to the family is the transmission of faith across generations, captured in the *Shema* of Deuteronomy 6:4–7:

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart... These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up."

Notice that this instruction happens not in a formal classroom or temple ritual, but in the mundane, everyday rhythms of family life:

- "When you sit at home": Moments of stillness, shared meals, and domestic rest inside the private space of the home, where truth is caught through atmosphere and unhurried conversation.
- "When you walk along the road": Moments of transit, labor, and community engagement (modern commutes and errands), helping children interpret the external world through a biblical lens.
- "When you lie down": Evening hours and bedtime, representing vulnerability, reflection, unpacking anxieties, and extending forgiveness.
- "When you get up": The morning rush, grounding the family in God's Word and prayer before stepping into secular environments.

Parents are designated by God as the primary spiritual formators of their children; the home is intended to be a domestic church. External ministries serve as secondary supports, but they cannot replace the theological weight of a parent's daily life. The home is the ultimate laboratory where theology is tested.

4. Covenantal Responsibility and the Apologetic of the Home

Within the safety of a godly family, children catch a glimpse of God's fatherly heart—His discipline, provision, protection, and boundless mercy. Abstract theological concepts like "Father," "Provider," and "Redeemer" are given tangible form by human parents. When a parent provides, shields, and disciplines with tears rather than rage, they build a mental pathway that allows a child to trust God. Conversely, abusive or absent parental authority distorts God's character and creates spiritual insecurity.

Covenantal responsibility means family relationships are unconditional. A child does not earn their place by performance; they are loved because they belong, mirroring justification by faith. Furthermore, a holy, stable, and joyful family serves as a radical counter-cultural

apologetic to a watching world, proving that human life flourishes best under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

5. Structurally and Relationally Ordered Roles

The Bible outlines specific roles within the household (Ephesians 5:21–6:4; Colossians 3:18–21) patterned after the Trinity. Within the Godhead, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are completely equal in essence, worth, dignity, and power; yet functionally, there is order and submission. Similarly, within the family, functional roles do not alter the absolute equality of husbands and wives as co-heirs of grace and image-bearers of God (*Imago Dei*).

New Testament headship is re-defined through the cross of Jesus Christ. It is not autocratic domination, but a crushing weight of sacrificial responsibility: husbands are commanded to love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her (Ephesians 5:25). True headship is measured by how much comfort and self-interest a leader lays down for the flourishing of those under his care. In response to this humble, protective leadership, a wife's respectful partnership (*hypotasso*—aligning under a mission) becomes a safe and natural alignment with a protector rather than submission to a tyrant.

In the parental dynamic, children are commanded to obey and honour their parents (Ephesians 6:1–2), an attitude of respect that extends into adulthood. Concurrently, parents are warned not to exasperate their children—avoiding bitter resentment caused by harshness, unrealistic expectations, or hypocrisy—but to bring them up in the instruction of the Lord with absolute truth and deep grace.

6. Generational Transmission and the Covenant Line

Scripture cautions against "generational near sightedness"—focusing only on immediate happiness—and presents a vision that extends three to four generations down the line (Exodus 34:6–7). Unaddressed sinful patterns (anger, unfaithfulness, addiction) become normalized, creating a compounding momentum of trauma for descendants. Conversely, when a family repents and builds a legacy of prayer, Scripture, and integrity, they initiate a generational ripple effect of righteousness that yields multiplied blessings.

In the Old Testament, patriarchs formally pronounced covenant blessings over their children, executing a prophetic handoff of spiritual responsibility. Today, parents must likewise impart a spiritual heritage: rooting their children's identity in Christ, sharing the history of God's faithfulness in their family, and commissioning them to advance the gospel.

7. The Impact of the Fall on the Family System

To maintain a realistic biblical view, we must recognize that sin fractured the family in Genesis 3. The Fall introduced immediate relational consequences:

- **Shame and Isolation:** Adam and Eve hid their nakedness behind fig leaves, replacing raw intimacy with emotional walls and self-protection.
- **Blame-Shifting:** Adam deflected responsibility to God and his wife ("The woman you put here with me..."), severing covenant unity to protect himself.

- **Struggle for Power:** God pronounced that relational rebellion would result in control, manipulation, and harsh domination ("Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you").

This brokenness spilled into the next generation in Genesis 4, where sibling rivalry resulted in Cain murdering Abel. Throughout the Old Testament narrative, family dysfunction persists—from Abraham's cowardice regarding Sarah, to Isaac and Rebekah's destructive favouritism, to Jacob's sons selling their brother Joseph into slavery. The family is not a pristine paradise; it is a recovering hospital in need of redemptive grace.

UNIT 3: MARRIAGE AND FAMILY IN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS

1. Marriage and Family in the Old Testament

The Old Testament documents the unfolding of God's redemptive purpose through human families, demonstrating how divine grace operates amidst human weakness.

The Patriarchal Era

The family was the primary social, economic, and religious unit during the patriarchal period. Patriarchs such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob functioned as spiritual leaders, building altars, offering sacrifices, and passing covenant promises down to their descendants. Despite their genuine faith, their households frequently suffered from polygamy, favouritism, and deception. Nevertheless, God remained faithful to His covenant, demonstrating that His redemption plan relies on His grace rather than human perfection.

The Mosaic Law and the Protection of the Family

When God formed the nation of Israel at Mount Sinai, He established moral, civil, and ceremonial laws to protect the family system. The Ten Commandments explicitly safeguard family structures:

- The fifth commandment ("Honor your father and your mother") secures parental authority and generational care.
- The seventh commandment ("You shall not commit adultery") guards the sanctity and exclusivity of the marriage covenant.
- The tenth commandment prohibits coveting a neighbour's spouse or household assets.

Furthermore, Mosaic legislation provided protections for vulnerable family members—including widows, orphans, and servants—and established laws governing inheritance and property to keep ancestral lands within family lines.

Prophetic Imagery and Divine Covenant Love

The Old Testament prophets frequently utilized the imagery of marriage to describe the relationship between God and Israel. God was portrayed as a faithful husband, while Israel was depicted as a bride. When Israel turned to idolatry, the prophets described it as spiritual adultery. Hosea's marriage to an unfaithful wife served as a vivid object lesson of God's

relentless, pursuing covenant love (*hesed*) toward an unfaithful people, illustrating that divine redemption seeks reconciliation and restoration.

2. Marriage and Family in the New Testament

The New Testament brings the biblical theology of marriage and family to its ultimate fulfillment through the life, teaching, and redemptive work of Jesus Christ and His apostles.

The Teaching of Jesus

Jesus elevated the sanctity of marriage by reaffirming God's original creation design. When questioned about divorce in Matthew 19:3–9, Jesus pointed back to Genesis 1:27 and Genesis 2:24, emphasizing that God designed marriage to be an indissoluble, lifelong covenant between one man and one woman. He explained that Mosaic concessions regarding divorce were permitted solely due to human hardness of heart, not as God's original intent.

Jesus also expanded the concept of family by introducing the family of God—a spiritual community united by obedience to the will of God (*Mark 3:31–35*). While affirming the physical family, Jesus taught that devotion to the Kingdom of God supersedes all earthly loyalties.

Apostolic Instruction and the Household Codes

The Apostolic Epistles provide clear instructions for Christian households navigating secular cultures (*Ephesians 5:21–6:4; Colossians 3:18–21; 1 Peter 3:1–7*). Rather than adopting prevailing Roman or cultural norms, the Apostles transformed family dynamics around the Gospel:

- Husbands are commanded to love their wives sacrificially, putting aside self-interest to cherish and protect them just as Christ loves the Church.
- Wives are encouraged to support and respect their husbands in mutual reverence for Christ.
- Parents are instructed to nurture their children with patience, instruction, and gentle discipline, avoiding harshness.
- Children are called to obey and honour their parents in the Lord.

Redemptive Restoration in the Church

Through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the New Testament presents the local church as a wider family network where single believers, widows, and those from broken homes find spiritual brothers, sisters, mothers, and fathers (*Mark 10:29–30*). Redemption in Christ empowers broken families to experience reconciliation, forgiveness, and transformation, allowing Christian homes to serve as light and sanctuary in the world.

COMPETENCY-BASED CURRICULUM (CBC) LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Activity 1: Comparative Worldview Matrix and Essay

- **Core Competency:** Critical Thinking, Communication, and Biblical Literacy.
- **Task Instruction:**
 1. Draft a comprehensive analysis contrasting the secular view of marriage (defined by legal contracts, individual utility, and changing social definitions) with the biblical view of marriage (defined by divine origin, lifelong covenant, and mutual sanctification).
 2. Write a 500-word reflective paper explaining how the three principles of Genesis 2:24 (*Leaving, Cleaving, and Becoming One Flesh*) address and resolve contemporary marital instability in your local community.

Activity 2: Household Discipleship Mapping (*The Shema* in Practice)

- **Core Competency:** Self-Efficacy, Practical Application, and Spiritual Leadership.
- **Task Instruction:**
 1. Conduct an audit of your weekly family routine using the four daily postures outlined in Deuteronomy 6:7 (*sitting at home, walking along the road, lying down, getting up*).
 2. Design a practical 7-day "Family Discipleship Plan" tailored for a contemporary home. Specify concrete spiritual practices for each posture (such as mealtime reflections, commute conversations, bedtime prayers, and morning devotionals) to ensure the intentional transfer of faith to the next generation.

Activity 3: Generational Legacy Analysis and Action Plan

- **Core Competency:** Problem Solving, Reflection, and Values-Based Leadership.
- **Task Instruction:**
 1. Identify two positive spiritual legacies and two negative behavioural patterns present across the history of your extended family or community.
 2. Write an actionable strategy detailing how the Gospel enables believers to interrupt negative generational cycles (referencing Ezekiel 18:20) and establish a new trajectory of covenantal blessing (referencing Exodus 34:6–7) for future generations.

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MODULE 2: BUILDING STRONG CHRISTIAN MARRIAGES

As you advance in this course, you transition from the foundational theology of marriage to the practical discernment and relational dynamics required to build a resilient, Christ-centered home. Having examined marriage as a divine calling established at creation, you are now ready to address the critical steps that precede and sustain a lifelong covenant: choosing a life partner, conducting a godly courtship, maintaining sexual purity, and preparing for gospel-centered ministry as a married couple.

The decision to marry is one of the most consequential choices you will ever make, second only to your personal surrender to Jesus Christ. It is a decision that cannot be easily reversed without deep spiritual, emotional, and relational pain. Modern society often portrays mate selection as a matter of sudden romance, biological attraction, or social convenience. In stark contrast, the kingdom of God demands that choosing a spouse be guided by biblical wisdom, spiritual discernment, rigorous observation of character, and unceasing prayer.

Throughout this module, you will discover that a successful Christian marriage is not found by chance; it is built intentionally. God does not merely care *that* you marry; He cares deeply about *whom* you marry and *how* you prepare for that union. The principles contained in these units are designed to protect you from common cultural traps, correct pervasive myths about romance, and equip you with practical tools for relational evaluation.

Furthermore, as a student of theology and a future minister or Christian leader, this module holds double weight. The principles you master here will not only guard your own home but will also form the bedrock of your future pastoral ministry. You will be called upon to counsel young adults, guide parents, conduct premarital sessions, evaluate relational warning signs, and model a godly household before a watching congregation. Study these pages prayerfully, allowing Scripture to align your desires with God's eternal standards.

UNIT 4: CHOOSING A MARRIAGE PARTNER AND COURTSHIP

1. Biblical Principles for Mate Selection

Scripture does not provide an explicit physical checklist, educational prerequisite, or financial threshold for selecting a spouse. Instead, it consistently elevates spiritual values, moral integrity, and godly character over external metrics. Human instinct often prioritizes charm, social standing, or physical beauty, but God looks directly at the heart (1 Samuel 16:7).

The wisdom literature of the Old Testament repeatedly warns against choosing a partner based solely on external appeal. Proverbs 31:30 establishes the foundational principle: "Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised." This principle applies with equal weight to both men and women. Physical attractiveness may ignite initial interest, but it lacks the structural capacity to sustain a marriage through illness, aging, financial hardship, and circumstantial distress. Character, refined by the Holy Spirit, grows stronger with time.

When evaluating a potential partner, biblical wisdom demands that you ask probing, character-focused questions:

- Does this individual demonstrate an active, saving faith in Jesus Christ?
- Do they submit their daily decisions to the authority of Scripture?
- Are they honest, transparent, and trustworthy under pressure?
- Do they treat others—especially those who cannot benefit them—with genuine kindness?
- Do they possess the humility to seek forgiveness and the grace to extend it?
- Do they exhibit emotional maturity and Spirit-led self-control?
- Are they actively committed to local church community and kingdom service?

2. The Indispensability of Godly Character

Personality may draw two people together, but character determines whether the covenant will endure. Character is not demonstrated by eloquent words during romantic moments; it is revealed through consistent behaviour across diverse circumstances over time.

Jesus established a universal law of evaluation when He declared, "By their fruits you will know them" (Matthew 7:16). Spiritual fruit requires time to cultivate and cannot be successfully counterfeited over an extended period. During courtship, you must observe how a potential spouse handles disappointment, criticism, financial strain, and personal conflict. Pay close attention to how they treat service staff, family members, authority figures, and children.

When structuring your evaluation during courtship, focus on four vital layers of a person's life:

- **Spiritual Roots:** A genuine fear of the Lord and a mind shaped by biblical truth.
- **Fruit Under Pressure:** Demonstrating patience, self-control, and trust when facing disappointment or conflict.
- **Relational Fruit:** Extending respect, humility, and forgiveness to family, leaders, and those who are less fortunate.
- **Covenant Capacity:** Maintaining honesty, financial integrity, and personal responsibility in daily commitments.

A common and dangerous delusion among young adults is the belief that marriage will reform a partner's flawed character. Marriage does not eliminate pre-existing character flaws; it amplifies them. Patterns of uncontrolled anger, deception, selfishness, addiction, or spiritual apathy present during courtship will inevitably worsen under the added pressures of household management and parenting, unless genuine repentance and Holy Spirit-driven transformation occur prior to marriage.

3. Prayer and Divine Discernment

Prayer must not be treated as a rubber stamp to validate personal romantic desires. True prayer is an act of radical surrender, aligning human affection with God's sovereign will.

Scripture provides clear models of seeking divine guidance in relational decisions. When Abraham's servant was tasked with finding a wife for Isaac, he did not rely on personal shrewdness; he prayed specifically for God's providential direction and character-focused signs (Genesis 24:12–14). God honoured his dependence by leading him directly to Rebekah.

Prayer acts as a spiritual filter during courtship, silencing emotional impulse and sharpening spiritual discernment. It enables you to evaluate a relationship objectively, asking God to expose hidden red flags, reinforce godly alignment, or close doors that lead away from His purpose. As Ellen G. White perceptively noted in *Messages to Young People*: "If men and women are in the habit of praying twice a day before they contemplate marriage, they should pray four times a day when such a step is anticipated."

4. The Value of Wise Counsel and Parental Blessing

Modern individualism often promotes total independence in romantic choices, viewing outside input as an intrusion. However, Scripture consistently links safety and success to an abundance of wise counsellors (Proverbs 11:14).

The Fifth Commandment calls believers to honour their parents (Exodus 20:12), which includes weighing their perspective regarding a potential life partner. Parents and spiritual mentors possess an objective advantage: they are not blinded by romantic emotions and can evaluate a suitor's character, maturity, and compatibility with sober judgment. Pastors, church elders, and mature Christian couples provide invaluable guardrails during courtship. Seeking their counsel demonstrates biblical humility rather than weakness.

5. Critical Warning Signs During Courtship

Courtship is an evaluative process designed to determine whether proceeding to marriage is wise. Discovering that a relationship should end is not a failure; it is often a merciful intervention. You must remain vigilant for behavioural red flags:

- **Persistent Deception:** Dishonesty destroys trust, which is the foundational currency of covenant unity.
- **Uncontrolled Anger and Intimidation:** Verbal abuse, explosive tempers, threats, or physical aggression signal deep emotional and spiritual damage.
- **Manipulative Control:** Isolating a partner from family, friends, or church, or using guilt to dictate behaviour, reveals an abusive desire for dominance.
- **Spiritual Inconsistency:** A lack of appetite for Scripture, prayer, fellowship, and worship before marriage indicates spiritual apathy that will drag down the future household.

- **Unaddressed Addictions:** Compulsive reliance on substance abuse, pornography, gambling, or digital media must be thoroughly resolved before marriage can be responsibly considered.
- **Chronic Financial Irresponsibility:** Habitual laziness, unmanaged debt, or impulsive spending habits create severe marital distress.
- **Persistent Disrespect:** A suitor who belittles, publicly humiliates, or mocks others will eventually direct that same contempt toward their spouse.

6. Navigating Cultural Traditions and Premarital Counselling

Culture exerts a powerful influence over marriage practices. In many African societies, marriage is recognized as a union between two family networks rather than merely two isolated individuals—a communal perspective that aligns well with biblical values of family honour and accountability.

However, culture must always be subjected to the authority of Scripture (Romans 12:2). Cultural traditions that promote forced marriage, bride-price exploitation, gender-based subjugation, or unbiblical rituals must be decisively rejected. Cultural customs are beneficial only when they reinforce biblical dignity and covenant integrity.

Finally, structured premarital counselling is an essential step in marriage preparation. Effective counselling provides a neutral setting to address critical operational topics before the wedding, including financial management, communication dynamics, conflict resolution strategies, in-law boundaries, sexual expectations, and family worship habits.

UNIT 5: ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF HUSBANDS AND WIVES

1. Marriage as a Covenant of Mutual Commitment

Marriage is established in the Garden of Eden as a sacred covenant, originating in God’s design prior to the entrance of sin. It differs fundamentally from a secular contract: a contract is conditional, dependent on fulfilled performance, whereas a covenant is anchored in enduring commitment and faithful love. As Malachi 2:14 emphasizes, God acts as a witness to the marriage covenant. Marriage involves three distinct parties: the husband, the wife, and God Himself. Consequently, covenant faithfulness within the home is an act of spiritual obedience to the Creator. Both spouses share equal responsibility for nurturing the relationship, using their lives to reflect the self-giving spirit of Jesus Christ.

2. Equality and Complementarity

A biblical view of marriage holds two principles in balance: absolute spiritual equality and functional complementarity. Genesis 1:27 confirms that both male and female are created in the image of God (*Imago Dei*). Husband and wife share equal dignity, are joint recipients of grace, and stand as co-heirs of salvation (1 Peter 3:7). Neither spouse is spiritually superior or inferior.

Eve was formed from Adam’s side (Genesis 2) to symbolize companionship, partnership, and equality—she was neither fashioned from his head to rule over him, nor from his feet to be

trampled. Complementarity acknowledges that God created men and women with distinct physical, emotional, and functional capacities designed to work together. Just as members of a body perform different functions while possessing equal value (1 Corinthians 12), marital roles are distinct yet equal in worth.

3. Mutual Submission

Before detailing specific marital roles, Scripture establishes mutual submission as the baseline for all Christian relationships: "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Ephesians 5:21). Biblical submission is rooted in humility, servant-heartedness, and placing the well-being of others above selfish ambition. It requires active listening, mutual respect, generous forgiveness, and a commitment to unity.

Biblical submission must never be distorted to justify tyranny, manipulation, domestic abuse, or passivity. Any attempt to enforce authority through violence or intimidation violates Christ's model of sacrificial leadership.

4. The Husband's Responsibilities: Servant Leadership, Love, and Protection

The New Testament designates the husband as the head of the wife, explicitly using Christ's headship over the church as the model (Ephesians 5:23). Biblical headship is not autocratic domination; it is servant leadership. Christ exercised His authority by washing feet, serving others, and laying down His life. Therefore, a husband's leadership must be marked by humility, spiritual accountability, and self-sacrifice. He leads primarily by personal example in integrity, devotion, and kindness.

Ephesians 5:25 commands husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church. This standard demands unconditional, patient, and forgiving action. A husband exercises spiritual leadership by maintaining family worship, praying regularly with and for his family, studying Scripture, and stewarding household resources wisely.

Additionally, a husband is called to provide for and protect his household across physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions (1 Timothy 5:8). Provision involves meeting daily needs, encouraging spiritual growth, and fostering an environment of emotional security. Protection entails guarding the home against harmful moral influences, resolving conflicts peacefully, and maintaining personal integrity. Providing for the household does not preclude a wife's economic participation, as demonstrated by the industrious woman in Proverbs 31; rather, it establishes ultimate accountability for household flourishing.

5. The Wife's Responsibilities: Indispensable Partnership, Spiritual Companionship, and Wisdom

In Genesis 2:18, God identified man's isolation as "not good" and created a "helper suitable" (*ezer kenegdo*). The Hebrew term *ezer* is frequently applied to God as Israel's protector and helper (Psalm 33:20), indicating that the word connotes strength, vital support, and essential partnership rather than weakness or subordination. The wife is created as an equal partner to join her husband in stewarding creation, nurturing the home, and advancing God's kingdom.

Ephesians 5:22 instructs wives to submit to their husbands as to the Lord. Understood within the overarching framework of mutual submission (Ephesians 5:21), this call represents a voluntary alignment with her husband's leadership to foster order and unity. It does not require passivity, silence, or the suppression of intelligence and conviction. If a husband commands something that violates God's law, a wife's primary allegiance remains with God (Acts 5:29).

A Christian wife acts as a vital spiritual companion within the home, exercising influence through her faith, prayer, and character—mirroring biblical figures like Hannah, Lois, Eunice, and Mary. Proverbs 31 presents the godly wife as industrious, economically productive, intellectually capable, compassionate to the needy, and spiritually mature. She manages household operations, exercises financial wisdom, speaks with truth, and honors God.

6. Shared Decision-Making and Operational Unity

A healthy Christian marriage relies on shared decision-making rather than unilateral authority. Wise husbands seek their wives' counsel, discernment, and expertise. Scriptural precedents—such as Aquila and Priscilla's joint ministry, or God instructing Abraham to listen to Sarah's voice regarding Isaac (Genesis 21:12)—demonstrate the necessity of mutual consultation. Major family choices regarding finances, child-rearing, church involvement, and career directions must be evaluated together through open communication, mutual respect, and prayer.

UNIT 6: COMMUNICATION, LOVE, AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

1. The Divine Origin and Intent of Communication

Communication originates in the character of God, who reveals Himself through speech, creation, the prophets, and ultimately through Jesus Christ, the living Word. Human beings, created in God's image, are intrinsically designed for relational communication.

In Eden, communication between God and humanity, and between husband and wife, was open, transparent, and unhindered. Following the Fall (Genesis 3), human communication became corrupted by defensiveness, blame-shifting, deception, and shame. Through the redemptive work of Christ, communication within marriage can be restored to build trust, foster understanding, and deepen spiritual unity.

2. The Power of Words and Active Listening

Communication functions as the vital link within a marriage, supplying emotional closeness and clarity. Without consistent communication, spouses rely on unverified assumptions, which often lead to misunderstanding, emotional distance, and resentment. Spoken words carry significant moral weight: "The tongue has the power of life and death" (Proverbs 18:21). Scripture explicitly commands believers to discard unwholesome speech in favor of words that build up the listener (Ephesians 4:29).

Biblical communication prioritizes listening over speaking. James 1:19 outlines the proper order: be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry. Active listening requires full attention, patience, empathy, and a desire to understand the partner's heart before

formulating a response. Listening validates the spouse's worth and de-escalates emerging arguments before they intensify.

3. Speaking the Truth in Love

Ephesians 4:15 instructs believers to speak the truth in love. Truth without love degrades into harshness and legalism, while love without truth leads to compromise, hidden bitterness, and superficial peace. Christian communication integrates honesty with kindness.

When addressing relational friction, partners should focus on specific behaviors rather than attacking character. Constructive dialogue avoids absolute generalizations such as "always" or "never," which trigger defensiveness. Instead, clear, respectful, and precise language allows couples to confront issues without tearing down personal dignity.

4. Non-Verbal Signals and Emotional Intelligence

Communication extends beyond spoken words to include non-verbal cues: body language, posture, facial expressions, tone of voice, eye contact, and silence. Inconsistencies between spoken words and non-verbal actions (such as declaring interest while staring at a digital device) create mistrust.

Furthermore, cultivating emotional intelligence—the ability to identify, understand, and regulate one's emotions while responding empathetically to a spouse—is essential for resolving interpersonal tension. The fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23) provides the internal framework necessary for healthy emotional communication.

5. Biblical Principles of Conflict Resolution

Conflict is an inevitable reality in a fallen world whenever two distinct individuals merge their lives. Conflict itself is not inherently sinful; rather, it serves as a mechanism to expose self-centeredness, clarify expectations, and refine character. Unresolved or mismanaged conflict, however, produces bitterness, emotional distance, and spiritual vulnerability.

Scripture provides a clear blueprint for resolving marital disputes:

- **Prompt Reconciliation:** Address offenses quickly rather than allowing anger to fester into malice (Ephesians 4:26–27).
- **Self-Examination:** Evaluate personal contributions to the dispute before pointing out a spouse's faults (Matthew 7:3–5).
- **Confession and Repentance:** Acknowledge personal errors directly without offering defensive excuses.
- **Forgiveness:** Extend unconditional, Christlike forgiveness, refusing to record past grievances (Colossians 3:13; 1 Corinthians 13:5).
- **Restoration:** Focus on rebuilding trust and relational harmony rather than winning an argument.

UNIT 7: SEXUAL INTIMACY, FIDELITY, AND FAMILY PLANNING FROM A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

1. GOD'S DESIGN FOR HUMAN SEXUALITY

Human sexuality is created by God rather than shaped by social evolution. Consequently, its definition and boundaries rest entirely on divine revelation rather than changing cultural trends. In Genesis 1:27, Scripture records: *"So God created mankind in His own image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them."* Sexuality is a foundational element of God's creation, which He declared to be *"very good"* (Genesis 1:31).

Humanity was intentionally fashioned as male and female, establishing equal dignity (*Imago Dei*) across both genders alongside functional distinction. When Eve was formed to resolve Adam's isolation, Genesis 2:24 established the lifelong pattern for marital unity: *"Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."* Jesus explicitly reaffirmed this foundational standard in Matthew 19:4–6. Becoming "one flesh" extends beyond physical union to mean a complete merging of two lives—emotionally, spiritually, socially, and physically—within a covenant context.

2. THEOLOGY AND PURPOSES OF SEXUAL INTIMACY

Marital intimacy is deeply theological; throughout Scripture, the marriage covenant mirrors God's redemptive relationship with His people (Isaiah 54:5; Hosea 2:19–20; Revelation 19:7–9). As Richard M. Davidson notes: *"Human sexuality reaches its highest meaning only within the covenant relationship established by God in marriage, where physical intimacy becomes an expression of total personal commitment."* Similarly, Stanley J. Grenz states: *"Christian sexual ethics begins with the conviction that sexuality is God's gift, intended to foster covenant community rather than individual gratification."* Paul reminds believers in 1 Corinthians 6:19–20 that their bodies are *"temples of the Holy Spirit"* to honor God.

Scripture reveals four primary purposes for sexual intimacy within marriage:

1. **Expressing Covenant Unity:** Intimacy continuously renews marital vows. Genesis 2:24 speaks of becoming one flesh, and Timothy Keller writes: *"Sex is God's appointed way for two people to reciprocally say to one another, 'I belong completely, permanently, and exclusively to you.'"*
2. **Fostering Companionship & Affection:** The Song of Solomon celebrates joyful, unashamed marital affection based on mutual delight rather than coercion.
3. **Providing Mutual Satisfaction:** In 1 Corinthians 7:3–5, Paul teaches reciprocal consideration: *"The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband."* Intimacy excludes self-centeredness, control, and exploitation.
4. **Participating in Procreation:** Genesis 1:28 commands humanity to *"Be fruitful and increase in number."* Children are received as sacred trusts and *"a heritage from the Lord"* (Psalm 127:3).

Ellen G. White presents a balanced view that rejects both asceticism and indulgence: *"The family tie is the closest, the most tender and sacred, of any on earth"* (*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 356). She counsels against arbitrary control, writing: *"Let each give love rather than exact it"* (*The Adventist Home*, p. 118).

3. MARITAL FIDELITY AND MORAL BOUNDARIES

Scripture sets clear boundaries to protect human dignity. The Seventh Commandment dictates: *"You shall not commit adultery"* (Exodus 20:14). Jesus deepened this standard in Matthew 5:28: *"Anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."* Andreas J. Köstenberger explains: *"Biblical sexual ethics are not arbitrary restrictions but divine safeguards designed to preserve the integrity of marriage, the dignity of persons, and the holiness of God's people."*

Fidelity (*fidelitas*) demands lifelong, exclusive commitment in thought, word, and action, reflecting God's steadfast covenant love. Paul notes that true love *"always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres"* (1 Corinthians 13:7). Gary Thomas observes: *"A good marriage is not built on finding the perfect spouse but on daily choosing to love imperfectly yet faithfully."*

Contemporary Threats to Marital Fidelity

- **Adultery:** Violates covenant trust and carries severe consequences, as demonstrated by David's sin with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11–12). While God forgives genuine repentance (Psalm 51), earthly consequences often remain.
- **Emotional Affairs & Digital Infidelity:** Inappropriate emotional intimacy outside of marriage weakens marital bonds. Secret messaging, social media obsession, and covert online relationships breach covenant openness. Richard Foster notes: *"Sin thrives in secrecy but loses its power when exposed to the light."*
- **Pornography:** Objectifies human beings and separates sexual pleasure from covenant commitment. Köstenberger writes: *"Pornography fundamentally opposes God's design for sexuality because it replaces covenant love with selfish consumption."* Overcoming pornography requires confession, spiritual disciplines, accountability, and reliance on the Holy Spirit.

Rebuilding trust after unfaithfulness demands genuine repentance, full accountability, time, and consistent transparency. Ellen G. White states: *"The marriage covenant covers every other covenant, for it is entered into before God"* (*The Adventist Home*, p. 340).

4. BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES OF FAMILY PLANNING

Family planning involves prayerful decisions regarding the timing and spacing of children. While Scripture calls children a divine blessing (Psalm 127:3), it does not mandate a specific family size. Instead, it emphasizes responsible stewardship, mutual agreement between spouses, physical and emotional health, financial readiness, and spiritual commitment.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church teaches that children are gifts entrusted by God. Couples are encouraged to make family planning decisions prayerfully while upholding the sanctity of human life. Decisions should be guided by a desire to glorify God, provide proper nurture, and strengthen family ministry rather than by selfish convenience or materialism. Key considerations include spiritual nurture, physical health, economic readiness, and mutual consent.

5. CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES AND PASTORAL MINISTRY

Modern sexual ethics face significant challenges from cohabitation, casual encounters, digital temptations, secular media, and consumer-driven self-gratification.

Living a Life of Sexual Purity

1 Thessalonians 4:3 states: *"For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality."* Purity requires positive choices, spiritual disciplines, and intentional boundaries, as demonstrated by Joseph's decision to flee temptation in Genesis 39:9: *"How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?"*

The church must support families through premarital counseling, marriage enrichment seminars, and parenting instruction. Pastors must provide compassionate care, active listening, confidentiality, and guidance anchored in Galatians 6:2: *"Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."*

Ellen G. White highlights the outreach potential of the home: *"The Christian home is to be an object lesson, illustrating the excellence of the true principles of life"* (*The Adventist Home*, p. 31). She adds: *"Marriage, a union for life, is a symbol of the union between Christ and His church"* (*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 64).

Ultimately, human sexuality, marital fidelity, and family stewardship point back to the gospel, showcasing Christ's unconditional love and transforming grace.

COMPETENCY-BASED CURRICULUM (CBC) LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Activity 1: Comprehensive Suitor Evaluation Tool

- **Core Competency: Critical Thinking, Spiritual Discernment, and Decision-Making.**
- **Task Instruction:**
 1. **Develop a comprehensive, 10-point "Character and Compatibility Evaluation Matrix" based on Proverbs 31, 1 Corinthians 13, and 1 Timothy 3.**
 2. **For each criterion, write two observational questions that assess real-life behavior under pressure (e.g., assessing financial stewardship, emotional self-control, or spiritual leadership) rather than verbal assertions.**
 3. **Write a 300-word reflection explaining why emotional feelings must be subordinated to Spirit-led character assessment during mate selection.**

Activity 2: Premarital Boundaries and Digital Purity Strategy

- **Core Competency: Self-Efficacy, Moral Leadership, and Digital Stewardship.**
- **Task Instruction:**
 1. Draft a practical "Covenant of Purity" designed for an engaged or courting couple.
 2. Define specific physical, relational, and digital boundaries (e.g., accountability software, environment limits, late-night communication rules) aimed at protecting the couple from premarital compromise and pornography.
 3. Include a detailed plan for restoring accountability and seeking spiritual counsel if personal boundaries are breached.

Activity 3: Case Study Analysis on Cultural Customs vs. Biblical Truth

- **Core Competency: Cross-Cultural Analysis, Problem Solving, and Biblical Application.**
- **Task Instruction:**
 1. Read the following scenario: *A Christian couple desires to marry, but the bride's family demands an exorbitant bride-price that will force the groom into extreme, long-term debt. Additionally, the family insists on performing traditional ancestral rituals that conflict with Christian worship before agreeing to the union.*
 2. Write a 500-word pastoral intervention plan addressing both families. Your response must:
 - Affirm the cultural value of family honor and community involvement.
 - Apply biblical principles (such as Romans 12:2 and 1 Corinthians 10:31) to critique financial extortion and syncretistic religious practices.
 - Propose a practical, Christ-centered compromise that honors the parents while preserving the young couple's financial stability and spiritual integrity.

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MODULE FOUR: MARRIAGE AND FAMILY MINISTRY

This module serves as a practical and pastoral bridge between the foundational principles of Christian family life and the active shepherd-care required within the local church community. While previous modules explored the biblical, developmental, and relational dynamics of the home, Module 4 equips leaders, pastors, and educators with the specific competencies needed to nurture healthy families and intervene effectively during times of distress.

UNIT 12: FAMILY LIFE EDUCATION AND MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT

1. Theological Foundations of Family Life Education

Family Life Education (FLE) is a preventive, educational approach designed to strengthen interpersonal relationships, build healthy marital dynamics, and promote spiritual growth within the domestic sphere. Grounded in the biblical mandate to build up the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11–13), FLE equips individuals and families with practical skills rooted in scriptural truth.

While clinical counselling focuses on remediation and crisis intervention, Family Life Education focuses on prevention, skill acquisition, and relational health before crises occur. Clinical counselling is typically reactive, seeking to repair fractured dynamics after a breakdown occurs. In contrast, FLE is proactive, focusing on building long-term relational resilience and practical skills across the family life cycle. The Apostle Paul underscores the necessity of continuous learning in relational stewardship when he urges believers to *"walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love"* (Ephesians 4:1–2).

Ellen G. White highlights the preventive value of intentional education in the home: *"It is in the home that the education of the child is to begin. Here is his first school. Here, with his parents as instructors, he is to learn the lessons that are to guide him throughout life"* (Child Guidance, p. 17). Family Life Education expands this principle across the entire lifespan, equipping parents, spouses, and youth to navigate relational transitions with grace and biblical wisdom.

2. Key Domains of Family Life Education

To foster holistic family flourishing, effective church-based FLE programs systematically cover key relational domains:

- Biblical Foundations of Marriage and Family: Establishing creation-based paradigms for marriage, covenant fidelity, equality, and mutual submission (Genesis 2:24; Ephesians 5:21–33).
- Interpersonal Communication and Conflict Resolution: Teaching active listening, emotional awareness, constructive dialogue, and forgiveness (James 1:19; Colossians 3:12–14).

- Human Growth and Development Across the Lifespan: Understanding cognitive, emotional, and physical changes from early childhood through adolescence, midlife, and aging.
- Parenting Education and Guidance: Equipping parents with authoritative parenting strategies, age-appropriate discipline techniques, and spiritual discipleship practices (Deuteronomy 6:6–9; Proverbs 22:6).
- Family Resource Management and Financial Stewardship: Teaching biblical financial principles, budgeting, debt elimination, generosity, and work-life balance (Proverbs 22:7; 1 Timothy 6:6–10).

3. Principles and Strategies of Marriage Enrichment

Marriage enrichment focuses on helping healthy or moderately distressed marriages deepen intimacy, improve communication, and strengthen covenant commitment. Rather than waiting for marital breakdown, enrichment ministry provides structured spaces for couples to invest in their relationship.

Primary Strategies for Church-Based Marriage Enrichment

1. Premarital Guidance and Assessment: Utilizing validated premarital assessment tools (such as PREPARE/ENRICH) alongside structured pastoral counseling to help engaged couples explore expectations, communication habits, financial styles, and spiritual compatibility before marriage.
2. Marriage Enrichment Seminars and Retreats: Hosting weekend retreats or multi-week seminars that combine biblical teaching with interactive exercises, enabling couples to practice dialogue in a safe, supportive environment.
3. Peer Mentoring and Small Groups: Pairing newly married couples with experienced, mature Christian couples for ongoing encouragement, accountability, and practical wisdom (Titus 2:3–5).
4. Intimacy and Covenant Renewal: Providing opportunities for couples to reflect on their marital journey, celebrate milestones, and intentionally renew their covenant vows before God and the church community.

UNIT 13: FAMILY COUNSELING AND PASTORAL CARE

1. Biblical and Pastoral Framework for Family Counseling

Family counseling and pastoral care represent the ministry of Christ extended to families navigating emotional trauma, structural distress, relational conflict, and spiritual crisis. Pastoral care is anchored in the shepherd-flock motif running throughout Scripture (Psalm 23; Ezekiel 34; John 10:11–15). Pastors and family ministers are called to care for the flock with compassion, wisdom, discernment, and spiritual integrity.

A sound framework for pastoral family care relies on four interconnected spiritual and relational pillars:

- Active Listening: Following James 1:19 by being quick to listen and slow to speak, validating emotional pain before offering counsel.
- Pastoral Presence: Fulfilling Romans 12:15 by weeping with those who weep and offering a calm, grounded, Christlike presence in times of distress.
- Scriptural Truth: Applying 2 Timothy 3:16 by bringing God's Word gently and contextually into complex human situations.
- Redemptive Hope: Pointing families toward Romans 15:13 by anchoring counseling goals in the transforming power and grace of God.

The Apostle Paul instructs believers in Galatians 6:2 to *"bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."* In a pastoral counseling context, burden-bearing requires creating a safe, confidential environment where family members can express grief, anger, fear, and repentance without facing immediate condemnation. Pastoral counseling integrates scriptural truth with sound relational principles, pointing broken families toward the healing grace of the Gospel.

2. Core Models and Techniques in Family Counseling

Pastoral counselors utilize proven relational frameworks to help families identify unhealthy patterns and build functional communication dynamics:

- Systemic Family Therapy Framework: Views the family as an interconnected system where a change in one member directly impacts all other members. Counselors help families identify unhealthy interaction loops, generational patterns, and rigid boundaries.
- Contextual and Covenantal Model: Focuses on fairness, trustworthiness, and ethical responsibility within family relationships. It highlights the importance of balancing give-and-take, honoring covenant commitments, and repairing trust after betrayals.
- Solution-Focused Pastoral Counseling: Emphasizes identifying existing family strengths, resources, and exceptions to problems, guiding families to set actionable goals aligned with biblical principles.

3. Critical Ethical Considerations in Pastoral Care

Pastoral care providers occupy a position of sacred trust. Maintaining strict ethical standards protects vulnerable care-seekers and preserves the integrity of pastoral ministry.

- Confidentiality: Pastoral counselors must maintain strict confidentiality regarding details disclosed during care sessions. Confidentiality may only be breached when mandated by law or ethical necessity—specifically in cases involving immediate threats of suicide, homicide, child abuse, or elder abuse.
- Recognizing Boundaries and Scope of Practice: Pastors must recognize the boundaries of their training. While pastors provide spiritual guidance, crisis stabilization, and short-term relational counseling, severe clinical disorders (such as

severe depression, psychosis, complex trauma, or active substance addiction) require timely referral to licensed professional Christian counselors.

- **Avoiding Dual Relationships and Misconduct:** Ministers must maintain firm professional and personal boundaries, avoiding financial exploitation, emotional dependency, or sexual misconduct in counseling relationships (1 Thessalonians 5:22).

4. Special Focus Areas in Crisis Pastoral Care

Pastoral ministers must be equipped to handle complex family crises with specialized care:

- **Grief and Bereavement Support:** Shepherding families through the loss of a child, spouse, or parent by offering long-term presence, active listening, and the comfort of the resurrection hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13–18).
- **Crisis De-escalation and Domestic Safety:** Prioritizing immediate physical safety, legal reporting, and shelter resources whenever domestic violence or physical abuse is reported within a household.
- **Trauma-Informed Care:** Understanding how sudden trauma (accidents, terminal illness diagnosis, economic collapse) affects family dynamics, helping families regulate stress and rebuild stability over time.

COMPREHENSIVE MODULE ACTIVITY

Student Scenario & Capstone Project

Scenario

You are serving as the Associate Pastor of Family Ministries at a regional church. A couple in your congregation, Robert (44) and Maria (41), request an urgent counseling session. They have been married for 18 years and have two teenage children (ages 16 and 14). During the initial intake session, the following issues emerge:

- 1. Relational Breakdown:** Robert works long hours as an engineer and spends his evenings disengaged on his computer. Maria feels emotionally abandoned and resentful, admitting she frequently criticizes Robert in front of the children.
- 2. Parenting Conflict:** Their 16-year-old son has recently started skipping school and breaking curfew. Robert favors strict physical discipline and grounding without discussion, while Maria secretly overrides Robert's rules to keep peace with her son.
- 3. Crisis Disclosure:** Midway through the session, Maria breaks down in tears and confides that three days ago, during a heated argument about their son, Robert grabbed her forcefully by the arms, shoved her against a wall, and threatened to throw her out of the house. Robert admits he lost his temper, blames work stress and Maria's constant nagging, but insists he is "not an abuser."

Student Tasks

1. Ethical and Safety Analysis (Unit 13):

- Identify the immediate ethical, safety, and legal responsibilities you have as a pastoral counsellor regarding Maria's disclosure of physical violence.
- Explain why continuing standard joint marriage counselling is inappropriate when active physical violence has occurred, and outline the immediate safety protocol you must implement for Maria and her children.

2. Family Systems Assessment (Units 12 & 13):

- Analyse the systemic relational dynamics occurring within Robert and Maria's household (including parenting style alignment, communication patterns, and emotional boundaries).
- Differentiate between the role of a short-term pastoral counsellor and a licensed professional therapist in this specific case. At what point, and for which issues, must you make professional referrals?

3. Family Life Education (FLE) Strategy (Unit 12):

- Design a 6-week church-based Family Life Education (FLE) program titled *"Building Covenant Families,"* intended for the broader congregation. Outline the topic, scriptural foundation, and key learning objective for each of the 6 weeks covering premarital care, communication, parenting, and financial stewardship.

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MODULE 5: MARRIAGE AND FAMILY PRACTICUM

1. Foundations of the Family Ministry Practicum

The Marriage and Family Practicum serves as the integrative capstone of family life education and pastoral care training. It bridges classroom theology, developmental theory, and counseling frameworks with real-world pastoral engagement. The primary purpose of the practicum is to develop practical competence, ethical sensitivity, and reflective self-awareness in ministry leaders.

Practicum training operates under a supervised learning model where students apply theoretical principles within local churches, community centers, or family ministry organizations under the guidance of experienced field supervisors. Grounded in 2 Timothy 2:15, which calls ministers to *"do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth,"* the practicum emphasizes both technical skill and spiritual maturity.

2. Comprehensive Intake, Screening, and Family Assessment

Before offering pastoral care or developing family life education interventions, ministers must conduct thorough, structured family assessments to understand the client's or family's relational dynamics, historical context, and spiritual baseline:

- **Intake and Screening Procedures:** Collecting essential background information, mapping family composition, identifying primary presenting concerns, and screening for immediate crisis indicators such as active addiction, self-harm risk, severe psychiatric distress, or domestic violence.
- **Genogram Construction and Intergenerational Mapping:** Utilizing a multi-generational visual assessment tool (genogram) covering at least three generations to map relationship patterns, repeating relational dynamics, health histories, trauma, and spiritual heritage.
- **Assessing Structural and Relational Boundaries:** Evaluating subsystem boundaries within the family (husband-wife, parent-child) to determine whether boundaries are healthy, rigid (leading to emotional distance), or enmeshed (leading to over-involvement and lack of personal identity).
- **Spiritual and Faith Formation Assessment:** Discerning the family's spiritual climate, personal prayer habits, corporate worship involvement, and theological assumptions about suffering, grace, and redemption.

3. Ethical Safeguards, Legal Mandates, and Professional Boundaries

Practicum students operate in a space that requires strict adherence to legal, ethical, and spiritual guidelines to safeguard care-seekers and maintain ministry integrity:

- **Informed Consent:** Ensuring families clearly understand the nature, scope, limitations, and pastoral context of the care or education being provided, including the student status of the practicum candidate.

- **Confidentiality and Mandatory Reporting:** Maintaining strict privacy regarding all personal disclosures. Students must understand the legal and moral limits of confidentiality, which mandate immediate reporting to civil authorities and supervisors in cases of child abuse, elder abuse, or clear threats of imminent harm to self or others.
- **Boundary Management and Dual Relationships:** Establishing clear physical, emotional, and professional boundaries. Practicum ministers must avoid dual relationships (such as counseling personal friends or business associates) and maintain strict vigilance against emotional over-involvement or sexual misconduct.
- **Supervisory Accountability:** Attending regular individual and group supervision sessions to review case notes, process personal emotional reactions (transference and countertransference), and receive constructive critique on pastoral methods.

FIELDWORK IMPLEMENTATION, SUPERVISION, AND MINISTRY EVALUATION

1. Fieldwork Execution: Program Delivery and Pastoral Intervention

During the fieldwork implementation phase, students directly deliver family life education or short-term pastoral care under active supervision. Fieldwork typically divided into two core operational tracks:

Track A: Family Life Education (FLE) Program Delivery

Students design, organize, and facilitate a multi-session family education initiative (e.g., a premarital seminar, parenting workshop, or financial stewardship course) within a ministry setting. Key responsibilities include curriculum design, interactive teaching, creating participant resources, and managing group dynamics.

Track B: Supervised Short-Term Pastoral Care

Students conduct structured, short-term pastoral care sessions with individuals or families facing routine relational transitions, marital communication hurdles, or parenting challenges. Interventions focus on active listening, goal setting, applying biblical wisdom, and facilitating constructive dialogue.

2. The Supervisory Process and Reflective Practice

Supervision is the cornerstone of professional and pastoral development during the practicum. It provides a structured environment where students process fieldwork experiences, refine clinical/pastoral judgment, and integrate feedback.

- **Verbatim and Case Presentation Analysis:** Students prepare written transcripts or detailed summaries (verbatim) of care sessions or workshop presentations to analyze interaction patterns, pastoral responses, and missed relational cues.
- **Reflective Self-Awareness (The "Use of Self"):** Examining how the student's personal family background, emotional triggers, and unexamined biases influence their pastoral care and group facilitation.

- **Supervisory Feedback and Skill Refinement:** Engaging in regular, honest dialogue with field supervisors to correct mistakes, refine active listening techniques, adjust curriculum delivery, and deepen theological reflection.

3. Ministry Program Evaluation and Outcome Assessment

Effective ministry requires rigorous evaluation to determine whether learning objectives were met and spiritual growth occurred. Practicum students implement multi-tiered assessment methods:

- **Participant Evaluation Instruments:** Administering pre- and post-intervention surveys, feedback questionnaires, and qualitative evaluation forms to measure knowledge acquisition, skill improvement, and participant satisfaction.
- **Supervisor Field Appraisals:** Receiving formal mid-term and final performance evaluations from field supervisors assessing professionalism, ethical compliance, counseling/teaching competence, and spiritual maturity.
- **Self-Evaluation and Integrative Reflection:** Writing a comprehensive self-assessment analyzing personal growth, professional strengths, areas needing continued development, and an updated personal philosophy of family ministry.

ACTIVITY

Practicum Capstone Case Study and Strategic Intervention Plan

Scenario

You are completing your Marriage and Family Practicum at Grace Community Church under the supervision of the Senior Family Pastor. You have been assigned to facilitate a pastoral intake and design a comprehensive ministry intervention for the Miller family: David (46), Sarah (43), and their children, Nathan (17) and Emma (12).

During your initial intake assessment, you gather the following family information:

1. **Relational Context:** David works long hours in sales and feels emotionally disconnected from Sarah. Sarah feels overwhelmed managing the household and working part-time, expressing deep resentment toward David. They report near-daily arguments about finances and parenting, often devolving into shouting matches.
2. **Intergenerational History:** Constructing a genogram reveals that David grew up in an authoritarian household with an emotionally distant father who used harsh physical discipline. Sarah grew up in a divorced home characterized by high conflict, instability, and enmeshed parent-child boundaries.
3. **Parenting & Child Dynamics:** Nathan (17) has become distant, spends most of his time online, and recently admitted to experimentation with vaping. David demands strict grounding, while Sarah secretly excuses Nathan's behavior and gives him

money, undermining David's authority. Emma (12) has begun showing physical signs of anxiety, including frequent stomachaches before school.

4. **Spiritual State:** The family attends church services sporadically. Family worship was abandoned three years ago. David feels spiritually inadequate, while Sarah feels the church offers little practical help for their daily struggles.

Student Tasks

1. **Comprehensive Assessment & Genogram Analysis (Unit 14):**
 - Analyze the intergenerational patterns present in David and Sarah's backgrounds and explain how their family-of-origin dynamics are impacting their current marriage and parenting styles.
 - Identify the structural boundary issues within the household (e.g., husband-wife subsystem, parent-child boundaries) and describe how Sarah's enmeshment with Nathan and David's isolation affect family stability.
2. **Ethical Safeguards & Referral Protocol (Unit 14):**
 - Identify any potential safety or clinical concerns in this case that require clear boundaries regarding your scope of practice as a practicum student.
 - Draft a formal Referral and Scope of Practice Protocol outlining when and how you would refer Nathan or the parents to a licensed professional counselor, while maintaining an ongoing supportive pastoral presence.
3. **Strategic Field Intervention & Ministry Design (Unit 15):**
 - Formulate a 4-week Short-Term Pastoral Care and Action Plan for David and Sarah focusing on communication, financial stewardship alignment, and restoring family spiritual routines.
 - Design a 3-session Family Life Education (FLE) mini-workshop tailored for parents of teenagers in the church, titled *"Navigating Adolescent Transitions with Grace and Boundaries."* Outline the topic, scriptural foundation, and key learning objective for each session.
4. **Practicum Evaluation & Supervisory Reflection**
 - Draft a 300-word Practicum Supervisory Self-Reflection answering: What personal biases or family-of-origin triggers might you experience when counseling the Miller family, and how will you use supervisor feedback to ensure objective, Christlike pastoral care?

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