

This paper outlines how I would conduct premarital counseling in my future ministry, drawing on biblical theology, counseling concepts learned in class, pastoral wisdom, and a minimum amount of outside reading, particularly Tim Keller's *The Meaning of Marriage*. Insights from an interview with an experienced pastor who regularly conducts premarital counseling helped structure and methodology as well. Any faithful approach to premarital counseling must begin with Scripture's vision of marriage. The Bible presents marriage as a creation ordinance grounded in God's design for human flourishing. Genesis 2 portrays marriage as God's response to human aloneness, and God creates a covenantal union marked by intimacy, permanence, and oneness. The language of "one flesh" emphasizes not only sexual union but the total sharing of all of life: emotionally, spiritually, and physically.

Jesus reaffirms this in Matthew 19, reiterating God's original design. By asserting that "what God has joined together, let no one separate," Jesus frames marriage as a divine act that calls for faithfulness beyond changing circumstances or emotional states. Marriage is rooted in covenantal commitment. The Apostle Paul keeps this theological idea going in Ephesians 5:21–33, presenting marriage as a living metaphor of Christ's self-giving love for the Church. Marriage is a way that God uses relational life to shape holiness, patience, humility, and forgiveness in both the man and woman.

Tim Keller's *The Meaning of Marriage* builds on this biblical foundation by stating that marriage as a commitment to future love rather than a celebration of present compatibility. Keller argues that marriage exposes sin, unmet expectations, and personal limitations. Rather than seeing these realities as failures, he presents them as God's chosen means of sanctification.¹ Premarital counseling, therefore, should prepare couples not merely for romance but for repentance, perseverance, and grace-filled endurance!

¹ Timothy Keller with Kathy Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the Wisdom of God* (New York: Dutton, 2011), 38–44.

From a pastoral counseling perspective, premarital counseling functions as both formation and discernment. Couples do not arrive as blank slates. They bring with them emotional habits, conflict, family systems, and expectations shaped by their families of origin, past relationships, and cultural factors. One of the pastor's primary jobs is to help couples make these implicit assumptions obvious. Using the counseling concepts learned in this class, I would approach premarital counseling with the understanding that conflict is inevitable but not inherently destructive. Many couples fear conflict and assume that disagreement signals incompatibility. Premarital counseling provides an opportunity to reframe conflict as a normal and even formative part of intimate relationships. The goal is not to eliminate conflict, but to teach couples how to engage it constructively, with honesty, humility, and self-control.

Assessment tools such as Prepare/Enrich or similar inventories can play a helpful role in this process. Used wisely, these tools provide language and frameworks for discussing sensitive topics such as expectations, finances, sexuality, and family dynamics.² However, they must always be interpreted pastorally. The goal is not to predict marital success but to facilitate deeper conversation and reflection.

To supplement this framework, I interviewed a pastor with five years of experience conducting premarital counseling in a congregational setting. He emphasized that the greatest danger in premarital counseling is pride. Many couples want to hide their sin and avoid it rather than face transformation, and also many pastors feel pressure to move quickly through the process in order to accommodate wedding timelines.

This pastor structures his premarital counseling around the book *Preparing for Marriage God's Way* by Wayne Mack.³ First, couples must share a basic understanding of what marriage

² David H. Olson, *PREPARE/ENRICH Program: Customized Version* (Minneapolis, MN: Prepare/Enrich, Inc., n.d.), accessed [Month Day, Year], <https://www.prepare-enrich.com>

³ Wayne A. Mack, *Preparing for Marriage God's Way* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2006).

is and what it is for. Ephesians 5 guides this discussion. Without a shared theological vision, couples tend to interpret hardship as failure rather than formation. Second, couples must understand themselves—their emotional histories, family systems, and default coping strategies. Finally, couples must practice concrete skills such as communication, confession of sin, forgiveness, and prayer. The latter two are well-covered in the book. He noted that the couples who struggle most early in marriage are often those who avoided difficult conversations during premarital counseling.

Based on these theological commitments and pastoral insights, I would develop a premarital counseling manual structured around eight sessions (or more if necessary) over approximately eight to ten weeks. Each session would last about ninety minutes and include Scripture, guided discussion using Keller's *The Meaning of Marriage*, practical exercises, and assigned homework.

Session 1: A Biblical Vision of Marriage

- Theological foundation; marriage as a covenant; Christ/Church

Session 2: Personal Story and Family of Origin

- Family systems analysis

Session 3: Communication and Conflict

- Healthy conflict; emotional regulation; repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation

Session 4: Roles, Expectations, and Shared Calling

- Headship/loving, submission/honoring, decision-making

Session 5: Sexuality and Intimacy

- Embodied intimacy; addressing expectations; boundaries; past wounds; and healing

Session 6: Finances and Stewardship

- Financial histories; budgeting; generosity, money-related conflict

Session 7: Spiritual Disciplines and Community

- Spiritual habits; Church involvement

Session 8: Covenant Commitment and Blessing

- Wedding vows; future challenges; pastoral blessing; plan to meet a few more times to discuss practical planning things such as timelines, wedding-day event, and roles/responsibilities for the wedding day