

July/August 2008, Volume 5, Issue 4

Editor's Note

Can a man with a good but wrongly structured marriage have a faithful evangelistic ministry? This question was posed to me recently. The answer seemed obvious—"Look, it may not be ideal, but if a person is out there sharing the gospel..."

I then presented the question to a pastor whom I respect tremendously, and his reply caused me to see a link more clearly than I had before: a rightly ordered marriage presents a picture of the gospel, and, in that sense, a distorted marriage can present a distorted gospel. Yes, God can certainly use those of us with imperfect marriages to be effective evangelistic witnesses. Thank goodness! But the more biblically ordered a marriage is, the clearer will be the portrait of the Christ and the church—that is the gospel. The clearer the marriage biblically the better the display of the gospel.

Consider one of the first consequences of the fall—the marriage of Adam and Eve is cursed with a distorted relationship (Gen. 3:16b). Consider also one of the best pictures of Christ's redemption—marriage (Eph. 5:22-33). Consider Paul's requirement that a pastor

have a rightly ordered home before he thinks of leading the church (1 Tim. 3:4). A rightly ordered and healthy marriage displays or pictures the gospel. It's a symbol or a type, like caring for the poor (2 Cor. 8:9).

As society moves further and further away from the biblical practice of marriage (think of the recent decision by the California Supreme Court to allow for homosexuals to marry), it will become that much more critical for rightly ordered and healthy Christian marriages to comprise the backdrop of gospel proclamation, again, like so many are saying about caring for the poor. Neither of these matters *are* the gospel, but both present a kind of picture of the gospel; both are powerfully redolent with the gospel's love and forgiveness.

How crucial then for pastors to attend to their own marriages, as well as the marriages in their churches. This issue of the 9Marks eJournal on marriage hopes it can help our brother pastors do just that, if only in a small way.

—Jonathan Leeman

MARRIAGE

9Marks Marriage Book Comparison Chart

Which book do you use for pre-marital counseling? Which for married couples with problems? What's the best all around book on marriage? Questions like these prompted us to devise the Marriage Book Comparison Chart, which includes both a rating comparison chart and a brief review for **thirty** books on marriage.

Comparison chart
Reviews

Page 6
Page 7



The Gospel & Deliberate Complementarian Pastors

Page 20

Complementarian marriages give witness to the gospel's power. Therefore, pastors need a strategy to lead their churches toward complementarianism.

By C. J. Mahaney



Leading Newly Married Small Groups

Page 22

Building foundations is better than fire fighting, so get your newly weds into small groups!

By Matt Schmucker



Book Review: Good Christians, Good Husbands, by Doreen Moore

Page 24

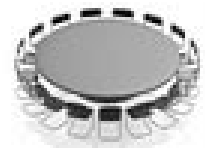
Reviewed by Matt Schmucker

PASTORS' WIVES

Pastors' Wives Forum

Page 27

We asked a roundtable of pastors' wives what the most unexpected blessings of being a pastor's wife has been.



Answers from Laurie Alexander, Danelle Bancroft, Kimm Harvey, Cathi Johnson, Kathy MacDonald, Pam Noblit, Shiona Rees, Jeanine Dell Sanchez, Jenny Schumacher



It's Not a Position, It's Juxtaposition

Page 33

Introducing the workbook (see article below), pastor's wife Connie Dever considers church expectations and then offers a different approach.

By Connie Dever

Juxtaposition Workbook

(Go to 9Marks.org and enter title into search function)

Here's a workbook older pastors' wives can use to help train younger ones, based off of Mary Somerville's book *One with a Shepherd*.

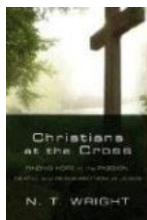
By Connie Dever and Lindsey Brayman

30 Practical Ways For Pastors to Love Their Wives & Families

Page 35

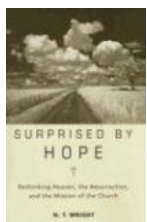
We asked several pastors for practical tips on caring for their wives and family.

MISCELLANEOUS BOOK REVIEWS



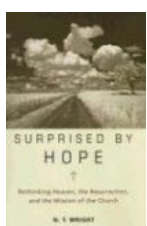
Book Review:
***Christians at the Cross*, by N. T. Wright**
Reviewed by Thomas Schreiner

Page 38



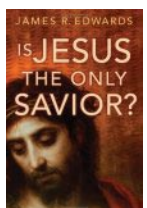
Book Review:
***Surprised by Hope*, by N. T. Wright**
Reviewed by Thomas Schreiner

Page 40



Book Review:
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Page 40



Book Review:
***Is Jesus the Only Savior?* by James R. Edwards**
Reviewed by Will Kynes

Page 43

AUDIO—LEADERSHIP INTERVIEWS

Fundamentalism and Separation with Mark Minnick

Go to 9Marks.org and click on “Audio”

Pastor and Bob Jones University professor Mark Minnick presents the case for the Fundamentalist doctrine of separation.

Biblical Theology with Michael Lawrence, Mike Gilbert-Smith and Jonathan Leeman

Go to 9Marks.org and click on “Audio”

Mark Dever leads a roundtable in discussing the importance of biblical theology for the pastor.

UPCOMING 9MARKS EVENTS

For more information on the following events, go to 9Marks.org and click on the “Events” tab.

Healthy Church Conferences

Pietermaritzburg, South Africa

July 2 to 4, 2008

July 7 to 10, 2008

Matt Schmucker and Jonathan Leeman

CCCC 2008 Annual Meeting

Buffalo, NY

July 21 to 24, 2008

Mark Dever

Worship God 08

Gaithersburg, MD

July 30 to August 2, 2008

Mark Dever

9Marks Workshop

Savage, MN

September 2 and 3, 2008

Matt Schmucker and Paul Alexander

9Marks Weekender

Washington, DC

September 18 to 22, 2008

Mark Dever and Matt Schmucker

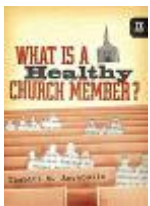
24th FIEL Conference for Pastors

São José dos Campos, Brazil

October 6 to 10, 2008

Matt Schmucker and Jonathan Leeman

NEW PRODUCTS



Thabiti Anyabwile, *What Is a Healthy Church Member?* from Crossway
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Marriage Book Comparison Chart

Key														Ratings and accompanying review by...
E = Excellent		Complementarian?	Scripturally Supported?	Well Written?	Ties individuals to local church?	Theologically sound?	Practical?	Gospel Centered (as opposed to moralistic)?	Helpful for communication & Conflict?	Helpful on romance & sex?	Helpful on money & finances?	Suitable for personal, small group, pre-marital study?		
Author	Book													
Akin, Daniel	<i>God on Sex</i>	E	E	G	F	E	E	G	E	E	NG	G	Owen Strachan	
Ash, Christopher	<i>Married for God</i>	E	G	E	G	G	E	E	NG	E	NG	E	Andreas Kostenberger	
Ash, Christopher	<i>Marriage: Sex in the Service of God</i>	E	E	G	NG	G	NG	E	NG	NG	NG		Andreas Kostenberger	
Chapell, Brian	<i>Each for the Other</i>	E	E	E	NG	E	E	E	G	NG	NG	E	Brian Vickers	
Chapman, Gary	<i>The Five Love Languages</i>	NG	P	F	P	P	F/P	P	P	P	NG	P	David Powlison	
Crabb, Larry	<i>The Marriage Builder</i>	NG	G/P	F	P	F/P	G	F	G	G	NG	P	David Powlison	
Eggerichs, Emerson	<i>Love & Respect</i>	G	F	E	NG	F/P	G	P	E	F	NG	F	Nathan Lugbill	
Harvey, Dave	<i>When Sinners Say I Do</i>	G/NG	G	G	NG	G	G	E	G	G	G	E	Tom Schreiner	
Hybels, Bill	<i>Fit to be Tied</i>	NG	P	F	P/NG	P/NG	F	F	G	G	F	P	Scott Croft	
Kostenberger, Andreas	<i>God, Marriage, and Family</i>	E	E	G	NG	E	G	F/NG	NG	NG	NG	G	Tom Schreiner	
LaHaye, Tim	<i>The Act of Marriage</i>	G/NG	NG	G	NG	G	E	NG	G	E	NG	G	Jim Hamilton	
Mack, Wayne	<i>Strengthening Your Marriage</i>	E	E	F	P	E	E	E	G	G	G	E	Eric Bancroft	
Mack, Wayne and Carol	<i>Sweethearts for a Lifetime</i>	E	E	E	P	E	E	E	E	G	P	E	Eric Bancroft	
Mahaney, Carolyn	<i>Feminine Appeal</i>	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	Rick Holland	
Mahaney, C.J.	<i>Sex, Romance, and the Glory of God</i>	E	E	E	NG	E	E	E	E	E	NG	E	Rick Holland	
Mason, Mike	<i>The Mystery of Marriage</i>	NG	G	E	NG	G	F	G	G	G	NG	G	Justin Taylor	
Nelson, Thomas	<i>The Book of Romance</i>	F	F	F	NG	G	G	F	G	F	NG	F	Jim Hamilton	
Parrott, Les and Leslie	<i>Love Talk</i>	F	P	E	P	P	E	P	F	F	F	F	Steve Boyer	
Peace, Martha	<i>The Excellent Wife</i>	E	E	E	P	E	E	F/G	E	G	NG	G	Jonathan Leeman	
Peace, Martha & John Crotts	<i>Tying the Knot Tighter</i>	E	E	G	G	E	E	G	G	G	G	G	Dee Reju	
Priolo, Lou	<i>The Complete Husband</i>	E	E	G	P	E	E	E	E	E	G	E	Andy Davis	
Rainey, Dennis and Barbara	<i>Starting your Marriage Right</i>	E	F	E	P	G	E	F	E	G	G	E	Blake Johnson	
Ricucci, Gary and Betsy	<i>Love that Lasts</i>	E	E	G	E	E	G	E	E	E	G	E	Mike McKinley	
Scott, Stuart	<i>The Exemplary Husband</i>	E	E	G	P	E	G	E	E	G	E	E	Bob Johnson	
Sproul, RC	<i>The Intimate Marriage</i>	E	G	G	NG	E	G	G	G	G	G	G	Justin Taylor	
Thomas, Derek & Rosemary	<i>A Biblical Guide to Love, Sex and Marriage</i>	E	E	E	NG	E	E	G	E	G	NG	E	Paul Alexander	
Thomas, Gary	<i>Sacred Marriage</i>	G	G	E	F	G	E	G	E	F	NG	G	Mike McKinley	
Wheat, Ed	<i>Intended for Pleasure</i>	G	F	E	NG	G	E	G	G	E	NG	P	Derek Thomas	
Wheat, Ed	<i>Love for Every Married Couple</i>	G	F	E	NG	G	E	G	G	E	F	G	Derek Thomas	
Wheat, Ed	<i>Staying in Love for a Lifetime</i>	G	F	E	NG	G	E	G	G	E	F	G	Derek Thomas	

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Marriage Book Summaries

Which book do you use for pre-marital counseling? Which for married couples with problems? What's the best all around book on marriage? Questions like these prompted us to devise the Marriage Book Comparison Chart, which includes both a rating comparison chart and a brief review for thirty books on marriage.

Akin, Danny. *God on Sex: The Creator's Ideas About Love, Intimacy and Marriage*. B&H, 2003.

Danny Akin's *God on Sex* presents a strongly complementarian approach to marriage and sex through easily understandable, application-oriented, verse-by-verse commentary on the Song of Solomon. Intended for a lay audience interested in the Scriptural text, *God on Sex* asserts that marriage is a God-ordained institution given to bless men and women in every facet of life—spiritually, physically, and emotionally. Akin's central point seems to be that cultivating a sexual relationship satisfying to both spouses is an essential component of a healthy, God-glorifying marriage. "This good gift of God," Akin writes, "will find its fullest expression realized when a man and woman give themselves completely to each other in the marriage relationship" (3). The healthy marriage necessarily includes a healthy sex life; accordingly, the healthy sex life is necessarily driven by a healthy marriage. Whether a young wife, a husband seeking to carry out his role as leader, or an older couple seeking rejuvenation, the reader will benefit from this two-sided emphasis.

The book includes considerable practical advice—and an avalanche of lists—on such topics as how to create romance, how to be attractive for one's spouse, what happy couples say about sex, and so on. Akin wants to help Christian couples not only develop a biblical understanding of marriage and sex, but to put this knowledge into practice on a day-to-day basis. I know of few other books in this area that offer such attention to the development of not simply a marital methodology, but a marital *life* in which one strives with great effort to please and bless one's spouse.

Areas that could use more attention? Though it is difficult to know exactly how to apply Christ's command to interpret all Scripture in light of his person and work (Luke 24), Akin chooses not to interpret the Song in a Christological way. One wonders if more could not be done in this area (see Jim Hamilton's review of Tommy Nelson's book below or his excellent article on this topic in *WTJ*, 68 (2006): 331–45). Also: the list on page 231 featuring an in-your-face approach to gender differences seems out of place in a book that radiates sensitivity and care.

Over all, *God on Sex* is a passionate, practical, biblically driven resource from a strong husband, father, and churchman. This is perhaps the strongest impression that the book makes—one feels after reading it that one has spent time conversing with a wise, practical, and loving husband. Far from being condemned or depressed from that conversation, one is all the better for it.

—Owen Strachan (*Ph.D. candidate, Trinity Evangelical Divinity, Deerfield, IL*)

Ash, Christopher. *Married for God: Making Your Marriage the Best It Can Be*. Inter-Varsity, 2007.

Christopher Ash's *Married for God* is a very good entry-level book on God's plan for marriage. The sequel to, and a popularized version of, *Marriage: Sex in the Service of God*, this volume is simply written yet theologically sound. It is God- rather than man-centered, decidedly complementarian, and consistently informed biblically. Chapter 4 on the purpose for sex is particularly helpful. Ash also has good discussions on the major biblical passages on marriage, on singleness and divorce, and on the nature of marriage as a covenant between two parties with God as a witness (see Mal 2:13–14). Also commendable is Ash's emphasis on faithfulness in marriage. This refreshing, engaging, and affirming book would be an ideal resource for young people contemplating marriage, for engaged couples preparing for marriage, or for married couples desiring to review the basics of marriage or to get their marriage back on track.

—Andreas Köstenberger (*Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, NC*)

Ash, Christopher, *Marriage: Sex in the Service of God*. Regent College, 2005.

This fine volume presents a very academic, systematic theological treatment of marriage for those with an advanced knowledge in theology and philosophy. The book's stated aim is to re-examine the biblical and theological foundations for sex and marriage. To this end, the book sets out to provide a systematic theological exegesis of the purpose and definition of marriage in Scripture. Owing to its exclusive focus on marriage, the book does not provide treatments of singleness, divorce and remarriage, homosexuality, and other related topics. Ash starts with a discussion of creation order as created rather than constructed. He contends that marriage is a status entered, not an ideal aspired to or a project undertaken. The purpose of sex is discussed in terms of procreation, relationship, and the public good. A central thesis of the book is that rather than taking the place of God, sex ought to be used in the service of God. Other helpful discussions include the morality of chosen childlessness, involuntary childlessness, contraception, headship and submission, and faithfulness vs. adultery. For those interested in a thorough discussion of the biblical, theological, and philosophical dimensions of marriage, this is a very useful and stimulating book.

—*Andreas Köstenberger (Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, NC)*

Chapell, Bryan, with Kathy Chapell. *Each for the Other: Marriage as It's Meant to Be*, rev. ed. Baker, 2006.

This excellent book on marriage is divided into three main parts. The first part focuses on the husband, a servant-leader whose authority in the family is grounded in Christ's love for his church. The husband is one who, as the head of his wife, sacrifices himself for her good. Secondly, the role of the wife is viewed as one of sacrificial submission by which the wife complements and completes her husband, and thus finds true, biblical honor and dignity. The third section, on parenting, flows from the previous two. Love for God, love between spouses, the responsibilities of both children and parents, as well some practical advice about what parents should *and should not* do are the essential building blocks for biblical parenting. Biblically and theologically grounded, and filled with pastoral insights, illustrations and examples that the reader will find helpful and enjoyable, this book is highly recommended for use by pastors, for those involved in pre-marital counseling, for small groups, and for couples who want and need a reminder of the true intention of marriage.

—*Brian Vickers (The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY)*

Chapman, Gary. *The Five Love Languages: How to Express Heartfelt Commitment to Your Mate*. Northfield, 1992.

5LL teaches several worthwhile things: love is expressed and received in different forms ("languages"); what communicates love to one person may be entirely different for another person; married people should learn what is meaningful to their spouses; they should also take initiative in showing accurate love, and persist.

But the underlying premise of *5LL* is faulty. It relentlessly communicates a theory of psychological needs that must be met by a spouse (or parent), and it ascribes magic-working power to change others if you give them what they want. *5LL* wholly lacks awareness of both the sin in our desires and the Christ who turns life upside down.

—*David Powlison (Christian Counseling and Education Foundation)*

Crabb, Larry. *The Marriage Builder: A Blueprint for Couples and Counselors*. Zondervan, 1982.

I've known marriages changed for the good by reading *MB*. The key? Chapters 3-8. The question "Manipulation or ministry?" convicted each party of a self-serving approach. By finding life in relationship to Christ, giving and honesty replace taking and fearing. Practical discussions of communication, sexuality, grace, commitment and acceptance further helped to rewrite the marital script.

That said, I have trouble recommending *MB*. Crabb's theory of psychological needs dominates chapters 1-2 (and pops up throughout), distorting his interpretation of our complex desires and of the gospel. Christ's grace enables our ability to love others via a different dynamic than Crabb portrays.

—David Powlison (*Christian Counseling and Education Foundation*)

Eggerichs, Emerson. *Love & Respect: The Love She Most Desires, The Respect He Desperately Needs*. Thomas Nelson, 2004.

The title says it all. Emerson Eggerichs' hugely popular book repeatedly exhorts husbands and wives that one problem plagues marriages above all others: "without love (her deepest need), she reacts without respect (his deepest need); without respect (his deepest need), he reacts without love (her deepest need)" (297). This phenomenon, which Eggerichs calls the "Crazy Cycle," occurs when couples fail to understand and apply Ephesians 5:33. After describing dozens of devastating consequences that come when this command is neglected, the remainder of the book lays out practical steps to apply both love and respect to a marriage and concludes with the invaluable benefits that result.

The book's unique contribution is its emphasis on biblical respect, and the result is a refreshing complementarian perspective. It is on this issue that Eggerichs is at his biblical best, gently arguing from Scripture against the low view of male leadership that pervades our society and infects countless marriages.

Though filled with many illustrations and tips designed to promote love and respect, the book's failure to emphasize the centrality of the gospel is disappointing. Eggerichs spends the majority of the book arguing from Ephesians 5, yet he fails to focus on the point of the passage: marriage is to be a picture of the gospel. Jesus is discussed but almost entirely apart from his cross, and the concept of his atoning sacrifice is utterly absent. True, the book's aim is marriage, but it is incomprehensible that Christian couples could apply Eph. 5, 1 Peter 3:1-2, and Eph. 4:32—each of which are examined—without dwelling on Christ's sacrifice in their place, the very exchange that precedes and drives all of the above passages. It seems that this lack of gospel-emphasis leads the author to hold a deficient view of human depravity. Rather than stressing the sinfulness of every spouse's heart and our constant need for repentance, Eggerichs assumes that the vast majority of us are people of "basic goodwill and good intentions" (21, 78, 81, 266).

This book is well written and full of practical advice and conducive to group study, yet I would advise all to leave it on the shelf and take up instead a book such as Gary and Betsy Ricucci's *Love that Lasts*. The Ricucci book is centered on Christ and the gospel, understands the depth of every spouse's sinful disposition, and it lacks none of the practicality of *Love and Respect*.

—Nathan Lugbill (*Pastoral Assistant, Capitol Hill Baptist Church, Washington, DC*)

Harvey, Dave. *When Sinners Say "I Do": Discovering the Power of the Gospel for Marriage*. Shepherd Press, 2007.

Countless books exist on marriage today, and they address a variety of topics. Harvey, however, reminds us of the most fundamental truth of all—the truth that is the bedrock of every marriage that pleases the Lord. And that truth is the gospel of Jesus Christ. In other words, Harvey reminds us that marriage is the one-flesh union of two sinners. Marriage is not a romantic dream, nor is it a flight from the harsh realities of everyday life. Instead, marriage reveals our sin in an up-close and personal way. The uncovering of our sin, Harvey teaches us, should drive us afresh and anew to the grace of the gospel. If we are keenly conscious of our own sin and our dependence upon the grace of God, then we will in turn convey that same grace and mercy to our spouse. The book is written in a conversational style and is filled with practical examples and stories, so it is ideal for small group studies, for marriage counseling, and for husbands and wives who want to renew and refresh their love for one another. Harvey's intention is not to address the theology of marriage or many of the practical issues treated in other books on marriage. What Harvey gives us, however, is immensely helpful: no marriage can thrive without being immersed in the grace of the gospel.

—Tom Schreiner (*The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY*)

Hybels, Bill and Lynne. *Fit to Be Tied*, new ed. Zondervan, 1997, orig. pub. 1991,

I first read *Fit to be Tied* a year or two after it was originally published, when I was a non-Christian sophomore in college (though I fancied myself a Christian at the time). I had been told it had some good practical advice about “Christian marriage.” What I found was a book that contained some helpful practical points on marriage and mentioned—almost in passing—that a “relationship with God in Jesus Christ” was needful for my happiness in any area of life, including marriage. I enjoyed some of the practical aspects of the book and never once felt confronted or uncomfortable in my vague, gospel-less, false conception of my own “relationship with Christ.” In retrospect, that was the problem.

As I’ve revisited the book over the years—as a follower of Christ—my basic assessment has changed little. *Fit to be Tied* offers some decent practical nuggets for the patient reader, but it is devoid of the basic theology of marriage and biblical rigor required to provide any foundation for the advice it offers. To be fair, not every marriage book needs to present a full academic treatment of the theology of Genesis 1 to 3 and Ephesians 5. Still, without some robust, meaningful consideration of the gospel, the word of God, and God’s glory, “how-to” books on marriage or any other part of the Christian life almost always devolve into anthropocentric pop psychology leavened with occasional spasms of Christian vocabulary. *Fit to be Tied* is no exception.

In the *Fit to be Tied* universe, the irreducible good is a “healthy marriage” for its own sake and my resulting happiness, which God evidently wants for me above all things. Why does scripture counsel us not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers? Fundamentally, the answer is so that we can achieve “spiritual compatibility” and “make sure that every husband and wife can share that which is most precious to them,” and so that we can avoid “frustration” by having a marriage built “from a common blueprint.” Marriage as a metaphor for Christ and the church? As a clear outworking of the gospel in earthly circumstances? As a means to bring God glory? Nowhere to be found.

The book’s (often sloppy) use of Scripture is rarely more than a means to its pragmatic end. The only passing reference to Ephesians 5 in the entire volume is used as an admonishment that men should “treasure” their wives—which itself is essentially defined as making more of an effort at romance than might come naturally to us. Jesus’ admonishment in Matthew 10 to be “shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves” becomes a warning not to lose our “street smarts” when dating, and to be “ruthlessly analytical” when assessing our future spouse in terms of biblical fundamentals, like whether the person “has a budget,” “keeps his body in shape,” or “maintains her possessions reasonably well.”

As I mentioned, the book does contain some practical wisdom. The Hybels responsibly pillory the myth that marriage is easy or ultimately fulfilling (as a substitute for Christ). The chapters on resolving conflict, romance, and sex in marriage may be practically useful for people struggling in those areas, even if the advice is grounded in biblical thin air. Even so, the nuggets here can be gained from other, more biblical volumes, such as C.J. Mahaney’s *Sex, Romance, and the Glory of God*.

The unfortunate bottom line is that, like so many books on “biblical marriage,” *Fit to be Tied* could use a little more Bible.

—Scott Croft (Elder, Capitol Hill Baptist Church, Washington, DC)

Köstenberger, Andreas, with David W. Jones. *God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation*. Crossway, 2004.

Köstenberger and Jones have written an indispensable book of biblical and theological depth on marriage. The book is a scholarly treatment of marriage, but it is written clearly so that laypersons can understand it. Köstenberger and Jones unpack the meaning of marriage from both the Old and New Testaments. They carefully study the fundamental biblical passages where God’s design for marriage is communicated. They also explore the theology of marriage: is it a sacrament, a contract, or a covenant? They ably defend the notion that marriage is a covenantal union between husbands and wives. Furthermore, the book tackles controversial issues that every husband and wife should understand. Even Christians debate today whether husbands and wives have different roles in marriage, and Köstenberger and Jones provide a convincing explanation of what the scriptures teach.

Nor do the authors confine themselves to marriage. The larger theology of the family and the role of children in the family are also explained from a careful study of the scriptures. Köstenberger and Jones explore what the scriptures have to say about disciplining children, so that we are equipped to raise our children in the nurture and

admonition of the Lord. Many books on the family and marriage say nothing about singleness. Köstenberger and Jones include a very helpful discussion of this matter.

Other questions are examined that are controversial in our culture: Is it right for a husband and wife to refuse to have children? What do the scriptures teach about abortion? Is contraception biblically permissible? What forms of contraception are acceptable for believers? What does the Bible teach about homosexuality? The authors address in a very helpful chapter what the Bible says about divorce, and in another chapter they ask whether a divorced person can serve as an elder or pastor in the church.

The above summary indicates that some controversial issues are addressed in the book, and there may be places where the reader disagrees with the authors. But the book addresses every matter with a high view of the authority and truthfulness of scripture. Nor are the scriptures simply accepted in theory. What is striking is the careful biblical interpretation that informs the entire work. This book would be helpful for Sunday School classes, small group studies, and for classes in a college or seminary.

—Tom Schreiner (*The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY*)

LaHaye, Tim and Beverly. *The Act of Marriage: The Beauty of Sexual Love*, updated and expanded. Zondervan, 1998, orig. pub. 1976.

This book is all about sexual intercourse. It addresses attitudes toward it, biological and anatomical realities related to it, gender specific dispositions toward it, and various problems people have with it. A book like this is good for people to read, perhaps when they get engaged, in order to be helpfully informed about, as the authors put it, “the act of marriage.” This book contains medical information that one should take with a grain of salt (since the authors are not physicians), and, though updated, it bears the marks of a volume published long ago. For instance, a pharmacist is referred to as a “druggist.” Even so, there is much wisdom and helpful information here from a Christian perspective.

—Jim Hamilton (*The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY*)

Mack, Wayne A. *Strengthening Your Marriage*. P&R Publishing, 1999.

Originally penned 31 years ago, this book continues to serve us well today with clear teaching on God’s will for our marriages. I served on staff at Grace Community Church for a number of years where Mack was an elder. This allowed me to see up close that the teaching he offers is the very life he has lived. The reader will find that this book provides a great starting point for considering the major areas of a godly marriage. From marital roles to a right mindset toward children, he brings Scripture to bear on each area. There’s plenty to think about and discuss with one’s spouse! Particularly helpful, Mack doesn’t merely focus on marital anecdotes, instead he asks readers the hard-hitting questions that will identify personal sin and bring them to the cross of Christ to see the true hope for lasting change and obedience.

Some readers will find the format challenging. The material is not presented in typical fashion but in an outline form through the entirety of the book. While this helps one track the major points, it also makes the book feel awkward and unfamiliar.

One significant strength: the book offers the opportunity to interact with the material by doing Bible studies after each chapter. For those of us who are tempted to read and move on, such exercises encourage us not to avoid application.

From pre-marital preparation to marriage refreshers, Christian couples of all types will appreciate what Mack offers and will be aided in their desire to honor Christ in their marriage.

—Eric Bancroft (*Pastor, Castlevew Baptist Church, Indianapolis, IN*)

Mack, Wayne A. and Carol Mack. *Sweethearts for a Lifetime: Making the Most of Your Marriage*. P&R Publishing, 2006.

Celebrating their 51st wedding anniversary this year, Wayne and Carol Mack greatly help the rest of us who long to celebrate such an anniversary ourselves. They title one chapter, “Good Marriages Require Perspiration,” and, sure enough, they show what marital hard work looks like and how rewarding it can be. And they do so with skillful writing and personal testimony. The ultimate goal of every Christian marriage is demonstrating the preeminence of Christ. It requires sacrifice. Yet it’s rewarded with the confidence of knowing that God, the creator of marriage, is pleased.

After starting with some fundamentals, the book divides with Wayne addressing the husbands and Carol addressing the wives with their respective duties and joys in marriage. Each of them brings Scripture to bear and helpfully applies it to the reader’s situation. True to many of Wayne Mack’s books, each chapter provides a section for application, which can range from personal questions to conversations topic for the couple.

The reader looking for clear biblical and practical instruction on a Christ-honoring marriage will find it all here. So whether you can hear wedding bells in your near future or you are enjoying decades of a faithful marriage already, you will not regret reading this book and sharpening your thoughts and practices in your marriage.

—Eric Bancroft (Pastor, Castlevew Baptist Church, Indianapolis, IN)

Mahaney, Carolyn. *Feminine Appeal: Seven Virtues of a Godly Wife and Mother*, revised edition. Crossway, 2004.

It’s a bit odd, as a man, to write a review on a book called *Feminine Appeal*. However, reading Carolyn Mahaney’s book was a delightful surprise for me. I am convinced that its impact is not limited to the women to whom it is written, but also to men who desire to “live with their wives in an understanding way.”

The central message of the book is for women to embrace and pursue the mentoring mandate in Titus 2 and thus point to the transforming effect of the gospel in the lives of women. Carolyn’s own words summarize this volume:

Consider the loveliness of a woman who passionately adores her husband, who tenderly cherishes her children, who creates a warm and peaceful home, who exemplifies purity, self-control, and kindness in her character and who gladly submits to her husband’s leadership—for all the days God grants her. I dare say that there are few things that display the gospel jewel with greater elegance (21).

Carolyn does in this book what Paul does with Titus: she paints a beautiful portrait of both the virtues and skills that make for a godly wife and mother. Moreover, she offers help, encouragement, and instruction, providing balanced attention to both mentor and disciple as she unfolds Titus 2. Not only so, but Carolyn also skillfully leads the reader into thoughts about gospel theology and personal sanctification.

The book’s strength is its simplicity. But that does not make it an easier pill to swallow. This is not a book for women who simply want to feel better about being feminine. It takes on the most serious and controversial dimensions of biblical femininity without blinking. For example, the subjects of submission to husbands and working at home are stripped of their cultural caricatures and presented to women as gracious gifts from a gracious God. Moreover, Carolyn handles the issues of sexual purity and marital intimacy with amazing clarity in an economy of space.

Bottom line: this book is theologically solid and clear, helpfully illustrated, sensitively written, realistic, appropriately humorous, humble, and it provides hope in the face of failure.

I highly recommend this book, but not just for married women. It is also great instruction for young, unmarried women, and it will be helpful for men (young and old) to understand, too. This book should be required reading for young men and women, and also for those of us who are married already.

—Rick Holland (Sr. Assoc. Minister, Grace Community Church, Sun Valley, CA)

Mahaney, C.J. *Sex, Romance, and the Glory of God: What Every Christian Husband Needs to Know*, rev’d edition. Crossway, 2004.

The accent of C.J. Mahaney's ministry is a passion to promote a gospel-centered orientation of one's life. No matter what he writes or speaks about, the gospel is sure to be the integrating focus. This emphasis is obvious throughout *Sex, Romance, and the Glory of God*.

Using the Song of Solomon as his foundation, Mahaney unpacks a compelling case for husbands to provide deliberate, sensitive, and selfless love to their wives. His encouragement is simple: the love that husbands want their wives to give must first be initiated. Physical expressions of love between spouses should be the fruit of deep roots of godly devotion to one another.

Though the book is rooted in Solomon's Song, it surveys and applies many other passages related to the marriage relationship as well. The expositions are trustworthy and concise. This is not a commentary on the respective passages, but applications from those Scriptures.

Mahaney's applications are specific, convicting, and helpful to any Christian husband who will listen. And the book's strength is just that—it's very practical. It's a paint-by-numbers approach to loving your wife in both soul and body.

Be warned, however. This is not a book for blushers. Mahaney is graphic in his descriptions of sexuality, and thus is probably not the best book for a couple to read before they are married.

Bottom line: This book contains great instruction for husbands and great insights for wives. It is theologically sound, practically applied, connected to gospel truth, appropriately humorous, and short enough to read in a few sittings, though sometimes too explicit in description.

It is too easy to say that this book is countercultural with regard to how the world thinks about marital love and intimacy. The problem is that it is countercultural with regard to how most *Christians* think about marriage. To read this book is to have your selfishness assaulted, to have your thinking reoriented, and to discover that when Christ is preeminent in the marriage bedroom, you find God-given satisfaction.

—Rick Holland (Sr. Assoc. Minister, Grace Community, Sun Valley, CA)

Mason, Mike. *The Mystery of Marriage: Meditations on the Miracle*, 20th anniversary edition. Multnomah, 2005, orig. pub. 1985.

This book surely has to be one of the more improbable success stories in evangelical publishing. A recent convert to Christianity is convinced he is called to celibacy, only to fall in love and get married. Then in his first, rocky year of marriage he writes a biblically informed philosophical meditation on the meaning of marriage based on the journals he kept during his engagement. A publisher takes a chance on the book, and 23 years later, the book is still in print. Luminaries like J. I. Packer have written, "Rarely . . . has a new book roused in me so much enthusiasm as has the combination of wisdom, depth, dignity, and *glow*—I don't know what else to call it—that I find in these chapters. . . . please excuse my own slight giddiness." The sagacious Elisabeth Elliot calls it "a drop-everything book," saying, "I don't need to read any other book on the subject."

Mason's book seeks to explore the "dynamic correspondence between marriage and the great invisible realities of the Christian faith. It is not a 'how-to' book so much as a 'how-come' book, a meditative inquiry into the spiritual foundations upon which marriage is built" (p. 27). Chapters cover (1) Otherness; (2) Love; (3) Intimacy; (4) Vows; (5) Sex; (6) [Mutual] Submission; (7) Death; and (a new chapter for the 20th anniversary edition) (8) Oneness. The book is far from perfect (occasionally downplaying and bypassing the differing roles God has designed in marriage; using ill-advised language about God taking risks; etc.), but at the same time, there is no other book like it, lyrically and profoundly exploring the miraculous mystery of marriage. It's not for everyone, but I learned much from it and would highly (though selectively) recommend it to others.

—Justin Taylor (*Crossway, Wheaton, IL*)

Nelson, Tommy. *The Book of Romance: What Solomon Says about Love, Sex, and Intimacy*. Thomas Nelson, 1998.

The best thing about this book is that it is chock full of interesting stories that reflect biblical truth. In addition to the entertainment value of the stories, the book makes selective use of psychological tidbits (e.g., men are microwaves, women are crock-pots) and wise recommendations on how to deal with relationships. It presents the story of the Song of Solomon as a gradual progression from two single people who meet, court, marry, and proceed through life together. The aforementioned anecdotes, wisdom, and practical steps for dealing with conflict and such are introduced as they fit into the purported story of the Song of Solomon. All of this can be very helpful, especially for those who have not seen good marriages where people deal with difficulties well.

Insofar as the book is presented as an exposition of the Song of Solomon, however, more attention is due both to the text of the Song itself and to its canonical context. It seems to me that the author of the Song intended readers to see more significance in the Song than is typically ascribed to it, especially given its canonical setting and the flow of redemptive history. Thus, more could be made of the fact that the male in the Song is the Davidic king, who is overcoming the alienation between himself and his beloved, with the scene alternating between a Garden setting and the city of Jerusalem.

Read in canonical context, the king is reversing the curse of Genesis 3:16, renewing the Edenic experience, and this, it seems, is a picture of the Davidic King who laid down his life for his bride. This has obvious implications for marriage (Eph 5:22–33). Drawing in these canonical realities from the whole of the Bible's story provides opportunities to address why things are wrong (the curse of Gen 3), how God addresses these wrongs (the Davidic King who overcomes the curse and initiates reconciliation), and the fact that only those who hope and trust in King Jesus will enjoy the new Eden, to which marital harmony in the present age points. We will not have good marriages apart from our hope in and emulation of the King who has overcome the alienation of sin.

—Jim Hamilton (*The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY*)

Parrott, Les & Leslie. *Love Talk: Speak Each Other's Love Language Like You Never Have Before*. Zondervan, 2004.

The goal of *Love Talk* is to increase the quality of conversations in a marriage relationship (p. 23). Such good conversations come about when the couple feels emotionally safe to say anything to each other (p. 50). How will they attain feelings of emotional safety? Through understanding one another's fears of the other and how these fears cause them to converse as they do (p. 58). Once these fears and communication styles are understood, then husband and wife can show empathy and understanding towards one another, which is the essence of "love talk" (p. 104).

What you will gain from *Love Talk* is a reminder that people communicate differently—and a way to think about these differences in useful categories. The book also practically helps the reader to consider his or her own fears, as well as the spouse's. And it is filled with the reminder that husbands and wives need to be thoughtful before speaking.

Unfortunately, *Love Talk* doesn't provide any real solutions to the main problem hindering communication in marriage—sin. In fact, sin isn't discussed in the entire book. Most instruction dwells on matters of miscommunication and doesn't deal with those things that cause the most problems with how married couples speak to each other, such as our own pride and selfish desires (James 4:1-2) reflected in our hearts (Matthew 12:34). Yes, there are references made about our fears, but *Love Talk* doesn't identify such fears as being wrong or even make an attempt to help remove them. Instead, it teaches us how to tiptoe around our fears by respecting them.

It's not until the last chapter that *Love Talk* finally reveals the underlying power that allows us to truly enjoy "love talk"—ourselves. Reading this book, one would think that boosting our self-respect and partner-respect by thinking positive thoughts is the key to every great conversation. The most remarkable comment of all comes in the beginning chapters where *Love Talk* asserts that the authors' communication solution won't be found in any other book (p. 28). Well, we can at least agree that it won't be found among any of the books of the Bible.

—Steve W. Boyer (*Elder, Capitol Hill Baptist Church, Washington, DC*)

Peace, Martha. *The Excellent Wife: A Biblical Perspective*, rev. ed. Focus Publishing, 1999.

Certified by the National Association of Nouthetic Counselors, Martha Peace brings a wealth of personal counseling experience and biblical knowledge to her book for women (and their husbands) *The Excellent Wife*. Her seasoned counseling hand is evident in the sensitivity she demonstrates to women in all types of marriages. The reader gets the impression that Peace has “seen it all,” making it easy to trust her (presumably) hard-earned wisdom. The opening testimony of Peace’s own adulthood conversion to Christ, following struggles with drinking and plans to leave her husband and children, only reinforces the reader’s confidence that this soldier knows the battlefield she is on.

Peace provides an astounding and nearly exhaustive portrait of the Proverbs 31 “excellent wife” (with the exception of mothering) from texts throughout the Bible. Scarcely a sentence is written without another sentence of Scripture to back up her instruction. Peace takes a strongly complementarian approach to marriage, but she also presents women with very clear guidance for approaching their husband’s sin.

I would encourage pastors and/or small groups leaders to use Peace’s book with two significant qualifications: First, Peace does encourage wives to seek out older, godlier women and church leaders when necessary, but generally she depicts the Christian life and marriage apart from the teaching, accountability, and community of the local church. Second, Peace affirms the importance of the gospel throughout the book, yet somehow the gospel affirmations typically do not filter through to her practical applications. Two examples: (i) Her chapter on dealing with a wife’s anger affirms God’s perfect anger and the propitiatory work of Christ toward the beginning of the chapter; but then her four practical steps for fighting anger include no reference to remembering this gospel truth but simply call women to exercise will power. (ii) A woman who struggles with impatience should say to herself, “Love is patient. I can show patience to him by patiently listening...” (emphasis *not* mine), with no reference to Christ’s patience with her, her new identity in Christ, and her freedom to be patient because she has nothing left to prove—her *cause* has been proven by Christ.

In short, women (and their husbands) will benefit immensely from the biblical portrait of a godly wife this book provides (I don’t know of anything else like it). But pastors may want to make sure the book is used in contexts where a teacher can present or discuss the material with gospel reinforcement, especially among wives who struggle with legalism and discouragement.

—Jonathan Leeman (9Marks, Washington, DC)

Peace, Martha & John Crott. *Tying the Knot Tighter*. P & R, 2007.

This is not a “normal” marriage book. Most marriage books deal with communication, forgiveness, finances, sex, and parenting. They give heart-warming stories, examples of things that go wrong, and lots of biblical principles to guide the relationship. They also help couples to feel better educated about marriage. *Christian* marriage books (hopefully) ground all of these discussions in Scripture.

In Martha Peace and John Crott’s *Tying the Knot Tighter*, the primary goal is not to educate or inspire (though it does both of these things). The main objective is to help couples reflect on and reevaluate the foundations of their *own* marriage. The authors write:

Taking the time apart to refresh ourselves on the foundations of marriage is vital as a couple. This is true for all Christian marriages. Just as the best players never get past the basics of their sport, so Christian couples need to be regularly reminded of the basics of a Christian marriage. This book sets out to provide such reminders (p. 11).

In nineteen short chapters, Peace and Crotts work through nineteen helpful topics: loving the Lord, bible reading, prayer, church, growing together, male leadership, wives loving husbands, submission, living by knowledge, respect, husbands providing for their family, setting the tone for home, communication, facing trials together, conflict resolution, money, sex, and parenting.

Each chapter has a biblical summary of the topic, heart-probing questions that help couples to reflect on their own marriage, and a prayer to conclude the discussion. The point is *not* to give you an exhaustive overview of each topic. Rather, the authors want couples to focus their time on asking each other questions. They want couples not

just to learn, but also to evaluate the dynamics of their own marriage. Many couples read together, but few take the time to ask heart-revealing questions that can expose the strengths and weaknesses of their marital relationship.

The most practical way to use this book is on date nights, weekend retreats, and occasional discussions at supper. Each chapter is easily covered in a single outing. Couples could choose to get away for a weekend and to cover several chapters in the book (*when is the last time you've taken your wife on a weekend trip?*). Or, a couple could gradually work through the entire book at dinner time.

Many of us struggle to ask our spouse good questions. We don't know how to ask questions that will probe our spouses' heart. So having a book that provides heart-revealing questions helps. The questions are also useful because they expose sin in marriage. God can use our spouse (and thoughtful questions) as a means to uncover sin that hides in the darkness.

Martha Peace and John Crotts are biblical counselors and members of NANC (National Association of Nouthetic Counselors), an organization founded by the godfather of the biblical counseling movement, Jay Adams. Nouthetic counseling is committed to the authority of Scripture. The Nouthetic movement has done a great job of grounding Christian living in the context of the church, reinforcing biblical roles in marriage, and helping people see the sin that so often messes up life.

If you are a pastor, this is an excellent resource to give couples in your congregation. Think especially of couples who are too busy to slow down. Most couples in your church probably rarely take time to re-examine the foundations of their marriage.

Do yourself a favor. Buy a copy of this book and take your wife away for the weekend. She will be *thrilled*. God will be *glorified*. And your marriage will be *better* for it.

—Deepak Reju (Assoc. Pastor, Capitol Hill Baptist Church, Washington, DC)

Priolo, Lou. *The Complete Husband: A Practical Guide to Biblical Husbanding*. Calvary Press, 1999.

One of the most practical and biblically sound books on marriage I have come across in a long time is Lou Priolo's *The Complete Husband: A Practical Guide to Biblical Husbanding*. By its expressed purpose, it focuses on the husband's roles and responsibilities, so it may not be best for married study groups for couples. However, all aspects of married life are covered so well that both husbands and wives can benefit from its teachings, whether directly or indirectly. The book is winsomely complementarian, which makes it trustworthy in the counsel it gives to husbands.

Its greatest strength is the skill Priolo shows in weaving together practical applications in plausible marital settings with sound exegesis of relevant texts of Scripture. He is excellent at giving lengthy lists of questions, issues, topics, hints, and suggestions that any husband can read and immediately apply to improve his marriage. The ten appendices are unusually practical and helpful, covering such things as "Things to say to diffuse an argument with your wife," and "Guidelines for giving directives to your wife." The biggest weakness of the book is that Priolo does not develop the theme of healthy church involvement as a significant part of a husband's discipling of his wife. All in all, I would recommend this book as a mainstay of any church's men's discipleship ministry.

—Andrew Davis (Pastor, First Baptist Church Durham, Durham, NC)

Rainey, Dennis and Barbara. *Starting Your Marriage Right: What You Need to Know in the Early Years of Marriage to Make it Last a Lifetime*. Thomas Nelson, 2000.

Starting Your Marriage Right by Dennis and Barbara Rainey is a highly practical book that addresses issues which every couple would benefit from discussing. The book is divided into 52 chapters, each ending with discussion questions and an action plan. The authors suggest that a newly married couple walk through the material with another couple, and the book lends itself to this approach. Many of the common issues concerning marriage are addressed in the book, such as finances, sex, and communication; but the authors also cover topics that are often neglected, including vacation plans, creating memories, and addressing past choices. Overall, the

book would be a good discussion starter and would provide opportunities for needed dialogue. However, it would require a couple to apply the gospel to their specific situations as they work through the practical considerations.

—Blake Johnson (Pastor, Grace Baptist Church, Cheshire, CT)

Ricucci, Gary and Betsy. *Love That Lasts: When Marriage Meets Grace*. Crossway, 2006.

I recommend this book very highly. The authors have a very high view of marriage as a tool for knowing God, giving him glory, growing in grace, and experiencing joy. *Love That Lasts* is easy to read, engaging, and immensely practical. I particularly appreciate the way the Ricuccis are honest about the struggles of marriage and encourage and equip the reader to persevere when marriage seems overwhelming and difficult. They also do a good job arguing for the necessity of the local church in growing a healthy marriage.

My wife and I refer back to the section on communication regularly as a tool for evaluating our marriage. We have also used it to good effect in doing marriage counseling for others.

—Mike McKinley (Pastor, Guilford Baptist Church, Sterling, VA)

Scott, Stuart. *The Exemplary Husband: A Biblical Perspective*. Focus, 2002.

The Exemplary Husband is wondrously helpful for husbands on so many issues. Intended to complement *The Excellent Wife* by Martha Peace, Stuart's work is 343 pages, with 21 chapters and 9 appendixes. Its emphasis is clearly didactic, so the study guides are necessary to help readers work out in their lives the topics that are covered. In fact, because there is so much material covered, unless guys take it section at a time, it will probably become another book read but ignored. This book is a great tool for counseling men, for men's studies, and for elders' studies.

—Bob Johnson, II (Pastor, Cornerstone Baptist Church, Roseville, MI)

Sproul, R. C. *The Intimate Marriage: A Practical Guide to Building a Great Marriage*. P&R, 1975.

R. C. Sproul's book (written in 1975 and reissued in 2003) is designed as a non-technical, practical, general guide and introduction to the basic patterns of married life (p. 8).

The topics covered in the various chapters are (1) Communication in Marriage; (2) The Role of the Man and Woman in Marriage; (3) Problems in Marriage; (4) What about Divorce? (5) Communication and Sex; (6) The Institution and Sanctity of Marriage. Each chapter has a dozen or so questions that couples can use to explore the themes in more depth. The teaching throughout is biblical, straightforward, and practical. Infused through the teaching are lessons drawn from Sproul's own marriage to his wife, Vesta. What emerges on these pages is a sinner saved by grace who absolutely delights in his wife and has not lost the wonder of being married. For an accessible, practical guide to some key aspects of marriage, this is a good and solid choice.

—Justin Taylor (Crossway, Wheaton, IL)

Thomas, Derek. *A Biblical Guide to Love, Sex, and Marriage*. Evangelical Press, 2007.

Thomas guides his reader through seven vignettes of the Song of Solomon with a fatherly tone that reveals his pastoral experience in both the text and the trenches. He is exegetically careful, yet accessible for anyone. You go away thinking, "Why didn't I see that before?" While recognizing the Christ-church analogy, he retains the more earthy main point as the joy of marital love and intimacy. At times the reader might like to see the applications tied more tightly to the power of the cross, and to see that Christ exemplified is the ultimate goal of marriage. But overall, this is a helpfully simple (yet not simplistic) reading of the Song that uses portraits rather than principles to encourage both specific application within marriage and patient wisdom on the way there.

—Paul Alexander (Pastor, Fox Valley Bible, St. Charles, IL)

Thomas, Gary. *Sacred Marriage*. Zondervan, 2000.

This book has one particular insight that justifies its existence: what if God designed marriage to make us holy more than to make us happy? When the author sticks to that premise and the applications thereof, the book is great. On the whole, *Sacred Marriage* is good at helping us to seeing the way that marriage exposes our sin, gives us opportunities to trust God's grace, and brings blessing as we persevere. These themes, however, have been more helpfully picked up and expanded in Tim Lane and Paul Tripp's recent book, *Relationships: A Mess Worth Making*.

On the whole, this is a fine book for personal reflection or to read with your spouse. I wouldn't use it for marriage counseling, however, simply because there are better books out there.

—Mike McKinley (Pastor, Guilford Baptist, Sterling, VA)

Wheat, Ed. *Love Life for Every Married Couple*, revised edition. Zondervan, 1980.

(I reviewed the mass-market paperback edition published in 1997, bearing the super-title, "Over 1 million copies sold").

Ed Wheat's books on marriage, especially this one, frequently receive high praise of the "Best book on marriage I've ever read" variety. And this, from folks who claim to have read many such books and attended numerous counseling seminars on marriage. There are problems with this book, however, despite its claim to be thoroughly biblical.

Not least is the B-E-S-T (Blessing-Edifying-Sharing-Touching) program, which in many ways puts men in positions of having to pander to the wife's every need (without proper ethical evaluation of the "need"). The book's worldview is based on a psychological *unconditional love/unconditional acceptance* model. His advice to husbands who have had adulterous affairs is *not* to confess these: "'Unless you are asked, never confess an affair from the past that would come as a shock to your partner. Confession in this case is not virtuous honesty; it is a cruel act that puts the burden and pain on your mate. Keep the knowledge to yourself, confess your wrong to God and rest in His forgiveness" (pp. 302-3).

There are some good things of a very practical nature in the book, but Wheat leans heavily on the neo-Freudian insights of counselors Paul Meier and Frank Minirth. A rating of B- at best.

—Derek Thomas (Minister of Teaching, First Presbyterian Church Jackson, Jackson, MS)

Ed and Gaye Wheat, *Intended for Pleasure: Sex Technique and Sexual Fulfillment in Christian Marriage*, third edition. Fleming H. Revell 1997, orig. pub. 1977.

This book contains a wealth of information told in a very frank, but generally acceptable way without appearing lurid. Dubbed as a Christian sex-manual by the publishers, the Wickets again invoke the philosophy of self-worth and personal gratification (they are pro-masturbation, for example, chapter 7) which are very problematic. They are pro-low-tech means for infertile couples but promote adoption in place of high-tech means which appear "too mechanical." They oppose oral sex, but on grounds that this is not the "way God would have designed," a view worthy of Aquinas, but hardly convincing in today's world.

Curiously, too, the wife is exhorted not to let herself go as age creeps up, but no such advice is given to husbands. Why some of this advice, perfectly acceptable to many Christians, is specifically *Christian* is difficult to discern, and it often appears as their personal preference/view as much as it is anything else. Since the Bible does not provide any advice on sexual technique, the specific (explicit) nature of the advice is welcome and necessary but in the end, only a personal viewpoint. It would require a large measure of discernment to read this book.

—Derek Thomas (Minister of Teaching, First Presbyterian Church Jackson, Jackson, MS)

Ed Wheat, *Staying in Love for a Lifetime*, a trilogy containing *Love-Life for Every Married Couple*, *The First Years of Forever*, and *Secret Choices* in one volume. Inspirational Press, 1994.

(Since I have said something about *Love-Life for Every Married Couple* above, I will comment on the other two here).

The First Years of Forever. A staple for over twenty years as a good introduction to the “unrealistic expectations” of marriage. Faithfulness and forgiveness receive particular attention, including some compelling practical analysis of forgiveness without overly pandering to the psychology of self-worth. On “communication” Wheat and fellow author, Gloria Okes Perkins, have some of the best advice I’ve read. The advice on debt, pandering to one’s ego, and jealousy are also well done, though the underlining psychology remains neo-Freudian. Good material for newlyweds.

Secret Choices: Personal Decisions that Affect Your Marriage. This book continues what was begun in *First Years of Forever*, offering more suggestions on how to reach marital fulfillment in areas of communication, daily living, and “sexual sharing,” all of it undergirded by what the authors consider most important of all – a shared faith in Christ. There is much of value here, not least in the way this book forces us to think about the decisions we have made in our marriages. Ultimately, though, the focus tends to be man-centered and success-oriented.

—Derek Thomas (*Minister of Teaching, First Presbyterian Church Jackson, Jackson, MS*)

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The Gospel & Deliberate Complementarian Pastors

By C. J. Mahaney

Our motivation for biblical manhood and womanhood in marriage is the gospel.

I am convinced that the complementarian position will strengthen the church in her God given-role to proclaim and protect the gospel. And the most effective apologetic for the complementarian position (apart from Scripture) is marriages, families, and singles who radiate the beauty and wisdom of God's plan for men and women.

Biblical manhood and womanhood is the life-transforming effect of the gospel on full display. When a church teaches, practices, and honors gender distinctions determined by our good and wise God, the gospel will advance. But this will only happen where there are humble and courageous pastors who lead every member and ministry of the church by personal example and with strategic pastoring.

Yet here's my concern: It is all too easy for us as pastors to affirm biblical manhood and womanhood and to contend humbly for the complementarian position, and yet still fail to intentionally and consistently apply this body of teaching to our lives and to our churches. Pastors must not only proclaim truth but practice truth.

Another way to say this would be, complementarianism must be *functional* in our personal lives and in our churches, not simply professed. Our understanding of biblical manhood and womanhood should mean that the husbands, wives, children, and singles in our churches look different than marriages and families look in the world.

Our responsibilities as pastors fall into two categories: personal application and pastoral strategy.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

Our teaching on this topic will only be as effective as our personal example. Modeling precedes teaching. Biblical instruction cannot be divorced from personal example.

We must provide our churches with a genuine (not perfect) model of biblical masculinity. It is possible to skillfully teach Genesis 1-3 or Ephesians 5 and yet neglect to apply these passages to our lives.

So let me ask you: Where and how will you demonstrate biblical manhood to your wife and children this week? What difference is your complementarian position going to make in your life and for those you love, lead, and serve? If I spent the week with you, would your conviction about biblical masculinity be obvious?

Gentlemen, here is a gift you can give to your wife this week. Set aside a few hours of uninterrupted time, and ask her to honestly evaluate your personal example of godliness and your leadership in the home.

I dare you to ask her this question: Where do I need to grow in serving and leading you?

For bonus points, ask this question: Where do I need to grow in serving and leading the children?

This one conversation could initiate dramatic changes in your life.

After you've talked to your wife, I encourage you to relate the details to a fellow elder, pastor, or friend. Invite their questions and observations and make yourself accountable to them for application. This step will weaken pride

and cultivate humility. Because God gives grace to the humble, this is a very smart thing to do. In fact, it would be stupid not to, since God opposes the proud. So let us avoid being mere advocates of the complementarian position. By the grace of God we must be functional complementarians, which means it will be evident for all to see.

(In fact, I double dare you to ask your wife the question above.)

PASTORAL STRATEGY

Do you have a strategy for helping your church demonstrate biblical manhood and womanhood?

If so, what is your strategy? What is your plan to clarify, cultivate and celebrate biblical manhood and womanhood in your church? This must be done intentionally, strategically and consistently—not occasionally. And it won't get done if you don't lead humbly, wisely, and boldly.

Here's why: The members of our churches are being assaulted daily by a feminist worldview and culture. They are breathing feminist air each and every day. So do not assume that your statement of faith or last year's teaching series are sufficient to protect your church from cultural or evangelical feminism.

Here's how: Begin by thinking through each ministry in your church. Is biblical manhood and womanhood modeled and explicitly taught in each ministry? What about your children's ministry? How about the youth ministry? The worship team? The counseling ministry? Thoroughly evaluate every aspect of your church, including the teaching diet on Sundays. Then devise a specific plan to channel this important body of teaching through each ministry of your church to every member of your church for every year you pastor the church.

Preaching on biblical manhood and womanhood is not enough—we must transfer this body of truth to every member of our church. Which begins with us.

C. J. Mahaney is the president of Sovereign Grace Ministries and the author of Sex, Romance, and the Glory of God: What Every Christian Husband Needs to Know (Crossway, 2004). This article was originally a blogpost at www.t4g.org.

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Leading a Small Group for Newly Weds

By Matt Schmucker

It's always better to address potential problems than actual ones, and it's better to be proactive than reactive.

Thus, our church encourages the couples in our midst who are in their first two years of marriage to join a small group of other newly married couples led by a veteran couple. Hopefully, this limits future problems and helps to build firm foundations for God-glorifying marriages.

Here are some hints for leading a newly married group.

GENERAL

- Keep the group smaller than six couples (including the leaders).
- Keep the group together for two years, but rotate them after one year to another veteran couple to hear another take on marriage.
- Work hard to have the entire group present each time you meet. The regularity (every two weeks or once a month) is less important than everyone being present to participate. Given the mobile society we're in, we found the simplest way forward was to bring our calendars to each gathering and schedule TWO meetings in advance.
- Meet for no less than an hour and for no more than two.
- Rotate the responsibility to host the group. As the leader you may learn a lot by visiting each couple's home.
- Pick a couple who is not hosting to provide dessert for the group. We found periodic meals after church with a discussion centered on the sermon to be helpful and fun as well.

DISCUSSION

- Get to know each other BEFORE you try to unpack the marriages.
 - Spend the first meeting listening to each other's backgrounds and conversion stories.
 - In a separate meeting get each person to describe his/her parents' relationship. As the leader you will learn important information about the person's experience and perception of marriage. This will undoubtedly feed your counsel to each member.
- Pick a book to begin reading as a group – maybe a chapter or two for each meeting. The point is not necessarily the book itself. Your goal is to get these couples thinking about marriage and shaking their presumptions out of the closet. Use the book as a launching pad for a strong discussion. Books to consider:
 - *Love the Lasts*, Gary and Betsy Ricucci
 - *Sex, Romance and the Glory of God*, C. J. Mahaney
 - *When Sinners Say I Do*, Dave Harvey
 - *Each for the Other*, Bryan Chappell
 - *God, Marriage and Family*, Andreas Kostenberger
 - *Money, Possessions and Eternity*, Randy Alcorn (money is a big issue for couples!)

- When you think the group is ready, have everyone close their eyes and raise their hands if they wish to split up (men in one room and women in another) to have a discussion about sexual intimacy. The first time I did this the vote was unanimous in favor of splitting up. You would assume in our sex-soaked culture that ignorance would be limited. It's not. As the leader, you need to determine how specific you want to be in your discussion. So far everyone has found this approach helpful, and many who have struggled in this area have found it encouraging to know they were not alone.
- Mentally prepare the young couples for the addition of children by openly talking about the transition—both the joys and the challenges.
- Lead the group without lecturing.
- Make yourself available for more private conversations outside the group for couples who are struggling.
- Finally, pray for your group. Satan loves division and has worked havoc even on Christian couples. Fight back by asking for God's protection.

Matt Schmucker, who is married to Elizabeth and is the father of five children, is the executive director for 9Marks and an elder at the Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, DC.

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Book Review: Good Christians Good Husbands? By Doreen Moore

Reviewed by Matt Schmucker

Christian Focus, 2004, 179 pp, \$11.99

Does being a good Christian make for being a good husband and family man? That's the question Doreen Moore explores in her brief book (179 pages; 24 pages of endnotes) by looking at three of the most extraordinarily fruitful men of the eighteenth century and their wives: John and Molly Wesley, George and Elizabeth Whitefield, and Jonathan and Sarah Edwards.

The first three chapters serve as mini-biographies for the three couples, including their opinions on balancing ministry and marriage. The fourth and final chapter presents the lessons to be learned.



CHAPTER 1: WESLEY

In 1783, two years after his wife's death, John Wesley wrote, "The person in your house that claims your first and nearest attention, is, undoubtedly your wife; seeing you are to love her, even as Christ hath loved the Church..."

According to Moore's assessment of the Wesley union, this is a terribly ironic statement. Wesley was unwilling to stop or even slow his itinerant preaching for any reason, including his marriage. He desired "to spend and be spent" for "the Cause." This left Molly Wesley alone most days of her marriage.

For her part, Moore does not present a flattering picture of Molly. She quotes one biographer who wrote, "As a rule, [Molly] was a bitter unmitigated curse." Molly was jealous of the relationships Wesley had with unmarried women and spent energy to undermine her husband's reputation. It was never clear in anyone's mind why they married in the first place.

After a final attempt at reconciling John and Molly, Molly's son from her first marriage summarized the relationship this way: "[I] leave matters no better than I found them. It is, indeed, a melancholy affair, and, I am afraid, productive of bad consequences."

Wesley was so far removed from his wife's life that he wrote the following in his journal on October 12, 1781: "I came to London, and was informed that my wife died on Monday. This evening she was buried, though I was not informed of it till a day or two after."

CHAPTER 2: WHITEFIELD

George Whitefield married Elizabeth James—a thirty six year old widow—on November 11, 1741, just a few years after beginning his ministry. Though it's unlikely Hollywood will ever want to present their story as a romance, Moore characterizes their marriage as "acceptable."

In a letter to a friend, Whitefield describes Elizabeth, "[She] is neither rich in fortune, nor beautiful as to her person, but, I believe, a true child of GOD, and would not, I think, attempt to hinder me in his work for the world." Like Wesley, Whitefield wanted to "spend and be spent" and did not want to turn down any request merely because he was married.

Why, then, was Whitefield's marriage "acceptable" while Wesley's was a disaster? First, Whitefield made it clear that he was looking for a "helpmeet" to work alongside him, especially in his much-loved Orphan House. Second, Elizabeth was no Molly. Elizabeth, though only converted three years before marrying Whitefield, was a godly, hard working, kind woman who was committed to the Cause in a way Molly wasn't.

In short, she knew what she was getting into by marrying Whitefield and worked to support it. Like Wesley, Whitefield's wife preceded him in death. The difference was that Whitefield felt a "chasm" at the loss of his bride.

CHAPTER 3: EDWARDS

Moore holds up the life of Jonathan and Sarah Edwards as the model for marriage and ministry. After all, Edwards "saw no dichotomy between 'the work of the Lord' and his family." Edwards married Sarah Pierrepont on July 28, 1727 and remained in their "uncommon union" till his death in 1758.

Edwards lived out his theology which regarded the family as a display of God's glory. He understood the family was a little church and he was its chief shepherd, taking responsibility for Sarah's and his eleven children's spiritual care. Though Edwards was famous for being in his study for upwards of thirteen hours each day, Moore writes, "she [Sarah] frequently accompanied him there. They often discussed religion. They prayed together at least once a day. After the rest of the family retired for the night they had a devotion" (101).

For her part, Sarah Edwards "was bright and had had an 'enlightened and polished education.' Her depth of thought, combined with her godliness and kindness, made her an enjoyable conversationalist. She so sought to please her husband that she did whatever it took to meet his needs" (100).

Upon her husband's death, Sarah wrote the following to her daughter:

"O my Dear Child,
What shall I say. A holy and good God has covered us with a dark cloud. O that we may all kiss the rod and lay our hands on our mouths. The Lord has done it. He has made me adore his goodness that we had him so long. But my God lives and he has my heart. O what a legacy my husband and your father has left us. We are all given to God and there I am and love to be. (127)

CHAPTER 4: HOW SHOULD WE THEN LIVE?

The final chapter presents a brief summary of the book and thirteen "Lessons to be learned and other Biblical thoughts to ponder." For a taste, here are the first two lessons: First, being in the ministry is hard work! Second, it is entirely possible that family concerns can be given too much priority.

If you have never considered such things, the chapter may be worthwhile. If you have, pass.

ACCURACY

I have read enough biographies on the lives of all three men to assume that Moore provides a good summary of their marriages. Wesley—nasty. Whitefield—acceptable. Edwards—uncommonly good.

AGENDA

I do not know Doreen Moore, but she makes her agenda clear as she inserts her opinions and experience. In the midst of recounting the histories of these couples, she will insert a comment like this: "Though my husband and I would both say that our marriage has been a source of great joy, I confess that only within the last few years have I internalized the truth that the foundation of a healthy Christian marriage is not that my psychological needs are met" (118).

These types of comments, peppered through the book, leaves the reader feeling like she has something of an ulterior agenda. Whether or not she does, they made for odd interruptions and might have been better saved for her own autobiography.

LESSONS

There are lessons to be learned for the minister and non-minister alike from the marriages of these three couples. In fact, I think the lessons are so obvious that the author could have left chapter four out of the book.

That said, these lives and their ministries were so utterly extraordinary that any conclusions we reach about their marriages are bound to be uncharitable—at least for Wesley and Whitefield. Which of us have ever tried to manage a revival and a marriage at the same time?

Is Good Christians Good Husbands? good?

If the main lesson of this book is simply that right theology does not guarantee a good marriage, then the message comes across loud and clear. And that is a good lesson for young ministers especially to consider.

The book is a quick read. It is fun to read if you like brief bios. Given the appalling rate of infidelity among ministers, or even just unhappy ministerial homes, every pastor should consider the state of his marriage and home. Does it have the aroma of Christ? This book should help him ask that question.

Matt Schmucker, who is married to Elizabeth and is the father of five children, is the executive director for 9Marks and an elder at the Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, DC.

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9Marks Pastors' Wives' Forum

We asked a roundtable of pastors' wives the following question:

What have been one or two of the most unexpected blessings of being a pastor's wife?



Answers from

- Laurie Alexander
- Danelle Bancroft
- Kimm Harvey
- Cathi Johnson
- Kathy MacDonald
- Pam Noblit
- Shiona Rees
- Jeanine Dell Sanchez
- Jenny Schumacher

Laurie Alexander

As Christians, we are all called to "appreciate those who diligently labor among us, and have charge over us in the Lord and give us instruction, and esteem them very highly in love because of their work" (1 Thes. 5:12-13). As the pastor's wife, I have unique insight into and means of obeying this command!



The apostle Paul also instructs pastors in 1 and 2 Timothy to pursue righteousness, godliness, gentleness, sobriety, the suffering of hardship, kindness, patience in the face of being wronged—just to name a few. Imagine a minister of the gospel married to someone working at odds with these commands.

My call to be my husband's helper means I'm called to help protect his reputation by cultivating my own character. What an unexpected blessing it has been to be held accountable in such a sobering way. This high calling is sobering, yes, but it is also a kindness from the Lord to my sinful heart, because I need the extra accountability! When I meet with other women, I need to be able to say in good conscience how I spend my time and how I'm redeeming the time. It's not only for my reputation, but most importantly for my husband's and the Lord's!

Laurie is the wife of Paul Alexander, pastor of Fox Valley Bible Church in St. Charles, Illinois.

Danelle Bancroft

Years before my husband and I were in ministry, I was told that ministry was hard because you lived in a "fish bowl." Everyone would be watching your every move and you had to be on your best behavior. Ironically, it's this expected drawback that has become an unexpected blessing.



The advice people give assumes that you have to be aware of what all kinds of people are thinking about you at all times. But this type of thinking produces a fear of man and not a fear of God. My main concern should be living in a fish bowl before God. I need to let Scripture (not people) teach me what I am to be.

Reflecting on what my Savior has done for me has caused me to be serious about sin and sanctification. I have learned that this is both a painful and glorious process. Titus talks about the pattern of godly women's lives should be such that the Word of God is not reviled (Titus 2:5b). It's freeing knowing that I don't live my Christian life before man, therefore I should not fear man. At the same time, it's very sobering that I am to remember that my life, not because of being a pastor's wife, but because of being a Christian, is to be lived in such a way that God's Word is not thought of lightly. It is God I fear, not man.

My husband and I often think that we should pay the church instead of them paying us. Being in ministry is hard and demanding, but also refining and rewarding. If this is living in a fish bowl, I'm jumping in with two feet! (1 Cor. 15:58)

Danelle is the wife of Eric Bancroft, pastor at Castlevew Baptist Church in Indianapolis, Indiana.

Kimm Harvey

Twenty-six years of marriage, 23 as a pastor's wife—who would've guessed? Certainly not me. And the joys are incalculable, so let me pick just one.



I love the fact that my husband's role was never just a 'daddy-thing' for the family. Each of us were called to something beyond ourselves, something beyond the family. We have the thrill of joyfully releasing Dave to serve in the fields of the Lord. That's never easy, though.

Like most pastor's wives, I adore my husband and would rather have him around more. And it was the same for Dave—our family is his passion, too. But in order for him to do his job well, he had to know we had faith and vision for him to labor hard outside the home. It is a way our family can sacrifice our best for the gospel. And trusting God for his life outside the home bears wonderful fruit within the family.

Our life in ministry is like a favorite book, and we can't wait for the next chapter!

Kimm is the wife of Dave Harvey, pastor of Covenant Fellowship Church in Glen Mills, Pennsylvania.

Cathi Johnson

The most unexpected blessing for me is how satisfied and motivated I am to support my husband. The passion he has to teach God's Word and shepherd our church gives him incredible eternal purpose. I believe in his efforts so completely that it is an honor to be his helpmate.



The privilege to serve the Lord by loving my husband and taking care of his daily needs has been an overwhelming joy. The Lord has been gracious to give me complete contentment to carry out the good work He had planned for me to do. The surprise blessing is the joy.

Cathi is the wife of Bob Johnson, pastor of Cornerstone Baptist Church in Roseville, Michigan.

Kathy MacDonald

To be clear I *love* being a pastor's wife. I get a front row seat for all the blessings of God at work in our church and beyond. But the joys I didn't see coming when I signed up to be a pastor's wife are the ones I experience in our marriage and family.



James refuses to get up and preach unless he and I are 100 percent on the same page. While weekends sometimes bring tension and turmoil, it is always short-lived as we rush to work things out so we can serve Christ with a pure heart. As the weekend of ministry approaches, the enemy predictably drops a bomb between us, but we've learned to stop on the spot and sort it out. How wonderful to join hands in prayer, humbling ourselves before each other and God—even in the church parking lot if it comes to that!

In order to speak truth to others you've got to be living it yourself. If you ignore this piece, it will deeply wound your marriage and your desire to serve Christ. God has blessed this weekly commitment with 25 fruitful years of ministry together, and by God's grace we will have 25 more.

Kathy is the wife of James MacDonald, pastor of Harvest Bible Church in Rolling Meadows, Illinois.

Pam Noblit

On the fifth day of my husband's pastorate, it was revealed that a senior staff member was in dire moral sin. Though the ten year old church had always held to strong Bible preaching, it was pragmatic in practice and had never practiced church discipline. Through that situation, God gave my husband the grace, wisdom, and courage to begin what has become a



twenty year pilgrimage of shepherding a church to reform its practices to match its preaching (doctrine). But this journey has taken our family through some very difficult circumstances.

Since we live in a small southern town, our daughters have felt very personally the effects of slander against their father and our church. However, one particular instance stands out. During our oldest daughter's high school years, she was persecuted quite heavily for her uncompromising faith. This did not go unnoticed by one Christian teacher. After observing our daughter being ridiculed and left out, this teacher called her aside and inquired as to how she held up so well. Our daughter replied, "I've seen my father suffer for the faith, why shouldn't I?" What an unexpected blessing!

To the glory of God, our daughters are not bitter. It shames me to say many of the blessings we have experienced were unexpected. Why should they be? Our God is faithful and loves his own. Praise the Lord!

Pam is the wife of Jeff Noblit, pastor of First Baptist Church of Muscle Shoals in Muscle Shoals, Alabama.

Shiona Rees

The one blessing that was expected rather than a surprise was seeing God at work in people's lives up close. It is a privilege to watch spiritual changes in the people around you at church. Though this was expected, as I said, it's also surprising to see how God works in different ways in different lives.



Many other surprises have come my way as a result of being married to a pastor. One which I have struggled with is the blessing of living in foreign countries (I am Scottish; we went to seminary in Australia and now work in the United States). Though I have resisted every move, to my shame, I have seen God's hand in moving us around and have grown in resting on the fact that my citizenship is in heaven. Also, he has given me opportunity to meet Christians of different cultures and to find fellowship and see the church in action in different contexts.

Having a husband steeped in the Word is a great blessing, particularly as he talks about what he is learning all the time. I learn second hand as he summarizes everything that he has been reading.

One of the richest blessings that I have found is the refreshment and encouragement from having guests stay in our house. It has been a great privilege to meet 'up close' many godly people who have been examples to us of a life lived to God's glory.

Shiona is the wife of Paul Rees, pastor of Christ the Redeemer Church in Spokane, Washington.

Jeanine Dell Sanchez

The dictionary defines blessing as "a favor or gift bestowed by God, thereby bringing happiness, or the invoking of God's favor upon a person." When considering what the blessings are of being a pastor's wife, it might be tempting to look at the gifts bestowed on you because of your husband's position. However, I prefer to look at the blessings received in service.



As a pastor's wife, I am given more opportunities than most to be a blessing and a person of influence. People naturally bring prayer concerns to the pastor's wife. Therefore, I am blessed to pray for these people and see God work. Other women may come for counsel. Once again, I am blessed by another opportunity to point her to the beauty and power of God's Word and to see it transform lives.

Added to these is the joy of hosting people in our home for small group Bible study and meals. I am blessed to have people come into our home, be fed physically, spiritually, and go home refreshed. As a child, I watched my pastor's family live out the gospel in these same ways, and I dreamed of being a pastor's wife myself. They were a blessing to me then; now, the Lord has allowed me to bless others.

Who says dreams don't come true!

Jeanine is the wife of Juan Sanchez, pastor of High Pointe Baptist Church in Austin, Texas.

Jenny Schumacher

The most unexpected blessing of being a pastor's wife has been the peace that comes in knowing that God is not surprised by our trials, but rather that he means good for us through them. Romans 8:28 reminds me that God uses even the most difficult trials to sanctify his people. He does it because he is good and wants what is good for the church. The hymn *What E'er My God Ordains Is Right* has brought me much peace in this area recently. What rich lyrics that say,



What-e'er my God ordains is right:
His holy will abideth;
I will be still what-e'er He doth,
And follow where He guideth.
He is my God, though dark my road,
He holds me that I shall not fall;
Wherefore to Him I leave it all.

God is sovereign, God is good, and God is for us. This means that no matter what difficulties may arise in the church, God is working for our good. Being a pastor's wife involves many trials, but knowing that God will work good through them has given me the peace and strength to stand.

Jenny is the wife of Eric Schumacher, pastor of Northbrook Baptist Church in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

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The Pastor's Wife: A Position or Juxtaposition?

By Connie Dever

To download a PDF of Connie Dever and Lindsey Brayman's "Juxtaposition," a study guide to accompany Mary Somerville's *One with a Shepherd, go to*

"What will your wife do if you become our pastor?" That was the question one church member asked my husband at a question-and-answer session at Capitol Hill Baptist Church (CHBC). He was candidating for the position of pastor.

How did Mark answer? Did he reply, "She'll take charge of women's ministry. She'll work with the children. She'll accompany me on visitations"? No, he didn't.

"She will seek to love the Lord," was his straightforward reply. "She will be my wife, the mother of our children, and a faithful member of this church." Then he added, "Remember, you will be hiring me; not my wife. The best way she can serve you is by letting her be who God has made her to be, and by letting her support me."

In other words, he did not want the church to view me as an assumed, unpaid member of the church staff. He did not want me in a *position*. Rather, he wanted me in *juxtaposition*. That is, he wanted me to be closely connected to my God, my husband, my family, and the other members of the church in a way that fulfills the biblical roles for all wives, mothers, and church members, and yet which also makes the most of the special opportunities that I have to complement my husband's ministry. That's what my husband taught his congregation-to-be that evening. It's what he set out for me as the best path. And not only has this path been freeing for me over the last fourteen years, it has proved fruitful for the church.

One way I have been able to minister simply by living in juxtaposition with my husband over this time has arisen through CHBC's commitment to training up young men for the pastoral ministry. These men come from our own membership as well as the church's pastoral internship program. With many of these men come their wives, who also hope to be mentored in how to best support their husbands as pastors. In response, several women and I formed a CHBC pastors' wives small group several years ago. And it has evolved from the day we started it.

After a number of years of making up our lessons as we went, we adopted Mary Somerville's book *One with a Shepherd* for most of our small group's readings. We chose this book because it is full of both thorough biblical reflections as well as practical ideas which will benefit both prospective and seasoned pastor's wives.

However, we do use this book with some qualifications. At times Somerville makes statements that clash with her main, well-balanced, biblical message. These statements convey, perhaps unintentionally, an unhealthily high expectation that a pastor's wife will always serve alongside her husband, doing pastoral work with him, rather than primarily supporting him as wife, mother, friend, and committed church member. In a few instances we found ourselves completely disagreeing with what Somerville suggests.

We also found that, while the readings from *One with a Shepherd* provided mostly excellent introductions to many topics commonly faced in pastoral ministry, the wives in our group were most hungry to hear from their own pastors' wives. They wanted to hear how we had seen these concepts applied to different ministry situations and seasons of life. They wanted to hear about the heart matters that lurked behind the surface issues and how those heart matters could be addressed by biblical truths. They wanted to hear a few edifying "war stories" and any words of wisdom we could offer. And they wanted to know how to talk to their husbands about these things, to become more closely connected with them for the sake of the gospel and the good of their families.

Given these concerns and other voiced needs, we wrestled with whether Somerville's book was the right book for us to use or not. We decided that it was. Rather than choosing to discard Somerville's good book, full of so much helpful teaching and advice, we chose to write a study guide to accompany it—something that would guide our discussion through the important applications that our women wanted, that would highlight the good things Somerville has to say, and that would clarify some of the troublesome statements.

The Lord has chosen to richly bless this study in our small group here at CHBC. It is our hope that this study guide might also be a useful resource to help other pastors' wives and their husbands to glorify God by being more closely connected to him, to each other, to their families, and to the brothers and sisters in their churches—all to the end of bearing much fruit for his Kingdom.

Thanks, Mark, for your wise headship! Soli Deo Gloria!

[Click here for Connie Dever and Lindsey Brayman's "Juxtaposition," a study guide to accompany Mary Somerville's *One with a Shepherd*.](#)

Connie is the wife of Mark Dever, pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, DC.

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30 Practical Ways For Pastors to Love Their Wives & Families

Compiled by several pastors

The demands of pastoral ministry can be tough on the pastor's wife and family. Not only do they tempt him to neglect his family, they can leave him void of good, creative, meaningful ideas on how to love and serve them.

Pastor, we cannot help you with the temptation to neglect them, other than exhort you to flee this temptation—Christ hasn't neglected you, has he?! But perhaps we can help you with several practical ideas to help motivate you to love and serve your wife and children more effectively. Here they are:

IN RELATION TO YOUR FAMILY...

1. Take the initiative and establish a plan for family worship. Then follow the plan! (Don Whitney encourages "brevity, regularity, and flexibility" in family worship.)
2. Come home at the exact time you say you will be home; and prepare your heart to serve your family, not be served.
3. Take responsibility for your children's education and discipline—don't leave it to your wife to figure out.
4. Share with your wife and kids some of the good things that are going on in the church, and then thank them for helping to make that possible.
5. Use every hour of your vacation time. And take a vacation that does not involve extended family; restrict it to just your wife and kids.
6. Take a two week vacation.
7. Diligently guard your days off.
8. There are times when it seems like you have to choose whether to be a good dad/husband or a good pastor. Good pastors choose to be good dad/husbands.

IN RELATION TO YOUR WIFE...

9. Get up early and have your quiet time, so that you can take the kids in the morning while your wife has her quiet time.
10. Give her flowers and a hand written card when she least expects it.
11. Regularly schedule a date night and take the initiative on logistics, i.e. organize the baby-sitter, make reservations, and have a plan.
12. Make sure you know her favorite restaurant, meal, flowers, ice cream flavor, and movie.
13. Schedule a weekly time where you watch the kids and your wife gets out to do whatever she wants—not errands. When you can, give her a whole day off from the kids.
14. Decide together with your wife how many evenings you will be gone and honor what has been agreed upon.
15. On Sundays, leave for church a few minutes early to stop and get your wife her favorite coffee drink.
16. Ask your wife over a romantic dinner areas she wants to see you improve.

17. Take your wife to an encouraging conference.
18. Plan regular out-of-town personal retreats for just you and her. Plan time on your retreat to write down all the evidences of grace you see in one another's lives and then share them with one another. Later, spend time writing down your hopes for ways you want to grow as husband and father over the coming year (she doing the same for herself) and then share them with one another.
19. Respect and seek her opinion on things concerning the church.
20. Go for long walks.

IN RELATION TO YOUR CHILDREN...

21. Have deliberate one-on-one time weekly with each of your children, probably to include playing, reading scripture, or praying.
22. Date your daughters.
23. Leave the church at church so dad can be dad at home.
24. Take a child with you on visits or short term trips.
25. Ask your children questions that allow you to shepherd their hearts, such as these (these questions were [posted by Justin Taylor](#), and were originally devised by Pastor Rich Gamache of Sovereign Grace Fellowship)
 - In your own words, what is the gospel?
 - Is there a specific sin you're aware of that you need my help defeating?
 - Are you more aware of my encouragement or my criticism?
 - What's daddy most passionate about?
 - Do I act the same at church as I do when I'm at home?
 - Are you aware of my love for you?
 - Is there any way I've sinned against you that I've not repented of?
 - Do you have any observations for me?
 - How am I doing as a dad?
 - How have Sunday's sermons impacted you?
 - Does my relationship with mom make you excited to be married?
 - (On top of these things, with my older kids, I'm always inquiring about their relationship with their friends and making sure God and his gospel are the center of those relationship. And I look for every opportunity to praise their mother and increase their appreciation and love for her.)
 -
26. Take an interest in what your children enjoy doing.
27. Read to them. Buy books they will enjoy. Take them to the library.
28. Sing with them.
29. Pray *for* them and *with* them.
30. Be careful not to put them in the spotlight at church (stop using them for every other sermon illustration!).

Contributors (all pastors): Bret Capranica (San Jacinto, CA), Brian Croft (Louisville, KY), Bob Johnson (Roseville, MI), Michael Lawrence (Washington, DC), Mike McKinley (Sterling, VA), Deepak Reju (Washington, DC), and Jeramie Rinne (Hingham, MA)

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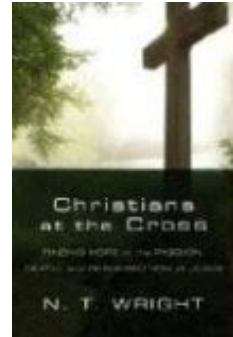
Book Review: *Christians at the Cross*, by N.T. Wright

Reviewed by Thomas R. Schreiner

The Word Among Us Press, 2007, xvi + 79 pp., \$10.95

This book derives from a series of sermons that N. T. Wright preached at the Church of the Ascension, Easington Colliery, during Holy Week in March 2007. Easington Colliery, a small town in England, has suffered over the years: a devastating underground explosion in 1951 killed 83 people, and then the mines themselves were shut down in 1993. The town has not recovered from that economic blow, and it is still reeling socially, morally, and spiritually.

Wright's sermons were intended to bring the message of the cross and resurrection to a community that had lost hope. Anyone familiar with Wright's work would expect the sermons to be creative and fascinating, and Wright does not disappoint. His sermons here have a verve and dynamism that carry the reader along.



THE BOOK'S STRENGTHS

Several things particularly struck me in reading the book. First, Wright captures the theme that the love of God is displayed in the cross. The cross signifies that God in Jesus has come to make things right. Something has gone horribly wrong with the world, but the cross shows us that God loves us and cares about our plight. Wright reminds the church at Easington Colliery—and us—that we can bring our pain and shattered hopes to the cross.

Second, Wright rightfully locates the story of Jesus within the story of Israel. What took place at the cross was not just a transaction. It is part of a grand narrative—part of God's plan to reclaim the world for his glory.

Third, Wright does not give pat answers. He admits that he does not have a blueprint that can solve the problems of the town. The cross of Christ reminds us that the way is not invariably easy. Sometimes we suffer as Christians in agonizing ways.

Fourth, the sermons offer hope. The resurrection of Jesus reminds us that death is not the last word. We can be sure that we will ultimately triumph. Nor is the resurrection merely a "spiritual" reality. Jesus was truly and physically raised from the dead, and we too will be raised physically with him.

Fifth, Wright emphasizes that the resurrection represents God's "yes" to creation. As Christians we are not to retreat from the world but work to change it, for we proclaim the joyful news that Jesus is Lord.

AND ITS WEAKNESSES

Are there any weaknesses in the book? Three different things stood out to me, but they are all related to the same issue. First, one of the central themes in Jesus' preaching was the call to repentance and faith. Wright rightly offers comfort to the church, but Jesus also emphasized the sins of those in Israel (yes, even when speaking to those who were already religious). Hence, he called on Israel to repent, to take up their cross and follow him, to turn away from all other gods, and to believe in the gospel. That theme is quite muted in Wright's sermons.

The second weakness is related to the first. Wright pays much more attention to our responsibility to further God's work in this world than he does to the need to put one's faith in Jesus. He agrees that the latter is necessary, but he stresses the former. Of course the Christian life is about more than "getting saved." We have work to do in this world after we believe. Nevertheless, it would seem that Easter week sermons would be a prime occasion to call

upon one's hearers to believe in the gospel; and yet a strong call to faith is lacking from this book. Wright seems to assume that all his hearers are already Christians. Wright should emphasize conversion more and call his readers (and hearers) to repentance and faith, especially since the church in England is shrinking and evangelism is such a crying need in Britain.

Third, Wright clearly believes that Jesus bore our sins as our substitute. Still, he scarcely emphasizes the awful judgment and wrath that we deserve as sinners—a wrath that is turned away by the cross of Jesus Christ (Rom 3:25-26; 1 Thess 1:10; 5:9). Wright focuses on the love of God, but he does not say much about his holiness. Yet it is when we see God's dazzling holiness that his love shines all the brighter.

We can be grateful for some of the themes sounded in this book. Still, the lack of urgency about our need to repent and believe in the gospel is a blind-spot in Wright. Any pastor who preaches during Easter week must make it a first priority to preach the good news of Christ crucified and risen and call upon sinners to repent and to put their faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Wright's failure to do this during Easter week is something pastors should not imitate.

Thomas Schreiner is a professor of New Testament at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and the author, most recently of [New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ](#) (Baker, 2008).

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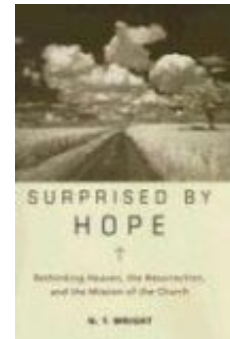
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Book Review: Surprised by Hope: *Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, by N. T. Wright
Reviewed by Thomas R. Schreiner

HarperCollins, 2008, 352 pages, \$24.95.

N. T. Wright is one of the most talented writers among New Testament scholars today. In this book he presents his understanding of what the Scriptures teach about heaven, the resurrection, and the church's mission.



A SUMMARY

What is heaven after all? Wright contends that too many Christians have a Platonic idea of heaven. They conceive of it in ethereal terms, as if we float in a bodiless state in some transcendent realm. Indeed, most Christians think of heaven as "up there," and as separated from the earth. What the Scriptures teach, however, is that heaven will come to earth. The Scriptures do not say, according to Wright, that we will "go to heaven when we die," but that heaven will come to earth, that the earth upon which we live will be transformed, and that we will enjoy the new creation.

Wright's understanding of the Christian hope is predicated upon the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. *Surprised by Hope* therefore summarizes Wright's older, massive, and outstanding book *The Resurrection of the Son of God*. What is important to see here is that the resurrection is irreducibly physical. People in the ancient world believed in spirits, ghosts, and the like, but they did not confuse things like these with the idea of a resurrection. Also, Wright does not simply accept the resurrection by faith, since the historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus is incredibly strong. No, we cannot prove beyond a shadow of doubt that Christ was raised. Still, his physical resurrection fits most suitably with the evidence of the empty tomb and the appearances of Jesus Christ.

The resurrection of Jesus is fundamental to Wright's thesis, for Christ's resurrection is tied to the future resurrection of believers. Hence, the future that awaits believers cannot be described as a spiritual existence in heaven. Rather, heaven will be on a new earth where believers will continue the bodily existence they enjoy in this world, but with bodies that are transformed by the Holy Spirit.

And what is the payoff for the church's mission in the present? Wright emphasizes over and over that our life in this world makes a difference. We do not simply wait to go to heaven when we die. We are called upon to engage this world, to work for justice in the political realm, to exercise our artistic gifts as creatures made in God's image, and to evangelize the lost.

AN ASSESSMENT

How should we assess *Surprised by Hope*? Wright's fundamental thesis here is correct. Heaven will be on a new earth, and therefore it must not be regarded as floating in some kind of spiritual never-land. We look forward to our future resurrection, and to the new heavens and new earth where righteousness dwells. Wright's defense of the resurrection of Christ, defended more fully in his major book on the topic, is the finest treatment I have read on the subject. Wright does affirm the intermediate state, but he rightly stresses that the future hope of believers is the resurrection. Furthermore, Wright is on target in saying that we are to strive for justice, truth, and beauty in this world. Some believers have said that this world is destined for destruction, and hence only focus on the salvation of the lost.

Yet there are some significant problems with the book. Surely some believers have mistakenly thought that heaven was only spiritual, but many (most of those I know) do not conceive of heaven in this way. We could say

that Wright exaggerates his thesis to make his point. Well and good. Still, he is excessively critical of the phrase "go to heaven." After all, we have a number of statements in Scripture about entering (going to!) the kingdom in the future (e.g., Matt. 5:20; 7:21; 18:3; 19:23-24; Mark 9:47; 10:15; John 3:5; Acts 14:22). Scripture also speaks of heaven as a realm above and separate from us (Matt. 6:1, 9, 10, 20; 18:10; Luke 24:51; John 1:51; Acts 1:10; 2 Cor. 12:2; Col. 1:5; 1 Pet. 1:4). That does not, to be sure, communicate that our future destiny is non-physical, but it does stress that it is a realm separate from our present existence. Yes, Wright is correct in saying that heaven will be a transformed earth, and that heaven will come, so to speak, to this world. But since the Scriptures also speak of us "entering" the kingdom; since they speak of heaven as a world above and beyond us; and since the new creation is not yet here in its fullness, I don't believe it's wrong to say that we will "go there," as long as we recognize that this is just one of the ways to express the reality that awaits us. In fact, Wright's protests against using the phrase "go to heaven" betray an overly literal understanding on his part. Hence, against Wright, the hymn *Away in the Manger* does not contradict Scripture when it asks God to "fit us for heaven, to live with thee there" (p. 22).

As noted above, Wright often emphasizes that our work in this world is important. Christians ought not to think that their work in politics, economics, business, art, and so forth is insignificant. There has been a kind of pietism that has denigrated such work. Still, it isn't clear that forgiving third world debt is a moral obligation on the same level as abolishing slavery. Wright too confidently dismisses all who disagree with him on this matter, sweeping away any objections with rhetorical statements. Moral claims in the public sphere must be advanced by careful reasoning, and Wright does not provide arguments to support his conclusions. Perhaps in the future he will tackle the matter with reasoned public discourse instead of dicta from above.

Wright commends evangelism as part of our work as believers, but he clearly emphasizes being engaged in the political sphere. Surely Wright has his emphases backwards here. The Scriptures teach that only those who believe in Jesus Christ and repent of their sins will enjoy the new creation. Isn't the most important thing for human beings, therefore, to gain acceptance into this new creation? Aren't there great artists and gifted politicians who have improved our life in this world (for which we are all thankful), and yet who will not be part of the new creation because they have rejected the gospel? Moreover, while Wright correctly affirms that everything done in this world matters, there is also discontinuity between this world and the next. The curse of Genesis 3 will not be lifted until Jesus comes again. Our work in this world is provisional and always touched by the curse. The invention of the car solved a pollution problem in the streets caused by horses, but no one foresaw that it would cause pollution problems of its own.

All this is to say that the call for Christians to evangelize remains more pressing than any call to work in the political sphere, even though all our work in this world is significant. Wright emphasizes that the good news of the gospel is that Jesus is Lord, but, as John Piper has pointed out, this isn't good news if you're still a rebel against God; its terrifying news. The New Testament is permeated with the message that we must turn from our sins and put our faith in Christ. Wright does not disagree with the need to do so, but he seems to be most excited about our work in the political and social sphere.

I could perhaps understand why Wright would stress social concerns if England's churches were full and thriving—as if almost everyone was a believer. But what is curious is that England's churches are empty, and unbelief is common. It seems that a bishop in these circumstances would vigorously call upon the church to evangelize, and would emphasize the need to put one's faith in Jesus Christ and to turn from one's sins. I don't see that urgency in Wright's writing, and therefore he veers from the message of Jesus and the apostles.

ODDS AND ENDS

I would also mention some bits and pieces of the book that call out for comment, even if I don't have space here to interact with them here in detail. For instance, Wright contends that Jesus never spoke about his return. He defends this claim in other works, but it's a controversial point. Here I simply want to register my disagreement with his exegesis.

Also, Wright correctly says that justification by faith and judgment according to works do not conflict (p. 140), but he gives us no help in seeing how these two themes fit together. Readers would be helped in knowing *how* the two themes cohere. Putting these truths together wrongly can lead to a final curse (Gal. 1:8-9), and hence Wright must be clearer in explaining the gospel in his exposition.

The section on purgatory is nicely done, showing that purgatory is absent from the biblical witness. But Wright falls into inconsistency when he endorses praying for the dead since this practice is not found in the Scriptures (p. 172). He does rightfully rule out invoking the saints for assistance.

Contrary to Wright, Jesus' statements about *gehenna* do not refer to the judgment of A.D. 70, though I cannot defend this argument here. Nor do I think Wright is correct in saying that judgment is a minor theme in the letters. The theme is pervasive in them, but, again, that would take too long to defend here.

Too often Wright prosecutes his case by caricaturing a view and then introducing his own view as the solution. Hence, he rightly rejects the notion that hell is a torture chamber, but his own view of hell seems to be shorn of any notion that God punishes those who refuse to believe in Christ. Wright argues that those in hell lose the divine image, and this may well be part of the picture. Nevertheless, many texts speak of God's active punishment of the wicked. Since Wright summarizes his view and does not engage in detailed exegesis, I assume he would offer a different interpretation of the relevant texts. Still, it's difficult to see how God's active punishment of the wicked can be denied (e.g., Rom. 2:8-9, 16; 2 Thess. 1:8-9, etc.).

Wright appeals to many because he is brilliant and fascinating, and some of what he says is helpful. Nevertheless, his failure to emphasize the centrality of the gospel is troubling, and pastors who find his work illuminating need to be careful that they do not veer away from their central task of proclaiming the good news to a lost generation.

Thomas Schreiner is a professor of New Testament at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and the author, most recently of [New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ](#) (Baker, 2008).

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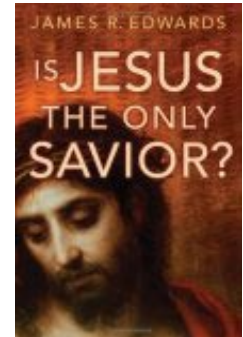
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Book Review: Is Jesus the Only Savior? by James R. Edwards

Reviewed by Will Kynes

Eerdmans, 2005, 250 pp. \$18.00

People in our postmodern, pluralistic world, says James Edwards, "would breathe more easily if we could all agree that Jesus is a savior of the world, not *the* savior of the world" (xi). However, with sound scholarship, a clear presentation of biblical testimony, insightful interaction with contemporary issues, and a few engaging personal anecdotes sprinkled along the way, Edwards demonstrates that the world is mistaken. Not only is Jesus *the* savior, but the only way to truly "breathe more easily" is to put one's faith in him, "for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12; cf. 105-6).



SUMMARY: WHY JESUS IS THE ONLY SAVIOR

Edwards's book begins by demonstrating that the academic theories claiming to get at the "historical Jesus" are not grounded in scientific objectivity, but in a naturalistic worldview that rules out anything supernatural from the start. The anti-supernaturalist conclusions of groups like the Jesus Seminar and other quests for the historical Jesus, he argues, "are not determined by unbiased scientific evidence...but by prior convictions and personal beliefs" (32).

Having undercut the "objective proof" for the relativists' case, Edwards presents his own evidence for Jesus' unique status as Savior. He argues for the historical reliability of the New Testament (chapter 3), considers its trustworthiness as a testimony to the Jesus of history (chapter 4), and examines Jesus' own self understanding (chapter 5).

With the New Testament's reliability established, Edwards is able in chapter 6 to detail how the "collage of images" the New Testament contains "expresses the universal scope and uncompromising character of redemption in Jesus Christ" (112). This sixth chapter is the best in the book. Edwards points to numerous biblical images, all of which testify to Christ's unique role as the world's only Redeemer.

In the last few chapters, Edwards addresses some common objections to the exclusivity of Christ. In chapter 7, he dispels the popular myth that the gospel arose in an insular, intellectually naïve world vastly different from the pluralistic and complex world of today.

In chapter 8, he argues that people no longer understand Jesus' work because they no longer understand sin. If people understood the depth of humanity's problem, they would see that "the death of God's Son for the sins of the world is the *only* way the world can be reunited with its Maker and Redeemer" (151).

In chapter 9, Edwards defends the gospel's viability against the postmodern rejection of metanarratives. He also addresses postmodern fears about religious violence and elitism. The peace promised in the gospel, he says, utterly transcends the relativists' "anemic" vision of non-hostility.

In the final chapters, Edwards addresses the question of Christianity and other religions. He shows humility and charity even as he strongly affirms the truth that Jesus is *the* savior of the world.

STRENGTHS

In the book's preface, Edwards claims that his subject matter is too important either "to be relegated to academia" or "to be written simplistically or breezily" (xii-xiii). On the whole, he succeeds in the difficult task of walking that fence.

Similarly, defending the exclusivity of the gospel requires both boldness and humility, and Edwards largely succeeds in this regard, too. He does not shy away from concepts like sin, hell, and substitutionary atonement (153-156), but presents them confidently and without apology.

His case for the exclusivity of Christ is a compelling one, not only because he exposes the hidden assumptions that drive those who deny it, but also because the competent, confident, yet humble tone which marks the book is a compelling reflection of Jesus himself. Throughout his work, Edwards refrains from deriding opposing views, even when the shaky logic supporting them invites it. He speaks the truth in love, and that adds hugely to his book's usefulness in evangelistic relationships.

WEAKNESSES

I do have some criticisms and reservations about the book. First, though Edwards addresses all the necessary aspects of salvation at some point, he never combines them to make clear the response his readers should have to Jesus' unique saving act. He is exceptionally clear about sin and our need to be forgiven, but he largely skims over Jesus' call to repentance (e.g. Mark 1:15)—on the believer's responsibility to turn away from sin.

Second, in his discussion of other religions, I believe Edwards errs too far on the side of charity by claiming, "In some instances religious practices are rejected not for their wickedness but for their worthlessness" (211). This is a false distinction. Yes, some religions lead to activity that is more morally reprehensible than others, but turning from the true God to any other faith, no matter how "moral," is the essence of sin. After all, the hyper-moral Pharisees received Jesus' strictest condemnation (e.g. Matthew 23).

Third, and most significantly, Edwards convincingly beats the Jesus Seminar at its own game, but he uses its methodology to undercut its claims. I fear that adopting their methods nevertheless concedes the victory. Method conveys meaning, and to establish the uniqueness of Jesus by applying modern historiographical methods to the New Testament is finally to make historiography the ultimate authority. We do not believe in Jesus because modern historiography tells us it is okay to do so. We believe because Jesus himself claimed to be the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and all his claims were vindicated when he rose from the dead. Edwards's approach would be better turned on its head, "for no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 3:11).

RECOMMENDATION

Edwards presents pastors and seminarians with an accessible entrée into contemporary Jesus scholarship, and his interaction with the "currents" of postmodernity provide a good starting point for further study in these areas.

Though one should bear in mind the concerns I raised above about method, the book may be used for reassuring Christians that "there is much more information, evidence, and reasoning in support of the trustworthiness of the New Testament and the truth of the gospel than many people are aware of" (xii).

Finally, the kind of person who would perhaps benefit most from this book is the skeptic who is sympathetic to the claims of the Jesus Seminar and other similar scholars. Here he will find an irenic yet forceful refutation of those approaches, and a humble but clear affirmation of Jesus Christ as the world's only Savior.

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Note: Bible.org has recently launched a new blog, Jesus in Primetime: Engaging the Public Square about Jesus, in which a formidable group of Christian scholars address the types of issues dealt with in this book. It can be found at <http://blog.bible.org/primetimejesus/> (HT: Justin Taylor).

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