

**Title**  
Unlocking the Marriage Code

**Propositional Statement**  
For thousands of years God kept a secret, but not any more. Knowing the secret could change a marriage.

**Theme**  
Why Marriage

**Biblical Texts**  
Ephesians 5: 22-33

#### Illustration 1

A fellow was raised way up in the sticks of northern Alberta – I mean, so far out in the sticks, never in his life had he seen a big city, to say nothing of modern inventions and neon lights. He married a girl just like himself and they spent all their married years in the backwoods. They had one son, whom they creatively named Junior. Around the time Junior reached his sixteenth birthday, his dad began to realize it wouldn't be too many years before their son would become a man and would strike out on his own. It troubled him that his boy could reach manhood and wind up getting a job in the city, not prepared to face the real world. He felt responsible and decided to do something about it.

He and his wife started saving for a trip the three of them would take to the city. About three years later the big day arrived. They tossed their belongings in the old pickup and started the long journey over winding, rough roads to the city of Edmonton. Their plan was to spend several days at the West Edmonton hotel and take in all the sights. As they approached the outskirts of the metropolis, Papa began to get a little jumpy: "Mama, when we pull up at the hotel, you stay in the truck while Junior and I go in and look around. We'll come back and git ya, OK?" She agreed.

Flashing neon lights and uniformed doormen greeted them as they pulled up. Mama stayed put as Papa and Junior walked wide-eyed into the mall. Neither could believe his eyes! When they stepped on a mat, the doors opened automatically. Inside, they couldn't believe their eyes. They walked over the granite floor and were amazed as they saw there was a ship in the mall. "Junior, look!" Papa was pointing toward a huge tank where sea lions were jumping out of the water. They went a little further and Junior cried out, "Papa, looka there!" there was an ice-skating rink—inside. They were awestruck as they headed back to the hotel entrance, and heard a clicking sound.

Papa turned and saw this amazing little room with golden doors that slid open from the center. "What in the world?" People would walk up, push a button and wait. Lights would flicker above the doors and then, "click," the doors would slide open from the middle. Some people would walk out of the little room and others would walk inside and turn around as, "click," the doors slid shut. By now, dad and son stood totally transfixed.

At that moment a wrinkled old lady shuffled up to the doors all by herself. She pushed the button and waited only a few seconds. "Click," the doors opened with a swish and she hobbled into the little room. No one else stepped in with her, so "click," the doors slid shut. Not more than twenty seconds later the doors opened again—and there stood this fabulously attractive blond, a young woman in her twenties—high heels, shapely body, beautiful face—a real knockout. As she stepped out, smiled, and turned to walk away, Papa nudged his boy and mumbled, "Hey, Junior.. go git Mama!"

**A LOT OF THINGS ABOUT LIFE** are mysterious.

Not all mysteries are as profound as that. Many are somewhere between just baffling and humorous. Every home has the mystery of a washing machine. My home is the worst. You can put in twelve perfectly matched pairs of socks and in some phenomenal, mysterious manner, you can pull out eight socks, none of which match anything. Add to that the mystery of traffic lanes. The mystery is that every lane you get into slows down. Who can ever explain it?

#### TRANSITION

How about marriage...there's certainly some mystery there. You've heard the first joke in the Bible...that God created a male and female and then told them to become one (the problem started when they tried to figure

out which one!). Henry Wadsworth Longfellow once said, "The men that women marry, and why they marry them, will always be a marvel and a mystery to the world."

Have you ever wondered why God created marriage...what was He thinking? Given the current state of marriages, you've got to wonder if there isn't a better plan. Consider the current marriage statistics:

- 41 percent of Canadian marriages end in divorce. Marriages that started with much joy and celebration. In fact, I have never been to a marriage where the bride and groom were not filled with hopes, dreams, passion and an lot of love for one another.
- Divorce rate doesn't include those who cohabit – live together. In Quebec, more couples are choosing to live together than to get married as the first living together experience for couples. The number of cohabiting couples has increased 865 percent since 1960.
- The percentage of children living in single-parent families has risen from 9 percent in 1960 to 28 percent in 1998.
- More than 40 percent of first-time mothers, ages 15-29, are not married.
- First time in history in America – average adult will have more spouses than children

***These aren't simply dry statistics. Dr. James Dobson of Focus on the Family recently wrote:***

"Behind these numbers are millions of hurting people -- husbands, wives and children for whom everything stable and predictable has shattered. They represent the pain of loving wives who committed themselves wholly and unreservedly to men who later rejected them for other lovers. They speak of husbands who are struggling to raise their kids alone because their wives decided they didn't want to be mothers anymore. And, of course, they reflect the pain of children who cry themselves to sleep at night because they can hear their parents at each other's throats."

Consider disillusion in marriage...those that are married and miserable. Many here today may be painfully aware that marriage will not complete your life, make you a perfect person, solve all your problems, give you endless bliss... But then, God never said it would. Marriage can bring happiness, companionship and contentment, but it can bring so much more

when we understand it as God intended. So, what is marriage all about, anyway

Well, today, I'm going to give you the biggest secret I know. For thousands of years God kept a secret, but not any more. Knowing this secret could change a marriage. The secret has to do with why God made marriage. It's like a code that God kept hidden for thousands of years until just the right time and then he revealed the secret. Seriously...I'm not kidding...the secret to marriage comes right out of the pages of the Bible. You'll need to turn with me to the New Testament and the book of Ephesians, chapter five.  
[Read Passage]

<sup>22</sup>*Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. <sup>23</sup>For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. <sup>24</sup>Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.*

<sup>25</sup>*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her <sup>26</sup>to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, <sup>27</sup>and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. <sup>28</sup>In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. <sup>29</sup>After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church— <sup>30</sup>for we are members of his body. <sup>31</sup>"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. <sup>32</sup>This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. <sup>33</sup>However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.*

Today I want to show you where the Bible cracks the marriage code...the secret to marriage.

I want to clarify something as I start, however. Just talking about marriage is sure to be a painful experience for some of you. Virtually every time I talk about this, I meet people who know all too well the pain that comes from badly injured marriages. I do not mean to make you uncomfortable today or to be critical of those who don't have perfect marital relationships...let's be honest, there's not one of us here today who has achieved that. Today, this is about figuring out the marriage code.

Though all of us fall terribly short of God's ideal for marriage, we should nevertheless be striving toward it. Many people have experienced

the pain of a broken marriage, possibly for reasons beyond their control. This is not intended to add to that pain. Many people are doing a heroic job of single parenting, and should be applauded for their courageous efforts.

Nor is it my intention today to alienate those who are not married. The Scriptures are very clear that there is a season for singleness, and in some cases, God has gifted individuals for single-hood.

My purpose is simply to encourage you about God's purpose and design for marriage... God's blueprint...unlocking the code. So, are you ready for the secret...? Here it is...

### **Marriage is NOT the real thing.**

That's it...the secret of marriage...that is what it's all about. Marriage is not the real thing. So, now that I've let you down or have totally confused you, let me take you back to the passage we just read, and let's walk through it to crack the code and make some sense of it all. Because, there is deep significance to what I am saying...MARRIAGE IS NOT THE REAL THING.

I get this from verse 32, which we will look at in a moment, but I want to talk quickly about the verses before – those nuclear verses from 22 to 31.

As we come to chapter 5, it starts with some words for wives and then some verses for husbands. By the way, just in case the first few verses stick in your throat or are somehow offensive to you...wives submit to your husbands and so on...let me point out something very important. Please notice that there are three verses written to the wives and nine verses written to the husbands...three times as many! That leads me to think that either the husbands job is more complicated, or husbands are just harder to teach.

Submit – fit in together with. Darcy Kimmel – getting out of the way so God can smack your husband.

Love – my experience in marriage...something I can remember.

In verse 32, it says, "This is a profound mystery..." Paul loved mystery. In fact, this book (Ephesians) has more mystery than any other book in the New Testament. [Walk through some of these passages if you need to extend the message – Ephesians 1:9; 3:4-6; 6:19-20]

Six times, Paul uses the word mystery (Greek musterion {moos-tay'-ree-on}). If you looked up the word "mystery" in the dictionary, you'd find definitions like, "something that baffles understanding and cannot be explained," "an enigma," or "a religious truth that is incomprehensible to reason and knowable only through divine revelation." A mystery could be:

- like a crime...something sinister and damaging that someone is trying to hide...CSI...Hardy Boys...Nancy Drew (for the old-timers)
- Paranormal...something out there...something that is not understandable...beyond logic...the X-files.
- Something which has been kept hidden by a secret society because the truth is so scandalous...like the DaVinci Code claims.
- If you look at the rest of Ephesians, you will discover that when Paul is talking about mystery he means something which was a secret, but has now been revealed, uncovered.

So...as we come to this passage about marriage, it's like a code. We are about to find out something about marriage that wasn't revealed before this time. Like a good mystery, there were many hints along the way, but they'd be very difficult to understand without the full code. And as I already said, the code is this...marriage is not the real thing. Marriage is a picture of the real thing.

Let's step back for a second and get a picture of the context of this passage. Ephesians begins with Paul telling us that we are as those who are blessed in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ (1:3); we are adopted children (1:5); the redeemed (1:7); forgiven (1:7); lavished upon by God (1:8); marked with a seal (1:13); God's possession (1:14); seated with Christ in the heavenly realms (2:6); and on and on. Since the Lord has blessed us in so many ways, he now tells us it ought to affect every area of our lives...certainly our homes. Chapter 5 turns to this and provides instruction on how to have a good marriage. But there is a link between God's relationship with us through Christ and our marriages...it's quite incredible.

I first read this passage as a young man wanting to be a good husband...

Paul has given us instructions regarding husbands and wives and seems to use the church and Christ's love for the church as an illustration of how a husband should love his wife, but then he uses a common, little word that turns the whole discussion on its heels...that word is "but" (one "t"). "But" is three letters in English, and only two in Greek...d-e... "de" (pron. {deh}). The word is used to stop the flow and introduce an opposing or clarifying phrase. He has been talking about marriage and the husband and wife's role and then interrupts the flow to tell us that he is not talking about the husband and wife and their relationship, but he is rather talking about Christ and the church. If you follow the flow of the passage, you are left wondering... "what do you mean you are talking about Christ and the church...the context is the husband and wife. Why the reversal?" The

impact is that the illustration...the picture in the passage, is not Christ and the church...the picture is my marriage. This is a secret that has been held by God for thousands of years.

Let me illustrate it this way. *[Show a picture of Coca-Cola.]* This is a picture of the "Real Thing" – Coca Cola. This is not the real thing, it is only a picture. *[Take out a can of Coca-Cola.]* This is the Real Thing. *[Crack open the can and take a drink.]* Now, let me review...*[Hold up both the can and the picture.]* This is the real thing...this is a picture, an illustration of the real thing. A picture of the real thing...and the real thing. Got it? Ok, here's the way it works with your marriage: your marriage is the picture of the real thing *[hold up picture]*...God's love for His people is the real thing *[hold up Coke can]*.

This, my friends, is a secret which God held for thousands of years...from Creation, until Jesus died for our sins. And the implications are out of this world! As a matter of fact, there is only one other time in the Bible where God calls one of His mysteries great or profound as He does in this passage. The word translated "great" or "profound" is "megas." We use this term freely in English...mega-watt...mega-byte...mega-hertz. It means a million...a lot...a mega-amount.

When the Bible says it is a mega-mystery, it means that there are a lot of implications of this concept. There are implications that go to the very root of who we are...of how and when God created us. There are implications that have the potential of changing my entire life...that I can spend the rest of my life unraveling and understanding. If I get up every day for the rest of my life and ponder the depth of this mystery, I will only scratch the surface. Let me wander down the mega-path with you for a moment. If marriage is not the real thing, but just a picture of the real thing...and that is why God made marriage...then let me ask you: "Do you think it is possible that God had this in mind even when He decided to create male and female?"

Notice the passage refers right back to God forming a male and female and then bringing them together and calling that marriage. "For this reason, a man should leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife and the two should become one flesh." That quote is from Genesis, right after he creates them male and female, in the image of God. Did you ever wonder why God made males and females in the first place? Especially when you consider all of the trouble this has brought to our daily lives, why did God create a "Y" chromosome in the first place...or the lack of a "Y" chromosome. We know from biology that God didn't have to create males and females in order for there to be procreation. Various organisms and even a species of lizards, reproduce without being male nor female. If you

remember your biology class from high school, it's called asexual reproduction, or vertical gene transfer. Genetic biologists are fascinated with the possibilities these days as they experiment with cloning, which is essentially reproduction without traditional gender interaction. Wow...think about this...could it be that God made gender to be a reflection of His love for his people?

Just some thoughts.

Delve into theology for a moment. Could it be that God created men and women and marriage as a means of making us more like Christ. Marriage is part of God's plan for our sanctification. I didn't know how selfish I was until I got married...

For years, theologians have also been discussing the concept of the "community" within the godhead (trinity) and suggesting that the creation of both male and female and the marriage union reflects the nature of God himself.

Let's branch off into social science...we find that marriage is the runaway best place for raising children, sexual fulfillment, personal health and happiness. Books and studies are coming in by the armloads, both secular and Christian, that bear out this incredible reality. When God gives an illustration about something as important as His great love, then He is careful to make sure that it is the best illustration going...even in spite of the sinful carnage surrounding marriages these days. Marriage is still the best thing going.

What does this all mean to you and to me...to my marriage and to yours?

First of all, if my marriage is a picture of the real thing and not the real thing, then **each marriage has profound value.** If marriage is a picture, given by God of all His love relationship with his people, then all marriages have profound value. This value holds for Christians and non-Christians...Jews and Gentiles...French and English...black and white...people from the north and people from the south...people from Quebec, and people from Alberta. It means that marriage is not an end unto itself. My marriage is not an island of it's own invention and meaning. This means that when the going gets tough and I feel like packing it in...when my marriage has a tough day, week, or year...when it feels like there is nothing left to hang onto in my marriage that has any value...when I feel like I have nothing left to give...I will keep trying, because it is not just about my marriage. At the bottom line, it's not just about me...or my

spouse. My marriage is about a picture...it says something about the real thing.

*[Aside – If time]*

Some will say...but doesn't it devalue marriage to say it is not the real thing? Or if marriage is so valuable, why will there be no marriage in heaven?

In Matthew 22:30 Jesus was asked a trick question about whose wife a woman would be in heaven, after being widowed seven times...Jesus knew about the mystery, the secret and replied that the woman would be no man's wife in heaven because "people will neither marry nor be given in marriage." No one will be married in heaven (to the joy of some and disappointment of others). Marriage is a portrait of God's love for his people and when we are in the immediate presence of the One who loves us, we don't need the picture any more, in fact to "hang on" to it becomes ridiculous. So if you like the picture, image the reality!

When we are in the presence of the real thing (e.g. my loved one) I don't need the picture. As a matter of fact it would have been ridiculous to gaze lovingly into the picture of my fiancé when we were going out and be enamored with this image of her if she were sitting right next to me. Oh, the picture was still valuable, but nothing compared to the reality. Ask anyone who has lost a loved one...their pictures are treasured, but they would trade in a million pictures for one day with the person again. The picture is valuable, only because of the inestimable value of the real thing.

Hebrews 13 – marriage is to be honored among all...

From a single mother to express her honoring of God's plan for marriage and family. Wrote this to another church member. *"The summary is that I wanted to thank you for living a life that honors God. In watching Courageous, I saw you as the young, black man... All throughout the movie, that man pointed people to God, fought with faith & courage, and loved his family. I kept being reminded of you."*

*At the end of the movie when the men were standing in front of the church asking who would stand up as men for their God & their families, I didn't think I knew too many men who would actually do that... but looking around church today, I actually think there are a few in our church who are already*

*standing.*

*You are one of those men & I felt led to say thank you for being a God-fearing & God-honoring man. I respect you for that & I am blessed to call you a brother in Christ."*

I know this person has endured much through a failed marriage, but I also know another thing – she wouldn't wish for the same for her children. For the sake of our children, let's value marriage.

Here's another bit of encouragement:

National Youth Survey – Josh McDowell & George Barna

- 73% of Christian youth – their lifelong goal was to have a satisfying and fulfilling relationship in marriage.
- A culture that hasn't given up on healthy relationships
- 53% of those same youth said "I don't want to have the same kind of relationship my parents have."

### **Secondly, each marriage has profound motivation.**

If marriage tells people something about God's love for His people, then I should have profound interest in the preservation and strengthening of marriage. Let's face it, marriage is hard work. In fact in the Old Testament, God commanded newly married men to stay home for a year and work on their marriage... (Deuteronomy 24:5) *If a man has recently married, he must not be sent to war or have any other duty laid on him. For one year he is to be free to stay at home and bring happiness to the wife he has married.* Did you catch that ladies...God is supremely interested in your husband taking the time to bring you happiness! I take no personal responsibility for the conversation that will be generated later today by a verse like this one.

In Malachi (2:15-16), God wouldn't even accept their sacrifices and he told them it was because of how they treated the wife of their youth and their wedding vows. In 1 Peter 3, we find out that God won't even hear our prayers when we don't consider and cherish our wife. I think it is safe to say the same for how wives respect and consider their husbands.

But that doesn't make it easier, it just gives us more motivation. Have you ever prayed a prayer like this one:

**A prayer for the day**

Dear God,

So far today, I've done alright.



*I haven't gossiped, and I haven't lost my temper.  
I haven't been grumpy, nasty or selfish, and I'm really glad  
of that!  
But in a few minutes, God, I'm going to get out of bed, and  
from then on, I'm probably going to need a lot of help.  
Thank you!  
Amen*

Now that is a fitting prayer for marriage! We're going to need a lot of help, and a lot of motivation to keep working on our marriages when times get really tough.

This motivation should also spill outside of my own marriage. If each and every marriage is a picture of God's love, then I will be profoundly interested in helping people have stronger marriages in my church, in my community...everywhere. We'll resist the silly notions that keep cropping up in the media and academia who are arguing that it's time we drop the idea of marriage altogether. In a recent national news article, one psychologist argued that marriage has become outdated. She said, "It's unrealistic to expect couples to balance modern work demands and desires for personal happiness against a life-long mandate to be faithful lovers, diligent parents and tireless helpmates." When marriage is a picture of something far greater than itself, I will be motivated to fight for better marriages at all cost, so that better pictures surround us all.

A word to the unmarried. It also gives me profound motivation to get married and especially to avoid the damaging false pictures like living together before marriage. If you are in your early to mid 20's and have not been called to a lifetime of singleness it's time to get on with it, find a spouse and start painting a good picture.

As if that is not enough, let me hit you with another thought. If marriage is a picture, and not the real thing; but the real thing is God's incredible love relationship with His people, then married people carry with them **profound responsibility**. This is true especially of Christians.

If we are carrying a message to the world around us that "God loves you and sent His Son to pay the price for your sin, to redeem you back to Himself," then we ought to be preeminently concerned with the picture we paint of the real thing. Of all the people who ought to care about marriage the most, it ought to be those who claim to have the message of God's love...ministers of reconciliation it calls us in 2 Corinthians 5...Christians.

I would dare say that the greatest friend of the gospel is marriage.

Remember I mentioned two great mysteries. The other one comes from 1 Timothy 3:16. The other **great** mystery is how you and I get to be godly...and the answer to the mystery is Jesus. There are only two great God-sized mysteries – one is how we get to be godly, and the other is why God created marriage – both point to Jesus.

Marriage is the greatest friend of the gospel.

Joe Aldrich, Lifestyle Evangelism wrote, "The two greatest forces in evangelism are a healthy church and a healthy marriage. The two are interdependent. You can't have one without the other. It is the healthy marriage, however, which is the 'front lines weapon.' The Christian family in a community is the ultimate evangelistic tool, assuming the home circle is an open one in which the beauty of the gospel is readily available. It's the old story: When love is seen the message is heard."

If you were to ask your neighbors... and if they felt they could be honest with you...Joe Christian Canadians...they'll tell you that if Christians don't have better marriages and families, then Christians have got nothing to offer. Your neighbors are wrong, but only partly wrong. And while they may think this way, where did they come up with this idea? Perhaps it's because God programmed them that way...even as far as their gender, and that there is within them a conscience or an instinct that there is something holy about marriage...something spiritual. Isn't it funny how many people want to get married in a church? Consider how many will fight to have the church "bless" their marriage. Where did that come from? Over 75% of Canadian marriages are performed by clergy.

Did you know that not only do people expect Christians to at least have decent marriages, but that there is little else that your community...your neighbors care about more than their marriages and families. I know this because Ipsos Reid asked Canadian families what was most important to them and 70% ranked family/marriage as first or second. (Those that picked marriage and family as number 2, picked hockey as number one.) If you really want to help your neighbors and reach out to your community then care deeply about marriages...starting with your own. Howard Hendricks says "If your Christianity doesn't work at home, it doesn't work. Don't export it!"

And so I say to pastors and church leaders, if we want to reach our community, we must start with our own marriage and family (it is a qualification to lead the church by the way), and also be passionately concerned for marriages in our community. Make strong marriages and healthy families a priority...

Here's an outreach strategy for you...did you know that you don't even have to quote a Bible verse, but if you help a needy couple with their marriage, you will give them a firsthand look at God's love. That is unbelievable!!! If you do this, you may well till the ground that allows the seed of the gospel to fall on fruitful soil, leading to salvation.

I would like to thank you for staying for me on Sunday and making me feel as though I belonged there with you and your family. I really needed that help from you that day. Thank you for inviting me into your home, for feeding me, and most importantly making me feel welcome among your family. You have raised an amazing family of caring people who are selfless and it was great to be a part of for a short while.

How about marriages that have been broken...

"Our families and the families in ancient Israel are flawed by dismemberment, physical and emotional violence, infidelity, petty jealousies, and mean-spiritedness. They are far from perfect. Yet it is exactly in those flawed places that the Spirit of God moves and where we can catch a glimpse of grace." Judy Garland flawed families of the Bible

...when people make enough of a mess out of their lives and when the chosen answers in a society are seen not to work, portions of that society begin asking the "God" questions once again.  
Charles Sell Family Ministry

## Profound Resources

God will move heaven and earth to help build a stronger marriage.

Ephesians 1

17I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. 18I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, 19and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength 20he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 21far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come