

Stewarding Time & Talents

Biblical Principles

SEEKING THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Seeking the kingdom of God should be your top priority in life. Putting God first in your lives allows other things to fall into their proper rank. Loving God and loving people are the two principles that should underlie all you do (*Matt. 6:33, 22:37-40*).

YOU ARE ACCOUNTABLE FOR HOW YOU USE YOUR TIME AND TALENTS

As you seek the kingdom of God, you are accountable to God for your stewardship of your time and talents (*1 Cor. 4:1-2*).

SEEKING CONTENTMENT RATHER THAN RICHES

Individuals and couples vary in wealth, talents, occupations, family situations, etc., but each one, by God's grace, must allow contentment rather than striving for wealth to order your priorities (*1 Tim. 6:6-12*).

THE IMPORTANCE OF HAVING A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Having a vision helps you stay focused on your true priorities and be good stewards of the gifts you have received. Not having clear direction can lead to living aimlessly and pulling away from God's priorities for your lives. It is essential to keep an eternal perspective as you set your priorities (*Prov. 29:18*).

FULFILLING THE GREAT COMMISSION

As individuals and as couples, you must consider your roles in how you can help fulfill the Great Commission (*Matt. 28:19-20*).

WORKING IN HIS KINGDOM

You have the privilege of working along with God to build his kingdom. God has designed you to do good works as an expression of your love for him (*Eph. 2:10*).

A Vision for your Marriage

WHY HAVING A VISION FOR YOUR MARRIAGE IS IMPORTANT

The purpose of a vision or mission statement is to succinctly state or define the reason something exists, its core values, and what goals it seeks to achieve. Considering the purpose of your marriage is crucial as you seek to intentionally glorify God in your marriage. Christ-honoring marriages do not happen by accident. Rather, you must have a biblically-based idea that serves as a roadmap about where you and your spouse are going in life. This roadmap outlines the goals and the steps along the way that will help you reach those goals. Keep in mind, however, that while you devise goals and plan your ways, it is the Lord who directs your steps (*Proverbs 16:9*). Over time your plans may change, obstacles may arise, and your goals may shift. However, if you are focused on glorifying him in all things, you can take those changes gracefully.

The types of goals you and your spouse may develop as part of this vision can vary and stretch over a wide range of topics. For example, one goal may be related to having children and raising a family together. You may also have a goal to one day build your own house, own a business, mentor teenagers, or support a mission organization. Having common goals can help encourage unity as a couple and will help guide you as you try to be good stewards of your time and talents. Each of you

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will have entered marriage with your own dreams and ideas about the future. As you become one, you join these dreams and ideas into a common vision and see how you can help each other fulfill it.

A long-term vision for your marriage can also help you frame up daily, weekly, and yearly activities and goals which can help keep you focused as you encounter distractions and changes that come along with life.

- **Distractions:** Satan tries to sabotage marriages by attempting to distract and discourage couples from their purpose. Comparison with others, ongoing sin struggles, selfishness, financial stress, isolation, spiritual stagnation, etc. can all become obstacles in your marriage which distract you from your Godly goals and purposes.
- **Changes:** Over time, normal changes in your life (i.e. addition of children, increased responsibility at work or church, etc.) can have both positive and negative effects on your marriage. While these changes might not be bad in themselves, you must be aware of how these changes might pull your focus away from your overall mission. Times of reflection and reevaluation can help ensure you do not lose sight of your true purpose.

QUESTION TO CONSIDER

What are some of the pressures that husbands and wives face (e.g., due to society, comparison, etc.) that make it difficult to (1) maintain proper priorities and stewardship and (2) make it difficult to become one and work towards a common goal?

Creating a Vision for your Marriage

One of the first steps to forming a vision for your marriage is to realize it's not all about you. Sometimes, one spouse may see his/her ideas and goals as superior to the others. Christ, husband, and wife are now in an intimate relationship and all endeavors, decisions, etc. must be for the betterment of that three-fold relationship.

A healthy marriage consists of two complete individuals, joining together and having identities as both individuals and as a couple. This oneness does not entail two "halves" becoming one or one spouse absorbing the other. Rather, as whole individuals they come together to be one in Christ (*1 Cor. 11:11*). However, God doesn't want you to join together so that you can live out selfish desires. Rather, the joining together of husband and wife is designed to help you learn to be more like Christ and to live in a meaningful, self-sacrificial manner. Consider this quote that addresses marital unity:

"This 'we,' however, is not achieved through the absorption of one mate into the other – either the wife into the husband or the husband into the wife. The apostle Paul is clear that each of us is given our own gifts and our own role to play in the kingdom of God. Each of us must be passionately devoted to our own faithful service. A mature marriage looks beyond itself, forfeiting not just the tyranny of individual desires, but also the tyranny of the couple's comfort."¹

In addition to being unified on goals and dreams, you must also escape "the tyranny" of comfort. Sometimes, particularly in the beginning of marriage, it can be easy to become absorbed into your life as a new couple. While this stage is healthy and

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it is important to bond as a couple, there needs to be a balance of reaching out to others. The stewardship of your time and talents will shift as you progress through different stages of your marriage relationship. If you are raising children, much of your time and talents are invested in them. Yet there will be other stages of your marriage when you will have time and talents to use in outreach or invest in the lives of others. Prayerful discernment is required to keep your priorities straight.

As you form your vision, it is also important to remember who you are matters more than what you do. God wants the image of Christ to be formed in you. You must not become so busy doing things (even good things) that you forget to spend time communing with God from your heart. God uses the relationships, experiences, and circumstances of your lives to shape and form you to reflect him more fully. Marriage involves serving another person more than serving yourself. It takes time, effort, and resources away from self and self-driven ambitions. While you may not be able to do as much as you could when single, marriage shapes your character and impacts your soul, allowing you to become more Christ-like. This relationship becomes the core from which other aspects of your life emerge. Making your marriage as God-glorifying as possible in every area becomes a life-long goal.

A final aspect of vision creation is to think of the “big picture.” Discuss ways in which the two of you want to be involved together in service, ministry, and worship for the Lord. As you and your spouse discuss goals and hopes for the future, encourage one another to consider the possibilities of how God could work through your lives. At times, God lays certain issues or missions on an individual’s heart that are meant to help you focus on and fulfill your unique purpose for your life on earth.² Marriage can help you work toward fulfilling your desires to serve Christ. For example, one spouse may help the other overcome fears or insecurities about becoming involved in a type of service within the church. As you identify and discuss your individual strengths and weaknesses, you may see ways one spouse’s strength can help the other’s weakness. In addition, consider your strengths and weaknesses as a couple. Look for ways that your strengths coincide and prayerfully consider how God could use them to serve others. And look for ways where you might need to make accommodations for each other’s weaknesses. This type of consideration will help lead to healthy stewardship of the vision and calling from God you sense in your life.

EXERCISE 1 - MARRIAGE STAGES

Consider married couples in the following age categories:

- Married 0 to 5 years
- Married 10 years
- Married 20 years
- Married 30 years
- Married 40+ years

What are the typical challenges that couples face in each of these groups? What strengths and weaknesses do you observe in Christian couples in each group?

What do you hope our marriage will look like in each of these stages?

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Day-to-Day Priorities & Stewardship

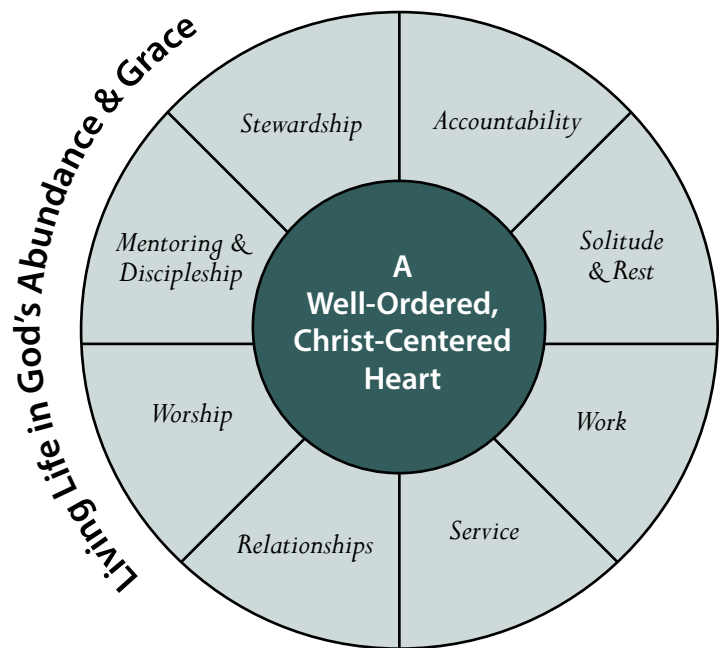
Being in agreement on the overall vision of your marriage allows a couple to be unified and increases intimacy. It also encourages a couple to consider their day-to-day priorities. Once these priorities are set, you can then decide how to be good stewards of your time and talents both as individuals and as a couple.

Proverbs 4:23 says, “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.” If you are to glorify God in your lives, you must start by making sure that your hearts are focused on God. Behavioral change, without a corresponding heart change, is futile. When your hearts are focused on God, then all aspects of your lives radiate his likeness (see the diagram below³). You shouldn’t live in a “compartmentalized” fashion in which you live according to biblical principles in some situations and not in others. The Word says to do everything as for the Lord (*Colossians 3:23-24*).

Decisions related to stewardship of time require the give-and-take process. Once married, your time is no longer your own – you share it with your spouse. It is important to be purposeful in how you spend your time alone, together, and with others. Strive for a healthy balance.

When leisure activities take precedence over service opportunities or quality time with friends and family, your time allocation needs to be reevaluated. On the other hand, if you keep so busy that you never have time during a typical week to relax or unwind, you will need to create opportunities for some self-care time. Deciding how to spend your time is similar to setting a budget. We are each allocated a finite amount of time, and you must decide how to spend it. Some categories of your time budget allow for more flexibility than others while others might be determined for us (work, responsibilities, etc.). The impact of the lack of balance in each category varies as well. Taking too much time out of the “sleep” category will eventually catch up with you and might cause sickness or irritability. Set aside time for the most important items so you don’t just try to get to them “when you have time.” Time is a commodity that you rarely feel you have enough of, so the “when we have time” opportunities seldom actually occur.

Stewardship, priorities, and your goals guide this process of time budgeting. You may have a hobby that you want to pursue or a leisure time activity that you enjoy. Does it fit with the Word and in your “time budget?” *Colossians 1:10* can help remind you of your priorities as well, “That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God.”



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EXERCISE 2 - PRIORITIES DISCUSSION

How can the following elements be used to help us keep our priorities and maintain proper stewardship of our time and talents? Discuss each section as a couple.

- Mentors in our lives
- Forms of accountability
- Relationships with other couples
- Service in the local church
- Investment in other individuals and couples
- Other forms of ministry we can become involved in

Relationships and the amount of time you can give them all change over time. Together, you and your spouse need to decide what is reasonable. You may need to put limits and boundaries on things that can take away from your marital relationship. Even being involved in many “good” things can be the enemy of the “best” things – keeping your spouse a priority.

- **Family**: If you live near family, many expectations may be involved in holidays, birthdays, and other family celebrations. Together, you and your spouse can decide on your level of involvement in these activities. If you live far away from family, you and your spouse will need to discuss how to be good stewards of your time while staying in touch with family.
- **Friends**: Friendships do change after marriage. You may find (or have found) less time to spend with close friends than you did when you were single. Naturally, you may grow closer to other married couples and make new friendships that now include both you and your spouse. At the same time, it is appropriate to maintain old friendships. It takes effort to maintain friendships, but they are essential for support and encouragement. It is not wise to depend on your spouse to meet all your emotional needs. Once again, balance is essential.
- **Church**: Commitment to a church body is of great importance. Being involved in your church and building relationships in the church can help you grow spiritually. Within a healthy church body, support, love, and encouragement can be given and received as needed. However, even church-related activities can become cumbersome. You may be involved in a church that has abundant opportunities for service. Talk with your spouse, a mentor, or a minister if you need feedback on how to keep the right balance.
- **Occupation**: The goal of your occupation is to provide for yourself and your family and to use the gifts you have been given. This is an admirable and appropriate goal. However, many people can fall into the trap of allowing work to take precedence over relationships and allowing it to fulfill needs (such as security, confidence, etc.) that were meant to be fulfilled elsewhere. Both husbands and wives with an occupation must defend against the pull that allows work to become more important than family.
- **Household duties**: Whether you rent or buy, whether you live in a small apartment in a city or a large house in the

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country, various household duties and the responsibilities come with having “things.” The more you possess, the more you must take care of. In your marriage, guard against the tendency to accumulate, and instead, discern what will allow you to maintain proper stewardship of your time and money.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Why do you think some couples start out strong in the Lord and then, apparently, lose focus? What will you do to make sure that doesn't happen to our marriage?

Further Couple Exercises

EXERCISE 3 - TIME ALLOCATION

In the chart below, examine how you each currently spend your time. Estimate how much time (in hours) each week each of you spends in the following categories. Then, fill in the chart with your ideal time allocation. Make sure it is realistic. Consider your priorities and what is practical.

Look over your responses. Are there differences between the actual and ideal time allocations that need to be addressed? Do priorities need to be shifted? Are you both getting enough time “with spouse?” Is there anything that is getting in the way of your couple goals and vision?

	<i>Husband</i>		<i>Wife</i>	
	Current	Ideal	Current	Ideal
Paid Work				
Volunteer Work				
With Family				
With Friends				
Church-related Activities				
Alone				
With Spouse				
Leisure Activities				
Housework/ Maintenance				
Social Media				

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EXERCISE 4 - DEVELOPING YOUR VISION

You can use this exercise to help develop or refine your vision for your marriage. The items below can be a guide to help stimulate and direct your communication.

- a. Commit to pray for God to guide you towards a clear vision for your marriage.
- b. Identify your personal and your spouse's individual strengths and weaknesses.
- c. Identify your strengths and weaknesses as a couple.
- d. Identify and discuss how you can help each other grow closer to the Lord. As an example, perhaps one of you is gifted in talking about their faith to non-believers and can help your spouse develop that ability, or perhaps one of you is very committed to prayer and can encourage the other to commit to prayer more fervently.
- e. Brainstorm together how you could serve the Lord as a couple. Think specifically about how you can use your couple strengths to serve individuals, your church, your community, your family, your coworkers, and your neighbors.
- f. Brainstorm together how you could individually serve the Lord and how you could encourage each other in those endeavors.
- g. Discuss your ideas and pray with an older, spiritually mature mentor couple who can help guide and direct your thoughts & ideas.
- h. Identify the steps necessary to channel your strengths towards service. Start with things that are small and manageable.
- i. This process can be repeated many times over the course of your marriage and will likely need many refinements as the Lord directs your steps.

Taking into consideration steps (a.) through (i.) above, create a mission statement for your marriage. If you have children, be sure to include your mission for your parenting. This statement consists of no more than a few sentences and summarizes your core values and goals.

REFERENCES

Referencing of these materials is not meant to imply an endorsement by the Apostolic Christian Church of America of the author, publisher, or organization that created the materials.

1. *Sacred Marriage* by Gary Thomas, 256.
2. *The Dream Giver* by Bruce Wilkinson.
3. *The Life You've Always Wanted* by John Ortberg, 194-195.